

*Stand Firm in the True Grace of the Gospel*

1 Peter 1:1-2

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Good morning elect exiles of Grand Avenue Baptist Church! For the past eight weeks, we have not been meeting in person. I know we have been together in spirit, some of us have met in our small groups, and some of us have been in Zoom meetings; however, I think we can all agree this is unsatisfactory. In many ways, the past eight weeks have been a season of dispersion for us.

It is providential that we begin our journey through 1 Peter. Peter wrote to Christians who were dispersed in Asia Minor (the modern-day Turkey region). These disciples of Christ are the suffering church. Some of them met together at the very threat of losing their lives, some of them met in secret, and some of them met together but did not know if the next day they will be arrested by the government of Rome.

That was the cultural and governmental climate they experienced in the Roman Empire. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Peter wrote this letter while in a Roman prison in Rome while waiting on his execution.

Our dispersion is not quite like their dispersion. Lord willing, next Sunday, we will meet together in the west parking lot here at the church building. The state of Iowa and the Federal government is not preventing us from meeting. Instead, our desire to meet next Sunday comes with a different set of concerns.

May the Lord multiply His grace and peace toward us as we begin our journey through 1 Peter and as we consider meeting together next Sunday. May the Lord *make us stand firm in the true grace of the gospel*. [pray].

I. Author: Peter: A Man Saved and Sent by the True Grace of God (v. 1a)

1 Peter 1:1a: "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*"

As we begin our journey through 1 Peter, it is important to know some background on Peter. If you were with us when we began our journey through Hosea, we looked at Hosea's background. However, we

didn't have much background info on him. We knew his name mean *salvation*, but beyond that, there was not much else.

Peter is different. With Peter, we actually know a little of what his life was like before he met Jesus and what kind of disciple he was before Jesus called him to be an apostle. Knowing Peter's background helps us to see the transforming power of the grace of God.

Peter's full name is Simon Peter. Perhaps his name worked liked it does down south where lots of people go by two names: Billy Ray or Jim Bob. When we go home, some of Stacy's family will call her Stacy Jo, or my family will call me Michael Ray.

The good thing for Simon Peter was that Jesus shortened his name to Peter. The name Peter means rock. Contrary to popular belief, it does not mean rock as in a foundational stone. Instead, it means *little pebble or small rock*. We might call him Gravel.

Peter was a fisherman with his brother Andrew. He and Andrew were roughnecks of their day and most likely had no formal education. However, these men were religious. They knew that they should be looking for the Messiah to come and deliver their people. Now keep in mind, they were looking for a Military Messiah to deliver them from the Romans, not a suffering, dying, and rising Messiah. We learn this as we follow Peter's life with Jesus.

After Andrew was introduced to Jesus, he went and found his brother, Peter, and told him he had found the Lamb of God. When Jesus met Peter, He called him to follow Him as a disciple, and he left his business of fishing and followed Jesus.

Peter's career as a disciple had its ups and downs but mostly downs. He was easily the most outspoken of the disciples. If he thought it, he usually said it. He made what is known as the great confession, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Jesus' reply to his confession was, "*Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father in Heaven and upon this rock,<sup>1</sup> I will build My church.*"

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<sup>1</sup> The *rock* is the gospel confession not Peter himself.

Then Jesus told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and be crucified. Peter's response was to try to talk Jesus out of that. Jesus then called Peter Satan. Peter's confession started out well but ended badly. He misunderstood what Jesus' ministry on earth was and how He came to save His people from their sin and the wrath of God and not the Romans.

One time the disciples were in a boat, and they saw Jesus walking on the waves toward their boat, and Peter asked Jesus if he could come to Him on the water, and he stepped out on the sea, but when he saw the wind and the waves, he began to sink. Then he called out to Jesus to save him. Jesus quickly took him by the hand and said, "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*"<sup>2</sup>

At the Mount of Olives, Jesus told the disciples they would all fall away on account of Him. Peter proclaims he would never abandon Jesus. Jesus told him that before the rooster crowed the next morning, he would deny Him three times. Peter did just that.

