

From Rebel to Holy

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[0 : 0 0] You're listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee. To learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.

And now, today's sermon. To help us receive all of Peter's benefits this morning, of this forewarning and the directive that he has to the church, I want to briefly remind us of the biblical worldview that he writes from, not only the worldview, but also the culture to which he writes in.

When you do not have the worldview or context of a letter like Peter's, you can miss the weight and really the application altogether. Here's a letter with no context for you.

It was a hard day, and I'm not really sure how to describe my thoughts. Sad, angry, vengeance, but mostly despair. I fear this is the only, the beginning of more pain and suffering.

I pray this letter finds you. The chaos that surrounds us is unlike I have ever seen before. I'm afraid life as I knew it would most likely never return.

[1 : 1 7] Our world is about to change. My mind knows that God is in control, but my heart is angry at him. My inner voice constantly fumes, hurling wise for what my eyes and ears have witnessed.

God, forgive me. I am a sinner. I hope you can come before I know what is about to unleash. Your loving son, Sam. Now, this context is hard for us to understand this letter until this next sentence.

December 8th, 1941, Pearl Harbor. Now, the pain, the suffering, and chaos makes a lot more sense, doesn't it?

You can see the smokes and smell the fire, fumes, and the chaos and death that surrounded that letter. Peter writes the same way. And if we do not pay attention to why and where he writes from, it's really hard to understand his meaning.

And the context, here he's writing from his Rome. We're not going to revisit that. We already covered this and what life looked like in the introduction to our letter, what it means to live in Rome.

[2 : 3 5] But today, I wanted to expand on this framework, what we've already been set forth, and really add to it some sounds and smells and experience to the context of Peter's letter, especially with what he writes this week.

Many of us can embrace the duality of our world. The spiritual and the physical, that two natures that we experience.

It's why we're here. Because of the spiritual side of our world, we come to receive the benefits of our king. There aren't many physical benefits for being here this morning.

We are naturally drawn to the physical portion, though. That's part of our, 90% of our existence in this world is physical. It's easier to believe and live with things that we can see and touch, taste, and hear.

We tend to draw into those senses. My daughter Jane would tell me about a conversation he was having with a classmate. And they were just talking about fun stuff. You know, paranormal, aliens, do you believe in them? And his response is, I only believe in things that I can examine.

[3 : 39] That's a common way to live life, right? If I can't see it, touch it, experience it, it's not real to me. In this letter, Peter is helping the church bring the spiritual and physical into connection.

Into their experience. Into the point that they're actually inseparable. The way in which they function. What is spiritual manifestation is seen in the physical realm.

And what we do physically is a reflection of the spiritual nature that we live in. Take note, look with me at verse 14. It's where we're going to pick back up from our time of working through this text.

And verse 14 says this. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. You were controlled by your body's desires.

This is because you were unaware of the power that drove the desire. If we were to reword this. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2. Paul has a longer section of describing this battle than Peter alludes to here.

[4 : 50] Ephesians chapter 2. Extremely famous passage. But I want you to read it in light of what Peter is saying. And we can use the two to really create this understanding of the physical and the spiritual collapsing in on each other.

And how they influence each other for our sake of understanding Peter's letter. Ephesians 2.1 he says, And you were dead in your trespasses and sins. So spiritually speaking.

And when you once walked, following the course of this world. So of course, the world set up a path. And you just went ahead and walked along with it. Following your leader. The prince of the power of the air.

The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. We followed our leader well. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh. We did it willingly because it fulfilled our desires.

Carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. And were by nature the children of wrath like the rest of mankind. The whole world follows this prince down his path.

[5 : 49] As he plays the flute. And we love its music. This is not a metaphor. Linguistically speaking. He is not speaking in metaphors.

Paul is pointing out to us the actual slave master that we fell under. He took the weakness of our flesh. Used it against us. The proneness to our desires.

And advertised more than we could ever control. And therefore became a slave. He knows how to fuel our rebellious nature.

What is a prince? This is an important title. A prince is related to a kingdom. This is a part of the taxonomy. The way in which the New Testament writers thought.

And who is it that serves with the prince? It's a kingdom. And this is his kingdom. This is why he's called the God of this age. Or the ruler of this world.

[6 : 47] So this is what Peter's talking about in verse 14. You are unaware of your master who you followed. The passions of your former ignorance. I think it's so hard.

My own mind. I'm trying to wrap my brain around the idea of kingdom. Like we just don't live in the context of kings and kingdom anymore. Other than the tabloid version of it. It just seems like it's Netflix shows.

But that's not even real to us in the United States. But this is how the Bible has built its platform. It's built its message. Because it's real. It's not just for literary fun.

