

HOLY LIVING IN A PAGAN
CULTURE

BY

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Introduction

For many years the little epistles ascribed to Simon Peter were given short shrift by biblical scholars. Because of this, 1 Peter has been referred to as an “exegetical step-child”—but since the mid-1970s it has been the subject of intensive studies by biblical scholars. 2 Peter, along with Jude with which it is closely related, had suffered the same fate—and revival of interest. I have personally been studying and preaching from the General Epistles for many years. In fact, my first writing assignment was a study guide for these seven letters including 1st and 2nd Peter.¹ In each of my pastorates, I preached a paragraph-by-paragraph series on each of them. Over the years, I have continued to delve more deeply into these letters. However, what is presented here is not a commentary; rather the primary focus of this study is their emphasis on holiness as a lifestyle to be lived out in the context of a pagan culture. This emphasis is a major point of both.² The thesis that this is a major problem addressed by 2 Peter rather than merely false doctrine was the occasion for revival of interest in this letter, although the circumstances of the recipients are different from those of the first letter.

Although not essential to the message of these two letters, a few words could profitably be said about the question of authorship. The traditional view that these letters originated with Simon Peter, the apostle, has been widely called into question. One of the major reasons is that the Greek of First Peter is grammatically superior while the latter is inferior. This has been traditionally explained as due to the fact that actually the first letter was written by Silas rather than Peter himself (cf. 1 Peter 5:12), whereas the second came from Peter’s own hand. William Barclay has written an extensive defense of the Petrine authorship of the letters using this argument. While the majority of contemporary biblical scholars remain skeptical of the Petrine authorship, and conservative students continue to insist on their authenticity, the issue will never be settled to everyone’s satisfaction. But for our focus, Jo Bailey Wells’ comment is pertinent: “Although historical critical questions concerning 1 Peter abound, there is

¹*Search the Scriptures* (K.C.:Nazarene Publishing House, 1960).

²Cf. J. Daryl Charles, “The Language and Logic of Virtue in 2 Peter 2:5-7.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998) 55-73.

considerable consensus among scholars regarding the theology of the epistle.”³ In the absence of any consensus about authorship, for convenience we shall develop these studies on the assumption of the canonically ascribed authorship.

This revival of interest in these two short epistles has resulted in a mass of scholarly research that provides the student with much greater insight into their message than has been previously available. My purpose in the following studies is to attempt to translate many of these findings into a form available to the average reader. This does, however, mean that integrity requires that credit be given for insights derived from scholars by way of footnotes. As in all biblical studies, not all scholars share the same conclusions; therefore I will be making judgments of my own as to which interpretations I believe to be the soundest.

In order to respect the integrity of scripture, its application to the contemporary situation must begin with an attempt to determine the meaning of the text in its original context. This suggests that we must begin with a brief description of our method of biblical interpretation. Simply put, we need to make two journeys. The first journey is back to the text and the other a return journey to the 21st century. What is the point of each? The first journey is to attempt to understand the meaning of the text in its ancient setting. This task is two-fold in nature. In addition to unearthing the historical and grammatical meaning in the first century, as a preparation for the return journey we must go further and seek to identify the theology that informs the text. This task is critical since it is the theology of the passage that is the vehicle by which we make the return journey. Often an attempt to make a one to one literal application of a biblical word to the contemporary setting results in distorting it.⁴ One major aspect of 1 Peter provides a case in point. It addresses Christians living in a totalitarian empire who had no such political rights as many today take for granted. “Christians today express their concern in political channels today in a way the first century Christians never could.”⁵ There *are* Christians, however, who today do live in such a situation. In either case, it is the informing theology that is the aspect of the scripture that has

³Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 210.

⁴One of the most glaring examples of this distortion is the widespread use of Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 to exclude women from public ministry.

⁵Floyd V. Filson, “Partakers With Christ,” *Interpretation* 9 (1955), 408.

universal, trans historical application and thus can serve as the means of relating the ancient text to the 21st century.

When working with an Old Testament passage an additional step must be taken in a Christian reading of the Hebrew bible. This step involves turning the B.C. word into an A.D. word.⁶ 1 Peter is perhaps the most thoroughgoing example of this exegetical procedure in the New Testament. Peter's theology is thoroughly informed by the Old Testament theology of the people of God and it is applied to his first century A.D. audience. This small epistle is chock full of references, allusions and quotations from the Hebrew Bible. The author cites at least 11 different Old Testament texts, usually from the Greek translation of the Hebrew (the Septuagint). In fact, few New Testament books are more relevant for a study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. As Jo Bailey Wells says, “The Hebrew Scriptures are re-read from a new perspective and scoured for their themes of promise, election, and covenant which are found to come together and make sense in the person of Jesus Christ. Separate texts are combined to this end.” (Isa. 28:16 and Ps. 118:22 in 2:4; Isa. 53:4 or 12 or 5 and Dt. 21:23 in 2:24a; Isa. 43:20-21 & Ex. 19:6 in 2:9).⁷ J. N. D. Kelly's comment is pertinent to this procedure: “The tone of the epistle being . . . mainly practical, we should not look to it for theology in the strict sense. It is, of course, packed with theology, but theology which is for the most part taken for granted rather than consciously expounded.”⁸ Or as Lewis E. Donelson says, “As with most early Christian letters, the theology is embedded in the rhetoric and exhortation of the letter.”⁹

⁶For a fuller description of this method, see H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), Appendix 2; H. Ray Dunning and Neil B. Wiseman, eds., *Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1990), Introduction.

