

The Epistle of First Peter

Author

Although scholars have disputed Peter as the author of this epistle, there is no substantial evidence that he did not write it. Irenaeus (140-203 AD), Tertullian (150-222 AD), Clement of Alexandria (155-215 AD), and Origen (185-253 AD) all ascribed the authorship of *1 Peter* to the Apostle Peter, the disciple of the Lord Jesus. Thus, his authorship has had strong support from the church fathers early in the history of the church (*Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, General Editor, 1999, p. 1810).

Audience

According to *1: 1*, Peter is writing to believers who are scattered in many churches throughout the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia—known as Asia Minor (modern Turkey) “in its eastern, central, and western regions and in those bordering the Black Sea” (Kistemaker, p. 16). The Apostle Paul was first forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in some parts of Asia Minor (Acts 16: 6, 7), but later was able to plant churches in some of the cities of these regions (Acts 18: 23; 19: 10, 26; cited in Kistemaker, p. 16; consult a Study Bible map). Some of the regions are also mentioned in Acts 2: 9-10; therefore, it is conceivable that some of the three thousand converts on the Day of Pentecost may have made their way back to their homelands after Pentecost and planted churches. But this took place about 35-40 years previously, and there seems to be little evidence for second generation Christianity in these churches (cf. *1 Pet. 2: 1-2*; also Kistemaker, p. 7). Some of the names associated with the southern part of the Galatian province where Paul carried out his ministry—Pisidia, Phrygia, Pamphilia, and Cilicia—are omitted; thus, Kistemaker concludes that *1 Peter* is addressed to those areas which were not evangelized by Paul (p. 16).

Peter’s references reveal both a Jewish and a Gentile audience. On the Jewish side are references like *1: 4-9* which are replete (filled) with OT quotations. Yet there are also statements like *1: 14, 18; 2: 9-10* and *4: 3-4* which indicate a Gentile background. The churches addressed probably were mixed congregations with both Jew and Gentile. Davids believes the audience was primarily Gentile (*1 Peter*, p. 8).

Theme and Purpose

The *primary theme* of the epistle is unjust suffering from the pagan majority of Asia Minor (cf. *2: 18-24; 3: 14-18; 4: 1-5*). Christ also suffered unjustly providing an example for the Christian community to follow in His steps; thus, suffering for righteousness should not come as a strange experience for these Christians (*4: 12*). The *purpose* of suffering is to provide a Christian testimony and witness to those who make false accusations in the hope that the excellent behavior of the believing community might bring their accusers to faith in Christ (*2: 11-12*). Many scholars date *1 Peter* before the death of Caesar Nero in 68 AD; and, therefore, before the widespread, statist persecution of the Christian faith. However, Kistemaker has pointed out that there is no solid evidence that the Neronian persecutions in Rome had not already spread to the regions addressed in Peter’s epistle (p. 7). It is apparent from the epistle that a considerable amount of local persecution was occurring from non-Christian slave owners and the general population which criticized

Christians for refusing to participate in a debauched (immoral) cultural lifestyle (see passages cited above).

I. Salutation (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, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1 Peter 1:1-2 NASB)

Peter identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, thus establishing his prerogative (right) to address the Christians who are scattered in various parts of the world. There is nothing prideful in this self-identification. It is necessary for the apostles to assert the God-given function providentially given to them by Christ in order to fulfill their role as the foundation of the church upon which other believers would be placed stone upon stone until the whole edifice (building) is completed (Eph. 2: 19-22; 4: 11-12; ***1 Pet. 2: 5***). In another place, Peter humbly identifies himself as a “fellow elder” among all the elders of the churches scattered abroad.

Peter is writing to both Jewish and Gentile Christians who have been scattered by persecution or had been living in these different places since the exile of their forefathers from the land of Palestine. Recall that on the Day of Pentecost there were Jews present who had come from Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia to celebrate the feast (Acts 2: 9). Some of these Jews had been converted to the Christian faith at the preaching of Peter and had returned to their own countries.

The persecution alluded to in 1: 6 may not be the general persecution which occurred at a later date in the Roman Empire, but is possibly the more localized persecutions of Christians throughout the Roman Empire (for another opinion, see Kistemaker, p. 7). *1 and 2 Peter* were written sometime between 64 AD and 68 AD, assuming the tradition that he was martyred under Caesar Nero about 64 AD. The two letters could have been composed *after* his death by Silvanus since it appears that they were dictated to Silvanus (***1 Pet. 5: 12***). Thus, if the letters were written about this time (64-68 AD), they would have been read by some or all of the same churches which Paul planted or wrote letters to in Asia Minor.

Jewish and Gentile Christians are all **chosen** by God (*eklektos*—Tit. 1: 1; Col. 3: 12; passim [in other places]). Two of the means by which they have been chosen are provided in the verse: the **foreknowledge of God** and the **sanctifying work of the Spirit**. Foreknowledge (*prognosis*) in the Bible is **not merely knowledge beforehand** as if God simply looked into the future and knew who would repent and come to faith in Christ. Rather, foreknowledge is God’s “love beforehand” for His elect people whom He loved before He created the world and before any were born (Eph. 1: 4; Rom. 8: 29). God’s foreknowledge is always related to His **purpose** in saving His people and conforming them to the image of Christ, as the passage in Rom. 8: 28-30 clearly shows. Furthermore, in the *Romans* passage, **foreknew** is inseparably linked to **predestined, called, justified, and glorified**; thus, whoever is foreknown is also the **recipient of all the other graces** mentioned in the passage. Without any doubt, God knew every single human being who ever lived in the sense of knowing **about** him before he was born, but this is not the way the word is used in ***1 Pet. 1: 2***; Rom. 8: 29; Acts 2: 23; and Rom. 11: 2; and it is obvious that every human being will **not** be the recipient of God’s saving grace. Therefore, it follows that the intimate foreknowledge of God here and in Rom. 8 applies **only to elect believers**.

God foreknew *us*; the passage does not say that God knew something *about* us (Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, p. 533). From the perspective of God’s omniscient purpose, it is impossible for God to “know something ahead of time” without having purposed it beforehand according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1: 11). God declares the end from the beginning in order to accomplish all of His good pleasure (Isa. 46: 10); and since He has done so, the sinner’s response of repentance and faith is also included in this declared purpose.

As the final argument, we cannot say that God the Father only knew *about* Christ before the foundation of the world. Rather, we must say that God the Father **foreknew (*proginoskō*)** Christ with *intimate love and affection* before the foundation of the world. We also have explicit proof in this very chapter, for Peter proclaims, **For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you (*1 Pet. 1: 20*). Foreknown (*proginoskō*)** is the same root word used in Rom. 8: 29 and *1 Pet. 1: 2*). Thus, with the same intimate knowledge with which God the Father foreknew Christ, He also foreknew us. How could this be? How could the Father foreknow sinners and love them eternally with the same love and affection with which He foreknew Christ? He did so because in the counsels of the Holy Trinity before creation, He ordained that His people would be chosen *in Christ Jesus*. We are thus loved beforehand for the sake of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who unites us to the Father through His blood. When the Father loves His son, He also loves all those who are united to His Son.

Christians are also chosen by (*en*—“by means of”) the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the second thing Peter mentions as the *instrumental means* by which Christians are elected. Therefore, we are not elected unto salvation *apart* from means or agency but *through or by means of* the foreknowledge of God and the work of the Spirit. The sanctifying work of the Spirit mentioned here could be either *definitive* sanctification or *progressive* sanctification or both. In definitive sanctification, the believer is entirely passive as the Holy Spirit regenerates his heart (the rebirth of Jn. 3: 3) and effectually calls him to the truth of the gospel (Acts 16: 14). Thus, the Spirit sovereignly and effectually “sets him apart” from the world (the meaning of “sanctify”) for salvation. In progressive sanctification, the Spirit continues to conform the believer into the image of Christ, progressively completing the task begun in definitive sanctification and justification. (While living in this world, the believer is always a work in progress.) We are entirely passive (inactive) in God’s foreknowledge (after all, the world was not even made when he foreknew us) and in the Spirit’s definitive sanctification or effectual calling. However, we actively participate with the Spirit in the work of progressive sanctification. The Spirit uses the means of grace—the Word, the sacraments (the Lord’s supper and baptism), fellowship, worship, prayer, etc.—to make us into the kind of people that we are declared to be in justification—namely, righteous and holy.

Filling out the Trinitarian formula before the word “Trinity” was coined by Tertullian in the early third century, Peter continues, **to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood**. In this short phrase Peter presents not only the *purpose* of our being chosen but the *third means* of our being chosen. The third means is the blood atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross in which He sacrificed His own blood. Thus, the complete work of the *economic Trinity* (or functional Trinity) is presented—the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sacrificial atonement of God the Son, and the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit. The purpose for which this amazing, incomprehensible work has been done is that believers will **obey Jesus Christ**. Along with the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter emphasizes the *crowning work of our redemption*—holiness unto the Lord. Salvation does not consist merely in justification, but sanctification, and finally glorification. We are saved

from the *penalty* of sin in justification, from the *dominion* (control) of sin in sanctification, and from the *presence* of sin in glorification. Thus, we *are* saved, *are being* saved, and *will be saved* according to the three phase fulfillment of the New Covenant—*inauguration* (the first coming of Christ), *continuation* (the entire age of the church before Christ returns), and *consummation* (the final stage of salvation at the second coming of Christ) (see Third Millennium). “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, **that** [in order that] we would be **holy and blameless** before Him” (Eph. 1: 3-4).

Salvation is not a one-legged stool consisting only in justification. One-legged stools will not stand! The stool must have at least three legs—justification, sanctification, and glorification. The Father did not foreknow us; the Spirit did not set us apart; and Christ did not die for us *so that we could live as we please*—selfishly, irresponsibly, and immorally. The New Covenant, as all other biblical covenants, has conditions. In the case of the New Covenant, the condition to keep on believing in Christ implies the perseverance of the believer in obedience to God’s covenant law. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14: 15). God wanted a people who are “zealous for good deeds” (Tit. 2: 14), a people whose good deeds would be noticed by men so that their heavenly Father would be glorified (Matt. 5: 16), a people who are not squeezed into the mold of their culture (Rom. 1: 2). *The chief end of God is to glorify God* (John Piper), and taking a multitude of self-seeking sinners to heaven does not serve that purpose. “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12: 14). The sanctification in this verse is not definitive sanctification which occurs at conversion, but progressive holiness of life which the believer is responsible to pursue. Failure to pursue sanctification ends in everlasting death. It is not optional. To the extent that we understand this great salvation, grace and peace will be ours in fullest measure (v. 2b).

II. Doxology (1: 3-5)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5 NASB)

Contemplating our great salvation, Peter naturally proceeds to doxology (praise). Through His great mercy, God has **caused us to be born again**—to be reborn through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Once again, rebirth is not something *we* do, but something **God** does without us. Analogously, our first birth, the physical birth, proceeded without our help or consciousness. Likewise, the second birth proceeds in the same way, without our help or consciousness. Just as we did not give ourselves physical birth, we did not cause our “rebirth”. When a baby is first born, he cries. His cry does not *cause* his birth; it is the *result* of being born. Analogously, the believer’s verbal profession of faith is not the cause, but the result of being born again of the Spirit. Somehow, we begin to see ourselves, Christ, and the gospel in a new light. We look much worse than we have ever seen ourselves before, and Christ looks much better than He has ever looked to us before. Finally, the gospel makes sense. This is regeneration (rebirth) which is followed by repentance and faith leading to justification (a declaration of guiltlessness and righteousness).

The “hope” to which we have been born is a **living hope** because Christ is not a *dead* savior, but a **living** Savior who has risen from the dead and defeated death. Hope in the scriptures is not wishful

thinking with no foundation (“I hope it will rain.”) but a settled confidence in the promises of God who cannot lie. It is only called “hope” because we cannot yet *see* it with physical eyes (Rom. 8: 24-25; Heb. 11: 1). Our **inheritance** is a permanent inheritance which will not **fade away** at our death. Fathers bequeath (will) their possessions to their children who may enjoy these possessions as long as they live or to the extent that they manage them well without losing them. When they die, the inheritance—as far as it pertains to them—will perish with them. If they are poor managers, the inheritance will be **defiled** or spoiled through misuse, or it may be lost to unscrupulous thieves. Those who have invested in the stock market may lose most or all of their wealth in an economic crash which has no accurate predictability. Nothing is safe in this evil world, for even the best security is not good enough to protect us against unpredictable forces, our own sin, or the sin of others which often impoverishes us. But the inheritance of the believer is everlasting because he has eternal life, and it will never be mismanaged or spoiled because the believer will be sinless. Further, our inheritance is **reserved in heaven** for us where neither thieves can steal it nor the forces of nature can destroy it (Matt. 6: 19-20).

But what *is* this inheritance? Will the Christian inherit a cloud in the sky? Will he be strumming on his harp all day? Peter does not give us much information in this epistle, speaking of heaven only as the abode of the Holy Spirit and the place where Christ sits at God’s right hand (**1: 12; 3: 22**; cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Peter*, p.15). However, in his second epistle he says, **But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells** (2 Pet. 3: 13), a phrase found only here in the NT and one which Peter quotes from the OT (Isa. 65: 17; 66: 22). When God made the world and all that is within it, He said, **“It is good.”** The good earth was spoiled (defiled) by man’s sin and subjected to futility, death, and sorrow (Rom. 8: 18-25). This is possibly the reason why Peter speaks of our inheritance as being **undefiled**, for the new creation will not be spoiled by man’s sin. But God’s original purpose in making a good earth and sinless mankind to live in it could not be ultimately thwarted (overturned). He willed to make new heavens and a new earth for redeemed mankind who would accomplish God’s **original purpose** in having dominion over the earth for His glory. We don’t exactly know how this will play out, but one thing is sure; what God has in store for His redeemed people will be exhilarating! In light of all his earthly sufferings as an apostle and missionary (2 Cor. 11: 23-28), the Apostle Paul could say triumphantly, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8: 18).

Since the inheritance of the saints is consummated in the return of Christ and the restoration of the heavens and the earth, Peter calls it a “salvation **ready to be revealed** in the last time” (v. 5). The **eschatological** salvation is something the Christian hopes for, not something he is actually experiencing in fullest measure now. As Davids remarks,

Indeed, to say, “I am saved” would not have made sense to Peter, for his response would have been, “Then why do you still suffer? Why are you not yet glorified?” At conversion one perhaps gets a foretaste of salvation and certainly receives the promise of salvation, but the actual experience of the fullness of that salvation cannot come before the revelation of Christ at the end (Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 20).

We may also add, “If we are saved, why do we still sin?”, for salvation in its fullest sense will include spiritual and moral perfection—sinlessness. As yet we do not yet “see” these aspects of our salvation, yet the pledge or guarantee of our inheritance has been given to us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1: 13-14).

But how can we be sure that we will persevere to the end and receive this inheritance (Matt. 24: 13)? How can we be sure that we will not lose our salvation through sinfulness? The answer is found in **v. 5a**; we are “protected by the **power of God** through faith. The true believer—distinguished from the false professor—should never fear falling short of a full and complete salvation. The same Holy Spirit who began the good work of salvation in us at regeneration will complete it until Christ returns (Phil 1: 6). God, the Great Healer of souls, never puts us on the operating table only to walk away from the surgery before the operation is complete. Furthermore, it is God who is at work in us through the Holy Spirit both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2: 12-13). This whole saving dynamic is included in Peter’s remark, “who are protected by the power of God **through faith**.” Again, there is the end—salvation—and the means to the end—the power of God working **through** and **with** our faith. God works through means, not without them, and our **continuing** faith is one of the means to the end of our salvation. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11: 6), and those who once claimed faith in Christ but have since renounced this faith have no assurance of salvation. Yet, true, saving faith is itself the gift of God (Eph. 2: 8) which is **bestowed** upon the believer and **maintained** by the power of the Spirit working through the means of grace—the Word, prayer, fellowship, worship, the sacraments, even trials (**1 Pet. 1: 7**; James 1: 2-4). We are protected by the power of God who works in us through His Spirit **to ensure the proper use of the means of grace** which will inevitably result in enduring faith and its **outcome**, salvation (cf. **1 Pet. 1: 9**).

III. Rejoicing in Persecution (1: 6-12)

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;⁸ and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.¹⁰ As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries,¹¹ seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:6-12 NASB)

In light of this great salvation, there is occasion for rejoicing even in the midst of persecution. The subject of persecution comes up in four out of five chapters in this epistle (the present passage, **3: 13-17; 4: 12-19; and 5: 9**; cited from Kistemaker, p. 17). Since the dating of the epistles of Peter is almost certainly from 64-68 AD, these are not the **official** persecutions of Emperor Domitian (early 90’s AD) or that of Emperor Trajan (110-111 AD). We know from Roman history that Emperor Nero (54-68 AD) burned two-thirds of the buildings and dwellings of Rome and blamed this conflagration (a big, destructive fire) on the Christians dwelling in Rome. He even had Christians rolled in tar, mounted on poles, and burned alive to illuminate his gardens. However, there is no definitive evidence that the trials Peter mentions were the result of **organized** persecution from Rome, or not. We just don’t know for sure. The **fiery ordeal** mentioned in **1 Pet. 4: 12** is a metaphor for trials and not a reference to the burning of Rome or Nero’s use of Christians for human torches. Most likely, Peter is speaking only of the common, ordinary hatred of Christians by pagans living among them (Kistemaker, p. 18).

Some unbelievers hate Christians because their godly lifestyles witness against them and to the

judgment to come (*1 Pet. 4: 3-4*). Jesus warned His disciples that they would be hated by the world **because they were not of the world**—i.e. they did not follow the world in its evil deeds. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (Jn. 15: 19). Based on the references above, the kinds of suffering alluded to are of the same variety that Christians have endured throughout the history of the church, and are now enduring. Thus, the references to suffering and persecution are quite **relevant to the church in any age and any generation** which will continue to attract the hatred of the world just as Jesus did. “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*” (Jn. 15: 18).

But what does Peter mean when he says that “for a **little** while” these Christians have been thus distressed? History will demonstrate that the church went through many **prolonged** periods of severe persecution and that the 20th century has proven to be the bloodiest century of Christian martyrdom. However, Peter did not think Christ would delay His coming for 2000 years (plus how many more?). Such remarks as **4: 7, The end of all things is near**, indicate that Peter was awaiting the imminent return of Christ (Kistemaker, p. 15). He was not alone in this expectation, for Paul, James, and the author of *Hebrews* (whoever he was) also spoke of the “last days” according to the prophetic witness of the OT (compare Acts 2: 17; 2 Pet. 3: 3; 2 Tim. 3: 1; James 5: 3; Heb. 1: 2 with Joel 2: 28-29; Mic. 4: 1; Hos. 3: 5; Isa. 2: 2; etc.). After 2000 years, we now know that the “last days” is a much longer designation of time than originally thought beginning with the coming of the Holy Spirit; but there was no way for the apostles to know that Jesus’ return was not imminent, for such information was not given to them (Matt. 24: 3, 36). Every generation of Christians should live with the expectation that Jesus could come at any time; and, therefore, they should be ready by being about His business (Matt. 25; whole chapter!). Those who dogmatically predict that He **must come soon** or that He **must come much later** obviously think they have figured it out better than the apostles.

The important point at this juncture in Peter’s letter is that **perseverance through trials and persecution demonstrate the proof of one’s faith** which, in turn, serves to glorify God at the consummation, the **revelation of Jesus Christ** when He returns (v. 7). Gold is precious and has been coveted as a valuable commodity for the entire history of the human race. When the value of currency (paper money) is in question—like it is now in Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe and in The Democratic Republic of the Congo under Kabila—the value of gold is never in question. Its price fluctuates up or down according to the times but always waiting for the next inflation, deflation, governmental blunder, or war. It will always be around as a **standard** by which to judge the nations’ currencies. But gold is nothing in comparison to our faith—a God-given faith by which we take possession of the immeasurable treasure of eternal life with God. Peter even calls gold and silver **perishable** (1:18), a surprising description considering they are both inert metals which will not rust. However, Peter is not speaking scientifically, but in terms of the value of gold and silver relative to everything else. They are the least perishable possessions on earth; yet, **both are perishable in comparison to genuine faith**. Silver can still tarnish, and both gold and silver can be lost or stolen. In the new creation with unlimited abundance, it is doubtful if gold and silver will have any particular value other industrial and aesthetic use. Genuine faith, on the other hand, cannot perish or be lost; nor can it be stolen, even by the devil himself and all his demons (Rom. 8: 38-39; Jn. 10: 28). Faith “is the victory that has overcome the world” (1 Jn. 5: 4); and if this victory could be reversed through the ultimate triumph of temptation, it would be a hollow victory indeed.

The writer of *Hebrews* describes faith as “the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things

not seen” (Heb. 11: 1), and Peter lends support to this description here (v. 8). Peter was present at Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples after His resurrection. The Apostle Thomas, however, was not present on that occasion and insisted that he would not believe Christ had risen from the dead unless he placed his hands in the nail prints of his hands and in His side (Jn. 20: 25; cf. Jn. 20: 9 where John notes that before the resurrection, none of the disciples—including himself—understood that Jesus must rise from the dead until it actually happened). When Jesus appeared to the disciples the second time, Thomas was present; and after seeing the wounds of Jesus’ crucifixion, he testified, “My Lord and my God” (Jn. 20: 28). Offering a stinging rebuke that Thomas would never forget, Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed**” (Jn. 20: 29). Considering that Thomas had personally witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, the widow’s son of Nain, and Jairus’ daughter (see my *Synoptic Gospels*), Jesus’ resurrection should not have been surprising. Peter now commends believers scattered throughout Asia Minor for conviction not based on sight, but faith. None of the Christians to whom he is writing had seen the risen Christ, but they had believed His message and the reports of His resurrection given them by others. In no sense is the faith of Peter’s audience or that of believers living from that time to the 21st century substandard (deficient in quality) to that of the original Apostles. In fact, their faith and our faith may be greater.

Is it possible that the apostles who saw and heard Jesus were of the opinion that their faith in the Lord *was not so great as the faith of those who would believe without seeing Jesus?* This possibility is real... (Kistemaker, p. 50; emphasis mine).

Peter Davids concurs,

Here one finds a paradox. Unlike Peter and others of the first generation who had seen Jesus, they have neither seen him in the past nor do they see him at present; *their faith is not based on their perceptual experience*. Yet, despite this apparent deprivation, *they in no way come behind the first generation of disciples* in Palestine, for they love and believe on Jesus. This paradox of faith without sight is often found in the NT (see John 20: 24-29; 2 Cor. 5: 7; Heb. 11: 1, 27), for as soon as the church expanded outside Palestine it was the experience of most Christians. The really important thing is *not what they can see* (e.g., the trials they have and their enemies), *but whom they love and are committed to* (cf. also 2 Kings 6: 14-17), even though they do not see him (pp. 58-59; emphasis mine).

Our joy in the Christian faith (v. 8—**joy inexpressible and full of glory**) does not depend on our visual witness of Christ or the resurrection. The visual testimonies of those who have gone before us are *essential* to the church’s survival (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 3-8; 1 Jn. 1: 1-4); but from the end of the first century onward to the present day, the church has walked by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5: 7), believing in the visual testimonies recorded in Scripture. We should be reminded that there were thousands who visually witnessed the presence of Christ and His miracles who *never believed* that He was the Christ, God in the flesh. They also would not believe the report that the Jesus had risen from the dead despite the impossibility of well-spread lies that His body was somehow stolen by a helpless following of fearful disciples (Matt. 28: 1-15). It takes more than visual sight—and miracles—to produce belief, and those who refuse to listen to the testimony of the Scriptures will not believe even if they see someone rising from the dead, something Jesus makes clear in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. Lk. 16: 31). Nevertheless, unbelievers are now required to repent on the basis of the fact that God has raised Christ from the dead.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

From this text, Paul is offering the unbeliever no option to *disbelieve* the gospel because he has not personally witnessed the resurrection. According to Paul, God furnished ample evidence that Jesus rose from the dead; and there was no getting around this proof. Even as God has furnished proof of his existence and attributes through His creation (Rom. 1: 18-21), He has also furnished sufficient proof of the resurrection in space and time through hundreds of eyewitness accounts (1 Cor. 15: 3-8). The only reason for disbelieving such proof is the *unproven assumption* that miracles are impossible and have never occurred, a modern pseudo-scientific bias. But how can this assumption be proven unless one is eternal, all-knowing, and present everywhere in the universe at once—i.e. unless he is God? Scientifically, no one can prove that miracles never happened. It must be assumed.

Throughout the continent of Africa, poor people oppressed by their own governments, rebel groups, Muslims, or the ravages of poverty continue to believe the gospel message in spite of very limited teaching or opportunity. They do not see Christ in the flesh; but through the work of the Holy Spirit within them they embrace Him and love Him. To God alone be the glory!

The outcome of such faith is the salvation of our souls. The word **outcome** (*telos*) can be translated “goal” (Rom. 10: 4). Thus, our faith has as its goal the salvation of our souls. Our faith is not the *basis or foundation* of our salvation, but the *instrumental means* by which we take hold of Christ and His atoning work. Continuing faith is, therefore, absolutely essential for salvation. The gospel message never circumvents (goes around) the active participation of the believer. We are saved by the atoning work of Christ on the cross, but that atonement will not save us if we do not continually believe in it.

IV. The Prophetic Witness (1: 10-12)

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries,¹¹ seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:10-12 NASB)

The salvation fully **announced** (or “reported”; v. 12) in the NT was only partially revealed to the OT **prophets**; thus, the prophets did not always understand the fullest significance of their own prophecies (Kistemaker, p. 53; cf. Isa. 6: 11; Dan. 7: 15-16; Matt. 13: 17; all cited by Kistemaker). Second, they did not know the time in which their prophecies would be fulfilled except that they would most likely be fulfilled *after* their time, and, thus in the life-time of future generations of believers (Davids, p. 64). After the Holy Spirit made predictions of “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow”, the prophets would make **careful searches and inquiries** of what the Spirit meant and when these things would take place. The predictions of the prophets, therefore, were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit; thus, Peter confirms the doctrine of verbal inspiration (Kistemaker, p. 54; see also 2 Pet. 1: 21). We cannot help but call to mind—as examples—the great prophetic predictions of Christ, the suffering servant (Isa. 53); Christ, the exalted Messiah (Ps. 2; Dan. 7: 9-14); His crucifixion (Ps. 22); the coming of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2: 28-32); the coming of John the

Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (Mal. 4: 5-6); the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (Mic. 5: 2); the virgin birth of Jesus (Isa. 7: 14); the new covenant (Jer. 31: 27-34); and the restoration of the created order (Isa. 11; Isa. 35)—to name only a few.

Thus, the sufferings of Christ are His earthly sufferings reaching their zenith (highest point) in His crucifixion; while the glories which follow are His resurrection, glorification, His ascension to the right hand of God the Father, and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost along with His manifold gifts to the church (Eph. 4). These present glories are followed by yet future glories in the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Col. 1: 19-20) and the rescue of the heavens and earth—the entire creation—from the futility of man’s sin (Rom. 8: 18-25).

By searching out these predictions, the prophets were not just serving their own curiosity, but Christians throughout all the ages (v. 12) and in a special sense the Christians to whom Peter was writing who did not have access to the full canon of NT writings (some of which had not yet been written and most of which had not been distributed widely to the existing churches). But now that Christ had come, had been crucified, had risen and ascended to heaven, the gospel message had been **announced** in ways previously unknown to the OT prophets. Furthermore, the manifold wisdom of God in the gospel is so astounding, so incomprehensibly magnificent, that even the *good* angels in heaven (so also Calvin and Hendriksen on Eph. 3: 10) earnestly desire (**long to look**, *epithumeo*; cf. Lk. 16: 21) to continually investigate (present active indicative; continuous action) the glories of the gospel and the kingdom of God to be consummated in Christ’s return.

Verse 12b is difficult, but equally intriguing. What does Peter mean that the angels desire to investigate the gospel? Kistemaker explains briefly, “...their knowledge of man’s salvation is incomplete, for they long to look into the mystery of salvation” (p. 57). This begs yet another question: How “incomplete” is their knowledge of our salvation? We get further insight into the text by way of Eph. 3: 8-10 where Paul says,

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; *so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.*

The meaning is not, as John Calvin explains, that the angels in heaven (“rulers and authorities”) are with us in our worship assemblies gaining knowledge of the word of God from mere mortals. Angels beholding the face of God walk by sight rather than by faith and do not require the ministry of the word. Rather Calvin remarks,

The *church*, composed both of Jews and Gentiles, is a *mirror*, in which angels behold the astonishing wisdom of God *displayed in a manner unknown to them before*. They see a work which is new to them, and the reason of which was hid in God. In this manner, and not by learning anything from the lips of men, do they make progress (*Ephesians*, p. 256, emphasis mine).

There is a sense in which angels can only behold this manifold wisdom of God in the church as the people of God live out the truths of the gospel on a daily basis.

The more the church lives in harmony with its high calling, the more also will the angels be able to see in it God’s marvelous wisdom. To make manifest in its life and character the “excellencies” of its Maker-

Redeemer, so that the principalities and the authorities may, indeed, see this wisdom is, therefore, part of the church's *Lofty Goal* (Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 160).

The principle theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the inclusion of the Gentiles into the covenant promises of God and the church (see especially Eph. 1 and 2). How could it be that God would take two entirely diverse peoples—Jews and Gentiles—and combine them into one single church? How could this work? But when angels behold the body of Christ, they see not only Jews and Gentiles living in unity with one another (Eph. 4) but different tribes and cultures among the Gentiles (black, brown, white, red, yellow) living together in one church. Only as the Christian faith is practiced incarnationally (in the flesh) among living human beings does the wisdom of God receive the recognition and praise *in the heavenly places* that it deserves. F.F. Bruce concurs but interprets "the rulers and the authorities in heavenly places" in Eph. 3: 10 as consisting of *both* good and evil angelic beings.

This new, comprehensive community [the church] is to serve throughout the universe as an object-lesson of the wisdom of God—his "much-variegated" wisdom....

There is no need to limit the "principalities and powers" in such a context as this to hostile forces. *All created intelligences are in view here*. When the foretelling and accomplishment of the Christian salvation are said in 1 Pet. 1: 12 to be "things into which angels long to look," something of the same sort is intended as we find here. The wisdom of God revealed in the cross of Christ and in its saving efficacy [effectiveness] in the lives of believers upsets all conventional notions of wisdom and demands their reappraisal in the minds of the spiritually mature (1 Cor. 1: 18—2: 6).

The "principalities and powers" learn from the church that they too have a place in the plan of God. *The reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in this new creation is a token of the reconciliation in which they in their turn are to be embraced*. [Here, of course, Bruce could only be speaking of good angels and not evil ones which will be confined to the lake of fire. Rev. 20: 10. DFM] In Col. 1: 19-22 the *cosmic reconciliation* which God has planned is *anticipated* in the experience of believers in Christ, whom "he has now reconciled"—and the means of reconciliation in the one case as in the other is the saving work of Christ, who has "made peace through the blood of his cross." *The church thus appears to be God's pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future, the mystery of God's will "to be administered in the fullness of the times," when "the things in heaven and the things on earth" are to be brought together in Christ (Eph. 1: 9-10)*. There is probably the further implication that the church, the product of God's reconciling work thus far, is designed by him to be his *agency* (existing as it does "in Christ") for the bringing about of the *ultimate reconciliation*. If so, then Paul, who is the direct instrument of God in creating the present fellowship of reconciliation, is indirectly his instrument for the universal reconciliation of the future (F.F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, pp. 321-322; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

To summarize, the church is not only a visible witness to the living inhabitants of the *earth*, but also to angelic beings in the *heavenlies* beholding the mystery of salvation. The earth is a stage or platform, as it were, upon which the grand drama of redemption is being played out. To use another analogy, the church is "Exhibit A" in the celestial (heavenly) courtroom of justice *proving* the infinite wisdom of God in salvation and proving that Satan is a liar.

V. The Call to Obedience (1: 13-25)

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your behavior*; ¹⁶ because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Peter 1:13-16 NASB)

Therefore connects the reader to the previous instruction of *vv. 3-12*. In light of the immeasurable grace of God in the gospel and our eternal inheritance, “how should we then live” (cf. Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live—the Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*)? Preaching always **demands a response** and is never solely for the purpose of informing the mind (although informing the mind is **part** of preaching—Rom. 12: 1-2. See discussion below). The latter is a Hellenistic notion—knowledge for its own sake—made prevalent through Greek philosophy; but the Hebraic notion of knowledge was that all information must be **applied** to qualify as true knowledge. If we don’t **practice** it, then we don’t **know** it. Solomon tells us, “The fear of the LORD is the **beginning** of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1: 7). Thus, **wisdom is applied knowledge** which leads inevitably to the reverent fear of God and obedience to His will. If not, then it does not qualify as true wisdom and knowledge. There are many educated people who love learning, and they have Ph.D’s to prove it; yet, many of them are still fools because their learning has not led them to the fear of God. They have tremendous head-knowledge of their respective fields—biology, economics, chemistry, agriculture, etc.—but their knowledge is **incomplete** because it is not referenced back to the Creator of all knowledge. (For a thorough historical treatment of famous scientists who were Christians, see Henry M. Morris, *Men of Science, Men of God—Great Scientists Who Believed the Bible*.) In his book, James Jordan protests the limited perspective of the Bible only as the history of redemption.

The Bible is a book for all of life. It give us accurate history. It also gives us law, for “what nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law?” (Dt. 4:8). It provides touchstones for geology [the flood, DFM] and benchmarks for medicine.

The Bible is a book for all of life. It is to be consulted by all priest-kings in their professional capacities for such guidance as it will give. It was a Bible-reading mariner [seaman DFM], Matthew Maury, who discovered the ocean currents precisely because he had been assured by Psalm 8:8 that there are “paths in the seas” (James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, p. 10).

Comprehensively understood, even the study of chemistry should lead a person to worship the Creator who created not only the substances utilized in chemistry but allowed man to discover the discipline of chemistry (Rom. 1: 18-22). Cornelius Van Til, a Dutch theologian, popularized the phrase, “All truth is God’s truth”; and if the natural man (i.e. the unbelieving man) has any truth at all, it is only because he is “borrowing” the truth from the Christian faith which he repudiates (denies). Unbelievers “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” because they do not wish to submit their lives to God’s rule; they do not wish to worship the true and living God. (For a philosophical treatment of how modern science has strayed from Biblical truth, see Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Mythology of Science*). If then, **all** knowledge—even the knowledge of physics—should lead to submission, worship, and obedience (response) **how much more** should the knowledge of God’s word lead us to the response of worship and obedience?

A. Putting Our Minds to the Work of Obedience (v. 13)

The New King James Version (NKJV) translates Peter’s exhortation, “gird up the loins of your mind”, a more literal translation. The metaphor (figure of speech) would be familiar to his audience. When a person wished to run or to work, he would tuck his long robe under his waist-belt so that he would not be hindered in the physical activity of running or working (Ex. 12: 11; 1 Kings 18: 46). Thus, Peter is saying, “Get ready to work!” or “Get ready to run!” in a spiritual sense, not a physical

sense. And such spiritual work requires the activity of the mind as well as the heart. Thus, the Christian faith and life is neither *all mind and no heart*, nor is it *all heart and no mind*. Rather, it is *all heart and all mind*. According to Jesus, the great commandment in the law is, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND” (Matt. 22: 36-37).

The word for mind is *dianoia* which has the same root as *nous* (“mind”) of Rom. 12: 2. Thus, *Christians must prepare their minds to obey God, using their heads as well as their hearts*. Peter does not advocate (favor) a mindless Christianity which is generally ignorant of the Bible but attempts to cloak (cover up) this ignorance by an appeal to super-spirituality—“The Lord told me to _____.” One can fill in the blank with virtually anything he wishes since he is claiming direct communication from the Holy Spirit who singles him out for special instruction not given to the rest of us ordinary mortals. Needless to say, such claims can produce a strange sort of “obedience”. I remember a Christian who claimed that the Holy Spirit “told him” to give another person’s Bible away to someone else without his permission. Some lecherous (lustful) “pastors” (so-called) have seduced young women in their congregations under the same pretense. A long time ago, someone said to Charles Spurgeon (possibly the greatest preacher of the 19th century), “Mr. Spurgeon, the Lord told me that I am supposed to preach in your pulpit next Sunday.” Spurgeon was unmoved, declaring, “Well, that is very interesting, because the Lord did not tell *me* that you were supposed to preach in my pulpit next Sunday. Consequently, sir, you will most assuredly *not* be preaching in my pulpit.” Another claimant to direct communication from God enthusiastically reported to Spurgeon, “Mr. Spurgeon, I saw a message in the clouds which spelled the letters, ‘G P C’, ‘Go preach Christ’. Therefore, I believe God is telling me to go into the ministry.” Spurgeon dryly responded, “Perhaps God is telling you to ‘Go plant corn’ instead.” Quite clearly, Spurgeon was not impressed with any claims to direct communication with God.

There is no denying that the Lord speaks to His people, and we can say without apology that all believers, not just a few favored ones, are daily guided by the Holy Spirit *speaking to them silently through the Scriptures* whether by exact quotation or general principles found in the Bible. This is ordinary *illumination* enjoyed by every believer. But *direct communication* from the Spirit or from an angel (or “the angel of the Lord”—a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ) has been the privilege of only a relatively *few* believers throughout the entire history of redemption—Adam, Moses, some of the judges of Israel, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, the OT prophets, the NT apostles and prophets, etc. Such people stand out in redemptive history as *exceptional* precisely because they have been given this *special* privilege of direct communication not given to anyone else. In the defense of his apostleship, Paul claimed direct revelation from God, a revelation which *set him apart* from the so-called apostles who opposed his ministry (2 Cor. 12: 1-4). Does this mean that the rest of us are now disadvantaged because the Spirit does not speak directly to us? On the contrary, we are the most privileged of all because we have the complete canon of the Old and New Testament scriptures, all of which are “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be **adequate, equipped for every good work**” (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). Being “equipped for every good work” is equivalent to Peter’s **prepare your minds for action**. *Nothing else is necessary* to prepare us for obedience besides the word of God, prayer (and other ordinary means of grace), and the Holy Spirit’s enabling power to help us understand and apply the Scriptures.

The command, **keep sober**, is in keeping with the previous command of preparing the mind for action. To be sober is the opposite of being intoxicated, and thus, mentally and spiritually in

control—“free from every form of mental and spiritual excess and confusion” (*BibleWorks*; it is the same word, *naphō*, used in 1 Thess. 5: 6, 8; 2 Tim. 4: 5; and 1 Pet. 4: 7; 5: 8). Fundamentally, Christians should be sound-minded people (not “goof-balls”) who work hard intellectually and spiritually, thinking through the implications of their faith to respond correctly to the complexities of life. Many difficult problems were facing Peter’s audience in the 1st century, including how to respond to tyrannical and oppressive governing authorities (2: 13-14); how to respond to persecution (2: 18-19); how to respond to infanticide (not mentioned in this epistle, but common in Graeco-Roman culture), etc. Proper response to such ethical problems required sober *thinking*, as it also does in our day, concerning the manifold problems faced by Christians in any culture—abortion, homosexuality, mob justice, wife abuse, corruption, etc.

B. Fixing Our Hope on the Grace to Come (v. 13)

How does the Christian maintain a state of spiritual alertness when the temptation is to “go with the flow” of the general culture, running with it in the same excesses of moral degradation (*1 Pet. 4: 4*)? How do young men and women avoid yielding to sexual immorality when “everyone is doing it”? (A very stupid statement, by the way. How can anyone who is finite and limited to one place at a time know that “everyone does it?”) How do Christian workers avoid stealing from employers who do not pay them on time or do not pay them what they promised? How do high officials in government positions avoid stealing when it’s so easily done and seemingly everyone around them is stealing? The answer is forthcoming in the last part of *v. 13*. ***Our hope is not in this world or in any happiness and pleasure we can glean from this world.*** Rather, we must fix our hope completely upon the grace of God to be brought to us at the revelation of Christ. As stated earlier, hope is not wishful thinking but a ***settled confidence in the promises of God revealed in the Scriptures***. We hope for it only because it is not a present reality which can be seen. We hope for eternal life, but until we die and enter the presence of God, eternal life is not something we can empirically verify (prove).

Yet, as Christians we are as equally convinced of heaven’s reality as the fact that the sun will shine in the morning and the moon at night. Both of these geophysical realities are established facts, but in the Christian mind, heaven is also a “fact” established from the word of God. As we meditate upon this hope, the fleeting pleasures of this world and the praise of men become less attractive to us. For example, consider the temptation of a married Christian man who is being seduced by a beautiful woman at work. His choices are clear: Give in to her sexual advances and enjoy the temporary pleasure of an affair, lose his marriage and children, and possibly begin a downward spiral of sin which ends in apostasy; ***or***, contemplate the joy of being faithful to his wife and his Lord until death and entering heaven with “well-done, good and faithful servant.” There is no question that sin is pleasurable for the moment; otherwise, why would people continue to sin? But its pleasure is relatively short-lived considering eternity.

It has often been said in the US, “Some people are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.” The idea behind this saying is that some people think about spiritual realities so much that they cannot function well in this earthly life. To be sure, we are not called upon to spend all our time reading our Bibles, praying, or singing hymns. Many of these we are commanded to do must be prioritized and postponed. Yet, I don’t think I have met any Christians in the US who are so spiritual that they are no earthly good. I think average Christians in the US have the opposite problem—they are so earthly-minded that they are almost useless to the kingdom of heaven. (I said, “almost”.) They

spend so much of their time making money, accumulating and maintaining consumer goods, and entertaining themselves, that they have little if any time left over to experience the genuine community of the body of Christ or to make significant contributions to the spiritual well-being of others. Peter exhorts the believers in Asia Minor to fix their hope on the grace to be brought to them at the future revelation of Christ—the consummation of the kingdom of God—to *enable them* to live a holy and righteous life *on earth*, a life which includes “good deeds” (*1 Pet. 2: 12*). The Apostle Paul makes the same appeal in Col. 3: 1-6, saying,

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.* For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. *Therefore* consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience....

Notice also from *v. 13b* that although grace is something we *presently* enjoy, it is also something *being brought* to us when Christ returns in glory. Since the verb is a present passive participle, this means that grace is “already on the way” (Kistemaker, p. 59). Thus, we receive the grace of God *in progressive stages* even as the kingdom of God comes not all at once, but in stages—inauguration, continuation, and consummation. (May I recommend the entire Third Millennium series of videos, audios, and manuscripts.) Everything we receive from the Lord is by grace, including the full installment of the inheritance Peter has spoken of earlier in *v. 4*. Our inheritance of the new heavens and earth is by grace, but the realization of that *particular* grace is for a future day.

C. The Command and Promise of Holiness (vv. 14-16)

The *purpose* of Peter’s exhortation to prepare our minds for action and to fix our hope on “future grace” (cf. John Piper, *Future Grace*) is found in *vv. 14-19*. Stated negatively, we must not **be conformed to the former lusts** of the flesh which once held us in bondage, what Peter describes a few verses down as a **futile way of life** (*v. 18*). Later on, he describes the former lusts more specifically—but not exhaustively—as **the desire of the Gentiles** including **sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries** (*4: 3*), the kinds of behavior which people mistakenly believe will bring them happiness and fulfillment. Why else would they live this way? Such a life-style is the result of **ignorance**—ignorance of the bondage of sin which is disguised as freedom; ignorance of the liberating effect of the gospel; ignorance of God’s law; ignorance of the joy of knowing God through Jesus Christ.

