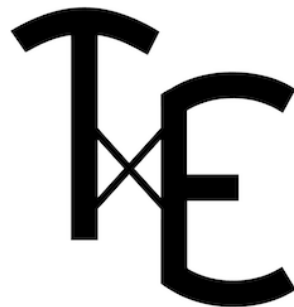




THEOLOGICAL ROUNDTABLE 2024

**1 PETER:
HOPE FOR EXILES**



October 15-17, 2024

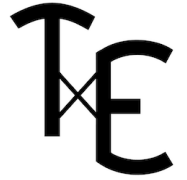
Tesoro Escondido Ranch | Mineral Wells, Texas

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Theological Roundtable 2024



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1 PETER 1:

THE GOSPEL OF LIVING HOPE

In this introductory paper, I want to make the case that the letter of Peter is an expansion and application of the gospel formula given by Mark (1:14-15). My opinion is that both Peter and Paul were conscious of this three-fold emphasis as they wrote their letters; that the apostolic doctrine is more gospel centered than has popularly been recognized. As a result much of what is called "preaching the word" is not really, since it ignores the heart of the word. We too often proclaim the ethical part of the New Testament as something beyond believing in such a way that lives are changed by what has happened in Jesus. Repentance is too often an additional requirement rather than the inevitable process of the truth of the gospel being believed.

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter proclaims and describes the gospel of God in terms of a living hope. In the first chapter he summarizes the work of Jesus the Messiah and introduces the basis for Christians to have hope in the midst of the worst kinds of persecutions. He defines his readers as "elect exiles". They are primarily converted Gentiles who have been scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. They have been somewhat surprised at the level of persecution they have experienced since their conversion to Jesus. They are in need of an understanding of the gospel of God and how it applies to their own journey.

From the early Church father, Papias, we have known that there is a relational connection between the gospel writer, Mark and the apostle Peter. Papias called Mark Peter's interpreter. It was Mark who clearly described the gospel of God, and quite possibly his understanding came from Peter.

Now after John was arrested Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:14-15

Peter understood the gospel as more than an invitation to make a decision and believe some biblical facts. He adopted the three-fold dynamic that Mark had recorded as Jesus' version of the gospel of God:

First, there is a fulfillment element whereby the advent of Jesus fulfills all previous promises, predictions, and prophecies. The gospel is a narrative with a specific plot moving toward a dramatic climax and it took centuries to bring the time to fulfillment. It is the end of the grand story. It only makes sense when the rest of the story is told. Each of the evangelists presented his own take on Jesus with a view to how he fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament.

Second, there is the dynamic arrival of the kingdom of God. The hope that had carried the believing remnant of Israel came from the prophecies of Daniel with the vision of the Son of Man riding the clouds of glory up to the throne of the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom that would not only last forever, but rule over all others (Dan. 7:13-14). Peter understood that Jesus had fulfilled that aspect as well and that it had massive implications, which he addresses in his two epistles.

Third, the gospel is of such nature that its announcement demands a response. "Repent and believe the gospel," Jesus said. Peter had followed this pattern in his sermon at Pentecost and heard the crowd respond, "What shall we do?" He responded, "Repent and be baptized. . ." In his first epistle, he spends much time talking about how to get our minds ready for the new creation that has come into existence and what the implications are when we think as new creations.

The relevance of Peter's first epistle could not be more obvious in our day. Various perversions of the gospel fill the airways, clutter the internet, and confuse even the most serious Bible students. Seldom do we hear the gospel presented with at least a reference to the fulfillment dynamic, the arrival aspect, and the demand for a radical change.

We are accustomed to hearing principles presented that have the promise of making life better if we can find a way to implement them. They are not necessarily unique to the gospel, nor do they require the power of the Spirit to employ them. Unbelievers can plant corn and get a harvest. They can work hard with honesty and generally succeed in the marketplace. Principles are good and reflect the intricate nature of God's order. When they are applied, life generally works better. But that is not the gospel.

Sometimes the good news part of the message being delivered is the opportunity to get in on a transaction that will put God in debt to our obedience in some way forcing him to bless us. This is much like the insurance salesman who assures us that he is doing us a huge favor by allowing us to buy his product because it will bring security and riches.

And then we often hear churches boasting about how their pastor "preaches the word of God." But that word is too often but a cold exegesis of a text without connection to the living gospel. Or it is even a focus on the judgment and destruction that is coming because we have failed to live up to God's expectations. It is evident that one can preach the Bible and miss the gospel.

As we contrast such substitutes with the message of Peter, we see the apostle consumed with the confidence that the gospel of Jesus proclaimed and applied will change people and their societies. He connects the Old Testament story and sees the shadows pointing to the substance of Jesus, the “living hope”. His use of “exiles” brings the Israelite story into the discussion. He describes an inheritance that was the center of hope for the Jews. They were fixated on a small piece of land and he expands that to cosmic proportions and reveals how superior the new inheritance is. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. We can’t lose it. It is kept by the powers of heaven. We also are kept by his power assuring us that our faith though essential won’t fail.

He even uses the experience of suffering and persecutions that the Israelites endured to show how that is part and parcel of the living hope we now share. God had explained to Israel why he had led them through the wilderness with its challenges instead of putting them on the smooth road of comfort and ease.

And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandment or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your father know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Deut. 8:2-3

Peter is sure of what is in the heart of his readers, and wants them to know that God is purifying that golden faith so that it is more precious. Their persecutions are not random, nor do they reflect their failures. God has made them new creatures with new hearts and uses the pressures of persecutions to reveal the uniqueness of their holiness. They have capability to respond in ways their “gentile” neighbors do not.

In the first chapter Peter describes the dynamics of the kingdom of God in creating a new people. It was God who foreknew the believers. He knew them not as names on a list, but as his own people, captured by his love. They didn’t find him. He chose them with a specific purpose and embraced them as his own people. Their sanctification meant that they were different from others. They were not better in value, but they had been assigned to represent God on earth.

The Israelites of the old story had been set apart to carry the story to completion, and that happened when the perfect Israelite was finally obedient to the covenant. These elect exiles are set apart to display the glory of the completed story. Jesus had introduced the world to a kind of love that had never been seen, and they would spread it to the ends of the earth. Their holiness was not a legalistic kind of religious ritual, but a freedom mankind had not known since Eden. They were free to obey someone other than sin (1:2). Jesus' blood was their mark of identity, and He had set them free to obey.

The living hope that permeates this text is brought about by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He ever lives. He is the promise made full. We no longer rely on the veracity of the prophets. Our hope is alive! When the gospel is proclaimed, that word is planted in our hearts and we are born again of the seed of the word of God, the gospel. The Father who planted the seed in us gives us his own nature. His care for us enables us to grow in that nature as we become more and more like him. Our part in the growth process is the dynamic of repentance. Peter describes that as preparing our minds for action, being sober-minded. The function of the word is to change a believer's mind, including adopting a new definition for reality and then adjusting behavior to fit this new perspective.

Peter emphasizes the focus on the grace that is coming. It is as sure as the grace that has been shown in the past. What has begun in the faithfulness of God's grace will be consummated in his future grace. We are not at the mercy of evil or random events. The God who knew before time all that would happen in time is still on time. All that sin has defiled the blood of Jesus has redeemed. The future is getting brighter for those who can see. The day when all wrongs are righted and all tears are wiped away is guaranteed by the precious blood of Jesus. This becomes another part of our motivation to live as the unique set apart people of God.

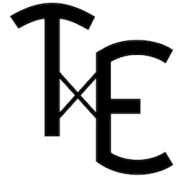
The cost of our redemption reflects the value God has placed upon us. We are not each an insignificant particle of mass that makes up humanity. We are rather specifically known and particularly bought by One who knows real value. If our time on earth is characterized by suffering, even persecution, we endure and rejoice that we are called to reflect a kingdom that is so different from all others that they want to eliminate it. But in their actions, they give us opportunity to reflect the love that is stronger than the sword or the bomb. In fact, there is nothing in the created order that is stronger than our living hope. He has defeated death, and rules over his own through the Spirit who raised him from the dead and empowers his people to fulfill the mission he has established from the beginning.

The living hope that characterizes the Christian is anchored in the word that promised a Messiah, that motivated the prophets of old, that became flesh in Jesus, that is planted when the gospel is proclaimed, and that abides forever. This word is the good news .

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:25)



Theological Roundtable 2024



Alan Wright
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1 PETER 2: ELECT EXILES

A friend's young son asked him why Peter Parker, aka Spider Man, takes the bus to school – *why doesn't he just web-sling himself to class?*

Good question. We could ask the same of the "Man of Steel" – why does Superman take the elevator to his office at *The Daily Planet*? In fact, why is he "mild mannered Clark Kent" at all?

Years ago, my kids gave me a plaque that read,

"Always be yourself, unless you can be Batman, In which case, be Batman."

Agreed.

When I was a kid, Batman was always my favorite because his superpowers didn't require being bitten by a radioactive spider or being born on a distant Krypton planet. I liked Batman because I figured I could *be* Batman. Just get enough money, a batmobile, a great computer and plenty of gadgets, and I could beat the bad guys.

If you can be Batman, be Batman, except If you're going to be Batman, there's a downside. I liked the gadgets, the cape and the batcopter, but I never thought about what made him Batman. Bruce Wayne was an orphan, a witness to the murder of his parents. Every little boy wants to be Batman. No child wants to be orphaned and traumatized by the sort of ghastly killing that led young Bruce to become the Caped Crusader.

Why do our superheroes have a vulnerable side? Why the alter ego? In the comics, the secret identity keeps the superhero from the daily limelight, protects their loved ones from being targeted, and perhaps protects them from legal ramifications. But from a narrative perspective, the whole story is altogether more fascinating and intriguing and dramatic when the protagonist is both an ordinary citizen and, at the same time, a superhero.

When we read or watch superhero stories, we are conflicted. We want them to be all hero and not at all human. Always be Batman and never be the orphaned boy Bruce. Always

Superman, never nerdy Clark. Always Spiderman, never childish Peter. We want them to be extraordinary because we need them to be extraordinary. We want them to be heroes, but we identify with them because they are humans. If they have no vulnerability, the story is gratifying, but boring.

We are similarly held in tension and frustration by our superheroes' secret identities. Sometimes moviegoers want to cry out to the screen, "Just tell the girl that you're Spiderman. She'll be really impressed! Tell them you're Batman, Bruce. They'll love you." We want our heroes to call a press conference and tell all their secret identities, but they never do. We're similarly frustrated when we see his public thinking that Batman might be a menace to society, and we'd like to tell the citizens the truth: He's truly benevolent. Don't falsely accuse him. He is on a mission to rid Gotham City of evil.

So we are left with the tension of our superheroes being ordinary, often misunderstood or even maligned, when they are, in reality, extraordinary people with supernatural gifts who have the power to change the world for good.

THE REAL SUPERHERO STORY

Like most of our popular myths and stories, we unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) craft our superhero tales in accord with the one, true, epic story that explains the world. It's a story of creatures made in the very image of the Creator, imbued with wisdom, adorned with glory and granted authority to rule the earth. But those creatures were not immune from temptation. They were like God, but vulnerable in their humanity. The lies of their arch enemy led them into disobedience and disgrace. To rescue them from their fallenness and restore them to their rightful place of dominion in the earth, a true superhero was needed, One who would not succumb to the temptations and taunts of the diabolical rival.

The "superhero" who came to our rescue didn't come as expected and didn't save as anticipated. The Savior came in glory but emptied himself and took on the form of a servant to save us. When our Hero was mocked, tortured and pierced, we might have longed to step near the cross and plead, "Don't bleed – show them who you are!" But the bleeding was needed. The raw humanity of the Savior was as important as his uncompromised divinity.

This dynamic and dialectical tension that plays out in the epic drama of Christ goes far to explain the mystery of the Christian's life in the fallen world. Christ, sent to reign and suffer, to heal and be wounded, to be a cornerstone that either secures or trips, is our "example" (1 Peter 2:21). His life on earth was both glorious and maligned and we, in Christ, can expect the same tension in our lives as secondary "superheroes."

PETER'S PERSPECTIVE

Peter had experienced the sudden rush of infilling power at Pentecost and preached the inaugural Christian sermon. He'd watched thousands be born again through the anointed words God gave Him to utter. He'd watched a lame man walk and leap and praise God under the sound of his own words, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise and walk."

Powerful Peter also lived in a Roman world that had no regard for the apostles' spiritual might or kingdom authority. In fact, Peter told the church that the Gentiles are likely to "speak against you as evildoers." He might as well have said, "You're Batman, but they'll probably call you a menace."

Though we might yearn to live solely in the triumph, power and co-reign with Christ that his death and resurrection secured for us, we are, in reality, like exiles, living in the midst of human institutions. We'd like to be Batman without being orphaned Bruce, to bear the glories of Christ but not the sufferings of Christ. Despite our deepest longings, one cannot be had without the other. There can be no Savior who is not both human and divine. There could be no salvation without both Good Friday and Easter Day. There can be no Christian in this world who is not both elect and exile.

ELECT AND EXILE

We've gathered around 1 Peter under the theme, "Hope for Exiles," but we might have more aptly titled our Roundtable "Hope for the *Elect Exiles*," mirroring Peter's salutation in 1:1: "To those who are elect exiles..." We are, indeed, "sojourners and exiles" (2:11), but we are also "God's people" (2:10).

Fifty years ago, it was easier for Christians in America to feel like "the elect." It now feels much easier to see ourselves as the "exiles."

Which are we?

Are we the "elect?" – "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation"? (1 Peter 2:9).

Or are we the "exiles" – "sojourners," "insulted," "grieved by various trials" ? (1 Peter 2:11, 4:14, 1:6).

Of course, we are both.

It is this theme, this paradox of our extraordinary and ordinary existence as an anointed but alienated people, that pervades the second chapter of 1 Peter. Until we understand, appreciate, and embrace the tension of our dual citizenship, we cannot know how to live as super-powered saints in a pagan society where we aren't in control.

When we are persecuted, we are beckoned to remember our eternal status in Christ. When we are most spiritually victorious, we are beckoned to remember how closely the

passions of the flesh crouch at the door. When we are emboldened with truth that the world has not seen, we are reminded to still be subject to human institutions despite their idolatry. When we soar with our spiritual freedom, we are reminded not to use our “freedom as a cover-up for evil.”

DIALECTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Philosophically, the notion of the dialectic finds its roots in Socrates and was developed in the 19th century by Hegel, who proposed that all real answers begin with a thesis, which is countered by an antithesis and is harmonized through a synthesis. But this dynamic of apparently opposite realities being true simultaneously through the mystery of “synthesis” predates Socrates and all philosophy because the self-revelation of God is One who is merciful and gracious... abounding in *hesed*... but who will by no means clear the guilty...” (Exodus 34:7). Yahweh is holy, holy, holy and is, at the same time, full of steadfast love that lasts forever.

The paradoxical connection of “elect” and “exile” is the dialectic of the Christian’s life on earth and is helpful to expose the meaning of 1 Peter 2. Three dialectical features stand out to me:

The Dialectic of Identity (Who Are We?):

Who we are as the elect:

“living stones. . . a spiritual house. . . a holy priesthood” (v. 4)

“a chosen race. . . a royal priesthood. . . a holy nation” (v.9)

“people who are free” (v.16)

“called” (v.21)

“healed” (v.24)

“dead to sin, alive to righteousness” (v.24)

Who we are as the exiles:

Tempted with “malice... deceit .. envy ... slander” (v. 1)

“newborn infants” (v. 2)

“sojourners. . . exiles,” subject to “war against your soul” (v. 11)

Spoken against as “evildoers”

“subject .. to every human institution” (v. 13)

Required to “honor the emperor” (v.17)

“endures sorrows. . . suffering unjustly” (v.19)

The Dialectic of Duty (What Are We to Do? How Shall We Live?):

What We Are to Do as the Elect:

“long for the pure spiritual milk. . . grow up into salvation” (v.2)

“come to him” (v. 4)

“offer spiritual sacrifices... through Jesus Christ” (v.5)

“proclaim the excellencies of him” (v.9)

“abstain from the passions of the flesh” (v.11)

“put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” (v.15)

“live as people who are free” (v.16)

“love the brotherhood. . . fear God” (v.17)

What We Are To Do as Exiles:

“keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. . .”, let Gentiles “see your good deeds” (v.12)

“be subject ... to every human institution” (v.13)

“silence ignorance” by “doing good” (v.15)

“honor everyone. . . honor the emperor” (v. 17)

if servants, “be subject to your masters. . . respect, not only ... the good but also the unjust” (v.18)

“suffer” for doing “good” (v.20)

“follow in his footsteps” (Christ who suffered for doing good) (v.21)

The Dialectic of Union (What We Have through Connectedness to Christ?):

What our Union with Christ means for us as the elect:

We ingest His grace - “[taste] that the Lord is good” (v.3)

We are “living stones” (v.5) “built up as a spiritual house”

Our sacrifices are “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5)

We “will not be put to shame” (v.6)

“the honor is for you who believe” (v. 7)

“called out of darkness into **his** marvelous light” (v.9)

“now you are God’s people” (v.10)

“mindful of God” (v.19)

“we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (v.24)

“by his wounds ... healed” (v.24)

“returned to the Shepherd” (v.25)

What Our Union with Christ Means for Us as Exiles:

“you come to him, a living stone rejected” (v.4)

“be subject for the Lord’s sake” (v.13)

“mindful of God, one endures sorrows” (v.19)

“Christ also suffered... leaving you an example that you might follow” (v.21)

His example to us: “reviled, did not revile in return” (v.23)

His example to us: “suffered, did not threaten” (v.23)

“entrusting himself to the him who judges justly” (v.23)

HOW THE SIMULTANEOUS REALITIES OF “ELECT” AND “EXILE” COMFORT AND EMPOWER

Peter’s seeming seesaw of thought between who we are as God’s beloved and holy possession (the elect) and as citizens of a natural world with ever changing political realities (exiles) serves to comfort us in our affliction and empower us in our Christlike mission. It is only in knowing that we are like exiles in this world that we are kept from disillusionment. It is only in knowing that we are his elect for eternity that we can live with hope amidst adversity.