⁷Wells, *God's Holy People*, 210. “The extensive use that Peter makes of the Old Testament reveals his own Jewish training but we need not assume the same background for his hearers. Paul's letters to predominantly Gentile churches are also steeped in the Old Testament.” Edmund Clowney, *The Message of Peter* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988)18.

⁸J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 25.

⁹*I & II Peter and Jude* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 19.

FIRST PETER

“[First Peter] has a living message for every age in which men seek to live in and for Christ in the midst of a non-Christian world.”

--F.W. Beare

Jo Bailey Wells described First Peter as being quite self-conscious in offering a biblical theology of holiness, and declares it the key New Testament text for understanding the biblical meaning of what it means to be “God’s holy people.”¹⁰ The fact that the recipients of this letter were surrounded by a culture thoroughly pagan makes it especially appropriate for holiness people today when our context, even in European and North American settings, is becoming more and more paganized.¹¹ In earlier years in America, the Christian ethic exercised a generally acknowledged authority in public life. With increasing religious diversification partly resulting from immigration as well as the increasing influence of the Islamic faith, this influence has dramatically diminished except in isolated pockets of the country. In other parts of the world, particularly those dominated by Moslem influence or atheistic philosophy, Christians are suffering persecution for their faith as never before. Edmund Clowney’s words are definitely appropriate: “Today, as in Peter’s time, there are storms of persecution rising against the church. Never was it more important to understand how the church is to be related to the world.”¹²

The Situation of the Addressees

The letter was evidently intended to be a circular letter to be sent to the several churches identified in the opening greeting. In these outlying areas, Roman religion was particularly emphasized and enforced. The Roman religious cult was the fastest growing religion in the Empire. It was virtually a civil religion. As a consequence, any alternate religion was considered unpatriotic and those who worshipped foreign deities put the civic loyalty of such persons under suspicion. Accordingly, restrictions

¹⁰Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 208.

¹¹This evaluation has been generally recognized to the extent that American has been designated as a mission field. Cf. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998).

¹²Clowney, *The Message of Peter*, 31.

were sometimes placed on their legal and social rights, and they bore the brunt of covert as well as overt social discrimination. Furthermore, local citizens tended to react to such persons with a combination of fear and distrust. Thus even if the Christian believers were native born, they were looked upon as “strangers in a strange land.”

To alleviate their situation, such persons often yielded to pressures urging social cooperation, cultural accommodation, and religious conformity. The price of such conformity, of course, was the sacrifice of all traces of religious distinctiveness so as better to blend into the social woodwork. Such was the predicament of the Christian community in Asia Minor addressed in 1 Peter. What seemed to be the central issue was their “lifestyle.” Peter uses a term that means “lifestyle” (translated in the KJV as “conversation”), a term he uses as much as the rest of the New Testament together. The holiness to which God’s people are called implies that one’s entire existence is informed by a worldview that is contrary to that which informs pagan cultures. The recipients of this letter were clearly converted Gentile pagans (cf. 4:1-6). The conflict between their present Christian values and their former manner of life is evidenced by references to what they once were and how they then lived. Although primarily speaking about “lifestyle” the implication is that there is a major gap between the values of the Christian community and its surrounding world (1:18; 2:12, 15; 3:15, 16; 4:3-4, 25-26).

The consequence of this disparity has resulted in the Christians (4:16, literally, “Christ-lackeys”) beginning to suffer from the harassment, slander, and reproach of a hostile society comprising Jews and pagans alike (1:6; 2:12, 19-20; 3:9, 13-17; 4:4, 12-16; 5:1, 8-10). This suffering had apparently bred doubt and disillusionment concerning the actuality of salvation. In view of such suffering was it not wiser and more expedient to renounce any claims to a distinctive identity along with exclusive commitments to God and the fellowship, and instead conform to local standards of civic and religious allegiance?

In his indictment of the modern day holiness movement, Keith Drury attributed one reason for its “death” to the fact that they “wanted to be respectable.” He said,

Holiness people got tired of being different and looked on as “holy rollers.” Somewhere along the line we decided we didn’t want to be weird. We no longer wanted to be thought of as a “sect” or a fringe group. Instead, we wanted to be accepted as normal, regular Christians. We shuddered at the thought of being a “peculiar people.” We

determined to fit in. But in our quest for respectability, we lost something. We lost our willingness to be “different.” Not just different from the world—but different from average Christianity. We left the fringe. We became respectable. And somewhere along the line, we lost the movement. It is hard to be a holiness movement when we don’t want to be different than the average Christian.¹³

In response to what appears to be a waning of commitment to the Christian lifestyle, 1 Peter attempts to head off the defection and disintegration of the Christian community in Asia Minor by reaffirming the great blessings believers have already experienced through their conversion. Indeed, they are strangers in society and strangers they are to remain, but by God’s great mercy they have found a home in the family of God (2:5; 4:17), the brotherhood of faith (2:17; 5:9). Therefore they are to resist the urge to conform to “Gentile” ways of living (1:14, 17; 2:11; 4:2-3; 5:8-9) and remain faithful to their calling as God’s elect and holy people (2:4-10). In large part the way he does this is to emphasize their identity by drawing a parallel with the people of God under the Old Covenant.

Peter’s Interpretive Principles

First, and foremost, what Peter does is present a theology of the Old Testament, transformed in the light of the Christ-event (esp. the Resurrection; cf. 1:3; 3:21). According to David Hill, “The perspective of the resurrection dominates the entire letter.”¹⁴ This is true even when the specific language is not used. The radical, worldview-transforming implication of Jesus’ resurrection is suggested by a parable of New Testament scholar N. T. Wright:

I once imagined, to make this point, a fantasy Oxbridge scenario: a rich old member gives to a College a wonderful, glorious painting which simply won’t fit any of the spaces available in the College, and which is so magnificent that eventually the College decides to pull itself down and rebuild itself around this great and unexpected gift, discovering as it does so that all the best things about the

¹³Keith Drury, “The Holiness Movement is Dead,” Presidential Address, Christian Holiness Partnership, 1995.