Then the women came to Peter and the disciples and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead and that they had seen Him. He did not believe the women, so he and John ran to the tomb to make sure it was true. John outran Peter, but when Peter arrived, he rushed past John to make sure the tomb was truly empty.

Finally, even after Jesus had risen from the dead, Peter still did not get it. He thought he was done as a disciple. He simply kept making one mistake after another, and the denial of Jesus was probably the last straw, so he told the other disciples he was going back to fishing. They said they would go with him.

Then Jesus met His disciples on the shore of Lake Galilee. When the disciples arrived, Jesus was cooking fish. Jesus pulled Peter aside, and He restored him as a disciple. He called Peter to feed His sheep.

Peter did and said some bold things as a disciple, and he did and said some bonehead things as a disciple. No one can deny that the true grace of the gospel did a transforming work in the life of Peter. It took a rough, hard, ole fisherman and turned him into a fisher of men.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 14:31.

No longer was Peter, the guy who was sticking his foot in his mouth, but he became the man who spoke on Jesus' authority. No longer was he struggling to find his faith, but he became the man who was filled with faith in Christ. No longer was he a denier of Jesus, but he became a bold proclaimer of the true grace of the gospel. No longer was he the cursing fisherman, but Jesus transformed him into a gospel fisher of men. No longer was he a fisherman stationed in Capernaum, but he became a man sent on a gospel mission.

Are you one of those persons who keeps blowing it with Jesus? Have you stumbled into sin, and it seems like you make one mistake after another? The fact is, we are all *"one of those persons who keeps blowing it with Jesus."* No one follows Jesus perfectly.

The life of the Apostle Peter is good news for us. Jesus will take you right where you are and move where He wants you to go. You and I simply need to do what Peter did continually humble yourself before Jesus. Love Him and follow Him to where He leads you.

II. Audience: The Audience is the Church: People Who Are Chosen and Suffer by the True Grace God (v. 1b)

1 Peter 1:1b: *"To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."*

Now we see to whom Peter has written his letter. He wrote to the churches in Asia Minor or what we know as Modern Day Turkey. He tells us immediately that he has written, *"to the elect exiles of the Dispersion."*

Calling the Christians in the churches *elect exiles* is a strange way to begin the letter. What does he mean by this?

First, the *greetings* in the NT letters are deep with theological meaning. There is no: *"Hey! What's up? How you doin?"* Then you move on to what you really want to talk about with the person.

Peter used the greeting to lay a theological foundation of what is to come later in his letter. By calling them the *elect exiles of the Dispersion*, he was grounding his letter in the grace of God. He wanted to remind them that although they were scattered throughout Asia Minor and it seemed like they did not belong

anywhere or have a home. He wanted them to know that they belonged to God and that they have a home in Heaven.

So, his letter was to be carried around the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. When they gathered together for worship, they were to read the letter to the believers. Peter wanted to help them stand firm in the true grace of the gospel.

The word *elect* means *chosen*. The Holy Spirit wanted to remind them that in a world filled with tribulation, they were chosen by God. They belonged to God, and the fact that they had been chosen was all grace.

Next, the Holy Spirit connects their choosing to the fact that they were *exiles*. The word *exiles* can also be translated *strangers*. They were not *strangers* to God, but they were *strangers* in a world that was hostile toward them. Because of persecution, most of them had been scattered throughout Asia Minor. Some of them had become followers of Jesus because of the ministry of the Apostles in their cities, but when they became believers, now this world was not their home. Now the world had begun to work against them. Regardless of why they were dispersed throughout Asia Minor, they were all pilgrims in this world headed to their heavenly home.

Friends, as followers of Christ, we are all *elect exiles* in this world. This world is not our home. We are pilgrims even in the age in which we live. Our home is in heaven, and we are to live as if heaven is our home. What this means is that we are free. We are not trying to build our kingdom here on this earth. We are living for another age, an age that is to come. This means we can let go of the things of this world and live for the next. It means we can be very generous people. It means that in the grand scheme of eternity, we really do not take risks because our future is secure in Christ.

There is another comforting fact about the church being *elect exiles* in this world. The word *exiles* is an OT word that defined the people of God that He had scattered throughout the world.