Peter is utterly realistic while utterly faith-building. Our new identity in Christ clarifies both who we are and whose we are, so that the empires of the world cannot define us. But our royal identity and priestly status does not displace our earthly limitations. In fact, Christ, with whom we are mystically united, experienced both glory and suffering in this world and our intimate union with him guarantees that we will likewise experience both power and persecution.

When we understand all the rich benefits of being in Christ, when we taste and see that the Lord is good, we crave his grace like a newborn longing for milk. It is the longing, the taste of sweet unity with Christ and the savor of his grace that causes us to grow. It is the ongoing nourishment of that spiritual milk and the increasing awareness of our exalted place in Christ and the remarkable affirmation of God over us that empowers us in the spiritual battle. It is the sober awareness that we are, while God’s own possession, like aliens in a foreign land, that keeps us comforted by God, rather than blaming God, when we suffer.

APPLICATION EXAMPLE: HOW CAN ELECT EXILES LIVE PURELY?

I remember a counseling moment with a dear parishioner and friend who had been struggling for years with a pornography addiction that was damaging his soul and unraveling his marriage. I asked the brother, “Do you ever, in a moment of temptation, say to yourself, ‘I’ll think I’ll abstain, because if I don’t, I’ll feel really bad afterwards?’ ” His candid response was unforgettable: “No,” he said soberly. “It doesn’t work that way for me. Instead,” he continued, “it starts with me feeling terrible about myself and, when I feel bad about myself, I do bad things.”

The more ashamed we are, the more we do shameful things.

If we embrace only the exilic nature of our place as Christians in our “foreign” culture, if we only consider the plight of our alien status, we’ll miss the profound power of knowing ourselves holy to God.

“There is no passage in the New Testament that more explicitly associates the Old Testament terms for Israel with the New Testament church than this one¹.” Peter’s echo of the Mosaic covenant (see Ex. 19:5-6) and ancient prophecies (eg., Is 43:20-21) reminds us that God’s vision of his people as a holy nation is not new! Jesus’ arrival does not usher in a radically new sort of identity for God’s people. But Christ’s coming brings the power and assurance for God’s people to be what he has always intended.

Peter’s emphasis on the image of the “elect” as a chosen race mustn’t conjure rigid notions of predestination; this is no wooden fatalism. Instead, our election, our being chosen in Christ (Eph.:4), traces grace to its earliest source in God’s love and enthralls our souls with both gratitude and power.

Priestliness in ancient Israel depended on genealogy, in that one had to be born into a priestly family. If born into the priestly family, one still must be properly washed, clothed, and anointed to handle the holy things and to mediate between God and people. The shocking assertion that we, in Christ, are all priests from a royal line, reminds us that we have been spiritually born anew into the priestly family wherein we have intimate and immediate access to God. Spiritually soul-washed, clothed with Christ and anointed with the Holy Spirit, every Christian is fully qualified to handle the holy things and mediate God’s grace to the world. We need never be ashamed to come into his presence in our time of need!

To be holy, in the definitive sense the writer of Hebrews declares, “we have been sanctified,” (Heb. 10:10), is to be God’s “own possession.” To be “royal” is to be restored to a spiritual ascendancy over the powers of darkness from which we have been delivered. To be those who once were not a people, but are now God’s people, to be those who had not received mercy, but are now recipients of mercy (Hos. 2:23) is to be delighted and motivated by a special status that pagans, whether first century Romans or 21st century Americans, do not enjoy and cannot understand.

My parishioner’s insight to the roots of his pornography addiction is instructive not only in the explanation of the defeat he so often felt, but also in defining the path to victory. If he does “bad things” when he feels bad about his life, the answer is to embrace a whole new identity that is filled with profound value and purpose. The modern version of self-esteem comes up empty because its claims of worth have no underlying substance. Solid, ultimate value is found in eternal reality and is assured by genuine justification in Christ.

¹ McKnight, S. (1996). *1 Peter* (pp. 109-110). Zondervan Publishing House.

When Peter exhorts his readers to put away malice and to abstain from passions of the flesh, he does so by reminding them who they are and whose they are. My parishioner struggling with pornography came to a new line of reasoning. In the moment of temptation, he began learning to rehearse his truest identity, his higher identity. In the awareness of definitive holiness (“I belong to God, I am set apart”) he began conquering temptation with a different thought, “I am holy and this sin doesn’t fit who I am.”

In sum, Peter is showing us that the certainty that we are the “elect” is both reason and power to live holy lives. But it is also powerful to be reminded that we are aliens in a pagan culture. Just as surely as we find powerful resistance to temptation by remembering our treasured status as God’s holy ones, we also find strength in the on-the-ground acceptance that we are utterly different from the world around us. We are not like this pagan culture. We are holy misfits. We are exiles, headed for a different homeland.

I think of a day when our young son Bennett came home from playing at a friend’s house for the afternoon. All evening he was whiny and unusually demanding. It was obvious that something had been modeled for him that afternoon. Instead of simply critiquing the child or scolding the child, we simply said, “I don’t know what you’ve seen today, but in this family, we don’t whine.” We are exiles in a whiny world. Where we come from, they don’t whine. In our kingdom, we “put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander” (v.1).

Victory over sin comes from the joint awareness that we are God’s treasured possession, too holy to do unholy things, and that we are not like this pagan world. We must admit our alien status in order to maintain our distinctiveness.

APPLICATION EXAMPLE: HOW CAN EXILES LIVE HONORABLY?

Some years ago, the same son was a volunteer teacher of the eight-year-old boys at Vacation Bible School. When trying to dissuade a boy from retaliating against another kid who had said something unkind, Bennett said: “When people are mean to us, the Bible tells us to be nice to them.” The boy thought for a moment and replied, “Well, that’s stupid.” The second chapter of 1 Peter shows us why it’s not stupid.

If we can increasingly gain victory over the war of the flesh by remembering ourselves as elect exiles, we can likewise learn to live peaceably and honorably amid ungodly institutions by remembering the same dialectic.

Exiles and sojourners do not expect the predominant culture around them to acquiesce, they expect to be misunderstood. But exiles who know themselves as a chosen race and holy priesthood do not despair when maligned nor melt into conforming to culture.

The exhortation to “keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (v.12) is an appeal to the higher identity of the elect as a people loved and honored by God. In the same way

Christians are to resist unholy temptations because they are holy, the people of God are to honor all people because believers are imbued with the kindness of God.

The command to “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (v.13) is, of course, not a sweeping mandate to obey even the most ungodly laws. The word for “be subject” could be translated as “defer.” It’s not a word for unqualified obedience. The New Testament narrative gives us stories of God sanctioning civil disobedience. For example, an angel of the Lord opened prison doors for the apostles so they could violate the high priest’s command for them not to teach. In response, Peter said, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:17-21). Peter hasn’t changed his mind about this in 1 Peter 2. Instead, he’s pointing to the dynamic way that believers’ paradoxical position as both elect and exile informs the kind of expectancy we have for the culture and the kind of other-worldly grace we can show amidst pagan society.

Thus, it is “for the Lord’s sake” that we are to be subject to human institutions (v.13). It is our elevated spiritual status as those chosen in Christ that leads us to live in such a way that we glorify God. The contrast between the deity of “the Lord” and the “human” nature of the emperor is highlighted in this verse, flying in the face of the deity cult of the Roman emperor. The Lord is the Creator, the emperor is a creature. Nonetheless, the believer mustn’t fall into the arrogant thought, “Since I’m the elect, I don’t need to honor human institutions.” Instead, the believer knows, “I’m human and I’m a sojourner in a foreign land, so I will respect their ways as much as I can.”

It’s “the will of God” that elect exiles do “good” (v.15) to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” (v.15). It is the established plan of God, the desire of God, that transformation in culture happens primarily by the “royal priesthood” mediating the kindness of God thus “muzzling” the “*agnosia*” (“not knowing”) of foolish people. To call the pagans “ignorant” is not a curse, it is a statement of fact. Being ignorant is quite different than being stupid. The predominant culture, then and now, is ignorant of the true nature of Christ and his church. As the kindness of God leads to repentance, so the good deeds of the chosen saints quieten the constant critique of the church and open the path to transformation.

The call to “love the brotherhood” is an invitation to practice *agape* within the church. Such covenantal love might not be possible in the culture, but honor is always possible. “Fear God” is an exhortation to worship only the Lord, while “honor the emperor” is a reminder that the emperor isn’t God.

Peter’s message is clear, *because we are the elect, we must live differently, honorably. And because we are exiles, we give heed to the customs and requirements of the culture we are in.* If we live as if we are all elect and none exile, we’ll be tempted to live arrogantly, and we’ll be continually overwrought at the pagan ways of the world. If we live as if all exile, and forget that we are the elect, we’ll likely conform to culture or despair of making any difference at all. In sum, our consciousness as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood... God’s

people” spurs us to live differently but honorably in pagan culture, knowing that the kindness of God on display through our good deeds and honorable posture can bring real change to the world around us.

CONCLUSION

The brilliance of C.S. Lewis’ Chronicles of Narnia shines in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* when the Pevensie children’s royal adventure in Narnia resolves to normalcy at the end:

... and before they had gone twenty more [paces] they noticed that they were making their way not through branches but through coats. And next moment they all came tumbling out of a wardrobe door into the empty room, and they were no longer Kings and Queens in their hunting array but just Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy in their old clothes. It was the same day and the same hour of the day on which they had all gone into the wardrobe to hide. And the Professor, who was a very remarkable man, didn’t tell them not to be silly or not to tell lies, but believed the whole story. ... Eh? What’s that? Yes, of course you’ll get back to Narnia again someday. Once a King in Narnia, always a King in Narnia.” (pp. 187-188). Harper Collins, Inc. Kindle Edition.)

Who are these seemingly ordinary English tikes?

Are they kings and queens, the fulfillment of ancient prophecies about the restoration of humanity? Or, are they ordinary boys and girls, bumping around with book satchels under the gray English skies like every other school child?

They are both.

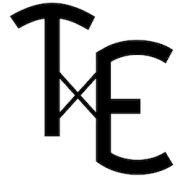
They are the elect, and Narnia is their kingdom. But they are also ordinary, and so they will forever feel like exiles in England. But they, and we, must never forget that “Once a King in Narnia, always a King in Narnia.”

Another way to put it, Batman will always be Bruce Wayne, the orphan. But the orphan, once Batman, will always be Batman.

And we, the chosen race, will always be sojourners in the world. But we aliens will always be a royal priesthood. We are the “elect” and the “exiles.” We are indeed the elect exiles.



Theological Roundtable 2024



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AN EXPOSITION OF 1 PETER 3

A. Submission of Wives to their Husbands (3:1-6)

vv. 1-2

That Peter is addressing the marriage relationship, rather than women in general, is evident from his use of “your own” (*idiois*) in addressing the *gunaikēs* (some manuscripts omit the definite article *hai*, perhaps as a way of focusing on “wives” as a vocative). Here they are commanded (the participle is clearly imperatival in force) to be “subject” or “submissive to” their husbands. The use of *hupotassomenai* (participial form of *hupotassō*), together with the opening word “likewise” (*homoios*) indicates that the imperative in 2:13, “be subject” (*hupotagēte*) continues to govern Peter’s thought. Of course, Peter is not saying that the submission of wives to their husbands is in every sense of the term equivalent to that of servants to their masters. But in their own distinctive ways, each is called on to be submissive to God-ordained authority.

The purpose of this willing submission is evangelistic: it is so that any believing wife who is married to an unbelieving husband (see 1 Cor. 7:12-16), that is to say, a husband who is actively hostile to “the word” (*logō*, an obvious reference to the gospel), might by means of her conduct bring him to saving faith. For “conduct” with reference to a life of holiness, see 1:15 where the same word is found (*anastrophē*). “Without a word” (*aneu logou*) points to their verbal silence. Peter does not mean that these women should never speak at all, but that their godly and loving behavior will likely be more effective in persuading their husbands of the truth of the gospel than any prolonged verbal argumentation (the verb rendered “may be won” was originally a commercial term, “gain” or “profit” but came to be used in the church for conversion; see Matt. 18:15; 1 Cor. 9:19-22). As the unbelieving husband observes the seemingly inexplicable joy and peace of his wife, the Spirit uses this to awaken him to the gospel.

Submission carries the implication of voluntary yieldedness to a recognized authority. As we also see in 2:13-25, such subjection in no way implies (much less requires) the notion of an inferior yielding to a moral or spiritual superior. There is ontological equality that exists within all hierarchical relationships. Neither does submission mean that a wife must always agree with her husband, as here she differs with him on the most important issue of all: the gospel of Jesus Christ. She believes, in obvious disagreement with her

husband, who does not.

What we read in v. 2 is somewhat redundant of v. 1. “When” unbelieving husbands observe the “respectful and pure conduct” of their wives, there is hope that such will be used by God to bring about their faith in Christ. The participle translated “when they see” could as easily be causal (“because they see”) or even instrumental (“by seeing”). “Respectful” is the rendering of *en phobō* (lit., “in fear”), and in view of how it is used elsewhere in this epistle (1:17; 2:17-18) may point more to her reverence for God than to her respectful attitude toward her husband (although the latter is always appropriate).

vv. 3-4

The instruction in these two verses may have been prompted by the tendency of some women to think that their outward beauty and fashionable clothing would make life easier at home or perhaps even help in winning their unbelieving husbands to Christ. There is nothing intrinsically evil with such things, but Peter’s counsel is that women not put their trust in them. He is arguing against what is overdone, excessively expensive and ostentatious, and inconsistent with Christian modesty.

There is likely an ellipsis at the beginning of v. 3, where an implied *kosmos* (not “world” but “adornment” or “adorning”) should be understood. Peter mentions three things in particular that constitute what is “external” or “outward”: the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold jewelry, and one’s clothing. The alternative to trusting in what is external (*exsōthen*; v. 3) or visible is to rely on what is “hidden” (*kruptos*) or invisible, which is to say, certain virtues that exist wholly within the heart but are given expression outwardly in how one lives. Adorn your soul, says Peter, with what is “imperishable” (“beauty” is not in the original text but aptly conveys the focus on inward attractiveness as over against mere physical beauty). Here he identifies what is inward and imperishable as “a gentle and quiet spirit” (*pneumatōs* here is not the Holy Spirit, but the human spirit or disposition, which of course is sustained and made possible by the ministry of the Spirit of God). Although the word “this” (reflecting the shift to the dative case) might suggest accompaniment, hence “together with” or “accompanied by” a gentle and quiet spirit it is more likely that the latter phrase is explanatory of what Peter means by the “hidden person of the heart.”

The antecedent of “which” is the “spirit” or inner disposition of meekness and quietness, which in turn is explanatory of what the “hidden person of the heart” entails. The reason for Peter’s focus on this invisible character trait is that it is “very precious” or of great value in the sight of God.

vv. 5-6

In order to reinforce his point (*gar*, “for”) he appeals to godly women in the OT, particularly Sarah (the others also likely in his mind would include Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah). They all exhibited precisely what he has called for in v. 4, namely, a preference for internal over external adornment and godly submission to their husbands. Their “hope” in God is another way of saying they lived *en phobō* (“in fear”, translated “respectful” in v. 2).

The precise way in which they “used to adorn (*kosmeō*; the related noun form, *kosmos*, “adornment,” appeared in v. 3) themselves” was “by submitting” (participle of means or manner) to their own husbands. For the fourth time in this paragraph (2:13-3:7) a form of *hupotassō* appears (this is the third instance of it as a participle), reinforcing our earlier observation that Peter is concerned throughout with godly submission to divinely appointed authority.

It was precisely in “calling him lord” that Sarah “obeyed” Abraham, her husband. Peter is alluding to Genesis 18:12 where Sarah expressed disbelief in God’s promise that she would bear a child. After all, she was barren and Abraham was old. The comment was a mere aside; she was talking to herself. There’s no indication that Abraham or anyone else was supposed to hear her say this. She is thus praised because she honors him when no one is listening. “Lord” is a term of respect, something akin to “Sir,” but is certainly not an affirmation of Abraham’s divinity!