¹⁴“To Offer Spiritual Sacrifices . . .” (1 Peter 2:5): Liturgical Formulations and Paraenesis in 1 Peter,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 16 (1982), 50.

College the way it was are thereby enhanced within the new structure, and all the problems of which people had been aware are thereby dealt with.¹⁵

For our purposes, the implication of this emphasis is that holy living for the New Testament believer is intimately related to Jesus Christ, i.e. it is Christologically focused. We will see this spelled out in various ways in our subsequent analysis.

A second interpretive assumption is the implication of the first, namely, that the church is the New Israel. On this point, Peter is simply reproducing one of the central truths of the entire New Testament. As Robert Mounce says, “that the church is now the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) is one of the great foundation truths of New Testament theology.”¹⁶ Early in his ministry Jesus selected 12 followers to be with him. To anyone in the first century this action would immediately indicate that he was establishing a reconstituted Israel. It is true that for hundreds of years the 10 tribes that originally made up the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been “lost.” But the eschatological hope of the Old Testament was that in the future all Israel would be reunited (see Ezekiel’s parable of the two sticks, 37:15-22). Jesus was not one of the 12 but their identity was the result of their relation to him. He was gathering a reconstituted Israel around himself, which further implies the Christological focus of New Testament theology.

This presupposition has been one of the most difficult biblical truths for modern evangelicals at the grass roots to accept. Under the influence of a 19th century movement known as Dispensationalism, they have held tenaciously to a literalism of the Old Testament that fails to see the theological transformation of the Old Testament hope that resulted from the coming of Jesus Christ. Hence, many have tenaciously, and at times viciously, rejected what they refer to as “replacement theology.” This situation is so wide-spread and so distorts the New Testament that it deserves a word of explanation. If I understand the term “replacement” correctly it refers to a position technically known as “supercessionism,” a view that says Christian Gentiles as Gentiles have completely and

¹⁵“Can a Scientist believe in the Resurrection,” a lecture delivered May 15, 2007 at Babbage Lecture Theatre, Cambridge to the Farraday Institute of Science and Religion.

¹⁶*A Living Hope* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1960), 8.

without remainder replaced or superseded Israel as the chosen people. By contrast, the following is what virtually all scholars (as well as the New Testament) mean when they speak of the church as the "new Israel."

What Peter assumes, Paul spells out in Romans 9-11. In this passage Paul is wrestling with the problem of Jewish unbelief. This problem arose from the fact that most of them depended on the marks of ethnic identity as the criterion for being a member of the people of God, i.e. circumcision, Sabbath observance and the purity laws related to diet¹⁷ and have not accepted the universal message of salvation through Jesus that transcends ethnic characteristics. In other words, they were not rejected; they rejected the gospel of Jesus as Messiah with its transformed implications. This does not mean, says Paul that the Jewish people have been excluded as a whole. As he says in 11:1, "I ask, then: has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, . . ."¹⁸

He goes on to argue that "there is a remnant chosen by grace, But if it is by grace, then it cannot be on the basis of works" by which he means those characteristics that identify Israel after the flesh. John the Baptist had already addressed that issue. To be a fleshly descendent of Abraham, he said, counts for nothing in the light of the dawning Kingdom of God. Since Abraham is the father of the Israelites and Abraham was justified by faith, i.e. by trust in the promise of God (Gen. 15), the true children of Abraham are those who have faith in God's fulfillment of his promise to Abraham in Jesus Christ. Paul makes this explicit in Galatians 3:6-9: "Thus 'Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' So you see that it is men of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith." He concludes his argument in Galatians 6:15-- "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision but a

¹⁷Modern scholars have demonstrated conclusively that the Jews of Jesus' day were not attempting to find God's acceptance by keeping the law. "Works of the law" rather referred to those ethnic characteristics that they believed marked out the true people of God, thus effectively eliminating Gentiles unless they became Jews by circumcision. This was the source of the early debates in the Book of Acts.

¹⁸Unless indicated otherwise, all scripture quotation are from the Revised Standard Version.

new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God."

In a word, Paul has redefined the parameters of Israel to include both Jew and Gentile who have faith in Christ. It is on this basis that he can say in Romans 9:6b-7, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned descendants."

It is because of this redefinition that Paul can say in Romans 11:26-- "All Israel will be saved," This is simply a tautology, "All saved people will be saved." This means that not all ethnic Jews are included in the New Israel that is marked out by faith in the covenant faithfulness of God fulfilled in Jesus, but they can be if they acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Simply put, the old Israel is restricted to those who are physical descendants of Abraham (including perhaps some proselytes who submit to circumcision). The "new Israel" includes both Jew and Gentile, both circumcised and uncircumcised, in the family of God. The entire book of Ephesians argues this point based on a transformation of Temple theology. Perhaps it would be more precise to say that unlike the old Israel, Gentiles are included in the New Israel on an equal footing, and this inclusive body is termed the church. To deny this and hold to an eternal distinction between Jew and Gentile as at least early Dispensationalism did is to reject the New Testament and deny the significance of Jesus Christ. As John Wick Bowman said in an analysis of the Scofield Reference Bible that popularized this idea, "if this is not heresy, nothing is a heresy." There is no Wesleyan theologian or biblical scholar who does not agree with scripture on this unless their perception has been distorted by a Calvinistically influenced theology based on a doctrine of unconditional eternal security that emerged in the late 19th century and has unfortunately taken conservative evangelicalism by storm.