The purpose, stated positively, is holiness (*vv. 15-16*). But what is holiness? *Holiness, or sanctification, consists of being conformed to the image of Christ in all of His moral perfections.* As such, it also implies heart obedience to the law of God. Notice that holiness is not simply a state of mind, but pertains to one’s **behavior**, his actions (*v. 15b*; **behavior** could be translated, “life-style”; Davids, p. 69). Theologians speak of two aspects of sanctification—*definitive* sanctification and *progressive* sanctification. Definitive sanctification, like justification, is an initial, once-for-all act of God by which He sets the believer apart for blessing and conformity to Christ. As the priests of the OT were set apart for the holy vocation of administering the sacrifices, all Christians are set apart as a people for God’s own possession and for the holy vocation of doing good deeds that their Father in heaven may be glorified (Matt. 5: 16). Progressive sanctification is a process by which God progressively makes us into the kind of people—a holy people—which He *declares us to be in*

justification. In justification, God legally declares that we are not guilty of sin because this sin has been atoned for by the blood of Christ. This is not a legal fiction because, in actual fact, we are no longer guilty. Christ has paid our penalty, and sin is no longer imputed to us. Further, God declares us to be holy and righteous in His sight because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us or deposited to our account. This is also not legal fiction, but actual fact. In the eyes of God, we **are** righteous because we are in Christ. But it is obvious that the Christian is not as righteous or holy **in practice** as he is legally declared to be. In progressive sanctification, the Holy Spirit indwells us with a mop, broom, and bucket—so to speak—to clean us up. As He changes our lives for the better, we **actually become** in practice the people God declares us to be—a holy people who desire to keep His law and practice good deeds. This cleaning-up process will not be completed in this life, but only after death.

The holiness of the believer is **founded upon the holiness of God**—the one who called us—**for it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy**, a quotation from Lev. 11: 45 and Lev. 19: 2. Peter now takes an OT passage written for national Israel and applies it to the NT church. God’s **original purpose** of having a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works (2: 9) has not been set aside because of Israel’s failure as a nation to measure up to its spiritual potential—being a light to the nations. There is, thus, a continuity of purpose for the OT people (ethnic Israel, including elect Jews) and the NT people (the visible church, including elect Jews and Gentiles). Note well that the OT passage in *Leviticus* does **not** say that God **wants** His people to be holy. This statement is true, but it doesn’t go far enough. His desire for our holiness is not simply a wish, but a **certainty** based upon His sovereign purpose—“You **shall** be holy, for **I** am holy.” God’s whole purpose for creating man was to bring him into fellowship with Himself, thus magnifying His glory by populating the earth with His perfect image-bearers (see Richard L. Pratt, *Designed for Dignity, “Finding Our Place in His Kingdom”*, pp. 1-22). But God cannot fellowship—or work in cooperation—with unholy, rebellious sinners. Such unholy occupants of the new heavens and earth would not serve His original purpose. Thus, for man to be fit for heavenly occupation and vocation, he must undergo a radical **transformation**; for only then can he serve the purpose for which he was created. Thus, “You shall be holy for I am holy” is not only a command, but a promise of His sovereign, transforming purpose.

VI. The Cost and Effect of Redemption (1: 17-25)

A. The Cost of Redemption (1: 17-19)

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. (1 Peter 1:17-19 NASB)

Redemption (v.18) is presented in the Bible as the purchase price of a slave’s freedom (Lev. 25: 47-54). God **redeemed** Israel from their bondage in Egypt with the purchase-price of the first-born of Egypt (Deut. 7: 7-8; 9: 26; also see Matthew Henry; *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. IV. *Hosea*, p. 1137). The Passover lamb was slain and its blood was applied to the doorposts and lintels of every Israelite home, causing the death angel to pass over each home upon which the blood was displayed (Ex. 12: 1-13). In their place, God killed every first-born son and every first-born beast in Egypt. From the exodus from Egypt onward, every first-born male beast or Israelite male child belonged to the Lord as a sacrifice or had to be redeemed with a purchase-price

(Ex. 13: 1-15). Since donkeys were valuable beasts of burden, they were redeemed with a lamb, and since human sacrifice was forbidden, all first-born males were also redeemed with a lamb (although the redemption price of a lamb for male children is not specifically stated in Ex. 13, there is strong presumption from the text that this was the price). Moreover, the lambs presented for sacrifice had to be “unblemished” (Ex. 12: 5; 1 Pet. 1: 19).

The Apostle Paul acknowledged that Jesus is now our Passover lamb who has been sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5: 7). As God’s wrath was turned away from the Israelite homes displaying the blood of the Passover lamb, even so His wrath against our sin is propitiated (satisfied) and turned away because of Christ’s blood displayed on the cross. By this same blood we are redeemed from the curse of the Law which requires death to the lawbreaker (Gal. 3: 13). In other words, as law-breakers we are on death row (a place in prisons for criminals awaiting execution) waiting to be put to death eternally for crimes against a holy, righteous, and just God who cannot remain just without punishing our sins. Christ purchases our freedom from prison and execution by dying in our place, thus satisfying the just demands of God’s law. God is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3: 26).

Another OT type (picture) is found in the prophecy of *Hosea*. After marrying Hosea and giving birth to their first son, Gomer (a prostitute before she married Hosea) returned to a life of prostitution and gave birth to two illegitimate children (Hos. 1-2; cf. Gerard Van Groningen, *From Creation to Consummation*, Vol. Two, p. 51; who argues that she was a prostitute *before* marrying Hosea). Eventually, Hosea had to purchase Gomer from her pimp—an agent or owner of prostitutes—for the paltry (small) sum of fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley (Hos. 3: 2). The normal price of a male or female slave in Israel was thirty shekels of silver (Ex. 21: 32); thus, Hosea pays half the price in silver and half the price in barley (Zondervan NASB Study Bible, 1999, p. 1254, notes).

In *1 Peter*, we are presented with a *comparison* and *contrast*. Israel was an adulterous nation which had to be redeemed from its life of adultery and prostitution to other gods. By her life of adultery, Israel had cheapened herself, just as Gomer had cheapened herself from the value of a beloved wife to the value of a prostitute slave. Peter’s audience, including us, is in the same slave market with Israel as adulterous prostitutes who go whoring after other gods—the gods of sex, money, material possessions, power, status, or any other thing we value more than God. As they stand, our lives as sinful slaves are cheap. Made in the image of God and for the worship of God, we have cheapened ourselves. Helplessly destitute (poor), we must be redeemed from this life of slavery. So far, the comparison, but *the contrast presented pertains to the purchase-price*. Although we are slaves whose value are reduced to thirty shekels of silver, God redeems us *not* with silver and gold which is perishable, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. From God’s point of view, we are not worthless slaves, but precious, elect children for whom He is willing to pay an infinite price which cannot be measured, the price of His own son.

It is beyond our feeble minds to grasp exactly what God did for us by sending Christ to die for us and spill His sacrificial blood. How can something so infinitely valuable be assessed? It is *on the basis of this value* that God the Father grants eternal life to the millions who repent of their sins and believe in their hearts that this blood actually cleanses them of all sin—past, present, and future.

B. The Effect of Redemption (1: 17-18)

1. *A new life in Christ*

The preposition, **from** (*ek*), in v. 18 denotes movement *away from something* (*BibleWorks*). We are redeemed **from** or **away from** our futile way of life. The effect of redemption is, thus, the abandonment of our former manner of life and the embracing of a new manner of life in obedience to Christ. If, indeed, holiness and sanctification (obedience) is *not* the effect which is registered in the heart and actions of the professing believer, he has good reason to question whether redemption has actually occurred. This is clearly implied in Peter's veiled warning, **If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth** (v. 17).

He follows up this statement with a reminder of the infinite cost of their redemption (v. 18). In light of what He has done in the sacrifice of His own son, God has no intention of permitting us to continue the sinful, self-centered, idolatrous lifestyle we practiced before conversion. What would be the point of redemption? We miss the point of God's saving grace to think that God only wants possession of our lives *after* we go to heaven. Far from it; He wants our lives *now*! We are his possession now, bought and paid for by the blood of Christ; thus, Paul tells us, "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body", that is, in everything we do (1 Cor. 6: 20; the context of this verse is the sexual immorality that was common in Greek culture, also common in African and American cultures even among professing Christians). If I purchase something with money, I demand immediately, not later, the use of the item or service purchased. We are *now* slaves of Christ purchased for His use; therefore, we are presumptuous (assuming too much) to believe that now that we are believers, we may continue to live our lives as if they belonged to *us*. Our lives do not belong to us; they belong to the One who bought them—redeemed them—with the precious purchase-price of Christ's blood.

2. *Evangelical fear of God*

Knowing that the cost of our redemption was so great, we must **conduct** our lives on earth **in fear**. It is not popular in modern evangelical circles to speak of the **fear** of God. Did not the Apostle John proclaim, "There is **no fear** in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love" (1 John 4:18 NASB). Yet, we cannot assign the exact same meaning to **fear** (*phobos*) in every place in the Bible without making Scripture contradict itself (cf. Matt. 10: 28; Lk. 1: 50; Rom. 3: 18; 8: 15; 1 Cor. 2: 3; 2 Cor. 5: 11; 2 Cor. 7: 1; Eph. 5: 21; 6: 5; Phil. 2: 12; Heb. 4: 1). From these verses, it is obvious that we must study the **context** to understand what **kind** of fear must be avoided and what kind should be cultivated in the believer. Since God is our Father, craven fear must be avoided. Our Father in heaven loves us; yet, He also demands obedience without requesting it. God never asks for obedience. "Please?" He is still the consuming fire whom Moses met in the burning bush, and we must never presume to live as we please as Christians as if we were somehow inoculated from the dire consequences of our sin. Discipline for believers is the inevitable result of disobedience, and God gives us an object lesson in the way fathers will discipline children whom they love (Heb. 12: 5-11). And what small child does not **fear** the wrath of his father when he disregards his law, however much he is aware of his father's love for him?

But Peter gives additional incentive for fear in v. 17: We will all appear before God's bar of judgment

(cf. 2 Cor. 5: 10; Rom. 2: 4-11; Matt. 16: 27). Although salvation is always by grace through faith, these verses demonstrate that **judgment will be on the basis of works**; and if there are insufficient works to prove genuine faith, then “that faith” will not save you (James 2: 14). Earlier, Peter says that the outcome of our faith is the salvation of our souls. This can only be true if our faith is producing righteous living. But if our “faith” is producing carelessness and licentiousness because we implicitly believe that where sin increases, God’s grace increases even more; therefore, let us continue in sin that grace may increase (Rom. 6: 1), then the outcome of our faith will be unrighteousness, not righteousness; and such an outcome cannot lead to salvation. Throughout scripture, not simply in James, we are warned that faith without works is dead.

The fear mentioned in v. 17 is not the craven fear of **final** judgment, for love casts out the craven fear of God who condemns the wicked. Charles Hodge remarks,

The principle of obedience in him is love, and not fear. Here, as everywhere else in the Bible, it is assumed that the favour of God is our life. We must be reconciled to him before we can be holy; **we must feel that he loves us before we can love him** (Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 205).

Thus, the fear of the believer is something other than the fear of condemnation, a condemnation which we have escaped, for “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8: 1). Our fear of God is two-fold. First, we fear His displeasure, not only His displeasure for **the moment**, but His displeasure **at the end of the age** when we appear before Him face to face. Much popular Christian teaching maintains that Christians will not have to endure the scrutiny of judgment when Christ returns; judgment will be only for unbelievers. But Paul explicitly says in 2 Cor. 5: 10, “For **we must all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed **for his deeds** in the body, according to **what he has done**, whether good or bad.” This sentence begins with the explanatory “for” (*gar*); thus, the judgment seat of Christ is the **reason** given in the passage for our ambition to be pleasing to God (2 Cor. 5: 9; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 273). This also agrees with the motivation for holiness and obedience given by Peter in v. 17. Every human being must one day give an account of his deeds in the flesh, good and bad. If we are believers, the blood of Christ will atone for our sinful deeds, and we will be recompensed (rewarded) for our good deeds accomplished through grace; but none of our deeds will be ignored or forgotten. Our desire to be pleasing to God is partly **conditioned** by our acute awareness that one day we must give an account for what we have done with our lives.

Consequently, we should fear lest our lives prove far less pleasing and useful to the Master than they could have been. Every believer—from the slaves in 1st century Ephesus and Colossae (Eph. 6: 5-8; Col. 3: 22-25) to 21st century employees, from the elders mentioned in *Hebrews* to the elders living today (Heb. 13: 17)—must one day give an account of his actions. He will either receive the reward for obedience or the reprimand (rebuke) for disobedience. Since no true believer will be eternally judged, his “payback” may be the loss of reward.

Although deeds are not the basis of the believer’s **salvation**, they **are** the basis of the **unbeliever’s condemnation**. It is because of evil deeds like “immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed” that God’s wrath will come upon the wicked (Col. 3: 5-6). Such evil calls forth God’s judgment, and God will “render to every man according to His deeds” (Rom. 2: 6; Matt. 16: 27; Col. 3: 25). This is so because a man is either saved by his works or by faith in Christ, and since **no** man can be saved by his works, those who trust in their works will be condemned by their works, even their so-called good

works which are not done in faith (Gal. 2: 16; Rom. 3: 20; 14: 23; Heb. 11: 6). In one sense, God will also render to the *believer* according to his works, for Paul says,

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: *to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life*; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek* (Rom. 2: 5-10).

This is not works-righteousness in new clothing, but the simple recognition that those who are saved by grace *will persevere in righteousness and good deeds*—what reformed theologians call “the perseverance of the saints.” Such an exhibition of good deeds, of course, can only be originated and sustained by God’s grace working in the believer through the Holy Spirit.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with *fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure* (Phil. 2: 12-13).

Paul says, “Work *out* your salvation”, not “work *for* your salvation.” There is a vast difference. While God is working salvation *in* us, we are working it *out*. Commenting on this passage, Murray notes,

The salvation referred to here is not the salvation already in possession but the eschatological salvation (cf. 1 Thess. 5: 8, 9; 1 Pet. 1: 5, 9: 2: 2). And no text sets forth more succinctly and clearly the relation of God’s working to our working. God’s working in us is not suspended [brought to a halt] because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing....The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 148-149; emphasis his, words in brackets mine).

Peter’s teaching—as well as Paul’s—is entirely consistent with that of their Lord, who insisted that what we do with our lives is crucially important and is an accurate indicator of the genuineness or falsity of our confession (Jn. 14: 15, 21; 15: 10; Matt. 25: 31-46).

Second, our fear of God consists in the dread of his discipline which is often severe and painful. The word used in Heb. 12: 6 is “scourges”. Discipline must be painful in order to extinguish the bad behavior which, in the long run, would be much more painful than God’s discipline. We would like to think that all of our actions are motivated by love for God, since love is the highest motivation for obedience. I wish Christians, including myself, were so noble as to be motivated by pure love. The truth is, however, that our love for God is far from perfect; and we also avoid certain behavior because we know that we will be punished if we do it, as the child fears the spanking from his parent. So be it. Fear of God’s discipline is also rooted in our faith that God is holy and desires us to be holy.

Parenthesis: Christ crucified—the predetermined plan of God (1: 20-21)

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21 NASB)

In *vv. 20-21*, Peter interrupts the call to obedience with a parenthetical statement about the predetermined plan of God to send His son as a sacrifice for sin (see below). When God the Father sent Christ to die for our sins, He was not *reacting* to an unforeseen turn of events which caught Him by surprise; He was rather carrying out His *eternal plan* foreknown and foreordained before the foundation of the earth. God had foreknown and foreordained Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden. He had also foreknown and foreordained how He would deal with Adam's sin and the sin of the whole human race. Jesus was, therefore, "delivered over by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge** of God" and "nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men" and put to death (Acts 2: 23). Thus, by saying that Christ was "foreknown before the foundation of the world" Peter is saying that Christ's atoning work on the cross was also foreknown before the world began. Christ was uniquely chosen for this task, being the only one who could accomplish it. In these **last times**, however, the work of Christ planned in eternity has been accomplished *in real space and time* for the sake of all believers who put their trust in Him. What's more, our faith and hope in God is not ill-founded because God raised Jesus from the dead. None of Christ's work is spiritual fiction, as if God the Father identified with sinners by raising up a *purely human* Christ who died as a martyr for His cause. If Christ is not actually the God-man, and if He did not really die physically on a cross and rise again from the dead, then Christianity is not true; it is the greatest and worse lie ever told.

3. Sincere love for other believers (1: 22—2: 3)

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,²³ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.²⁴ For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,²⁵ BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." ¹And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Peter 1:22-3 NASB)

a. The command

In *v. 22* Peter continues the call to obedience by commanding us (imperative verb; it is not a friendly suggestion) to love other believers **from the heart**—one of the marks of a genuine Christian, and therefore, the true church. **From the heart** indicates the quality of love commanded which must not consist of superficial cordiality (being nice) cloaking deep-seated bitterness and hatred—the kind of "love" we often experience at church social functions from people who refuse to speak to us in private (cf. *1 Pet. 2: 1*). Rather, our love should be **sincere** (literally, "without hypocrisy"; *anupokritos*). While it is true that we should love all people and do good to all people, we should especially love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because we are part of the same body (Gal. 6: 10; Jn. 13: 34; 15: 12, 17; 1 Cor. 12). The man who claims to love God but hates his brother is a liar (1 Jn. 4: 20). Furthermore, hatred is not limited to overt (outward) acts of aggression or deep-seated animosity but can be broadly defined as indifference to the needs of our brother (1 Jn. 3: 15-18). Thus, by commanding us to love fellow believers, Peter is commanding **radical self-**

sacrifice and self-denial—as is John (1 Jn. 3: 16).

b. The means (1: 23-25)

But how can we attain to such radical obedience, especially when our brothers and sisters in Christ can be so—well, unlovable? As the old saying goes, “To live above with the saints we love is all glory; but to live below with the saints we know; well, that’s a different story!” Our love is unique, however, only if we love the saints we *know* with all their “warts” and flaws—the same way we wish to be loved, with all our flaws (Matt. 7: 12). The problem, of course, is that *we* have so few flaws while everyone else has so many! It is truly tough being the only near-perfect person in the whole church!—as we all think of ourselves from time to time. The means to radical love is found in the *nature and origin* of our birth, a supernatural birth affected through the *word of God*. Natural, human birth can only result in sinfulness. For the moment we are born into this world, we are disposed to getting our selfish way at the expense of others. As we cannot expect clean pigs, or dogs which are socially refined in their table manners (2 Pet. 2: 22), so we cannot expect selfless love from unregenerate sinners.

The new birth—regeneration—on the other hand, results in a new creation in Christ who is disposed to a self-sacrificial spirit, putting others’ interests ahead of his own (Phil 2: 4). Jesus spoke of Himself as the seed which falls into the ground and dies; and if it died, it would produce much fruit (Jn. 12: 24)—fruit which is organically similar to the seed which produced it. Thus, by laying down His own life in self-sacrificial love, Christ planted a seed in the ground which has born the fruit of the Christian church—a people who, like Christ, seek the good of others by laying down their lives for the sake of the brethren. Furthermore, the seed which perished through crucifixion proved to be imperishable by rising again from the dead. Even so, our seed, though dying, is imperishable.

Like the Word of God incarnate in human flesh—Jesus, the Son of God—the *written* word which is preached (v. 25b) is imperishable and will continue to produce people who are born again of the Spirit and able to love others as Jesus loved them. As the world was created through the word of God, so the new creation also is produced by God’s word in written form, the Scriptures. Furthermore, although purely human flesh will wither like grass (v. 24), the believer, born of imperishable seed, will live forever and will continue producing the fruit of righteousness—love for the brethren. The gifts of the Spirit—special knowledge of revealed mysteries (1 Cor. 12: 8; Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*), tongues, even the gift of preaching—will one day cease; but love will never cease. It is the atmosphere of the new heaven and earth.

c. The method (2: 1-3)

However powerful the new birth is, the written word of God *does not operate automatically* within the believer without any effort. The believer must read it, meditate on it, and obey it. Further, he must cast aside any harmful attitudes and actions which hinder its assimilation. Peter once again furnishes the reader with a *therefore* (v.1) introducing his exhortation. In light of the origin and nature of the new birth coming into existence at the preaching of the word of God through the power of the Spirit, the Christian must make it his priority to *long for* (*epipotheo*; cf. Phil. 1: 8; 4: 1; 1 Thess. 3:6) the *milk* of the word. The analogy in this passage has none of the negative connotations (meaning) of 1 Cor. 3: 1-2 in which Paul chides the Corinthians for being immature (cf. Heb. 5: 12-13). Instead, longing for the milk of the word is a positive trait encouraged throughout the

Christian's life. It is also possible that the congregations Peter was addressing consisted of many new Christians.

The picture provided is a familiar one, that of a newborn infant frantically sucking on his mother's breasts as if his life depends upon it—slurp, slurp, slurp! In fact, his life *does* depend upon it. At this stage in the infant's life, nothing but his mother's milk will do. (Peter writes long before the days of baby formula, a modern substitute for breast-feeding in Western cultures but recently proven inferior to mother's milk, the real thing!) By his mother's milk the baby grows to be strong and healthy, putting on several pounds of muscle, bone, and fat within weeks. Analogously, the Christian must read and study the Bible as if his life depends upon it—because it *does!* This is not true only for new believers, but for all believers; for all of us are babies with respect to God. One simply cannot live on something he ate two years ago, or even a few weeks ago. To be healthy we must eat regularly and nutritiously. When we fail to eat, we will notice demonstrable changes in the way we think and act and in our ability to resist sin. We will grow weak spiritually.

By longing for the word, we will grow **in respect to salvation**; that is, we will grow in our knowledge of God's promises in salvation and in our ability to practically apply the lessons of salvation. We will not become "more justified" by a fervent reading of the Bible, but we will grow in our present *experience* of salvation which, in turn, leads to sanctification (holiness)—an essential element of our salvation (Heb. 12: 14; Rom. 2: 4-11).

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹ *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God. (Romans 2:4-11 NASB)

Paul is clearly in agreement with James. "Faith without works is dead."

The salvation of which Peter speaks must not be limited to justification, salvation from the guilt and penalty of sin, as important as this is. Peter is speaking of the full-orbed *eschatological* salvation which will one day be ours at the consummation (completion) of the kingdom of God. This will include not only justification, but glorification—salvation *from* the very presence of sin, salvation *in* the presence of God, and the enjoyment of our new, glorified bodies within our inheritance, the new heavens and earth.

Another thing I have noticed about nursing babies—four of them who are now grown—is that they are not easily distracted from their "business" of sucking when they are truly hungry. As we feed ourselves from the word of God, directing our attention to the kingdom of God with its present and future blessings, the *differences and disputes* we sometimes experience with other believers will not seem so cosmically important. Along with our desire for the word, we must put aside any attitudes or actions which hinder the assimilation (digestion) of its nourishment. (Have you ever tried enjoying a meal with the family after a nasty argument? The food doesn't go down as easily.) Through **malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander** (*v. 1*) we essentially negate any benefit we might have received from the word. It gives us indigestion, not nourishment. Feeding upon the word must also include *submission* to it, for whenever we are confronted with the word of the Lord, we are confronted by the

Lord himself.

Verse 3 implies that only those who have **tasted** of the kindness of the Lord will actually **long** for the milk of the word. Our response to the word of God may be a very crucial indicator of our salvation experience.

VII. Building God's Spiritual House (2: 4-10)

A. The Church as God's Spiritual House (2: 4-8)

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*,"⁸ and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. (1 Peter 2:4-8 NASB)

Beginning with this section, Peter comprehensively bridges the gap between God's Old Covenant people, the Jews, and His New Covenant community, the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. There is an unmistakable continuity of God's purpose in redemption expressed in these seven verses (*vv. 4-10*). Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised long ago in all the OT scriptures, more explicitly in the prophets (beginning with Moses) who investigated their own prophecies carefully **seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow** (1: 11). Interwoven into this fabric of OT Christology is *Peter's specific purpose* in writing it. Throughout the epistle, we find evidence that Peter is writing to a persecuted people. The subject of suffering appears explicitly fourteen times in the epistle to which are added other related expressions—**reviled, harshly treated, frightened, slandered, malign, fiery ordeal**, etc. Such persistent, unrelenting suffering at the hands of unbelievers may well have convinced his audience that God also rejected and despised them. (Doesn't Satan often use our own suffering to convince us of the same thing?) Peter wishes to show his persecuted readers that there is an identity of purpose between the suffering of Christ and the suffering of His people. Further, there is identity between the value men impute (place upon) to Christ and His followers and the value imputed to them by God the Father. Although despised by men, Christ and His people are beloved of the Father, **choice and precious** in His sight.

1. Jesus Christ—the cornerstone

In the present passage, Peter reminds his readers that Christ was the stone which was **rejected by men**; yet, He is **choice and precious in the sight of God** (*v. 4*). He is also **a choice stone, a precious corner stone** (*v. 6*), the most important stone in God's building, but carelessly cast aside by the builders as worthless (*v. 7*). In *vv. 6-8*, Peter combines three passages from the OT—Isa. 28: 16; Ps. 118: 22; and Isa. 8: 14, in that order. The context of Isaiah's prophecy is Israel's idolatry, its rejection of Yahweh, and the future exile of the northern kingdom of Israel into Assyria in 722 BC. All three are Messianic prophecies predicting the rejection of Christ by the post-exilic and reconstituted Israel in the land of Palestine under Roman rule. As their forefathers had rejected Yahweh's rule in Isaiah's day, the 1st century Jews—led astray by their faithless religious and

political leaders, the Pharisees and chief priests—rejected their Messiah and put Him to death on a cross. Peter now applies the passage to *any* unbelievers, including Gentile unbelievers, who refuse to submit to the message of the gospel.

The Greek text of 1 Pet. 2: 6 uses the same words as those found in the Greek translation (the LXX or Septuagint) of Isa. 28: 16—*lithon akrogoniaion eklekton entimon*, translated “a choice stone, a precious cornerstone” in the NASB (1995) and in the ASV (1901), “a chief corner stone, elect, precious”. In Isa. 28: 16 the Greek translation reads *lithon polutelē eklekton akrogoniaion entimon*, translated in the NAB, “a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone” and in the ASV, “a tried stone, a precious cornerstone”. The only difference between the two phrases is the addition of the word, *polutelē* (“costly”, “expensive”, or “precious”). Furthermore, the Isaiah passage also uses the word, *themelion*, “foundation”—“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone **for the foundation**, firmly placed” (NAB). In the ASV it is translated “Behold, I lay in Zion **for a foundation a stone**, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone **of sure foundation**”. The ASV more nearly translates the LXX since **foundation** (*themelion*) occurs twice in the verse.

Cornerstone (*akrogoniaios*) normally designates the final stone placed at the *top* of the structure integrating the whole structure together. It may also be called a keystone, like the keystone in an archway. However, Isaiah seems to use **cornerstone** primarily as a *foundation stone* rather than a capstone (cf. Davids, p. 89, note 29; also F.F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 306). Bruce remarks, “The Hebrew wording [of Isa. 28: 16] leaves no doubt that the stone being laid is a foundation stone: ‘Behold, I am founding...a founded foundation.’ Yet this foundation stone is in some sense a cornerstone, bonding the structure together (p. 305; words in brackets mine). In Eph. 2: 19-20, Paul tells the Gentile Christians that they are “no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation (*themelion*) of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone* (*akrogoniaios*).” Metaphors are often mixed in the Bible to accomplish the meaning desired by each author; and in this particular verse (Eph. 2: 20), the apostles and prophets of the NT era appropriately comprise the foundation (*themelion*) of the church for the simple reason that they received their message *directly* from Christ during His ministry on earth, or by *direct revelation* from Christ. On the other hand, Christ himself is the chief capstone (*akrogoniaios*) integrating the whole structure together.

However we look at it, the message is the same. In the ancient East, skillful builders always used the *best* stones for the foundation and capstones of a building. The *irony* is that while Christ is exalted by God the Father as the *most important* stone in the whole edifice, He is cast aside as unsuitable by His Jewish kinsman and now by Gentiles who reject the gospel. To the elite members of the Sanhedrin, to the Pharisees and scribes, to Judas Iscariot, and to the vast majority of the Jewish people, Jesus was a huge disappointment not worthy of the distinction, Messiah. To the vast majority of the gentile world today who have heard of Jesus and the good news of the gospel, Christ remains an enigma whose life may seem exemplary but whose death is puzzling and pointless. Whatever Christ can offer can be obtained just as well with Buddha, Mohammed, or a host of other religions. Nevertheless, whoever believes in this choice (*elektos*) stone “*will not be disappointed*” (v. 6b). For believers who have been disappointed with work, with grinding poverty, with poor health, even with marriage and family, there is One with whom they will never be disappointed—the Savior, Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus Christ—the stumbling stone

This precious value (Christ Himself) belongs only to those who believe in Him, but to those who do not believe, He is a **stone of stumbling and a rock of offense** (v. 8a). The word translated, **rock of offense** (*skandalon*), literally refers to a trap set to ensnare an unwary victim (*BibleWorks*), like a loose stone placed in the path of a blind man (Lev. 19: 14). The term is used metaphorically in the NT as a spiritual trap causing a person to sin (cf. Matt. 16: 23; 18: 7; Rom. 14: 13). Christ is not a trap *causing* unbelievers to sin. People stumble over Christ, not because He makes them stumble, but **because they are disobedient to the word** (v. 8). He is, nevertheless, the *occasion* for their falling into sin. Had He not appeared in the flesh, preached, and done miracles among the Jews, they would not have incurred *the particular sin* of rejecting their own Messiah (Jn. 15: 22). As it was, they saw His works and still did not believe, thus, aggravating (making worse) their sin (Jn. 9: 41). Christ became their stumbling block rather than their Savior. In the same way, the preaching of the word of God becomes the occasion for stumbling, the *skandalon* of unbelievers who hear the word but refuse to believe it.

This is the element of human responsibility. Everyone who rejects the gospel must bear the responsibility of their unbelief. Yet, men are never in ultimate control of their own destinies. The divine side of the equation—human responsibility/divine sovereignty—is that their unbelief was predestined in eternity past—to **this doom they were also appointed** (v. 8b). The word, **doom** (fate or destiny) is not in the Greek text, but translators have correctly supplied this word to complete the thought. Those who stumble because of their disobedience to the word are **appointed or destined for this stumbling** in the same way that believers are appointed to eternal life (Acts 13: 48; Rom. 8:). They do not believe because they are sinners and hate the light, but also because they are not Christ's sheep (Jn. 10: 26-27). Thus, there is both predestination to salvation and predestination to damnation. The one implies the other.

There are many Christians who believe in predestination to eternal life but not predestination to eternal death. The scriptures prove that they are two sides of the same coin.

1Th 5:9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2Pe 2:3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Jud 1:4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Rom 9:22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

3. *Christians as living stones*

Like Christ, the persecuted believers in Asia Minor to whom Peter is writing are rejected by the general population of men. Although they are **living stones** (v. 5a), chosen and loved from eternity past to erect God's spiritual house, they are despised by pagan culture as worthless. Consequently, persecuted Christians need not be surprised at the **fiery ordeal** facing them (4: 12) since Christ faced the same thing during His time on earth. If the world hated Him, it will also hate them (Jn. 15: 18). If the world rejected Christ as useless and unsuitable, it will also reject us as worthless and

unsuitable. Moreover Christians who are committed to the plenary (complete) inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures *will also be hated by liberal Christians* who believe the Bible can contain outright error or that it must be culturally interpreted or filtered for undesirable and inaccurate content. For example, many professing Christians believe that although Paul may have prohibited female elders (1 Tim. 2), he did so only as one who was shaped by the cultural norms of the day. More enlightened modern Christians can now sit under the spiritual oversight of women pastors, in clear violation of Paul's out-dated command. The same can be said concerning Paul's stringent views of homosexuality and fornication.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NASB)

Surely in our modern world, Christians cannot subject themselves to such archaic teaching which forbids two homosexuals from loving one another as a married couple. But such thinking forgets that Paul was writing Corinthian Christians, people living within the 1st century Greco-Roman society which viewed homosexuality and fornication as normal means of entertainment—the same way we would view eating at a restaurant or playing football. But secondly, the same professing Christians who attempt to normalize homosexuality and sex before marriage would also prosecute a thief or con-man at the drop of a hat and would sneer at a drunken man staggering down the road. Lack of respect for the word of God produces staggering contradictions and inconsistencies. We cannot pick and choose what we wish to call sin. God alone can define it.

As living stones, Christians are being built up into the dwelling of God (Eph. 2: 20-22). Individual stones scattered over the ground have little usefulness. In fact, they serve only as stumbling stones. But when they are collected into a unified whole, they provide a spiritual structure useful for the Lord's work.

The emphasis throughout is collective: the church as a corporate unity is the people, priesthood, nation, etc., *rather than each Christian* being such. This emphasis is typical of the NT in contrast to our far more *individualistic* concern in the present. The West [*and, I might add, increasingly in Africa DFM*] tends to focus on individuals relating to God while Peter (and the rest of the NT; e.g., Paul's body-of-Christ language) was more conscious of people's becoming part of a *new corporate entity* that is chosen by and that relates to God (Davids, p. 91; words in brackets and emphasis mine).

The implications of the corporate identity of the church are so staggering that they can scarcely be overemphasized. Not only have modern Christians in the west—and increasingly in the developing world which uncritically imitates the west—viewed themselves individually, the corporate western church has viewed itself in isolation from the body of Christ world-wide. We have an *us-them* approach to Christianity rather than a *we* approach. “Give us this day our daily bread” becomes a prayer we pray for our individual families with little or no concern for those who are starving world-wide, particularly Christians. “Lead us not into temptation” becomes a prayer for personal holiness rather than the holiness and spiritual well-being of the entire church, often devastated by inadequate teaching or heresy. Tithes and offerings become the possession of *our* local church rather than the property of the kingdom of God and Christians abroad. We think we can spend this money any way we please—for the “glory of God”, of course. This isolation mentality is registered in our preoccupation with building programs and even local, domestic missions to the detriment of world missions.

As Patrick Johnstone has said, “The church is bigger than you think.” God is building one church with a diversity of people in different cultures. We are “our brother’s keeper”, meaning that we are responsible for the welfare of not only brothers and sisters in our own local churches, but also the world. This is a big responsibility, and the temptation is to consider the task so big—too big, in fact—that we must rather concentrate on a small area to be effective. But the church has never been given the liberty of specializing in one locality or one kind of ministry. This is why the risen Christ has bestowed gifts upon His church. No one person, church, or denomination (not recognized in Scripture) can do everything; yet, we must cooperate with Christians from all evangelical churches and denominations to fulfill Christ’s commission. The authority of Christ is worldwide; we must therefore **go** worldwide, making disciples and teaching people to obey all that Christ has commanded us.

B. The Church as the New Israel (2: 9-10)

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (1 Peter 2:9-10 NASB)

1. Our Identity (2: 9a, 10)

Beginning in v. 9, Peter provides four terms to set forth the identity of the corporate church. As Davids has noted, the emphasis is not individual but corporate. ***The Christian discovers his identity not as an individual living in isolation from others, but as one part of the whole body of Christ***, the clear teaching of 1 Cor. 12. This is essentially ***Trinitarian*** since God exists not as an individual person, but as three persons in loving and cooperative community with one another, sharing the same essence, but performing different functions. We may even say that there is mutual dependency within the Godhead. “God is spirit” (Jn. 4: 24), and a spirit cannot live among men or die on a cross. But to accomplish salvation, God the Father ***depended*** upon the Son to become incarnate in human flesh, the first time in the history of mankind. Christ cannot indwell every believer with His human body. When He told his disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit as a “comforter”, He was ***depending*** on the Spirit to do His unique work of indwelling and sanctifying. The three persons do not dwell in isolation from one another, but in a unique community of the Spirit, dependent upon one another to accomplish salvation for God’s people. There is no possible way to plunge to the ultimate depth of this mystery, but this doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture. (However, the doctrine of the Trinity was not formulated until the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD and modified in the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD—almost four centuries after Christ’s crucifixion! Christians exist in the same way, essentially one in communion with other members of the body of Christ, yet as distinct persons who have individual functions to perform in the church—as eyes, ears, feet, hands, etc.

In his book, *Evangelical Reunion*, John Frame has unequivocally argued that Christians are not identified by their denominations. Denominations are never mentioned in Scripture, and schisms (divisions) are mentioned only negatively (1 Cor. 1: 11-13); there is simply ***the*** church and individual congregations in a community of love with other congregations.

Now, brethren, we *wish* to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their

own accord,⁴ begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, (2 Corinthians 8:1-4 NASB)

Corinth was in Achaia, and Philippi and Thessalonica were in Macedonia. Paul is referring to the generosity of the churches in Macedonia to the church in Judea. They were individual, local churches cooperating with one another for poverty relief in Jerusalem caused by famine (Acts 11: 28-30). Now, notice the rationale (reason) for Paul's appeal.

I give *my* opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*.¹¹ But now finish doing it also, so that just as *there was* the readiness to desire it, so *there may be* also the completion of it by your ability.¹² For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what *a person* has, not according to what he does not have.¹³ For *this* is not for the ease of others *and* for your affliction, but by way of equality—¹⁴ at this present time your abundance *being a supply* for their need, so that their abundance also may become *a supply* for your need, that there may be equality;¹⁵ as it is written, "HE WHO *gathered* MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO *gathered* LITTLE HAD NO LACK." (2 Corinthians 8:10-15 NASB)

The Corinthians had delayed their gift, so Paul uses a little spiritual blackmail to get the Corinthians to remember their promise. In other words, he says, the Macedonians are poorer than you, yet *they* gave. So what's wrong with you?

The "equality" Paul is speaking about is not equality of *resources*. Paul is not teaching a primitive Marxist socialism which requires everyone in the world to combine resources with everyone else, divide it equally among all people, and produce a leveling economic effect in which everyone has the same thing—and everyone is poor. Did God do this? If this were a good plan, God would have equally distributed the world's resources Himself and saved Karl Marx, communist countries—including North Korea—liberal politicians like Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, a lot of grief. (Hillary still can't believe she was beaten by Donald Trump.) God has gifted some individuals and countries the ability to gain wealth, but not others. It is the responsibility of wealthy nations to share this ability with other countries, but sin stands in the way (see my *Doctrine of Man*). As God will hold wealthy individuals responsible on Judgment Day for being stingy (Lk. 12: 15-21), He will also hold wealthy nations responsible for being indifferent toward the poor (Ezek. 16: 49; Rev. 18: 2-3, where Babylon refers to the world economic and political system, not simply Rome—which, by the way, also fell).

It is also not an equality of *natural abilities or spiritual gifts*. It is evident that our natural abilities and talents are quite different both in quantity and quality. The range of intelligence from one Christian to another is enormous. As much as I would wish to think as well as John Calvin or thousands of present day theologians, I can't and never will regardless of effort. I was not born with the necessary intelligence quotient (IQ). Yet, God loves all believers and has an agenda for each of us, a plan to be used by Him for the purpose of making His invisible kingdom visible in this world and eventually to fill the world with this visible kingdom. All of us, great and small, are needed in this grand endeavor; and for those who are extremely gifted (with money and/or ability) to say that we don't need those who are less gifted is wrong and displeasing to the Spirit who distributed all gifts as He pleased (1 Cor. 12: 11). Whether or not we *think* we need each other is beside the point. Scripture says we do.

Note well that in the following verses, Peter makes a clear identification between the church of the OT and the church of the NT. The church did not come into being in Acts 2; it already existed as

God's chosen nation of Israel. With the progressive revelation of the NT, we learn that national identity as God's people is not enough—in fact, it never was enough. All along, the people of God must have been born of the Spirit. Nevertheless, the church has a visible representation: the nation of Israel in the OT and the visible church in the NT. We all recognize that not everyone in the church is a genuine believer, but what else is new? Not everyone in Israel was a genuine believer, either (Rom. 2: 28-29), yet God spoke to Israel as His chosen race as Peter now speaks to the church. As there was in the OT a true Israel within Israel, so there is now a true church within the visible church.

a. A chosen race

The phrase, “body of Christ” does not appear in Peter; rather, he borrows the descriptions given to Israel in the OT and applies them to the church (Deut. 7: 6). Israel was a chosen race of people, for God did not choose any other ancient civilization—Egypt, Phoenicia, or China—although these and many other cultures were far more advanced than Israel. Moreover, God did not choose more powerful nations like Assyria or Babylonia (see also Deut. 7: 1 for more powerful nations around Palestine); but He chose Israel because of the great love He had for Israel and for their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deut. 7: 7-8). But then, why did God love Abraham (who served other gods with his father, Terah; Josh. 24: 2), and Jacob (who lied to his father Isaac; Gen. 27: 19-24), instead of Esau and Pharaoh? The answer to this question is found in Rom. 9: 8-18,

That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, *so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls*, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "**I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.**" So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." *So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.*

On the same basis that God chose Israel as His people, He has also chosen us, the church, as His people, not because of moral purity, proven achievement, or cultural and intellectual potential, but on the basis of grace alone (before we were ever born; Eph. 1: 4) that His sovereign purpose of showing grace might be established. If someone might object to the unfairness of this arrangement, Paul has a ready answer,

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, *who are you, O man, who answers back to God?* The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? (Rom. 9: 19-20).

Every human being is dead in sin, anyway (Eph. 2: 1), and under God's wrath (Eph. 2: 3; 5: 6); but God showed mercy to some.

b. A royal priesthood

Borrowing again from the OT, Peter describes the church as a “royal priesthood” (Ex. 19: 6a). The designation, “royal”, is derived from the fact that Israel as a nation represented the *kingdom* of God on earth whose purpose was to lead all other people groups to serve the living God by fulfilling the creation mandate of Gen. 1: 28. The priestly function given to the tribe of Aaron was that of representing the people to God, offering up sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the people of Israel. As the tribe of Aaron functioned for the specific, spiritual needs of every other tribe, so also Israel as a nation was chosen to function for the spiritual needs of all the nations. Israel was supposed to be a *light to the nations* by keeping God’s law, a law greater and wiser than anything known to other nations.

"See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. ⁶"So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷"For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? ⁸"Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:5-8 NAU)

Through faith in Yahweh and obedience to the Law, Israel should have been the “evangelistic” “conduit” by which the nations would come to Yahweh in repentance and faith (see the prophecy of *Jonah* in which God has mercy on merciless Assyrians). However, Israel failed in this task because it was a rebellious people who did not keep the Law but went whoring after other gods. Instead of being a light to the nations, Israel became a by-word for God’s judgment and curse causing His name to be blasphemed among the nations.

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ¹⁷"Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. ¹⁸"Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹"Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰"When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.' (Ezekiel 36:16-20 NASB; cf. Isa. 52: 5)

Being expelled from Yahweh’s **land** meant one of two things to the pagan nations: (1) Either God was *unwilling* to keep His promises to His people, or (2) God was *unable* to defend His people against other gods (Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, p. 348; cf. Ex. 32: 7-14 in which Moses uses “holy arguments” to forestall [prevent] Israel’s destruction). But God was zealous for His holy name, and He would not allow the nations to continue profaning it because of His wayward people. For the sake of His great name, He would re-gather His people into the land of promise, and He would send His Spirit to cleanse and renew His people. The chief end of God is to glorify Himself (John Piper).

"But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. ²²"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is **not for your sake**, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, **but for My holy name**, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. ²³"I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. ²⁴"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷"I will

put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:21-27 NASB)

Note well that bringing the people of Israel back from exile would vindicate God's holy name among the "nations" which, because of this, "will know that I am the Lord." God not only wishes to vindicate His name and bless His people beloved for the sake of the fathers, but He also has the salvation of the *nations* in view (cf. Isa. 2: 1-4). The promises of returning to the land and being given the Holy Spirit are closely kin (similar to) to the promises given to the Israelites through Jeremiah the prophet some forty years previously.

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."³⁴ "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34 NASB)

We must not draw too fine a distinction between God's *putting His Spirit within them* and His *putting His law on their heart*, for the two things are essentially the same thing. Only by the operation of the Spirit can the sinner's disposition (desires) be changed to obey the law from the heart and not merely as an external ordinance which is alien (foreign) to his nature. Proof of their identity is found in *Hebrews* where the author (whoever he is; may God bless him) applies Jeremiah's prophecy to the *church*—not once, but twice (Heb. 8: 7-13 and 10: 16-18). Thus, we see that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and heart obedience to the divine law are God's gifts to the church and are not in any sense in opposition to one another, but two sides of the same coin. The Spirit does not oppose the divine law, but enables the believer to keep it, not merely to avoid divine discipline, but to manifest his love for the God who gave the law.