“Children” may be an ethical designation, pointing to someone who imitates a quality in another. Hence, you are her “children” in the sense that you behave in relation to your husbands in the same way or manner as she did. But more is likely intended than that. The “children” of Abraham suggests covenantal status and spiritual membership in the people of God (see Luke 13:16; also Matt. 3:8-9). Paul likewise spoke of those who have become the children of promise as having Sarah for their mother (Gal. 4:21-31).

Most take the two participles in v. 6b as conditional, hence: “if you do good” and [if] “you do not fear.” Others object, arguing that this would make their covenantal status dependent on their works. But it may well be that these two participles are not stating conditions on which covenant status hangs suspended, but rather two ways in which the authenticity of that status is confirmed (see Heb. 3:6, 14). Doing good and not fearing bear on-going witness (both participles are present tense) to the reality of having already become Sarah’s children.

Whereas “anything” that is “frightening” or intimidating could be inclusive of any individual or experience that poses a threat to one’s well-being (cf. Prov. 3:25), it is likely the danger posed by unbelieving husbands that Peter has particularly in mind.

B. The Honoring of Wives by their Husbands (3:7)

Peter would never have us think that husbands do not also bear significant responsibility. In fact, they “likewise” must relate to their wives in a way that is consistent with who these women are in Christ. Once again, the participial form of a verb is to be understood as imperatival: “live” or dwell with them in an understanding way.

The phrase translated “in an understanding way” is, more literally, “according to knowledge.” It is unlikely that Peter means knowledge of God or of the nature of women as such, in terms of their disposition and proclivities, as over against the nature of a male. The conjunction “as” (*hōs*) is likely providing us with the content of the knowledge in view. Thus, live with your wives with the recognition or understanding that they are “the weaker vessel.” The latter does not refer to moral or intellectual capacity but most likely to inferior physical strength, and perhaps social status. The comparative adjective (*asthenesterō*, “weaker”) requires that we recognize men to be “vessels” as well. But women, especially in the ancient world, were more vulnerable and easily taken advantage of than were men. Let this knowledge, then, govern how you relate to, protect, and honor your wife!

Our wives are deserving of honor because they, no less so than believing men, are “heirs” (or, “co-heirs”) of “the grace of life.” Whether Peter intends us to understand this grace as leading to life or that the grace consists of life (likely the eschatological inheritance of life, as in 1:4), his point is that women are equally included in the saving benefits of Christ’s work.

Peter clearly suspends the answer to our prayers on our faithful obedience to this command. These are the prayers of the husband, for why would God penalize women for the failure of their husbands to properly honor them? We should never presume that God will answer us while we continue to mistreat those who are fellow heirs with us of eternal salvation. In view of Peter’s subsequent citation in 3:12 of Psalm 34:12, we must assume that callous disregard of one’s wife will close God’s ears to our prayers and turn his face against us.

Although there is much practical counsel for wives in this paragraph, I here draw attention to the responsibility of husbands. Wayne Grudem comes directly to the point by reminding us that “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 honour’ on her.”²

C. Mutual Respect and Love for All (3:8-12)

vv. 8-9

² Grudem, *First Peter*, 146.

In saying, “Finally, all of you,” Peter isn’t bringing the epistle to a close but only the *Haustafel* or family code that began in 2:13. *Pantes* (“all”) indicates that he no longer has any particular group in mind but the entire Christian community. There is obviously an ellipsis as there is no verb governing these virtues. We should probably assume some form of either *eimi* (“be”) or *ginomai* (“become”) or perhaps yet another imperatival participle. In any case, there are five behavioral characteristics Peter calls for in v. 8.

First, he calls for “unity of mind” or a common purpose among them. Although the word appears only here in the NT we find this same emphasis elsewhere, especially in Paul (see Rom. 15:5-7; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:1-2; 4:2). He isn’t calling for uniformity but rather of sharing the same spiritual values, recognizing and contending for the same theological truths, proclaiming the same gospel, and most important of all, being devoted to and passionate about the same Christ and his supremacy and glory.

The word translated “sympathy” is also a NT hapax and has the sense of sharing the same emotions or feeling what others feel so that you can respond with sensitivity to the need. The third virtue is the well-known term for “brotherly love” (*philadelphoi*). Christians must also cultivate a “tender heart” one for another. Peter’s fourth term (*eusplanchnoi*) is related to the standard term for intestines which were regarded as the seat of one’s emotions, hence “tender-hearted” or “compassionate” or to “feel generous in the depths of your being.” It is the antithesis of hypocrisy that acts tenderly yet feels malice. Finally, we are to have “a humble mind” (*tapeinophrones*), a word that in ancient times was regarded as a vice but is now a virtue in the redeemed community. Although a hapax, it is closely related to *tapeinophrosunē* (“lowliness” or “humility of mind”) found in Acts 20:19; Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; Col. 2:18, 23; 3:12; 1 Pet. 5:5.

The negative counterpart to these positive affirmations is found in v. 9. The call for non-retaliation reminds us of how Jesus responded to those who reviled him (see 1 Pet. 2:23), suggesting that Peter has in mind our response not to those within the Christian community but to our persecutors without (see also Matt. 5:43-44; Luke 6:27-28; Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15). Our response should be to “bless” or to invoke God’s grace upon our enemies because this is precisely what he has done for us in Christ. Indeed, to “bless” others is the very purpose (*eis touto*, “unto this” is used twice elsewhere in 2:21 and 4:6) of our calling.

The conjunction *hina*, translated “that” (ESV) could be introducing the purpose of our blessing others, hence, “in order that you may obtain a blessing.” Or, more likely, it expresses result: the obtaining of (more literally, “that you might inherit”) a blessing comes as a result of having blessed others. The language of inheritance was also found in 1:4 and 3:7.

vv. 10-12

These three verses contain an extended citation of Psalm 34:12-16 as it is found in the LXX

(Ps. 33:13-17). The capacity to “love life” and to “see” (i.e., enjoy or experience) “good days” is dependent on one’s commitment not to speak evil or deceitfully. God simply will not bless those who seek verbal vengeance. But concrete action is also required as the psalmist calls on us, negatively, to “turn away from evil” (*apo kakou*; genitive of separation) and, positively, to “do good”. To “seek” peace is the same as to “pursue” it.

There is once again an ellipsis as we must supply *eisin* (third plural present active of *eimi*, “they are”). God’s “eyes” *are* attentive to the needs of the righteous (i.e., they who resist the temptation to resort to verbal revenge) and his “ears” *are* listening to their prayers. Those who “do evil” by using their tongues and lips to exact vengeance on those who have mistreated them will find that the Lord has turned his face “against” them. The preposition *epi*, used in v. 12a in a positive sense of “on” or “upon” is here in v. 12b used negatively, hence “against”. Peter once more, as in 3:7, ties answered prayer to godly obedience and humble trust in the sufficiency of God’s goodness.

There is no more fearful thought than that the God of heaven and earth is “against” someone. You do not want God for an enemy! This is a powerful incentive to avoid the doing of “evil” (v. 12), but an even more stimulating reason to “do good” (v. 11) is the enjoyment of God’s manifest presence and the grace he supplies to those who humbly submit to his instruction and guidance (see Js. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

D. Zealous for Good in All Things and the Promised Vindication (3:13-4:6)

vv. 13-14

Peter is still concerned with the necessity of godly behavior in the face of hostile opposition. This is evident from the rhetorical question with which v. 13 opens. The anticipated answer is, “No one.” All things being equal, being “zealous for what is good” ought to assure a person of escape from harm. Some take the “harm” as ultimate or eschatological, the point being that our earthly persecutors can do nothing to undermine or destroy our eternal inheritance in Christ (see Rom. 8:31, 35-39). But in view of the parallelism with v. 14a the “harm” is more likely equivalent to the physical “suffering” that we endure now, during this life. Peter is clearly a realist and knows that the Christian lifestyle will often provoke opposition, something he openly confessed earlier in 2:20-21. In saying “even if” one should suffer for righteousness he’s not questioning whether it will occur. It most certainly will. What is of utmost concern for the believer is that the suffering be provoked by righteous living and not because of sin.

There can be little doubt that Peter is alluding to the beatitude of Jesus in Matthew 5:10 – “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In both instances the believer is pronounced “blessed” (*makarioi*), something that Peter will repeat with the same word in 4:14.

The latter half of v. 14 literally reads, “Do not fear the fear of them” (a cognate accusative). He isn’t instructing believers not to fear what frightens unbelievers. The genitive (“of them”) is objective. We are not to be afraid of them or intimidated by what they might do.

vv. 15-16

In place of fear the believer is to “honor Christ the Lord as holy.” The translation “honor . . . as holy” reflects one word in the original text, the same verb (*hagiadzō*) used in the opening petition of the so-called Lord’s Prayer: “hallowed” or “sanctified” be your name. The meaning is much the same whether Peter intends us to “honor Christ as the Lord” (in which case *ton Christon* is the direct object of the verb *hagiasate* and *kurion* is the complement) or to “honor the Lord, that is, Christ” (where *kurion* is the direct object and *ton Christon* is in apposition to it). The ESV takes a slightly different tact and makes “Lord” appositional to “Christ” (hence, “Christ the Lord”)

To honor Christ as Lord means truly and sincerely to believe that Christ alone is Lord and our enemies aren’t, no matter how much power and authority they may wield. He alone must be cherished in our “hearts” as utterly unique and precious above all. We must let the reality of his supremacy be preeminent in our thinking and feeling and govern our response to those who seek our harm. In this way our refusal to fear our enemies honors Christ as Lord because it shows that our hope in him is unshakable.

We also must “always” be “prepared” to defend the hope that is within. Perhaps this defense is itself the way or means by which we honor the Lord as holy. In either case, Peter isn’t thinking of the scholarly apologist or of a formal courtroom setting (although see Acts 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16), but of a daily (“always . . . anyone”) readiness to explain the “reason” or “ground” (*logon*) why our hope is in Christ alone.

The manner of our defense matters greatly: it must be with “gentleness” and “respect.” By “gentleness” he means the absence of arrogance and pride and the presence of humility and calmness. Given Peter’s consistent use of *phobos* in this letter (1:17; 2:17; 3:2), the word “respect” should probably be rendered “fear” (*phobou*) and refers less to one’s attitude toward other people and more to one’s reverence for God.

It may well be that “having a good conscience” (see 2:19) is the result of conducting oneself with “gentleness and respect.” Others treat it as an imperative: in addition to responding with gentleness and respect, “have a good conscience” so that when your enemies slander and revile (cf. 2:23; 3:9) you it is they who are put to shame. Earlier in 2:12 the apparent purpose of such behavior was the conversion of one’s enemies. In 2:15 Peter envisioned them being put to silence. Whether or not the “shame” they here experience is a prelude to genuine conversion is difficult to know.

v. 17

This verse is a virtual echo of 2:20 and anticipates what follows in 4:15-16. Elliott argues that the point here “is not that God wills suffering but that *God wills doing what is right* rather than doing what is wrong . . . even if and when this results in suffering.”³ But this seems to be an effort to evade the obvious and, for Elliott, uncomfortable theological conclusion that God often does in fact will that his children suffer in spite of their obedience to him. Peter’s point is that if such suffering should be God’s desire (lit., “if the will of God should will”), we must be diligent that it not be for sins we have committed.

Whereas not all Christians have the spiritual gift of evangelism (Eph. 4:11), no believer is exempt from making Christ known to those who ask for an account of the hope in our hearts. We should know and be quick to explain why he is more precious to us than all else and why we are prepared to suffer for his sake, even when it is unjust and undeserved. Nothing will more readily commend Christ to the unbeliever than the believer’s patient endurance of persecution for his name’s sake.

The Victory and Vindication of Christ - 3:18-22

This paragraph is not only the most difficult passage in 1 Peter but also one of the more challenging texts in the entire NT.⁴ Our approach to it thus calls for both careful analysis and hermeneutical humility.⁵

vv. 18-19⁶

That Jesus died “once for all” (*hapax*) puts his sacrifice in contrast with the OT sacrifices that had to be repeated annually. That he died, “the just for the unjust” (see Isa. 53:11) points us to the requirement that an atoning sacrifice had to be unblemished and spotless and also highlights the unmistakable substitutionary nature of his death. The aim of Christ was to overcome the alienation brought about by our sin and to bring us to God, a theme found yet again in Eph. 2:18 and Rom. 5:2.

We must not overlook the seemingly unimportant “also” (*kai*) which indicates that Peter is here providing us the rationale for vv. 13-17. In other words, we should readily embrace undeserved suffering for “Christ *also*” suffered in this way. Needless to say, we do not suffer in the precise way he did, as a substitutionary sacrifice that propitiated the wrath of God, but Peter still wants us to find in his atonement for us an incentive to bear up

³ Elliott, *1 Peter*, 635; italics in original.

⁴ Martin Luther’s conclusion is shared by many: “That [vv. 18-19] is as strange a text and as dark a saying as any in the New Testament, so that I am not yet sure what St. Peter intended” (cited by Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 252).

⁵ For additional insights in this passage, see Daniel R. Hyde, *In Defense of the Descent: A Response to Contemporary Critics* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

⁶ There are numerous textual problems in v. 18. Some manuscripts read “he died” (*apethanen*) rather than “he suffered.” Some add “on your behalf” or “for you” (*hyper humōn*) while others read “on our behalf” (*hyper hēmōn*). Notwithstanding these variations, the likely reading is reflected in the ESV, “Christ also suffered once for sins.”

under the oppressive persecution of the non-Christian world.

The last clause of v. 18 provides an apt transition into a focus on his triumphant defeat of all enemies as seen in his resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to the right hand of God. His “being” put to death and made alive suggests either a causal relationship, in the sense that he brought us to God *because* he died and was raised, or an instrumental emphasis: it was *by means of* his death and resurrection that we are brought near to God. The difference between these two options is minimal. In view of the *men/de* construction, there may even be a concessive force to the first participle: “although, on the one hand, having been put to death in the flesh, he was, on the other, made alive in the spirit.”

The terms “flesh” and “spirit” do not refer to the two elements of which we are composed: the material (body) and the immaterial (soul or spirit), as if to suggest the former dies but the latter survives. Such Greek categories of thought are foreign to the NT. Neither do these terms refer to the two natures of Christ: human and divine. Rather they refer to two modes or spheres of existence. As R. T. France has noted, “*sarx* in the New Testament denotes the natural human sphere of existence, and *pneuma* in contrast with it denotes the supernatural sphere.”⁷ Again, France explains:

“So here the contrast is between Christ’s death in the natural sphere, and his risen life in the eternal, spiritual sphere. His earthly life ended, but that was succeeded by his heavenly life. Thus the second phrase [‘made alive in the spirit’] does not refer to Christ disembodied, but to Christ risen to life on a new plane.”⁸

In other words, the phrase “made alive in the spirit” does not refer to an experience of Christ prior to the resurrection, as if after he died he entered into an intermediate, disembodied state.⁹ Simply put, the final clause of v. 18 is directly descriptive of the death and resurrection of Christ (see 1 Tim. 3:16). Thus, he died in the earthly, temporal realm, a realm characterized by flesh, and he was made alive or raised to the heavenly, eternal realm, a realm characterized by spirit. In either case, Peter has in view Christ’s resurrection from the dead.¹⁰

The opening relative clause in v. 19, “in which,” clearly has its antecedent in the word *pneumati* (“spirit”) from v. 18. Since the latter has in view the resurrection of Christ, what follows in v. 19 must be an experience *subsequent* to his resurrection, not prior to it.¹¹

⁷ R. T. France, “Exegesis in Practice: Two Examples,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, edited by I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 267. Paul speaks similarly, although with slightly different terms (*psuchikos* and *pneumatikos*) in 1 Cor. 15:42ff., where his focus is two different types of bodies adapted or suitable to two different modes of existence.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 267. Likewise, Jobses, *1 Peter*, 239.

⁹ For an extended defense of the notion that Christ “descended” into Hades after his death but before his resurrection, see the work by Justin W. Bass, *The Battle for the Keys: Revelation 1:18 and Christ’s Descent into the Underworld* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

¹⁰ The datives of “flesh” and “spirit” are either datives of sphere or reference/respect. Again, the distinction is minimal.

¹¹ In the words of Peter H. Davids, “It was, then, in his post-resurrection state that Christ went somewhere and preached something to certain spirits in some prison. All these terms call for an explanation” (*The First Epistle of Peter* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 138).

Whereas some argue that the clause “in which” has no antecedent, and should simply be translated “when”, each case they cite in 1 Peter as purportedly similar fails to convince insofar as not one of them has a masculine or neuter noun in the preceding clause which might be taken as its antecedent (see 1:6; 2:12; 3:16; 4:4).