Significantly, the letter of First Peter was written to Gentile converts to Christianity (Cf. 4: 3-4; 1:18). Though there may have been Christian Jews in the churches addressed, the descriptions of the recipients' past condition makes it highly unlikely that the audience was largely Jewish and not Gentile as some have argued. Yet despite their non-Jewish heritage, the apostle draws on the Old Testament at almost every turn in order to interpret the working of God in the present time and to give moral direction to his readers. Part of his purpose was to incorporate these

Gentile converts into the long story of God and Israel that was launched with the call of Abraham.

It needs to be noted at the outset that the holiness to which the people of God are called does not refer to a special group of people within the church, but to the entire community of faith. This truth is also present in the formation of the Sinai covenant, which is a paradigm for much of Peter's message. This requirement has been described as being "democratic" in nature, since in order to approach the divine holiness, cleanness is required not only of priests but of laity as well. Like the rest of scripture, the perspective is corporate in nature, not individualistic.

A sub-implication of Peter's interpretive principle is suggested by Gene Green: "[Peter's] selection of [OT] texts was based upon the correlation between the situation of the people of God in the Old Testament and that of his readers."¹⁹ Peter's audience was facing what might be termed social ostracism because of their Christian lifestyle. These pressures were especially acute where close social relations existed, viz. slaves/masters, [pagan] husbands/[Christian] wives (cf. 2:18—3:6). As we have noted the result was they may have been weakening in their faith under the pressure and being tempted to conform to a more socially acceptable lifestyle (4:2, 3; 1:14). Peter's theology and ethics drawn from the parallel situation of God's people in the Old Testament was designed to strengthen their resolve. A signal example is in 3:10-12, which cites Psalm 33:13-17 that is addressed to a similar situation (see v. 4, 7) but makes some significant alterations in the Septuagint translation from which it is taken. As Green says, "All these alterations betray Peter's deliberate attempt to interpret the OT ethical instructions in the light of his readers' present situation."²⁰

T.W. Manson, in reflecting the interpretive method described above, commented, "Once the meaning of the OT text was found, it becomes the clear duty to express it; and accurate reproduction of the traditional wording of the Divine oracles took second place to publication of what was held to be their essential meaning and immediate application."²¹

¹⁹"The Use of the Old Testament for Christian Ethics in 1 Peter," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41.2 (1990).

²⁰Ibid. Peter obviously does not hold to a "dictation" theory of inspiration vis-à-vis the Old Testament.

²¹Quoted in Ibid.

A further implicit assumption that apparently informs Peter's theology should be noted. Many scholars believe that behind all these passages, more or less overtly, lays the sacrament of baptism in which the believer is made, in a realistic sense, a new person. F. W. Beare, in one of the early classic commentaries on the letter said, "This is the fundamental fact upon which all the teaching of the Discourse is based. With their baptism, the old life of paganism is buried forever, and a new life has begun, a life created within them by God, a life lived in spiritual union with the risen Christ."²² Christian baptism ritually symbolizes the miracle of God's saving grace.

1. It pictures the washing away of one's sins, the bath of regeneration (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21).

2. It dramatizes our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:9-13). As the New Testament believer went down into the waters of baptism, he "died" to his old life; as he came forth from the water he arose to "walk in newness of life." This is still the dramatic implication of baptism in non-Christian lands. Baptism cuts the new man off from his old life and marks him henceforth as Christ's person. When it is so understood, baptism is a powerful deterrent to backsliding since baptism puts our death to sin into the arena of public fact. As Jesus' burial was proof of his death to sin, Christian baptism is intended to demonstrate our death to sin. As such, it incorporates us into the full benefits of Christ's atonement and becomes our pledge to holiness.

3. It portrays our "putting on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 13:14; Colossians 3:9-11). In the Early Church, the person about to be baptized laid aside his old garments (which symbolized his old manner of life) as he stepped into the water; as he emerged, he was given new white clothes (which pictured the new robe of Christ's righteousness and holiness, which was his). Thus, he "put on the new man," or Christ, in a dramatic ceremony which told the world the old had passed and the new had come. This practice is behind that of our putting on new clothes at Easter, since in later centuries Easter became the time when many were baptized.

4. It symbolizes the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:4-5). The Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit is associated with Christian baptism throughout the New Testament, but especially in Acts. Sometimes

²²F.W. Beare, "The Teaching of First Peter," (Anglican Theological Review xxvi, 1944-45). Some scholars, including Beare, think that parts of the letter actually embody a baptismal ritual and/or homily.

this gift seem to come at the time of baptism (Acts 9:17–18; 19:4–6); again, it was separated by some length of time (Acts 8:12–17); yet again, sometimes the baptism with the Holy Spirit preceded water baptism (Acts 10:44–48). Nevertheless, the reality symbolized by water baptism is not experienced until we have been filled with the Spirit and cleansed from sin. Water baptism is a pledge and seal of Spirit baptism. After the middle of the second century, the church teachers regularly portrayed baptism as “regeneration” [initial sanctification].²³

The Structure of the Epistle

Unlike some of Paul’s letters (e.g. Ephesians), which have a clearly designed structure, 1 Peter does not appear as a logical development of ideas. The letter is almost like a “stream of consciousness” sermon resulting in a kind of circular character that involves much repetition of themes. This characteristic is reflected in some representative comments from scholarly studies of 1 Peter: it has “no definite plan or logical evolution of a train of thought” (C. Bigg)²⁴ “When one reads 1 Peter without interruption (as it is intended to be), it leaves behind a genuinely vague impression concerning both its form and its contents.” “A predetermined plan (from the author) cannot be found because one never existed.” “The author,” says Gunkel, “does not feel under the necessity of a uniform arrangement of the whole, as we would do it today. He is rather inclined to be carried off by the momentary impression of an extempore address. Repetitions are frequent.” No wonder one writer opened his discussion of this letter by saying that it is “one of the most difficult books to interpret of any in the New Testament.”²⁵ It is clear that the author of 1 Peter is no theological essayist. He is a churchman addressing the concrete, practical needs of Christians at a particular time and particular places.

