

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – October 23, 2015

First Letter of Saint Peter

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise to God for a Living Hope

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Context

- 1) Last week (October 23 Study Notes) we took a look at the background and historic context of Peter's writing of this letter. Today we expand on this a little more.
- 2) On the night of July 18, 64 A.D. a fire broke out in the city of Rome. It soon enveloped the whole city, burning for 6 days and 7 nights. Of Rome's fourteen districts only four remained intact. Three were leveled to the ground. The other seven were reduced to a few scorched and mangled ruins.
- 3) According to the Roman historian Tacitus, "*Terrified, shrieking women, helpless old and young, people intent on their own safety, people unselfishly supporting invalids or waiting for them, fugitives and lingerers alike – all heightened the confusion. When people looked back, menacing flames sprang up before them or outflanked them. When they escaped to a neighboring quarter, the fire followed - even districts believed remote proved to be involved. Finally, with no idea where or what to flee, they crowded on to the country roads, or lay in the fields. Some who had lost everything - even their food for the day - could have escaped, but preferred to die. So did others, who had failed to rescue their loved ones. Nobody dared fight the flames.*" The Annals
- 4) The carnage was great as was the death toll. When the flames abated, the survivors were on the verge of revolt.
- 5) History has assigned the blame to Nero, who wanted to clear away shanties to make room to enlarge his palace. Nero needed a scapegoat. He found an easy prey – the Christians.
- 6) Christians were viewed by some to be a strange group. They followed a man named Christ. They were rumored to be cannibals, because they met together in homes to drink someone's blood and eat his body.

Outline of 1st Peter

1. **Opening Remarks** (1:1-2)
2. **Dignity of the Christian Life**
 - a. New birth in Christ (1:3-9)
 - b. Testimony of the Prophets (1:10-12)
 - c. Be Holy Yourselves (1:13-2:3)
 - d. Christ the Living Stone (2:4-10)
3. **Duties of the Christian Life**
 - a. Civil duties of the Saints (2:11-17)
 - b. Suffering like Christ (2:18-25)
 - c. Household duties of the Saints (3:1-7)
 - d. Moral duties of the Saints (3:8-12)
4. **Difficulties of Christian Persecution**
 - a. Conduct during Persecution (3:13-22)
 - b. Living for the Last Days (4:1-11)
 - c. Suffering and Christian Glory (4:12-19)
 - d. Shepherds and the Flock (5:1-5)
 - e. Humility and Vigilance (5:6-11)
5. **Closing Benediction**

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They spoke about "love feasts,"--- at which they greeted one another with a holy kiss. This soon became enlarged into stories of sexual orgies.

- 7) In order to pin blame on the Christians, Nero began a series of terrible persecutions against them: It was during this time that Christians were dipped in tar and burned as torches to light the gardens of Nero for a banquet. They were tied to chariots and dragged through the streets of Rome until they were dead. They were thrown to the lions; they were tied up in leather bags and thrown into water so that when the leather bags shrank, the Christians were squeezed to death. These were but a few of the horrors that awaited believers.
- 8) Some scholars believe these events in Rome were the backdrop for Peter writing to the churches in Asia.

Salutation

- 1) At the outset, Peter identifies himself as the apostle of Jesus Christ. The Greek word *apostolos* means "a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders."
- 2) Peter sees himself as an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ Jesus.
- 3) He writes to the *parepidēmos* – Greek for aliens, that is "one who comes from a foreign country into a city or land to reside there by the side of the natives."
- 4) Peter understands that we who follow Christ are alien sojourners here. Our true home is in heaven.
 - a) As alien sojourners we live as people who are exiles – living side-by-side with native residents with whom we share no heritage. The meaning is that we live in an unbelieving and sinful world among men and women who deny the reality of God, and hence the natives live as enemies of God.
 - b) Yet even as aliens work for the betterment of the community which is their unnatural dwelling place, even so believers are to live and work for the salvation of our neighbors. We are to be light bearers in a sin-darkened world.
- 5) Hence, Peter's readers are part of the *diaspora* which in Greek means "scattered throughout" the regions that Peter names.
 - a) The Jewish diaspora refers to the dispersion of Israelites and later Jews out of their ancestral homeland (the Land of Israel) and into communities across the world. They took their faith, their customs, and the sacred words of Holy Scripture with them where ever they went. Their true home was Israel.
 - b) Peter uses this imagery to call to mind the proper relationship of followers of Jesus Christ to our resident communities – while we live here, this isn't our homeland. Our true homeland is with Christ in heaven.
 - c) Even as God worked through the circumstances of Israel to disperse God-fearing Jews across the face of the earth and to bring His word to a world living in darkness, so now God is working through the circumstances of the church to spread the Good News of the gospel throughout all the earth.
 - d) Hence, by referencing a familiar pattern of the way God worked through His people in Old Testament times to reach the world with the Holy Scripture of the Law and Prophets (dispersion being the means by which the message was spread abroad), Peter shows how God is using that established pattern once again, yet now applying it to the new cloth of the Gospel of salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 6) The provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia are located throughout what is modern day Turkey. (see map next page)
 - a) In this we see that even at the early date of this writing the Gospel message was already established in many parts of the Roman empire.