The verb translated “went” in v. 19a is crucial for the proper interpretation of the passage. There is nothing in it that suggests the idea of a “descent” into hell. It is the standard Greek verb meaning “to go” (*poreuomai*). Its significance is seen in its usage in v. 21 where it describes the ascension of the risen Christ: he “has gone” (or he “went”) into heaven where he is seated at God’s right hand. As we’ll see below, the verb describes the same event: the ascension and exaltation of the risen Savior. In other words, far from describing a “descent” it actually describes an “ascent”.¹²

Who or what are “the spirits in prison” to whom Christ made proclamation? There are three primary competing views. One is that they are the “spirits” of human beings who have died physically. But as France points out, in *none* of the purported parallel texts “is *pneuma* used absolutely; it is always qualified by ‘of the dead’, ‘of the righteous’ [Heb. 12:23], etc. If *ta pneumata* here meant ‘people who have died’, it would be a unique absolute use in this sense. This does not exclude the possibility entirely, but it casts strong doubt on it.”¹³ On the other hand, the noun *pneuma* is frequently used in the NT for angelic beings.¹⁴ One must also take into account the statement in v. 20 that these “spirits” in prison “did not obey.” If the “spirits” in question were living human beings when this rebellion occurred, we would expect Peter to say, “spirits of those who disobeyed.”

Those who insist on taking “spirits” as a reference to human beings identify them as those men and women who rebelled in the days of Noah, perhaps especially those who mocked him for building an ark. Thus it was the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God, before he became human flesh in the person of Jesus, who through or “in [or by means of] the [Holy] Spirit” preached to the disobedient people living in the days of Noah, just before the flood. Christ wasn’t personally present at that time but by means of the Spirit spoke to them through Noah.¹⁵

A variation on the notion that the “spirits” here refers to human beings is that it was during the three days between his death and his resurrection that Christ descended into

¹² Had Peter wanted us to think of a “descent” he likely would have used the verb *katabainō* (“to go down, descend”). Achtemeier rightly concludes that “there is no necessity, therefore, to understand the verb *poreutheis* to mean ‘descend’; it refers to a journey, no more. On the other hand, the verb *poreuomai* is the verb used in the NT to describe Christ’s ascension” (1 Peter, 257). On this view, then, “the three elements of the redemptive event are in view in 3:18-19: the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension” (Jobes, 1 Peter, 242).

¹³ France, “Exegesis in Practice,” 269.

¹⁴ Aside from Heb. 12:23, the plural of *pneuma* is never used of humans, but only of spirit beings (whether good angels, as in Heb. 1:14; or evil angels, as in Matt. 8:16), and this more than 30x in the NT. Grudem cites Matt. 27:50 and John 19:30 as instances where *pneuma* is used absolutely of the human spirit, but in both texts *pneuma* is singular, not plural.

¹⁵ The best defense of this view can be found in Grudem, “Appendix: Christ Preaching through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19-20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature,” *First Peter*, 203-239, and in John Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18-20: Ancient Mythology and the Intermediate State,” *WTJ* 48 (October 1986): 303-36.

hell and preached to those who were disobedient during the days preceding the flood of Noah. From this some have concluded that he was giving them a second chance to be saved after their deaths.¹⁶

The most likely view is that Peter has in mind those rebellious angels (demons) who sought unnatural and immoral unions with female humans. This is the incident recorded in Genesis 6:1-5 (see the parallel references in 2 Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6).¹⁷ As punishment for their grievous sin, God consigned them to “prison” as they await their final punishment in the lake of fire. It was to these demonic spirits that Christ proclaimed his victory and their judgment, after his resurrection and likely at the time of his ascension.¹⁸

Where or of what nature this “prison” might be isn’t stated by Peter. The likelihood is that the term is used figuratively to make the point that they are in some sense confined or restrained by God until the time of final judgment. “The main point to be established is that there is no mention of going down, or of Sheol or Hades (which is never called *phulakē* [prison] in biblical literature). Christ went to the prison of the fallen angels, not to the abode of the dead, and the two are never equated.”¹⁹

But *when* and *in what way* did these “spirits” or “demons” disobey and why was it important that Jesus proclaim his victory over them? Two other texts likely refer to this same event (see 2 Pet. 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7). Each is probably referring to what we read in Genesis 6:1-5 where “the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive” and “took” them “as their wives.”²⁰ This was the “sin” (or disobedience, v. 20a) of those demons referred to, for which they are now confined in prison. This sin was not their original rebellion, for why, then, would only *some* be confined and not all? It can't be that only the more wicked were permanently confined, for Satan, the most wicked of all, is still free. The context in 1 Peter 3, 2 Peter 4, and Jude 6 links this “sin” with the flood of Noah. Most believe they are referring to this event in Genesis 6.²¹

The time of this proclamation is clearly indicated in the relative clause with which v. 19 opens: “in which.” Although not overtly temporal in force, its antecedent in v. 18b (“made alive in the spirit”) points to a time *subsequent* to the resurrection of Christ. What is important to remember is that nothing in this passage suggests that the time of this proclamation was *between* Christ’s death and resurrection.

¹⁶ One must ask, if a second chance for salvation was being offered, why only extend it to this select group of the physically dead and not to all who died prior to the coming of Christ?

¹⁷ Although only of secondary relevance, it is interesting to observe that this is the view taken by the author of 1 Enoch 6-16; 18:12-19:2; 21:1-10; 54:3-6; and chapters 64-69.

¹⁸ The clearest and most succinct defense of this view is found in Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 184-190.

¹⁹ France, “Exegesis in Practice,” 271. As noted, “prison” (*phulakē*) is never used of the abode of humans who have died, but is used of the location of Satan and demons (Rev. 18:2 [3x; each of which is translated “haunt” in the ESV]; 20:7).

²⁰ It should be noted that the word “wives” is not found in the text, but is assumed by most translators.

²¹ For a more thorough explanation of Genesis 6 and its relevance for 1 Peter 3, see Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 101-09, 185-91; as well as my chapter, “Did Jesus Descend into Hell?” in *Tough Topics 2: Biblical Answers to 25 Challenging Questions* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2015), 63-76.

Did Christ “preach” the gospel or “proclaim” judgment to the spirits in prison? In favor of the former is the normal use of “to herald” (*kērussō*) in the NT (but see Luke 12:3; Rom. 2:21; Rev. 5:2 for exceptions; possibly also Luke 4:19 and 8:39). Elsewhere in 1 Peter the gospel is made known with the verb *euangelidzō* (1:12, 25; 4:6) while *kērussō* appears only this one time in the letter. In support of a proclamation of judgment is the use of “to herald” in the LXX where it often describes the bringing of bad news as well as good. It is also likely that what Christ “proclaimed” was his definitive triumph over and subjugation of “[fallen] angels, authorities, and powers” (v. 22). All were “subjected to him” by virtue of his death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation (see Eph. 1:20-22; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14). One must also ask what relevance there is for his readers in the first century in a proclamation of the “gospel” to humans living in the time of Noah? On the other hand, as France has noted, the triumphant declaration to the evil demonic spirits was of immediate practical help to those who were suffering persecution:

“They might be called to endure the worst that anti-Christian prejudice could inflict. But even then they could be assured that their pagan opponents, and, more important, the spiritual powers of evil that stood behind them and directed them, were not outside Christ’s control: they were already defeated, awaiting final punishment. Christ had openly triumphed over them. Here is real comfort and strength for a persecuted church which took very seriously the reality and power of spiritual forces.”²²

v. 20

Peter’s reference to the “spirits” or demons who disobeyed just before the great flood, as described in Genesis 6, provided the link to his mentioning of Noah and the building of the ark. Peter sees in Noah’s experience and that of the other seven people with him a pattern or type or prefiguring or foreshadowing of the experience of Christians in his day (and today as well):

- The fewness of the people (8) / the minority to whom Peter was writing
- Noah and his family persecuted and slandered / Peter’s audience persecuted and slandered
- God set apart Noah and his family in the ark / God set apart the Christians of the first century and today through baptism.

The fallen angels were (and are) in prison “because they formerly did not obey,” that is to say, back “when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah.” The period during which God waited patiently falls between the rebellion of the “sons of God” (fallen angels) as described in Genesis 6:1-4 and the flood of Noah (Gen. 7:11 (which most believe to be 120 years based on Gen. 6:3, the time during which Noah was building the ark).

²² France, “Exegesis in Practice,” 272.

Peter's readers were undoubtedly aware of their small numbers and could easily have been overwhelmed as they compared themselves with the pagan majority among whom they lived. Thus, they are here reminded that only a "few" (eight persons) were preserved from the judgement of the flood.

The ESV translates the preposition *dia* (followed by the genitive "water") as local, hence "through the water." This is certainly possible, although others argue for an instrumental sense of *dia*, "by means of the water." France is probably correct in pointing out that "the instrumental sense is much easier when one considers the typological application: the Christian is more easily viewed as saved 'by means of' the water of baptism than by passing through it, though the latter is also possible. Probably Peter is deliberately exploiting the ambiguity of the word *dia* to assist his passage from the Old Testament story to its typological application."²³

vv. 21-22

The grammar in the opening of v. 21 is difficult. To simplify, we should probably understand it in this way: "which (water) now also saves you, (who) are the antitype (of Noah and his family) - (that is) baptism." In other words, the experience of Noah and his family in the flood is the type of which Peter's audience and their baptism is the antitype (*antitupon*). France is especially helpful here:

"The essential principle of New Testament typology is that God works according to a regular pattern, so that what he has done in the past, as recorded in the Old Testament, can be expected to find its counterpart in his work in the decisive period of the New Testament. Thus persons, events and institutions of the Old Testament, which in themselves need have no forward reference, are cited as 'types', models of corresponding persons, events and institutions in the life of Christ and the Christian church. On this principle, then, . . . Peter takes the salvation of Noah in the flood as a model of the Christian's salvation through baptism."²⁴

Peter immediately qualifies the sense in which baptism saves us: it is not by the physical action itself in which dirt is removed from the body. In other words, the physical action of baptism has no intrinsic saving power. There is no mechanical relationship between being immersed in the water and having your sins forgiven. The physical dimension of baptism is good for washing your body but not your soul! The only sense in which baptism saves, says Peter, is insofar as it provides the occasion for "an appeal to God for a good conscience."

²³ Ibid., 273.

²⁴ Ibid., 273-74.

“Appeal” (ESV) is the translation of *eperōtēma*, which others render with the word “pledge.” If the former is accurate, the one being baptized “appeals” to God, on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ (or more literally, “through” or “by means of,” if *dia* is instrumental; see 1:3), to cleanse one’s conscience and forgive one’s sins.²⁵ Baptism is the occasion on which the believer calls out to God for spiritual purification. It is the call of faith, not the water, that results in salvation. If, however, one embraces the translation “pledge”, the believer responds to God in baptism by “pledging” faith, devotion, and obedience. “Peter is reminding his readers that when they were baptized, a question was asked about their faith in Christ, to which they gave a positive response. They were then baptized in water as a sacrament of that pledge of faithfulness made to God. Peter reminds them of that pledge as they face suffering because of Christ and the temptation to turn away.”²⁶ In both cases, the “appeal/pledge” is the external expression of an internal repentance. It is the physical symbol of a spiritual reality. It is not the water itself or its cleansing effect on the body that saves. Baptism saves only insofar as it is the public expression of commitment and repentance on the part of the believing soul. Baptism is the vehicle or the instrument of your appeal to God or of your pledge to him.

The concluding phrase of v. 21 brings Peter back full circle to the theme of vv. 18-19 and the triumph of the risen Christ. The focus of v. 22 (based on the language of Ps. 110:1; see Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 10:12; 12:2) is the exaltation and ascension of the risen Savior, which signifies his complete subjugation of all fallen and rebellious demonic powers. “Angels, authorities, and powers” is standard NT language for the fallen demonic hosts (Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:24-27; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15). Their subjection to Christ is undoubtedly the content of his proclamation (v. 19).

Peter’s audience was suffering greatly at the hands of their enemies. This entire letter is a call for them to persevere, an encouragement to them not to quit or abandon their faith. Thus, Peter’s point here is two-fold. In the first place, he wants to reassure them that their unbelieving enemies and especially the spiritual powers of evil that stood behind those enemies cannot win! They cannot prevail! They are not outside of Christ’s sovereign power or control. In fact, they were thoroughly defeated at the cross and resurrection of Christ (see especially Col. 2:14-15). Christ has triumphed over them. In fact, he has even gone to the place of their imprisonment and added an exclamation point, as it were, to their defeat, proclaiming to them that he is Lord.

He also encourages them to persevere by reminding them of what their baptism means. By being baptized they are marked out as God’s chosen few who, like Noah and his family, will be saved even when all around them mock them and slander them. Their baptism commits them to unswerving loyalty to God no matter the consequences. Baptism is the symbol of their being united with Christ in his resurrection, as well as his

²⁵ This entails taking the genitive noun *suneidēseōs agathēs*, “good conscience” (ESV) as objective: one is asking or appealing to God “for” a good conscience, i.e., that one’s conscience might be cleansed of the guilt of sin.

²⁶ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 255.

defeat of the demonic hosts. Your baptism is the reminder of the victory in which you stand, the victory that Christ achieved by his death and resurrection and exaltation above all principalities and powers.

**Addendum:
A Study of Genesis 6:1-5**

When did these “spirits” disobey God and what did they do? The good news is that we have two other passages in the NT that also refer to this event. The first is found in 2 Peter 2:4-5. There we read:

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; . . .”

And then also in Jude 6-7 we read:

“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day – just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

What in the world do these texts have in mind? The answer is found in an obscure and extremely controversial passage in the Old Testament. In Genesis 6:1-5, we read this:

“When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.”

Some argue that the “sons of God” were humans, the godly male descendants of Seth, whereas the “daughters of men” were ungodly female descendants of Cain. There are a number of reasons why this view is unlikely. First, the phrase is “daughters of *men*” not “daughters of *Cain*,” which on the surface seems more likely to describe daughters of men in general. Second, surely not all the daughters (female descendants) of Cain are to be thought of as significantly more evil than other females in the earth. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the men of Seth’s line were godly, or that the women of Cain’s line were wicked. Third, if the men of Seth’s line were godly, why did they marry ungodly

women in the first place? Why wouldn't they have married godly women from within their own group? Fourth, whereas the phrase "sons of God" is used to describe the nation as a whole, it is never used in the OT to refer to a particular group within humanity noted for their piety. Fifth, on the other hand, it *is* used specifically of celestial beings (see Job 38:7). Sixth, why would God send such a devastating judgment by means of the flood simply because godly men may have married ungodly women?

Another view is that the "sons of God" were men of nobility (kings, rulers, princes) who because of lust married outside and well below their rank and status (their sin was polygamy). But as Oropeza observes, "it is not clear . . . why God would abhor polygamy enough to destroy the entire earth by the flood. Long after the flood, the Israelites engaged in polygamy without incurring God's displeasure."²⁷

The most likely view is that this text describes a massive intrusion of the demonic into the domain of humanity. This was the interpretation dominant in the patristic period until Augustine (354-430) argued for the first view above. Why do I think this view is the more likely one? First, the phrase "sons of God" is used in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss. 29:1; 89:6; and probably Deut. 32:8 to refer to angelic beings.²⁸ Second, the contrast between "sons of God" and "daughters of men" suggests that the former are to be distinguished from human beings. The contrast is most naturally taken to be between beings who are not human and beings who are. Third, Jude 6-7 implies that the sin of these angels was sexual in nature.

The most frequently cited objection to this view is that angels/demons do not marry or procreate (Matt. 22:30), thus it is inconceivable that demons could engage humans in any kind of sexual relationship. But in Matthew 22 Jesus is describing the *heavenly* behavior of *holy* angels, *not* the *earthly* misbehavior of *evil* angels. Also, the point of Matthew 22 is that angels do not intermarry with *each other*, i.e., they are not a race that propagates itself. But they still might seek some sort of sexual interaction with *humans*. We should also remember that in Genesis 18-19 angels appeared in human form, ate solid food, and were pursued by the homosexual community of Sodom and Gomorrah. Clearly, "an angel's involvement in sexual activity was not foreign to the Pentateuch's world of thought."²⁹ When we add to this that the NT portrays demons as longing to inhabit human bodies, it suggests that Genesis 6 is possibly describing not so much demons *per se* but *demonized humans*, i.e., humans in whom demons are dwelling. Page summarizes as follows:

"The sin had a sexual nature, yet it was not simply a sexual sin. More fundamentally, it was a *sin of rejecting the order created by God and violating distinctions he had instituted between the various kinds of creatures he had made*. Not

²⁷ B. J. Oropeza, *99 Answers to Questions about Angels, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 61.

²⁸ Although we should not give it too much weight, it is worth noting that the phrase "sons of God" was understood to refer to angels in the earliest known exposition of Genesis 6, that is, in 1 Enoch 6-11.

²⁹ Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 49.

content to live within the parameters established by Yahweh, the angels formed unnatural unions with human women. The ancient Israelites may well have preserved this story because they saw in it a warning to shun the fertility religions with their sacred marriages between gods and humans."³⁰

Oropeza suggests that these were not in fact demonized humans but "incarnated demons" (for lack of a better term). He then asks the question: "If angels really did manifest themselves in human form, how is it that they were able to duplicate the human DNA structure necessary to produce offspring (if indeed our current understandings of human structuring are correct)? Even if angels are supernatural and were intelligent enough to do so, creating human life seems to be a work that is reserved only for God."³¹ He goes on to suggest that perhaps "the sons of God saw the wickedness of humans and asked God to clothe them with bodies so that they could come to earth to teach men laws and morals. . . . It was at this time that angels descended from heaven to earth. After they were clothed with human flesh, however, they fell to the same passions as do all humans, and so they gave themselves over to the lusts of the flesh, desiring earthly women."³²

In summary, I believe that Genesis 6 describes the "sin" mentioned in 1 Peter 3, 2 Peter 2:4, and Jude 6. Subsequent to their fall from heaven, and as an expression of their moral depravity, an unspecified number of those demons either inhabited (took up residence in) human bodies and contracted marriage relationships with the "daughters of men" or in some way obtained bodies capable of reproducing offspring. Thus we are reading either about a case of demonized men entering into marriage with women and contributing greatly to the increase of depravity and corruption in the earth (Gen. 6:5-7), or about demons who were granted human form that made it possible for them to engage in sexual relations with women and produce offspring. These demons were, at some later time, consigned to permanent imprisonment until the day of final judgment.