There is literally a kingdom that has a prince over it. And he's known as the prince of darkness. Write these passages down in the margin. Or you can put it right here next to Ephesians. Colossians 1.13 and 2 Corinthians 4.4.

They're really helpful passages in building out this concept. Or the idea of the world that Peter's writing from. Listen to this. This is Colossians 1.13.

[7 : 50] He, being Jesus, has delivered us from the domain of darkness. The realm. The kingdom of darkness. There's an actual king with the prince. There's a kingdom with the prince.

A ruler. He's known as also a god. He says, you were delivered from that domain. Listen to this. And transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son.

Now you have two kingdoms. Just in that one verse. You have one that's ruled by a tyrant. And you have one who is ruled by a loving God.

That means there's a third kingdom. And Peter is saying the evidence of the kingdom that you show allegiance to is seen in the third kingdom. Which is this physical realm.

You live in those three kingdoms. The two spiritual kingdoms are at war. The evidence is of it. It's seen here in the physical. 2 Corinthians 4.4.

[8 : 47] In their case, the God of this world, this king, blinded the minds of the unbeliever to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Who is the image of God. He hates our creator and our king. And has rebelled so much that he runs around making sure no one sees his glory.

He blinds them. He intoxicates them with sin so much. They will not in and of themselves be able to see his glory. So within our physical world, there is a domain of darkness whose God, the prince of darkness, blinds the hearts of minds.

In his kingdom. This prince of darkness, his name became known as Satan. We know this name well. The leader of a rebellion of thousands and thousands of beings who follow him and are partakers of this rebellion.

It is not just Satan against Christianity. Paul and Peter write that there's our entire kingdom. This is why Paul, when he says in Ephesians 6, you don't wrestle against people, flesh and blood, but against rulers and nations and powers.

[10 : 07] He's describing an entire kingdom. The larger context to understand this, Peter's instruction is saying this is what you are refraining, falling back into.

So just for the sake of clarity, so we can, when we read what Peter writes, we have these, we can all see it together. Here's the framework. Here's your first kingdom. It's our physical kingdom. This is the one we see. When we're embraced in, we understand it.

It's passing away. There's a second kingdom. It's our spiritual kingdom. It's our king. The king of kings. The one that we were transferred into, which means there's a third one that we were transferred out of, and that is the rebellious kingdom.

The kingdom of darkness. The prince of the power of the air. He has so many titles. But it exists. And Peter writes as if it's reality.

So you cannot receive the benefits of Peter if you do not read it in this way. So let's walk through Peter's wise words to the church using the paradigm to help us receive the benefits.

[11 : 11] Verse 14 again. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passage of your former ignorance. The way in which you used to act was because of the prince of the darkness who was causing you to live a rebellious life.

Now you know that you used to be in that kingdom, and you're not in that kingdom anymore. You see, it makes sin have a little bit more of a bite to it, doesn't it? It's not like a little child who slipped out a cookie when he wasn't supposed to.

This was an act of treason. It's an act of rebellion. He goes, don't go back to that. You can feel the weight of it. Stop and imagine, just for a moment, thinking about wars.

Imagine a Nazi German soldier who sees, his eyes are opened. He finally realizes the tyranny of what his army is doing.

And he runs across the battle lines and says, I want to join the right side. Awesome. We give him a uniform. Give him a place to stay.

[12 : 27] And he wakes up the next morning. New uniform. New identity. New team. New country. New country. And as he's walking to the mess hall in front of him, he sees a Jewish soldier. Runs up and he shoves him onto the ground.

Yelling in his face and spitting on him and says, you are a dog of a race. What happened? What did he do? He reverted back to his former passions.

Can you imagine all the United States soldiers standing around him going, what are you doing? You came over here to not do that and now you're doing it again. This is what Peter's saying. What are you doing?

Don't go back to your former ways, rebelling against the king. Do you not see how horrible that is? See, we have gotten softened to seeing sin for what it is.

And Peter's heightening it for us. It's a rebellion against our king of kings. Our former fleshly passions that we gave into are the very acts of the prince that slaved us.

[13 : 37] Look at verse 15. He's going to contrast the change of leaders and the change of kingdoms. Verse 15 says, But as he, meaning our king, our God, who called you as holy, you also be holy in your conduct.

Now the younger John, who used to hear this word growing up, would shudder at the word holy. It meant a cold and distant God who only chided me for failing to live up to a boring life of no fun and awkward rules.

That's what holiness meant to me. I think some of you have maybe felt this as well. It was comforting the first time I read Psalm 73, if you want to turn there.