This characteristic makes it virtually impossible to develop an outline of the letter as a guide to presenting Peter’s argument by following the

²³This discussion of baptism is heavily dependent on W.M. Greathouse, “The Meaning of Baptism,” Nazarene Pub. House, n.d.

²⁴Quoted in Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 20.

²⁵Robert W. Thurston, “Interpreting First Peter,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 17.5 (Summer, 1974), 171.

[dis]order of the text. Hence, in order to formally present the emphasis we are pursuing we shall take recourse to a different method based on a pattern that recurs throughout the first letter. This pattern corresponds to two Greek moods, the indicative and the imperative. The indicative declares a fact, something that is the case, whereas the imperative commands or enjoins something that is to be done (or believed) on the basis of or in response to that fact. That structure appears throughout the New Testament, prolifically in the letters of Paul where the indicative often indicates a new state of existence that must manifest itself in a new life (the imperative). An extended example is found in Col. 2:20—3:17. Clowney points out an important implication of this pattern: “Without the indicative of what God does, the imperative is addressed to a helpless sinner, the victim of his illusions; it becomes a commandment that crushes or drives to vain and presumptuous efforts.”²⁶

The relation between these two “moods” is often indicated by the use of “therefore,” (as in 1 Peter 1:13) sometimes, “so” (as in 2:1). Sometimes there is no indicator at all but the pattern is there. I am initially indebted to the work of Jo Bailey Wells for calling my attention to this pervasive pattern. She says, “These imperatives give to the letter a structure by which the overall theme and purpose cohere. They proceed according to a fairly consistent pattern, beginning with 1:13 and extending to the end of the epistle.” They all “relate to living out a holy life in the face of an alien, unbelieving and often hostile environment: to the end that God may be glorified (2:12) and others discover the hope he offers (3:15).”²⁷

These imperatives take two forms. They refer to both the identity of the believers and the salvation benefits they have received through faith in Jesus Christ. Both give rise to imperatives concerning their lifestyle.

²⁶Clowney, *Message of Peter*, 61.

²⁷Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 211-12.

PART ONE
INDICATIVES OF IDENTITY
AND BLESSING

Chapter 1

Resident Aliens

“Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, . . . Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11)

Like Paul, Peter opens his letter with a summary paragraph (greeting) stating in a very dense form what he then goes on to unpack. Aside from this practice, there is so much common material with Paul that some older commentators believed 1 Peter is dependent upon Paul.²⁸ But J. N. D. Kelly and others argue that the apparent borrowing is simply the result of both Paul and Peter (along with other NT writers) drawing on a common tradition prevalent in the early Christian movement (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-3).

Of this introductory summary, William Barclay says: “It happens again and again in the NT that the true greatness and wonder of a passage lies not only on the surface, and in that which is actually said, but in the ideas and the convictions which lie behind it, and out of which it is written. That is particularly so of this passage.”²⁹ It is true that the major emphasis of the letter is encapsulated in these two verses. It introduces motifs to be developed further in the letter and is crucial in identifying the identity of the recipients (an indicative). Peter’s identification of his audience continues and culminates in 2:9-10, which many feel is the hinge of the letter. The imperative(s) emphasized as a response to these indicatives are appeals to live out this identity. The meaning of the indicatives implies that one should “become what you are,” not “become what you are not.”³⁰ This pattern appears repeatedly throughout the letter. It provides an insight into the nature of the holiness to which God’s people are called, namely, response to grace. (it is never causal). Here Peter is drawing on the pattern that is present in the establishing of the Sinai covenant, the theology of

²⁸For a summary of similarities between 1 Peter and Paul’s letters see Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 11.

²⁹*The Letters of Peter and Jude* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 195.

³⁰An excellent analysis of the indicative/imperative pattern is Richard Howard, *Newness of Life* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1975). Unfortunately, the author misinterprets the meaning of the imperative to be “become what you are not.”

which informs all biblical calls to holy living. The ethical instructions of the covenant are introduced by the indicative, "I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, therefore..." Then follows imperatives of moral instruction.

The greeting initially identifies the recipients as "Exiles of the dispersion" (1:1). It is here at the outset that we are first introduced to the fact that these Christians in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) are living in a pagan, hostile environment. Scholars have vigorously debated how this designation should be translated and what its precise meaning is. The Greek word (*paroikos*) is thus variously translated as "exiles," "strangers," "sojourners," or "pilgrims." The old NIV sought to interpret it by adding "in the world." This addition was dropped in the 2011 version. This word is used again in tandem with another Greek word (*parepidēmos*) with substantially the same meaning in 2:11. The two taken together carry the meaning of "resident aliens." They refer to a "stranger" or "alien" dwelling in a foreign land. More specifically the Greek words denote residence in a place without taking out or being granted citizens' rights. "They describe someone who is not a citizen of the place in which at the moment he happens to be, but whose citizenship is of another country."³¹

Hence the terms have a civil meaning. One influential interpretation attempts to explain this in sociological or economic terms. It is true that the specific instructions (to slaves and wives) imply that the church was drawn from the disenfranchised levels of society, but one's social status was a product of several factors, relative income or access to the means of production being only one of them. The general thrust of Peter's message, however, provides little if any basis for this kind of interpretation. Rather, as Joel Green says, "these are people whose commitments to the lordship of Jesus Christ have led to transformed dispositions and behaviors that place them on the margin of respectable society. Their allegiance to Christ had won for them animosity, scorn, and vilification. Their lack of acculturation to prevailing social values marked them as misfits worthy of contempt."³² This is evidenced "... by its unrelenting assault on the values and practices by which the wider world of 1 Peter would have been constructed." Although primarily speaking about "lifestyle" the implication is that there is a major gap between the values of the Christian

³¹Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, 237.