The point of our passage in 1 Peter, therefore, is that after his resurrection and through the power of the Spirit Jesus went to the prison where these "spirits" or demons are being held and he proclaimed to them the victory he had achieved through his death on the cross and his being raised from the dead.

Addendum: Ephesians 4:9

Some have argued that the Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4:9, refers to a "descent" of Christ into Hades or Hell between the time of his death and resurrection. The text reads, "In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower

³⁰ Ibid., 53 (emphasis mine).

³¹ Oropeza, 99 *Answers to Question*, 64.

³² Ibid., 64-65. Contrary to what many assume, the text does not explicitly state that the Nephilim were the offspring of the intermarriage between the sons of God and the daughters of men. The word *Nephilim* recurs in Num. 13:33 in reference to the Canaanite giants who intimidated the Israelites into not entering the promised land.

regions, the earth?" Some translations render this, "into the lower parts of the earth."

One minority view is that this refers to the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary (see Ps. 139:15). Others have said it refers to his burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

As noted, a long-standing interpretation is that this describes Christ's descent or journey into Hades sometime between his burial and resurrection. But the contrast in the verse is between an ascent to heaven and a descent from heaven, not a descent from earth to the underworld or the realm of the dead. Andrew Lincoln also contends that if Paul "had had three levels in mind and meant that Christ descended to the deepest level just as he ascended to the greatest height, he would have been more likely to have used a superlative [lowest] than a comparative [lower]." ³³ Also, Paul has consistently referred to a "two-story" cosmology in Ephesians: heaven and earth; not a "three-story" cosmology: heaven, earth, under the earth. Lincoln asks, how can a descent into Hades be logically deduced from Christ's ascent to heaven, "which, after all, appears to be the force of the argument here." ³⁴

It is likely that the confusion surrounding this text is due to a mistranslation of the phrase "lower parts of the earth," as if Paul had in mind a realm or something beneath or within the earth itself. A better translation is: "the lower parts *which are* the earth" (hence, "of the earth" would be a genitive of apposition which further defines or explains the preceding noun). "On this view the lower regions are not the lower parts of the earth but rather the lower parts of the cosmos, that is, the earth, and the writer is speaking of a descent to the earth." ³⁵ In other words, Paul's contrast is not between one part of the earth and another, lower, part, but between the whole earth and heaven. If that is the case, two options remain.

On the one hand, Paul may be referring to the incarnation itself. This idea of the incarnation and exaltation of Christ in terms of descent and ascent is found in John's gospel (see 3:13; 6:62). Others would focus specifically on the element of Christ's humiliation and its contrast with his exaltation, as portrayed in Philippians 2:5-11.

A more recent interpretation that is gaining a following says that the descent in view is that of Christ in the person and activity of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thus the descent would be subsequent to the ascent. Appeal is made to Psalm 68 itself which came to be associated with Pentecost (some saw in it a reference to Moses' "giving" of the law). This view would certainly connect well with the emphasis in vv. 7 and 11 on the giving or distribution of spiritual gifts. The main objection, however, is that Pentecost is not typically thought of as a descent of Christ, but of the Spirit. Advocates respond by pointing to the numerous texts where Christ and the Spirit are closely related (cf. Rom.

³³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 245.

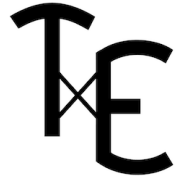
³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

8:9; 2 Cor. 3:18; etc.). Somewhat against this view is v. 10 where the one who “descended” is explicitly said to be Jesus.



Theological Roundtable 2024



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1 PETER 4

The keyword of the chapter is “suffering.” Although suffering is arguably the primary word for 1 Peter, chapter four has a different emphasis point.

vv. 1-2 (all scripture from ESV)

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions [desires] but for the will of God.

Grudem notes that the theme of suffering from 3:18 continues here but with an emphasis on suffering to avoid sin. Suffering itself does not stop sin but rather in the context of suffering that is in line with the will of God (as outlined in the previous chapter). Grudem also points out that being “free from sin” does not mean that a person can somehow cease from sin altogether – that would not be in keeping with other scripture (1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Jas 3:2; 1 John 1:8).

Michaels discusses the difficulty of “ceased from sin” in application to what Christ has accomplished. Christ has not ceased from sin in a sense that he has ever sinned, but he has ceased from having to deal with it. “Christ suffered for sin,” in the past tense, indicates that it is finished (as he declared on the cross), but his suffering was for our sins.

To “arm yourselves with the same way of thinking” is to have the mindset of Paul in Galatians 2:19-20: “I am crucified with Christ; I live, and yet it is not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith for the Song of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Since Christ suffered in the flesh, we should “arm [our]selves” with the “same way of thinking” to “cease from sin.” Sin is an archery term for “missing the target.” One who is armed with Christ’s way of thinking is no longer shooting at the wrong target. Human passions are aimed at a different target, and although the shots may be landing, they are not Christlike in aim. Now live for the Will of God proclaiming, “Not my will but yours be done.” Jesus declared this in Gethsemane, enveloped by tremendous suffering - the *Via Delarosa* - the way of suffering. He was sweating blood as his anticipation weighed the coming event. He prayed all night and asked three times for a different way.

CONTRASTING OF PASSION/DESIRE (GARDEN) AND PASSION/SUFFERING (CROSS)

It is Christlike not to desire physical suffering but also Christlike to yield and submit your will to the perfect will of God.

Human Passions (Here in I Peter 4 as cravings, lust, natural desire) – this word for passion (ἐπιθυμία *epithymia*)³⁶ is different than the passion of the cross (πάσχω *paschō*)³⁷. It is what we will *live* for; keep in mind that everyone is on the path towards death. Everyone dies, and then the judgment. Whatever we determine to “live for” with human passion is what we are actually “dying to do” with Christlike passion. We have only been given so much time on earth, and every moment is time indeed spent. How we spend our Kingdom commodities (time, talent, treasure, talk, and touch) is essential both now and in the eschaton. Grudem notes that Peter uses “passion” (*epithymia*) in a negative sense to denote human passion that is opposed to the will of God. “Humans must always strive to not let their lives be influenced by them.” There is human desire in opposition to the will of God that first appeared in Genesis 3:6. When tempted, Eve saw that the tree was desirable. There has been a battle from the beginning for human desire.

What we choose to do is often fueled by our passion (good or bad). What we live for is what we are genuinely dying for. “Not my will, but yours be done” is a declaration of understanding about which passion is of eternal value and worth. In Philippians 1:21, Paul states, “For me, to live is Christ and die is gain.” Paul’s declaration also comes from an eternal perspective: I cannot be killed; I am already dying, and if you take my body, I will simply enter my eternal place already prepared by God. The death of Jesus on the Cross is simultaneously Christ’s passion for suffering and joy.

There is a clear distinction between human actions according to fleshly desires (or passions) and the willingness to submit to God’s will, even if that means suffering. This contrast of action is driven by eternal versus temporal passion. A passion that is directed through the yielding of natural will in exchange for trust in the creator God (the one to whom glory is due) is how one emulates Christ. Suffering in the present is not merely with future hope, but also beneficial to the believer while living.

Paul states in II Corinthians 1:3-5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort

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³⁶ G2123 ἐπιθυμία *epithymia*, n. [38] [√ 2093 + 2596]. desire, longing (in contexts where the desire is positive and proper); coveting, craving, lusting (in contexts where the desire is immoral and sinful):- desires (13), evil desires (8), lust (4), coveting (2), desire (2), passions (2), cravings (1), desire (1 [+2400]), eagerly desired (1 [+2121]), evil desire (1), longed for (1 [+3836, 6034]), longing (1), sinful desires (1)

³⁷ G4248 πάσχω *paschō*, v. [42] [→ 2801, 2802, 3584, 3926, 4077, 4078, 4079, 4557, 4634, 5155, 5217, 5218, 5224]. to experience, suffer, endure (almost always in NT with reference to unpleasant experiences):- suffer (21), suffered (13), suffering (5), suffers (2), experienced (1)

those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

vv. 3-4

³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.

Grudem points out that “Gentiles” has long been a term for Judaism to refer to non-Jews. In the context that Peter is now speaking, he is referring to those who do not follow Christ. Note that the word translated “lust” or “passion” in v. 3 describing Gentiles is the same as “human desire” or “passion” in v. one.

“For” begins this v. as a critical connecting word. The time is past (or) it is sufficient – Grudem notes that the reader should have no more desire to live in the way they once did – following after negative human passions. In essence, Peter says, “It’s about time you move on from your old behaviors,” or “You ought to be done acting in old, foolish ways.”

Peter lists various kinds of sin. Passions (*epithymia*) again appear here. Drunkenness (*oinophylgia*) points towards following after physical desires and excesses. Grudem points out that lawlessness is here plural and likely refers to even against civil law – thus something even forbidden by secular law. They are surprised when you do not join them from the Greek (ξενίζω *xenizō*)^{38a}. “Indulgent debauchery” or “profligacy” is from the Greek word (ἄσωτία, *asotia*) and implies uncontrolled indulgence in pleasure seeking. This is the word that describes the Prodigal sons “loose living.”

This section suggests that the intended readers would have included those who had formerly been pagan Gentiles. Jews would have already had a moral code that would not have encouraged such pagan actions. Their old pagan friends would not only be surprised but then abuse them – “speak evil.” This terminology is found in several other books.

vv. 5-6

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

⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though

³⁸ G3826 ξενίζω *xenizō*, v. [10] [√ 3828]. to receive a guest, entertain; (pass.) to stay as a guest; to think of something as strange, be surprised, astonished:- staying (2), surprised (2), guest (1), guests (1), showed hospitality (1), shown hospitality (1), stay (1), strange (1)

judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

All people will one day give an account, not just to human government but also to God. The judgment cannot be escaped by death, An eternal judgment is implied here that is not limited to earthly matters with a temporal ending. Grudem suggests that “be ready” indicates the possibility of suddenness. Grudem also ties v.s 5 and 6 together concerning “the dead” and indicates that the dead refers to those who heard the gospel while alive and later died.

The emphasis on the judgment being in the flesh is to show that it is part of something temporal or passing, while eternal life is in the spiritual realm and eternal. Everyone must die, but not all will have everlasting life.

The end of the previous chapter addressed Jesus’s going to those who were disobedient long ago in the time of Noah. Did he go in the past or to the people now? Some equate these “dead” to the spirits in prison from 1 Peter 3:19 and interpret the spirits in 3:19 as human spirits to whom Christ spoke during a proposed descent into the realm of the dead. But the “imprisoned spirits long ago” is likely a reference to angelic fallen beings. Michaels determines that Peter includes this section from 3:19-4:6 to emphasize that there is no need for Christ’s followers to fear evil. Even though evil is still present in the world, Jesus has already addressed the spiritual powers and vindicated those who suffer for his sake. This section aims to express the victory that Jesus has already won, even amid present suffering.

Some take the spiritually dead of vs 6 to be those that are physically alive at the time Peter is speaking, but Grudem points out that there would not be a reason for the qualifier “even.” Additionally, why would the sentence be in the past tense, “was preached”?

Others have argued that the dead in v. 6 are people after they died physically to whom the gospel is preached as a second chance, but Grudem notes that this does not fit the context of a warning. Such an interpretation would also not encourage a need to forgo sinning if one can repent after death.

vv. 7-8

⁷The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Grudem says that “the end of all things” in v. 7 refers to redemptive history and that “all things” have been completed. This does not reference a future event but emphasizes a sense of immanency for all. This completion is related to Jesus announcing from the cross that “it is finished.” Peter indicates that lackadaisical withdrawal must be avoided as one

holds to a sense of the nearness of Christ's return. The grace Jesus offers in his death empowers what Storms refers to as practical righteousness, which is worked out through expressions such as "self-control" and "sober-mindedness." Such expressions of righteousness aid one's focus, which is then also beneficial to prayer. Thinking of prayer as a conversation with God, with a mind clear of temporal trappings, is greatly beneficial.

Grudem noted that one should "be alert to events and evaluate them correctly in order to be able to pray more intelligently." Keep on loving one another with the reason being that "love covers a multitude of sins." Grudem emphasizes that Peter's use of the Greek *ektenes* describes love as "earnest love." Peter's exhortation here is in keeping with his thoughts from the beginning of the letter in 1:22. This attitude of love creates an atmosphere that "covers a multitude of sins." One's love expressed toward another person with eternal focus results in a relationship between people that is more likely to look beyond immediate offenses and hold hope for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Michaels suggests that Peter focused attention from 2:11 to 4:6 on the relationship of believers to hostile society but moves his emphasis, beginning in v. 7, towards God, who is coming to judge, and his followers' need to "love one another." Michaels advocates that this movement is in keeping with Peter's declaration in 2:17: "'Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.'" The nearness of the end is the driving force that reminds Christ's followers to follow his new commandment" given in the upper room to "love one another." Jesus declared in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." This new commandment was different from "love your neighbor" and "love your enemy" statements that were familiar.

The key difference in Jesus's new command is the use of reciprocating action that he demonstrated by washing the disciple's feet. Jesus explained that he had given them an example that they should now do "for one another." In John, it was the beginning of a series of "one another" statements. Michaels notes that Peter here does something similar by repeating both "to one another" (*ἀλλήλων allēlōn*) and "to each other" (*ἑαυτοῦ heautou*). Michaels indicates that the use of reciprocating action in these verses indicates actions within the family of believers. This observation is in keeping with the command of Jesus in John 13, yet the reciprocating action that Jesus demonstrated was washing his disciples' feet.

We must remember that John stated in 13:2, "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him," and there is every indication that Jesus washed his feet. Jesus demonstrated his act of love even to the one who was already planning to betray him. One could argue that the command of Jesus to "love one another" occurred after Judas left. Additionally, John explained in v. 10 that all of them were clean except Judas, who would betray him. John 13:18 also states, "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'"

Jesus emphasizes in John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (ESV). Following Jesus’s new commandment in v. 34, he then declares that the reciprocating action of love is how all people will identify the disciples of Jesus. Michaels makes a valid point by suggesting that Peter has moved the conversation beginning in v. 7 from respecting all people to the reciprocating love of believers.

vv. 9-11

⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 9 emphasizes that this is “love without grumbling.” Grumbling here would include grumbling against God and others. Michaels concludes that hospitality is an embedded notion in the Jewish culture, and being attached to “one another” indicates that it should be treated along with reciprocal love and not in the following conversation of spiritual gifts. Hospitality is a principle along with love that gives context to how Peter encourages gifts to operate.

Grudem’s title for v.s10-11 is “Glorify God using gifts.” Paul emphasized spiritual gifts in I Cor. 12:7-11 and Peter likewise here indicates that each person in the fellowship of believers has “charismata” or grace gifts. Gifts are to serve one another and to be stewarded as varied grace from God. There are, as is indicated in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, various spiritual gifts or grace gifts. People may function with more than one. Grudem notes that the expression here, “a gift,” is not limited to one, but rather, at least one. Michaels points out that Peter does not specifically attribute these gifts to the Spirit, but it is in keeping with various discussions of grace gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

Five places in the New Testament indicate spiritual gifts in a list (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:7-11; 12:28-30; Eph. 4:11; I Peter 4:10). No two lists are the same; no gift is on every list, and there are instances of *charismata* that are not included on a list. It appears that the variety of gifts is not meant to be handled exhaustively in scripture. Grudem wrote, “One could say there is an almost limitless variety.” Michaels suggests that the idea of variation of gifts is as varied as the grace of God for the many ways that humans require grace. The word used here for various is employed throughout the New Testament to speak of such things as various sins, problems, trials, etc. The variation of gifts parallels the loving grace that covers a multitude of sins.

“One who speaks” would be anyone speaking with the intention that it would be on behalf of God. One that utilizes a gift that involves speaking. Grudem identifies “gifts

involving speech-activity: evangelism, teaching, prophesying, and perhaps singing or snaring words of praise and testimony.” Peter similarly treats serving as being a gift empowered by God. The v. culminates with the statement that all should be done to glorify God through Jesus Christ. Grudem noted that the NIV rendering of “praise” is inadequate to capture the whole meaning here and “Glorified” speaks more to attitudes and actions. The section closes with a doxology from Peter emphasizing that glory and dominion or power belong to the Lord forever.

Michaels adds that while speaking in tongues is likely not included here because of a more individualized prayer aspect, the interpretation of tongues should be considered. Tongues with an interpretation would edify the body of believers, with the context being “speech of Christian believers to each other.” Michaels does recognize that Peter, unlike Paul, does not differentiate speaking gifts or classify them in such a way.