While the nation was restored to the land of promise after the exile (see *Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah*) and experienced *limited* spiritual renewal, it is a sad fact of history that the nation as a whole continued in its waywardness and unbelief through the NT era (Dan. 9; Rom. 9—11) until this very day. Should we conclude, then, that God *failed in His design to honor His own name by making Israel His peculiar people*? A resounding, no! God never fails in anything He wishes to accomplish (Isa. 46: 10). As the Apostle Paul insists, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom. 11: 1). As God reserved for himself seven thousand Jews during Elijah's day who did not worship Baal (vv. 2-4; cf. 1 Kings, 19: 18), Paul says, "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a *remnant* according to *God's* gracious choice" (v. 5). While choosing the remnant, God hardened the majority (11: 7); for God never intended to build His covenant people—the church—from Israel *after the flesh*, but the new Israel *born of the Spirit*.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29 NASB)

This was *Paul's* answer to the question: "Has God failed in His purpose?" *Peter's* answer to this question (though it is never asked in his epistle) is found in the first chapter. He is speaking to those

who are **chosen** (v. 1); who are **born again to a living hope** (v. 3); who are **protected by the power of God through faith** (v. 5); who **love Christ** (v. 8); who **believe in Him**” (v. 8); who are **redeemed** with His **precious blood** (vv. 18, 19); who **fervently love one another from the heart** (1: 22).

These—and these only—are the ones whom God has chosen as His **holy nation**, His **royal priesthood**. How could it be otherwise? How could anything but a **holy nation** represent the nations’ spiritual needs before a holy God? The church, therefore, is given the responsibility once exclusively given to Israel in general and the Levites in particular. As the OT priests offered up incense on the altar (Ex. 30: 7), the church offers up its prayers to God (Rev. 5: 8; 8: 3-4). Moreover, the church attempts to reconcile fallen sinners to God through evangelism (2 Cor. 5:20; Matt. 28: 19-20) and good works (Matt. 5:16; Tit. 2: 7; 2:14; 3: 8, 14).

There is no priestly caste in the church; therefore, **every member** of the church—not just elders—performs the role of priests representing each other and lost sinners before the throne of God. Through prayer, good deeds, and evangelism, Christians are commissioned by Christ to minister to each other (Heb. 10: 24-25) and the world (Gal. 6: 9-10).

c. A holy nation

Holy basically has the connotation of “separate” or “set apart.” Thus, a holy nation is a nation set apart from all the rest. Israel was chosen by God as a unique people set apart and separated from all the other nations. To prevent Israel’s emersion into the pagan nations and their idolatrous practices (think of drowning), God built a wall of separation around them by giving them various and sundry laws governing their diet, clothing, animal husbandry, and agriculture (Lev. 11: 3-8; 19: 19; Deut. 22: 10). The intent behind these laws was one of **total separation** from the pagan nations. To impress upon the Israelites the need for **moral** separation, tangible expressions of **physical** separation were given them as **moral object lessons** arguing from the lesser to the greater. In other words, if even the clothing they wore should separate them from pagan culture, **how much more** should their moral practice separate them from the nations?

In the new covenant there is no such mandated **physical** separation between Jews and Gentiles (Gal. 3: 28); consequently, all such dietary, agricultural, and clothing laws have been abrogated (done away with) (cf. Acts 10). What God has **declared** clean **is** clean (Acts 10: 14-15). On the other hand, the principle of **moral separation** between the church and the world remains in full force; thus, the principle, what the *Westminster Confession of Faith* calls “general equity”, of the dietary and clothing laws remains in effect. Christians must not be “bound together” (literally, “unequally yoked”) with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6: 14; cf. Deut. 22: 10). In other words we should not be bound up with unbelievers in close, equal relationships which may present situations tempting us to compromise important biblical principles in order to please the other partner (e.g. business partnerships, especially marriage partnerships—unless already contracted; cf. 1 Cor. 7: 10-11). Christians and unbelievers in such relationships will not be able walk in harmony (2 Cor. 6: 15) because of different world-views and a different set of moral standards. Thus, we are commanded to “come out from their midst and be separate” (v. 17), not in the sense of establishing Christian communes physically separated from the rest of society, but in the sense of being “**in** the world” but not “**of** the world” (Jn. 17: 11, 14). By necessity we are **in** the world (1 Cor. 5: 9-11), and we should cultivate relationships with unbelievers which may lead to their salvation; but we must not treat opposing world-views, religions, or life-styles as if they were equal and viable alternatives to the Christian faith and world-view. Simply stated, Christian moral values should never be compromised—even in the way we dress (1 Tim. 2: 9)

or in the way we use material wealth (Matt. 6: 19-21; 1 Tim. 6: 17-18). While not attempting to draw attention to ourselves, our manner of life should be conspicuous (noticeable) to anyone who knows us well.

d. A people for God's own possession

Lastly, as Israel was chosen as a people for God's own possession, so is the church (Ex. 19: 5; Tit. 2: 14). God redeemed the entire nation of Israel by the death of all the first-born of Egypt; He redeemed all believers—Jews and Gentiles—by the death of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Since Christ has purchased us, we must not enslave ourselves to other people or to degrading behavior (1 Cor. 7: 23; 6: 20); and we must not live our lives as if they belonged to us, for they belong to the one who purchased them (1 Cor. 3: 23; Gal. 3: 29; 5: 24). As the slaves (*doulos*) of Christ, we are totally and completely at his disposal to do his will and to be pleasing to Him in every way. This is what any slave does, no matter how oppressive and unfair his master. But Christ is a good, benevolent, and loving master, and His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5: 3). Therefore, slavery *to* Christ is true freedom (1 Cor. 7: 22; Rom. 6: 7), and freedom *from* Christ is true slavery (Rom. 6: 20, 22).

2. Our purpose (2: 9b)

The purpose of our being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession is set forth in *v. 2: 9b*. As the Lord brought the elect nation back from exile to vindicate His holy name; even so, our redemption is *God-centered*, not man-centered. As John Piper has so pithily (briefly but substantially) stated, "The chief end [purpose] of God is the glory of God." As sinful, finite creatures, we have difficulty understanding this statement, for it seems to ascribe pride and egocentrism ("It's all about me") to God; but such egocentrism is perfectly legitimate when speaking of God. It is only sinful from man's point of view who wishes to be his own God and have the world bow to his own interests. But God alone is God, and He is not primarily interested in handing out real estate in heaven. His primary interest is His own glory and excellence, and this is the focus of this verse. The reason we have become the people described in *v. 9a* is "**so that** [we] may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light."

The "*excellencies*" of God include His names, works, and attributes. The works of God include His works in creation, salvation, and providence. His attributes include both His incommunicable attributes (e.g. sovereignty, immutability, the "omni's"—omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, etc.) and His communicable attributes (holiness, wisdom, righteousness, truth, goodness, mercy, grace, love, patience, and faithfulness). His names reflect both His works and His attributes. The purpose of every Christian—the reason he is breathing air—is to proclaim (*eksangelo*; "to tell everywhere") all the divine names, works, and attributes of God to a world of sinners who have lost their way. But our proclamation is not in word only, for God never reveals Himself in word only, but also in deeds. God says, "Let there be light," and He creates light. He says to Pharaoh, "Let my people go," and then delivers His people through plagues and parting the Red Sea. He proclaims His love to Israel and sends manna from heaven. Jesus, God incarnate in human flesh, speaks to the poor, "Don't worry about what you eat or drink," but refusing to send the multitudes away hungry, miraculously feeds the five thousand and later the four thousand (Matt. 14: 13-21; Matt. 15: 32-39). Christian deeds without words are meaningless, for they fail to communicate the reason they are done; and words without deeds are powerless, for they have no credibility (James 2: 14-16). As we say in the US, "Talk is cheap."

Words and deeds together, however, produce the powerful message of the gospel. Ministries of mercy in the name of Christ such as feeding the poor, providing medical care to the sick, rescuing the drug addict and the prostitute, adopting the orphan (Matt. 25: 31-46), proclaim that God is a God of mercy who shows pity to those who are hurting, but also to those who are slaves of sin. Political activism in the name of Christ proclaims the God of justice and righteousness who cares about the laws which are legislated in any given society. In art and music, Christians must exhibit the beauty God has created both visually and audibly. In theater and cinema, Christian actors, producers, and directors must portray “the God who is there” in all the joys, trials, tragedies, triumphs, and failures of humanity throughout its long and difficult history—to demonstrate “His-Story” in human history. In all places and in every sphere of human existence—no matter how simple or complex the task—Christians must be present to proclaim the praises of God *who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light*.

But how can we do this unless we are *walking in the light both individually and corporately*? It is impossible to overestimate the extreme necessity of personal and corporate holiness—in a word, obedience to the law of God in thought and action—as we face the inexhaustible task of making the *invisible* God *visible* through the church. Again, we must comprehend Peter’s emphasis on the *corporate witness* of the church. It is not sufficient for a small percentage of committed believers to proclaim God’s excellence. To be credible to the world of skeptical sinners, it must be proclaimed by the *whole* church walking together in the light. Had the church throughout its long, tortuous history succeeded in doing this, the Great Commission of Christ would have long since been completed, and He would have already returned in glory (in my opinion). In His inscrutable (incapable of examination) and incomprehensible (incapable of full understanding) providence, God planned to accomplish this goal through a weak and negligent church—slowly and painfully. The church is more like ancient Israel than we would wish to admit.

While claiming that Jesus is our greatest treasure, the church in the US nevertheless succumbs (falls) to materialism and consumerism (the love of money and “stuff”). “I’d rather have Jesus *AND* [not “more than”] silver and gold; thank you very much!” But the gods of silver, gold, and real estate (land and houses) quickly crowd out personal sacrifice in giving to domestic and foreign missions and faith-based organizations involved in mercy ministries. As a result, the church in the US is experiencing very minimal growth, the large mega-churches growing at the expense of the smaller churches, many of which are dying. Moreover, some of the mega churches are growing at the expense of the gospel, teaching the message of personal achievement (the health and wealth gospel which is no gospel). There are, of course, many exceptions to our materialistic culture; otherwise, my wife and I would not be serving here in Uganda through the material sacrifices of committed believers, both wealthy and non-wealthy.

For professing Christians in Rwanda, settling tribal hatreds and past offenses was more important in 1994 than the obedience of forgiveness and reconciliation. Eight hundred thousand slaughtered Rwandans—including children—was the grim result. Many professing Christians converted to the Muslim faith because Muslims sheltered Tutsis and moderate Hutus from the genocide. Some “Christian” pastors actually participated in the genocide, offering shelter in their churches only to allow the Interhamwe militia to murder hundreds who were barricaded inside. It will take decades, perhaps a century, for the church in Rwanda to regain any credibility among the unreached and Muslim populations. As always, there is a silver lining in the dark clouds hanging over Rwanda.

Many know now that nominal (name-only) Christianity cannot seriously compete with tribal hatreds deeply rooted in African culture.

How can a church paralyzed by the love of money and the things money buys, or a church seething with genocidal racism, ever proclaim the excellencies of God? Those who are called out of darkness must no longer walk in the darkness, but in the light.

3. *Our motivation (2: 10)*

But where do we find the motivation for radical obedience to the gospel? In the context of *1 Peter*, how can a church suffering persecution generate the courage to witness to their neighbors who are hostile to the gospel? In the context of the materialistic US and the tribal divisions of Africa, what is the proper motivation for turning one's back to cultural norms—tribal hatred, the worship of ancestors, human sacrifice—which are disobedient to the gospel? The answer is found in **2: 10** which is grammatically connected to **2: 9b**. Once we were not the people of God and were walking in the darkness of our own minds and our respective cultures (Eph. 2: 3). But now we have been called out of that darkness into the light of God's truth, and this light has transformed us into the people of God who receive His mercy. We must not return to that darkness, no matter what the cost, even the cost of our own lives.

Peter quotes from Hos. 1: 10-11; and to get the full import of this statement, it will be helpful to "camp out" for a short time with *Hosea*. The second child of Gomer (the adulterous wife of Hosea) is a daughter whom Hosea names Lo-ruhamah ("she has not obtained compassion") symbolizing that God will no longer have compassion on Israel because of her idolatries (Hos. 1: 6). This appeared strange, for at the beginning of Hosea's prophecy, Jeroboam II, the king of Israel, was still on the throne with his apparent military and economic success. Even toward the end of Hosea's prophecy some 30 to 40 years later, the people of Israel thought Hosea was a fool (9: 7). Yahweh will have compassion on Judah, at least for now, but 150 years later in 587 BC they will fall as well. The third child is named "Lo-ammi" ("for you are not my people") (v. 9). Therefore, the second and third children of Gomer are illegitimate, born of whoredom. Israel is, thus, a faithless wife, a wife of whoredom who pursues other lovers, the false gods of the nations. She had broken the covenant with Yahweh; consequently Yahweh has rejected her in faithfulness to His covenant curse (Deut. 28: 15-68). God is *always faithful* to His promises, all of them. He is just as faithful to His *promise of cursing* for disobedience as He is to His *promise of blessing* for obedience.

In spite of the fact that God is rejecting his covenant *people*, he will not renounce his *covenant*. There will be a restoration of his people, both of Judah and Israel in which they will have a common ruler. Those who have been declared, "not my people" will be called, "the sons of the living God" (vv. 10-11). **The main question is: When did this restoration take place?** Some would interpret the fulfillment during the return of the exiles in the days of Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and Jehozadak, the priest, in 539 B.C. under the orders and protection of Cyrus. John Murray applies the verse, in its historical context, strictly to Israel, but says that Paul applies the prediction to the influx of elect Gentiles (Rom. 9: 25-26). In the same way that the Gentiles were not the people of God in the Old Covenant, they shall be called the sons of God in the New Covenant. The restoration of fallen Israel, therefore, is a *type* of which the calling of the Gentiles into favor is the *antitype*

(Murray, *Romans*, Vol. 2, p. 38). Calvin, Henry, and Keil, on the other hand, apply the passage in *Hosea* to the calling of both elect Jews and Gentiles into the church and ***not to the restoration of physical Israel as a nation*** (Calvin, *Hosea*, p. 64; Matthew Henry, *Hosea*, p. 1123; Keil, *Hosea*, p. 49). Just because God has cast off his national people does not imply that his covenant promise has fallen to the ground. God never intended to save the whole physical nation. “But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel” (Rom. 9: 6).

This last interpretation is supported by the reference in v. 11 to the “***one leader***” who would only be poorly represented in Zerubbabel (see *Haggai*) but abundantly fulfilled in Christ. Also, the number of Israelites returning to Jerusalem in 539 B.C. was few (about 50,000; cf. Ezra 2: 64-65), hardly corresponding to the “sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered”.

The promise which begins in Hos. 1: 10 does not conclude in v. 11 but actually continues in Hosea 2: 1. Notice that the “Lo” (which in Hebrew means “not”) is removed in v. 1 so that the names of the children read “my people” and “she will have compassion”, just the opposite of the names given in vv. 6 and 9. This will be a reversal of God’s rejection. Commenting on the ***fulfillment*** of this passage, C. F. Keil remarks,

So far as the fulfillment of this prophecy is concerned, the fact that the patriarchal promise of the innumerable multiplication of Israel is to be realized through the pardon and restoration of Israel, as the nation of the living God, ***shows clearly enough that we are not to look for this in the return of the ten tribes from captivity to Palestine, their native land.*** Even apart from the fact, that the historical books of the Bible (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) simply mention the return of a portion of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites, under Zerubbabel and Ezra, and that the numbers of the ten tribes, who may have attached themselves to the Judaeans on their return, or who returned to Galilee afterwards as years rolled by, formed by a very small fraction of the number that had been carried away...; the attachment of these few could not properly be called a union of the sons of Israel and of the sons of Judah, and ***still less was it a fulfillment of the words, “They appoint themselves one head.”*** As the union of Israel with Judah is to be effected through their gathering together under one head, under Jehovah their God and under David their king, ***this fulfillment falls within the Messianic times, which furnish a pledge of their complete fulfillment in the last times, when the hardening of Israel will cease, and all Israel be converted to Christ*** (Rom. 11: 25, 26) (*Hosea*, pp. 48-49).

Hubbard argues for a four-stage fulfillment (David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea*, pp. 70-71). The ***first stage*** of fulfillment takes place in the return from exile beginning in 539 B.C. with the decree of Cyrus and continuing for almost a hundred years until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. That this post-exilic return is not a complete fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecy in 1: 10—2: 1 is evident from the lack of a royal leader (v. 11) and the lack of numerical expansion found in v. 10 (“like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered”). Such terms of the expanse of Israel are not fulfilled in the relatively small numbers which returned from Babylon. Even the post-exilic prophets Malachi, Zechariah, and Haggai speak of better days in the future when the promises of renewed prosperity and restoration will occur (Haggai 2: 6-9; Zech. 14; Mal. 4).

The ***second stage*** of fulfillment takes place in the birth of Christ when believing Israelites would be united under their Messiah.

The **third stage** of fulfillment takes place in the formation of the church. Both in 1Pet. 2: 10 and in Rom. 9: 25-26 the apostles use the last names of Gomer's second and third children as a reference to the Gentiles who are incorporated into the church.

The **fourth stage** of fulfillment is the return of Christ. Hubbard seems to include the "grafting in again" (Rom. 11: 23) of the Jews as part of Christ's return (p. 71). This brings up an interesting question which is introduced in the last part of the quotation of Keil above. The promise of 1: 10—2: 1 may, in part, be fulfilled in the **re-incorporation of national Israel** into the olive tree of God's people presented in Rom. 11: 1-32. Time will not permit an explanation of this passage, but the weight of the evidence suggests that there will be a spiritual revival among the national Jews in which the overwhelming majority turns in faith to their Messiah (See John Murray, *Romans*). In Hubbard's words,

Paul seems to say that, though the bright promises of Israel's future can be broadened to embrace Gentiles within the church, the formation of the church does not exhaust these promises. Something will be left over as an experience of redemption for the original covenant people (p. 71).

Peter is, thus, noting the fulfillment (or at least the partial fulfillment) of the prophecy of Hosea. He is warranted to use the quotation in *Hosea* in speaking to both **Jewish and Gentile Christians**. As **Jewish** unbelievers, they were cut off from the promises of God because they and their fathers before them had violated the covenant requirements through idolatry and disobedience. As **Gentile** unbelievers, they had **never** been considered the people of God and were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2: 11-12). All of this had now changed. They had been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light—the light of the gospel. In the darkness they were "not a people" (**Lo-ammi**) and "had not received mercy" (**Lo-ruhammah**), but in the light of Christ they were God's people (**Ammi**) and had received mercy (**Ruhammah**) (Hos. 2: 1).

All of us, Jew or Gentile, African or American, are in the same condition before coming to Christ. We were not God's people and had not received His saving mercy. We lived for ourselves as if God did not exist. But now we are his people and the recipients of his mercy. **It follows, then, that we can no longer live for ourselves but only for Him.** "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5: 14-15). The proper motivation, therefore, is not "Live for God and you will be saved", but "Live for God **because** you are saved." We love Him and live for him because we are grateful for what He has **already** accomplished in the sacrifice of Christ. The work of salvation is accomplished. What remains is the appropriate **response** to salvation—a holy life. And as we have seen before, living a holy life is the **only** consistent response we can make as believers, and the only response we will **wish** to make. Professing Christians who have no desire or disposition to live for God's glory are not true believers. They have denied the work of the Spirit who causes believers both "to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2: 13).

In the remaining portion of the epistle, the Apostle Peter explains what it means to proclaim the excellencies of God.

VIII. Proclaiming the Excellencies of God through Excellent Behavior (2: 11—3: 12)

A. Self-consciousness of our Identity as Strangers and Aliens (2: 11)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11 NASB)

One of the first steps in understanding how to please God is to become self-conscious of who we are as believers and where we ultimately belong. Peter addresses his readers as **aliens and strangers** on this earth, expatriates who have their homes somewhere else. Peter could be interpreted literally since he was writing to people who were literal strangers and aliens in foreign lands. But it is more likely that he was using their expatriate status as an analogy to their expatriate status in the world at large. As Christians, they were strangers on this earth. As Paul says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3: 20). Those whose citizenship belongs to this present age are strangers and aliens to the kingdom of God (Eph. 2: 12) and whose lives are characterized by Paul as follows:

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ,¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (Philippians 3:18-19 NASB)

As citizens of the kingdom of God and aliens and strangers in this world, we must cultivate a certain attitude about our stay upon this earth. Like Abraham, we are seeking a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11: 9-10). This abode is described in Rev. 21: 1 as “a new heaven and a new earth,” in Acts 3: 21 as the “restoration of all things”.

1. Only passing through

First, we know that our time on this *present* earth is very short and that we are only passing through. This consciousness, in turn, should cause us to hold everything we have in *this life* with a loose grip. We can't take our money, our property, or our possessions with us to heaven. They will all be left behind (Lk. 12: 16-21), and in the new heavens and earth God will distribute eternal rewards which are based upon our spiritual service in this life (see below). The only thing we can take with us are the works which we have done for the kingdom of God and for the glory of God (1 Cor. 3: 12-14; Col. 3: 23-24; Matt. 25: 21; 31-40). ***Our orientation to this life, therefore, must be conditioned by our true citizenship.*** We are pilgrims just passing through this life attempting to do all we can for the glory of God. It makes no sense to accumulate things we cannot keep. In the words of the now-famous missionary to Ecuador, Jim Eliot, “He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep so that he can keep what he cannot lose.” In contrast to the unbelievers Paul mentions in Phil. 3: 19, whose minds are set on earthly things, our minds must be set on “the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3: 1).

This does not mean, contrary to much evangelical thinking, that we need not be occupied in “polishing the brass on a sinking ship.” In other words, since God is going to destroy this present world with its ungodly works, why should we bother ourselves in seeking to preserve it? But this kind of logic is contrary to the biblical teaching of the creation mandate.

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28 NASB)

This mandate has never been rescinded (done away with) and is the ultimate goal toward which God is moving his redeemed people. The entire history of redemption is the story of (1) how man rebelled against God's original mandate in Genesis to pursue his own independent kingdom, (2) how God put enmity between His people and Satan (and Satan's people, people like Cain), and (3) how God turned the clock of time backward toward His original intention by sending His Son to redeem a people for God's own possession who will accomplish His original plan of having dominion over the earth. (See Richard Pratt's excellent overview of biblical history in Third Millennium, particularly "Building Biblical Theology", "Kingdom Covenants and Canon of the Old Testament", and "Kingdom and Covenants in the New Testament").

Moreover, we must remember that God is going to reward Christians for their good works, even the work of a slave who does his work heartily unto the Lord.

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord **you will receive the reward of the inheritance**. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Colossians 3:22-24 NASB)

In his second epistle, Peter says that the earth and its works will be destroyed with intense heat.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, **and the earth and its works will be burned up**. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:10-13 NASB)

Notice that "the earth and its works will be burned up." How then will even the good works of Christian pastors, engineers, doctors, teachers, laborers, mothers, wives, fathers, and husbands be preserved? I believe Peter is speaking metaphorically. Fire is used to purify and test precious metal, burning away all the dross and impurities. All our work in this life is also being tested by God to see if we are doing it according to the proper standards (the word of God), the proper motive (the love of God), and the proper goal (the kingdom of God).

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NASB)

It stands to reason that if a Christian's work is done according to these criteria, it will also stand the test of God's judgment on The Day of Judgment. God will not burn up those works which he approves.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:58 NASB)

Yet, if all works were destroyed at the coming of Christ, our works would be in vain. And Paul is not speaking only of the good works of evangelism, missions, and preaching; otherwise, only Christians who are regularly doing these things would be approved by the Lord. He is also speaking of rearing children, laying bricks, or farming. Remember, in the new heavens and earth there will be no need for missions or evangelism, “for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jer. 31: 31). But there will still be the ongoing need to subdue the earth for the glory of God.

2. Loyalty to the kingdom of God

Second, although desiring to be model citizens in our adopted country—anywhere on the earth—our true loyalties belong to our real country—the kingdom of God. Given the choice of blending into the culture where we live by obeying the rules and cultural traditions of that country, we must obey God rather than man. Most of the cultural norms and rules of our host country will not require us to disobey God. The reason for this is that the laws of every country are generally rooted in the work of the law of God implanted in man’s nature.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (Romans 2:14-15 NASB)

Unbelievers who have never studied the Bible or the law of God written in the Bible still “do instinctively the things of the Law” required in the Bible. They love their families, seek lawful vocations, speak the truth, preserve the property and safety of other men, etc. This is because they are, without exception, made in the image of God and recognize the wisdom of God’s law.

However, we must take a stand against any cultural practice which violates the laws of the kingdom of God. As we shall see in *1 Peter*, generally we can exist as law-abiding citizens in the host country—better citizens, in fact, than other citizens who are not believers (2: 13-17). At other times, however, we must be willing as Christians to resist the evil inherent (within) in all of our respective cultures.

One egregious example of disobeying a law in order to obey God is a Christian doctor who refuses to perform abortions because of his respect for human life. Another example would be pastors who refuse to perform wedding ceremonies for homosexual couples. There may come a time in the US when all pastors will be forbidden to preach on any text of Scripture which condemns homosexuality as sin. When that day comes, pastors must obey God rather than man.

B. The Witness of Good Deeds (2: 12)

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 NASB)

A very large portion of this epistle pertains to the Christian’s witness before ***Gentile unbelievers***, whom Peter simply calls, “Gentiles” (2: 12). (As far as Paul and Peter were concerned, all true believers were “Jews” in the spiritual sense of the word (cf. Rom. 2: 28-29; Gal. 3: 29). Peter urges Christians to maintain excellent behavior before critical Gentiles who were looking for opportunities to slander Christians. Live in such a way, he says, which will give them no grounds for their

accusations. When he wrote this letter (early 60's AD), Christians were accused of all sorts of things. By calling each other brother and sister and greeting each other with a "holy kiss" they were accused of incest (sex between siblings). By "eating" the body and "drinking" the blood of the Lord Jesus in communion, they were accused of cannibalism and infanticide (as a source of flesh and blood) (E. E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, p. 89). Furthermore, since they refused to call Caesar, "Lord", they were accused of political sedition and lack of patriotism, eventually leading to all the major Roman persecutions.

Thus, they were often slandered as "evil doers", making it all the more necessary to promote the Christian faith through exemplary behavior to prove their detractors wrong. The words "excellent" and "good" are the same in the Greek (*kalos*). Through good behavior and good deeds, Christians would cause the false accusations of unbelievers to fall on deaf ears. Furthermore, because of their good deeds, unbelievers would "glorify God in the day of visitation." The "day of visitation" could mean the judgment of the world at the return of Christ. God has made everything for His own glory, "even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16: 4), and when Christ returns in judgment of the wicked, they will glorify God involuntarily as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Phil. 2: 9-11), and all Christians will be vindicated for their belief in Jesus Christ. Another possible explanation—and the one I prefer—is that **the day of visitation** is the day some of these non-Christian critics repent of their sins and trust in Christ as their Savior. As they observe the superior life-styles and integrity of these despised and maligned Christians, they become ashamed of their own sinfulness and realize that Christians have something special which they do not have (so also Calvin, *1 Peter*, p. 79; Kistemaker, p. 97). Thus, the ultimate purpose of exemplary behavior is not man-centered praise for Christians, but God-centered praise (Calvin, p. 79).

Christians who speak out against homosexuality are often accused of hating homosexuals. Based on some isolated news reports with professing Christians shouting at homosexuals, some of this bad press is deserved. The Bible tells us to hate sin, but Jesus informs us to do good even to those who hate us.

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. (Matthew 5:44-45 NASB)

But one could just as erroneously accuse Christians of hating promiscuous heterosexuals, adulterers, thieves, murderers, gossips, liars, and so forth, all of which is condemned in Scripture and sins of which Christians are also guilty. Thus, they should also be accusing us of hating other Christians for these sins and enacting anti-hate legislation accordingly. But of course, unbelievers pick and choose which sins they dislike (theft and murder) and which ones they find acceptable (adultery and fornication). Unbelievers fail to recognize that Christianity is the only religion other than Islam which recognizes the existence of sin and sinners. Christianity is the only religion that claims that, left to ourselves, we are helpless in the face of sin. Therefore, true believers do not self-righteously turn down their noses at sinners. Instead, we direct them to the same grace which we have enjoyed. This is not hate, but love.

What the modern news media does not report are the many faith-based ministries which are attempting to help homosexuals who, having discovered that it produces sorrow rather than gaiety, are trying to leave this life-style. There are also many ministries who are helping unwed mothers,

prostitutes, victims of sex trafficking and drug abuse. More than other religion, Christianity seeks restoration through deeds of love (Titus 3: 8).

C. Submission to Human Government for the Lord's Sake (2: 13-17)

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.¹⁵ For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.¹⁶ Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.¹⁷ Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17 NASB)

1. Submitting to the civil magistrate—honoring the king

Considering the ongoing persecution of those whom Peter addresses, it is particularly important that he remind them to submit themselves to every form of human authority, including kings and governors (Davids, p. 99). As a general rule, such human authorities are ordained by God for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right. The reward of praise will not come from the civil magistrate, but from God. The best we can expect from our respective governments is that they will leave us alone as long as we obey the law. Peter's wording is very close to that of Paul in *Romans*.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.⁷ Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:1-7 NAU)

The source and bedrock of all human authority is the sovereignty of God. For this very reason, the Christian should submit himself to this authority **for the Lord's sake**. Human authority, though woefully imperfect, is still **sent by Him** for the common good of humanity and is better than the anarchy and chaos we get when there is no clearly established authority. Peter, like Paul in *Romans*, is speaking **prescriptively** of what human rulers **should be** rather than **descriptively** of what they often become—tyrants (as in the case of Nero who ruled Rome when Peter wrote his epistle and by whom he may have been martyred). He does not naively believe governments always have the good of humanity at heart. Much of the time heads of countries rule for their own selfish interests, even if they began office with idealistic and altruistic intentions for the good of the country (e.g. Fidel Castro of Cuba). (For more discussion on this subject and on Rom. 13: 1-7, see my commentary on *Titus*, pp. 9-12). By obeying the proper human authorities, persecuted Christians could **silence the ignorance of foolish men** who were accusing them of political sedition (rebellion against the government). Christians would not call Caesar, “Lord”, nor would they offer incense in his honor (Davids, p. 104). This was not sedition, but conscientious objection to practices which violated their loyalty to Christ. By obeying the laws of the land and being model citizens, Christians could prove their integrity before a critical audience.

The city of Smyrna was a rival to Ephesus and was known for its loyalty to the Roman Empire. Possibly, Polycarp (the ancient church “father”) was the bishop of the church during the time John was writing Revelation. Polycarp was a disciple of John who was burned at the stake in 155AD for refusing to say “Caesar is Lord”. When threatened with being burned at the stake, he answered, “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you wait? Bring forth what you will” (William Hendriksen, *Revelation*, p. 80).

As believers, Christians are **free** from the social conventions (rules) which require them to do things because of cultural tradition. However, they must not use their freedom in Christ as a “cover” for evil (v. 16). Freedom in Christ is not a *license* to do what we *want* to do, as if because we are Christians, we are not subject to human authority. Rather, our freedom in Christ gives us the *ability* to do what we *should* do. As free men, we are, nevertheless, the “bond-slaves (*doulos*) of God.” What this liberty means in Paul’s writings is the willingness to forego lawful liberties for the sake of another brother (1 Cor. 10: 23—11: 1). In the context of 1 Pet. 2: 16, it means that Christians should strive to keep the law of the land even if such laws may seem to have no discernable moral relevance. Christians should keep every human law provided it does not require them to violate their allegiance to Christ. God’s law is always higher than man’s law, but freedom in Christ does not permit Christians to ignore laws prohibiting theft and murder, or even seemingly insignificant laws against pollution and speeding in the name of Christian liberty.

Many of these laws are actually rooted in the law of God even if the members of parliament who enacted these laws were not aware of it. For example, speeding laws are enacted because research has proven that more deaths occur on the highways when people are driving fast and are, thus, less able to control their vehicles. If drivers would simply allow more time to get to their destination, be more patient and slow down, many lives would be saved. Speeding laws, therefore, agree with the law of God which says, “You shall not kill.” As another example, there is a law in Rwanda forbidding littering. If you throw trash on the ground and are caught, you will be fined. Is there any moral value to this law? Indeed! Around Kampala, thousands of empty water bottles and other trash clog up the water drainage systems around the city causing flooding during heavy rains. Because pedestrians are careless of their trash, drainage ditches back up; and people, especially children, die in their homes at night during heavy rain storms.

Another obvious benefit of littering laws is beauty. As a country, Rwanda is far more beautiful than Uganda simply because it is not “trashy.” But when you look at Uganda, you see trash thrown all over the streets making a garbage dump out of one of the most potentially beautiful countries in the world, one that Winston Churchill once called “The Pearl of Africa.” Disregard for the natural beauty of a country is also disregard for God’s creation and, thus, disregard for God. God gave us the natural beauty of creation to reflect His glory and for us to enjoy. When we trash it, we show our contempt for His glory and His gifts. The same goes for unnecessary pollution of any kind.

For a final example, it is against the law in Uganda to cut down a tree without planting three more trees to take its place. Since most African citizens cook with wood, Uganda and other African countries are rapidly becoming deforested. Deforestation reduces the annual rainfall which, in turn, results in the reduction of annual food production. (In Malawi, there is only one growing season, and farmers can go for six months without rain.) This reduces the GDP (gross domestic product) which is a measurement of the economic health of a country. So far, Uganda has two growing seasons, but if

deforestation continues, it may have only one by the middle of this century. Cutting too many trees without replenishing them can cause draught, poverty, and death. Thus, laws about cutting trees have their basis in the law of God—“You shall not kill” and “You shall not steal”.

The Christian, then, is not at liberty to decide for himself which laws of a country he wishes to keep or not keep. He must keep *every law of the land which does not violate the law of God*. Thankfully, civil laws which violate God’s law will be rare. Why? Because God gave civil government a measure of His common grace to limit the abuses of lawless men. By God’s grace, even wicked governments are capable of enacting good laws.

2. Treating all people with honor and dignity

In summary of this section, Peter gives four short commands, **Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king** (v. 17). All of these commands relate to the subject of submission. Although we are under no obligation to obey unbelievers who have no official office, it is in submission to God that we honor them as His image-bearers. The distinction is made, first, between **all people** and **the brotherhood**, and, second, between **God** and **the king**. All people must be treated with dignity regardless of whether they are Christian and regardless of social and economic status. All people are made in the image of God; and for this reason, every human being has “regal” (kingly) status in the eyes of God. This is the basis of God’s law in Gen. 9: 6, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, **For** in the image of God He made man.” The work, “for”, gives the reason why murder is punished with execution. Consequently, the execution of the guilty person is not murder by definition. An attack upon God’s image—murder, assault, rape, kidnapping, etc.—is considered an attack upon God and punishable by death in the OT theocracy. But the law against murder also implies the necessity of preserving life and honoring other human beings simply because they share God’s image. The Apostle James makes it very clear that showing favoritism to the rich and powerful while despising the poor and helpless is a form of murder (James 2: 1-12). If we **fear God** (1 Pet. 2: 17) we will have no fear of men, even rich and powerful men.

All people have dignity, and believers demonstrate their faith in Christ by treating every member of the human race with dignity. This principle is often forgotten in the US where one’s worth is determined by how much money he has. It is overlooked in African countries where one’s tribal descent determines his worth in the eyes of others. In Rwanda months before the 1994 genocide, radio broadcasts were made regularly calling upon the Hutus to rise up against the “cockroaches”—the Tutsis. The Tutsis were no longer considered human beings, but one of the lowest forms of animal life: cockroaches which foraged (hunted for food) in waste dumps. After many months of this hate propaganda, millions of radical Hutus were prepared to hack their Tutsi neighbors to death with pangas (machetes). This is called racism, not Christianity, and racism is another form of murder and an attack upon God. Jesus’ insisted that hatred is a form of murder (Matt. 5: 21-22); and certainly, unresolved hatred often results in physical murder. The genocide in Rwanda proved without any doubt that the country was not rooted in the Christian faith—all such claims aside.

But, again, Africa is not face its guilt alone. For almost two hundred years in the US, the black man struggled to gain the basic rights of the white man and to be treated with dignity. The church stood guiltily silent in the background of this struggle, siding with the cultural status quo (cultural beliefs) which considered the black man inferior in the eyes of God. While the church should have been at the forefront of the struggle for racial equality, it sat back and did nothing, or actually supported

white racism. As a sad result of this neglect, there are many black people in the US who consider Christianity as “the white man’s religion”. Lacking substantial spiritual leadership, the black community in the US now suffers severe spiritual problems, including illegitimate children growing up without paternal guidance (70 % of the black population), drug addiction, and domestic violence. Ninety percent of the prisoners I once taught in prison bible studies were black. According to the US Department of Justice,

Approximately 12–13% of the American population is African-American, but they make up 35% of jail inmates, and 37% of prison inmates of the 2.2 million male inmates as of 2014 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014) (Cited by Wikipedia).

As believers, we must be at the *forefront* of our culture, not the *background*, in demonstrating the dignity of all men. As we model this belief, we may be able to influence our culture for good, creating a social climate of good-will toward all men without racial and class distinction.

3. *Showing special love for fellow believers*

While honoring **all people** and loving one’s neighbor as he loves himself—the summary of the fifth through the tenth commandments—Christians should demonstrate a *special* love for the **brotherhood** (cf. Gal. 6: 10; note the word, “especially”). Believers are part of the family of God, and there are special obligations to love one another within the family which is the body of Christ for whom He died (cf. 1 Cor. 12). All the claims of the Christian faith before the critical eyes of the world are rendered useless if Christians fail to love one another with tangible deeds (1 Jn. 3: 17-18). “Love one another” is the fundamental commandment which Jesus left with His disciples in the few remaining hours before His crucifixion (Jn. 13: 34; 15: 12, 17). It is so fundamentally important that Christ establishes brotherly love as the decisive mark of the Christian church declaring, “By **this** all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13: 35). Brotherly love is perhaps *the most effective apologetic (defense)* for the truth claims of the gospel, and during the fearful persecution of the church in those first few centuries of the last millennium, the testimony of one notable unbeliever was this: “Behold, how they love one another.” It is doubtful that many unbelievers would make the same statement today about the church given centuries of division and conflict. But when this love once again becomes the predominate witness of the church, the world will stop and take notice. Even now in certain places around the globe, particularly where the church is most severely persecuted, Christians are winning people to Christ merely by the way they love each other. In a world where people are longing for connection and community with others, the church is designed by God to be the most attractive and effective place on earth where this community can be found. But it is not automatic; it must come through self-sacrifice and self-denial, the same kind of self-sacrifice and denial presented in the life and death of Christ.

4. *Fearing God*

Secondly, while the Christian must **honor the king**, he has a special obligation to **fear God** from whom the king derives all his authority (cf. Jn. 19: 10-11). By making this distinction, Peter is explicitly denying any false claims to deity (the claim to being a god) commonly made by Roman Caesars, a denial resembling Jesus’ statement in Matt. 22: 21, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s”, thus making a distinction between Caesar and

God. By writing such a statement, Peter was risking his own life; and, indeed, he was finally apprehended by Caesar Nero and crucified upside down on a cross about the year 68 AD (according to tradition). Caesar must be honored as one whom God has providentially installed as the head of the Roman Empire. Although one does not have to respect the person, he must respect the office.

However, allegiance to the Caesar, or any king, governor, president, or MP, only goes so far. As Jesus sent out the twelve disciples on their mission, He said to them, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10: 28). Caesar was able to kill the body, but he could not touch the soul. God, on the other hand, is able not only to kill the body but destroy both body and soul in the never-ending torment of hell. If we fear God, we need fear no one else. This truth was eloquently and courageously illustrated in the story of many Christians who were willing to die for their faith at the hands of Roman emperors.

Roughly a hundred and thirty years after Peter’s martyrdom, Emperor Septimus Severus, faced with the threat of barbarians outside the empire and dissident groups within, decreed the worship of Sol Invictus—the Unconquered Sun—as a means of unifying all the diverse religions of the empire. One could worship whomever or whatever he chose as long as he acknowledged the Sun god as the supreme God above all. Jews and Christians refused to comply with this ruling and quickly exasperated the emperor’s patience. Determined to force submission, Severus made it a capital crime, punishable by death, for anyone to convert to the Christian faith. The church father, Irenaeus, though certainly not a new convert, is believed to have been martyred about this time, in the year 202 AD, as well as the father of Origen in the city of Alexandria, Egypt.

The best-known story of martyrdom was that of Perpetua, a nobleman’s daughter, and Felicitas, her slave, both of whom had recently converted to the Christian faith and awaiting baptism in defiance of Severus’ new policy. Four others, including three men, were also martyred at the same time, 203 AD, in the city of Carthage, Africa (R.J. Rushdoony, *World History Notes*, p. 85). Most likely, their story was originally told by the church father, Tertulian, who preached in Carthage (Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1, p. 83).

After Perpetua and her friends were arrested, her father vainly pleaded with her to renounce her faith in Christ—something she could have done as a noble woman—and all charges would have been dropped. In answer to her father, she said that since everything had a name, and since it was useless to attempt to change someone’s name, her name of Christian could not be changed. Perpetua was only 22 and had just given birth to a son whom she was breast-feeding. After her arrest, her son was taken away from her, causing her much discomfort from breasts swollen with milk. At the trial, her father appeared with her son. Taking her aside, he pleaded, “Pity your child” (Rushdoony, p. 85). He reasoned that even if she were not willing to save her own life, she should renounce her faith and choose to live for her son’s sake. After this incident, she reported, “And somehow God willed it that neither the child any longer desired the breasts, nor did they cause me pain; and thus I was spared anxiety about the child and personal discomfort” (Rushdoony, p. 85).

Felicitas, Perpetua’s slave, was eight month’s pregnant and was naturally concerned about the life of her unborn child; yet, she was afraid that her life would be spared as a result of her pregnancy, denying her the privilege of dying for her faith; or that her execution would be postponed until later, and she would not be able to join her four friends in the community of martyrdom. God granted her

petition for an early child-birth, and in the eighth month she gave birth to a girl who was cared for by another Christian woman (Gonzalez, p. 84. Rushdoony says that this woman was her sister). As she lay in prison moaning with the pains of childbirth, a Roman guard taunted (mocked) her saying, “You who are in such suffering now, what will you do when you are thrown to the beasts, which you despised when you refused to sacrifice?” She answered, “Now it is I that suffer what I suffer; but then there will be another by my side who will suffer for me, because I shall suffer for him” (Rushdoony, p. 85).

All five Christians, including Perpetua and Felicitas, were condemned to the arena to be torn to pieces by wild beasts. As they entered the arena, Perpetua was singing a psalm. At their sentencing earlier, the three male martyrs (Revocatus, Saturninus, and Secundulus—Gonzalez, p. 83) had warned the judge in no uncertain terms that a worse judgment awaited him, “You may judge us, but God will judge you.” For this outrageous audacity (boldness) the three men were forced to run the gauntlet and receive a severe beating before facing the wild animals. The two women were stripped naked—the usual custom to entertain the lustful Roman mobs who attended these executions by the thousands—but when they saw these two young women with milk dripping from Felicitas’ breast from her recent childbirth, they fell silent and shuddered. The women were then removed from the arena and covered in loose clothing (Rushdoony, p. 85).

Saturninus and Revocatus died quickly and bravely. But no beast would attack Secundulus. Some of them refused to come out to him, while others attacked the soldiers. Finally, Secundulus himself declared that a leopard would kill him, and so it happened.

Perpetua and Felicitas were told that they would be attacked by a ferocious cow. Having been hit and thrown by the animal, Perpetua asked to be able to retie her hair, for loose hair was a sign of mourning, and this was a joyful day for her (Gonzalez, p. 84).

Continuing with the story, Rushdoony remarks,

When the half-dead martyrs were to have their throats cut to end the games, they stood and moved to the appointed place. When it came to Perpetua’s turn “she herself placed the wavering right hand of the youthful gladiator to her throat.” Her calm and self assurance exceeded his (p. 86).

Perpetua and her friends, “of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. 11: 38a), feared God—and Him alone.