³²Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007), 16.

community and its surrounding world (1:18; 2:12, 15; 3:15, 16; 4:3-4, 25-16).

Peter's use of the concept is therefore theological in nature. In a word it is not so much the socially marginalized that become Christians but that through conversion Christians become alienated from their social environment (cf. 1:17b). Or as Wells puts it, "Christians are estranged not because they live differently. They are estranged because they have a different intrinsic vision of reality. And because of this vision, they live differently." Peter frequently uses a term that means "lifestyle," (translated in the 16th century KJV as "conversation"). The term is used in this letter as much as the rest of the New Testament together. The holiness to which God's people are called implies that one's entire existence is informed by a worldview that is contrary to that which informs pagan cultures.

This concept of being exiles or "sojourners" is deeply rooted in Israel's history so that the use of the term, if properly understood, is appropriate. Abraham is seen as the prototype and progenitor of the "resident alien" (cf. Gen. 23:4). Throughout much of its history, Israel had been a people without a permanent home. For this reason a true Israelite could say, "I am an alien (*paroikos*)... a sojourner (*parepidemos*), like all my fathers" (Ps. 39:12, Septuagint). "The Abrahamic covenant initiates and encapsulates a relationship with God which is most aptly described by the 'sojourning language,' so much so that the whole national thinking and philosophy displays for us 'a nation on the move.' Its social and religious outlook reflect that of travelers journeying toward a land they can call their home."³³

This characterization was especially emphasized in the confession of faith that recalled the exodus. In connection with the offering of the first fruits of the harvest every Israelite was taught to say, "A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt and sojourned (*paroikesen*) there" (Deut. 26:5). Even in the period during which Israel was settled in the land, "every Israelite was viewed as a foreign guest or squatter, who could be entrusted with the use of something without establishing a claim to ownership,"³⁴ or "a resident alien and a settler."³⁵ This relationship was the basis for the land laws that decreed that "The

³³Moses Chin, "A Heavenly Home for the Homeless," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991), 104.

³⁴Martin Noth, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 188-9.

³⁵Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 314.

land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants” (Lev. 25:23). It is furthermore the theological principle that informs the Jubilee provisions for all property to return to its original resident every 50 years. 1 Chronicles 29:14-15 reports a thanksgiving prayer by King David for gifts received for building the Temple when Israel, by all appearances, had ceased to be sojourners: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding.” Ultimately the terms of identity do not just refer to a literal journey from point A to point B, but are extended to refer to one’s whole sojourn on earth. Whether or not the person is physically a resident alien is not the determinative factor. What is determinative is his attitude to life. Therefore, by calling his readers "aliens" and "sojourners," the apostle is indicating that the church is the legitimate successor to Israel of old with the same status.

The sense of exile was especially dominant after the Babylonian captivity of 587 B.C. This may be specifically what Peter has in mind. This possibility is supported by the further identification of his audience as Exiles of the *Dispersion*. He uses the technical term (Diaspora) for Jews scattered throughout the world away from the homeland. This terminology goes back to the Babylonian captivity when the inhabitants of Judea were carried away into exile. From that time forward one of the major preoccupations of Jewish thought was the hope for the end of exile. The old Latin Christmas hymn reflects this ethos: “O Come, O come Immanuel and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lowly exile here Until the Son of God appear.” When we read the nativity hymns in Luke with this in mind, the longing for the end of exile and how the Jews thought it would occur becomes clear, notably deliverance from oppressors.

The exile was both geographical and theological. Geographically they were away from the homeland. In a limited sense this aspect came to an end with Cyrus’ decree granting the Jews permission to return to the homeland. But theologically, the exile continued. God had departed from the Temple (see Ezekiel 10) and even after the Temple had been rebuilt there is no indication that the Shekinah had returned so there was the sense that theologically the exile had never ended. Since from the New Testament perspective the work of Christ brought an end to the exile theologically and the geographical dimension was transformed, what Peter is talking about introduces an eschatological (futuristic) element into his

message, which he further develops later in this letter and 2 Peter. They are exiled from their true homeland. What is the “homeland.” The average person would probably say it is “heaven” but neither Peter nor other biblical writers suggest this. Furthermore, the emphasis of the entire New Testament is that the ultimate home of the saints is not a disembodied existence in “heaven,” but rather the resurrection of the body to inhabit a “new heavens and new earth.” (Isaiah 65:17, 65:22; Revelation 21:1f; cf. 2 Peter 3:13) Psalm 37:11 declares, “the meek shall possess the *land*.” But Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount declares that “the meek shall inherit the *earth*” thus implying that the whole earth has now become the holy land. The Apostles’ Creed straightforwardly declares the distinctive Christian belief in “the resurrection of the body.” The significance of the eschatological element embodied in the concept of “hope” revolves around the concept of “inheritance,” which is introduced in 1:3-5. We will explore this later.