Serving does not have further qualifications given here by Peter and like speaking, it should be done with the strength that God supplies. Michaels makes a comparison of this pronouncement of God’s strength as the source of power for believers with Paul’s writing in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (ESV). Although the context is different, the idea is similar, with God as the source of strength to endure suffering and to empower servanthood.

v. 11 contains a doxology ascribing power and glory, but there are differing opinions concerning to whom glory and power are attributed. The preceding words are “so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” The closest antecedent in this case is Jesus, yet God is more often ascribed glory in New Testament doxologies. Selwyn concludes that there is a case for both Jesus and God as the focus of glory in a somewhat “binetarian” treatment of them together in these v.s. Michaels sees the concluding “amen” as the end of both the doxology of Peter and the commands that began in 2:11.

vv. 12-16

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Grudem noted that many people treat v. 11 as an ending thought because of it ending with “Amen,” however, there are several instances where Amen is employed as a point of emphasis that does not break up or conclude a thought (Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; 1Tim. 1:17). Michaels accepts the “amen” as conclusive of the previous thought

and v. 12 the beginning of a new point of emphasis. I feel there is a connection of continued thought here, but the ending amen in v. eleven makes v. 12 the beginning of a different assertion. Michaels sees 4:12-19 as a “look back” over previous themes before beginning a new appeal in chapter 5: “The structure of his letter at this point is best described as interlocking” (p. 257).

Grudem noted that “fiery trials” were not mutually exclusive because likely ten or more churches were being addressed in four provinces and there was known violent opposition occurring at that time. Even if persecution varied by church and region, it would be appropriate for Peter to address this problem to all who may receive the letter. v. 12 speaks of a fiery ordeal, which may be a reference to the imagery of the refiner’s fire in Proverbs 27:21. Peter speaks of a trial that tests or “proves” a person, using the same word from 1:6 (peirasmos) to indicate a positive outcome from a difficult situation.

This testing should be seen as expected in the Christian life and not considered “something strange.” Christ’s followers should instead rejoice that they can “share in Christ’s suffering.” Consider Rom. 8:17 – “Rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” The idea of rejoicing in the midst of persecution is also in keeping with the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:11-12 states, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad...” (ESV).

Peter follows his encouragement with examples of how a trial might happen. Peter states that being insulted for one’s faith is instead a blessing. “For the name” or “in the name” indicates a person that is operating as Peter encouraged in v. 11. Speak and serve as one who is doing it on behalf of the Lord. The consequences of such action are noted here as having a possible hostile reception. Be aware that operating on the Lord’s behalf will insight some, but it is for His glory and your blessing.

Michaels explored the relationship in v. 15 with the prophesy concerning the coming Messiah in Isaiah 11. Peter uses the phrase “Spirit of glory and of God rest upon you.” The well-known prophecy of Isaiah would have been recognized by the readers of the time but with the addition of “glory” and the change of tense from “will rest” to “rests.” Peter is openly declaring that followers will experience joy (like Jesus) when they experience suffering (like Jesus), and the Holy Spirit here described as the “Spirit of glory and of God,” will rest upon them. Isaiah used several descriptions for the “Spirit of the Lord,” including wisdom, counsel, and knowledge. Peter here includes “Spirit of glory.” The addition of glory may be a device by Peter to attach this section to the previous conversation concerning the glory of Jesus. Grudem notes that “glory” here foreshadows heavenly blessing but also indicates the present indwelling of the Spirit.

In v. 15, Peter lets it be known that not all suffering gives reason for rejoicing, but only

suffering experienced for the correct reason. To suffer for such things as murder, stealing, evil, or meddling is not to be included as righteous suffering. Both Grudem and Michaels note that the word translated as “meddling” is very rare and has been assigned various meanings. It most likely indicates someone not only concerned with other people’s affairs, but one who injects themselves into matters not their own.

“If one suffers as a Christian” could be rendered “if one suffers as a follower of Christ.” Grudem noted that the word “Christian” is formulated in the manner of the word “Herodian” meaning follower of Herod. Peter then juxtaposes shame and glory concerning Christians by emphasizing that the shame assigned to those who follow Christ by those of the world is an opportunity to remain joyful and glorify “that name.” This may mean that followers of Christ glorify the name of Jesus when shamed for it or receive the reviling as a means of glory even when it is intended as shame. Hebrews 12:2 states, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Embracing suffering like Jesus embraced the cross is to not accept the ascribed shame of the world but count the joy and give glory to God.

vv. 17-18

17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

The preceding context of v. 17 is a trial that is refining in nature. Grudem noted that Peter here uses (*krima*) instead of (*katakrima*), rendered as judgment instead of condemnation. Like the refiner's fire is a “fiery ordeal” for positive outcome, the judgment here is a discipline for course correction, yielding a better future. Grudem suggests that God has “begun judging within the church, and will later move outward.”

The Greek phrase (*oikos tou theou*) translated as “house of God” does not appear elsewhere in scripture as referencing anything but the temple, according to Dennis Johnson. (Johnson, pp 291-292). Grudem adds that Peter only used *oikos* (house) one other time in 2:5 speaking about believers “being built into a spiritual house.” Additionally, the Greek here includes *apo* (from), indicating that judgment proceeds from God’s own house (where his people are).

This exhortation from Peter hearkens back to the judgment mentioned in Ezekiel 9 concerning judgment beginning with the elders in v. 6. Grudem concludes that Ezekiel 9 would have likely been in Peter’s thoughts as he penned this instruction. Judgment begins with God’s house, meaning with his people, who now represent the house built together.

Grudem agrees with Johnson that the imagery that Peter uses here may be even more influenced by Malachi 3 than Ezekiel 9. Malachi speaks of the coming judgment of the temple (house of God) and a “refiner’s fire,” which Peter has also mentioned. This employment of Malachi’s refiner’s fire lends more to a sense of purification as the reason for judgment. The “fiery ordeal” Peter has mentioned would be a fire that is not just for destruction but for purification. Malachi 3:3 begins, “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi...”

Malachi 3:5 moves from those in the house of God to those external:

Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts (ESV).

The movement in Malachi is from those inside the house of God first and then to those outside.

In the context of judgment beginning with the house of God as a refiner’s fire is the following statement from Peter, “[A]nd if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” Then Peter restates the questions as a quote from Proverbs 11:3, “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” If the refiner’s fire is so intense for those inside of the household, then how will those fare who have not yet accepted the good news of Jesus? The fire of discipline, which burns away the things that are not of God for those who have accepted Christ, is a fire of destruction for those who do not believe.

v. 19

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

I had a professor explain long ago that when one encounters a scripture beginning with “therefore,” you must ask: “What is it there for?” This concluding statement from Peter summarizes the direction that Peter is offering his readers. Suffering is a reality that everyone will encounter, yet one has a choice of how to receive it. Some suffering is for righteous reasons, and even that intended for opposition can be used as good. God is not unaware of suffering, and even the one that wills it for the greater good of those who follow Christ. Grudem notes that seeing the suffering as good becomes comforting when one embraces the context of God’s good and perfect will. There is further comfort in knowing that we are more like Jesus in our suffering and that the Spirit of glory rests upon us in the midst of the trial.

“Entrust their souls” is the final appeal asserting that a person may place oneself into the care of “the faithful Creator.” The author and finisher of life is also the faithful sustainer who cares for us amid this mortality. Grudem reminds us of the words of Jesus in Luke 23:46, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.” These words here resonate the trust of Jesus on the cross. Additionally, Paul writes about the battle of mortal life and suffering in the hope of future glory in the book of Romans 8:17b-18 by stating that we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

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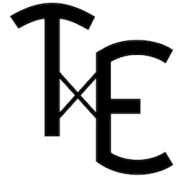
¹ G2123 ἐπιθυμία *epithymia*, n. [38] [√ 2093 + 2596]. desire, longing (in contexts where the desire is positive and proper); coveting, craving, lusting (in contexts where the desire is immoral and sinful):- desires (13), evil desires (8), lust (4), coveting (2), desire (2), passions (2), cravings (1), desire (1 [+2400]), eagerly desired (1 [+2121]), evil desire (1), longed for (1 [+3836, 6034]), longing (1), sinful desires (1)

¹ G4248 πάσχω *paschō*, v. [42] [→ 2801, 2802, 3584, 3926, 4077, 4078, 4079, 4557, 4634, 5155, 5217, 5218, 5224]. to experience, suffer, endure (almost always in NT with reference to unpleasant experiences):- suffer (21), suffered (13), suffering (5), suffers (2), experienced (1)

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Theological Roundtable 2024



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1 PETER 5

We all are longing for home. All of life for the Christian sojourner is played out with a sense of displacement at the core of his existence. I travel full time in my assignment of caring for and equipping pastors and leaders. I've noticed something in an increasing way as I get older. I absolutely love what I get to do. There's nothing that rings my bell like seeing the Lord bring encouragement and strength to the people we serve. However, there's hardly a trip that at some point I don't wish I was home. That's made me realize something; as glorious as the gospel is, it doesn't fully satisfy this longing. The promise of the gospel upholds us, encourages us, emboldens us and sustains us, but it doesn't eliminate the yearning we have for home; as a matter of fact, it intensifies it.

Peter addressed this letter to "elect exiles" and concludes it by sending greetings from "She who is at Babylon," which denotes an undertone of living well in the context of this longing. But while Peter reminds the original hearers (and us) of the surety of our salvation and of our security as sons, he also asserts that we live as exiles. Although we are "seated with Christ in heavenly places" we are also seated "by the rivers of Babylon". These two simultaneous truths are held in tension as we fulfill our assignment of representing God as his people on the earth. Our mission will be met with resistance from the devil, the world and our flesh, but we have been equipped to withstand every opponent of the gospel by his great grace. We tackle this mission as a community, side by side and heart to heart in what Luther called "the mutual conversation and consolation" of the saints. As Peter concludes his letter, he's addressing a major component the community of Christ needs to be successful in her assignment: godly leadership.

ELDERS

Peter begins his exhortation to the elders (shepherds) by identifying with them. I imagine then, as now, it would have been easy to see Peter as part of an elite group with a sort of unobtainable status with God. He is second to Jesus in New Testament mentions. But instead Peter very transparently refers to himself as a "fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed." He was saying, "I'm one of you." It's important to note Peter's vantage point for witnessing the sufferings of Jesus. He was standing in the shadows being consumed with guilt and shame and regret. As far as he knew, he'd forfeited all favor he'd ever had with Jesus. Of

course, that would be disproved later when Jesus met him on the beach and reconfirmed his commission to “feed my sheep”. I can only imagine that it was with a deep sense of grace and gratitude that Peter added to his own description, “... a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.” He had tasted forgiveness and restoration firsthand and was certain of his inclusion in whatever sort of glory that would be forthcoming.

Then, from that fresh memory, he charged the elders to “shepherd the flock of God” among them. It would serve us well to pause and reconsider this charge. Notice that we are to care for the flock “among” us. This speaks to the communal aspect of the people of God.

I also believe very strongly that we should examine the ways we support and encourage individualized Christianity in our churches. I see it as one of the prime enemies of the gospel we contend with in our culture. Sheep are to be fed, cared for and protected in the liberating constraints of a flock. A good shepherd spends his time monitoring the condition of his flock so he’ll know what to feed and when, so he’ll be aware of threats of disease or enemies sneaking into the community. He’d be more concerned about the sheep he has than the sheep he’d like to attract into his fold. Be cautious of the cultural threat of investing too heavily with time, energy and resources in an online presence if it takes away from ensuring the sheep you already tend are healthy.

The metaphor of the people of God as sheep is found throughout the scriptures. It’s used to convey a number of truths about our dependence on Christ as the Great Shepherd. It conveys our need to trust in someone who knows infinitely more than we do and has our best interest at heart. It implies our need for direction and guidance. Left to ourselves, we wouldn’t choose the pastures we need. The metaphor puts across the notion of our helplessness, weakness and need for protection. It clearly communicates that we as the people of God need someone to feed us, lead us, tend to us and protect us. As a side note, it would be good for us to be aware of how distasteful we find it to agree with these descriptors as applied to ourselves. We are shepherds, yes, but we are also sheep. When Peter mentions the Chief Shepherd, he reminds us that the buck doesn’t stop with us. He also is helping us remember that the sheep we’re tending belong to Someone else, and that we ourselves need to be shepherded if we desire to be effective.

Jesus stands alone supremely equipped and qualified for that position. He is fully sheep, yet also fully shepherd. He became one of us, knowing first-hand all of the needs we’ve noted earlier. For instance, when Jesus prayed in the garden He was praying as one of us. His prayer, “if it be possible” reveals an inner desire for other options, but “nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” shows his yieldedness to and trust in a Shepherd who knows best. Peter watched from afar as Jesus displayed all the qualities of a great leader in the time of his greatest testing. He stood in his position willingly, not under compulsion. He did it not for himself, but for the Father’s glory. He didn’t dominate, even though he could’ve called 10,000 angels. He was aware that he was serving as the ultimate example for every shepherd following in his path. There’s little doubt this was in Peter’s mind as

he charged the elders with this highest of callings. He had seen the Chief Shepherd in action up close and personal.

Obviously, we want to pattern our lives after his. We all know that people can be drains and pains, becoming a very real threat to willingness. I'm very aware that I've pained and drained the people I'm addressing here. Be that as it may, we must realize that like Jesus, we are as much sheep as we are shepherds. We too need tending. In my own experience, I've found that unless I have shepherds tending to me, I'm very liable to end up tending the sheep in my charge out of an underlying level of frustration. Left to myself, I'm also guilty of garnering shameful gain; not so much financially as spiritually. I've kept my weaknesses and shortcomings hidden. I allowed people to only know my victories. In that sense, I was gaining status as a "strong" Christian in an illegitimate way. I'm happy to report I was led out of that practice by caring shepherds. My hope and intention is for my life to somehow serve in some small way as an example to both shepherd and sheep.

Of course, all of these qualities increase through practice while we are hands on and hearts deep, tending the sheep. This is especially important in a day when we're tempted to spend more time, energy and resources on the pen. I believe we are in a move that will reemphasize people over programs. I strongly believe one of the ways forward in that shift will be for us to re-prioritize the re-establishment of the role of elders in our current church culture. Regrettably, elders have become "protectors of the church's business" instead of "protectors of the flock." This has to change for the church to be effective in its next iteration in our country.

I'm reminded of a sermon I read, written by the great British evangelist, G. Campbell Morgan. In it he told a story about a conversation that his friend had with an actual shepherd. This shepherd was showing his friend where the sheep lived and where they ate and where they stayed in the night. And he showed him this structure which was four walls with an opening in the wall. And the shepherd said that when the sheep were in there, they were safe. Then the friend said, "But there's no door." And the shepherd said to him, "I am the door." Morgan explains that this shepherd was not a Christian man, he was not making a reference to Jesus' words in the New Testament. But he was saying that when it was nighttime, when it became dark, that the sheep would go into the structure, he would lie down in the opening, and no sheep could get out unless it went over him, and no wolf could come in unless it passed over the shepherd. The shepherd was himself the door.

Last words are important, especially if the speaker is aware of the finality. Paul called together the elders of Ephesus to address them in what he assumed would be their last meeting. He ended his farewell speech with the main concern that was on his heart and mind.

"I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night and day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." - Acts 20:29-31

Then he went on to remind them how he'd labored to be an example through investing his life into the health and welfare of the people, often at his own expense. You'll notice common threads in Peter's charge. It was obviously understood among the apostles that elders were to be equipped with an awareness of the Gospel, which was strong enough to identify and expel perverted truths. I contend that this equipping takes precedence over business acumen in church leader's qualification. It is no small undertaking to form men such as described by Peter and Paul in the busyness of life in our current church culture. It is a daunting task, but form them we must.

I personally believe it was on Peter's mind even then. His next thought was toward the younger men in the community. He charged them to "be subject to" the kind of men he'd described. This is generational discipleship of the highest order. I think that implied in Peter's call to the younger is an assumption of active engagement of the older. I'm asking all of us to deeply consider how we might more strategically prioritize this call. I encourage you to seek to identify these young men and invite them into a deeper walk. We'd love to come alongside you and assist in that. One way we're currently seeking to raise up leaders is through a semester-based Zoom class. I partner with pastors for candidates, then each participant gets a letter of invitation from their pastor and me. I've been meeting with roughly a dozen men in their 20's for six consecutive Monday nights each quarter for a couple years. Then I meet with them in person as my travel schedule allows. I envision this project as sort of a greenhouse that's conducive for growing elders. I realize that every man might not have the call, but I believe we will see some bloom into elders.

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD AND THE UNFADING CROWN OF GLORY.

There are several thoughts on the meaning of receiving the unfading crown of glory. The New Testament mentions an imperishable wreath (1 Cor 9:25), the crown of righteousness (1 Tim 4:8), and the crown of life (James 1:12). I don't believe these are put forth as incentives to coax us to work harder. They're not suspended before us as the proverbial dangling carrot. I believe in every case it points to being face to face with Jesus. It's an encouragement that he is our ultimate home and once we arrive there we'll be overwhelmed with its permanence. Jesus, the hope of glory, is our crown. Besides, any physical crown that ends up being presented to us will pass quickly through our hands and be cast at the feet of the Great Shepherd.