D. Submission to Authority and Suffering for the Lord’s Sake (2: 18—3: 13)

The subject of suffering appears often in Peter’s epistle. This is so possibly because Peter was an eyewitness of the suffering of Christ before and after His crucifixion, and this made a profound impact upon his whole ministry. In the passage which follows, he takes up the various ways that Christians suffer at the hands of others, particularly those in authority over them. Servants often suffered abuse from their masters; and wives—being the weaker vessel both physically and socially—often suffered physical and emotional abuse from their husbands. The reference to husbands appears to digress (move away) from the subject of submission to suffering, yet Peter’s admonition to husbands to recognize their wives as spiritual equals and to treat them with respect and understanding was a radical departure from established tradition. Thus, husbands are admonished to embrace the suffering of self-denial for the spiritual well-being of their wives.

1. Servants submitting to unreasonable masters (2: 18-20)

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.¹⁹ For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.²⁰ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. (1 Peter 2:18-20 NASB)

The addressees of v. 8 are not bondslaves (*doulos*), but household servants (*oiketēs*) who enjoyed a large measure of freedom and responsibility in Roman households. In fact, they often lived better than many free men in Graeco-Roman society who lived on the streets or in cheap rented quarters. They were practically indistinguishable from free men in their dress, prompting the Roman Senate to introduce legislation requiring servants to wear a distinctive type of clothing (Kistemaker, p. 104). The above description was not true of bondslaves who had the lowest socio-economic status in society, the very reason Paul refers to himself as a *doulos* rather than an *oiketēs* (Rom. 1: 1; Gal. 1: 10; Tit. 1: 1). Peter also uses *doulos* in v. 16, admonishing believers to the proper attitude concerning Christian freedom.

The unusual thing about this admonition is that Peter (along with Paul—Eph. 6: 5-8; Col. 3: 22-25; etc.) addresses servants *in the first place*. Jewish and Stoic moral codes placed no moral demands upon slaves or servants of any kind (only upon their masters) for the simple reason that *slaves did not enjoy the status of full personhood*, and therefore, had no moral responsibility (Davids, p. 105). By addressing servants, Peter goes against the current of common custom and affirms the personhood of all people, servants and slaves included. He omits any address to masters (which we find in the Pauline letters) only because his main subject is submission to suffering. The church as a community of people from all walks of life and possessing radically different socio-economic status was truly a “new creation” (Gal. 6: 15) unparalleled in the history of the world.

We may be surprised that neither Peter nor Paul challenged the legitimacy of this institution in any of their letters; but this is somewhat understandable from a practical standpoint. Slavery was a societal institution outside the jurisdiction and control of the church (Davids, p. 105) and any explicit condemnation of it would have provoked severe persecution from Roman citizens and government alike without accomplishing any positive results. Such overt teaching also could have provoked a wide-spread rebellion among radical elements of the slave population which would have ended in a blood-bath, something which had already occurred in about 70 BC with Spartacus and thousands of other slaves who followed him (see also Hendriksen’s comments in my commentary on *1 Timothy*, as well as Kistemaker’s, p. 47). It could be argued, considering the economic difficulties of ancient civilization, that slavery was necessary for the survival of a large segment of the population who had no other means of livelihood. As I have noted in my commentary on *1 Timothy*, slavery was not necessarily oppressive and dehumanizing; otherwise, under the theocracy some slaves would not have chosen to remain with their masters voluntarily. Further, even in the pagan Graeco-Roman society, Paul implies that there were at least *some* masters who were “good and gentle” (v. 18) and not unreasonable. Such a state would be far better than poverty.

Servants should not be mere men-pleasers who did their work only when being watched, getting by with minimum effort as revenge toward their “unreasonable” masters. Their attitude should be governed by “respect” for their masters (in the Greek, *phobos*, “fear”, the same root word used in “fear God”). The verb is a present participle indicating the need for *continual* submission, not just

occasional. Their work-ethic must be governed from within (“for the sake of conscience toward God”—*v. 19a*) not from without (by the whip or some form of external punishment). Internal discipline is the best discipline. Obedience at the end of a whip or from severe sanctions did not honor God, but serving one’s master as if he were serving Christ (Col. 3: 24b) “finds favor” with God (*v. 19a*). To be sure, some masters would not appreciate their servant’s conscientious efforts, and their servants would suffer in spite of their best service (*v. 19*). In such a scenario (situation), they could “count it all joy...knowing that the testing of [their] faith produces endurance” (James 1: 2).

Their potential for receiving God’s praise increased in proportion to their willingness to serve their masters from a sense of duty and love toward God alone without any expectation of reward from their masters. The potential for reward from God is revealed in the unusual way Peter phrases the sentence (Davids, p. 107; cf. Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, p. 260). The clause, “For this finds favor” reads literally, “For this is grace”, *touto gar charis*, the same Greek expression we find in Luke 6: 32, “If you love those who love you, **what credit is that to you?** For even sinners love those who love them.” “What credit is that to you” is literally, “**what grace is that to you?**” All of God’s rewards to His people are extensions of His grace working in us that which is well-pleasing to Him (Phil. 2: 12-13). Thus, nothing we do is grounds for boasting or self-congratulations. The Apostle Paul says that God has granted to believers not only the faith to believe in his name but the privilege of suffering for Him (Phil. 1: 29). Nevertheless, although it is the product of God’s grace, our suffering is pleasing to God and will receive its just reward.

There is no **credit**, however, for the servant who is slack (lazy) in his work and gets the punishment he justly deserves (cf. Lk. 6: 32-34; cited in Davids, p. 107). There is no honor in suffering for wrong-doing, but if they did **what is right** and suffered for it, they would find **favor with God** (*v. 20*)—the *second* time the favor of God is mentioned in two verses. Thus, Peter emphasizes for effect the favor of *God* and not the favor of *men*. If Christian servants were only seeking recognition from their masters, they would *soon lose heart in their work; but if they were doing their work to please the Lord alone, they could bear up under many sorrows* (*v. 19b*).

While slavery is now relatively rare due to the world-wide influence of Christianity, the importance of this section of Scripture for present-day problems in labor and management cannot be over-estimated. For the vast majority of the world’s labor force, work is a drudgery to be endured until the next day off—a day off which many developing-world workers never get. Day after day, laborers plod away doing work they despise in conditions which are often far more wretched and deplorable than those of ancient slaves. Furthermore, they often work for unreasonable, disagreeable, contentious employers and bosses who never give them any encouragement for work well-done. Even in the US, a large percentage of employed people—including highly paid executives—are dissatisfied with their work, conditions at work, pay, management, or all of the above.

How can Christians persevere in such dissatisfying occupations or work environments for most of their adult life, many of them until they die? The only way is by recognizing that all work is honoring to God if done for the glory of God (at least, all work which does not violate biblical principles. It should go without saying that prostitution and illegal drug peddling, among other occupations, are intrinsically sinful.) But further, all labor done for the glory of God will receive its just reward (Col. 3: 24). It makes all the difference in the world when someone remembers that his real Boss (his Master) is God and that God’s eye is upon him to correct him or reward him not on the basis of how much money he makes or what vocation he has—both of which are insignificant to the

God who owns the universe—but on the basis of his motivation and effort in pleasing his Maker. All believers have the same potential for making God smile upon our labor.

But this is more easily said than done, and for twenty-five years I labored in a vocation which I never anticipated as my chosen profession, but one which I felt was necessary to support my family—repairing and remodeling old houses. I have worked for people who are **good and gentle** and a few who were **unreasonable**. Having graduated second in my class in high school and having graduated college with honors, I was the classic underachiever from the world’s perspective, also from my own perspective. The only thing which kept me going was the reformed Christian faith and its biblical world-view that **all** labor is a means of honoring God. This world-view is desperately needed on the continents of Africa and North America (the only two of which I have first-hand experience) in which men view labor only as a distasteful means of wealth or survival. A flawed understanding of labor is particularly a problem in Africa. Ask the average Ugandan **pastor** (let alone the average Christian), “When did Adam begin working in the garden,” he might tell you that Adam began working **after** he fell into sin. Therefore, work itself—and not the difficulty of work—is the curse resulting from Adam’s fall, something to be avoided whenever possible, especially manual labor. Some men even wish to enter the pastoral ministry to avoid the alternative of working with their hands.

Such an attitude toward labor contributes significantly to the reason why sub-Saharan Africa has not entered the global market. Many excuses for failure have been given, and some of these are valid—failing governments, corruption, internal wars, geographical isolation from coastlines, draught, etc. (cf. Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion—Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done about It*). I am not an economist, and I do not understand all the complex issues involved. Moreover, the average African worker can do little—aside from voting, sometimes at the risk of his life—to solve complex political problems which are beyond his reach. But what he **can do** is work, and work **with consistency and constancy**, even in those agricultural pursuits most African males seem to dislike. Like it or not, agriculture is still Africa’s most reasonable ticket out of poverty. But as long as millions of acres remain unused, this will not happen.

A biblical attitude toward labor would go a long way in solving many of Africa’s economic woes. Rather than hoeing in the fields just to put food on the table, the African might think of himself as cultivating the garden of God and receiving His smile and favor as he works. (He might also remember that he is presenting a good example to other African males who are wasting their time playing cards.) Rather than laying bricks for a simple wall, he might think of himself as demonstrating the excellence of the kingdom of God with skilled, conscientious craftsmanship which shows care and precision (Ex. 31: 1-6; 36: 1). Christians who demonstrate the “excellencies” of God (**1: 9**) with their labor can be an evangelistic witness for the kingdom of God which the world sees far too little. Regardless of what they do, who they work for, or the conditions of their labor, they are free men, for Christ has set them free to please Him (see my sermon, “Working for the Lord—The Slave Becomes a Free Man”; Col. 3: 22—4:1; Eph. 6: 5-9).

2. The paradigm (model) for submission and suffering—the suffering of Christ (2: 21-25)

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we

might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:21-25 NASB)

As a powerful encouragement to suffer unjustly at the hands of unreasonable masters, Peter presents the superlative example of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus suffered unjustly at the hands of many people—the Jews, Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, the Roman guards—a suffering finally terminating in His crucifixion on the cross. Quoting from Isa. 53: 7 and 9, Peter establishes the sinlessness of Christ both before and during His ordeal of crucifixion. Corresponding to v. 22, Isaiah 53: 9b reads, “He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.” Thus, Christ had sinned *neither in action nor speech*, the instrument of sin which James tells us is the most difficult to tame. “For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he *says*, he is a *perfect man*, able to bridle the whole body as well” (James 3:2). Christ alone *is* that perfect man who never did or said anything contrary to the will of God. In the entire 33 years before His death, He was the son with whom the Father was *always* well-pleased.

Christ continued His sinless existence throughout the ordeal of crucifixion. Corresponding to v. 23, Isa. 53: 7 reads, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.” Though innocent of all charges trumped up against Him, Christ uttered no threats against His accusers or tormentors. There was no need for personal retaliation, for the supreme judge of the universe, God the Father, knew His innocence. Christ **kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously** (v. 23b). In contrast to Christ’s self-restraint is the retaliation of Paul—arguably a distant second best to Christ—toward his accusers when the high priest, Ananias, ordered someone to strike him. “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck ?” (Acts 23: 3) Personally, I can identify with Paul’s response much more easily than with Jesus’; and, quite frankly, it could be argued that Paul was within his rights. I, on the other hand was not within mine. While visiting Cairo, I became upset with an Egyptian waiter who tried to charge me twice for the same cup of coffee. I set him straight, but repented later of the way I handled the situation (but too late to apologize). Be imitators of Jesus: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23: 34; cf. Lk. 9: 52-56; see Kistemaker, p. 110).

We are **called for this purpose** that we may imitate Christ by following in **His steps** of suffering unjustly (v. 21). But there is more to the imitation of Christ than *simply* suffering. Unlike eastern religions which teach that suffering has intrinsic value (value for its own sake), Christianity encourages suffering for a *specific purpose*. Christ suffered *for us*, bearing **our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness** (v. 24). Thus, His suffering had the eternal purpose of cleansing us from the guilt of sin by having our sins nailed to the cross and crucified (Col. 2: 14). His suffering also had the eternal purpose of breaking the power of sin in our lives so that we would die to sin as a way of life and live righteously. Christ did not suffer for the sake of suffering; He suffered to achieve an eternal goal of bringing us to God (*1 Pet. 3: 18*). By the wounds of Christ, we were healed of our sin, misery, and judgment (v. 24, a quotation from Isa. 53: 5; cf. Isa. 6: 10; Jer. 17: 14). “Healing” is a common OT metaphor for the forgiveness of sin. This verse should not be taken as a proof-text for the health and wealth gospel peddlers who guarantee physical healing. Like the rest of the world, we were continually straying away from God like stupid sheep who are easily lost, but now we have returned to God through Christ (v. 25; a quotation of Isa. 53: 6). Once again, the purpose of Christ’s suffering was to reclaim His sheep—to bring us back to

God.

There is also nothing intrinsically valuable about *our* suffering. Christ is not suffering now, and heaven will be filled with holy people who will no longer suffer. But for now, suffering is essential in God's program for His people. As the suffering of Christ had purpose, our suffering also has purpose. According to the context of *v. 21*, Peter implies that our suffering has the *same* purpose as that of Christ. Christ suffered unjustly in order to heal us of our sin and misery. Likewise, Christians must embrace unjust suffering as a means of healing the human race of sin and misery. The primary theme of this section of *1 Peter* is "Proclaiming the excellencies of God through excellent behavior." "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may **because of your good deeds**, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation" (*1 Pet. 2: 12*). Suffering unjustly and bearing it patiently without fear is a powerful *witness* to unbelievers. Since our natural disposition is to fight back, it takes supernatural ability through the Spirit to suffer patiently.

Further, suffering for the sake of *helping* others is also a powerful witness. There is scarcely any country on the face of the earth which lacks Christian missionaries who are involved in some kind of medical or relief work. They work long hours helping the poor and sick, sometimes being killed by radical religious groups or rebel forces, but more often simply suffering lack of rest and exposure to sickness. By their suffering many are healed physically of their diseases, and some are also *healed* of sin by observing their "excellent behavior" of self-denial.

By suffering unjustly for us, Christ left us an **example** for us to follow in **His steps** (*v. 21*). That example is suffering for the sake of others, both Christians and non-Christians, so that billions of lost sinners can be healed of their sin and misery and so that Christians can grow into a mature church (Eph. 4: 11-13). The ministry of the church is modeled after the ministry of Christ, but Christ did not save the world by riding in on a white horse and lopping off heads with a long sword. At the end of time He will return this way (figuratively speaking) in judgment and not in salvation (Rev. 19: 11-15). In the meantime, He has come into the world to save the world (Jn. 3: 17); and His means of doing so is personal suffering and self-denial. As His disciples, this same method is no less ours; for in our bodies we complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1: 24). Not in any sense do we add to Christ's completed sacrifice on the cross—a unique sacrifice which is once for all and all-sufficient. What we complete are the sufferings in the flesh which are necessary for this atoning sacrifice to be proclaimed *to* the world and comprehended *by* the world.

To take the gospel into all the world, Christians must be willing to deny themselves and suffer for His sake. We must deny ourselves the companionship and community of family members and friends by serving Christ in foreign countries. We must be willing to give up our children to the call of missions. We must be willing to deny ourselves financial security and material things for the purpose of giving *sacrificially* to the work of missions, evangelism, and mercy ministries. We must be willing to deny ourselves an early retirement in order to follow God's calling late in life, even when others are ending their careers at 65 and relaxing. We must be willing even to sacrifice our own lives. As John Piper puts it, "When enough Christians are willing to get their throats cut, we will win the Arab world for Christ." For Perpetua and her four friends, the day of her execution was a day of joy, for it had been granted to her not only to believe in Christ, but to suffer for His name (Phil. 1:

29).

Jesus did not come to this earth riding on a white horse, nor did He come cruising in on a Mercedes Benz sedan. He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53: 3). He did not have a regular place to lay his head at night (Lk. 9: 58). In every sense He was the suffering Servant willing to set aside His privileges as God (Phil. 2: 6)—and riches (2 Cor. 8:9)—in order to identify Himself with the fallen humanity He came to save. Should He ask anything less of us, His humble slaves? Is the servant greater than His master?

2. Wives submitting to unbelieving husbands (3: 1-6)

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,² as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.³ Your adornment must not be *merely* external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;⁴ but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.⁵ For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands;⁶ just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (1 Peter 3:1-6 NASB)

a. Connection with preceding context

The connection with the preceding section is evident from the beginning phrase, **In the same way (v. 1)**. Peter has been speaking of submission to every human institution for the Lord’s sake. Everyone must be subject to their earthly rulers, however tyrannical. Slaves must be subject to their masters, even unreasonable masters. **In the same way**, wives must be subject their husbands, even unbelieving husbands, because this is the divine structure of authority which God has designed for society. However, another more immediate connection is also possible. Peter has been instructing us that our outward behavior before unbelievers is an important apologetic (defense) for the Christian faith. Thus, he may be saying, “In the same way **Christ suffered for the purpose of bringing us to God**, Christian wives must be willing to suffer to bring their unbelieving husbands to God.” Or, we could take a both/and approach and say that both connections are likely. What Peter does **not** do is to define the relationship of wives to husbands as the same fundamental relationship as slaves to masters. Wives are not their husbands’ slaves! Christian husbands, therefore, must not imitate pagan culture by treating their wives as slaves (James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, p. 155).

b. A declaration of freedom and equality before Christ

Disobedient to the word implies that these husbands had already heard the claims of the gospel from their wives or others, but had rejected it (Davids, p. 116). One cannot be disobedient to a message he has never heard. Peter’s exhortation is far more profound than it may seem on the surface, and while it may seem to some modern readers as a declaration of bondage and servitude for women, it was actually a declaration of freedom. In the cultural context of the 1st century, it was expected that a wife would follow her husband in his religious affiliation (beliefs). For all practical purposes, she had little choice. However, Peter does not admonish wives of unbelieving husbands to give up practicing their Christian faith or to refrain from public worship. In fact, he encourages them to practice their faith more fervently for the purpose of winning their husbands. This was radical advice

for women in a male-dominated pagan culture, that a wife could chart a different course in worshipping a god other than her husband's (Davids, p. 116; also Kistemaker, p. 118).

When I painted houses for a living, I met a woman who was afraid of converting to the Christian faith because she believed her husband would leave her if she did. This was a clear case of ultimate loyalty to either the husband or Christ. In the case of women who are already Christians, they must obey their ultimate loyalty to Christ which supersedes all other loyalties. (See my discussion of this point in "Interpretation of NT Epistles", Col. 3, and see Eph. 5 and 6 where the phrases **as to the Lord** and **in the Lord** place restrictions upon our submission to anyone in authority over us (cf. Acts 5: 29). Our fundamental loyalty is always to the Lord.)

c. Submission to husbands in spite of freedom and equality before Christ

As far as the gospel was concerned, and as far as a person's conscience was concerned, there was no male or female—all were equal in the eyes of God (Gal. 3: 28). Peter does not express this equality in the same way as Paul, but his admonition to wives amounts to the same spiritual emancipation (freedom) and responsibility. However, this equality does not eliminate the duty of a wife's submission to her husband, whether he was a Christian (Eph. 5: 22-24) or a pagan (1 Pet. 3: 1). What equality *does* do is bind her conscience to Christ rather than her husband and gives her biblical justification for refusing any obedience to him which violates her primary loyalty to Christ (so also Davids, p. 117, footnote 5). Thus, the wife is obligated—but free in Christ—to obey her husband in anything which does not contradict obedience to Christ. Further, she is free—but also obligated—to disobey him in anything which contradicts her obedience to Christ. Some pastors would advise the wife to submit herself to *any* of her husband's demands, arguing that since she is under his authority, *he, not she*, is ultimately responsible for her behavior. If this is true, then no one under authority is responsible for his own actions which are directly related to his superior's demands. This was the argument of German soldiers in World War II who murdered Jews under orders from their military superiors, but when the Day of Judgment comes, "We were just following orders" will not suffice for an excuse. This reasoning is flawed because men *and* women are free moral agents who must one day stand alone before God and be judged for the deeds we have done on earth, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5: 10).

As a practical example, what if a husband commands his wife to steal in the market place? Her proper response to this command is that of the Apostle Peter who was commanded by the Sanhedrin to quit preaching about Christ, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). Her refusal may result in a severe beating, but God will honor her suffering for the sake of His name. As a more complicated example, what if a husband who has contracted AIDS from extramarital sex demands sex from his wife? Is she obligated to have sex with him according to Paul's command of 1 Cor. 7: 3-4, knowing that continued sexual submission to him will possibly result in AIDS? While the Bible requires the sexual submission of both husband and wife to one another, it also forbids murder (Ex. 20: 13); and if the Bible forbids murder, it also forbids suicide, murdering oneself. A wife who submits to her husband's sexual demands under these circumstances is committing a slow suicide, depriving God of her own life and her children (if any) of any parental upbringing since both she and her husband will die from AIDS.

I am well aware of the many complicated ethical issues which can arise from a discussion of submission to authority, questions which we cannot treat here. For example, what about the

kidnapped children of “The Lord’s Liberation Army” (a blasphemous name) of Joseph Kony who have been forced at gunpoint to kill others? What about the moderate Hutus of Rwanda who were given the choice of dying or executing Tutsis? These are not simple cases and must be dealt with on a case by case basis, as with many other ethical issues in which the solution is not “black” or “white” but varying shades of gray. What I am emphasizing here is the responsibility of wives to act as free moral agents who must one day give an account of their actions. They are in every sense of the words, free and responsible before God.

d. Marital abuse and divorce as a consequence of obedience to Christ

Practically, loyalty to Christ could end in divorce, as in 1 Cor. 7: 13-16, in which Paul grants a Christian wife (or by good and necessary inference, a husband) the right to allow her unbelieving husband to leave the marriage if he chose to do so, for “God has called us to peace” (v. 15); and, besides, there was no guarantee that he would become a believer, anyway (v. 16). Thus, Christian wives were given the freedom to follow Christ with a *clear conscience* even if it meant that they could eventually lose their husbands. But further, if the unbelieving husband wished to remain in the marriage, it also meant that the Christian wife could be subject to a certain amount of *abuse* from a husband who wished to drive her away from the faith. The husband may not like her new-found faith which prevents her from carousing (wild partying) or engaging in inappropriate sexual activity (e.g. wife-swapping, a decadent pastime of some American couples who are bored with their own marriages) (cf. 1 Pet. 4: 3-4). The possibility of spousal abuse is not explicitly spelled out in the text, but implied from the context, as stated above. As Christ suffered unjustly at the hands of sinners, **in the same way** a wife may suffer unjustly at the hands of her unbelieving husband. Further, Peter encourages wives to **do what is right without being frightened by any fear** (v. 6). In a pagan culture where wives had only limited freedom, angry husbands who did not get their way could get very nasty, leaving wives with only very limited remedy or recourse (source of help).

In our discussion of Ephesians 5 [see Hurley, pp. 138-152] we noted that the roles of both the husband and the wife were defined from the model of Christ and his church without regard to the social setting or to the qualifications or performance of the partner. Peter’s discussion amplifies this by calling for the same sort of response in the worst possible context for a wife. She is to continue to live a godly life even with an abusive pagan husband who can in no way be considered to demonstrate Christ’s love for the church. If we superimpose Paul’s imagery upon Peter’s we can make the following observations: (1) the suffering wife of an unbeliever is called by God, even in her painful situation, faithfully to demonstrate the obedient love of the church for Christ by her submissive love for her husband (Eph. 5: 22-24; 1 Pet. 3: 4-5), and (2) her willing, suffering love for her husband not only shows the church’s love for Christ but also shows the willing suffering and love of Christ for his church (1 Pet. 2: 21-25). It is not an easy calling which Peter lays before the Christian wife of an unbeliever (Hurley, p. 154)!

The *degree* to which wives must endure suffering from their unbelieving husbands is left unclear (both in the text and by Hurley), and many pastors will take Peter’s words as an open-ended requirement for women remaining with their abusive husbands at all costs. Based on a number of exegetical considerations, I do *not* believe Peter is suggesting that Christian wives must grant their husbands—Christian or pagan—free reign to treat them any way they please. A wife is not a convenient punching bag for cruel husbands—either with fists or abusive speech. This passage, while encouraging *patient suffering* and forbearance for Christ’s sake, should *not* be used to hold Christian wives hostage to severe physical abuse or even severe verbal and emotional abuse from husbands *who have no intention of honoring the marriage covenant*. Marriage is a sacred covenant

before God having conditions requiring compliance. In other words, neither husbands nor wives are free to do as they please in the marriage without the possible forfeiture of privileges, even the marriage itself. If, for example, I am abusive toward my wife whom I have promised, before God, to cherish and support, then I have violated the stipulations (conditions) of the covenant by which I am bound.

There is no covenant in scripture without conditions. In the OT, the people were bound by the terms of the Law given through Moses, the prophet. These conditions continued throughout the confrontation between Israel and the prophets who condemned Israel for their sins and warned them of exile if they refused to obey God's laws. They did not heed the words of the prophets; consequently, God "divorced" Israel for spiritual adultery and drove them away from Canaan into foreign lands.

"And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.⁹" Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. (Jeremiah 3:8-9 NASB)

God divorced Israel, and later Judah, for adultery, proving that His marriage with Israel and Judah had the condition of faithfulness to the covenant document, the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods before me." Likewise, any marriage covenant has the condition of faithfulness. The husband and wife agree to be sexually faithful to one another, and even in a society where polygamy is accepted, Christian husbands must heed the teaching of 1 Tim. 3: 2, 12 demanding monogamous marriages for elders and deacons. Although the requirement of monogamy for everyone else is not specifically spelled out in this passage, the Christian church has properly interpreted the requirement for monogamy among leaders to be a progression in moral revelation for the rest of the church. Christ has one church, not two or three. He is a monogamist and implicitly taught monogamy when He said,

'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND **THE TWO** SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH ' (Matthew 19:5 NASB)

The "two", not the three, four, five or ten, "shall become one flesh." Jesus is quoting from Genesis 2: 24 which reads:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and **they** shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24 NASB)

"They", not "two". But "they" must be interpreted as "two", one husband and one wife, since this is the way Jesus interprets it. Polygamy was permitted in the OT because of the hardness of men's hearts—like divorce (Matt. 19: 8)—but Jesus is clearly demonstrating that monogamy was always God's design for marriage. Nevertheless, because we cannot "undo" a polygamous marriage by forcing an unbiblical divorce or the abandonment of the unwanted wife and children, then we must make the best of a difficult situation. I have dealt with these issues in my "Doctrine of Man" and will not repeat them here. My view is that the church should welcome converted polygamists into the church without requiring them to abandon their marriages, but that they cannot be elected as officers in the church. Single or married Christians, on the other hand, must be warned against polygamy and disciplined for contracting them.

Getting back to the original subject, marriage has conditions. But sexual fidelity is not the only condition for marriage, as Peter clearly shows. Treating our wives in an **understanding way** (see

below) is not a **suggestion**, but a clear **command** from God’s chosen apostle. Likewise, Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church...” Paul was not offering this as good advice. He is issuing a command, and if this command is seriously violated with unrepentant abuse, the wife is no longer obligated to stay in marriage in which she is beaten day after day with fists or words.

(For an extended discussion of this subject, see my *Systematic Theology*, “*Anthropology*”, “*Protection of Women Under Biblical Law*”, pp. 152-155, and “*Verbal and Emotional Abuse as Biblical Grounds for Divorce*”, pp. 155-171.) We will return to this topic below under “**3. Husbands Submitting to Christ (3: 7)**”.

e. Submission as silent evangelism

This qualification duly noted, regardless of maintaining her independence from her husband religiously, the wife could not do so socially or functionally. Before Christ, she stood on a level place with her husband, subject to Christ alone in conscience; but the same Christ demanded her **functional** submission to her husband in the marriage relationship (cf. Eph. 5: 22-24, in which the husband’s headship over his wife is predicated [based] upon Christ’s headship over the church).

Moreover, her godly submission is designed to win her husband to the Lord **without a word**. This does not mean “without *the* word”, that is, without so much as any profession of faith on her part. Her profession of faith before her husband is already assumed in the passage. I believe the verse means without her **continuous** verbal witness about her faith which would be interpreted by him as **nagging**. The Christian wife must not feel compelled to “drop hints” about her Christian faith in every conversation with him or—to use a modern example—to leave evangelistic tracts all over the house so that he will accidentally find them and read them. This has, doubtless, been the methodology of many well-meaning Christian wives who long to see their husbands come to Christ, but such methodology is not encouraged by Peter (cf. Hurley, p. 153). Rather, by her excellent **behavior** she must win him to Christ (**chaste and respectful**; literally, “morally pure behavior accompanied by fear”). Rather than “talking the talk”, she must “walk the walk.” Her actions will speak louder than her words, but only if her actions are convincing, compelling, and consistent. (I didn’t say, “perfect”, and we must not blame wives for difficult marriages because their behavior is not flawless.) Many husbands have been won to the faith by the respectful submission of their wives, a notable example being Monica, the mother of Augustine, who finally won her husband Patricus to the Lord (Davids, p. 117).

One of the most effective weapons in a wife’s spiritual arsenal is a **gentle and quiet spirit (v. 4)** which basically means “not insistent on one’s own rights” or “not pushy, not selfishly assertive”, “not demanding one’s own way.” (Wayne Grudem, “*Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them*”—*1 Peter 3: 1-7*; p. 197; *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood—A Response to Evangelical Feminism*; John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds.).

Such a gentle and quiet spirit will be beautiful before other human beings, even unbelieving husbands (verses 1-2), but even more important, it “is of great worth in God’s sight.” Why? No doubt because such a spirit is the result of quiet and continual trust in God to supply one’s needs, and **God delights in being trusted** (cf. 1 Peter 1: 5, 7-9, 21; 2: 6-7, 23; 5: 7) (Grudem, p. 197, emphasis mine).

This counsel is consistent with what Peter has just said, that she must attempt to win her husband

without a word. But more is implied than keeping one's mouth shut, for a woman can be equally manipulative and controlling with her body language—rolling the eyes, tightening the lips, avoidance techniques. The “silent treatment”—refusing to speak to her husband—can be far more offensive than nagging. Rather, the wife must “keep a quiet heart” (borrowed from Elizabeth Eliot's book title), content to know that God is in control of her husband, allowing her to relinquish control and let God deal with him in His own way. God created men in such a way that we don't want to be controlled by our wives, even if they have our best interests at heart. Men were designed to lead their wives, not follow them. One result of Adam's fall was that the woman would “desire” to control him, but God wouldn't let her do this; the man would rule over her instead (Gen. 3: 16; cf. 4: 7, in which sin desires to master, or control, Cain). However, the requirement of submission to her husband is *not* the consequence of the fall, but implicit in the order of creation (see 1 Tim. 2: 9-15, along with my commentary). As husbands **observe** the morally pure and *respectful* (the proper interpretive translation of *phobos*) behavior of their wives, they may reason that there is something special about Jesus after all. While many pagan wives are contentious nags who are never satisfied with anything their husbands do, their Christian wives are consistently content. Other wives are cheating on their husbands, but they never have to wonder what *their* wives are doing in their absence.

f. Submission for the Lord's sake

But even if the husband never comes to Christ, the wife's gentle and quiet spirit—the **hidden person of the heart**—is **precious in the sight of God**, making it acceptable and valuable for its own sake, or rather, for Christ's sake. Peter's admonition, therefore, is not pragmatic (the idea that something is right because it works); and he was not giving Christian wives a blanket guarantee that if they demonstrated a gentle and quiet spirit, their husbands would be won to the Lord—no exceptions! He was a wise pastor who would never open the door to disillusionment by offering false promises which may never come true. This was not the marriage version of the “health and wealth” gospel, “Come to Christ and you will have a happy marriage—guaranteed!” No, being a godly wife was not a strategy for manipulating husbands into the kingdom of God; it was valuable because God approved of it (cf. Hurley, p. 153) and, therefore, the **right** thing to do (v. 6).

It should be noted that the wife's submission to her husband was in no sense patterned after the social, marital norms (rules) of ancient Graeco-Roman culture. Rather, it was predicated (based) upon her relationship to Christ (**precious in the sight of God**, v. 4; cf. Eph. 5: 22, “as to the Lord”) and upon the church's relationship to Christ (Eph. 5: 23-24). “The matter thus became one of *theology* rather than *sociology*” (Hurley, p. 147)—or *biblical law* rather than *cultural tradition*. Modern evangelical feminists insist that male hierarchy in a Christian marriage is a throw-back or concession to outdated norms (social practices) of ancient culture which are substandard to Biblical ethics. But the feminists must somehow prove that Peter and Paul were not sufficiently courageous to swim against the tide of social pressure. It is argued that while knowing a better, more egalitarian (equal) approach to husband-wife relationships in which husband and wife were equal in authority, they continued teaching socially acceptable patterns for marriage just to attract new converts or to avoid persecution (Grudem, p. 204). But would anyone wish to question Paul's courage, or Peter's courage *after* the resurrection of Christ?

g. Dressing appropriately for the glory of God

Consistent with respectful behavior and moral purity (v. 2) is appropriate dress (v. 3). Like the Apostle Paul (1 Tim. 2: 9), Peter would not agree with many modern Christian women that one's dress is a neutral matter—unimportant to God. The external appearance should not belie (misrepresent) the hidden person of the heart. Peter is not *absolutely* forbidding women to braid their hair or wear gold jewelry, as if unkempt (unwashed and not brushed) hair is inherently more holy than braided hair; nor is he instituting a “Plain Jane” theology advocated by some conscientious Anabaptist believers whose wives cannot use cosmetics or *any* jewelry, gold or otherwise. The Greek text does not include an adjective modifying “**clothing**”, but simply says, “putting on clothing (dresses) (*himation*)” without specifying “expensive” or “nice clothing”. Thus, the argument that women were absolutely forbidden to wear braided hair or **gold jewelry** may prove too much; it also proves that they should not wear clothing of any kind—a *reductio ad absurdum* (reducing an argument to an absurd conclusion) (Grudem, p. 205). As with the reference about Sarah calling Abraham, **lord**, the specific application of clothing, jewelry, and hair styles would have to be interpreted according to the cultural context (cf. 1 Cor. 11: 1-16).

On the other hand, Peter is discouraging external adornments as *priorities*, and it is more consistent with the text to assume he was talking about *expensive* clothing which normally accompanied gold jewelry and expensive hair-do's (The NIV translates the word, **fine clothes**; cf. 1 Tim. 2: 9 in which Paul uses the modifier, “costly” (*polutelēs*) before the word, “garments”). It would be likely that both Paul and Peter discouraged excessive expenditures on external adornments, whatever they were, and for the same reason. In his own day, Isaiah utterly ridiculed the wealthy women of the southern kingdom for a slavish dependence upon external beauty. Piling term upon term for ornate jewelry and dress, he warns them that the day would come (the exile) when they would exchange their exquisite coiffure (hair-do) for a “plucked out scalp” and their fine clothing for “sackcloth” (Isa. 3: 16-24; cf. Davids, p. 117). Some of Peter's readers would be familiar with this text and his point would be well-noted. With a poignant (sharp, biting) critique of both ancient and modern culture, Davids remarks,

Women have often internalized [to make an opinion one's own] the male tendency to view them as sexual objects or as possessions whose appearance displays the wealth and power of the male. [In the US, we call such women “gold diggers” or “trophy wives”. The men, for their part, are simply lecherous fools. DFM.] This comes out in dressing to attract the notice of men or in competing with other women in the richness of their dress. Peter, like the NT in general, will have none of this (p. 117; words in brackets mine).

It is quite apparent that Peter is speaking only to *wealthy* women who could afford such finery since peasant women and female slaves normally possessed only one good outfit, and thus, were incapable of dressing lavishly (Davids, p. 117, footnote 8). Nevertheless, his discouragement of this misplaced priority was very practical both for rich and poor alike. First, even pagan husbands would be impressed at their Christian wives' disinterest in displaying *themselves* to other men. Second, modest dress among wealthy women would “lessen class distinctions” between them and other women in the church who were modestly or poorly clothed by necessity. Further, the money which would have been wasted on self-adornment could be spent more generously in helping others (Davids, p. 118).

[Note: I really wish Christian women—and men—in the US would take Peter to heart; then, maybe, it would not be so difficult to generate long-term funding for missionaries and mercy ministries. A reduction in annual clothing expenditures of about 10% across the US church would just about do it,

freeing up funds for thousands of people involved in helping others. This would depend, of course, on the cooperation of Christian husbands who may enjoy displaying their wealth, as well as their willingness not to spend the extra money on automobiles and golf clubs. May I extend my heart-felt thanks to those who monthly sacrifice their hard-earned money to those who sent my wife and me (and continue to send me) to Africa—the only people who would conceivably read this, anyway. I am also grateful to my wife, Fran, who daily encourages me with her godly behavior and lack of priority on material things, including clothing and jewelry.]

Fourth, even women of humble means should not yield to the temptation of emphasizing their dress at the expense of their commitment to Christ.

But “What is good for the goose is also good for the gander” (i.e. what is right for the female is also right for the male). In modern culture, men can be as overly concerned for dress as women, and can spend just as much. Just the right kind of suit, shirt, tie, belt, and shoes can become an obsession to call attention to one’s status and success, as the popular book, *Dress for Success*, indicates. Men’s affluent dress may become a cause of stumbling for ignorant Christians who are inclined to show deference and respect for someone merely on the basis of external appearances while despising others who are even less affluent than themselves (James 2: 1-13). But God is never impressed with our affluence; and He condemns it outright *if* we don’t use it for the good of others, but only for ourselves (Lk. 12: 15-21).

I am aware that I am writing for Africans, most of whom have very little expendable income for extra clothing. Yet, God’s word is timeless and without boundaries. It applies to all people and all cultures. Peter warns us against the ageless tendency to define ourselves and our worth on the basis of external appearances. We cannot be defined by others’ opinions of us; we are defined by who we are as image-bearers of God and by our relationship to God through Christ. We are who we are before God, alone. We will stand alone before His bar of judgment, not that of public opinion.

We must not leave this subject until we address another important issue concerning clothing. As I mentioned in my commentary on 1 Tim. 2: 9, women should not dress in such a way that attracts the wrong kind of attention. *Expensive* adornment attracts attention to their wealth, or their husband’s wealth, and fails on this account to be modest and discreet. But there is another kind of modesty and discretion which pertains to sexual attraction, and women do not need wealth to be sexually attractive. Such immodesty or indiscretion may not have been in Peter’s (or Paul’s) direct line of sight when instructing women how to dress. The reason may be because only prostitutes dressed provocatively in the market-place to attract the attention of customers; and in the church such indiscretion was not a wide-spread problem. However, in modern culture where women commonly press the boundaries of decency, Peter’s words are timelessly appropriate. Christian women should never dress in such a way that attracts sexual attention *unnecessarily*. I have attempted to phrase this carefully lest I drift into a legalism which holds Christian women hostage to legalistic standards of weak men who have severe problems with lust. What is acceptable for one man may not be acceptable for another, and it is impossible to iron out all the differences. God made women naturally attractive to men, and he made men visually receptive to their physical features—the sparkle in their eyes, the brightness of their smiles, and the curvature of their cheeks, hips and breasts. (You get the idea.) This is not sinful, but a God-given sexual attraction. What men do with this natural attraction is a moral issue. Therefore, it is not *necessarily* a woman’s fault if a man’s mind drifts into lustful thoughts about her. She could be dressed as modestly and discreetly as she possibly

can be and still attract his lustful attention. Men, therefore, must keep a tight rein on their thoughts and eyes and not let sexual lust become a master which is always crouching at the door (Gen. 4: 7).

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin? (Job 31:1 NASB)

On the other hand, women can dress in such a way that their sexual features are not left to a man's imagination. Tight, low-cut blouses which expose the breasts; tight pants or skirts which over-emphasize the curvature of the hips; short skirts which tease a man's eyes upwards toward the crotch, a place where his eyes should not go—all of these things are *unnecessary* enticements to lust which could be easily avoided. While men are accountable to God for what they do with their eyes and imaginations, women are also accountable to God for causing their brother (or an unbelieving male) to stumble into sin unnecessarily.

h. Showing respect

In contrast to clothing fashions which come and go, to clothing which becomes faded from multiple washings or is ruined by moths, to hair-do's which must be washed away, Christian women must cloth themselves with the **imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit**. Kistemaker prefers "unfading beauty" to complete the thought (p. 121) which is quite in keeping with Peter's contrasts. Such has been the practice of godly women of another era, like Sarah (v. 5), who submitted herself to Abraham, and when addressing him, *always showed respect* by calling him "lord". This should not be interpreted as the name by which modern Christian wives must address their husbands. The cultural context must be our guide in applying Scriptural norms. When my children were young, we taught them to address my wife and me with "Ma'am" and "Sir" when they had a question. This did not imply that they were our slaves or that they had to kiss my ring when they addressed me, but that they were aware of the need for showing proper respect and honor (for this illustration, see Hurley, p. 155). The *specific form* of respect shown by a wife to her husband will differ according to the time and culture (Grudem, p. 204). Ugandan women commonly stoop to their knees and bow when greeting older men. This gesture has often made me feel uncomfortable. In American culture this would appear servile and demeaning, but in Uganda it is merely a sign of respect and an honored custom. I wish we had more respect for old people in my country.

Submission should not arise from fear of reprisal or punishment (v. 6; *phobeomai*) which is distinguished from the respectful **fear** of v. 2 (*phobos*; same root word, but the context determines the meaning).

All types of intimidation—physical, emotional, social—would be used to force them back in line with the husband's religious beliefs. While calling for gentleness and inner tranquility overall and subordination to their husbands in all areas indifferent to their Christian faith [i.e. those areas which did not violate their conscience DFM], he encourages them to stand firm in the light of their hope in the coming Christ and quietly refuse to bow to the threats and punishments of their husbands. They are subordinate, but their subordination is revolutionary in that they are subordinate not out of fear or desire for social position or other human advantage but out of obedience to Christ who treats them as full persons and allows them to rise above the threats and fears of this age (Davids, p. 121, words in brackets mine).

4. Husbands submitting to Christ (3: 7)

You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7 NASB)

a. Treating their wives as fellow heirs

Peter says very little to husbands, but the force of his exhortation makes up for its brevity (briefness). In one sense, he has already addressed husbands by addressing their wives and giving them *equal status in God's eyes*. Husbands must treat their wives with honor as **fellow heir[s] of the grace of life**. By calling the wife a **fellow heir**, Peter places wives on the *same spiritual level* as their husbands and promises them an *equal portion of the inheritance* which believers receive at the consummation when Christ returns. This was radical thinking since women in ancient culture were not legally entitled to the property of deceased husbands, a practice which continues in many cultures today. All Christians—Jews, Gentiles, men, women, slaves and free men—are fellow heirs *with Christ* because they are “children of God”. (Rom. 8: 16-17; Eph. 3: 6). Because the new covenant has been inaugurated (officially begun) with the sacrifice of Christ, God's people have been elevated from the status of immature children in the Old Covenant administration (*napios*; Gal. 4: 1) to full grown “sons” (*wios*; Gal. 4: 4-7) in the New Covenant administration. The reader will notice from this portion of Scripture in *Galatians* that Paul does not mention “daughters.” The reason is that daughters in the Graeco-Roman society could not possess the same social status as sons and could not receive the same measure of material inheritance. Paul is careful, then, to grant women the same spiritual status as full-grown sons. As far as the gospel is concerned, women have the same privileges as men. Peter acknowledges this equality here in his epistle, calling the wife a **fellow heir**.

b. Honoring their wives as weaker vessels

In the Graeco-Roman social context, it was an easy thing for husbands to exploit their wives physically and sexually. The husband could obtain an easy divorce, and since the wife would have a much more difficult time supporting herself financially, her husband wielded a substantial amount of emotional power over her. This weaker social position may be Peter's meaning when he says that the woman was **weaker**. He was not implying that she was weaker spiritually, intellectually, or even emotionally. Often, women prove themselves superior to men in all three categories, even responding to severe emotional trauma (e.g. the death of a child) better than men. It is also possible that he is making note of the obvious, that women are *physically* weaker than men and are, therefore, vulnerable to the husband's physical abuse. (But although women can't lift as much weight as men, they generally live longer in modern culture.) It is more likely from the context, however, that Peter is referring to *the woman's subordinate position to her husband's authority* which makes her more vulnerable (puts her at more risk) to his mistreatment (so also Hurley, p. 156, and Grudem, p. 206). Further, this admonition may also imply that a woman has greater *emotional sensitivity* to harsh and unfair treatment. Because of their emotional nature, women can be more easily hurt by harsh words than men would be. This is not a *spiritual* weakness; it is actually a woman's *strength* giving her the ability to empathize with hurting people and to be sympathetic with their struggles. When a small child is hurt, he normally runs to his mother, not his father. He knows who will give him more compassion! Yet, in terms of her susceptibility or exposure to her husband's physical and social power, it is a “weakness”, a gap in her armor of self-protection making her husband's protection all the more important.

