

God's Chosen People

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[0 : 0 0] of the first chapter, 1 Peter, chapter 1 at the beginning. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for sprinkling with his blood, may grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Now, as God will direct us, we are going to, God willing, follow our studies of Peter's life, as we saw it mostly in the Gospels, with a study of this first letter of Peter.

Now, reasons for doing that, one being that there is much in this letter that obviously relates to the teaching that Peter received from the Lord in the different circumstances we saw him in, as he at times really struggled with Jesus and who he was and what he required, and the various ways in which Jesus taught him, even in times when after he denied him, yet the Lord came back to restore him.

And from all of those passages we saw earlier, as we looked at his life, there's much that connects with this letter. And as you go through the letter, as we will do, God willing, we'll see, that Peter obviously learned from all of these experiences in such a way that he's now extending or bringing his experience and learning to bear upon this letter, as he writes to those that are named here at the beginning in these regions.

We could see in a way that the letter here, the first letter of Peter, is the outworking of what Jesus said to him, as we saw in John chapter 21.

[1 : 5 8] You remember the interview there as to whether or not Peter loved him. Do you love me? Do you love me? Three times he asked him, do you love me? And Peter, in response, said, yes, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love me. And three times Jesus said to him, feed my sheep, feed my lambs, feed my sheep, be a pastor to my people, be their shepherd. And that's really in many ways what you see in this first letter of Peter.

That's what Peter is doing. He is being the shepherd of these people that are scattered throughout all these regions. They are the sheep of God's flock, and they require the direction that this apostle, drawing from all his own experience, but also as led by God to write these things to them, as he brings that before them for their benefit.

Now these sheep, as we call them, these people of God, as they're scattered throughout these regions, one of the things that is obvious very soon, as you read 1 Peter, is that he's writing this letter to people who are really suffering.

People who are being abused, misrepresented, spoken against, persecuted, different ways in which they are really suffering for what they are as God's people in the world.

[3 : 1 8] And one of the great features of this letter is that we can take all our sufferings, indeed in many ways, most of them at least, with us to this letter and find that Peter has something to say to us.

It's a letter written specifically to people in their suffering as Christians. That's why it has been so precious to suffering Christians, persecuted Christians, down through the generations of the church. And there's so much in that itself for ourselves. It's a letter for us today. It's a letter for the times in which we live in, when the Christian church, at least the Christian church, the church, the faithful people of God, are indeed facing so much by way of trial and temptation and suffering in seeking to live obediently to Christ as their King.

Now notice, first of all, how you find him addressing them as he speaks about himself. One of the features, again, of the epistle is that he doesn't say much at all about himself.

Although he's drawing so much from his own personal experience and all you can see in passages, yet I know where Peter actually learned that. I can think of how Peter actually was dealt with by the Lord and how this particular matter that he's saying to these people has arisen from that.

[4 : 45] But he doesn't present himself. His concern is these people, how they relate to God, how the way in which they live as Christians in the world must be set out by him for them.

He has a lot to say about these people themselves, but very little about himself. And that's always the case, isn't it, with good pastoring, whether it's ministers, elders, leaders in the church.

We're not here to present ourselves, to speak about ourselves. The burden of our hearts is the flock of God, the people of God, the sheep of God, that direction and teaching of them that God gives us to address in the preaching of the gospel.

And he calls himself Peter. You see, there's the first letter, the first word in the letter, Peter. And that takes your mind back, doesn't it, to Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18.

You remember there that, where you find the Lord saying to him, you are Peter. You shall be called Peter. You'll be called Peter the Rock.

[5 : 59] A word which means rock. We looked at that in our studies of Peter. And what he's really saying to these people is, I'm writing to you in the capacity of someone who knows the Lord, someone who was named by the Lord.

I'm coming to you as one of the Lord's servants. And I'm presenting myself to you in the name that Jesus gave me. It's not myself.

It's about him. The name that Christ gave him. Peter, Petros, the rock. Now he had failed, as we saw many times, a number of times, failed to live up to that name.

Just like you and I fail very often to live up to the name that Jesus gives us as his people, Christians, the people of God in the world. And yet here he is, used by God, just as he uses weak and sinful people like you and I to be of benefit amazingly to other people.

And he calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. And of course that immediately introduces him as someone who has authority to speak.

[7 : 13] He's not speaking in his own name. He's not speaking out of his own ideas or his own authority. He's an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And we talk about apostolic teaching and we talk about apostolic foundations. And by that we mean that the apostles by which we came to have the New Testament by and large were themselves simply like or very like the prophets of the Old Testament, taken by God and used by God and given authority by God to be his mouthpiece.

And to actually write those things that you now have in these letters of the New Testament. It has apostolic authority. It has the authority of God himself through Peter to these people that he was writing to and of course now to us because it's become part of God's word in scripture.