Now we just finished Hosea, and if you remember, because Israel had disobeyed God, they were exiled from the Promised Land. According to Deuteronomy and the prophets, to be an *exile* was to be under God's

curse due to sin and disobedience. Yet, what we find here is that to be an *elect exile* was not a curse, nor was it due to sin and disobedience. They were *elect exiles* because God had chosen them. It was because they belonged to God.

The gospel has reversed the curse of what it means to be an exile. Now God's people are *elect exiles* because they have been obedient. The struggle they now face is from the world, our flesh, and the devil.

Here is how this works. Have you ever had the experience where you have been obedient to God, and things do not get easier but harder? Most of us have. The truth is, most believe that because we belong to Jesus, and if we obey Jesus, that life will get easier. We think that everything we do will work out. The fact is, most of the time when you follow Jesus, life does not get easier. What actually happens is that it gets harder.

What we are going to learn in 1 Peter is that when this happens, what God is calling us to do is be a witness in our suffering. He is calling us to be people who stand firm in the true grace of the gospel and share with people what Jesus has done to save them from their sin and eternity in hell under the wrath of God.

Transition: My third and final point is in v. 2. Let me just recap where we have been. First, we met the Apostle Peter, the author of the letter. Then we saw who the letter was written to, and finally, we see why he wrote to the churches.

### III. Message: God's People are to Stand Firm in the True Grace of God (v. 2)

*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,  
in the sanctification of the Spirit,  
for obedience to Jesus Christ and  
for sprinkling with his blood:  
May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

Peter plants his message of the true grace of God deep in the soil of the Trinity. What we have in v. 2 is Peter's version of the chain of grace.

Here is what I mean. In Romans 8:29-30, we find what theologians call the *Golden Chain of Salvation* or the *God's Golden Chain of Grace*. You may be familiar with how it goes but listen to the Apostle Paul's version:

*For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

Scholars call vv. 29-30 the *Golden Chain of Grace* because the words connecting the phrases together operate like links in a chain. Listen to them: *For those whom He foreknew, He predestined; and those whom He predestined He called; and those whom He called He justified; and those whom He justified He glorified.* Each word acts like a *golden link in the chain of salvation*.

The Apostle Peter does a similar thing, but he uses prepositions to set apart each phrase that creates a link in *the chain of grace*. But Peter does something different. He takes one more step by welding the links together through the work of the Trinity: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let's examine *Peter's golden chain of the true grace of the gospel*.

The first link in the chain is *foreknowledge*. We must not misunderstand what Peter means by *foreknowledge*. He is not saying that in eternity past that, the Father was looking through the corridors of time and saw who would believe, and then He *chose* them to salvation. Peter cannot mean that God learned who would believe and then chose them.

God did not look through the corridors of time and say, "*Oh, I see that this person is going to follow Jesus, and that person is going to believe.*" Then all of the sudden, He says, "*Oh, did not realize that he would believe in Jesus. Well, I have to choose him because he repented.*"

God did not do that because *foreknowledge* does not God learned who would believe and who would not. To say God does not know everything and then learns truth is the old heresy called *Open Theism*. Open Theism says God does not know the future but only knows options. It means that after we make our choice. He responds as if we are playing some kind of chess game of life with Him. This is NOT what *foreknowledge* means.

So what does the *foreknowledge of God* mean? First, one of the ways that Scripture describes how God cares for us is that he *knows* us. Psalm 1:6 says, “*The LORD knows the way of the righteous.*” In Amos 3:2, God says to Israel, “*You only have I known out of all of the families of the earth.*” The NIV paraphrases this verse, “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.*” When Yahweh says He knows His people, it means He knows them in a special way.

When you add the prefix *fore* to *knowledge*, it is signaling to us that He knew us before we knew Him. In other words, before time began, He knew us, and He chose us. This is what it means to be elect. So, before time began, God set His grace and love on us. As Eph. 1:4 says, “*God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world.*”

Peter’s point is that God initiated our relationship with Him. God is the One who made the first move toward us, not us toward Him. God was not backed in a corner and had to choose us, and now He is stuck with us. The fact is He chose us because He loves us. Let me make this personal. He chose you because He loves you in Jesus Christ.