I wasn't alone in thinking about holiness in this way. You see, the prince of darkness hates holiness. He hates God. So if he could get his followers to hate holiness too, that's a victory.

It's a victory. This is how the psalmist writes about his experience of enduring holiness. Verse 3. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[14 : 54] For they have no pains until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind. This is me.

I'm looking at the world going, they're looking like they have a good time. I'm looking like I'm not having a good time. They look happy. I look sad. I do what is right and I frown. They do what is wrong and they keep having more fun.

What's wrong with this picture? Holiness was just rules to keep me from having fun. I don't know if that's been your experience, but it's been mine.

But this is not at all what Peter has in mind. When you understand that holiness is the person of God. His attributes on display.

The paradigm shifts. Holiness isn't rules. It's a person. It's a person. God is what? Holy. Not only are my former desires for pleasure pure rebellion against my king, implanted into me by the enemy and continue to fuel by his kingdom, the rebellion, but they also destroy the beauty and the glory of God.

[16 : 10] You see, when I'm told to be holy, what I don't see and what I should see is this, that the holiness of God represents all of him that is good and beautiful and glorious.

To be holy means to be loving and patient, kind, merciful, gracious, forgiving, humble, meek, and gentle. To be holy, everything we experience and adore about our God.

He says, I want you to be like that. Now, I have met people who are holy, and I really like being around them. Because I feel loved and saved and cared for.

There's a spirit of gentleness and meekness. I'm drawn into them. You see, that, when I'm called to that, I'm like, that makes sense to me. I want to be a part of that.

To reflect God's love for me to others, that's not a holiness that sounds like it's a bunch of rules. It sounds like it's an experience of giving that which our world lacks.

[17 : 17] Our world lacks holiness. It does not have a concept for holiness. It's selfish, self-gratifying, and death. And what does Jesus say when he shows up on the scene?

I am love, forgiveness, and life. So be like me. Be holy. Don't fall back into the tyranny of the darkness.

But, John, we've all tried to do that. All of us have tried to be holy this week. And all of us showed up going, one more week of failure.

Check. We all feel it. We are epic failures at showing holiness. This is why we keep reading. Look at verse 17.

And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourself with fear throughout the time of your exile.

[18 : 19] Now listen, I have spent a lot of time on this verse. Because it is, it's written in a context that it's just we don't live in. And a lot of this is our own fault.

It's my own fault. I don't think about God and his holiness and the Old Testament and the connection between these three kingdoms. And I wish I had more time to unpack this. But I'm going to do my best in the few minutes that I have.

Peter uses a phrase we would not catch because it's really kind of a Greek idiom in the language. When Peter says, when you call upon, this was a common way of saying that you are reaching out past the realms.

You are reaching out into the spiritual divinity realm to talk to the gods. That was a common phrase. When you go talk to the gods, when you call upon the deities.

So Peter drops a bomb in this phrase for these people living in Rome and the outskirts of Rome who are very well versed in pagan worship. Nobody addresses their gods with the title of father.

[19 : 29] Never. You don't call upon the gods and say, oh, our fathers. They're very distant and cold and they're often to be feared. In a wrong way. In a wrong way. And yet Peter says, your level of intimacy is unheard of because when you call, you call out with the title and conversation as father.

Well, this changes the entire paragraph before and this one. Your new king that you call father.

He loves you as much. Jesus says this. He loves you as much as he loves his only son. The equality of love he has for Jesus, he has for you.

This is right after he says, be holy and be reminded of the love your father has for you. You call him not a distant deity.

You call him father. And as for your attempts at holiness, child, let me help you with that. This king is not like earthly kings or other gods or other humans.

[20 : 44] He doesn't look upon you and judge you in the ways in which you think, oh, if we could only get this into our hearts. This is why we have to see him first as father and then as judge because of how he judges.

He does not judge like we think he does. Listen to how Peter explains God's disposition towards you in your holiness and judging you. Call on him, verse 17, call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds.

The word impartially here is a Hebrew idiom brought over. Peter's using it and it means to receive the face. In oriental countries or in culture, when you greet one another, you look down as a form of respect.

And to then show someone that you praise them and show worthy of them, you uplift their face and you look upon their face. But the judgment is based upon what they see.

Their wealth. How they look or how they have acted. Peter says, that's not how your God looks at you.

[22 : 02] He does not look upon, I love this, this author wrote this. This is what impartial means. Outward parents, no.

Wealth, culture, social position, family, background, education, beauty, intellect. All things that more or less sway the opinions of man do not count with God when it comes to appraising a person's character or worthiness.

He does not look upon you in comparison to others. He looks upon you as child. You see, often we present our holiness to the Lord either in comparison to someone who is less than us or someone who we think is holy.