So he's instructing them as an apostle and that's important in relation to their circumstances because they needed to know that this letter had come from someone who had not just authority but Christ's authority to say these things to them.

Someone whose word you could depend upon. Someone who was speaking for God and who could be relied upon to tell you the truth. Peter, that's the writer, Christ's apostle.

[8 : 42] But then looks secondly and we'll give more time to this at the recipients. There's the writer, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ but who are the recipients? Well, I'm not going to deal with everything in these two or three verses this evening but just simply focus on them being God's chosen people.

In fact, in the original text of 1 Peter, the word elect comes right at the beginning of or near the beginning of the first opening line, the sentence. Peter, to the elect of God, to the chosen people of God scattered throughout these regions, they are strangers in the world, exiles.

And this is an interesting and significant description. You need to take the whole thing with us. To those who are elect exiles according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ for sprinkling with his blood.

Now, Peter would, at one time, never have associated himself with such people as these. We understand from some of the things he says in the letter that he's describing people who are largely from a Gentile background, not from a Jewish background.

And there was a day when Peter, even since he came to know the Lord, was not prepared to associate with Gentiles. Gentiles. You remember, down through history, there's this great cleavage

between the Gentile world, that world outside of the Jewish people, because they associated rightly that God had revealed himself to them down through the years of the Old Testament.

[10:29] And it was so, so difficult for the Jewish people, even for the likes of Peter, to accept that the Gentiles were going to be part of the church, that they were going to be saved, that they were going to be incorporated into the people of God.

And you remember that great incident in Acts chapter 10, where Peter had his vision adjusted, where he had his view and his thinking adjusted radically as to how to think of Gentiles when he was sent to the house of Cornelius.

And in verse 28, you find him coming into that context and saying to those who were gathered there in Cornelius' house, God has shown me, there was a day, he said, when we would not have associated with the likes of you, but God has shown me not to regard anything as unclean, but God declares clean.

Because, you see, as he wrote to this group of people, if you go to chapter 4, just cast your mind forward and follow me in verses 3 and 4.

He's saying there, again, he's addressing the difficulties these Christians are facing, the temptations they're facing. So he's saying, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

[11:53] For he says, the time has passed, is sufficient for doing that which Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality and passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you. You see, Peter would never have associated with people who did those sort of things until God adjusted his thinking and gave him to see that, yes, these Gentiles, while down through history they were kept outside of the pale of revelation, but now they're being brought in, in Christ, into the saved people of God.

They are God's chosen people, just like those of the Jews are God's chosen people. That's why you can say in chapter 2 and verse 10, once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.

Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. and that reminds us that whatever we think of people in their background or their skin color or their race or their past practices, if God has dealt with them mercifully and brought them to know himself and brought them to be part of his church, then that's what we have to accept and not just accept grudgingly or reluctantly, but accept it for what it is, the people of God, the people who belong to Jesus Christ.

And just before we go on, there is another point in regard to this. He's beginning here by reminding, remember we've said the context for the letter is a suffering people, a people who are really facing so many trials and difficulties as Christians, and what he's doing here is reminding them of who they are.

[13:53] Before he ever comes to say to them, this is what you must do in the face of that opposition, this is what you must be active in, this is what your life must be practically. Before he says any of that, he says, remember who you are.

This is who you are. You are the elect of God. You are the chosen people of God. And that carries into the thrust of this letter for ourselves tonight.

Here you are tonight, you're facing difficulties as a Christian too. We all have certain difficulties as Christians, or as the people of God's church in the world. Even if you've not professed your life to be one of faith in Christ yet, and I hope if not, that you'll do that soon.

But nevertheless, you know what it's like for people to even look askance at you, if you belong to the church, if you go to church regularly. Well, what do you do?

You remind yourself of what God says about his people. That you are the people of God. God, it's one of the great incentives that God has given us throughout the New Testament and the Old Testament indeed, that when we're facing these difficulties, when we have to ask ourselves, well, how can I cope with this pressure?

[15:09] The Bible tells us, God says to us, remember who you are. And when we know that we haven't been what we should have been, and when our heart grows cold, and when we've become somewhat worldly, and when we've departed from the path of obedience, and perhaps not kept up our devotions, or our relationship with Christ as we should, which happens to all of us from time to time, this is how God really comes at times to pull us up short, and to say, well, who are you?

Remember who you are. What's leaving you like this? Because you belong to me, and because you belong to me, I require of you that you live a certain way of life consistently.