St. Paul has somewhat the same understanding of the nature of the church when in Philippians 3:20 he refers to it as having their citizenship in heaven or in Moffat’s translation, being a “colony of heaven.” The city of Phillipi had been settled by retired soldiers for the purpose of demonstrating to the citizenry the advantages of the Roman culture. In a word it was to be a little Rome away from Rome. In like manner the Christian church was to demonstrate by its lifestyle the greater blessedness of the heavenly life. A similar emphasis is found in Colossians 3:1-2, “So, if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

The point is that the Christian is to take the cue for her values and consequent behavior from the “country” of her citizenship, not from the culture of the place where she is presently residing. When we put this picture in the context of New Testament theology, which Peter expressly reflects in various places throughout the epistle, we can get a clearer sense of what he is envisioning. The general perspective of the New Testament is informed by a dualism of “two ages,” referred to as the “present age” and “the age to come.” Although, unlike the Pauline epistles, we do not find this explicit language in either First or Second Peter, this theology of history is implicitly present. It becomes most clearly articulated when 1 Peter 1:10 and 1:13 are placed in juxtaposition. J.W. Pryor says, “Peter takes over the normative Christian eschatological perspective of the now-

not yet and of Christians as a people of two ages, moving from the old to the new and yet, paradoxically, affected by both.”³⁶

The “present age,” as perceived by the dominant Jewish understanding was under the dominion of demonic powers with Satan as the “prince of the powers of the air.” The “age to come” was the kingdom age that would become reality when evil was defeated and peace and righteousness would reign in the earth. Followers of Jesus, in the light of his resurrection, transformed this “eschatological dualism.” The New Testament is informed by this transformed theology of history. Although the “present age” has not come to an end, as Jewish thought had believed would occur, the “age to come” had broken into history so that the two ages are overlapping. In technical theological language, this is “inaugurated eschatology” and remains to be consummated in the future. The End had come rushing into the present as a consequence of the work of Jesus. This is what Paul came to see in his Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ.

By faith in Jesus, one could become a resident of the age to come while at the same time living in the present age. This explains the otherwise enigmatic statement in Hebrews 6:5, “. . . have tasted the powers of the age to come.” These two realities had a radically different, often conflicting, set of values and resulting lifestyles. This is precisely reflected in Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your minds.”

What Peter is implying by his designation of his audience as resident aliens is their status in “the age to come” while they continue to live in the “present age.” Like Paul, the imperative that is implied by the metaphor, and spelled out in 2:11-12, is that they are to conform their values and lifestyle to the “new creation” they inhabit by virtue of being citizens of the “age to come” that was launched by Jesus’ resurrection. This is why this history transforming event is so emphasized in the letter. In brief, what the readers were, determined what they should do. The imperative based on their identification as resident aliens is stated succinctly in 2:11-12: “Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

³⁶J.W. Pryor, “First Peter and the New Covenant,” *The Reformed Theological Review*,

God’s Chosen People

“. . . chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” (1 Peter 1:2)

The central identifying designation of the church is found in the term “elect” often translated as “chosen.” John H. Elliott declared this the “fundamental indicative of the entire epistle.” What does it mean? It is the term by which Israel identified herself as the special people of Yahweh. Thus this designation underscores Peter’s indebtedness to the story of Israel in spelling out the identity of his readers. The supremely important point here is that basic Old Testament promises and predicates, which originally applied to the people of Israel, are now transferred to the universal Christian community that includes both Jew and Gentile as a consequence of the work of Christ.

It is important to note that this election is a corporate concept and does not refer essentially to individuals as such. This both guards against interpreting election as having to do with the choice of individuals to be saved or excluded from final salvation and is essential to understanding the remainder of what Peter says in this passage. It helps us understand the nature of the church. The church is not a mutual admiration society but a body divinely called to live in an alienated society in holy nonconformity in order to declare the saving deeds of God through a holy way of life. As a child in the church, we learned a chorus that embodies this truth:

We’re Saved, Saved to tell others of the Man of Galilee
Saved, Saved to live daily for the Christ of Calvary
Saved, Saved to invite you to His salvation free
We’re Saved, Saved, Saved by His blood for all eternity.

The principle of interpretation previously discussed suggests that Peter has in mind the great election passage in Deuteronomy 7:6-8: “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought

you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” This passage helps us understand what Peter means by “election.”

First, it implies a special relation by which the people in this relation are described as “holy.” This holiness is relational in nature since only that which is in relation to God can be holy. As Dennis Kinlaw says: “The OT may differentiate between things that are clean and unclean, but it knows nothing that is holy apart from its relation to God.”³⁷ This aspect of election is identified throughout scripture in terms of a unique relation to God (cf. Ex. 19:5; Deut. 14:2, 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Titus 2:14). This relational holiness must be distinguished from a holiness that is ethical in nature. It is best described as a *status*. Ethical holiness, as we shall see, is an imperative based on the former as an indicative.

Second, it is a relation based on God’s unmerited love and not on any qualifications of the people. Third, it entails an act of deliverance from a former bondage. In the case of Israel, they were freed from Egyptian slavery. In the New Testament sense, it is a redemption from the slavery to sin resulting in a freedom to enter into another relation that is characterized as perfect freedom. A remarkable insight into this truth is reflected in the movie, “Moses,” starring Ben Kingsley as the great Hebrew leader. In the context of his exhausting role of attempting to address all the disputes among the people, his father-in-law, Jethro, gives the wise advice to delegate the smaller issues to others. Moses replies, “Why is it so hard to hear someone tell the truth” Then follows this dialog:

Moses: “These people are still learning to live without the law of their task masters.”