CLOTHING OURSELVES IN HUMILITY

Peter then describes the uniform for elders by using a fairly rare verb that refers to a slave's apron put on before serving. Most likely this would have been the item Jesus reached for when preparing to wash the feet of the disciples. Most of the time, the good elder prefers the view from the back seat. This foundational element of eldering is being greatly challenged at present.

Modern day ministry has become a magnet for narcissistic personalities. Harmful traits can easily be presented as strengths, rebranded with words such as confidence, strong leadership, clear vision or thick skin. Power has become the intoxicating agent of choice. It's no wonder we'd be cautioned to keep sober-minded. The landscape of American church life is rife with comparison and competition for market share. Projecting images of health, wealth, and the "good life" has become commonplace as a drawing card. "Borrowed" photos of crowds representing more varied ethnicities are posted as ways of being more appealing. Laugh tracks and applause are added in the editing booth to make the messages more lively and "listenable". Why? Because there's power in being the most popular. When power makes the decisions, relationships become expendable and the church that appears so strong and vibrant externally can actually be spiritually weak and relationally anemic internally.

Consider this from Henri Nouwen:

The long painful history of the Church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end and thereby give us hope are the true saints. One thing is clear to me: the temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love. - Henri Nouwen, In the Name of Jesus, 57-60

And this from Chuck DeGroat:

I was often asked to write references for prospective planters. My warnings about their narcissism were often read as recommendations of their gifts to inspire, their quick wit, strong leadership, charisma, charm, and influence. In retrospect, I see the damage done by those deemed ready to lead and plant churches. In too many post-denominational ministry networks today, where traditional ordination processes have been abandoned, young leaders are snatched up and deployed without proper training or soul formation, simply because they've been successful in other arenas. We've not yet learned. But as stories of damaging narcissism increase, and as social media serves as an amplifier for victim's voices, we may be approaching a reckoning. - Chuck DeGroat, When Narcissism Comes to Church

Jeremiah 6 paints a horrific picture of the state of the people of God in Jerusalem. It foreshadows many of the things we find in the warnings of Paul and Peter. They're going their own way. They refuse to listen to wisdom. There is widespread greed and empty promises of peace offered to gain advantage. I was struck by the damning statement made of such a seemingly innocent occurrence: "they did not know how to blush." The allure of power and control has that effect on the human heart.

What a gift God offers us in the opportunity to humble ourselves. The obvious alternative is him doing it for you, for humility is not optional for the leader. Instead of lengthening the paper, I decided instead to provide this excellent resource to you originally published in November of 2004 by John Piper. I can't improve on these tools provided to assist in the voluntary humbling of ourselves. (See Piper Attachment)

A big piece of the practice of humility is to be aware of the source of anxiety in your life, (often unrealistic expectations) and to develop the habit of throwing those things onto Jesus. He never tires of taking those things because he cares for us unceasingly. When we continue to entertain these things instead of casting them on Jesus, we usually get a visit from a prowler.

For that reason, we are to rid ourselves from the influences of any intoxicating agents of the age and pay attention to what's going on around us for the sake of the sheep as well as our own. Prowlers operate as quietly as possible in the darkness. They don't want to draw attention to themselves. Their best hope is to catch you not paying attention, then to steal what you have. This is a method of the enemy in our day. We are to resist him. I think it would be interesting to consider what other things the New Testament instructs us to resist. I find that we are not to resist someone demanding our coat. I find that we should not resist someone forcing us to walk a mile with them. I find examples of saints who never resisted the seizure of their property, but rather joyfully accepted it. It may be the case that our unhealthy management of dual citizenship, earthly and heavenly, has caused us to expend our energies resisting some things we shouldn't. If so, it would be worth examining how that has negatively affected the condition of the church in our country.

Peter lists some of the tools with which we are supplied for opposing the evil one. We resist him by being firm in the faith. We cling to the gospel and each other. We resist him through active, faithful solidarity with brothers and sisters around the globe, praying and seeking opportunity to offer help through other open doors. We resist him by resting in the fact that this world is not our home. We will not trade our identity for security, comfort and ease in a place we were never intended to dwell for long. We resist him by waiting well on the restoration, confirmation, strengthening and establishing that comes from heaven, rather than some cheapened, illegitimate, earth-bound version of those things we long for.

I treasure this book. Its words are amazingly relevant to us in our current chaotic situation. I wonder what it would look like if I was tasked with writing a letter to a group of suffering believers. It would more than likely be soaked in compassion and sympathy, but that's not the case at all with Peter's letter. There are moments where you hear his heart for the condition they're in, but this is clearly a set of marching orders. He reminds us that suffering is part of the normal Christian experience and that we are not alone in our trials, and neither should we dwell on our situation. We are the people of God. We're here on an assignment. God will give us grace for everything we endure and will, in his time, bring ultimate relief and release. It is the true grace of God that serves to fill our senses with the smell of restoration, confirmation, strength and establishment in our journey toward home. Reminding each other constantly to focus on that realization in the midst of trials and suffering results in the kind of peace that Peter pronounces over us in his closing sentence. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Resisting Pride When You're Praised -

John Piper

1. I call to mind that I am not self-existent; only the triune God is. Only God is absolute, but I am contingent. I remind myself that I am utterly dependent on God for my origin and for my present and future existence. I call this to mind and ponder its truth.
2. I remember that I am by nature a depraved sinner and that, in all my sinning, I have treated God with contempt, preferring other things to his glory. I take stock that I have never done a good deed for which I don't need to repent. Each one is flawed because perfection is commanded. Therefore, I realize that God owes me nothing but pain in this life and the next.
3. I ponder that this condition of mine is so desperate that it could only be remedied at the cost of the horrid death of the Son of God, to bear my punishment and provide my righteousness. And I revel in the forgiveness and righteousness that is mine in Christ.
4. I meditate on those Scriptures that say, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you," (1 Peter 5:5-6; see James 4:6-10). And, "He who is least among you all is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48; Mark 9:35; Matthew 20:26).
5. I pray that the eyes of my heart would see these biblical truths for what they really are.
6. I ask God to make me not just see them but also feel them with a sense of the meekness

and lowliness and brokenness that corresponds to their true weight.

7. I renounce desires for praise and notoriety and esteem when I see them rising. I say, “No! In the name of Jesus get out of my head!” And I turn my mind afresh with prayer toward the beauty and truth and worth of Christ.
8. I try to receive all criticism — from friend or foe — with the assumption that there is almost certainly some truth in it that I can benefit from. “Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19).
9. I strive to cultivate a joy in Christ and his wisdom and power and justice and love that is more satisfying than the pleasures of human praise, with the goal that, by the Spirit, I would be granted the miracle of self-forgetfulness in the admiration of Christ, and in love toward people.
10. Finally, I turn often to older writers who knew God at depths which most of us modern people seem incapable of. I turn, for example, to Jonathan Edwards whose descriptions of humility awaken the deepest longings in me, as, for example, when he wrote to Mrs. Peperell on November 28, 1751, concerning Christ:

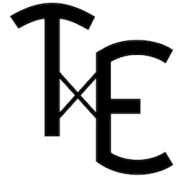
He is indeed possessed of infinite majesty, to inspire us with reverence and adoration; yet that majesty need not terrify us, for we behold it blended with humility, meekness, and sweet condescension. We may feel the most profound reverence and self-abasement, and yet our hearts be drawn forth sweetly and powerfully into an intimacy the most free, confidential, and delightful. The dread, so naturally inspired by his greatness, is dispelled by the contemplation of his gentleness and humility; while the familiarity, which might otherwise arise from this view of the loveliness of his character merely, is ever prevented by the consciousness of his infinite majesty and glory; and the sight of all his perfections united fills us with sweet surprise and humble confidence, with reverential love and delightful adoration. (Works, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), p. cxxxix)

Longing to forget me, and treasure Christ, and love you,

Pastor John



Theological Roundtable 2 0 2 4



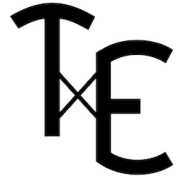
APPENDIX: SUMMARY AND RELEVANCE FOR RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Books (other than commentaries) from our Preparatory Resources list are overviewed in the following pages. The contributors were asked to survey the contents for those who haven't read a particular book and then to suggest lines of relevance with 1 Peter and of discussion for our large and small group meetings. We hope to integrate these books with our conversations about the biblical text. Your reading these responses will help you do that. Our thanks to these contributors for their additional effort to serve us.

<i>Walking with God through Pain and Suffering, Timothy Keller</i>	56
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Theological Roundtable 2024



Brian Fields
Contributor

WALKING WITH GOD THROUGH PAIN AND SUFFERING

BY TIMOTHY KELLER

The first line of Tim Keller's book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, is an excellent encapsulation of why the subject matter is so important: "Suffering is everywhere, unavoidable, and its scope often overwhelms.³⁹" Well said. Learning how to understand, process, and grow through suffering is often the difference between thriving and waning. Keller frames this very helpful and thorough discussion around the imagery of fire, drawn on repeatedly through 1 Peter⁴⁰.

The book is divided into three sections, all relating to the furnace, the first of which is entitled "Understanding the Furnace". In these chapters, Keller explores the way other religions and worldviews handle the reality of suffering. Ultimately, the contrast is drawn that Christianity has a unique perspective on suffering that is both more satisfying and hopeful. While acknowledging the reality and seeming injustice of pain, the Bible does not dismiss it as either illusory or insignificant. By great contrast, the Bible points to a redemptive purpose in it. As with all things, the universal scope of Christ's redemptive work has the power to transform even the worst parts of the human experience, causing them to become meaningful facets in the growth and maturity of every believer.

The next section, "Facing the Furnace," Keller addresses the tension that exists between God's sovereignty and the reality of suffering. Though God is all powerful, the world is still fallen, and broken things happen to everyone. God rectifies this not by eliminating suffering but by entering into it with us. He is both sovereign and suffering. This is demonstrated most clearly in Jesus suffering for our redemption, and in doing so purchasing for us the possibility of our suffering being redeemed with purpose. The encouragement comes in the fact that God enters suffering with us! He does not abandon us to it. Therefore turning to Him all the more in the midst of suffering is the most transformational of choices.

³⁹ Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (USA, Penguin Books, 2016), 1.

⁴⁰ 1 Peter 1:6-7, 4:12.

The final section is “Walking with God in the Furnace”. Keller concludes by describing various Christian attitudes and practices that not only prove the reality of our faith, but serve as means of grace during the trials of life. We may weep, but we still pray and worship while trusting and hoping. The secular world focuses on fixing the problem, more than responding to it rightly and living through it righteously. Secularism must do this because it has no hope beyond this life. Believers do have hope in this life (and the promise of God’s help), but our real hope is in the life to come. Therefore, living well through suffering has great value that God uses in the life of every believer.

Though Keller’s book is not based directly on 1 Peter, the correlations are many. As Peter tries to prepare the church for the hard times to come, he instructs on how to frame persecution within the Christian worldview. Likewise, he gives many imperatives on how to live out the faith in the face of suffering. Given the similar subject matter, the following are some possible points for discussion and reflection.

#1 The popularity of prosperity theology from previous generations still echoes throughout Christendom. It may still manifest in us whenever something bad happens and the first question we ask is “Did I do something wrong?” or “Is God mad?.” Keller presents suffering as an inevitable, unavoidable part of the human experience: “No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career – something will inevitably ruin it.⁴¹” Peter, while not quite so dogmatic, seems to declare the same thing (1:6).

How does the gospel address the reality of suffering while still maintaining our hope both in this life and the life to come?

- Is the hope of deliverance in this life the thing to be focused on?
- Or is the hope of the life to come meant to be the primary encouragement?

#2 Good wisdom would encourage building a sturdy theology of suffering into our lives when the waves of trouble are at their calmest. The tempest isn't the best time to build a theological framework. Keller asserts that the sovereignty of God demands that suffering will always have a purpose. In chapter 2, Keller distills some of the possible purposes for suffering down to 3 in general:

“Some suffering is given in order to chastise and correct a person for wrongful patterns of life (as in the case of Jonah imperiled by the storm), some suffering is given not to correct past wrongs but to prevent future ones (as in the case of Joseph sold into slavery), and some suffering has no purpose other than to lead a person to love God more ardently for himself alone and so discover the ultimate peace and freedom⁴².”

⁴¹ Keller, 3.

⁴² Keller, 47.

Peter affirms God's purposes in suffering as well (1:7, 4:13, 5:10).

Do you agree with Keller's three categories?

- Given the underlying framework of sovereignty, what would God's purposes be in each of these instances?
- Does Peter seem to be focusing on one of these categories in particular?

What is the best way to minister to someone who has neglected or been unable to develop a robust theology of suffering, yet they are currently in the midst of difficulty?

- Since the difficulties of life often drive people to seek help in God, what assurances can we offer them through the gospel?

#3 Keller's imagery of the furnace matches very well with Peter's imagery of the refiner's fire. Keller spends the first section of the book comparing and contrasting various worldviews and religions to Christianity in terms of how they deal with suffering. He writes:

"Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine⁴³."

Peter likened the meaningful purposes of God in the midst of suffering as more precious than gold (1:7).

What are the means by which we have learned to stay encouraged by God's purposes in the midst of great sorrow?

- Things such as Bible study, prayer, sharing with a community, solitude? Which have been most helpful for you (Keller focuses on many of these in the third section)?
- Are the value of these universally equal, or are they more helpful for some...or more helpful in certain situations.

⁴³ Keller, 30.

#4 In the secular worldview, according to Keller, “suffering is never seen as a meaningful part of life but only as an interruption.⁴⁴” Therefore, it is treated as something to be avoided and eliminated at all costs. Though there is no biblical encouragement to seek out suffering, there is sufficient direction to deal with it well when it comes. Peter says not to be surprised by it, or think it strange, but to rejoice in it (4:12-13). However, modern western culture has drawn an equivalence between happiness and the absence of suffering. Christianity is at odds with that. Peter encourages rejoicing, joy, praise, and hope as the pervasive attitudes of believers while they are going through suffering, not only when things are going well. Keller affirms:

“Happiness is a by-product of wanting something more than happiness – to be rightly related to God and our neighbor. If you seek God as the nonnegotiable good of your life, you will get happiness thrown in. If, however, you aim mainly at personal happiness, you will get neither⁴⁵.”

The distinctive reality of Christianity is the ability to experience the love of God and real joy in the midst of suffering, even when it is not eliminated.

How difficult have you found it to live up to this Christian imperative in the midst of your times of personal struggle?

- What has helped and what has hindered?

Keller ends each of his chapters with a story from real people. Some of them end with victory in this life. Some of them end with victory in the life to come.

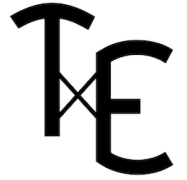
- How often have you found yourself encouraged by people who have suffered well, and rejoiced through the struggle?
- Was it just as encouraging to see someone die well, as it was to see them live with suffering well?

⁴⁴ Keller, 26.

⁴⁵ Keller, 187.



Theological Roundtable 2024



David Holland
Contributor

WHEN CHRISTIANS FACE PERSECUTION: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY CHEE-CHIEW LEE

RANDOM NOTE FROM CONTRIBUTOR:

Academic publishers who print academic books in tiny 7-8pt type with footnotes in even-tinier 4-5pt type, all set in pages with narrow margins, should probably just go ahead and hang a sign on the building that reads, "Why yes, we *do* hate our readers. Why do you ask?" And now on to the summary.

AUTHOR:

Chee-Chiew Lee is a female native of Singapore who holds a Ph.D. from Wheaton College in the U.S. As a Singaporean, Lee is especially positioned to explore the issue of Christian persecution, having grown up as a Christian in a predominantly Buddhist island nation – a city-state surrounded by majority Muslim Malaysia and Indonesia, and lying within the influence orbit of China.

CONTENT:

As the subtitle suggests, Lee's book is a sweeping survey of what the New Testament says about persecution combined with an overview of what key biblical scholars have said about those passages.

In her own words, Lee says, ". . . this study seeks to describe a theology of the New Testament authors with regard to facing persecution (p.9) and "As an attempt to describe a New Testament theology of facing persecution." (p.11)

First, persecution is defined, with the definition unpacked deeper in the book to include:

- Family/Community Ostracism
- Loss of Property

- Loss of Income
- Loss of Social Status
- Violence
- Imprisonment
- Execution

Lee's working definition of persecution makes a point of distinguishing it from other forms of trouble, adversity, or trials – such as is typical of living in a broken world filled with broken people.

Then Lee provides some relevant history of persecution in the early Church for context. There she points out that, according to the New Testament writers, the sources of persecution can generally be classified as coming from three sources:

1. Jews and the Jewish religious establishment, particularly the Sanhedrin;
2. Gentiles/Pagans, particularly elements of imperial Roman government infused with the cult of Emperor worship, and regional and local officials of the Roman government, and
3. Satanic/demonic spiritual powers.