While this [emotional sensitivity, DFM] is something that is also a great strength, it nonetheless means that wives are often more likely to be hurt deeply by conflict within a marriage or by inconsiderate behavior. Knowing this, Christian husbands should not be “harsh” (Colossians 3: 19) or fill their marriage relationship with criticism and conflict, but should rather be positive and affirming, living together in an understanding way and bestowing honor on their wives (Grudem, p. 206, words in brackets mine).

Peter, therefore, wanted Christian husbands to recognize that although women were in a very vulnerable position to them *socially, emotionally, physically, and in terms of biblical authority*, they nevertheless shared an equal status *spiritually*. They must treat them, therefore, **according to knowledge** (*kata gnosis*), either knowledge of the ways of God or knowledge about the nature of women, or both may be implied (cf. Grudem, pp. 207-208). God was no respecter of persons, and if the husband *exploited* his wife in any way, God would take notice and avenge her mistreatment by hindering the husband’s prayers (so also Davids, *1 Peter*, p. 123, and Wayne Grudem, p. 208). Some commentators interpret **prayers** as the joint prayers of husband and wife together (Hurley, p. 156; Kistemaker, p. 125), but Peter is not at this moment speaking to wives, but **husbands** (plural); thus, **your prayers** refer to the husbands’ prayers alone.

So concerned is God that Christian husbands live in an understanding and loving way with their wives that He interrupts His relationship with them when they do not do so! No Christian husband should presume to think that any spiritual good will be accomplished by his life without an effective ministry of prayer. And no husband may expect an effective prayer life unless he lives with his wife “in an understanding way, bestowing honor” on her. To take the time to maintain a good marriage is God’s will; it is serving God; it is a spiritual activity pleasing in His sight (Grudem, p. 208).

The husband’s responsibility is to treat his wife in an understanding way—**according to knowledge** (v. 7) of *her nature as a woman* and *God’s ways with his people*—and show her honor as his spiritual equal, not as his property. He must love her as Christ loved the church, sacrificially, even to the point of dying for her but especially day to day, saying no to his selfish desires while considering her interests and needs. Christ does not beat His church, and He does not *take* love from His church by force—a self-contradiction in terms. Rather, He instructs His church by the word and influences her by the wooing of the Holy Spirit to *desire* Him above all else and to *give* Him the love He deserves. If a husband wishes his wife to respond to him sexually, there is a simple way for him to achieve this goal. He must cherish her and treat her with respect, honor, and love. However, Peter has no manipulative goal in view. As women must submit to their husbands for the Lord’s sake, so husbands must honor their wives because God says so, and because this pleases Him, not to get something they want from their wives.

c. Wife abuse

I once pastored a church in a small, rural community in Arkansas of 9,000 people. This little town had a shelter for battered women who needed protection from their abusive husbands. On any given week, this shelter (a small house) was occupied by an average of five women, many of whom were young and pregnant, who were too afraid to go home to their husbands or boyfriends. One can only wonder how many women need protection in large US or African cities with millions of inhabitants.

Samuel Waje Kunhiyop (*African Christian Ethics*, pp. 244-245) presents nine reasons for domestic violence against women in Africa. Heading the list is the “*demonstration of power and control*.” Cultural tradition holds that the woman is the husband’s property, and in order for him to establish and confirm his authority as the “lion” (Kunhiyop’s term) in the family, he resorts to abusive tactics

to control her and the children.

The second reason on his list for wife abuse is the wife's "*denial of sex*". Since she is considered his property, the husband assumes that he can have sex with her anytime he chooses without her consent. This is an abuse of power which is commonly accepted both here and in many other cultures, but it amounts to nothing but *marital rape*. Although it is rarely, if ever, prosecuted, we cannot imagine Peter or Paul condoning this abuse of power. Any church worth the designation, "church", would not tolerate marital rape among its male members. It is an offense which, if not repented of, should be subject to severe discipline and excommunication.

Kunhiyop also mentions "*jealousy and possessiveness*" as another reason for domestic violence. Once again, as the husband's "property", the wife is not allowed to speak to another man in private. This same jealousy is common in every cultural expression of wife abuse, including that in the US. It is immensely hypocritical since many abusive husbands are sexually unfaithful to their abused wives—one of many double standards.

Fourthly, "*learnt behavior*" is also a reason for wife abuse. Children learn from their fathers even when they are not conscious of being taught. If a boy grows up watching his father abusing his mother, it is far more likely that he will grow up to be an abusive husband, perpetuating the cycle of abusive behavior.

Estimates suggest that between 50 and 75 percent of the men who batter their wives experienced or witnessed abuse in their own childhood home. One family research laboratory has argued that young boys who have watched their father beat their mother have a 1000 per cent greater likelihood of violence in adulthood than boys who never undergo this painful childhood experience (Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse*, p. 33).

Domestic violence is also more common in "*polygamous marriages*" in which wives compete with one another for the affection of their common husbands. This occurs when one wife falsely accuses another wife of serious behavior such as trying to poison her husband. The husband may react to this accusation with a severe beating.

Wife abuse also occurs in Africa through "*social tolerance of violence.*" Women are not encouraged by parents, relatives, or friends to leave abusive relationships especially when young children are involved who may be left behind with their abusive father. Doubtless, the wife's questionable financial situation has much to do with her reluctance (hesitation) to leave. The church should get involved to protect and give financial assistance. By having a safe place to go and food for their children, battered wives and mothers will be more likely to leave abusive relationships. Their children, in turn, will be better off with a single parent than a home rife with abusive speech and beating. Such advice will be seen as unrealistic in poor economies, but we are called to faithfulness in the midst of seemingly hopeless circumstances. Christ never promised that obedience would be easy.

Much of the domestic violence in Africa—and, I might add, in the US—is the result of "*lack of sanctions on those who perpetrate domestic violence.*" As a general rule, abusive husbands either escape punishment altogether, or they get an innocuous (painless) slap on the hand, all the encouragement they need to continue the cycle of abuse. While it is a criminal offense for a man to attack someone in public, he can abuse his wife privately in his own home with impunity (without punishment). The first public act is called aggravated assault resulting in jail time; the second act

behind closed doors is called “bad temper or lack of self-control” (Kunhiyop’s terms) and results in hospital time for the wife. This judicial idiocy is by no means limited to Africa but is also common in the US where abusive husbands are too rarely punished. We might wonder whether the judges and police are also abusive husbands. Even evangelical churches don’t seem to know what to do with abusive husbands, still less what to do with battered wives. Even my own denomination seems clueless.

Kunhiyop also lists “*physical and emotional weakness of women*” as another reason for domestic violence in Africa. As stated above, women exhibit more vulnerability to emotional abuse than men because of their sensitive nature as women. This is the way God made them, and it is not a spiritual weakness, but part of their constitution or make-up which puts them in a weaker position relative to men. Women commonly have difficulty resisting abusive men, and many cases of battered women are not reported to the police or anyone else for fear of reprisal. This is not cowardice, but failure of the legal system. The real coward is the abusive male who picks his fights with someone he can conquer—his wife or girlfriend. But if he wants to fight, let him go to the bars and pick a fight with someone who can fight back!

The last major reason for domestic violence in Africa which Kunhiyop lists is “*alcohol abuse.*” In his concluding section on domestic violence, Kunhiyop advocates a pro-active response.

The starting point for our response to domestic violence must be the recognition that all violence against women and children is morally unjust. They are human beings created in the image of God, and as such they are not inferior to men. They are entitled to be treated with respect.

This truth needs to be communicated to boys and girls at a young age. Boys need to be educated about the fact that they are in no way superior to women. They need to be taught that women are to be respected and treated with dignity. Young girls, too, need to be trained to know that they are not inferior to their male counterparts. They must be taught to assert their equality to men and to report acts of aggression against them and their children. Reporting involves recognizing that domestic violence is not a private offence but a criminal one. As such, it must be reported to the police, who must act to restrain the perpetrator and prevent future violence. In a traditional setting such as a village, it should be reported to the elders who can easily and effectively restrain the man from abusing his children or wife. It is advisable to also report the matter to the pastors and elders of the church. Violence is perpetuated by silence. When reported, it can be monitored and checked (pp. 247-248).

When it comes to wife abuse and child abuse, enough is enough. For those readers who are looking for a life’s calling, may I suggest a ministry to battered women and children which includes compassion as well as judicial activism in getting just laws passed in parliament demanding prosecution of abusive men and legal protection of abused women and children. And may God be with you, for such a ministry will be strewn with frustration and disappointment with “the system” which often propagates abuse and supports the abuser. Another possible ministry is that to abusive husbands who recognize their destructive behavior and want help. Even wife-abusers are not beyond the hope of salvation.

d. Mutual submission to wives not commanded

In spite of the husband’s requirement to treat his wife with consideration and honor, the husband *is not required to offer mutual submission to his wife* (often argued by modern evangelical feminists). In fact, neither here nor in Eph. 5, nor anywhere else in the NT is the husband commanded to submit

to his wife.

The command that a *husband should submit to his wife* would have been highly unusual in that male-dominated culture, and if the New Testament writers had thought Christian marriage required husbands to submit to their wives, they certainly would have had to say so very clearly in their writings—otherwise, no early Christians ever would have known that that was what they should do (Grudem, p. 199; emphasis his).

Even the command in Eph. 5: 21, “and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ”, does not prove *mutual* submission within the marriage relationship. If it did, then it would be a clear self-contradiction for Paul to follow this *general* command with *explicit* instructions for wives to submit to husbands, children to submit to parents, and slaves to submit to masters (Eph. 5: 22—6: 8). There is no specific command for husbands to submit to wives, a command which would essentially neutralize the command for wives’ submission to their husbands. Instead, Paul is *introducing* the subject of submission with the *general heading* of submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, followed by *specific examples* of submission. No Christian—husband or elder—is above the law of God; and therefore every believer in subordinate position has recourse to God’s law against abusive people. However, never do we find the reversal of the commands found in the *Ephesians* passage. In other words, we never find Paul telling husbands to submit to wives, parents to children, and masters to slaves (Grudem, pp. 199-200). Society as a whole has a distinct order of authority, and Christianity does not subvert this order. This does not imply that a husband should never consult his wife on major decisions concerning the family. Honoring his wife would require seeking her opinion and the benefit of the Holy Spirit’s guidance in her life. We may learn obedience through the work of the Holy Spirit in another person. (See John Frame, *Making Biblical Decisions*, Third Millennium). Yet, if there is a difference of opinion, the husband must take upon himself the responsibility of headship and making final decisions. Honoring and respecting one’s wife must not become the husband’s *excuse for abdicating (giving up) his responsibility* for spiritual headship of the home, including his wife (1 Cor. 11: 3). Adam tried this experiment by following Eve, ending in bondage and death for the whole human race. Paul admonishes women in Ephesus not to follow the path of Eve who failed to consult her husband about eating the fruit (1 Tim. 2: 14). Abraham tried it—listening to Sarah’s suggestion to have a child by Hagar—and his submission to her lead has resulted in centuries of warfare between Jews and radical Muslims.

e. The imitation of Christ in self-denial

There is a biblical, peaceful balance between being an over-bearing husband (who is always demanding his way as the “lion” of the family) and a husband who is a “hen-pecked rooster” (an American expression) who is controlled by his wife and always giving in to her demands. Loving one’s wife as Christ loved the church does not imply consistently letting her have her way. Christ loves the church, but He does so by *leading* her, not by letting the church have her way. Husbands earn the respect of their wives and children by being godly men who seek His wisdom and counsel and who are in control of their own passions—their tempers and their use of alcohol, money, sex, and power. Physical strength and the use of intimidation (threatening behavior) has nothing to do with being a real man, especially a man of God (1 Tim. 6: 11; 4: 7-8). As the wife’s role is patterned after the church, the husband’s role is patterned after Christ himself, “a testimony to the [crucial importance] of the husband’s function in the relationship” (J. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self—Apostolic Teaching for Personal Wholeness*, p. 197, words in brackets mine). Chamblin continues,

As Christ showed his love for the church by giving himself up for her, so the husband is to do for his wife (5: 25). This means that he will serve his wife “in a way that is holy and honorable” (1 Thess. 4:4). Such conduct is significant because the husband may choose not to do so; instead he may use his headship to tyrannize his wife, or throw his weight around by being unfaithful to her (1 Thess. 4: 4-6). ***But the crown that Christ bestows upon the husband is made not of gold but of thorns.*** As Christ crucified is the power of God (1 Cor. 1: 23-24), so power is released into the marital relationship when the husband lays down his life for the sake of his wife, which may well include the crucifixion of the urge to commit adultery. Such a husband encourages his wife to become all that God created and redeemed her to be.

The structure of 5: 25-28 is instructive. The enveloping verses (25, 28) call upon husbands to “love their wives.” The enclosed verses (26-27) describe how this happens. Christ loved the church, not for what she was, but for what she by his oversight would one day become—“a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (v. 27 NIV). So too, says Paul, a husband should love his wife ***not just for what she is***, but for what by God’s grace ***she can become***. How many a wife, viewed by her husband with contempt because in some way she falls short of his expectations, becomes in response yet more contemptible? But how many a wife, viewed by her husband with respect and love in face of a ruinous physical or psychological condition, has grown more lovable as a result? Amid marital weaknesses and hardships, as amid their apostolic counterparts, the power of Christ crucified is perfected (p. 197).

Thus, it is not by submission to a difficult wife that the husband ***submits himself to suffering*** for Christ’s sake. Nothing is mentioned in v. 7 about a difficult wife—although wives are sometimes difficult. The husband’s suffering must imitate the suffering of Christ, a self-inflicted suffering for the good of his wife. As Christ denied Himself lawful rights and liberties in order to save His bride (the church), the husband must be willing to deny himself even lawful rights and liberties, thus setting an example of Christ before his wife and helping her in the process of sanctification (Eph. 5: 26-27). This will often include a willingness to forgive her faults and shortcomings just as Christ—a sinless husband—forgave his church. “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4: 8).

E. Summary Exhortation for Submission and Suffering (3: 8-12)

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;⁹ not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.¹⁰ For, "THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT."¹¹ "HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT."¹² "FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL." (1 Peter 3:8-12 NASB)

Peter will now conclude the exhortations he began in 2: 11, ***To sum up... (v. 8)***. In his summary statement he uses six positive characteristics of a Christian and one negative. The six positive characteristics are **harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit** followed by a participial phrase, **giving a blessing**. The one negative characteristic is **not returning evil for evil or insult for insult**. The passage is strongly reminiscent (bringing to mind something else) of Paul’s instructions to the church in Rome (Rom. 12: 14-21) as well as the paradigm (model) for suffering Peter gives in 2: 22-24. The exhortation is directed not to husbands, wives, or servants specifically but to the church community in general, **all of you**.

1. Be harmonious

The word literally means, “of one mind” (*homophrones*). This does not mean that Christians cannot have differences of opinion on many important issues, but that those differences should not disturb the harmony of working together in the body of Christ—both within the local church and between different evangelical denominations. Our singleness of purpose in the gospel should overrule *differences which are relatively unimportant* causing us to set aside our personal interests for the sake of others’ interests (Phil. 2: 1-4, in which “intent on one purpose” is translated from *en phronountēs*, “having one mind”). Obviously, neither Peter nor Paul would advocate (recommend) setting aside important doctrinal truths which were fundamental (basic) to the gospel (cf. 2 Pet. 1: 19—2: 3; Gal. 1: 8-9, in which Paul calls down a curse upon those who were distorting the gospel). Nevertheless, we deceive ourselves if we think doctrinal agreement alone will produce the unity of faith and harmony Peter is talking about (Davids, p. 124). If this were true, there would be no disharmony within any given denomination. To do us any good, *truth must be practiced*; and to be practiced, truth must impress itself upon the heart, not just the head. If all Christians are intent on pushing their own agendas (programs) for the local church or presbytery, then everyone will be pushing in different directions; and the church will lack a coherent effort in promoting evangelism and discipleship around the world. To be efficient, we must encourage and support one another even if we disagree on certain issues.

John Frame, one of the most influential reformed theologians of our time, argues for more biblical ecumenism and cooperation among evangelical Christian denominations.

The movement in the 1970s and 1980s toward greater Christian involvement in social issues was spearheaded, not by Reformed amils and postmils, but by Arminian premils like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. This is an embarrassment for us Reformed people, *who like to think that we have a corner on Christian political thought and action*, and tend to look down our noses at “fundamentalists” for their lack of a “full-orbed Christian world—and-life view.” Of course, fundamentalists like Falwell and Robertson may have been influenced, at third or fourth hand, by Reformed people like Rousas J. Rushdoony, Gary North, and Francis Schaeffer. But it was the evangelical premils who took the lead in the actual movements for social change, and we should give them credit. *Here we see another reason why the church should reexamine its divisions*. Full implementation of Christianity in our time requires the gifts given to people in all Christian traditions (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 280, emphasis mine).

In another book, *Evangelical Reunion*, Frame says,

The church is a wonderful thing, deserving our deepest loyalty. It is that for which Jesus shed his own blood. But denominations are another thing altogether. I am not saying that we owe no loyalty to our denominations. I am saying that our loyalty to our denominations must be tempered by the understanding *that these organizations are the result of sin, inadequate human substitutes for the God-given order of the one true church*. Somewhere in each of our hearts ought to be the conviction that denominations should work, not to their glorification, but *to their own extinction* (emphasis mine, no page numbers available from this document which may be downloaded free from the Frame-Poythress.org).

Frame provides a brief overview of the origins of denominationalism, beginning with the schism of Jeroboam I who built illegal cult worship centers in Dan and Bethel, then tracing post-NT schisms in the heresies of Marcion and Montanus and the non-heretical schisms of Novatian and Donatus. He also exams the legitimacy of the schism of 1054 between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church over the procession of the Holy Spirit—i.e. whether the Spirit proceeded from the Father or the Son or both. He even questions the schism of Chalcedon (451 AD)

which split the Egyptian and Syrian churches from the rest of the church over the two natures of Christ in the one person. Frame argues that division could have been avoided had the Chalcedonian formulation been written more in scriptural language rather than philosophical language. Luther, he suggests, could have remained an excommunicate member of the Roman Catholic Church, rejecting the judgment of the church and seeking change within the church. Luther himself rejected Zwingli as a brother in Christ over their disagreement concerning the Lord's Supper, a division which continues, although evangelical Lutherans do not deny the genuine faith of Reformed Christians and *visa versa* (Reformed Christians do not deny the faith of evangelical Lutherans.) We could go back earlier in tracing denominational schism to Corinth when Paul nixed the idea of various factions within the church of Corinth.

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. ¹² Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11-13 NASB)

As far as the Apostle was concerned, there was to be no Church of Paul, Church of Apollo, Church of Cephas (Peter), or even **The** Church of Christ, a title claimed by one *denomination* in the US. Although naively claiming *not* to be a denomination, but the one true church, it is actually neo-Catholic in its claims to be the true church.

I have many questions concerning Frame's analysis, especially concerning whether Luther could have remained in the Roman Catholic Church. Frame admits the legitimacy of the split between the Presbyterian Church in America and the Presbyterian Church US. The issue was fundamentally over the doctrine of plenary inspiration and whether the Bible could contain errors which affected the life and ministry of the church. For an example, consider the ordination of women in the church (one of the issues in 1973) which has escalated to the issue of the ordination of homosexuals today within the PCUSA, merger of the PCUS and the PCUSA. Once we justify questioning the explicit statements of Scripture on one issue (cf. 1 Tim. 2: 12; 3: 12), we will begin questioning it on any issue, even sexuality (1 Cor. 6: 9-10). The standard then becomes whatever society will allow, and we can look at history to see where this leads (Gen. 19: 24; the murder of 6 million Jews before and during WWII; and the genocide of Rwanda in 1984. I might disagree with Frame in some points; but we should all be able to agree with him that

Evaluating these matters, especially at more than four centuries' distance, is very difficult. And it is even more difficult to evaluate the various Protestant-from-Protestant splits of the later centuries. It is clear, however, that all denominational division has been due to sin, somewhere: ***either among the founders of the new denomination, or in the previous denomination, or both....***

The difficulty of evaluating these events means that today it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate the "one, true church" which Jesus founded in the first century. It would be so nice if we could pick out ***one denomination*** today and say, "This is the one." That would be the denomination that had never been guilty of unjustified division from any other body, nor had ever provoked justified division of anyone from itself. No, there is no such beast. All denominations, so far as I can tell, are guilty in some measure, at some point in their history, of schism or of provoking schism, in some degree....

The one, true church does, however, still exist! Jesus' promise that the gates of Hell will not prevail (Matt. 16:18) has not been broken. But the true church exists today in many denominations, rather than one. It exists in broken form. It exists, but its government has been injured.

Not entirely, of course. In some ways, the church is still governed the way the one true church was governed in the first century. For one thing, we still have local congregations, as they did then. The local congregation is, as it was then, the central bond of Christian fellowship. This represents the "government by tens and hundreds" of Exod. 18. For another thing, the church today still has the same supreme court as did the church in the first century. That is the court of heaven where Jesus, the one head of the church, makes the final decisions. At that level, the church is still united, and, indeed, at that level it has a unified government! (emphasis mine)

Those who favor denominations, Frame argues, are arguing pragmatically rather than biblically. Pragmatically, denominations may carry on the work of missions, church planting, mercy ministry, etc. while maintaining doctrinal purity without the hassle of divergent views. So what harm comes from denominationalism? I will summarize Frame's argument.

1. ***Denominationalism weakens church discipline*** since the disciplined member can easily drive or walk down the street or cross town to another church which does not recognize the disciplinary action of his former church. It then becomes business as usual.

I met this problem face to face in one of the churches I pastored. A woman had committed adultery. Supposedly, she repented and went back to her husband, but refused any efforts on my part to counsel with her and her husband or to seek forgiveness from the members of our church who were harmed by her adultery. The next thing I know, she and her husband were seeking to join another Baptist church (I was a Baptist at that time), and I received a letter from the pastor of that church seeking a letter of recommendation for this couple. I explained in my response that the couple was welcome to remain in our church and continue healing from the damage caused by adultery, but I could not in good conscience give them a letter of recommendation when all the issues had not been resolved. I then received a heated visit from a deacon in the church who reamed me out for being harsh. I stuck to my decision and suffered yet another breach of loyalty among the leadership of the church. Commenting on this further, Frame says,

Part of the problem is that there are no consistent standards of doctrine or morality among our denominations. First Methodist may simply be a more liberal church than First Baptist. Another part of the problem is that denominationalism hinders communication among churches. First Baptist may conscientiously inform the other local Baptist churches of its action, but they cannot write to all the churches of other denominations, and First Methodist does not receive the message. Bill isn't going to tell them. Another part of the problem is that denominationalism fosters an ungodly competitiveness, rather than cooperativeness, among churches: First Methodist may be very happy to get someone away from the Baptists, so happy that they don't even trouble to ask the former church about Bill.

Since discipline can be a rather unpleasant business to begin with, and since its purposes are so easily frustrated as in the above example, many churches abandon it altogether, except for preaching and teaching. And without discipline, the whole moral and doctrinal condition of the church of Christ deteriorates. Certainly our denominational divisions must take a good part of the blame for this sad situation.

2. ***Membership vows of loyalty to the local congregation and submission to the leadership of the church*** (as long as God's word is not violated by loyalty) ***are not taken seriously***. People get offended easily, and rather than seek biblical reconciliation with the leadership, they simply disappear into another church.

3. ***Denominationalism produces an imbalance of the gifts of the Spirit.*** Some denominations are more gifted in scholarship than others. I can cite my own denomination, the PCA, as being well-supplied with learned scholars. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church would be another such denomination. However, in my own reckoning and that of others, the PCA and OPC are too homogeneous. Although we would wish to believe that we are reaching out to this generation, when we look at our denominational membership and even individual church membership, we must admit that we are not reaching our very diversified culture—not many black people, tattooed people, purple or orange-haired people, or drug users. The PCA is primarily a middle-to-upper-middle-class phenomenon, and those who say differently are in denial. But we sure get good teaching, and we wish we could spread this teaching around, but for some reason other denominations who are zealously reaching the tattooed drug users are not interested in Presbyterians taking over their seminaries, pulpits, or Sunday school classes—and probably for good reason.

Partly because of the reformed emphasis on educated pastors in the 19th century, the westward expansion of the church in America was primarily fueled by the evangelistic zeal of uneducated Arminian Baptists and Methodists whose denominations had a greater emphasis on missions. For this reason, reformed churches are somewhat of a rare bird in the western US even to this day. And how do PCA men training for the ministry respond to this lack? Rather than become church planters in the northwest (Washington state, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, etc.) they take an existing pastorate in the southeast where the influence of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS and Orlando, FL has created many Presbyterian churches. At any rate, this imbalance produces churches which lack some of the essential gifts of the Spirit, including my church, the PCA. As Frame says, God promised the gifts of the Spirit to the one true church but not denominations—and, I might add, He did not promise them to individual local churches existing in isolation from other local churches.

Essentially, denominations tend to be populated by people who have similar interests and backgrounds. Especially today, denominational membership is based less on doctrinal commitment than on ethnic, socio-economic and social factors. Therefore, certain denominations have a disproportionate number of intellectuals, others the salesman-types whom God often uses as effective evangelists, others the big-hearted, generous folk who like to focus on the needs of the poor, others the artistic types who make good organists and choir members.

And often denominational barriers frustrate the communication of these gifts from one denomination to another. A church of one denomination may face formidable barriers in seeking to benefit from the ministry of someone in another denomination, even when the two denominations are very similar in doctrine and practice (*Evangelical Reunion*).

4. ***“Because of denominationalism, the church lacks common courts to resolve disputes”.*** The pastor and deacons of a Baptist church are not going get together with the elders of a Presbyterian church to discuss problems which arise between two Christians of each denomination.

5. ***“Denominationalism hardens existing divisions.”*** Even the issue of infant versus believer’s baptism has yet to be resolved after 2000 years of church history. Rather than having multi-denominational church conferences discussing this and other issues, denominational views become fossilized and fixed without any hope of coming together.

6. ***“Denominational division makes reconciliation more difficult—reconciliation, that is, of the***

estrangements that led to the division.”

2. *Be sympathetic*

Literally, “to share the same feelings” (*sumpathēs*), or “compassionate”. Christians should care about one another and be *sympathetic* with the struggles others are going through. Back in the 1960’s, a famous rock duo, Simon and Garfunkel came out with a song entitled, “I Am a Rock”. The lyrics included the following verse, “I am a rock; I am an island. And a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries.” If we fortify ourselves against the pain of others—like a rock fortress—we will not have to experience the unpleasantness of their personal problems. After all, don’t we have enough problems of our own without experiencing the problems of others? And if we isolate ourselves from others—like an island disconnected from the mainland—we will remain sufficiently distant from them to protect ourselves from being hurt by them. But such self-centered self-protection is completely opposed to Peter’s exhortation to “share the same feelings” with others who are in trouble or hurting (see Larry Crabb, *Connecting* and also, *Inside Out* for an excellent analysis of community and relationships within the body of Christ).

Everyone goes through many struggles in life, and the church was designed by God as a *community* of people who would help each other bear one other’s burdens (Gal. 6: 2). Jesus left His disciples the instructions, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13: 34). In one sense, this commandment was not *new* (Lev. 19: 18), but it was new in the sense that the commandment had never been expressed so powerfully in the life and death of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Yes, there had been many throughout the history of the world who had died for others; but never before had God the Son left His eternal home in heaven to be incarnated in human flesh to endure the same sufferings that we suffer, and more, so that we might live eternally with Him *without* suffering. Four times in the upper room discourse just before his death, Jesus commands His disciples to love one another “even as I have loved you” (Jn. 13: 34; 15: 12, 17). As Christ loved us and laid down his life “for his friends” (Jn. 15: 13), so believers must do so for one another (1 Jn. 3: 16).

Laying our lives down for our friends may not involve dying a martyr’s death, but it *will* involve a certain measure of self-sacrifice and self-denial for others. As people observe this self-sacrifice for others, they will be brought to a saving relationship with Christ, for this kind of self-less love is the distinguishing characteristic of a true disciple of Christ (Jn. 13: 35). “No man is an island” as much as he attempts to live this way, but Christians must make a special effort to avoid living in isolation from other believers, which amounts to contempt. If we are walking down the road without any baggage and see another brother carrying a heavy load, what should we do? Our natural, fleshly, instinct is self-preservation—to keep walking, rejoicing that we don’t have such a heavy burden to carry. Peter exhorts us to be sympathetic to our brother by helping him carry *his* burden. Throughout the world, the people of God are carrying many burdens—poverty, hunger, sickness, persecution and imprisonment (Matt. 25: 31-46). If we are not helping others with their burdens, it is only because we refuse to carry them. With modern means of communication, ignorance can no longer be an excuse—“Lord, when did we see you hungry?” Further, while our primary responsibility is to help other believers carry their burdens, we must also help unbelievers (Gal. 6: 10; “especially”, but not “exclusively”).

But when does our *help* actually *hurt* the very people we are trying to help? Based upon my limited

understanding of the African context, helping actually hurts people when it distracts their focus away from their own personal resources—labor, materials, and ideas—and draws their attention exclusively toward external resources (See *When Helping Hurts*, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert; and Lois Ooms, *Transformational Development*. If you help someone build a house, he will keep looking to you alone for resources to complete it. Or if you help someone purchase an existing house, he will send you an email when the roof leaks without ever considering the possibility of getting on the roof himself to fix it. (If this sounds like personal experience, you are correct.) After a while, a person can get burned out with helping others because nothing he does seems to be enough. And, truthfully, it isn't enough. Must we give up, or should we continue exploring better ways to help?

One would think that Jesus, tempted in all things as we are (Heb. 4: 15), would have gotten burned out every single day of his three year ministry. He would often have to leave the disciples and get alone to pray, and had he not been the perfect God-man, he would likely have suffered a nervous breakdown helping thousands of people and preaching beyond the limits of human exhaustion. Even His own family thought He had gone “nuts” (Mk. 3: 20-21). For a purely human example of heroic altruism, think of the tireless efforts of the Roman Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, helping the abject poor in Calcutta, India. When we think of these examples, we should cease feeling sorry for ourselves. The vast majority of us have not yet resisted sin to the point of shedding blood (Heb. 12: 4).

3. *Be brotherly*

As stated above, we must understand our “filial” relationship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. ***We are part of the same family of God and while not necessarily related by blood, we are related by faith.*** The Bible teaches that we are all united with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6); thus, we are connected together by bonds which are stronger than blood. The ancient saying “blood [biological relationship] is thicker than water [the water of baptism]” is ***not*** true. While all Africans feel a special kinship with biological family members, including kinship with their tribe—and they should honor this kinship—the ***most important*** relationships of all are our relationships with fellow members of the body of Christ. When one member hurts, all of us hurt with him (1 Cor. 12: 26). If professing Christians in Africa had truly understood this principle, the tribal-motivated killings in Uganda (under Amin and Obote II, 1971-1985), Kenya (recently), Rwanda (1994 genocide), and Congo (for the last 10 years) would have never occurred. Uganda claims to be 88% Christian; Rwanda 81%; Kenya 78%; and Congo 95% (figures from Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*). The fact that these atrocities did occur (and are now occurring in Congo) proves that the Christian faith and world-view has not yet become deeply rooted in African society. It lies superficially on the surface.

Nor is the Christian world-view well-rooted in the US where Christians regularly take one another to secular courts over differences which should be settled in church courts (1 Cor. 6: 1-8). ***Genuine*** Christian faith, on the other hand, engenders (produces) brotherly love for fellow believers and compassion for all men regardless of faith.

4. *Be kindhearted*

A true believer is “tenderhearted” toward others (***eusplanchnon*** from ***eus***, “good”, and ***splanchnov***, the “inner parts” or “bowels”; cf. Phil. 1: 8; 2: 1; 2 Cor. 3: 12; “affection”). When we

behold someone in need or someone suffering, our response should be compassion which reaches to our innermost being (cf. Lk. 10: 33, the good Samaritan who “felt compassion”; *splanchnizomai*). The suffering of others should affect us emotionally, as if we had been struck in the belly by a blunt object. This is the idea behind the word, *splanchnon*. To be kindhearted is to have “good feelings” or emotions toward others, emotions which spur us into action to relieve suffering or to show compassion. Having knowledge is not enough. The Christian must also have feelings. Reformed Christians who emphasize the intellect often downplay the feelings as unimportant, but our Lord Jesus had feelings for people when they were hungry, sick, or when they had no spiritual leadership (Matt. 9: 36; 14: 14; 15: 32; *splanchnizomai*). There is no dispute that Christian charity and mercy ministry (medical care, food for the hungry, etc.) should be governed by intelligent planning and reasonable methods of helping people. If we don’t plan intelligently, we will end up helping those who don’t need help and failing others who do. The history of missions and international aid in Africa, to this day, is replete (well-filled) with stories of inefficiency and duplication of efforts by well-meaning Christian charities and NGO’s (non-governmental agencies) who are either unaware of what other agencies are doing or simply don’t care. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing—or doesn’t want to know.

On the other hand, people’s hearts are rarely moved by logic and reason alone. Statistics about the number of hungry people in Darfur, Sudan or the number of children who ran from abduction by Kony in northern Uganda will not stir people to get out their checkbooks and make contributions. What often moves their hearts to part with their income are pictures of starving children on TV screens or a documentary about the “Invisible Children”. Charitable organizations are well-aware of the power of visual images and market their mercy ministries accordingly. And this is not all bad as long as all the relevant information is open and honest. But personal involvement is the greatest motivator of all—the difference between sending a check to a starving child and actually holding a starving child while you feed him. One of the differences between lectures and sermons is the way information is presented. In a sermon, especially, the goal should be to move the heart to produce activity. To some extent, lectures in theology or the Bible should move the heart as well, but the pupil can take just so much “preaching” in one day before he is worn out with it! Lectures, therefore, may have to be somewhat more subdued in their intensity and application. Nevertheless, God wants us to love Him with all of our being, including the emotions. Peter desires the hearts of his audience to be stirred to action in helping others.

In the first centuries of the Christian church, Roman citizens commonly practiced infanticide. If a mother gave birth to an unwanted female or a defective male, fathers would often place the unwanted infants under aqueducts—waterways built high above the ground which supplied water to modern Roman cities. There, the babies would suffer a sure and certain death to ravaging dogs roaming the cities after dark. Aware of this practice, Christians would sit under these aqueducts and wait for infants to be abandoned by their fathers. They would then rescue them and adopt these Roman babies into their own families. They would love children who were unloved even by their own Roman families. This is what happens in a pagan society when believers are moved to compassion to help the helpless. What’s more, the pagans take notice and many are won to the Lord by a show of compassion which they are incapable of producing.

5. Be humble in spirit

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5: 5; James 4: 6). No one,

least of all me, is truly qualified to comment much about the virtue of humility, so I will keep my comments short. The verse above says it all. No one is allowed in God's sight to be proud simply because **he has nothing about which to be proud**. If we wish to boast, we should limit our boasting to the cross of Christ and the gospel (Gal. 6: 14). Whatever we have by way of material wealth, health, good looks, or spiritual gifts, we have received by grace—**unmerited** favor—thus eliminating any grounds for boasting in ourselves.

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:7 NASB)

Pride in our own achievements quenches the Spirit since it robs God of any due credit for the work of the Spirit in our lives (Phil. 2: 13). This is even true of financial achievements since the wisdom and knowledge to make money is one of God's common graces even to unbelievers. And if one follows His instructions about wealth, no sorrow comes from it.

It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it. (Proverbs 10:22 NASB)

In the context of the church, we can see the important contribution humility can make to the community and fellowship of God's people. There are no big people or little people in the body of Christ, for we are all sinners saved by grace and not by works or human merit. All of us have been **given** a certain gift or gifts—"the manifestation of the Spirit"—to use for the building up and edification of every other member of the body, not for self-gratification or recognition from others (1 Cor. 12: 7). We are what we are by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15: 10), nothing more and nothing less. How silly and foolish, then, to think that we are **something** when we are really **nothing**; for on our **best** day, we are still weak and sinful in comparison to what we **should be**, given so much grace and opportunity (Rom. 12: 3). I am reminded of a story I once read (can't remember where) of two very prominent (well-known) Christian leaders in England in the 19th century (I think). They were mutual friends, and in one conversation together one of them made note of the fact that they both had become famous in the Christian church for their scholarship and preaching. Alarmed by this statement, the other man said to him, "Do you see this cup of tea?" "Yes," replied the boaster. "Then put the tip of your finger in this tea." He did so, and a small ripple was produced that vanished in a few seconds. "There," he said. "That ripple represents your ministry and mine, and what we have done will soon be forgotten, just as that ripple." Not too soon after this, the boasting church leader fell from prominence while the humble man continued in a fruitful ministry.

Humility, in the words of Davids, "does not mean a poor self-concept ('I'm no good'), but a willingness to take the lower place, **to do the less exalted service**, and to put the interests of others ahead of one's own interests" (p. 125, emphasis mine). The way this humility may—and **should**—express itself on the campus of Westminster Theological College is through the willingness of students—who are almost fully funded through scholarships—to work heartily for the Lord digging in the gardens, removing litter from the campus grounds, cooking and peeling in the kitchen, and cleaning in the bathrooms. Is this asking too much of students? Our Lord Jesus took the form of a humble bondsman, removing his outer robes and washing the disciples' feet (Jn. 13: 5). None of the disciples seemed interested in volunteering for the task, one reserved for the lowest servant. Apparently, it was beneath their dignity. Strange that Jesus did not think the task beneath **His** dignity!

6. Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead

At this point, Peter turns his attention away from one's primary relationships with his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and turns it to one's relationships with *unbelievers*, specifically hostile unbelievers. This is a difficult command, for our natural instinct is to defend ourselves and fight back. When many Ugandan drivers force me to hug the shoulder of the road while they take their half out of the middle, my *least* inclination is to raise my right hand and say, "God bless you!" The same feeling of injustice wells up within me when Ugandan merchants attempt to charge me twice the normal price for an item simply because I'm white. No one likes injustice, especially if the injustice is directed personally against him!

But the examples above are petty and insignificant. Peter was referring to far more serious acts of aggression toward the Christian community in Asia Minor which later faced the possibility of imprisonment or death. And what are we to say to the injustice that is now going on in so many parts of the world? Christian pastors in Pakistan are being beaten, imprisoned, and even killed for their faith by Muslim extremists while the police look the other way (*World*, publication date unknown). The Sudanese of Darfur are being dispossessed from their lands by genocide to give the Khartoum government free access to oil (*World*, publication date unknown). For 21 years children in northern Uganda were abducted from their homes and robbed of their childhood and innocence. Innocent people in Congo have endured 20 years of war so that a few can seize political power and money. The African people stand by and watch while their political leaders embezzle (steal) billions of dollars of international aid to build their plush houses and drive their expensive automobiles, money which could be used for building roads, dams for hydro-electrical power, and rural hospitals and clinics for the poor (see George Ayittey, *Africa Unchained*). Such injustice gives birth to hatred and a desire to get even—vengeance. How else can we explain the last 40 years of rebellion and chaos in sub-Saharan Africa (see Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos*)?

Yet, Christ did not come into the world (the first time) to judge the world but that through Him the world would be saved (Jn. 3: 17). As followers of Christ, *we* are in the world for the same purpose, that we might be a *blessing* to the world by following in the faith-steps of our father Abraham through whom all nations were blessed (Gen. 12: 2-3). Our weapons against injustice are not steel pangas or AK-47's (Matt. 26: 52), but the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Eph. 6: 17). If Jesus had intended to conquer the Roman Empire through armed resistance, He could have called upon twelve legions of angels (72,000 plus) to help Him with the task (Matt. 26: 53), and the battle against Pilate, Caesar, and the Jews would have been over in a matter of seconds. Instead, laying down His life which no man could take from Him (Jn. 10: 17-18), Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified on a cross, thus destroying the works of the devil who blinded whole nations to the gospel (1 Jn. 3: 8; Rev. 20: 3). The kingdom of God was inaugurated (begun) with suffering and death and will be propagated (spread) throughout the world with the afflictions of Christ completed in the suffering of His people who lay down their lives for others (Col. 1: 24).

Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5: 13-14), but they can only function this way by virtue of their *difference* from everyone else. If Christians return evil for evil and insult for insult, they are no different from everyone else since unbelievers, whenever they have the power to do so, strike back at their enemies and give insult for insult. But Christ instructed us not to strike back when we are insulted, but to turn the other cheek and accept the insult (Matt. 5: 39). (See my *Synoptic Gospels* on this passage. Jesus is not suggesting that we allow ourselves to be bludgeoned [beat] to death.) Accepting insults and injustice is very difficult—impossible, really,

apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit. I confess that I am not very good at it and need more grace than most people in this particular area.

What can help us learn to accept insults from others and to refrain from paying back evil for evil? The key to learning this virtue is found in the same text, **but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing**. The key, therefore, is learning to look forward to the *future inheritance* bestowed on God's covenant people (so also Davids, pp. 126-127; what John Piper calls "future grace" in his popular book, *Future Grace*). From eternity past, God's elect people were chosen to receive the blessing of eternal life (Eph. 1: 4-5).

What is included in this **blessing**? For starters, we will see Christ face to face (1 Cor. 13: 12); we will inherit the new heavens and earth restored to the beauty and grandeur (majesty) of an environment untainted (unmarred) by human sin (Rom. 8: 18-25); and we will receive our glorified bodies which will be imperishable and not subject to sickness, sorrow, and death (1 Cor. 15). These glorious blessings are revealed to us only partially (1 Cor. 13: 9-10), but the day will come when we will see them with our own eyes, as Paul says, "but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM'" (1 Cor. 2: 9; a quotation from Isa. 64: 4). A human being can live through much abuse and injustice if he knows there is an end to it and that another life of peace and rest is on the other side. Furthermore, since the blessing of eternal life is not earned or deserved (Kistemaker, p. 128; Davids, p. 127), the Christian's blessing toward his oppressors should not be conditioned (depend) upon their *merit*, but upon grace. As God has dealt with us on the basis of grace, then grace must govern our behavior toward unbelievers.

But further, a person can accept abuse much easier if he knows that justice will prevail in the end (*v. 12b*). Because God is a God of justice, there is no need for us to receive resolution to all the injustice we and others experience in this life. In this temporal life, godless men may not have to answer for their crimes and atrocities against others (murder, theft, rape, corruption; cf. Job, chp. 24 and 21: 7 where he asks the question, "Why do the wicked still live, continue on, also become very powerful?"). Nevertheless, God will remember the sin of the wicked, even every careless word they speak (Matt. 12: 36; Ps. 73: 18-20). At the end of time, those whose sins have not been atoned for—resolved, to use another term—by the blood of Jesus will receive the just retribution (payback) they deserve and will be so terrified of the judgment that they will beg for the rocks and mountains to fall on them, thus hiding them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6: 15-16).

Such a terrifying future for the unforgiven should not fill our hearts with joy, but pity and compassion (Ezek. 33: 11). It should also quiet our hearts from any thoughts of personal vengeance, knowing that vengeance belongs to God alone, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord. 'BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12: 19-21). In Rom. 12, Paul is quoting from Deut. 32: 35, 41 and Prov. 25: 21-22. Solomon (cf. 25: 1) advocates goodness to one's enemies rather than personal vengeance. Intimately familiar with many cultures (he had many foreign wives; 1 Kings 11: 1-3), Solomon refers to the ancient Egyptian ritual of expiation (removal of guilt) in which a guilty person demonstrates his repentance by carrying a basin of glowing coals on his head. Therefore,

your kindness to someone who has wronged you may have the effect of bringing him to repentance (*Zondervan NASB Study Bible*, 1999 edition; footnote on Prov. 25: 22). Peter's logic follows exactly the same path as Paul's, for his basic premise (the basis for an argument) is that these believers who were dispersed all over Asia Minor (see 1: 1) and enduring persecution should keep their "behavior excellent among the Gentiles [i.e. Gentile unbelievers], so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation" (2: 12; see commentary above). ***Good deeds, even good deeds done to our persecutors, bring men to repentance.***

To buttress (support) his argument, Peter also uses a quotation from Psalm 34 (vv. 10-12; Ps. 34: 12-16). The theme of this psalm is the salvation of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked. The man who takes refuge in the Lord is blessed (Ps. 34: 8) and will not lack anything necessary for his sustenance (v. 10). Although the righteous suffer many afflictions, the Lord will eventually deliver them out of them all (Ps. 34: 19). The souls of the righteous will be redeemed, and those who take refuge in the Lord will never be condemned. But God will slay the wicked and will condemn all those who hate his righteous people (v. 21). God sets His face against evildoers, and He will remove even the memory of them from the earth (v. 16; although Peter omits the last part of the verse).