So he reminds them that that's who they are, to those who are the elect of God. But now then, you see, we need to keep leaving aside this reference to where they're scattered to, and the fact that their exiles will come back, God willing, next time, and look at that, because that itself is important. They are God's chosen people, but they're chosen people in this world right now. That's why Peter is writing this to them. Well, we'll see something of the relevance of that, but let's just tonight focus on them being the chosen people of God, because the word elect, it's very important that we realize the way in which the language runs, and how certain things there are kept tightly together in the apostle's thought.

So, literally what he's saying is, to those who are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through the sanctification of the Spirit, and unto obedience to Christ, and sprinkling with his blood. [16:59] That's the sequence. The word elect runs into these following phrases. They are elect according to something. That's the source of their being chosen, or the elect people of God.

And that election of God follows through and progresses into their sanctification. They're not elect in a way that will remain detached from their sanctification.

They are elect through sanctification of the Spirit. And thirdly, the terminus of God's election in the context is obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood.

And that's what we want to finish, to go on to. To look at and finish there this evening as we look at these three aspects of how election is dealt with by Peter in relation to its source and its progress and its terminus.

They are elect firstly according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. This is great theology, but it's very practical in its application.

[18:09] It's theology for a suffering people. It's theology for the practical issues of the Christian life, as indeed all theology ultimately is.

Now, when he says that they are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, it means much more than that God knew all about them from all eternity before they ever lived.

It's not just that he knew in advance or had this information about them in advance. Of course, he did that. He's all-knowing. But the foreknowledge here is actually to do with the love of God.

You know that in the Bible, the word know is often associated with an intimacy of relationship such as in marriage. Adam knew his wife Eve and she bore a son.

It has that intimacy of loving relationship built into the meaning of the word know. And that's really something that you find here even though it's now foreknowledge.

[19:12] It really means God's love in action but it's prior to their own existence in this world. You have been elect according to the foreknowledge.

In other words, he's saying, remember that God has actually chosen you before you were born.

That is, love settled upon you before you were born. and that's how you've come to be God's chosen people because his choice of you did not begin subsequent to your birth in this world.

You find something very similar in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. You know the passage I share very well in chapter 1 where Paul is dealing with the wonderful, such a long sentence there at the beginning of the first chapter there of Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us. You see, that translation is good. I think it's saying that here is foreknowledge, here is predestination, God's love settling upon his people from all eternity.

[20:37] That's his love coming to rest upon them. To see them as his people. And what a wonderful emphasis that is. Why is it wonderful?

Well, not just because it's great theology, it's not there just to satisfy our minds. Remember the circumstances of these people. What do they need to know?

They need to know that they have a God who cares for them. They need to know that their God is actually a father. A father like no other father.

A father whose fatherliness and fatherly love has settled upon them before they ever came to be.

And that's not going to leave them or going to be diverted from them now that they're in these circumstances.

This is conveying to them assurance and comfort that as God's people they have their roots in God's eternal love. Their lives are anchored in that love of God.

[21 : 45] And here tonight as a Christian you have so many struggles as I have in life. you have low points in your experience from time to time.

You have struggles and difficulties. What do you need to know? What do you need to know especially? You need to know the love of a father.

A perfect father. A father who is himself the model of what a father should be. And that that fatherly love of God as it has enveloped his people in eternity it continues into their life in this world to be so precious so comforting so assuring to them that that's who they have as their God.

One of my favorite gospel singers at the moment is a lady called Ellie Holcomb and she writes many of her songs from her own difficulties and they're full of wonderful teaching.

They're not just for entertainment she's obviously drawing from many of her own low points as well bereavement challenges temptations and in one of the songs she has a song called You Are Loved and that's so important isn't it to know when you're suffering when you're feeling low when maybe you feel that nobody else understands the things you're going through what you really need to know above everything else is that you are loved and especially loved by God she says some days you're tired of trying to measure up you see a girl who's not enough when you look in the mirror some nights all you want to do is hide because every time you look inside you're face to face with failure but you are loved oh not because of what you've done no even when your heart has run the other way nothing's going to change his love and you are wanted not because you are perfect

[24 : 04] I know that you don't think you're worth that kind of grace but look into his face and you'll know that you are loved you've searched for something that will stir your soul that will make you feel less alone but nothing ever saves you well he knew before you ever took a breath there'd be days when you'd forget how beautiful he made you but you are loved oh not because of what you've done nothing's going to change his love elect according to the foreknowledge the prior eternal love of God that's how they are the chosen people of God but then through sanctification of the spirit the word through I think is better than the translation of the word in the sanctification of the spirit because it really there shows us that the elect of