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b) That Peter writes to a number of churches over a fairly wide geography seems to imply that more than one copy of this letter was put into circulation fairly early on – maybe several copies were made at Peter's side and sent off all at once. This is conjecture. We don't know.

c) All of the churches that John later writes to in Revelations are located in this geography.

d) From John's letter – Revelations – we learn that each of the churches is unique and each has its own "corporate culture" so to speak.

e) The Holy Spirit, speaking through John, calls out the strengths and the weaknesses of each of the charisms of the seven churches.

f) In this we are reminded that at the early date of this writing, the church was still in its infancy. It was a charismatic community of believers, held together in the unity of the Holy Spirit – and not a hierarchy. As the church grew and multiplied its numbers, and as some began to teach a different and contrary gospel than the one which was proclaimed by the Apostles, the need for ecclesiastic authority became apparent. Hence, the office of bishop was established fairly early on in the life of the church.



Chosen with the Foreknowledge of God the Father

1) Peter coordinates three aspects of redemption with the three Persons of the Trinity:

- a) The Father elects us for salvation;
- b) The Holy Spirit makes us holy (through the life-long process of sanctification); and
- c) The Son consecrates us to a life of service by His blood, service in obedience to Jesus: i.e. "Follow Me."

2) Speaking of the Father, the words "know" – *ginōskō* in Greek, and "foreknow" – *proginōskō* in Greek and *yada* in Hebrew commonly mean "choose" or "set favor upon" or "acknowledge." It is used throughout the Old and New Testaments to indicate those whom God *chose* or *set His favor upon*.

- a) In the call of Abraham to be the founder of God's covenant nation Israel, God says "*I have chosen him.*" The verb is literally, "*I knew him.*" (Genesis 18:19)
- b) The same is true of Amos's description of Israel, "*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.*" (Amos 3:2) The verb is once again "*yada*" – i.e. – "known."

3) In the New Testament God's foreknowledge is clearly linked to the death of Christ and to the salvation of the "elect."

- a) "*Before the creation of the world*" Christ was "chosen" or "foreknown" to be the Redeemer (1 Peter 1:20), a clear indication that God knew from the beginning that mankind would fall into sin.
- b) On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter denounced the wicked men who put Christ to death, but he acknowledged that they had acted in accord with "*God's set purpose and foreknowledge.*" (Acts 2:23)

Not Fatalistic Determination

- a) God's foreknowledge in the life of an individual man or woman does NOT mean that God foresaw certain people would believe in faith, and these God predestinated to salvation as a result of their faith.
- b) Such a statement turns things completely upside down, for in saying God foresaw certain sinners would believe in Christ, and that because of this, He predestinated them to salvation, is the very reverse of Scriptural truth. Such a statement implies that grace is earned or merited by something we do. It is not!

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- c) God did not elect any sinner because He foresaw that he or she would believe, for the simple reason that no sinner ever does believe until God gives him/her faith. Faith is God's gift (Ephesians 1:8-9) – the gift is the *cause*; believing is the *consequence* of using His gift.
 - d) Furthermore, if it were true that God had elected certain people to be saved because in time they would believe, then that would make believing a *meritorious* act (i.e. grace is earned), and in that event the saved sinner would have ground for “boasting,” which Scripture emphatically denies. (Ephesians 2:9)
- 2) You and I believe because God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and chose not because He foresaw you and I would believe, but chose simply because it pleased Him to choose.
 - 3) God does not force anyone to become a believer but works in each person's heart so that the individual freely chooses to receive Christ as Savior (or not).

Through the Sanctifying Work of the Spirit

- 1) The word “sanctifying” in Greek is *hagiasmos* which means “purification.” It is the special work of the Holy Spirit. (see Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; and Galatians 5:5)
- 2) It is the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to lead holy lives, dedicated to the service of God and conformed to His likeness. Sanctification is a necessary part of being a Christian (see 1 Corinthians 6:18-19). The Holy Spirit:
 - a) Makes believers more like Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:18)
 - b) Helps restrain and humble our sinful human nature so we want to submit to God. (Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:17)
 - c) Is opposed to natural desires that war against God's growing life in us. (Galatians 5:16-17, Romans 8:5-9; and Jude 19)

To be Obedient to Jesus Christ and Sprinkled with His Blood

- 1) Sprinkling with blood is associated with rites of priestly ordination in ancient Israel. Moses sprinkled the people of Israel with the blood of the Sinai covenant, binding them to Yahweh and consecrating them to be a holy and priestly nation to the world. (see Exodus 24:8 and 19:6)
- 2) Aaron and his sons were ordained to priesthood with the sprinkling of blood. (see Leviticus 8:30)
- 3) This Old Testament pattern prefigured and anticipated the description of believers as members of a “royal priesthood” of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:9)
 - a) In Israel, once a year the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was located and sprinkle the blood of animal sacrifice on the mercy seat. It symbolized forgiveness of sin: that is God's eyes, represented by the eyes of the cherubim that were situated on either side of the mercy seat, did not see man's sin, but rather the sinner washed in the blood of sacrifice was put in good standing before God. This sacrificial ritual had to be repeated every year, since the blood of bulls could not do for man what Jesus did on the Cross. (Hebrews 9:5)
- 4) Today, Jesus is our High Priest and He Himself has sprinkled His own blood on the true mercy seat in heaven—the throne of grace. (Hebrews 9:23–26) What Jesus did on the Cross was done once for all. “*It is finished.*”

Discussion Questions

- 1) Discuss the role of each Person of the Trinity in the life of a believer. Why must I be sprinkled in blood?