Some commentators interpret OT promises primarily in terms of *temporal* blessings. This idea has been challenged by Waltke as a misunderstanding of the many promises to believers in the OT. Such promises could not be unambiguously true unless God's blessing extended beyond physical life. Below, I have quoted extensively from Bruce Waltke's, "Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?" found in his book, *An Old Testament Theology*, pp. 910-913. Bold italics in brackets are mine. I have interjected some clarification in brackets [] between Waltke's statements. All bold emphasis except "***I AM***" is mine.

These heavenly promises of life, health, prosperity, and honor seem detached from earth's harsh realities. The promises seem false to human experience under the sun, as Job (9:22-23) and Qoheleth (Eccl. 9: 2-3) complain, and contrary to sound doctrine.

[Job 9: 22-23 reads, "It is *all* one; therefore I say, 'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'²³ "If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent." Ecclesiastes 9: 2-3 reads, "It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear."³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they *go* to the dead." Thus, Job and Qohelet interpret life in contradiction to Proverbs as if God's treatment of the righteous and the wicked is all the same. DFM]

Eliphaz resolves the conflict by the doctrine of original sin (Job 4: 17), but the narrator of Job disallows the argument (1: 8), and so does ***I AM [Yahweh]*** (42: 7).

[Eliphaz interprets Job's troubles as the consequence of his sin, but at the very beginning of the book, God declares that Job is a righteous man, disallowing Eliphaz' argument that Job's suffering is deserved. Moreover, at the end of the book, God disapproves of the way Job's friends have handled him. He justifies Job and puts his friends at his mercy to pray for them. DFM]

Solomon, however, adds to the covenant obligation in Proverbs 3:1-10 that **I AM** disciplines those he loves (Prov. 3: 11-12), probably to motivate a person to keep his covenant obligations to make him or her fit to experience covenant blessings. If anyone should reckon that Solomon and other sages [*wise men*] are dullards [*stupid people*] who cannot see or think straight, let them recall that keen observation and cogent reflection mark the sage. Kenneth Aitken takes an exceptional misstep when he suggests the sages were too optimistic in their promises: “There is a strong suspicion here Israel’s sages have confused their belief about what **ought to be the case with what actually is the case.**” Von Rad goes further, suggesting Qoheleth accuses the sages of so-called “old wisdom” of becoming “entangled in a single false doctrine.” James G. Williams shares that opinion: “His [Qoheleth’s] primary mode of presentation of contrasting proverbs... is in order to contradict traditional wisdom.” These solutions deconstruct with Proverbs, which calls for truthful speech, and the canon, and so undermine Christ’s and his apostles’ claims that all Scripture is inspired of God, who does not author confusion, and that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10: 35; 1 Cor. 14: 33; 2 Tim. 3: 16).

[In other words, the idea that the Proverbs misrepresent the truth is inconsistent with the belief that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for instruction and training in righteousness. If the writers of the Proverbs are “too optimistic” in their promises, this cast doubt upon the rest of Scripture. DFM]

The popular evangelical solution that these are **probabilities**, not promises, though containing an element of truth, raises theological, practical, and psychological problems by **stating the matter badly**. According to this wording the human partner is expected to keep his obligation perfectly (Prov. 3: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9), but God may keep his imperfectly (3:2, 4, 6, 8, 10). In truth, however, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful” (2 Tim. 2: 13). Moreover, a sober person would like to know the probabilities, and a psychologically well person could scarcely trust the **I AM** with all his heart (Prov. 3: 5), knowing God **usually, but not always**, keeps his obligations.

[In other words, should we read the proverbs from the point of view that we must “hedge our bets” if the promises don’t work out? How much incentive will we have in keeping His commandments if the promise of long life applies only to life on earth in the here and now, especially when we see good people die young? DFM]

Other steps, however, can be taken toward a resolution. First, the promises are **partially** validated by experience. The sober, not the drunkard (cf. Prov. 23: 29-35), the cool-tempered, not the hothead (15: 18; 19: 19; 22:24; 29: 22), and the diligent, not the sluggard, **usually** experience health and wealth.

Second, the epigrammatic nature [short and to the point] of the proverbs often cause the audience to overlook the counterproverbs that qualify these promises. “There are many proverbs,” says Raymond Van Leeuwen, “that assert or imply that the wicked prosper...while the innocent suffer.”...The wicked has treasures gained by wickedness for a season (10: 2a), but they will not deliver him from death (10: 2b). At that time the wicked’s craving will be frustrated (10: 3b). In contrast, the righteous one who is afflicted at death will be delivered from death (10: 2b) and be fed (10: 3a). The several “better-than” proverbs assume the reality that **at present** the wicked have material presents and the righteous do not: “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice” (cf. Prov. 16: 8, 19; 17:1; 19: 1, 22; 21: 9, 19; 22: 1: 25: 24; 28: 6; Ps. 37: 16; Eccl. 4: 6). **Without these qualifying sayings, one could legitimately accuse Solomon of being guilty of spouting half-truths.**

[Waltke acknowledges that the Proverbs are only “partially”, not completely, validated by corporate experience. As a general rule, they are accurate; but they allow for some exceptions. Moreover, **the “counterproverbs” provide documented evidence that the writers themselves acknowledge such exceptions.** The “better-than” proverbs at the outset admit that some of the wicked have “great

income” while the righteous have “little” (16: 8). Some of the righteous are “lowly” while the wicked enjoy the “spoil” (16: 19). The peaceful house of the righteous may have only a “dry morsel” to eat while the house of the wicked, full of strife, partakes of a feast (17: 1). A poor man walking in his “integrity” is superior to a rich man (implied in the text) who is “perverse in speech and is a fool” (19: 1). If all these counter-proverbs are taken into account, it can hardly be said that the Proverbs are unrealistic and promise too much. DFM]

Third, the genre effect of being a primer [a basic reader] on morality for youth cause Proverbs *to focus on a future when the righteous rise, not on a present when they fall*: “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down in calamity” (Prov. 24: 16). “Seven” symbolizes completeness, like the “count of ten” in boxing and the proverbial “nine lives” of a cat. In a word, “the righteous are regarded as knocked out for good.” Yet the saying throws away the harsh reality in a concessive clause for the greater reality that the righteous will rise. By contrast, the genre effect of *empiricism* [believe only what you see DFM] causes Job and Ecclesiastes to focus on the sufferings of the righteous *before* they rise.

[Regardless of what happens to the righteous, they will rise again. On the other hand, the wicked fall but ultimately do not rise. Naboth appears to fall, but the retribution against Jezebel and Ahab imply that his fall was not permanent since God vindicated him in the judgment against the king and queen. In this section, Waltke is getting closer to his conclusion that the promises of Proverbs must transcend the expiration of earthly life or what he calls “clinical death”. When viewed as promises transcending this present life, the proverbs are not “probably true” but absolutely true apart from empirical verification (Faith is the evidence of things not seen); and they give us all the incentive we need for absolute obedience and trust. Job’s and Qohelet’s statements mentioned earlier focus on the righteous when they fall, but ignore the righteous when they rise—a recovery not always susceptible to empirical verification. Only at the end of both books do we see resolution and balance. DFM]

Finally, as pointed out above, the righteous rise in a blessed future that *outlasts death*. In addition to the exegetical arguments presented there, Proverbs’ concept of justice *demand such a hope*. Like so much of the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs is a masterpiece of indirection, preaching its message through the theological reflection of those with ears to hear. Instructively, the opening situation depicted in the father’s first lecture resembles the first situation of humanity outside of the Garden of Eden. Even as Cain murdered righteous Abel, sending him to a premature death, after which Cain lived out a normal life span, so the father represents a traveler’s “innocent blood” (Prov. 1: 11-19) as being dispatched to a premature death by venal sinners who walk on top of his grave and plunder his house. *These initial situations discredit the popular interpretation that life and death in Proverbs refer respectively to living to an old age and to a premature death. For justice to be done, as Proverbs assures it will be (e.g., 3: 31-35: 16: 4-5), Abel and the innocent traveler must be vindicated and delivered from death in a future that lies beyond their clinical deaths.* If clinical death is the last word for the waylaid innocent, then the father’s first lecture, along with other biblical stories about the deaths of martyrs, *deconstruct the Bible’s claim that God upholds justice*. Kathleen A. Farmer rightly comments: “One either has to give up the idea of justice or one has to push its execution into some realm beyond the evidence of human experience.” Obviously that future is not accessible to verification, as Jerry Gladson notes critically, but without that kind of faith one cannot please God. *If these promises could be validated by experience, why does the father command the son to trust in the I AM (3: 5)?*

[This is a profound statement. Essentially, if God is a God of justice—and, of course, He is—then the innocent traveler’s blood (Prov. 1: 11-12) and the blood of Abel (who died young while his murderous brother’s descendants built cities and established culture—Gen. 4: 17-22) must be

avenged. If not avenged, the father's promises to the son in chapter 3 are empty (e.g. 3: 2, 25). Thus, promises of long life in Proverbs must extend beyond clinical life. If they speak only of temporal life, they offer insufficient incentive for righteousness which *may* or *may not* pay off. DFM]

If God rewarded virtue immediately, the son would *confound pleasure with piety*, using piety and ethics to satisfy his prurient [*lustful*] interests. He would substitute eudaemonism (i.e. the system of thought that bases ethics on personal pleasure) for the true virtues of faith, hope, and love. God develops the character of his saints by calling them to suffer for the sake of righteousness, while living in hope of eternal life. *In this way he teaches them virtue while upholding justice* (Rom. 5: 3-4; 2 Peter 2: 3-11).

In sum, Proverbs characterizes the wise as living by faith entirely (“with all your heart,” 3: 5), exclusively (“lean not on your own understanding”), and exhaustively (“in all your ways acknowledge him,” 3: 5-6a).

[This is the answer to believers who ask why Christians often have it so hard while the wicked have it easy. Christians must be taught to trust God, “to walk by faith and not by sight”. As they trust, they become men and women of character who love God for unseen promises. If all believers had it easier than unbelievers, people would become Christians in name only because of its verifiable temporal benefits. But faith looks beyond empirical verification (visual “proof”). God is not a God to be worshipped to satisfy our every conceivable want. He is a God to be trusted when the waves of trouble flow over us like Job. In the end, he never cursed God. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and if our paths were consistently smooth, faith would become impossible because never needed. DFM]

To summarize, Peter is quoting OT promises which extend beyond physical life, and these promises serve to stabilize the suffering, persecuted believer in the midst of his trials. Because of the future promises, he can love his enemies and pray for their salvation. His suffering is only for a short time, this present evil age; but the suffering of unbelievers is eternal. Rather than seeking vengeance, we must pity unbelievers and pray for them. They are blinded by the evil one to the kingdom of God, a blindness we would share were it not for the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts. The readers who were familiar with Ps. 34 would get Peter's meaning immediately. Considering God's protection of the righteous and their bright prospects for the future, there was no call or necessity for personal vengeance. Vengeance belongs to God alone.

David (the author of Ps. 34) admonishes the reader, “Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit” (v. 13)—the very sins of slander and lying with which the wicked afflict the righteous, as Peter himself recognized (*1 Pet. 2: 12*). The sins of the tongue are the most difficult to tame (James 3: 2-8), and if believers can tame the sins of the tongue they can turn away from other evils as well (v. *II*). As the exiles in Babylon were advised to seek the welfare of the city to which the Lord had sent them (Jer. 29: 7), so the believers in Asia Minor living in exile should seek and pursue peace with all men as much as humanly possible (*3: II*; cf. Rom. 12: 18). Having been with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry, Peter called to mind much of His public and private teaching, including the beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5: 9).

IX. Suffering Persecution for the Sake of Righteousness (3: 13-22)

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. ¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. ²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Peter 3:13-22 NASB)

In the Greek text, *v. 13* begins with “and” (*kai*) indicating that Peter is continuing with his previous discussion (Davids, p. 129). Having witnessed the suffering of Christ with his own eyes and having been deeply affected by it, Peter spends considerable time in this epistle developing the implications of Christ’s suffering for the believer. ***The character of Christ’s suffering is a model or paradigm for the believer’s suffering.*** As Christ did not suffer for unrighteousness, neither should the believer’s behavior deserve the suffering of others; rather, he should be an exemplary citizen and neighbor. As stated earlier, the persecution which the Christians in Asia Minor endured was possibly not organized statist persecution. Statist persecution came later in the 1st century and occurred sporadically (not regularly) for the next two hundred years. Their primary persecution was at the hands of ordinary citizens in Asia Minor consisting of both Jews and Greeks. Throughout his missionary journeys, the Apostle Paul suffered from both Jews and Gentiles. The persecution Peter mentions most often, however, is not religious persecution from Jews, but mistreatment from Gentiles who did not understand the Christian faith and whose ungodly behavior was shamed by the exemplary (good by example) behavior of 1st century Christians (cf. **4: 3-4**). Like Noah, the Christians living as aliens in foreign countries (Peter’s primary audience) were witnesses to a skeptical, hostile audience who did not believe God’s word.

A. Avoidance of Unnecessary Suffering by Doing Good (3: 13)

By all means, the Christian should avoid ***unnecessary*** suffering resulting from poor behavior. There is no honor for God’s name in suffering from one’s foolish sinfulness (*v. 17*). While it is true that God causes ***all*** things, even our sin, to work together for our ***good***—namely, conformity to the image of His Son (Rom. 8: 28-29)—a Christian’s misbehavior gives unbelievers an occasion for blaspheming the name of God (Rom. 2: 21-24). Peter’s assumption in *v. 13* is that a Christian is not as likely to suffer from others if he does what is good (cf. Prov. 3: 3-4). The question Peter asks is rhetorical, demanding a negative answer, “No one.” In other words, if a Christian lives according to the principles encouraged in **3: 8-12**—by blessing others and pursuing peace—there will be few, even in a predominantly pagan culture, who will want to harm him or criticize him. On the other hand if he is contentious, argumentative, quick-tempered, ready for a fight, and generally hard to get along with, he should not be surprised if he invites ill-treatment from others. He deserves it! And there are, indeed, genuine believers who commonly act this way; otherwise, Peter would not find it necessary to warn them about being persecuted for unrighteousness (*v. 17, doing what is wrong*). Furthermore, Paul would not have to include, “not pugnacious” (not argumentative or ready to fight) as a requirement for elders in 1 Tim. 3: 3. If you haven’t met Christians who are argumentative, maybe you should get out of the house more often. Better yet, go into the pastoral ministry.

Experiential holiness is not instantaneously (immediately) accomplished the moment we are converted to Christ. Oh, that it were! There are many rough edges of our lives which will take years—possibly a life-time—to smooth over; and since the Holy Spirit will not do all the work alone, real change generally takes a long time (Phil. 2: 12-13). As a general rule, we are our own worst enemies in the process of sanctification because we do not consistently avail ourselves of the means of grace—Bible study and meditation, prayer, fellowship, the preaching of the word, confession of sin, constructive criticism from others, etc. These graces are not automatic, and we make choices each day concerning how much or how little we will access the ordinary means of grace. Consequently, most of us languish in besetting sins which could be extinguished while other believers progress quickly toward conformity to Christ. (In case you are wondering, I’m one of the “languishers”.) We have no one to blame but ourselves.

Because of the different temperaments and personalities given to us by God, all of us are disposed to different kinds of sinfulness. Some of us are timid (like Timothy) and must be encouraged to be bold for Christ and not let others intimidate us into silence and apathy. Others of us are “high strung” and bold, but our boldness often leads us say things and do things which are sinful or susceptible to misinterpretation (even by saying the *right* thing in the *wrong* way). We often “rub people the wrong way.” Furthermore, all of us possess different cultural, sociological and family histories which have molded us into the kind of people we are. Had I been born a Karamajong, I would likely be a brawler—scratching, fighting, and stealing for whatever I get—since stealing and fighting is a cultural tradition. Some people have fought their way through life, and they have turned out later to be violent people. Had my father been chronically abusive to my mother, research shows that I would be 1000 times more likely to engage in violent behavior toward my own wife (Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse*, p. 33). Many young African men, even Christians, have a long history of observing abusive fathers; and it is likely for them to imitate such abuse.

I will never forget an experience Fran and I had in 2004 visiting a squalid refugee camp in Uganda near the border of Tanzania. The occupants were refugees from the Rwandan genocide ten years previously; therefore, most of them were probably Hutus, some of whom may have participated in murdering Tutsis; but we didn’t ask any questions. Children had been born and had grown up in this squalid camp consisting of simple mud huts, little food, poor soil, and contaminated water supplies. Everyone was dreadfully poor, what is technically called absolute poverty. We were hosting visitors from the US who had come for a two-week missionary trip to Uganda, and one of the planned activities for the day consisted of playing games with the children followed by giving each of them a gift. Planning is essential for activities of this sort, and no one had estimated the number of children encountered that day. Consequently, as the gifts were being handed out, they began to run short—a shortage easily noticed by children who were accustomed to shortages. Chaos soon broke out, and the children began to grab and claw for whatever they could get, sometimes from the hands of smaller children. The law of the jungle—the survival of the fittest—soon prevailed, but who were we to judge them? The children were doing what they had learned to do—survive. Survive is also what many poor children living in city ghettos in the US do. They learn what they think they need to do in order to survive.

We should never ignore the profound influences our upbringing, past experiences, and cultural traditions have had upon our personalities and behavior. To a large extent, we are shaped by our past. None of this, however, implies blind fate or environmental or sociological determinism in which a

Christian (or an unbeliever) is locked away into the prison cell of his personality or past without the possibility of escape. God is also in control of our past; and we are, after all, created in the image of God as moral agents who make real, responsible decisions about how we will act and what we will be. We are not determined by our past. This is not a denial of the doctrine of total depravity or total inability. God is sovereign and we are responsible; and we are responsible *because* God is sovereign. I have taken this little detour only because we must be aware of who we are and from whence (from what place) we have come in order to understand why we and others behave the way we do. Believers are yet sinners who often suffer for the cause of unrighteousness. The more we know ourselves and our sinful tendencies, the better prepared we are to correct them. Furthermore, we must refrain from judging others too harshly who have grown up in very unfavorable social and family environments and from expecting them to act like those who have been nurtured in more advantageous conditions. Had we endured what they have endured, we may have had far more sinful habits than they.

B. The Blessing of Suffering for Righteousness (3: 14-16)

We can keep suffering to a minimum with good behavior, but we can't eliminate it altogether. Peter is not unrealistic. He recognizes that even godly people sooner or later will be mistreated by their pagan neighbors, for this is the kind of mistreatment in view here. How could it be otherwise; for even Christ, the only perfect man, was persecuted? Peter had been an eyewitness not only to His suffering on the cross but to the constant slander, misrepresentation, and outright blasphemy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He also remembered Jesus' warning, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you" (Jn. 15: 18), a warning likewise remembered by the apostle whom Jesus loved, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you" (1 Jn. 3: 13). Christians all over the world are hated—in predominantly Muslim countries but also in the remaining communist countries like North Korea where unauthorized meetings are banned and the participants punished with imprisonment or even death. Evangelical Christians are hated in the US, being accused of the hatred of homosexuals and labeled as self-righteous because they believe in sexual purity before marriage.

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (Philippians 1:29 NASB)

Believers suffering for the sake of righteousness should not despair, but rejoice that they have been considered worthy of suffering for the sake of their Lord. Jesus prepared us for this purpose and gave us the sure promise of blessing.

1. Declaration of blessing (3: 14)

The word of blessing harks back (returns) to the beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5: 10-12).

Verse 14 is a quotation of Isa. 8: 13 which refers specifically to Judah's fear of foreign invasion by Assyria. Judah had failed to fear the Lord and had fallen into idolatry; and when men fail to fear

God, the fear of *men* is the inevitable result. When persecution comes—and it will come eventually—believers should not give in to the fear of men who can only destroy the body (Matt. 10: 28), but must set apart (**sanctify**) Christ as the sovereign Lord in their hearts knowing that Christ is more than capable of delivering them from harm if He so chooses. Thus, Peter takes a passage speaking about God in the OT and applies it to Christ in the NT, revealing something of Peter’s Christology (Davids, p. 133). Christ is identified with Yahweh.

2. Persecution as an opportunity for witness (3: 15-18)

At the same time, believers should use this persecution as an opportunity for witness. When they are falsely accused, they should always be ready to give a defense (**apologia**; cf. Lk. 12: 11; Acts 24: 10) for their “hope” in the gospel (Peter’s common word for “faith”; Davids, p. 132). This defense should not be made arrogantly but with gentleness and reverence (**v. 15**), for there is no profit in causing needless offense to the gospel by provoking anger unnecessarily. Christians often make the mistake of winning the battle but losing the war, so to speak, by angrily defending themselves rather than the gospel. Our goal is not to win an **argument** with the unbeliever, but to win **him** to Christ. Moses and Christ are our examples (Davids, p. 132). When challenged by Aaron and Miriam for marrying a Cushite woman (Cush is now modern Ethiopia), Moses refused to defend himself, allowing the Lord to defend him instead. On that occasion he is called the most humble man on the earth (Num. 12: 1-13; apparently a side comment added later by another author). Christ describes himself as “gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11: 29); and apart from his confrontations with the proud scribes and Pharisees, whom He called “hypocrites” on more than one occasion (Matt. 15: 7; Matt. 22: 18), He approached lowly sinners as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9: 36). There is a marked difference in the way He speaks to ignorant crowds and individuals and the way he handles those who sinned against a clear understanding of his identity (Jn. 4: 17-18; Matt. 12: 24-32).

By all means, the Christian should maintain a clear conscience before God so that their accusers would be put to shame for slandering them (**v. 16**). We should give skeptics (those who don’t believe) no “ammunition” to shoot back at us. **Keep[ing] a good conscience** is Petrine terminology for excellent behavior. Peter is not referring to the common platitude among moderns who appeal to their subjective feelings of innocence when, in fact, they are guilty—“My conscience is clean!” Again, Christ is our ultimate example who could—with a good conscience—say to the Jews, “Which one of you convicts me of sin?” (Jn. 8: 46a) Although it is impossible for us to be as guiltless as Christ, we can aim at the goal of causing no offense through sinful actions or words (Acts 24: 16). It is better for us and for the cause of the gospel to suffer **for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong (v. 17)**.

The introductory word, **for**, in **v. 18** introduces the reason for Peter’s admonition in **v. 17**. Christ Himself died for doing what is right for the purpose of bringing us to God. In the same way, if believers are willing to endure suffering for the sake of righteousness, they, too, will be able to bring lost sinners to God. Christ was just and holy, yet He died for the unjust; and His sacrifice brought us—the unjust—into the presence of God. As believers who are holy (set apart for God’s use) suffer unjustly at the hands of sinners, their sacrificial suffering will touch human hearts and win them to the gospel. In no sense does the suffering of Christians have the atoning value of Christ’s suffering. In this sense His suffering is unique and once for all, and nothing can be added to it. Yet, the applications of Christ’s afflictions are completed in His suffering church (Col. 1: 24).

I am reminded of a book I read many years ago, *The Persecutor*. It is the story of Sergei Kourdakov, a young, up and coming communist leader in the Soviet Union commissioned to hunt down and persecute Christians who were worshipping underground (in secret) in the Communist state. One evening he and his men raided a small church and severely beat many of its members, taking some to jail. Included among the beaten was a young woman whose courageous demeanor made a profound impression on Kourdakov. Weeks later, he raided yet another church and found this *same* young woman among the worshippers. Moved by her unflinching commitment to Christ, he would not let his men touch her on this second raid. Eventually, and largely due to her witness, Kourdakov was converted to Christ, afterwards escaping from the Soviet Union to the United States where he lectured widely in various universities. He was later hunted down and murdered by undercover members of the Soviet Communist Party living in the United States.

In a recorded sermon, John Piper said that when enough Christians have their throats cut for their faith by radical Muslims, we will win the Arab world for Christ. Truly, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, chapter 50, cited by Wikipedia). But there are other ways of sacrifice besides literal martyrdom, and Peter is encouraging believers in Asia Minor to suffer *all kinds* of injustice willingly for the sake of winning others to Christ.

3. Deliverance from persecution (3: 18-22)

Thus far, Peter has made an identification of the suffering of the Christians in Asia Minor to the suffering of Christ. In a similar way, he likens the deliverance of Christ from death to the deliverance of believers from persecution; and he does so in a most unusual way. The following verses are some of the most difficult in the NT, and the interpretations are many. I will present three.

a. The *first* interpretation (that of Clement of Alexandria, AD 200) holds that Christ, in spirit, descended into hell after His resurrection to preach to the spirits of those who had lived during Noah’s day. This interpretation evokes many questions, one of which is the question of men having a *second chance* to hear the gospel after they die. And if there is no opportunity for them to respond to this gospel, then what is the point of their hearing it? But there is no scriptural evidence either for Christ descending literally into hell after his resurrection or a second chance for men to hear and receive the gospel (Heb. 9: 27). His descent into hell, mentioned in the Westminster Confession of Faith, refers to his suffering on the cross and the momentary rejection by the Father. For these reasons, this first interpretation can be easily dismissed (Kistemaker, p. 142-143).

b. The *second* interpretation follows from 2 Pet. 2: 4-5, “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a **preacher of righteousness**, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...” From this we may deduce that through Noah, a “preacher of righteousness”, the Spirit of Christ preached to those who were later drowned in the flood and whose souls (“spirits”) are now in prison (hell) at the time of Peter’s letter. This interpretation (Augustine’s, AD 400) requires that we take “spirit” in 1 Pet. 3: 18 as the **Holy Spirit** and change the translation of the words **in which** (NASB) in v. 19 to **by whom**. Christ was “made alive **by the Spirit, by whom** He also went and made proclamation...” This translation is possible from the Greek text, and the King James Version renders the clause accordingly, **but quickened by the Spirit**, along with the New King James Version, **but made alive by the Spirit**. Further, the NKJ follows with the prepositional phrase, **by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in**

prison. Thus, while God waited patiently for 120 years (Gen. 6: 3) during the days of Noah to destroy sinful mankind with a flood, He was at the *same* time preaching to them through His servant Noah who was endowed with the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary from the text to assume that the Spirit of Christ preached **in prison**, but only that the Spirit preached to those who were presently (in Peter's time-frame) in prison.

Kistemaker has posed one major objection to Augustine's interpretation. The Spirit's proclamation to the spirits in prison is grammatically connected to the resurrection of Christ: **put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit.** Therefore, it appears that the proclamation to the spirits is made *after* His resurrection from the grave and *not before.* But if the proclamation of the Spirit is made through Noah's preaching, it was made even before Christ's *incarnation*, not after his *resurrection.* For this reason Kistemaker rejects the Augustinian interpretation which had been predominantly accepted for centuries until the present (p. 145). Furthermore, the text does not say that the Spirit preached to "the spirits *of men* now in prison" but to "**spirits now** in prison" (the "now" is actually a translator's addition and is not in the Greek text). This is admittedly a very unusual construction if Peter is speaking of preaching to *men*, and this has prompted Kistemaker and others to adopt a different interpretation (p. 142).

c. The *third* interpretation questions the meaning of the word, **preached.** Preaching implies proclamation, but "proclamation" (*karusso*) can have a broader meaning than the proclamation of the gospel (e.g. a public announcement"), although this is the way the word is normally used throughout the NT (Davids, p. 140). The **spirits** of *v. 19* could be interpreted as *angelic* spirits, not the departed spirits of human beings. If so, then the proclamation of the Spirit of Christ is the **public announcement of Christ's victory over Satan and all His enemies.** We read in Col. 2: 15, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a **public** display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

...the resurrected Christ, during his ascension to heaven, proclaimed His victory over death to imprisoned spirits, fallen angels. The exalted Christ passed through the realm where the fallen angels are kept and proclaimed his triumph over them (Eph. 6: 12; Col. 2: 15) (Kistemaker, p. 145; so also Davids, p. 141).

In Rev. 20: 7, John writes that after a thousand years Satan will be released from prison to deceive the nations, a **prison** which is identified as the abyss in Rev. 20: 3. In Lk. 8: 31, the demons possessing the Gerasene demoniac begged Jesus not to send them into the "abyss", a place for the imprisonment of demonic spirits. Supporting this interpretation is the reference to fallen angels in 2 Pet. 2: 4. The fallen angels which were "disobedient" were cast into hell only later to suffer the indignity of having the resurrected Christ proclaim His ultimate victory over them.

This interpretation is supported by the context of *v. 22* where Peter says that Christ **having gone into heaven after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to him.** Thus, the temporal reference **after** may be a reference back to the proclamation in *v. 19.* He made proclamation to spirits in prison that he had defeated death and Satan, after which he ascended into heaven (cf. Col. 2: 15).

Of the two plausible interpretations, *b* and *c*, I still favor the Augustinian interpretation, *b*, that the Spirit of Christ proclaimed the impending judgment of God upon the world **through** the preaching of Noah. Thus, He made proclamation to the departed spirits of **men, not fallen angels**, who are now in hell because they refused to listen to Noah's warnings. The fact that Peter mentions Noah as a

preacher of righteousness in his second epistle (2 Pet. 2: 5) inclines me to favor this interpretation in spite of the objections mentioned above. Noah preached to men, not angels, and Peter mentions this proclamation in a little different way in *1 Peter*. Further, I don't think it is necessarily problematic that the proclamation to the spirits in prison is grammatically connected to the resurrection of Christ. A grammatical connection is not necessarily a logical connection, and Peter could just as easily have introduced the spiritual presence of Christ with Noah as a *transition* to His next point about baptism.

Further, God's patience and forbearance (v. 20), is directed toward *men, not angels*, and there is never any reference in Scripture, unless this one is considered, about God having patience toward angels. There is also the temporal clause, **when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah**, giving a temporal context to the **proclamation**. In Gen. 6: 3 the passage reads, "Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'" God will not strive forever with sinful *men, not angels*; nevertheless, He will wait 120 years before He brings judgment upon men. There is nothing in scripture indicating that God has shown patience to fallen angels.

What remains to be explained is *the analogy between the flood and Christian baptism*. According to the symbol (v. 21; *antitupos* in the Greek text from which we get the word, "antitype") Noah and his family, eight persons, were brought safely through the flood while the rest of humanity perished. While the waters of the flood resulted in *destruction* for the mass of humanity, the same waters resulted in *salvation* for the small number of God's elect. How so? Because the flood waters caused the ark to float, safely transporting Noah and his family *away from* the sinfulness of humanity which threatened to engulf them. Thus, instead of God's *minority* people being engulfed in an ocean of human corruption, God engulfed the *majority* of the human race in an ocean of water. Further, as the flood waters cleansed the earth of man's sin, baptism is a symbol of the believer's cleansing from sin (Kistemaker, p. 146-147).

Corresponding to this, baptism saves us. Peter is not implying that the *physical act* of baptism saves the believer, for he specifically denies this by saying, **not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience**. The **appeal** of v. 21 is undoubtedly repentance and faith; and the next clause, **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**, completes the thought. Sincere belief—a good conscience—in Christ's atoning death and resurrection is the instrumental means of salvation, not water baptism; for baptism is only the *external* symbol for the *internal* reality. (If only water baptism were necessary for salvation, teaching the Bible is a waste of time. We should simply purchase large water trucks with attached sprinkler systems, driving through the neighborhoods and villages of Africa baptizing them in the Triune name of God. Baptists, on the other hand, could use water cannons.

To further support this interpretation, consider the repeated reference to **a good conscience** (vv. 16 and 21) which connects the Christians of Peter's day with Noah. Noah himself had a **good conscience** toward God because he believed God and obeyed Him by building the ark, and this was an act of faith. In spite of any accusations from the skeptical, unbelieving bystanders that Noah was wasting his time and money which could have been used for better purposes, Noah continued doing what God had instructed, thus eventually putting his detractors **to shame** (v. 16). Consequently, Noah's faith was the instrumental means of saving him and his family from God's destruction but at the same time the instrumental means of condemning the world. His building of the ark was itself an evangelistic sermon. *A good conscience convinced that one's belief and actions are good and right*

in God's sight is a strong apologetic against a skeptical world (cf. 2 Pet. 3: 3-7). Good behavior will likewise put the world to shame (eventually) for disbelieving the gospel.

Analogously, as the flood separated and saved Noah's family from the sinful world in which they lived, baptism symbolically separates and saves Christians from the world around them (Kistemaker, p. 147), but this baptism operates only by faith. In addition to cleansing, baptism also symbolizes death to a sinful way of life and resurrection to a new life (Rom. 6: 3-4). In spite of the world's skepticism about a Jew who died for the world 2000 years ago, Christians are convinced that the gospel story is true and that this story has changed their lives.

From 3: 14 to 3: 17, Peter is encouraging the Christian *minority* in Asia Minor to endure suffering for the sake of righteousness. Noah doubtless endured suffering from his skeptical generation for 120 years while constructing the ark. ("Hey, fool, where are you going to float that big boat?!") He was likely the brunt of many jokes as well as accusations of insanity. But when the flood came, the ark was no laughing matter. In the same way, Christians may suffer severe persecution from unbelievers, but they should not be frightened of being swept away by skepticism and mistreatment. As Noah believed in the promises of God to deliver him through the flood, a believer's faith in the resurrection of Christ (v. 21b)—symbolized by baptism—will deliver him from the persecution of a sinful generation and will bring him safely through the trials of life to God (cf. Davids, p. 143). Christ is risen and sits at the right hand of God, possessing all authority in heaven and earth (v. 22; cf. Matt. 28: 18). Implicitly the persecuting majority will suffer His judgment.

X. Identification with the Suffering of Christ (4:1-6)

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.³ For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*;⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*. (1 Peter 4:1-6 NASB)

A. Preparation for Suffering (4: 1-2)

Peter begins chapter 4 with an exhortation based on Christ's suffering in the previous section, v. 18. (Thus, vv. 19-22 is a parenthesis or additional information concerning the believer's ultimate deliverance from suffering. The verb clause, **arm yourselves with the same purpose** has also been translated, **arm yourselves also with the same mind** (NKJ; see also Heb. 4: 12 where the same word, *ennoia* is translated "intents").

Several points should be considered. *First*, since Christ suffered in the flesh, Christians should expect suffering. Peter explicitly says that believers must "arm [themselves] with the **same** purpose [intent]." The word **arm** is a military term for *putting on the weapons of warfare* (Kistemaker, p. 156; cf. Rom. 13: 12; 2 Cor. 6: 7; 10:4; Eph. 6: 11; cited in Kistemaker; the root form of the verb in 1 Pet. 4: 1 is the same as that in 2 Cor. 6: 7 and 10: 4). Suffering, as part of our spiritual warfare, is a *normal part* of the Christian life, not something which should be surprising to us as if it were some strange event (cf. 1 Pet. 4: 12). It is not something we must actively seek, but something we will

commonly experience if we are committed to living the Christian life (Jn. 16: 33). We may not suffer personally, but we are called upon to *share* the suffering of others, believers and unbelievers (2 Cor. 1: 3-4; Gal. 6: 10). Christ did not conquer His and our enemies through conventional (ordinary) military campaigns or political maneuvering; He conquered them through suffering and death. He told Pilate that His kingdom was “not of this world”, otherwise, His disciples would be fighting (Jn. 18: 36).

In the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 18-20), it is clear that the Christ’s conquest is not completely consummated (brought to fulfillment), and that we are commissioned to continue the task not with carnal (fleshly) weapons of conventional warfare, but with the proclamation of the gospel through the power of the Spirit (Eph. 6: 10-18; 2 Cor. 10: 3-5). Since evangelism and discipleship are the methods of our warfare—not killing (the preferred method of *radical* Islam)—we can expect suffering in this age to continue as part of God’s *means* of drawing men and women to Christ. The Apostle Paul said as much about his own life (and pardon my repetition of this amazing verse).

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is **lacking** in Christ’s afflictions (Col. 1: 24).

Paul is not speaking of any deficiency in the atoning efficacy (value) of Christ’s death, but only of the remaining application of this efficacy to the salvation of the lost and the building up of the church.

Thus, as soldiers who are accustomed to strapping on their weapons for battle—an ordinary part of their duties—the Christian must prepare himself for the *ordinary* duty of suffering in the flesh for the cause of Christ, a suffering which includes resisting sin (see below). Further, while the sins listed in *vv. 3-4* consist in the sins of *co*-mission, we know from Scripture that there are also sins of *o*-mission, failure in doing the things we ought to do (Matt. 25: 31-46). Through the exhortations of *vv. 7-11*, Peter implicitly includes participation in the suffering of others.

B. The Goal of Suffering—Sanctification (4: 3-4)

Second, the reason Christians must be *willing* to suffer in the flesh is given in the next clause, **because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...** What is his meaning? He certainly does *not* mean that suffering is good *for its own sake*, as some Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, would have us believe. Heaven is a place of ultimate good, but in heaven there will be no suffering, nor will there be any need for suffering. Some scholars believe that Peter is drawing from the Pauline epistles, in this case, *Romans*. Evangelical scholarship dates the writing of Peter around 60 AD to 68 AD (due, in part, to the similarity with Paul’s writings). Paul wrote *Romans* in about 58 AD in which case Peter would have been able to familiarize himself with this epistle (also, see 2 Pet. 3: 15-16). In Rom. 6 Paul argues for the *inevitable* sanctification of the believer on the basis of justification, and in *vv. 6-8* he says,

knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; **for he who has died is freed from sin**. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

The word for “freed” (v. 7) is the word *dikaoō*, the same word Paul uses for “justify”; thus, some translators and commentators render the clause accordingly, “for he who has died is **justified** from

sin.” However, the context of the passage is clearly *sanctification*, not *justification*. In other words, Paul’s primary concern in the passage is to convince his readers that the *primary aim* of justification is to *free* the Christian from the dominion and rule of sin—in a word, *sanctification*. This has led some translators (KJV, NKJV, NASB, and NIV), as well as commentators, to translate *dikaoō* as **freed** (cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, p. 377). Thus, whoever has become united with Christ in the likeness of His death is likewise risen with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection and is no longer a slave of sin. In relation to the dominion of sin, he is no longer a slave; he is **free** (Rom. 6: 1-8). Therefore, in the phrase, **he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin**, Peter is possibly taking his cue from Paul’s letter to the *Romans*. It could be just as easily argued—depending on one’s presuppositions (assumptions)—that the Holy Spirit is giving Peter similar insight into the believer’s identification with Christ, and whether or not Peter borrowed the expression from Paul is not important. At any rate the teaching is this: “he who has suffered in the flesh [*vicariously in union with Christ, DFM*] has ceased from sin [*as a way of life, DFM*].” He is no longer under the dominion of sin. But he has not ceased sinning altogether, and Peter is not advocating the false doctrine of *perfectionism* which teaches the possibility of a sinless mortal life (so also Kistemaker, p. 157). The verb **has ceased** is *perfect tense* indicating an action which has already occurred in the *past* (in the crucifixion of Christ) but which has lasting results for the *present* and the *future* (the present and future life of the believer). Further, Kistemaker has pointed out that the verb (which is in the *middle voice*) can be translated as a passive verb and rendered, “has been released from sin.” Since the believer has completely identified himself with Christ in his suffering and death on the cross, as well as His resurrection to life, this identification has the lasting effect of *delivering him* from a life characterized by sin. The passive rendering of the verb—“has been released from sin”—indicates that the *liberation* from sin is “the work of God and not of man” (p. 157).

It should also be noted that Christ’s suffering was not limited to the suffering of the cross, but the suffering He *experienced throughout His life* as He continually and successfully *resisted* the temptation to sin. It is theologically significant that the verb *peirazō* (“*tempted*”; cf. Matt. 4: 1, the temptation of Jesus) has the same root as “trial” (*peirasmós*, James 1: 2, 12), and that translators alternately render *peirasmós* as “temptation” or “trial” (cf. NAB, KJV, NKJ, NIV). Thus, our identification with Christ consists not only in our identification with the suffering of His *death*, but the suffering of His *temptation and resistance to sin*. He resisted temptation to the point of death, and the suffering mentioned by Peter in *v. 1b* must be inclusive of *our* resistance to sin, including the catalog of sins Peter mentions in *vv. 3-5*. Furthermore, part of the suffering of Peter’s audience consisted of the *taunting and slandering* from unbelievers who did not understand why Christians refused to conform to their cultural excess: “In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they **malign you**” (*v. 4*). Thus, Christians not only suffer from being tempted, but they suffer from the misunderstanding and slander of others when they successfully resist temptation. (See below).

The statement in *v. 1b* is admittedly a very difficult one for all commentators, and the interpretation above is not satisfactory to some. Davids argues that the vocabulary in Rom. 6: 7 is too different from that in 1 Pet. 4: 1 to make any “easy equation” (p. 148).

Here we are dealing with “suffer,” not “died,” and with “ceased” or “has finished with,” not “is freed from.” *More puzzling is the combination of the aorist tense* (which often indicates a single completed act) in “suffering” with the perfect tense (which indicates a past event with a continuing present result) in “has finished with” (p. 148; emphasis mine).

David's reference to the aorist tense of **suffered** is significant in that Peter speaks of this suffering as a **completed act** (and usually the *aorist* implies a completed act in the *past*, which is why English translators usually use the past tense when translating aorist verbs). We would rather have expected a **present indicative verb** implying *continuing* action. This would have rendered the phrase, "for he who *keeps on suffering* in the flesh has ceased from sin." But the verb is aorist, not present. On the other hand, if we accept the phrase as similar to Rom. 6: 7, Peter is reminding the Christian of his **identification with Christ** whose suffering *is* a completed activity in the past. Christ does not continue to suffer. Nevertheless, when Christ suffered, the Christian suffered **with** Christ vicariously, and this **union** with Christ in His suffering has the **continuing effect** of breaking the power of sin in his life.

Furthermore, Davids' argument that **ceased from sin** is a reference to the believers' perfection *after* death is unconvincing (p. 150). In **vv. 3-5** Peter is admonishing his audience to live holy lives *now*, and the hope of perfection after death would seem insufficient exhortation and encouragement to that end. Rather, his argument resembles the same theology of Paul who invokes (puts into use) one's **union with Christ in His death and resurrection as the primary enablement for holy living** (Rom. 6: 8-14). For these reasons, I would agree with commentators who argue that **v. 1b** is a parallel to Paul's statement in Rom. 6: 7 and the identity of believers' suffering with the suffering of Christ.

The NKJ renders **v. 3** as follows: "For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries." In other words, Peter says, "Enough of this already! We have wasted enough of our life—too much, in fact—in living for the flesh!" Therefore, the Christian is **done** with his past life of living for sensual pleasures, but now has the **intention** of suffering in the flesh **in his resistance against sin** (see commentary above).

Of course the "gentiles" (a synonym for "unbelievers") didn't (and still don't) understand why Christians won't attend their wild "drinking parties" which often result in sexual immorality ("sensuality", "lusts"). After all, they think, sex, alcohol, and having fun is what life is all about. What else is there? And they often slander Christians for being such prudes (people who are overly careful about their behavior). "These Christians think they are better than everyone else." But it doesn't matter. Christians do not have to be defensive about righteous living, but the ungodly will have to give an account to God for their unrighteous behavior (**v. 5**). Of course, Christians should be humble people who never flaunt their righteousness before unbelievers. We should never demonstrate a "holier than thou" attitude but be aware of the fact that apart from God's grace, we would continue living in sin just like everyone else. God desires righteous living, not self-righteous Pharisees. At one time we were dead in our trespasses and sins and lived in the lusts of our flesh even as the rest of the world, but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2: 1-5).