And he says, child, don't look at the judge in this way. He does not judge you like this. He looks upon you as a father, looks upon his child.

You are not met with preconditions. This means he does judge our works. But he does so unlike anyone else.

[23 : 14] He judges them in such a way that they are without fear. Which is so hard for us to understand. But yet he uses that word. Fear. Read verse 17.

And if you call on him who is father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, not their condition, what they actually do, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

Wow. The English language sometimes has its limits. We kind of have one understanding of fear. I think this word can be translated a couple of different ways. But we do know it's not the fear of judgment.

Write this down. In 1 John 4.18, it's very clear that the apostle John did not have the indication that we should be afraid of our father. He says this, 1 John 4.18.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment. And whoever fears has not been perfected in love. Either the Bible contradicts itself or maybe we have to resolve that fear is often used in different ways.

[24 : 26] We are not facing judgment. That's been paid for. But the God and creator of the world who removed all this judgment, Peter is saying, you obey him out of awe and reverence, respect, knowing that your actions matter.

This is what's been helpful for me is that my God actually cares what I do. Think about that for a moment. Because he is judging whether this is beneficial or not beneficial. He's not a distant God.

He looks as a father and judges by actions and says, yes, son, that is good. That is good. That is beneficial. That is pleasing. For those of you who have children, you've seen this in your kids.

They're doing something and it's a mess. And they've got stains and they've ruined the carpet. But they want to make sure you saw what they created. Right?

Because they want you to judge it, whether it's good or bad. And you look at it and you think, this is horrible. But I understand the intentions of their heart.

[25 : 42] And I am pleased. That is the attitude. Well, John, how would you argue that's the attitude? Because that's where Peter's leading us.

That's where he's drawing us. I think many of you probably feel this here. This concept of awe and fear. I know that it helps me in my family's relationship, my relationship with my children and my wife.

I have this similar respect. Not equal to the Lord, but similar. I fear hurting them. I love them so much and I respect who they are as a relationship to me and as a person.

That I long to live in such a way that protects them. I'm not afraid of the judgment that comes from them. I'm afraid of disappointing them. Do you understand the difference?

This is what he says. The time of your exile. Understand that this is how we live. We live in such a way where your God actually cares about who you are.

[26 : 55] And you address him as Father. Now, in case you're worried. In case you're worried that God's bringing judgment down upon you. You're worried that you're going to fail him.

Because you are. Look how Peter backends these instructions in verse 14. Before I read it.

Sorry, verse 18. Let's read the whole context again. Because I think it's going to be healthy and helpful. As obedient children, do not conform to the passage of your former ignorance. We've got three kingdoms going on here now.

But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct. But live like the king. And if you call on him who is father who judges impartially. Don't worry about what other people think.

You look to the God. You look to your father. According to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. Let your love for God be what brings your motivation.

[27 : 55] Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers. Not with perishable things such as silver or gold.

But with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. Oh, Peter understands and knows the love of Christ. Because he's using it to motivate our holiness.

The purpose of our life. Church, some distant king who had billions of dollars did not send money so that you could be set free from your slavery of darkness.

A king you'll never meet or know. He says, you weren't ransomed with gold and silver. You were bought with something that can't be replaced.

That is priceless. That a million universes could not pay for. The blood of the son of the king unto death.

[29 : 02] And he says, ransomed. Means you were actually pulled by payment out of the kingdom of darkness. He walks over and pulls you out of your prison.

This is so important because at times we think, well the door of the prison was open and we came out. No, he walked up with the payment and laid his son down. In brutality. And said, I now own them.

They belong to me. And Peter's like, why are you wanting to go back over there? You want to step over the body and blood of Christ. Resurrected by the way, he's not dead. You want to step over the cross and go back over there.

For what reason? Because your flesh wants to feel good? Do you not understand that pleasing your flesh will destroy your king's holiness?

And for those around you. This is why we fight against the desires of our flesh. This is why your time here is short. I love when he says that.

[30 : 06] He says, look, you're going to have to fight this for a little while because you're in exile. Do you know what exile means? You have another place you belong but you're not there. He's like, I'm building it. I go to prepare a place for you.

New world's coming. This isn't it. Don't put your hope here. Man, it's so hard. Every day I'm like, this place is pretty good. That's all I know. This place is pretty great. Until my son's breaks went out this morning and I was like, this place is horrible.

When are you coming back, Jesus? Jesus. It's like, you're reminded that this world has got glimpses of Eden but it's not Eden. It's got a shadow of the Savior but I don't see him yet.