God the election of God which takes place in eternity the love of God settling upon his people it's not confined to that act of God in eternity it works through into the life of God's people in this world world that's the great thing about this love it comes to be progressed if you like this electing love and this election itself has progressed through these people being sanctified by the spirit of God in other words their election essentially becomes visible if you like through the lives that they're now living as sanctified lives that means lives that the spirit of God has enabled them to live as cleansed as concerned to live for God to deal with sin lives in every way that the word sanctified doesn't just mean set apart for God but concerned to be holy in other words the chosen people of God are chosen to be holy again follow me through to chapter 2 and verses 9 to 12 where he says but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light once you were not a people but are now

God's people beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles picking up that emphasis from the first verse to abstain from the passions of the flesh which war against your soul keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable and of course you also find that he's saying there that the people of God are to be holy as the one who has called them as holy that's further in the first chapter there where he calls there in verse 15 or 14 onwards as obedient children don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance but as he who called you is holy you also be holy in all your conduct saying it is written you shall be holy for I am holy God's chosen people according to the foreknowledge of God the

Father through sanctification of the Spirit of God and if somebody says well I am a Christian I believe I am a Christian I believe the Bible I go to church I take part in worship services but I have no time for this holiness thing I don't want any of that ultra religious thing where you give emphasis to sin and to sanctification and to praying to God in such a way that wants you to be holy or to be Christ like no that's not for me that's not really what my Christian life is at all well it's not a Christian life then here are God's chosen people according to the foreknowledge of God the Father God has loved them from all eternity where does that love show itself through in their lives in their being sanctified by the

Spirit of God sin is a problem to them a problem in the sense that it's something they fight against something they need to overcome in their lives practically something they need to pray to God

about and something they need to work at in order to overcome it if we don't love holiness we've got a problem we can't say we're Christians and really disregard holiness as if it was only of minor importance they are elect through sanctification of the Spirit and thirdly for or unto I think it's best again unto obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood in other words the goal or the terminus of their being elect of God is obedience to Christ and sprinkling with his blood it's pretty much the same thing or different emphases but you take those two things together obedience to Christ and sprinkling with his blood if you go back to again if you follow me through to

[29 : 50] Exodus 24 I'm not going to spend too much time on it but Exodus chapter 24 and verses 6 to 8 here's Moses remember on Mount Sinai is where the people are and God has come to reveal himself to come down on the mountain to give the Ten Commandments and in chapter 24 give an account of the way that the covenant was ratified or sealed and after they had offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings in verse 5 verse 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood he threw against the altar in other words that's blood that's directed God words sacrificial blood directed God words as sacrifice as sacrifice is in fact something that God has indeed required and specified but it has its impact if you like towards

God to deal with sin and then half he actually threw against the altar then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people and they said all that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient and Moses took the people and said behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words now that was literally done but it was symbolic action it was action that taught them that sacrifice worked towards God in order to deal with their sin but also the benefits to them were that they partook then of life as God had arranged it through sacrifice and of course all of that comes in Jesus Christ to be fulfilled so wonderfully that's why you have the emphasis later on in chapter 2 and verse 24 where he says that he bore our sins in his body on a tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness and you find the emphasis near the end of chapter 1 as well where you find you were redeemed not with precious perishable things but with the precious blood of

Christ like a lamb without blemish or spot now what is all that saying to us well it's saying to us that the death of Jesus and all of that has accomplished or what Christ has obtained by his death in other words that's eternal life for us that comes to be applied to us the death of Jesus worked firstly towards God for his acceptance instead of us instead of the penalty of sin being applied to us it was applied to Jesus and the benefits of that the eternal life that that bought for us is applied to us that is what it means that the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ and obedience to him that is the application of redemption of salvation to us spiritually catechism wonderful summary of doctrine the shorter catechism questions 29 and 30 asks as follows how are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by

Christ we are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to us by the Holy Spirit how does the spirit the next question is how does the spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ the spirit applies the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling and the next question what is effectual calling you see the wonderful sequence there that helps you really so wonderfully to understand some of the symbolic matters that are mentioned in the Bible including the sprinkling of blood and what it means it's the application of all the benefits of Christ's death to God's chosen people and that's really the terminus for election it's elect according to the foreknowledge of

God the Father it's election through the sanctification of the spirit and it's unto it's with a view to it has as its objective obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ in other words we're finishing the study with that really important emphasis submission to Jesus Christ obedience to Christ it's not about how much we know or understand about election that doesn't mean we don't try and understand as much as we can from the scriptures but it's not about how much do I understand of election is that what makes me a Christian how much can my head cope with that sort of theology because you can know as much as there is to know about election and still be lost still not be saved or turn it around and say in order to be saved you don't need to understand everything or even very much about election but listen to this you cannot be saved without submission to

[36 : 01] Christ that's the crux of the issue that's where election leads and your concern and my concern tonight has to be that is my life in submission to Jesus have I bent my knee to his authority to rule my life have I given my life to God to Jesus as the evangelist D.L.