C. The Vindication of Suffering (4: 5-6)

Verses 5-6 have had two major interpretations, one old and one new. Representing the old school, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine spiritualize the term, "dead". Their interpretation proceeds as follows. It is for the purpose of raising dead men to life that the gospel is preached "even to those who are dead," i.e. **spiritually** dead (**v. 6**; cf. Ezek. 37: 3). Their idolatrous and unholy life is **judged**

in the flesh so that they may be resurrected to a new life in the spirit (or, “Spirit”). If interpreted in this way, we see yet another parallel with Paul’s letter to the *Romans*. Notice the highlighted words and phrases.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He **condemned sin in the flesh**, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the **Spirit**. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, **though the body is dead** because of sin, yet the **spirit is alive** because of righteousness (Rom. 8: 3-10).

Perhaps more analogous is 1 Cor. 5: 5.

I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:5 NASB)

Thus, as Ezekiel preached to dry bones (Ezek. 37), the spiritually dead of ancient Israel, Peter says that the gospel is preached to the spiritually dead of his day. As they are judged in the flesh as men, they are made alive by the Holy Spirit.

But there are various problems with this interpretation. *First*, in *v. 5* Peter says that God judges “the living and the dead.” The phrase, “the living and the dead” became a proverb in the early Christian church (Kistemaker, p. 162), and is used by Peter elsewhere in Acts 10: 42 in which the reference is to those who are *physically* either alive or dead. Paul uses the same phrase in 2 Tim. 4: 1 and Rom. 14: 9 in the same sense. Based on these comparisons, the “dead” in *v. 5* are the physically dead. It would, therefore, be unlikely for Peter to shift his meaning from physically dead in *v. 5* to spiritually dead in *v. 6* (Davids, p. 153; so also Kistemaker, p. 164). *Second*, the verb tense of **preached** is aorist indicating a definite point in time. It is not present tense which would have suggested the *continual activity* of the gospel being preached to the spiritually dead. Rather, Peter is saying that the gospel *was preached* at a point in time in the past to those who *now* dead. (The “now” is inserted in the NIV to indicate that those to whom the gospel was preached were not dead *when they heard* the gospel, but that they are *now* dead.

Who, then, are these people to whom the gospel was preached in the past but who are now dead? They are *dead believers* because they now **live in the spirit according to the will of God**. That is, they are now in heaven living as spirits. How, then, are they **judged in the flesh as men (or “according to men”)**? Does Peter mean that their life in the flesh has been judged *by God* or that they have been judged *by others according to purely human standards of judgment*? The context of the passage favors the *second* possibility because the context suggests that believers were being slandered by unbelievers for their good behavior, even as Christ was slandered (*v. 4, and they malign you*; cf. Davids, pp. 154-155). Furthermore, even the broader context of *1 Peter* focuses on the suffering of believers and its relationship to the suffering of Christ. “In the sight of their opponents [according to men DFM] the believers received their just judgment by suffering physically” [even as Christ received just punishment, according to men, by claiming to be the Messiah] (Kistemaker, p. 165, words in brackets mine, who shares the same interpretation as Davids).

Nevertheless, the judgment of men will be proven faulty since those who were judged by men live eternally (Davids, p. 155), even as Christ was vindicated by being raised from the dead.

XI. Community in the Midst of Suffering (4: 7-11)

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint.¹⁰ As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.¹¹ Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11 NASB)

A. Community through Expectation (4: 7)

From v. 7 we get the impression that Peter expected Jesus' return at any time: **The end of all things is near**.... (cf. 2 Pet. 3: 3-13). He was not alone (James 5: 8-9; Rom. 13: 11; Heb. 10: 25; 1 Jn. 2: 18; Kistemaker, p. 166). In light of his expectation, he admonishes his audience to be reasonable and self-controlled ("serious and watchful in your prayers"; NKJ). The only proper state of mind for the Christian is one of expectation and readiness; for without it, we often get sloppy and negligent in the Christian life (Matt. 25, the parables of Jesus on readiness). Peter was particularly concerned with the impending persecution facing the early church all over the Roman Empire and was possibly concerned that severe persecution could cause the love of many to grow cold. Therefore, he proceeds to encourage them especially in their love for **one another** (mentioned three times in three verses) which included praying for one another. If anything would fortify the church during times of persecution, the sincere, mutual love of the brethren would accomplish this purpose, the very commandment Jesus urged upon the disciples on the evening of his betrayal (Jn. 13: 34, 35; 15: 12, 17). And Peter remembered.

B. Community through Forgiveness (4: 8)

One important reason for love is provided—the love of the brethren will **cover** a multitude of sins (*kalúptō*; same word used in LXX in Prov. 10: 12; cf. James 5: 20). Some sins in the church must be directly addressed and corrected; this much is certain from the instructions Jesus left to the disciples (Matt. 18: 15-20) and directed by Paul in 1 Cor. 5. Without discipline, chaos reigns and Christians fail to grow from lack of accountability. There are other sins, however, which are less serious and should be overlooked. If Christians are over-scrupulous (too careful) about correcting every conceivable evil in others, however small, there will be little time for anything else. More importantly, there will be no harmony in a church where people are zealously watching each other's mistakes and making mountains out of ant hills. It probably would be interesting to know the number of times the Lord Jesus overlooked the spiritual stupidity of the disciples compared to the number of times He actually corrected them through direct statements or parables, but I suspect that He exercised unimaginable patience.

Love is patient and kind (1 Cor. 13: 4) and does not take into account a wrong suffered (13: 5a). That is, love does not keep long accounts of grievances but is willing to keep short accounts through a forgiving spirit. In light of the fierce opposition from the world and the devil, Christians should not be fighting one another; but, sadly, petty grievances often divide people, congregations, and whole denominations. Peter recognizes this danger and urges the church to avoid unnecessary disputes.

Much of the time, it is better just to let it go. (For further discussion of this subject, see my notes in *Synoptic Gospels*, Matt. 18: 15-20, in which I point out the checks and balances of disciplinary procedure.)

C. Community through Hospitality (4: 9)

Being hospitable without complaint involves the willingness to share one's food and home. Traveling was a treacherous ordeal in the ancient east as the parable of the Good Samaritan suggests, and traveling inns were equally as dangerous as the roads which led to them. "Generally they were considered bad, the traveler being subject not only to discomfort, but also robbery and even death" (Robert C. Stone, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 280; also cited in Kistemaker, p. 168). Christians often invited traveling believers—especially traveling missionaries—into their homes for extended stays, and such hospitality was commonly promoted as a practical way of showing Christian love (Heb. 13: 2; cited in Kistemaker, p. 169). The Apostle John makes this hospitality conditional, urging believers *not* to allow heretical teachers into their homes (2 Jn. 1: 10), implicitly proving that believers were in a habit of giving shelter to traveling brethren.

Without complaint acknowledges that guests would often take undue advantage of their hosts, most of whom would be living on very limited means; but if they did, Peter urges patience and a non-complaining spirit—the opposite of "When will these people *ever* leave?!" My wife, Fran, and I can appreciate the influence of this passage upon believers in the 21st century and can testify to the hospitable spirit of so many generous Christians in many different churches and states in the US who have opened their homes to us as we were itinerating for financial support. They not only saved us hundreds of dollars in hotel bills, but they fed us and befriended us. One man in Miami, FL (whose name I have forgotten) even took us for a free cruise out into the Atlantic Ocean where we enjoyed our first (and last) snorkeling adventure. Bobbing up and down in his boat on the ocean waves made me throw up my lunch, and my snorkel kept filling up with salt water (my inexperience), but the outing was unforgettable in other ways as well.

Being hospitable would also include hospitality to Christians living in the same area. The Apostle John was not exactly tentative (hesitant) in his exhortations for believers to extend a helping hand to needy Christians.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth (1 Jn. 3: 15-18).

For the first century church, such practical and tangible expressions of hospitality were "not seen as an optional extra, but as a central part of the faith" (Davids, p. 157). Reading the NT epistles, one would be inclined to believe that all first century Christians were thoroughly contentious and ineffective. We must remember that the epistles were written to solve problems. There were, of course, many problems; but there was also success in evangelism, missions, and hospitality; otherwise, how did the rest of us become Christians? The church weathered the storms of persecution from the outside and heresy from the inside; yet, the church keeps on keeping on. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

D. Community through Spiritual Gifts (4: 10-11)

The church is presented in the Scriptures as a body with many members (1 Cor. 12). Each member, however seemingly unimportant and insignificant, is *essential* to the proper functioning of the body (1 Cor. 12: 22). Several important principles emerge from *v. 10*, and I will add at least some additional information from *1 Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, and *Romans*.

1. Each person in the church has received a gift from Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Peter does not go into as much detail as Paul, but from Paul's epistles we know that these are gifts from the Holy Spirit given to the church on the merits of Christ's atoning sacrifice as He ascended into heaven (Eph. 4: 7-8). Notice that in the *Ephesians* text, **Christ** is the one who gives the gifts (4: 8) while in *1 Corinthians* a gift is a "manifestation of the *Spirit*" (12: 4, 7). In this variation there is no contradiction since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1: 11; Rom. 8: 9). Further, Christ is the one who baptizes His church with the Holy Spirit (Mk. 1: 8; F.F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, including citation; see F.F. Bruce for a thorough explanation of Eph. 4: 7-8 and the differences with the OT text, Ps. 68: 18). According to Bruce, the picture in *Psalms* is that of

...a military leader returning to Jerusalem at the head of his followers, after routing an enemy army and taking many prisoners. The victorious procession, with the captives in its train, makes its way up to the temple mount, preceded by the sacred ark, which symbolizes the invisible presence of the God of Israel. To him [God] a sacrifice of thanksgiving will be offered when the procession reaches the temple precincts, and the tribute received by the victor from the vanquished foe will be dedicated to him. This tribute is referred to as "gifts" which the victor has received "among men"...(Bruce, p. 341; word in brackets mine).

The *minor* deviation (change) in the NT text in *Ephesians* is that the second person singular of the original ("you", referring to Yahweh or his anointed king) is changed to the *third* person singular ("he", referring to Christ). The *major* deviation is the change in the verb from "**received**" (Ps. 68: 18) to "**gave**" (Eph. 4: 8), a deviation which is not supported by the Hebrew text or the Greek Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). Rather, the translation is from the Targum (Aramaic translation of parts of the Hebrew OT) (Bruce, pp. 342-343). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul uses the Aramaic translation and applies it to Christ. Through His victory on the cross, Christ receives a host of captives—namely, believers—whom He in turn gives away to the church as gifts. Thus, the receiving of gifts is with a view to giving them away (Hendriksen, p. 191). It is clear from the context of Eph. 4: 11-12 that the gifts were **people who were endowed with abilities given them by the Spirit**. This is somewhat different from 1 Cor. 12 and Rom. 12. In *Ephesians*, Paul says that Christ gave the church gifts—namely, people—who could equip other believers for their work of ministry. These gifts were apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers (the combined gift of pastor-teacher). The ordering of the gifts is significant since the apostles and prophets (NT prophets) formed the foundation of the church (Eph. 2: 20; William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 142).

2. Each spiritual gift is used in serving one another.

All of these people-gifts are for the purpose of equipping the saints for their work of service and the resultant edification (building up) of the body of Christ (Eph. 4: 12). Seen together, **all** of the gifts of the Spirit must be used **in serving one another** (*1 Pet. 4: 10*) not simply the equipping gifts. The apostolic and prophetic gifts were given to the church temporarily to build a foundation upon which other teaching could be laid (1 Cor. 3: 10). The gift of pastor-teacher is a permanent gift for the

purpose of continuing instruction in Christian doctrine and application (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). Thus, as God's people are trained in Christian doctrine and application, they will be fully prepared to carry on the particular work to which God has called *them*. Everything we do for the Lord should be done wisely and intelligently as we are well-informed by the Word (cf. Acts 6, in which men filled with the Spirit were chosen to administer the feeding of widows).

By exercising our spiritual gifts, we are serving one another in some way or another. The only two spiritual gifts listed in *1 Peter* are **speaking** and **servicing**. Speaking gifts would include all the *equipping gifts* of Eph. 4: 11 as well as exhortation and leading (Rom. 12: 8), special wisdom and knowledge (1 Cor. 12: 8), prophecy (which may be different from the official gift of prophecy), distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12: 10; Rom. 12: 6). Some of the speaking gifts, I believe, were only temporary until the church received the completed canon of Scripture—tongues and the official gift of prophecy, for example. The gift of prophecy, on the other hand, *might* include the special ability for discerning and recognizing corporate sin in the church—as, for example, the prophets of the OT, most of whom made few predictions about the future but preached against the sins of Israel and Judah. If so, such a prophetic gift has relevant application today when someone in the church may see errors that no one else sees. As always, prophetic utterances must be tested by others. Alternately, this gift could be the **word of wisdom** (1 Cor. 12: 8) or **exhortation** (Rom. 12: 8).

Very few, if any, church sessions in my denomination would recognize the continuation of the prophetic gift, even as I don't in the normal way the gift is interpreted. I do not believe in continuing revelation which must imply the continuing canon of Scripture. Yet, the Bible speaks to us prophetically, and I believe that there are many discerning members in the church who are looking at the way we "do church" and saying to themselves, "Stop! Where do we find all this stuff in the Bible?"—things like staff-run churches which make only limited use of other members of the church who are gifted in teaching, counseling, management; like pastors who do not belong to the local church but to the local presbytery; like regular monthly presbytery meetings; like thirty minute sermons which are supposed to adequately equip God's people to do the work of ministry. There are many traditions which the church must begin to question; otherwise, in 100 years it will become irrelevant to society which is constantly changing. Some things do not change. The gospel does not change. God's moral requirements do not change. Yet, the way we apply the gospel and the morality of the Bible must be appropriate to the existing culture without compromising its essential truth.

Servicing would include virtually every other gift in the church including the ability to perform miracles and heal the sick, special faith in believing and appropriating God's promises (1 Cor. 12: 9-10), special generosity in giving and in showing mercy (Rom. 12: 8). It would go beyond the purpose of this commentary to do a detailed exegesis of these gifts or to attempt to determine which ones, if not all of them, are still relevant for the church today. Based upon my own study, I believe the miraculous gifts have ceased, but I will not disfellowship my brothers who believe otherwise. This does not imply that miracles never occur, but that no one is now given the gift of performing miracles.

It should be pointed out that *none* of the lists alone or together are *exhaustive* (my opinion). That is, I believe there are many other spiritual gifts which are *not mentioned* in any of the lists. For this reason, the gift of *servicing* is included in 1 Pet. 4: 10 and Rom. 12: 7, a gift which "keeps on giving" since it covers almost *everything* the Christian does for others—for example, the gifts of giving and

showing mercy. In fact, both in Rom. 12: 7 and 1 Pet. 4: 11 the teaching (speaking) and serving gifts are lumped together as a *general heading for all the other gifts*. Virtually every gift in the church is a gift of teaching or serving, and if we wished to summarize all the gifts with one word, “serving” would cover them all.

3. One’s particular gift of or gifts does not belong to him; it belongs to God and to the church.

Thus, by using our gifts well, we become **good stewards of the manifold grace of God**. The word **steward** (*oikonomos*) signifies a household manager who administers his master’s goods but *does not own* them. God has given gifts to His people for the express purpose of using them for the good of others which implies that we are not permitted to exploit them for our own selfish purposes or to make a reputation for ourselves. For this reason, Paul gives the Corinthians—who apparently were flaunting or exploiting their gifts—“a more excellent way”, the way of love and selflessness in the use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12: 31; 1 Cor. 13). The church, therefore, is God’s household under management.

4. Spiritual gifts are God’s means of administrating the “many-colored” expressions of His grace.

The term, **manifold** literally means “many-colored”. God’s grace is bestowed (Rom. 12: 6) upon the church in many diverse and “multi-colored” ways, even as sunlight is divided by rain into diverse colors of the spectrum. As we have seen, the spiritual gifts are diverse, and the people who administer these gifts are also diverse—so diverse in fact that each person will exercise his spiritual gift in a unique way according to his intellect, personality, and cultural and educational background. Thus, there are *as many* manifestations of one spiritual gift as there are people who have been given this gift! Take preaching, for example. No two preachers are alike in their delivery, nor will they preach the same sermon on the same passage. No two Christians will exhort or show mercy in the same way. Such manifestations of the Spirit are, therefore, inexhaustible. No Christian is a carbon-copy of any other Christian, and this is why all of us are needed in the church to express the particular gift or gifts we have been given for the common good. When some Christians refuse to exercise their gifts whether through ignorance of the gift, laziness, or the mistaken assumption that their gift doesn’t matter, there is a gap or deficit in the whole ministry of the body of Christ. This is the clear teaching of 1 Cor. 12: 14-29. Even the most seemingly insignificant people in the church are necessary for the common good.

On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;²³ and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked,²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:22-26 NASB)

But let’s face it. This concept of mutual dependency in the church is only a theory to most of us. Some people are considered important and others are expendable. We would never admit this openly, but in practice, this is our flawed ecclesiology, our doctrine of the church in which only a minority of people are ministering to one another. Thankfully, people will often exercise their spiritual gifts

without even consciously knowing what those gifts are; but it is better that members, especially elders, help others discover what their gifts are, thus enabling them to use their gifts more efficiently and purposefully. This seems to be what Paul is doing in 1 Cor. 12 to prevent some from thinking too highly of their gift, or themselves, and to prevent others from thinking too lowly of their gift, and themselves. To be useful in the church, we must feel a sense of responsibility to others to fulfill our mission in the church.

Far too often, the speaking gifts become the focus of attention leaving people wondering whether they have a gift at all or even if it matters whether they have a gift. But if the rest of the body of Christ is not using their spiritual gifts to serve one another, as well as serving people outside the church (Gal. 6: 10), it makes little difference how well the elders are teaching or preaching (if even we should make a distinction between the two things). The church may be *well*-informed, but not *trans*-formed by the truth. Churches should be training centers for ongoing *ministry*, not auditoriums or “preaching centers” for *information*, where the saints come to hear the preacher but with little vision for using what they have learned to proclaim the kingdom of God in word and deed in their homes and jobs.

As preaching centers or lecture halls, churches inadvertently (without intent) become cult centers for favorite preachers, much like the Corinthian church which had divided itself into Apollosites, Paulites, Cephasites, and Christians (1 Cor. 1: 12). This kind of thing happens today to some extent, but it is not how it normally plays out. Normally, the pastor of a church is “called” to another church (usually a bigger one), and the church quickly assembles a “pulpit committee” to “call” another pastor—usually one who is from another city. I have known of no such case, in my own denomination, in which an existing elder or elders were even considered as permanent replacements for the vacating pastor. Indeed, they are not considered “teaching elders” (a non-biblical term) because they have not gone to seminary. As the years go by, perhaps even months—the average stay of a pastor in the US is two years—the congregation either affirms the cult pastor or rejects him as too disinteresting or non-productive if the church is not growing. If he senses that he is on the way out, he looks for another church before the hammer comes down. Generally little help is given the pastor to improve his preaching or ministry. After all, he’s a professional—that is, until it comes to the question of managing the household of God, in which case other members consider themselves much more competent.

My question is: When do we stop this cultic nonsense and work together with our respective gifts for the edification of the church? When do we pull together with the pastors and elders—all sinful people like ourselves—to make disciples? When do we recognize that all the gifts are necessary for our personal sanctification? (Eph. 4: 12-13). Unless there is a contradiction between 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4, the prepositional clauses, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12 NASB) are not limited to the equipping gifts of pastors and teachers. The church becomes unified and mature (v. 13) not simply by what preachers and teachers do, but by what *everyone* does. This interpretation is fortified by vv. 14-16.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:14-16 NASB)

The church grows up spiritually by what “every joint supplies”, not simply by what “the pastor” supplies. As important as preaching and teaching is, it will not supply everything we need to grow into “a mature man” and “to the unity of the faith”.

What we find in Acts in Paul’s missionary journeys and church planting is not what we see today in the western church or in developing countries which imitate the western church. What we see in Acts is *indigenous leadership* arising from the rank and file of the local church. There were no John MacArthur’s, John Piper’s, or Tim Keller’s; no “mighty men” of any denomination, only common, ordinary elders chosen among the congregation who had the requisite qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and elsewhere. There were no presbytery exams or licensing, only the multiple moral qualifications summed up in “beyond reproach” and the one intellectual qualification, “able to teach”. Those chosen had a reputation for service with no academic degree, not a seminary degree with no reputation for service. When an elder moved on or died, the church continued without disruption, allowing other elders to preach the word. There is no record of any celebrity search for pastors.

The elders [plural noun] who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those [plural pronoun] who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17 NASB)

Do we see the distinction between “ruling” and “teaching” elders in this verse? What I see are *ruling* elders who also have been given the gift and responsibility of teaching and preaching—not just one of them or two, but however many had the gift, irrespective of the size of the church. If one wishes to argue that Acts and the NT epistles are not necessarily normative (the standard) for the practice of the modern church, I would ask, then what *is* normative? Is *The Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church of America normative? Why? Who says? Could it be that the church has become powerless and irrelevant in modern society across the globe because of our infatuation with personalities and buildings? The two seem to be interconnected, since celebrity preachers “need” large auditoriums for increasing *crowds*. But perhaps they are simply “crowds” after all, not true disciples who long to be fed for the purpose of ministering to others, like the “crowds” who followed Jesus around without ever submitting to his teaching.

5. One must exercise his spiritual gifts enthusiastically.

As general categories for all the gifts of the Spirit, **speaking** and **servicing** are mentioned once again in **1 Pet. 4: 11**. Considering the fact that all gifts are divinely given, they must be used with **great enthusiasm** for the glory of God. The one who preaches or teaches must be self-aware that he is handling the very words of God in the Holy Scriptures, **the utterances of God**. God’s word is God-breathed (*theopneustos*); therefore, whenever we take up a text to preach or teach, we must remind ourselves that this is not just any book, it is God’s book revealing the way to eternal life through His son, Jesus Christ. Is there anything more important than knowing God and spending eternity with Him? Is any other subject on earth more urgently needed by mankind: Physics? Medicine? Political Science? Economics? All of these things are important because they are created by God, but my soul will not be destroyed if I do not have a useful, working knowledge of physics, medicine, or economics. I can live a sickly life (through lack of medical care) or die a poor man (through poor money management) and still live eternally with God. But the utterances of God in the Bible are **not optional extras** which men and women can do without. Their lives and eternal destinies hang in the balance between heaven and hell on the basis of a practical, useful understanding of the word of God.

At the very least, they must understand the gospel, but to live a productive and happy life (“blessed”)

they must know the Bible well enough to apply it to complex situations and circumstances, avoiding the pitfalls of fools (Prov. 1: 20-33). Having this in mind, we must be urgent in our preaching and teaching. Further, we must be faithful to the text of Scripture. If we are to speak the utterances of God, rather than our own, we must resist the temptation of spending too much of our time telling stories or talking about ourselves. What the Bible says is more important than what *we* say; therefore we should spend most of our time trying to explain the Scriptures and their applications. Qualification is needed here. Good stories which illustrate truth can be used powerfully in driving the scriptures “home” to the heart. Just think of the parables of Jesus and OT narratives. Most of the Bible is in narrative form, not propositional truth found in the Law. For this reason, we should be careful to use *good* stories which are applicable to the scriptures we are preaching, not simply stories which entertain but do not convey truth to be applied.

Those who serve must do so **by the strength which God supplies**; or in other words, with *all* the strength God gives them without holding back. Paul’s equivalent exhortation is, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10: 31). They must not think that their own strength is sufficient for the task, for there will be too many disappointments and difficulties in serving to keep going if we fail to depend upon the strength which God alone can supply. The people we seek to help will frustrate us through inattention and carelessness. Many will not appreciate our help, like the nine lepers who did not give thanks to God for Jesus’ healing (Lk. 17: 17). Those we attempt to teach may not be interested in studying the Bible, or they may not show up when teaching is available. Ministry is never “down-hill” and easy; it is always “up-hill” and difficult. There are many in our day claiming to have phenomenal success in winning people to Christ, and some write newsletters about their success. They claim that hundreds come to their preaching and make decisions. But are these same converts filling the churches on a weekly basis, and are they living godly lives in response to the gospel? Close examination of many, if not most, of these new “converts” will reveal little understanding of the truth and even less practice. But we are called to make “disciples”, not shallow “converts” to the gospel, “teaching them to obey” all that Jesus commanded His first disciples. If we fail to work with the strength which only God can give us, we will surely become disillusioned and give up.

6. The goal of spiritual gifts is the glory of God.

The goal of our spiritual gifts—whether preaching, helping, showing mercy, evangelizing, or keeping the church books organized—is that God, not ourselves, would be glorified through His son, Jesus Christ. We might have expected Peter to say that God would be glorified through His *church*, but the two expressions are essentially the same. To the extent that the church mirrors the image of Christ in His earthly, incarnational ministry of preaching, healing, feeding the poor, and delivering men and women from Satan’s power, to that same extent God is glorified in Christ whose body is the church in union with Christ (*v. 11b*). Further, the glory which belongs to God alone is shared with Christ Jesus **to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever**. It is a glory which Christ, the son of God, “very God of very God”, shared with the Father even before the world was made (Jn. 17: 5).

XII. Suffering Revisited (4: 12-19)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the

name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶ but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. ¹⁷ For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? ¹⁹ Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. (1 Peter 4:12-19 NASB)

A. God's normal means of testing His people (4: 12)

The predominant theme in *1 Peter* is suffering, and he now revisits the subject. Considering that Peter was an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ (**5: 1**), this should not surprise the reader. Likewise, Peter believes that suffering also should not come as a surprise for these 1st century believers (**v. 12**). Of course, the reason Peter tells them persecution should not be a surprise was that it *was, indeed*, a surprise! Unlike the Jewish nation who had for centuries endured persecution from majority cultures in many nations of the Diaspora (the dispersion of the Jews after the exile), persecution was a new thing for these gentiles in Asia Minor.

Before their conversion they were perfectly at home in their city. And instead of rebelling against God they had accepted the gospel message. But now they were experiencing cultural isolation and personal hostility, not what they might have expected as the blessing of God. Well might they have wondered if something had not gone wrong. Thus our author reassures them: persecution is not something “strange” or foreign to their existence as Christians. What is happening is right in line with Christ’s predictions....(Davids, p. 164).

The **fiery ordeal** is not a reference to the burning of Rome by Caesar Nero but the ordinary trials and tests which Christians in Asia Minor were experiencing—namely, various forms of ostracism, mistreatment, slander, and other persecution from the majority population of unbelievers. It is a metaphor for the refiner’s fire in purifying metal by separating the impurities (Davids, p. 165, citing Prov. 27: 21). Why should Christians *expect* such an ordeal? From Peter’s point of view, the Lord Jesus Himself in the upper room discourse had warned His disciples that if the world hated Him, they would hate His disciples also, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*” (Jn. 15: 18; cf. 15: 24, 25).

But what does it mean that the world will hate us? Surely all of us have friends who are not believers, but we do not feel any hatred from them. But Jesus was speaking in general terms, not necessarily in particulars. Some unbelievers may have great respect for us personally and admire us for our ethical principles of honesty and integrity; but as a general rule, the world of sinners has no love for Christ or His followers. In fact, if we were to press personal friends with the claims of the gospel challenging their self-righteousness or their sinful life-styles, their positive disposition toward us most likely would be dramatically altered. All of a sudden, they would feel that their philosophy of life (their belief system upon which they have based their whole lives) is being called into question as a lie. Furthermore, the logical conclusion to their unbelief is that they are bound for condemnation and hell, and no one enjoys being told that he is going to hell!

Yet, if we are concerned for their spiritual welfare—and often we aren’t—eventually we must share this information with them, the bad news and the good news, which denies everything they have previously believed about life and death. Would they still love you? They may still respect you, but don’t be too surprised if they begin avoiding you and spending more time with people who believe

the same way they do. Often Christians are well-liked people only because they make only feeble attempts—if any attempt at all—to win their friends and neighbors to Christ. They are unwilling to endure the persecution of being called self-righteous. It is much easier just to be friendly and nice (and of course, politeness is a virtue), but remember that one day your unbelieving friend will come face to face with a holy God who will judge him either on the basis of Christ’s atoning sacrifice or by his own deficient merits. Were he able then to talk with you, he may say, “I wish you had told me the truth.”

Suffering is normal for God’s people not because God cannot *prevent it*, but specifically because He providentially *orders it* for proving or testing us. In fact, God tailors our suffering like a suit of clothes specifically ordered for each one of us individually to accomplish His will in perfecting us for His glory. The word for **testing** (*peirasmos*) is the same as that for “trials” in James 1: 2, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.” In James the trials of one’s faith produces “endurance” which results in being “perfect”, “complete”, or “mature” (v. 3; *teleioi*; cf. Matt. 5: 48; 1 Cor. 14: 20; Phil. 3: 15). Without testing, the Christian remains an immature child who is unable to apply his faith to difficult circumstances. In the natural world, people do not completely grow up until they must leave the protective environment of their parents and face the challenges of the real world. So it is in the spiritual world. We don’t grow up until our faith is challenged, and then our faith is determined to be the real thing or a counterfeit (Matt. 13: 1-9; 18-23). Furthermore, we never get to the point in this life when there is no need for the perfecting or improving of our faith (Eph. 4: 13). The “mature man” in this verse is the “complete” or “perfect” man in Christ, *teleios*. The verb “attain” is subjunctive aorist, a verb indicating something potential but not actual—that is, something which will come to pass but has not already come to pass. We are not yet complete, and to complete us, God must subject us to testing. It’s really no different from training for other tasks or skills. The general does not send soldiers to the front lines straight off the plane. They must first go through boot camp and be taught how to function as soldiers under fire. When the bullets come raining down on them, their training takes over, and they know how to react. On an everyday level, the new employee does not take over the store on the first day. He must be tested to make sure he knows what he’s doing. The big difference is that our training is good for eternity, not for some temporal task which will soon be over; for we are becoming mature disciples to cultivate the renewed earth for the glory of God.

B. An Occasion for Rejoicing (4: 13-14)

But when we do suffer for Christ’s sake, it is an occasion for rejoicing both in the here and now (**keep on rejoicing**; present imperative) and at the consummation when Christ is fully revealed (**may rejoice**; subjunctive). **To the degree** indicates that our rejoicing should be in proportion to our suffering for the name of Christ. The more we suffer for Him, the more we should rejoice in the privilege of suffering which will be rewarded on the last day. The privilege of suffering for Christ’s sake is also recognized by Paul who tells the Philippians, “For to you it has been **granted** for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake” (Phil. 1: 29; *charizomai*, to give as a favor or a gift). Thus, God is giving believers the **gift of suffering for his name** (Acts 5: 41). “Some gift!” we may be tempted to say, but this would be a very unholy response. God never forgets our suffering, and at the revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of this age, He will reward our suffering proportionately. We have already seen from **1 Pet. 2: 19-20** that bearing up under unjust treatment is **grace** to us, but there will be no credit to the one who suffers for his own unrighteousness.

In putting suffering, rejoicing, and blessing into the same context (*vv. 13-14*), Peter reminds us of the Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 10-12). Furthermore, the clause, **because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you** (*v. 14*) is reminiscent of the enablement of the prophets during the OT who were persecuted by their countrymen yet filled with the Spirit, as well as Jesus' promise of enablement to His disciples when commissioned for their first missionary expedition, "But when they hand you over [to kings and governors, *v. 18*], do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say" (Matt. 10: 19). Whoever is willing to suffer for His sake will not be alone in his suffering, but God's Spirit will strengthen him to endure the suffering, present his testimony, and rejoice in the "fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3: 10).

C. Suffering for Righteousness versus Unrighteousness (4: 15-19)

There is no shame (*v. 16*) in suffering for righteousness as there is in suffering for unrighteousness—as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or troublesome meddler (*v. 15*). No Christian should have to suffer for such behavior which is not fitting for anyone who claims to know Christ and be freed from a life of sin. Such behavior *slanders* the good name of Christ. The one who suffers as a Christian, on the other hand, *glorifies* the name of Christ because He acknowledges God as one who is weighty and worthy of honor—as one who is *worthy of our suffering*. If Christ had not lived a perfect life, if He were not the divine Savior, if He had not died on the cross for our redemption; in short, if He were not all He claimed to be and demonstrated Himself to be, He would not be worthy of our suffering. As it is, He is all He claimed to be and is *more than worthy* of anything we render to Him, even suffering unto death. And as Christians suffer in innocence, they imitate their Lord who Himself suffered in innocence. Suffering in innocence for Christ's sake—as opposed to guilty suffering—testifies to the truthfulness of the gospel and the claims of Christ, glorifying His name.

Judgment for sin begins in the church (*v. 17*) because of greater responsibility and greater knowledge of the will of God. This comment refers back to *v. 15* and is an additional warning to believers to live out the Christian life in obedience, not in disobedience, as if they would never be held responsible for their sins. Even believers must be judged at the last day for every deed they have done in the body both good and bad (2 Cor. 5: 10; Rom. 14: 10; 2: 5-16), and Peter's warning confirms his agreement with the Pauline doctrine of a tribunal (law court) for Christians at the end of the age. The atoning work of Christ frees us from the guilt of sin and ultimate condemnation of hell, but it *does not cancel our day at court* when we will have to give an account for what we have done on earth during our lifetime (see also Matt. 25: 31-46). Commenting on Rom. 14: 10, John Murray remarks,

Reluctance to entertain the reality of this universal and all-inclusive judgment springs from preoccupation with what is conceived to be the comfort and joy of believers at the coming of Christ rather than with the interests and demands of God's glory. The latter should always be paramount [most important] in the outlook of the believer. And it should not be forgotten that, although God will bring evil as well as good into judgment, there will be no abatement of the believer's joy, because it is in the perspective of this full disclosure that the vindication of God's glory in his salvation will be fully manifest. It is only in the light of this manifestation that the believer's joy could be complete. Judgment involves severity and by this consideration the believer should always be actuated in the life of faith (*Romans*, vol. 2, p. 185; words in brackets mine).

But in what sense does judgment **begin** with the household of God, the church? In the immediate context, Peter reveals his belief in the imminent (immediate) return of Christ, **The end of all things is**

near... (4: 7). The end of all things included the final judgment on both believers and unbelievers, and it appears that in Peter's reckoning the chronological order of judgment would be believers *first* and unbelievers *second*. It should be noted that this is exactly the same order found in Matt. 25: 31-46 and Rom. 2: 5-8.

While being ashamed for our sins and heart-broken for forfeited opportunities in serving the Lord, the believer will nevertheless rejoice that God's glory is vindicated (see Murray's quote above) and that he is ultimately acquitted. Furthermore, he will be rewarded for the good that he has done. But what will be the outcome of judgment for the unbeliever, the one who **does not obey the gospel of God?** Peter does not answer this question, but leaves the dreadful prospect to the imagination of the reader. If the Christian rightly dreads the prospect of giving an account to God for misplaced priorities, sins of commission and omission, the prospect for the unbeliever is scarcely imaginable. *Revelation* gives us just a faint hint of the horrific events surrounding the future judgment.

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6: 15-17)

Only with great **difficulty** is a righteous man saved (v. 18), for it took the supernatural grace and power of God in sending His son in the flesh to humble Himself to the point of dying on a cross. Compared to the divine energy expended at the cross when God the Father momentarily rejected Christ on our behalf and when Christ died for our sins, creating the world was relatively easy since it involved no separation between Father and Son. Truly, it is with **great** difficulty that any of us are saved, and only a sovereign, Triune God could have done it. But if so great a salvation is rejected, how shall the sinner escape (Heb. 2: 3)? There is nothing more that **can** be done than has already **been** done. No other option is available, and there is nothing left but a terrible day of reckoning.

The entire passage must be interpreted in light of the mistreatment which Peter's audience is presently enduring at the hands of the unbelieving majority. Under the constant threat of persecution, they would be tempted to conform to substandard, cultural norms and, thereby, get some measure of relief from hostility (cf. Heb. 10: 32-39, where the same temptation is being examined). But reckoning with their accountability to God at the judgment, and with God's judgment for unbelief and the persecution of His people, Christians must put themselves in God's hands by doing what **is right** (v. 19). Regardless of the **temporal** judgment from unbelievers manifested in their persecution, the final, **eternal** judgment of Christ should be the determining factor for their behavior. No prediction can be made how their behavior will be interpreted or treated, and they must not base their actions on any practical calculation of what kind of response they will receive. Rather, they must do the right thing (v. 19b) regardless of the response, thus entrusting themselves to God who judges righteously. Thus, Peter implicitly returns to the example of Christ, **who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously** (1 Pet. 2: 23). We are reminded of the final words of Christ on the cross, "Father, into **your** hands I commit my spirit" (Lk. 23: 46). Into God's hands is where we must leave ourselves and our lives. Pleasing Him is the only ultimate good.

XIII. Final Instructions (5: 1-12)

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**.⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.¹¹ To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.¹² Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! (1 Peter 5:1-12 NASB)

Therefore connects his closing remarks not simply to the previous instructions of **4: 12-19**, but to the *entire contents* of the letter. He first addresses the **elders** of the church, the leaders who must provide spiritual oversight, then the **younger men**, then the whole congregation, **all of you**.

A. Elders, shepherd the flock of God among you... (5: 1-4)

It is clear from the instructions that Peter is addressing the spiritual leaders of the congregation, not simply the older men (the word for older men and “elder” is the same [*presbuteros*], and the context must determine how the word being used). These are the men who must **shepherd the flock and exercise oversight**. The verb **shepherd** is *poimainō*, the same verb Paul uses in Acts 20: 28.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28 NASB)

The metaphor is doubtlessly taken from our Lord's own description of Himself as a shepherd of His flock (Jn. 10: 1-18) who protects the life of His sheep from thieves and wolves (vv. 10-12), lays down His life for His sheep (vv. 11, 15), and knows His sheep (v. 14).

Furthermore, Jesus' final instructions directed personally to Peter were **Tend my lambs** (Jn. 21: 15); **Shepherd My sheep** (21: 16); and **Tend My sheep** (21: 17)—*three* times for emphasis. The first and last commands, **Tend** or **Feed** (*boskō*) pertains to the activity of shepherds grazing their sheep, while the second command **Shepherd** (*poimainō*) pertains to the protective activity of the shepherd in defending His sheep from harm (*BibleWorks*). Adding intensity to the command was Jesus' haunting question—asked three times—against the background of Peter's three-fold denial, **Simon, son of John, do you love Me?** Considered along with Jesus' statement to all the disciples, **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments** (Jn. 14: 15, including the commandment to tend and shepherd the sheep) became for Peter one of the hallmarks (a mark of genuineness) of a Christian elder. **If an elder loves Christ, he will tend His sheep**, for in the final analysis they are **His** sheep, not the **elder's** sheep. Yet, the sheep are committed to the elder's care or stewardship for safe-keeping and feeding. Christ's metaphor left an indelible (non-removable) impression upon Peter's mind for the spiritual oversight of God's people, and it is understandable that he would employ it here for his fellow-elders.

Peter's denial of Christ and the work of grace which accompanied it humbled Peter. Once confident of his own faith-*fulness* in contrast to the other disciples' possible faith-*lessness* (Matt. 26: 33), he now describes himself as a **fellow elder** (v. 1) among the other elders in Asia Minor. And such he was, for although given many other gifts, including the gift of apostleship, the *practical work* of all the apostles and elders was the *care of the church defined as the "body of Christ" or "God's household"* (v. 17)—*not as an institution, presbytery, or general assembly*. As an apostle, Peter must exercise leadership and authority over other elders and apostolic representatives (e.g. Paul's oversight over Timothy and Titus). Indeed, his apostolic authority over the other elders in Asia Minor is assumed in this very letter. Yet, following the example of his Lord, he never loses sight of the *basic responsibility* of anyone given the task of Christian leadership. It is not Peter's authority, status, or office as an apostle which is uppermost in his mind, but the care of a "good shepherd" who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Moreover, this same task dominated the mind of the Apostle Paul in his last words to the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20: 28) and to Timothy (2 Tim. 4: 1-2) in spite of the necessity to defend his apostleship when the need required it (Gal. 2; 2 Cor. 12).

There is no way to estimate the number of churches Peter addressed in this epistle *nor the number of elders residing in each local church*, nor is there any honest way of proving any particular form of church government from this text or any other text. Each church in Asia Minor (there were no sanctuaries) probably consisted of several congregations, each having one or more (probably more) elders exercising spiritual oversight; but as far as Peter was concerned, they were all *one church*. The most important consideration was not the particular form of church government or the number of elders in each house church—often the misguided emphasis of ecclesiology. Rather, we should concentrate on the nature, substance, and mission of the church, not its organization. Small house churches probably didn't need but one elder, but this elder also had the combined resources of other elders shepherding different house churches within the same city. Moreover, elders may have rotated among the different house churches, providing the congregation a diverse ministry.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, (Titus 1:5 NASB)

It is clear (to me at least) that the singular church in Crete consisted of several congregations scattered in different cities throughout the island. This was probably true of other churches which may have been scattered throughout big cities like Rome or Syrian Antioch. There is no way to determine whether multiple elders were appointed in every city or whether one elder was appointed to every city, thus making up a plurality of elders on the whole island. By good and necessary inference from Scripture, I am in favor of the theory that at least two were sent to each city congregation. In spite of the modern trend toward senior pastors who are "a tad more equal" (please excuse my sarcasm) than ruling elders or "associate" pastors (cf. Lk. 10: 1; Eccles. 4: 9-10; Acts 13: 2-3; 15: 39-40), there is no evidence for an elder who had more authority than others. If one wishes to argue the Episcopal system from Paul's instructions to Titus (Tit. 1: 5), then one could counter-argue that we have no personal representatives of the apostles living today—that is, unless one wishes to go all the way to Roman Catholicism.

The elder was not a law unto himself (1 Tim. 5: 19-20); thus, there was likely a plurality of elders in every congregation for accountability. However, a plurality of elders in each congregation of the singular church (in Ephesus, Crete, Rome, etc.) cannot be proven unequivocally (without any doubt).

The most important question is this: Are the elders actually *doing* the work of shepherding? If they are not, then it matters little how many there are. By examining the metaphor of shepherding or pasture-grazing a flock, it is clear that *all* the elders were responsible for this shepherding task, not simply those who are now commonly called “teaching elders” or “pastors.” Although the distinction between “ruling” and “teaching” elders is now written into the books of “church order”, it is a distinction which receives no emphasis in scripture.

The **elders who rule well** are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially **those who work hard at preaching and teaching**.¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18 NASB)

The **elders who rule well** is the antecedent of the pronoun **those**. Those elders who worked hard in the ministry of the word were elders who also **rule**, i.e. ruling elders. But to be able to preach regularly from the pulpits of my denomination, one must be licensed by the presbytery. It is an accepted convention within my denomination, but it has no inarguable foundation in Scripture. So why does my denomination hold it so dearly? Ostensibly, to prevent heresy being spread from the pulpits of our denomination. But if the Reformation of the 16th century proved anything, it proved that the primary deterrent to denominational heresy is not licensure, but an informed membership who can spot heresy when it hears it. “The Bible in the hands of every Christian” was the unofficial motto of the Reformation, but unless God’s people are well-informed from the Scriptures, they will yield the floor to anything that comes in seminary dress—i.e. anyone coming to them with an academic degree. Addressing the issue of church government, Frame notes:

I am, as I stated earlier, a Presbyterian, because I believe in a body of congregations connected to one another by a plurality of elected representative officers. I believe this because (a) I find in the New Testament some indication that the Christians followed in general the organization of the synagogues from which they came, because (b) it appears that bodies larger than local house churches functioned as "churches," and because (c) the New Testament always refers to church rulers ("the bishops," "the elders") in the plural. Pragmatically, the Presbyterian form seems to me to allow the best combination of mutual accountability with local control and freedom, a system which forms the pattern, e.g., for the remarkably successful structure of the U. S. civil government.