So, exiled brothers and sisters, when you are sitting around and wondering if God knows what is going on in your life of exile—He does know, and He loves you. You are not exiled because of your sin, but because God knows what is best for you. Take heart that He hears your prayers. Take heart that He is working His will in your life. Take heart that He is moving His infinite resources of grace to care for you.<sup>3</sup> He is going to work all things together for your good and His glory.

The next link in Peter’s Golden Chain of Grace is *sanctification*. The word *sanctification* is one of those fluid theological words that must be read in context in order to know exactly what is intended by the author.

Here is the word *sanctification* means in our context. The *elect exiles* are God’s chosen people who are set apart and are consecrated to be holy. Peter will unpack what it means to be God’s holy people later in the

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Ortlund, *Supernatural Living for Natural People*, 127-128.



letter. For right now, we need to see that Peter is continuing to anchor our hearts in the fact that we are God's possession.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you belong to Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God has set you apart from the world to be the Father's holy possession for His holy purposes. The Father has planned good things for you to do. You are holy and precious to Him. You belong to the Father by the Spirit's work.

So, when you hear that voice in your head and saying, you are a mistake, you don't belong, you are a failure, you need to preach to yourself that by the work of the Holy Spirit you belong to your Heavenly Father. You are His, and He loves you.

The next link in the Golden Chain of Grace is governed by the single preposition "*for*." We are set apart *for obedience to Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling with his blood*.

The background for this statement is found in Exodus 24:3-8 where Moses initiated the people of Israel into covenant with God. Listen to this text and notice how Peter shows us that our obedience is now to Jesus Christ and His gospel:

*Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do."* <sup>4</sup> *And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord . . .* <sup>5</sup> *And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord.* <sup>6</sup> *And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar.* <sup>7</sup> *Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."* <sup>8</sup> *And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

Noticed what happened after Moses read the Law to the people. They promised to obey all that the LORD commanded, and then he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on them. This sealed God's covenant with them.

In the same manner, Peter is saying that just as the Israelites pledged their obedience and were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice and that sealed their covenant with Yahweh, likewise, when we confess our faith in Jesus Christ and repent of our sin and trust Him as our Lord and Savior and pledge our obedience to God, the blood of Jesus Christ is applied to us, and we enter the New Covenant with God.<sup>4</sup>

Peter concluded his greeting with a prayer of grace and peace for the elect exiles. His prayer is more than a typical prayer of *grace and peace*, but the tip of the gospel arrow in his letter for grace is the main thread woven throughout the letter, and it is the overall purpose he gives for writing at the end of the letter.

Listen to how Peter concluded his letter to the churches in 5:12, *“I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.”*

So, here is the take away as we conclude Peter’s introduction. The grace of God not some “kindly” introduction to a letter. The grace of God is the power and presence of God the Father poured out on us in the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of the Son of God. The grace of God is why God’s people are elect. Grace is why we are set apart by the Spirit of God. Grace is how we will become obedient to the Son of God.

Likewise, the word *peace* at the end of the greeting is more than absence of conflict. The word peace, by its very nature, is a word that is also anchored in the work of the Trinity. We are saved by the God of Peace through the work of the Prince of Peace and given the Spirit of Peace.

Brothers and sisters, we are living through a time where fear of the unknown is not simply localized in an experience of one or two individuals but it worldwide because of the coronavirus. More than ever, we need to be people who lean into the grace of God and be filled with the peace of God by the Spirit of God for the glory of the Son of God.

Let me pray for us as we close. *“Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank you for this letter of 1 Peter. We thank you for clarifying our identity in this world. We praise you that you have called us for obedience to Jesus Christ. May his eternal glory be ever before us. May his season of earthly humiliation guide*

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<sup>4</sup> Sam Storms, *ESV Expository Commentary, Vol. 12, Hebrews-Revelation*, 302; see also: Thomas R. Schreiner, *New International Version, The New American Commentary, An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, Vol. 37, 55-57.

*us. And may his vindication inspire us to press on through this wilderness world. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> David R. Helm. 1 and 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings (Preaching the Word Commentaries) . Crossway. Kindle Edition.