He says, listen, it's a short while. You're going to have to fight this way for a short time. But I do want to point out one thing. Go back to verse 18.

He says this, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers. You should just never take for granted words in the Bible.

[31 : 10] Especially the ones that just kind of pop. Futile and forefathers. Man, this is important. He's pointing out the entirety of the Old Testament. I think in mind, if you want to write it down, I think he has the story of Jeremiah here.

Because the ways in which he uses these words, Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 5. This is what Jeremiah is proclaiming to Israel. Thus says the Lord, what wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me and went after worthlessness and became worthless?

That's what he meant when he says futile. Worthless. Jeremiah was rebuking them. For the worthless worship of the gods.

They had turned back to the gods of Egypt. Literally in this context, he says, I brought you out of Egypt. I withheld the water so you could walk on dry ground. I provided for you.

And what did the gods do? He goes, do not go back to the futile, wasted, worthless submission to the gods.

[32 : 21] That's what Peter means. It makes sin feel different. You're crossing enemy lines from going from the kingdom of light and holiness and love and grace and kindness and purity and freedom.

And you're walking back over here so your flesh can have a little tingling again. It's like understand what you're doing. This is why he says, if you walk by faith, believing in this kingdom and this king, you'll say no to your flesh.

But if you don't walk by faith, then you're going to give in. And you're going to cross the lines and you're going to live a futile, worthless life. And at the end of your life, when the judge judges you, he'll say, worthless.

My child, you belong to me and you're going to live with me forever, but your actions were worthless. Okay? I think it's easy for us to see, when we read the Old Testament at times, the craziness.

Like probably the most famous two cities or connected cities that we think of that are dirty and vile, the Sodom and Gomorrah. We kind of cringe at what took place there, what they were doing.

[33 : 33] A city controlled by the passions of darkness. They were enslaved, willfully indulging in it. You see, our world is no different.

Sodom and Gomorrah has just spread to the globe. Look at how men and women are controlled by their flesh. They identify themselves by what they desire.

Their whole identity. Children changing the structure of God's creation. Why would they do that? It's demonic. It's from a power far deviant than we can imagine.

Peter comes to the church and says, You were freed from that. You don't serve that king. You are no longer under those gods.

Look what your king did for you. Those gods never done anything for you except for take. And your god, your king, died for you. In your place. Do not be afraid of him.

[34 : 40] But love him as he loves you. Look at his love. It does not compare to anything else. And remind yourself, you are not being compared to anyone else in this world.

Don't be ignorant. Don't go back to your ignorance. Don't be blinded. Be wise. Open your eyes. See, when you have that context, man, Peter's letters.

Really comforting and terrifying. Sometimes I'll have a hard time looking at you when I preach. Because many of you have faces of pain.

Not because my preaching is that bad. Because of what you carry. You're in tears. I know what the evil has done to the people you love.

And sometimes it feels hopeless. And you feel helpless. How is this going to get better?

[35 : 52] Peter says, at the end of his letter, he wins. The two kingdoms at war, he wins.

The prince of darkness grim. We tremble not for him. One little word will fail him.

The word, the king, will bring his demise. While we wait, we are rescuing people from his domain into our domain.

So yes, the way we love each other and the way we love our world. How we refrain from selfishness and anger and violence. How we reflect kindness, sacrifice.

All of that God is using to ransom people out of that kingdom. How you love your spouse is exactly what God has designed to advance his kingdom.

[36 : 54] How you love and raise your children up to believe in this king and the other king. And the dangers of this world is advancing the very reasons why you still exist.

This church is designed to be a supernatural, magical place where we come and the spirit comes and he fills us back up. He trains us, he equips us, and he powers us.

Not with fear. Not with dread. He powers us with love. Do not believe that your love that you project in your home is worthless.

Last statement and I'll be done. Paul says, do not let Satan have a foothold in your home, in your life. The moment we allow anger, violence, hatred, lust, greed, bitterness to protrude out of our mouths.

You've opened the gate to the kingdom of darkness. That's how he begins to take over. And we no longer are being effective for the kingdom. May God have mercy on us.

[38 : 05] May we confess our sins. And may we see the goodness of our king because he loves us. May we pursue holiness not out of fear. We want others to experience the same holy love of our God that we have.

Amen. Father, we are so weak and distracted. Help us today. Help us to see that your holiness is beautiful because it flows from your love.

It flows from your justice. It flows from your unchanging nature. There is no greater power, which means our love is secure.

There is no greater God, which means our home is safe. Lord, help us this morning to turn from the passions of our flesh and turn towards your love.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Thanks for listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee, where everyone is in equal need of grace.

[39 : 10] To plan a visit or to learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.