I would hope that the one, true church will one day, by God's grace, achieve reunion and adopt the Presbyterian form of government as its pattern for reorganization. However, the arguments for Presbyterianism summarized above are certainly not water tight; certainly they don't have the same force as those for the deity of Christ or salvation by grace. After all, the New Testament never commands us to follow the "synagogue pattern" alluded to in (a). And although the evidence for city-churches (presbyteries) is strong in the New Testament, it is harder to establish the existence of courts higher than those, except for that which included the apostolic band itself (Acts 15) and which had only one meeting that we know of; so (b) may not lead us to a full-blown Presbyterian structure. And although the New Testament speaks of bishops and elders in the plural (c), this fact does not quite prove that all churches were normatively required to have a plurality of elders. Can we be sure that there was never any church in which only one man was qualified for the eldership? Can we be sure that there were no distinctions of gifts, wisdom and responsibilities among the elders such that one could become *primus inter pares* [first among equals, DFM]?

So there is some uncertainty about the original form of government in the New Testament. If it were important to God that the church be governed in one and only one way, I have no doubt that he would have made it more clear. Therefore, I am inclined to take the issue of church government a bit less seriously than many people do. I think that God regards the structure and method of church government to

be less important than the reality of Jesus' own government of the church as its supreme priest-king. The relative indifference of the New Testament to matters of human government would seem to be an invitation to us to take the reality of Jesus' own government more seriously. Related to this, another reason, perhaps, for the uncertainty about governmental structure is that this structure is less important than the spiritual qualities of the leaders and the people. When those spiritual qualities are lacking, the best form of government (the Presbyterian, of course) will be a curse upon God's people. When they are present, even inadequate forms of government will work well....

I suspect that if God ever permits the one, true church to reunite under a common government, **he will at the same time bring about a great increase in our love and trust for one another**; how else could reunion even be conceivable? And when that happens, even though I dearly hope that the church will be Presbyterian, it won't bother me terribly if my dear brothers choose another system to govern God's people. I trust that this attitude of mine is not motivated by theological indifference, but by a desire to respect the emphasis, as well as the specific teaching, of the Word of God, and to promote the unity of the church which the Word of God requires more clearly than it requires any particular governmental structure. (Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, emphasis mine).

The word for **rule, direct, or lead** (*proistēmi*) is used five times in the context of church leadership (1 Tim. 3: 4, 12; 5: 17; Rom. 12: 8; and 1 Thess. 5: 12) and twice in the general context of “engaging in good deeds” (Tit. 3: 8, 14). Elders and deacons must **rule** their own households well as a test for their abilities to manage the affairs of the church (1 Tim. 3: 4, 12). (This is an implicit argument for male leadership in the church, even among the deacons. How does a wife and mother lead her family without usurping the husband's authority and violating Scripture (Eph. 5: 22-24)? See my notes on 1 Tim. 3.) Furthermore, while the text in 1 Thess. 5: 12 is clearly about elders, it is likely that Paul is speaking exclusively of elders in Rom. 12: 8 and not inclusively of others in the church with the gift of leadership. This leaves us 1 Thess. 5: 12; 1 Tim. 3: 4; and 5: 17 which speak of the ruling or leadership function of elders; and even in this, the role of shepherding must be paramount (most important). Managing one's household is primarily a reference to the spiritual oversight of one's own family, not primarily to making a living and keeping a family budget. Therefore, all the elders of the church are shepherds—or at least should be.

No man should be selected as an elder whose sole interest is in the physical property of the church or budgetary matters. There are businessmen and accountants in the church who are quite capable—more capable, in fact—of managing budgets and buildings, but incapable of shepherding people. Those who are interested in the ministry of the word and people problems may not be skilled with budgets and buildings, but these are not skills required for elders. (Besides, there were no “sanctuaries” until the 4th century; so let's scrap the buildings, anyway, and get on with building the church.) The “mega-church” trend in the US (rapidly spreading into developing nations) has never been the pattern of church development which stands out in the NT, particularly the book of Acts. In an interview with noted theologian and historian, George Grant, editor-in-chief Marvin Olasky of *World Magazine*, suggests this question (*World Magazine*, “Life-Changing Lessons”, September 2, 2017 (italicized words are Olasky's, regular type is Grant's response):

***Turning to your church, Parish Presbyterian [the name of the church where Grant is an elder]:
Sounds like you embrace the parish model of local churches.***

Yes. We're a Presbyterian Church in America congregation with a commitment to remain small enough so we know each other. We aim for growth by planting new congregations.

These are individual churches, not satellites?

Yes. Your pastor knows you, your children, your story.

This cuts against the megachurch idea of having a celebrity pastor.

We live in a culture that thrives on that. It's dangerous for the celebrity and the wider culture.

Megachurches do not produce home-grown disciples. They build big auditoriums that are capable of accommodating large audiences. The pastor is a superstar with superlative communicative skills, and when he hands over the pulpit from time to time, it is to another staff pastor in the church. It is unlikely, within this staff-driven structure, that elders who can teach will ever be recognized as teachers. They will never presume to ask for the opportunity to preach.

But at the very least, the elder must be **able to teach** on a one-on-one basis. This is his job description, regardless of the “mess” (Grant’s words) we have made of the church.

The question is: Is the elder concerned about the spiritual growth and welfare of people, and is he capable of feeding them and discipling them as a group or individually? Does he even have an interest in such matters? If not, he is not qualified as an elder whose primary labor is in the word and prayer (Acts 6: 4). If one argues that “ruling” also involves budgetary matters and administration, I would ask how these tasks fit into the primary exhortation of Peter and Paul to “shepherd” the flock. Administration, it appears to me, is primarily a diaconal responsibility; and, personally, I believe that the “tail is often wagging the dog” in many congregations, Presbyterian or otherwise. Administrative and budgetary matters are consuming the time allotted for many session meetings with too little time left over to discuss the important questions of spiritual nurture, difficult marriages and other problematic relationships in the church, and opportunities for ministry for the whole congregation. Consequently, individual members of the church can easily “fall through the cracks” and be lost from sight—or simply ignored with the false hopes that they can resolve their own problems. Only when they fall deeply into sin does someone really take notice and say, “What happened?” But the question is not: What happened? Rather, the question is: What *was happening* right under our noses while we were preoccupied with other less important issues than shepherding the flock? I should add that I do not think highly of my own shepherding gifts, and my observations of the deficiencies of the church come from my long list of personal failures. It is far easier to see what should be done than to actually do it. However, the way we “do” church often hinders the development of deep personal relationships and trained elders who are capable of caring for people.

Exercising oversight is another way of describing the work of shepherding the flock. The word is *episkopeō* from which we get **bishop**, proving once again that the terms **elder** and **bishop** are interchangeable in the NT (cf. Acts 20: 17, 28, in which the requirements of oversight and shepherding are applied to the elders at Ephesus.) The task of the elder (*presbuteros*) is that of an overseer (*episkopos*). Peter now gives a series of alternating negative and positive commands describing the kind of oversight needed in the church. Sometimes we get a better picture of what something should *be* by seeing what it should *not* be.

1. ...not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God

The elder should not go about his duties simply because he feels an obligation because of his office, but because the will of God has gifted him and called him to this task. Although playing golf or watching football on TV may be more entertaining, teaching a bible study or discipling a young convert gives him a far greater sense of joy and fulfillment. Therefore, no one needs to coerce him to do the work of an elder; he *wants* to do it.

2. ...not for sordid gain, but with eagerness

Ministry is not for money. Elders should be “honored” (paid) for the considerable amount of time they put into the oversight of the flock (1 Tim. 5: 17), but the reimbursement is not their motivation for attending to their duties. They shepherd because they are eager to see qualitative growth and maturity in the congregation and people released from the bondage of sin into fruitful ministry to others. Once the elder assumes the quid pro quo posture (one thing in return for another), his effectiveness and joy in the work is diminished. Godliness is a means of great gain if we are content (1 Tim. 6: 5-6).

But perhaps this is the source of many of our problems in the church. One could write a book on this one prepositional phrase, **not for sordid gain**. On the surface, one can think of the thousands of health and wealth gospel peddlers who are milking their congregations for as much money as they can squeeze out of them. Their condemnation is just. On the other hand are pastors who begin in small congregations but are eager to move to a larger congregation. Of course, we can never weigh the motives of such men; only God can do that (Prov. 21: 2). However, it is a *curious coincidence* that very few pastors are “called” to smaller churches with reduced salaries. Perhaps it has less to do with money than the prestige of preaching to more people. Whatever the reason, we would think that, on average, just as many pastors would be called from larger churches to smaller ones. If it is the call of God, then the size of the church should be irrelevant. Of course, they now have more experience (having been tutored by the smaller church) which will come in handy in the bigger churches; but if there were a genuine plurality of elders there would be plenty of cumulative experience among the elders in a presbytery to make up for a younger man’s inexperience. But if this is the case, why not call one of the congregational members who are ordained by the local church, not the presbytery, and forget reaching outside the congregation? But such elders do not have seminary training, making the suggestion unrealistic for most congregants.

On another dangerous level, could it be that *the salary often shuts the mouths of the prophets*? The false prophets of the OT told the king only what he wanted to hear because they were paid from the king’s treasury (cf. 1 Kings 22: 5-8). But even a truly prophetic ministry by a chosen apostle can be compromised by the fear of men (Gal. 2: 12). This can be a very subtle danger, and even conscientious pastors can be unconsciously influenced by fear, minimizing difficult passages which are intended to bring conviction and emphasizing those which bring comfort. The desire to be well-liked and popular can be rationalized on the basis that people won’t listen to pastors they don’t like. Quite true—I know from experience—but what has this got to do with the cost of corn meal in Kenya? Jeremiah was not well-liked, nor most of God’s prophets (Matt. 23: 37). People didn’t like what Jesus said, either (Jn. 6: 66); and at the end of his life he had only a handful of disciples (relative to his popular exposure) who were committed to Him. But theirs was a different job description. While the prophets were there to warn the people of disobedience and its consequences interspersed with messages of comfort and hope, the pastor’s responsibility is more evenly mixed with comfort

and warning, including frequent promises of God's blessings for obedience. Of course, congregations don't wish to hear warnings very often, but this is nothing new.

I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:1-4 NASB)

To remain steadfast in truth, the pastor/teacher must have an audience of One.

3. ...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (cf. Matt. 20: 25; Mk. 10: 42; Lk. 22: 25)

Peter remembered the Master's correction of the twelve disciples, who on more than one occasion bickered with one another about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18: 1-5; Lk. 9: 46; 22: 24). Christ demonstrated the proper attitude of humble service in everything He did, but possibly no object lesson was more powerful than that of washing the disciples' feet shortly before His death (Jn. 13: 1-17). The image of leadership is that of a humble servant, not that of a pompous ruler self-conscious of his position and authority. Leading by example (deed) gives credibility to the words we speak (word), and without it our words are empty.

Many mistakes are commonly made in shepherding (I have made most of them) with the best of intentions for nurturing God's people. Conscientious elders desperately wish to see Christians grow in their faith and become productive members of the kingdom of God. But often our zeal for their growth can become overbearing and high-handed. While being responsible for their spiritual oversight, elders cannot bind consciences with detailed instructions which become oppressive means of controlling the flock—"Be here. Do this. Don't do that." The purpose of oversight is not ***control***, but the ***facilitation*** (enabling) of genuine growth and ***self-discipline***—the end goal of all discipline. If a believer continually depends on elders to tell him what to do in every circumstance—and if elders encourage such dependence—he will remain a babe in Christ. In the natural world, parents must train their children in such a way that one day they will not constantly need them to make wise decisions in life. The same is true for spiritual nurture in the church in which the whole congregation is growing together into the "mature man" in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4: 13), able to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5: 14).

Granting, then, that the fundamental issue for the New Testament is the rule of God through the Spirit, the biblical method of determining policy must be, not majority vote as such, but Spirit-generated consensus among the leadership. The elders did have Christ's authority to rule, but they recognized a world of difference between godly rule and worldly tyranny. They were to rule in a unique, non-worldly way, as "servant-leaders," following the steps of Jesus himself (Matt. 20:26-28). Further, they knew that they were not the depositories of all wisdom, and ***no leader with any sense thinks that he can drive the sheep where they have no inkling to go***. Good leadership is always consultative, in the sense of consulting the well-being of those led. It listens to the whole people of God, and particularly to those for whom it is responsible. Of course it does not merely capitulate to what the sheep already think their well-being is, but educates them. And by educating them it is able to lead them rather than simply driving them (Frame, ***Evangelical Reunion***)

Regretfully, I had to learn this the hard way when I attempted to develop small groups within the total membership of a church I pastored. I thought the members would follow the recommendation of the three elders (I was one) to disband the Sunday evening service of the church—poorly attended, anyway—and meet together in homes on Sunday nights to build community within the body as well as outreach to their respective neighborhoods. Sounds like a good idea, right? Apparently not to the general membership. It only created a maelstrom of discontent and controversy. We attempted to implement the small groups, but it was a disaster from the start. I was driving the sheep, not educating them about the importance of small groups.

4. The reward

There is an eternal reward for faithfulness in shepherding God's flock in addition to the temporal reward of seeing Christians mature in their faith. (Did you actually believe you could render service to Christ without being repaid?) The timing of this reward is clearly at the return of Christ, **when the Chief Shepherd appears**. Peter only alludes to this reward, calling it the **unfading crown of glory**, and Paul gives us additional information in 1 Cor. 3: 6-15.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive **his own reward according to his own labor**. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw**, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test **the quality of each man's work**. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a **reward**. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The reward is according to **each man's labor**; and, thus, cannot be the **general reward** of salvation which is given on the basis of Christ's merits alone. Secondly, there is a qualitative difference in the labor of one man from another denoted by the difference between gold, silver, or precious stones—on the one hand—and wood, hay, and straw on the other. Thirdly, one must be faithful in how his teaching builds upon the foundation of the gospel as given him by the apostles and the prophets (Eph. 2: 20). If he is faithful in his teaching—or shepherding—he will receive a reward. If he is faithless, he will “suffer loss” by forfeiting his reward; yet, he himself will be saved by believing the gospel. Note well that there are pastors (elders) who will be saved at the judgment but will see their work go up in smoke due to their faithlessness in preaching and teaching. This does not imply that **everything** we teach and preach must be without error, an impossibility. The promise of reward or curse pertains to the **general tenor** of our teaching. Are we generally faithful or generally unfaithful in our teaching? Or have we committed, or are we committing, some serious error which may lead to the damnation of those we wish to shepherd?

The Pauline passage above seems agreeable with the motivation for service Peter is now giving the elders of the churches in Asia Minor. If they fulfill their duties well by fulfilling the conditions of **vv. 2-3**, they will receive **the unfading crown of glory**, a permanent reward designed specifically for those who serve as elders, for Peter is speaking to elders, not the general congregation in these verses. But the possibility of a reward for faithfulness also implies the opposite: the forfeiture of reward by those who served **under compulsion, for sordid gain**, and those who **lorded** it over those who were

placed into their care; or, to recall Paul's words, built on the foundation with **wood, hay, and straw**. There is no automatic outcome, but an outcome conditioned by the quality of service.

B. Younger men, be subject to your elders (5: 5a)

With a brief word, Peter commands the **younger men** in the congregation to be submissive to their elders. While the command could be interpreted as submission to the older men of the congregation, it is more likely from the immediate context that he is speaking of submission to overseers. Could it be that Peter had heard rumors of disrespect from the younger generation of men in the churches? Possibly, or it could be that Peter simply understood that younger men are, by nature, ***prone to challenge authority***. (Something about male testosterone, perhaps.) At any rate, submission to authority is part of the divine order for both church and society (cf. **2: 13-17**), and for the congregation which is allowed to question the prerogative (legitimate right) of elders to rule, shepherd, and discipline sin, the only alternative is ***pure democracy*** (the rule of everyone) which inevitably leads to ***anarchy*** (no rule at all)—which is what one finds in many (most?) congregations.

Between Joshua and the kings of Israel is the period of the Judges, a period of anarchy in the history of Israel where “every man did what was right in his own eyes.” The result was immorality and idolatry of every kind. God has so ordered the church to provide a ***representative*** leadership which must function by the voluntary submission of the remainder of the congregation—voluntary, since there are no police or army to enforce submission. There is recourse for handling those who blatantly refuse to subject themselves—church discipline which may ultimately lead to excommunication (2 Thess. 3: 14). Thus, from God's point of view, submission is not voluntary but mandatory. Yet, the church is a family, not an army battalion, and the members of the family should yield themselves voluntarily to their leaders for their own benefit (Heb. 13: 17).

C. All of you... (5: 5b-10)

Verses 5b-10 is a series of commands for the whole community of the faithful followed by the reasons or motivation for the commands.

1. ...clothe yourselves with humility...humble yourselves (5b-6)

Having admonished the younger men to humble themselves by submitting to the elders, Peter now admonishes the whole congregation to exercise a spirit of humility toward one another. **Verses 5b-6** should be taken together. By using the metaphor of putting on clothing, he emphasizes the importance of ***practical continuity***. Putting on clothing is something we do ***every day*** without even thinking about it—a continuous habit. And while humility toward others will not be as easy or as habitual as putting on our clothes, it is nevertheless a ***life-style behavior*** which we must value and for which we must strive as the product of the new man in Christ which we have become (cf. Col. 3: 12, in which Paul also uses the figure of putting on clothing, including the clothing of ***humility***).

Occasional humility will be about as effective as an occasional truce (cessation of hostility) in a war, but an occasional lull in hostilities will not allow the congregation to pull together sufficiently for the ***sustained goal*** of serving Christ through service to others. Instead, everyone will be looking out for Number One, himself or herself. Humility must be a settled life-style of every member of the church who considers the interests of others equal to his own (Phil. 2: 3-4). As we consider others more

important than ourselves, they are likewise obligated to consider us more important than they, creating a sense of *balanced appreciation* for one another and cooperation with one another in the body of Christ.

There is both a negative and a positive motivation for humility. **God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble** (cf. Prov. 3: 34). This is what we in the southern US call a “double wammy”. The proud Christian is penalized in two ways. Not only does he not receive the additional grace from God that a humble person receives, but God actually opposes him. He is opposed because he has denied or minimized the grace of God as the source and fountain of all good in his life, and this denial *offends* God. Further, a prideful person is not in the proper disposition of mind to *receive* grace since grace is unmerited (undeserved) favor. But if he thinks he deserves something from God, he will receive His goodness as a wage for services rendered. Such thinking is muddled (confused) since whatever material things, talents, or spiritual gifts we possess have been given by God as unearned gifts and should never be the basis for boasting and pride (1 Cor. 4: 7). Pride shuts the door to grace, but God will give more grace to the humble, not because grace can be earned through humility—a contradiction in terms—but because humility is the *empty vessel which can receive grace*. The first beatitude is “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” (Matt. 5: 3), those who are humbly aware of their need for grace. Pride, on the other hand, is the *full vessel overflowing with self*, and there is no more space in that vessel to receive grace. Lest we should think that grace is a static quantity given to all believers in equal measure, consider that Paul says, “But to each one of us grace was given **according to the measure of Christ's gift**” (Ephesians 4:7). This statement contradicts the egalitarian spirit of the modern world in which everyone must have the same, but God clearly “measures” or distributes His grace according to His own pleasure. Everyone does not have the same amount of material wealth, intelligence, or natural abilities. In the same way, Christians differ from one another in the measure of grace given them registered in the quantity and the quality of spiritual gifts.

Considered from the standpoint of human relationships, pride convinces us that we *deserve* the respect, admiration, and service from others, and, therefore, builds a wall of separation between us and others even as it separates us from God. The humble Christian, on the other hand, has no expectations other than the promises in the bible, and he thanks God for the goodness of others which he knows in his heart he does not deserve considering his sins of commission, omission, and the sins of the heart. Thus, when others treat him poorly, he does not retaliate (get back) by returning evil for evil (Rom. 12: 17). Apart from God’s grace, poor treatment from others is what we would get all the time. But when treated fairly, we are able to sincerely thank God and others. This is not false humility or self-effacement (“I am a worm” theology). It is an honest evaluation of who we are apart from Christ and in Christ and that all the benefits of this life, including recognition, fair treatment, and love from others flow only from the fountain of His grace to us. The blessings of this life are grace from first to last.

On the basis of the positive promise and the negative warning, Peter commands his readers to humble themselves before God in order that God may exalt them in His own good time, the **proper time** (v. 6). This is the second command for humility followed by yet another reason or motivation. The predominant use of the conjunction *hina* (**that**) is “to introduce final clauses expressing purpose or goal” (*BibleWorks*). What does Peter mean by being exalted in the proper time? Two interpretations are possible, and both may be intended. The word **exalt** (*hupzoō*) is also found in Phil. 2: 9 in a slightly different form of *huperupzoō*. Christ humbled Himself as a man and died as a man, and for

His perfect obedience God the Father highly exalted Him at His right hand and gave Him a name above every name. Jesus was also exalted at God's right hand **at the proper time**, not *before* His crucifixion and suffering but *after* it—that is, after He did the will of His Father by accomplishing redemption for His people. Likewise, the paradigm (model) for the people of God is humility and suffering *before* exaltation. In due time, God will exalt His chosen, redeemed people and will exhibit them before the world in all their glory at the return of Christ (Col. 3: 3-4).

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4 NASB)

Until then, our true identity is **hidden** to unbelievers who cannot perceive spiritual realities (1 Cor. 2: 14), and we must humble ourselves under God's mighty hand (Deut. 5: 15, i.e. His protective power) patiently awaiting the day of our exaltation and glorification. With **v. 6** Peter agrees with Paul that Christians are "children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him so that [hina]* we may also be glorified with *Him*."

Secondly, Peter could also be speaking of *temporal* exaltation in this present life in which God takes the lowly Christian and raises him up through extraordinary providences. Remember the plight of Joseph in the land of Egypt, humbled through slavery and imprisonment, but exalted to second in command in Egypt. This happens *sometimes*, but recall Waltke's assessment of Proverbs that most of God's promises must extend *beyond clinical death* in order to be absolutely true. If God elevates us before men in this life-time, it is a gift of His grace for the purpose of glorifying His name, but quite often the righteous die before any noticeable vindication. But if Peter has any temporal exaltation in mind, he is more likely speaking of exaltation before *fellow-believers* rather than before the *world* since the context is clearly **humility toward one another (v. 5b)** (but see discussion below). As an example, the humble Christian who goes about her business serving in the church for many years without expecting anyone to notice her or thank her may be surprised to discover that others have been watching, after all; and after some time they begin to come by one by one expressing sincere appreciation for what she has meant to them and the whole church. Or it is possible that a special dinner will be held in the church in her honor. But all this is a bonus. She serves, not to be noticed by men or to receive their praise, but because she loves the Lord and His people. God, on the other hand, is not content to let her service go by unnoticed, but exalts her publicly before men. In other words, Christians should not expect any recognition from others for their labors in this life, but they also should not be too surprised when God lifts them up that He might be glorified in them.

Although Peter applies the OT text to the context of life in the church, the quotation is clearly a reference to the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright. ³³The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. ³⁴Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted. (Proverbs 3:32-34 NASB)

Again, we ask with Waltke, do the Proverbs promise too much? How many times have we seen the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer throughout their lives (Ps. 73)? Yet, as we also learn from Ps. 73, inevitable judgment is coming upon the wicked and immeasurable blessing for the righteous. It's only a matter of time.

When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within,²² Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was *like* a beast before You.²³ Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand.²⁴ With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory.²⁵ Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:21-26 NASB)

How could anyone reading this deny that Asaph believed in the blessings of God beyond clinical death? Notice the underlined portions. If God's blessings are limited to this earthly life, then there should be much that the psalmist desires. The OT is filled with the promise of temporal blessings for the OT people, but they are blessings realized only in the context of a vital relationship with God; and they serve as types of the eternal blessings of God beyond death—including a new heavens and a new earth. God is Asaph's **portion** long after his **flesh** fails him. But if the wicked *always* suffered a miserable late-life crisis and died in ruins, people would convert to the faith only for temporal blessings; and they would attempt to calculate the timing of their deaths in order not to give God too much of their lives before it was necessary. However, such a stingy attitude is far from that of Asaph. **And afterward receive me to glory** must be an explicit reference to life beyond death, for Asaph has already described this present life as an enigma (confusing situation), seeing that despite God's promises to bless the righteous, it is the wicked who seem to be the recipients of His blessing. Such a present situation was far from **glory** (cf. Rom. 8: 18). Come to think of it, was this not the same enigma faced by John the Baptist? John prophesied:

"His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12 NASB)

But it didn't happen according to John's expectations, prompting him to question whether Jesus was *really* the one Israel was looking for. Jesus assures him that He is the one who was promised, and His miracles attested to this fact (Matt. 11: 2-6). What John, the disciples, and other Jews did not realize was that the kingdom of God was coming progressively in stages—*inauguration* (first coming), *continuation* (the church age), and *consummation* (the second coming) (see Third Millennium series).

2. ...casting all your anxiety upon Him (v. 7)

This is the second command of a different nature, but the grammar (a participle clause) clearly links it to the preceding verse. Casting one's anxiety upon the Lord (an imperative) has something to do with humbling ourselves under His sovereign providence, His **mighty hand**. Once again, we must be mindful of the *historical context*. Peter is speaking to a persecuted minority who must look to the Lord for protection. The **mighty hand of God** would be a recognizable expression from the OT (Ex. 32: 11; Deut. 4: 34; 1 Kings 8: 42; Dan. 9: 15; Ezek. 20: 33) signifying the protective power of God for His covenant people against all enemies. Christians must therefore be willing to accept their persecution humbly, knowing that their troubles are only for a limited time before their ultimate deliverance. Therefore, we are back to the most likely interpretation of being exalted at the proper time. That time is *the consummation of the kingdom of God* at the end of this age when God's people will be revealed in all their glory with and through Jesus Christ. Until then, they will be persecuted and despised, and often unappreciated even within the church. This kind of treatment produces considerable **anxiety** in their hearts and minds; but they must patiently wait for the coming age—which Peter has told them is **near**—until the mighty hand of God delivers them. Peter and the other apostles must not be faulted for encouraging Christians about the nearness of the return of

Christ. Jesus had not given them a specific time for His return, and did not even know Himself from a human standpoint (Matt. 24: 36.)

Although God may seem at times to be very distant and unconcerned for their situation, He **cares** for them (*melei*; cf. Mk. 4: 38; Lk. 10: 40; Jn. 10: 13; 1 Cor. 9: 9). Believers need to be reminded that God is glorified when we suffer for His name (3: 13-17; 5: 14, 16; see commentary above); and the entire history of redemption proves that when He appears most distant to us, He is nevertheless near to us in our suffering. In Ex. 3: 13-14, God answers Moses' question about His name with "I am who I am" or, translated, "I am who I always have been" or "I will continue to be who I have always been." This last translation is possibly the most likely considering the historical context. Israel had been in Egyptian bondage for almost 400 years (Gen. 15: 13) with little hope of deliverance and without communication from Yahweh. (Not even Genesis had been written.) After all these years, this man Moses shows up with a message from God. The Israelites would understandably ask Moses who this God is or "What is His reputation or history?" The name God submits to Moses will assure them that He is the *same* God to them and for them that He has *always* been for His people, for He also says to Moses, " 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations" (Ex. 3: 15b).

3. ...*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert* (v. 8)

Being **sober** (from *nēphō*) is just the opposite of being drunk (literal meaning). The figurative command is to be "free from every form of mental and spiritual excess and confusion...self-controlled, clear-headed" (*BibleWorks*). To be **alert** means "to be watchful" (*grēgoreō*; cf. Matt. 24: 42). As long as we live in this world, Christians must be vigilant—always alert and watchful. The reason is that our enemy, the devil, is always **alert**, looking for an opportunity to harm us in some way or another. Like a **lion**, he is prowling around in search for some careless prey which is **not** watching. I have commonly heard an explanation of this verse which presents the picture of an old, worn-out lion who must growl to scare away any competitors since he is old and unable to defend his territory. Thus, the devil is a defeated predator. But this explanation does not fit well with the urgency of Peter's command. The devil is to be genuinely feared, and the Christian who is not watching can end up like the careless gazelle blissfully grazing, unaware that it is about to be mauled and eaten. One example might be the careless male who is seduced by the empty flattery of the adulteress or harlot who lures him into bed with lies, beauty, and promises of wildly exciting sex, thus ruining his marriage or stealing his virginity (Prov. 5 and 7; especially 7: 18). Another example might be the unscrupulous businessman who convinces a trusting but naïve Christian investor that his business practices are moral when in fact they are filled with complicated compromises cheating investors of their money (the Bernie Madoff variety whose pyramid investment scheme cost charitable organizations billions of dollars. His last name says it all.). The devil wears many clothes—to use another metaphor—and he may not look like a lion, but an angel of light (2 Cor. 11: 14). No matter what he looks like; he is deadly, and he enjoys eating believers for lunch.

4. ...*Resist [the devil]* (v. 9)

No matter how cunning or powerful, the devil must be resisted and should be resisted. Since the verb is imperative, we are commanded to resist. It follows that the believer is **capable** of resisting Satan's temptations. Why should I be warned if "The devil **made** me do it", rendering me helpless and not

responsible? But a Christian is no longer a slave of sin (Rom. 6); and since God is at work in him through His Spirit to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2: 13), the believer can never say that he couldn't resist the temptation. Paul assures us that God will not allow us to be tempted in such a way that we have no means of resisting (1 Cor. 10: 13). He will always give us an "escape hatch" so that we can either run from the temptation (1 Tim. 6: 11; 2 Tim. 2: 22) or stand against it (Eph. 6: 14).

In his book, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, John Frame discusses the idea of "**tragic moral choice**" in which a Christian finds himself in a situation of choosing only between the lesser of two evils. In other words, he has no choice except to sin; he simply chooses the lesser sin. One example suggested by some proponents of tragic moral choice is Rahab who was given the choice of lying to the men of Jericho or implicating herself in murder by turning the Israelite spies over to be executed. Even theologians as astute as John Murray argue that Rahab broke the ninth commandment (*Principles of Conduct*, pp. pp. 143-148). But if Rahab is a liar, then this liar is approved by the Holy Spirit who places her name in the hall of fame for faithful people (Heb. 11: 31; Matt. 1: 5). It is clear from the bible that Rahab did not please God by lying; rather, by faith she made her peace with the God of Israel and declared war on her own godless people. The Hebrew midwives were also at war with Pharaoh and his murderous plot to kill the male infants of Israel, Moses also included (Ex. 1: 15-21; Matt. 2).

The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them."²⁰ So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. (Exodus 1:19-20 NASB)

Note the immediate context of the midwives' lie and God's approval. **So God was good to the midwives...** Why was He good to them? Because they lied to Pharaoh in order to protect the lives of Hebrew babies. One might accuse them of cowardice. Why not tell Pharaoh the truth and then subject themselves to a martyr's death? But by staying alive, they could perpetuate the lie and save more Hebrew babies. The longer Pharaoh believes the lie, the more babies are saved.

Repetitive examples are available from Scripture (1Sam. 20: 6; 1 Sam. 16: 1-5; 1 Kings 22: 19-23; all cited in Frame, *DCL*, p. 836).

For modern examples, the biblical principle of withholding truth from the godless applies when our homes are attacked by criminals who wish us harm or withholding truth from Nazis in WWII who wished to transport all Jews to the gas chambers. Thousands of similar situations have been faced by Christians throughout human history. God always gives us an escape so that we do not have to sin. Withholding truth from those who wish to use the truth to do evil is not equivalent to breaking the ninth commandment. The commandment says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20: 16). A murderous criminal or a Nazi in WWII could hardly be classified as a "neighbor".

Another situation could be given concerning the sixth commandment against murder. When convicted murderers are executed by a lethal injection of gas, is this murder? If it is, then Gen. 9: 6 actually commands murder.

"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. (Genesis 9:6 NASB)

One can see by this example that there are *situations and circumstances* which make taking a human life legitimate, even obedient to God's command. God is always consistent; it is we who are often inconsistent. Killing in a just war is legitimate in order to preserve human freedom. In December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, a US naval harbor, killing over 3,000 seamen. For this act of aggression, the US declared war on Japan and ultimately killed over two million Japanese soldiers. But what would have happened to the freedoms of American, European, and Asian citizens had Japan won WWII? The answer lies in the rape of Nanking, China by Japanese forces from December 13, 1937 through January, 1938 in which over 200,000 Chinese citizens were raped and killed in only a six week period.

Killing an armed intruder is legitimate to preserve your life and the lives of family members. Even if the intruder is unarmed, it is legitimate to kill him if he enters your home or compound at night when you cannot identify him or determine whether he is armed and dangerous. If during the day, the person may be identifiable, leading to arrest and restitution of stolen property as well as being determined to be unarmed and no threat to life (Ex. 22: 2-3; see James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, pp. 136-137).

Therefore, we can see that Paul's assurance that avoiding sin is possible and Peter's admonition to resist the devil is possible for the Christian. God will never put us in a situation in which some kind of lesser sin cannot be avoided.

In Rom. 6: 11-14, the imperatives (commands) of vv. 11-13 are based upon the indicatives (declarations of fact) of v. 14. The imperative verb phrases are in bold letters while the indicative verb phrases are underlined.

Even so **consider yourselves** to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.¹² Therefore **do not let sin reign** in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,¹³ and **do not go on presenting** the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but **present yourselves** to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14 NASB)

Thus, the commands to consider ourselves dead to sin, to not let sin reign in our bodies, to not present the members of our bodies to sin but to present them to righteousness are all based upon the *fact* that sin will not be master over us because we are not under law but are under grace. Commenting on the indicative, "for you are not under law but under grace", Charles Hodge remarks,

We are not under a legal dispensation, requiring personal conformity to the law, and entire freedom from sin, past and present, as the condition of our acceptance; but we are under a gracious dispensation, according to which God dispenses pardon freely, and accepts the sinner as a sinner, for Christ's sake, without works or merit of his own. Whoever is under the law in the sense just explained, is not only under condemnation, but he is of necessity under a legal or slavish spirit. What he does, he does as a slave, to escape punishment. But he who is under grace, who is gratuitously [without merit] accepted of God, and restored to his favour, is under a filial spirit [the relationship of a son]. *The principle of obedience in him is love, and not fear. Here, as everywhere else in the Bible, it is assumed that the favour of God is our life. We must be reconciled to him before we can be holy; we must feel that he loves us before we can love him.... The only hope therefore of sinners, is in freedom from the law,* [which Hodge interprets as...] *freedom from its condemnation, freedom from the obligation to fulfill it as the condition of acceptance, and freedom from its spirit* (Romans, p.206; emphasis added).

Thus, even as we are justified by faith in Christ, we must also be sanctified by faith in Christ, a faith which yields the obedience of a son and not the obedience of a slave. Without the filial disposition of a son who loves his Father and feels his Father's love, we will not be able to resist temptation. Growth in grace (sanctification) is the process by which this filial disposition—the spirit of adoption (Rom. 8: 15)—is more and more realized in our consciousness thereby increasing our ability to resist temptation.

The question arises how the rest of **v. 9**, which speaks of suffering, fits with the command to resist the devil. It is probable that Peter is speaking primarily about the temptation of *apostasy* which often results from unrelenting persecution (compare 1 Pet. 5: 12 with 2 Thess. 2: 15). The Christians in Asia Minor were going through a period of severe testing and trial from persecution. This much is apparent from the predominance of the theme of suffering throughout the epistle. Severe and persistent trial opens the door to the temptation to leave the Christian faith and thereby find *relief* from trial. This is the emphasis in this verse, and Peter counters this temptation to apostasy by assuring the Christians in Asia Minor that their circumstances were not unique. They were not alone in their suffering, but the same kind of suffering was being experienced by their brethren all over the world. But his use of words is interesting because he does not simply say that their brethren are *enduring* suffering but are **accomplishing** or **successfully completing** the same experiences of suffering (*epiteleō*; cf. Gal. 3: 3; 2 Cor. 8: 11; and especially Phil. 1: 6). Suffering is viewed not simply as something to bear painfully, but something to be *achieved or finished* as a work of grace (cf. Col. 1: 24). For the Christian church, suffering in this world is a necessary accomplishment which must be *finished* in order for the kingdom of God to be consummated. Thus, Jesus is waiting to come back, and He will not return until His church has completed its mission of suffering for His name. I don't know what this interpretation does to your personal view of eschatology, but for me, it makes we wonder about the theory that the world will be mostly Christianized by the time Christ returns. I agree with John Frame who claims to be a "short-term amillennialist and a long-term postmillennialist".

Our suffering is not the pointless suffering of eastern mysticism, including Buddhism, but has the ultimate purpose of winning people to Jesus Christ. When the world sees Christians who are willing to pay any price necessary to be faithful to their Lord, Christians who are willing to sacrifice their lives, money, and comfort in the service of others, then they will know that this is not an empty religion among other empty religions. When our suffering is complete, Christ will return and fulfill all His promises by establishing a new heavens and a new earth.

The interpretation above does not negate the many different kinds of temptations thrown at us by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Satan can lead a professing believer *progressively* into the sin of apostasy in a variety of ways; he need not introduce us to some strange philosophy or theological heresy. By giving in to the temptation of lust or greed, to use two examples, the believer's resolve to maintain his faith can be weakened, and he may come to the conclusion that the Christian faith is not worth all the persecution and ill-treatment from the world, nor is it worth the self-denial which the Christian faith demands. Remember from **1 Pet. 4: 4** that the pagans of Asia Minor were surprised that Christians would not participate with them in all their revelry and party-going and told lies about them as a critical response. Having fallen to temptation and having enjoyed its temporal pleasures—money, sex, power, or all three—a fallen Christian now has the additional incentive to deny his faith by turning from it altogether, proving himself to be an unbeliever after all (1 Jn. 2: 19).

As a pastor I remember counseling a Christian who was having serious doubts about his salvation, doubts which could have led to abandoning his faith. After only a couple of sessions with him, I became suspicious that he was having sex with his girlfriend outside the bond of marriage. I exposed my suspicions to him—which turned out to be correct—after which I explained that I was not at all surprised that he was having doubts about his salvation. Why shouldn't he doubt his salvation when he was living in sin? How can we have fellowship with God if we are walking in darkness (1 Jn. 1: 6)? He never visited our church again after that session, but I hope his sin of fornication did not ultimately lead to apostasy.

Any fall to temptation, unless checked and corrected (Matt. 18: 15-20), can start the Christian on a downward spiral which leads eventually to the sin of apostasy. Therefore, Peter admonishes his readers to resist the devil and to stand firm in their faith, knowing that they are not alone in experiencing the suffering and, by implication, the temptations which accompany it.

XIV. Benediction and Doxology (5: 10-11)

Peter now closes the body of his letter with a benediction, followed by a doxology. **After you have suffered a little while** may indicate that Peter believed in the imminent (soon) return of Christ (cf. 4:7 and commentary). At the end of His earthly ministry, Christ Himself had presented many parables concerning the need to be prepared for His return—the parables of the fig tree, the thief, the ten virgins, and the talents (Matt. 24: 32—25: 30). Further, His answer to the disciples' question (Matt. 24: 3) could easily have been interpreted to mean that the end of the age would occur *before* the present generation passed away (Matt. 24: 34). Yet, in other parables, Jesus clearly indicated that the master of the house would be gone “a long time” (Matt. 24: 48; 25: 19), that the bridegroom would be delayed (Matt. 25: 5), that He is coming back at a time when “you do not think he will” (Matt. 24: 44). Roughly thirty years later when Peter wrote this epistle, that generation was truly coming to an end. Matthew 24 is complicated, and an intense examination of it will reveal that Jesus was answering *two* questions from 24: 3 and not *one* (see my *Synoptic Gospels*). At any rate, Peter encourages the suffering Christians in Asia Minor by assuring them that their suffering would be only a little while longer.

An inspired author makes no mistakes, and Peter was correct in a number of ways. Although Jesus would *not* return in a short while to relieve them of their suffering, their mortal lives would soon end, and they would be transported out of suffering into eternal bliss. Second, in the light of eternity, all earthly suffering is only **a little while**, a green blip on a radar screen; and no amount of suffering in this life can be “compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8: 18b) (so also Kistemaker, p. 205). In another sense, the Neronian persecution would end when Nero committed suicide in 68 AD, and there would be no other organized persecution of the church by a Roman emperor until Marcus Aurelius from 161 to 180 AD. There was, however, localized persecution before that time (B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*). Although it is often argued by church historians, Kuiper included, that the Neronian persecutions were confined to Rome, spreading no farther, other scholars are not convinced of this assertion (Kistemaker, p. 7); and the suffering mentioned in *1 Peter* may have been an overflow from Rome. Private citizens who hated Christians needed no greater encouragement to escalate their persecution than the cruelty of the Emperor of Rome. It is possible, therefore, that the churches in Asia Minor would enjoy a long period of peace and safety after Nero's death in 68 AD. If Peter wrote his two epistles from 63 to 64 AD

(Kistemaker, p. 19), then they had only four more years before this general persecution was over. Of course, the local harassment of Christians would continue long after organized persecution subsided but probably would not be as severe lacking the sanction of the emperor and the local civil magistrate.

It should also be said that if Peter, Paul, and others *believed* in the imminent return of Christ, this belief did not make them false prophets. They never *prophesied*, “Thus says the Lord, I will return in AD 68, 70, 100, etc.” Jesus Himself made no such pronouncements, even saying that He did not know the day of His coming, but only the Father knew. Therefore, there was no pretention on the part of the apostles of knowing when the day would be, despite the pretensions of countless religious crackpots since the first century, continuing into the 21st century.

As a further encouragement, Peter says that they were **called** to the eternal glory of God in Christ (v. 10; cf. Rom. 8: 18; 2 Thess. 2: 14). As they reflect and meditate on the glory of God and *their eternal participation in this glory*, they will be able to endure the suffering of this present time. The calling in this verse is the effectual, divine call of the Holy Spirit drawing the sinner into the participation of God’s grace through Christ (see my *Systematic Theology*, “Effectual Calling”). As such, it is a “divine summons” that one “cannot ignore” (Kistemaker, p. 204). *The order is important*. The Christian is first called to participate in the sufferings of Christ *before* he is called to participate in the “eternal glory” (v. 10) and “dominion” (v. 11) of Christ. We would like to omit the first summons and skip to the next one, the glory; but this will never happen for the Christian church; for Paul says, “if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*” (Rom. 8: 17a). Indeed, our experience of the glory of Christ will be intensified to the extent to which we have participated in His suffering.

Until the glory of Christ is *fully realized* in our experience, God will use suffering to **perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish** us (v. 11). **Perfect** (*katartizō*; cf. Matt. 4: 21; Gal. 6:1) means to mend, repair, or restore; **confirm** means to make immovable or fixed (Lk. 16: 26); **strengthen** (*sthenōō*) occurs only here in the NT and nowhere else in Greek literature (Kistemaker, p. 205); **establish** (*themelioō*) means to lay a foundation (Matt. 7: 25; 1 Cor. 3: 10). Notice that **God... Himself** will do all these things, proving that the doctrine of the *perseverance* of the saints is also the doctrine of the *preservation* of the saints (Phil. 1: 6). The first concept is inseparable from the other, for if God were not preserving us by His infinite care, we would be inevitably lost. Contemplating this great salvation, Peter follows with doxology, **To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

XV. Closing (5: 12-14)

Silvanus is a variant form of Silas and is the same man who became a traveling companion and fellow missionary of Paul (Acts 15: 22, 27, 32-33; Davids, p. 198, including references; for the rendering, “Silvanus”, see 2 Cor. 1: 19; 1 Thess. 1: 1; 2 Thess. 1: 1). It was common practice in those days to employ a secretary to physically write out letters or messages as they were being dictated, followed at the end of the letter by the author’s own greetings written in his own hand-writing (Rom. 16: 22; Col. 4: 18; Gal. 6: 11; 2 Thes. 3: 17; Philemon 1: 19).

His final word of exhortation and encouragement consists in the fact that the apostolic faith, including what he has just written, is **the true grace of God**. They need not fear that their faith is false or that they were suffering for nothing. They must, therefore, **stand firm** in this faith to receive

their final, eschatological salvation. Peter's faith would be put severely to the test a few years later, and he is now writing from the place of his execution, **Babylon**, which is a code name for Rome (Rev. 14: 8; 16: 19; 17:5; 18: 2, 10, 21; cited in Kistemaker, p. 209) where he was crucified, according to tradition, upside down. He would not fail Christ again. **She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you** is the church in Rome.

Greeting one another with a kiss was customary as well as the wish of peace, even in the midst of suffering.

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