She notes that the first systematic persecution of the fledgling church flowed from Jerusalem's Great Sanhedrin and then spread through the Diaspora through communication to the legal/judicial network of the Lesser Sanhedrin bodies located wherever significant synagogues were found.

Then Lee dives into the New Testament scriptures themselves, beginning with the Gospels and the statements of Jesus in which He warns His followers that they *will* face persecution. She then examines Luke's chronicle in the book of Acts, which includes Saul's/Paul's leading of an emerging, Sanhedrin-centered movement to suppress Christianity; as well as the stoning of Stephen and Peter's arrest and imprisonment.

Lee then turns to the numerous passages from Paul's letters that relate to persecution – including his personal accounts of being stoned (once) flogged with 40 lashes minus one (five times), and beaten with rods (three times).

Lee points out that these differing methods of punishment/torture/execution highlight the differing sources of persecution for both Paul personally and the early church in general.

Namely that beating with rods was a common form of punishment meted out by Roman

governmental authorities. And Paul's stoning was likely at the hands of a mob of Greek-Roman pagans. But Paul's five episodes of having been flogged with 39 lashes was, as Paul directly states in 2 Corinthians 11:24, came at the hands of his fellow Jews. And Lee points out that those five floggings most likely took place within the walls of various local synagogues.

After Paul's letters, the author examines the book of Hebrews, an epistle that deals extensively with the pressure faced by Jewish converts to the Jesus faith to turn back and abandon the faith (apostasy).

SUMMARY:

Lee summarizes her book by pointing out that many of the New Testament writers' exhortations about persecution are aimed at preventing new Jewish followers of Jesus from apostatizing under the intense pressures of persecution.

ROUNDTABLE RELEVANCE: 1 PETER

Lee's analysis of the book of 1 Peter is brief but illuminating. Lee's main points about 1 Peter's handling of the subject of persecution include:

- "1 Peter employs a strong eschatological perspective in encouraging readers to persevere in their faith."

(Reviewer's note: Here and elsewhere in the book, Lee seems to assume that references such as "in these last days" or "the revelation of Jesus Christ" or "the end of all things is at hand" refer to the world-ending Second Coming of Christ rather than the end of the Old Covenant system fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Or at least assumes that this is what Peter meant when he used these terms.)

- Peter addresses "all kinds of trials" in places in his letter, but generally "the letter mainly addresses the persecution readers face due to their faith."
- "For Peter, suffering persecution faithfully is a corroboration of their true standing in Christ. (1 Peter 1:4,7)"
- Peter "exhorts his audience to follow the example of Christ who is the exemplar of suffering unjustly but not retaliating, entrusting himself to God because God will judge justly. (1 Peter 2:21-23)"
- "Since the end of all things is near, the readers need to have a sober mind, so as to pray and to resist the devil by standing firm in their faith. (1 Peter 4:7; 5:8-9)"
- "Peter ends the letter by summarizing his purpose of writing: to encourage them and testify to the 'true grace of God', such that they should 'stand fast in it.'" (1 Peter 5:12)

QUESTIONS AND PROPOSITIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION:

Question:

Is there a meaningful scriptural difference between (A) the trials and trouble that all people face because we're living in a fallen, broken world filled with broken people; and (B) authentic, real-deal persecution?

If so, are we right to apply the New Testament's (including 1 Peter's) exhortations about how to respond to persecution to how we respond to other types of trials and trouble?

Proposition (related the question above):

Few American Christians have ever experienced real persecution. We may have been called a "Jesus freak" by a classmate or coworker and walked away with hurt feelings. But the most relatable item from Lee's list of manifestations or persecution the typical American believer is likely to have experienced is "Family Ostracism."

Therefore, we American Christians tend to conflate, confuse, or combine the issue of persecution with the reality of trials and trouble that result from living in a fallen, "groaning" Creation; living alongside broken people; and our own tendency to make bad decisions.

Agree or disagree?

Proposition/Question:

Historically, the entry of the gospel into a new region or culture results in persecution of those carrying that "good news" message and persecution of the first converts to embrace it.

For example, the early, emerging Church experienced intense persecution as new Jesus-followers fanned out across the known world:

1. Declaring to Jewish communities the complete fulfillment of the Old Covenant order and system in Jesus Christ.
2. Declaring to pagan cultures that their gods were false. And that the one, true God had come to earth as fully human, paid the price to redeem mankind, defeated death, and then ascended to the throne of heaven and earth as King.

Neither message was warmly received by those respective cultures and communities, to put it mildly.

Nevertheless, history also shows that as Christianity becomes deeply rooted and the gospel transforms the culture from the bottom up, persecution tends to diminish or disappear.

Europe would serve as an example of this. Even in “post-Christian” Europe, Christians generally experience authentic persecution only to the degree an area has received high levels of Muslim immigration.

So how does (or should) our eschatology impact our expectation of persecution in our daily lives?

Question:

The recent Covid pandemic raised questions and presented dilemmas for many American Christians concerning the New Testament’s exhortations about obeying government authorities.

For example, Peter writes:

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

Peter’s exhortation here doesn’t seem to leave a lot of wiggle room for creative interpretation. Yet, Peter’s initial readers, most of whom were living under pagan Roman rule, and were forced to navigate tricky issues concerning government obedience and matters of Christian conscience.

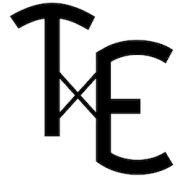
How do we navigate similar dilemmas?

Some frustrated U.S. Christian leaders seem to be making a case for armed resistance, or at minimum advocating for muscular pushback against and resistance to various levels of government as they see legislation and regulation that runs counter to conscience and conviction.

Can such action be reconciled with Peter’s commands above? Or Paul’s in Romans 13:1-7?



Theological Roundtable 2024



Joe Vest
Contributor

POLITICAL CHURCH

BY JONATHAN LEEMAN

Jonathan Leeman's *Political Church* reimagines the relationship between church and state through a covenantal approach to political theology. His provocative thesis states that *the local church is inherently a political entity, functioning as an embassy of Christ's Kingdom*. Leeman defines politics as "the mediating of God's covenantal rule," encompassing both governmental institutions and all of life under God's authority. This challenges both secular and theocratic tendencies in Christian political thought, calling for a renewed appreciation of the local church's political nature and its role in shaping political engagement.

AUTHORITY AND POLITICS DERIVED FROM GOD

All political reality originates in God's triune nature and his rule over creation as the Creator-King. Being created in God's image, humans are inherently social and political beings. The creation mandate given to Adam and Eve is fundamentally political (Leeman terms it the "citizenship mandate"). Leeman extends this to show how the new covenant establishes a model body politic – a nation of righteous citizens.

HUMAN GOVERNMENT AND AUTHORITY

Leeman grounds legitimate human government in the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9), which authorizes and obligates humans to ensure justice. This covenant distinguishes between matters subject to human government and those subject to divine governance, limiting the first of these to human-to-human interactions. Leeman argues that the liberal separation of politics and religion is artificial and untenable, asserting that all political stances are inherently religious.

THE LOCAL CHURCH AS A POLITICAL ENTITY

Central to Leeman's argument is that the local church is "a political assembly, an embassy of Christ's Kingdom," rooted in Jesus' giving of the Keys of the Kingdom to the church (Matthew 16:18-19, 18:15-20). This view opposes both theocratic and purely secular understandings of church-state relations and emphasizes the political nature of church

membership and discipline. The author stresses the importance of understanding institutions, particularly in ecclesiology, thus challenging the modern trend to deinstitutionalize churches in favor of "more community" and "less institutional authority."

THE CHURCH AS EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM

Leeman presents the local church as an embassy of Christ's rule, emphasizing its role in representing Christ's Kingdom on earth. The church possesses *declarative authority* - the power to speak on Christ's behalf, not to create new laws or execute judgment. This authority is exercised through the "Keys of the Kingdom," which represent the church's power to affirm or deny citizenship in Christ's Kingdom through practices such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, preaching, and church discipline.

OUR DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Regeneration fundamentally changes a person's identity, including their political identity (Gal 2:20, 1 Peter 2:9-10). This dual citizenship creates tensions between our primary loyalty to Christ's Kingdom and our earthly obligations. We are called to live as "sojourners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11) while also being subject to earthly authorities (1 Peter 2:13-17). Navigating these tensions requires wisdom and an understanding of the "already/not yet" nature of Christ's Kingdom.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIP

Leeman proposes grounding religious freedom in the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9:5-6) rather than in liberal concepts of individual rights or state neutrality. This approach limits civil governments to human-to-human interactions while creating a protected space for religious practice. Leeman argues that political and religious realities completely overlap, contrary to liberal attempts to separate them. However, he maintains that this doesn't advocate for either theonomy or fusion of church and state, arguing instead for separate institutional authorities for both church and state, each with its own jurisdiction (Matthew 22:21).

DISCUSSION POINTS: POLITICAL CHURCH AND 1 PETER

Political Engagement

Leeman's View:

Christians primary political loyalty belongs to Christ's Kingdom, while still engaging with earthly political structures.

1. Active Engagement: We should be actively involved in earthly politics as representatives of Christ's Kingdom.
2. Institutional Specificity: The church is to shape Christian political engagement as an embassy of Christ's Kingdom.
3. Covenantal Framework: Political engagement is understood within God's covenantal relationship with humanity.
4. Prophetic Witness: The church's political engagement often involves standing against prevailing cultural norms, potentially leading to conflict and suffering.

1 Peter's Perspective:

Emphasizes the tension between our status as "elect exiles" (1 Peter 1:1, 2:11) and our responsibilities within earthly societies. He calls for submission to earthly authorities while maintaining a distinct identity and lifestyle as God's people.

1. Abstain from fleshly passions (1 Peter 2:11)
2. Submit to earthly authorities (1 Peter 2:13-14)
3. Live as free people and servants of God (1 Peter 2:16-17)
4. Witness through honorable conduct (1 Peter 2:12)

Modern Evangelical Perspectives:

The modern church is expressing a wide variety of approaches to this topic, including:

1. Cultural Engagement: Many evangelicals, influenced by figures like Francis Schaeffer and Chuck Colson, advocate for active cultural and political engagement to shape society according to Christian values.
2. Two Kingdoms Theology: Some Reformed thinkers propose a distinction between the "Kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of man," arguing for Christian involvement in politics while maintaining the church's distinct spiritual mission.
3. Neo-Anabaptist Withdrawal: Influenced by theologians like John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, some advocate for a more counter-cultural stance, with the church as an alternative community rather than seeking political power.
4. Pragmatic Involvement: Many evangelicals engage in politics pragmatically, supporting candidates or policies that align with their values without any comprehensive political theology.

5. Social Justice Focus: An increasing number of evangelicals, especially younger generations, emphasize political engagement focused on issues of social justice, informed by biblical themes of justice and compassion.

Discussion:

These varying perspectives present both commonalities and tensions in understanding Christian political engagement:

1. How does Leeman's call for active political engagement as representatives of Christ's Kingdom align with or differ from 1 Peter's emphasis on abstaining from fleshly passions and submitting to authorities?
2. Can the concept of "elect exiles" be reconciled with the church as a political entity with real authority? What implications might that have for each of the modern evangelical approaches?
3. Does Leeman's covenantal framework provide a more coherent basis for political engagement than the varied approaches in modern evangelicalism? How does it compare with Peter's theology?
4. How can churches navigate the tension between being "not of this world" and yet actively engaging in worldly political structures? Does Leeman's "embassy" model offer a helpful paradigm, or does 1 Peter suggest a different approach?

Religious Freedom and Submission to Authorities

Leeman's View:

Leeman proposes a new understanding of religious freedom based on the Noahic covenant and the Keys of the Kingdom, rather than on secular political theory.

1. Religious freedom should be grounded in the Noahic covenant's authorization of government to punish violent transgressions against men, not transgressions against God.
2. The church's authority to declare citizenship in Christ's Kingdom (Keys of the Kingdom) limits state authority in religious matters.
3. Separation of church and state are based on the distinct authorities given to each, rather than on liberal political theory.
4. The state's role is limited to maintaining order and punishing evil; it does not have authority over matters of religious belief and practice.
5. While the church has declarative authority (to declare citizenship in Christ's Kingdom), it does not possess coercive power in the same way the state does.

1 Peter's Perspective:

1. Submit to authorities for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 2:13-14)
2. Freedom and Responsibility (1 Peter 2:16)
3. Honor everyone and fear God (1 Peter 2:17)
4. Suffering for Righteousness (1 Peter 3:17)
5. Ultimate Allegiance to Christ (1 Peter 3:14-15a)

Peter balances submission to earthly authorities with ultimate allegiance to God. He presents a nuanced view of engagement with civil authorities, balancing respect and obedience with righteous suffering when earthly and divine mandates conflict.

Modern Evangelical Perspectives:

1. First Amendment Emphasis: Many American evangelicals ground their understanding of religious freedom in the Constitution's First Amendment, with some even viewing it as divinely inspired.
2. Persecution Complex: Some perceive increasing restrictions on religious freedom as persecution, leading to a defensive posture.
3. Culture War Mentality: Certain groups frame religious freedom issues within a broader "culture war," as battles against secularization or moral decline.
4. Two Kingdoms Approach: Some Reformed thinkers distinguish between the church's spiritual authority and the state's temporal authority, advocating for Christian engagement in politics while maintaining the church's distinct mission.
5. Social Justice Perspective: An increasing number of evangelicals, especially younger generations, view religious freedom in the context of broader human rights and social justice issues.
6. Pragmatic Engagement: Many engage with issues of religious freedom and civil authority pragmatically, without any real theological framework.

Discussion:

1. Can Leeman's concept of the church's declarative authority be reconciled with Peter's instructions to submit to every human institution? How might this impact the church's response to potential government overreach?

2. How does Peter's nuanced view of suffering for righteousness' sake inform or challenge both Leeman's view and contemporary evangelical approaches to religious freedom conflicts?
3. How can churches navigate the tension between submitting to authorities and maintaining their distinct identity and mission? Does Leeman's model offer a helpful paradigm, or does 1 Peter suggest a different approach?
4. What are some current situations in which both congregations and individual believers face conflicts between civil law and their convictions? What principles from Leeman and/or 1st Peter can guide them?

Suffering and Christian Political Witness

Leeman's View:

1. Political Conflict: The church's political witness often involves conflict with the prevailing culture, potentially leading to suffering.
2. Institutional Contrast: The church, as an embassy of Christ's Kingdom, inherently stands in contrast to worldly political structures, which can result in tension and persecution.
3. Prophetic Role: The church's political witness involves a prophetic function, calling out injustice and proclaiming God's standards, which may provoke opposition.
4. Suffering as Testimony: Suffering is a powerful testimony to the reality of Christ's Kingdom and the church's allegiance to it.
5. Eschatological Perspective: Suffering understood within the context of the "already/not yet" nature of the Kingdom points to future vindication and glory.

1 Peter's Perspective:

Peter presents suffering as an expected part of the Christian life, particularly when it results from righteous living. He emphasizes a non-retaliatory response to suffering, coupled with a readiness to give an account of one's hope. The epistle frames suffering within an eschatological perspective, pointing to future glory and vindication.

1. Suffering for Righteousness: Expected, but blessed (1 Peter 3:14-15)
2. Sharing in Christ's Sufferings: Reason for rejoicing (1 Peter 4:12-13)
3. Witness through Conduct: Honorable behavior glorifies God (1 Peter 2:12)
4. Suffering and God's Will: Entrust souls to God while doing good (1 Peter 4:19)
5. Example of Christ: Called to follow His pattern of suffering (1 Peter 2:21)

Modern Evangelical Perspectives:

1. Prosperity Gospel: Downplays suffering, instead emphasizing God's blessings and success for faithful believers.
2. Culture War Mentality: Some view suffering primarily through the lens of cultural conflict, and even actively seek confrontation as a form of witness.
3. Social Justice Emphasis: An increasing number of evangelicals, especially younger generations, connect Christian suffering with advocacy for the marginalized and oppressed.
4. Quiet Faithfulness: Some emphasize quiet endurance and faithful living as the primary form of Christian witness in the face of suffering.
5. Global Persecution Focus: Many evangelical groups highlight and advocate for believers facing persecution in other parts of the world.
6. Therapeutic Approach: Some evangelical teachings focus on personal growth and spiritual development through suffering, sometimes at the expense of its wider theological significance.

Discussion:

1. How does Leeman's framing of suffering in terms of political conflict compare with 1 Peter's more general expectation of suffering for righteousness' sake? Are these perspectives complementary or contradictory?
2. How might Peter's view of suffering inform or challenge each of the various contemporary evangelical approaches to political engagement and witness?
3. Does Leeman's institutional approach to church witness provide a more coherent framework for understanding Christian suffering than the varied approaches in modern evangelicalism? How does it compare with the personal and communal emphases in 1 Peter?
4. How can churches navigate the tension between standing firm for truth (potentially inviting conflict) and maintaining a winsome witness as described in 1 Peter? Does Leeman's model offer helpful insights?
5. How should Christians discern between suffering that is a result of faithful witness and suffering that may be due to unwise or unnecessarily provocative actions? What principles can guide this discernment?
6. How do the eschatological dimensions of suffering and witness in both Leeman's work and 1 Peter speak to contemporary evangelical understandings of the church's role in society?