Jethro: “Have you traded an Egyptian slave owner on earth for a taskmaster in the heavens?”

After Miriam objects that they have the law, Jethro replies: “The laws are not sufficient by themselves. The people must learn how to follow the law without Moses or any leader. They must learn to follow the law without fear of any whip on their backs or their souls, to follow the law

³⁷Dennis Kinlaw, “Old Testament Roots of the Wesleyan Message,” *Further Insights Into Holiness*. K.C.: Beacon Hill Press, 1963.

because they are free not to. When they have learned that they will be truly free. Until then they are still slaves.”

This is St. Paul’s point in Romans 6:19—“. . . just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for [ethical] sanctification.”

When we take a wider-angled look at the concept of election it is apparent that it is a task oriented term. What is the purpose of the task for which they/we were/are chosen? We have to go back to Abraham and take note of the position he is given in the biblical narrative. The promise to and call of Abram is a response to the dark picture of the human race in Genesis 3-11! The purpose of Abraham’s election is embodied in Genesis 12:1-3 in the phrase: “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”(NRSV) The key word in this text is “blessing.” It is used 5 times in verses 2-3 and is apparently intended to stand in contrast to the term “curse,” which is used 5 times in the first eleven chapters (3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). Thus the significance of Abram’s call is that it is intended to reverse the “series of aimless human wanderings, which have characterized 1-11. Men are still on the move in Genesis 11:2, but the centrifugal effect of these early Genesis narratives is now arrested by the centripetal potential movement of the world back to an Eden situation through Abram.”³⁸

H. W. Wolff identifies the various aspects of the “curse:” It had meant the loss of freedom (3:14), alienation from the soil (3:17), estrangement from society (4:11) and shameful degradation (9:25),³⁹ together reflecting the relationships that constitute humanity in the image of God. Thus to experience “blessing” through Abraham has already been prepared for somewhat, although in the negative, by the words of the curse: “to enter a free and fruitful life, to come out of bondage, out of vain striving and aimless wandering, out of hubris and fear of death.”⁴⁰

This tells us that Abraham and his descendants were intended to be God’s partners in his redemptive enterprise of restoring his creation, his whole creation, to its pre-fall state. No contemporary biblical scholar has more adequately developed this theme than N. T. Wright. In one important

³⁸F. B. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1009), 72.

³⁹H.W. Wolf, “The Kerygma of the Yahwist,” *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, edited by Wolff & Brueggemann (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 55.

⁴⁰Ibid.

quote, full of meaningful implications, he says: "If Abraham and his family are understood as the creator's means of dealing with the sin of Adam, and hence with the evil in the world, Israel herself becomes the true Adamic humanity."⁴¹ It is important to note that this election is a corporate concept, not individualistic. This perspective is essential to understanding the remainder of what Peter says in this passage.

But Peter is writing to Gentile Christians, not Israel, which suggests that a major transformation has taken place. This transformation is implied by his use of the concept of "foreknowledge." Victor Paul Furnish states that the Greek word translated as "foreknowledge" is best translated as "purpose" and not as the more literal "foreknowledge." "For in both the Old Testament and the New, God's 'foreknowledge' of the future is rooted in the fact that past, present, and future are all encompassed within the arc of his divine will and guidance."⁴² Joel Green makes the same point: "This refers less to notions of predetermination and more to the divine purpose as a basic hermeneutical principle that will pervade the letter as a whole."⁴³ The point is that God has purposed from the beginning to have a people who will carry out his work in the world of restoring humanity to its created destiny. This is reflected in the fact that the parameters of the "chosen people" undergo a process of transformation as history unfolds.

In the early stages of the chosen people, which focused on the immediate descendants of Abraham, a clear evidence of the Lord's "electing" will was present. The normal human pattern of succession in the Patriarchal age was set aside with both the children of Abraham and the children of Isaac. The eldest was the traditional heir of the headship of the family but the choice of the progenitor of the redemptive line singled out Isaac rather than Ishmael and Jacob rather than Esau. The apex of the elective action of God encompassed the 12 sons and thus the families or tribes descending from Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. In the process of time as the result of the near uninterrupted failure of Israel to keep covenant with the Lord, the parameters of the "chosen people" was narrowed to a righteous remnant within the larger

⁴¹*The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 262.

⁴²"Elect Sojourners in Christ, An Approach to the Theology of 1 Peter," *Perkins Journal of Theology*, Spring 1975, 5.

⁴³1Peter, 19.

community. Isaiah, in the 8th century B.C., spoke clearly that this remnant would replace the nation as God's redemptive people in the world (cf. Isa. 6:13; 10:20-22; 46:3; cf. Romans 9:27)

When it became apparent that this limitation was still inadequate, as the Apostle Paul clearly saw, the function originally attributed to Israel as a whole narrowed down to one faithful Israelite who lived out this destiny. It is for this reason that he refers in Romans 3:21-22 to this vision: "But now apart from the law the righteousness [covenant faithfulness] of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness [covenant faithfulness] is shown through the *faithfulness of Jesus Christ* to all who believe." (NIV, footnote reading). With the narrowing of the "elect" to one "faithful Israelite," the parameters then begin to broaden to include those who through faith in Jesus become the children of Abraham by faith, both Jew and Gentile.

How are the present people of God chosen or elected? "Through sanctification in the Spirit." The Greek word translated "through," or "in" (év) can function in two ways: "by means of" [instrumental] or "in the sphere of." [locative] There are three possible meanings dependent on how the preposition functions, each of which is biblically sound: 1-the means by which God's people are called; 2-the sphere within which they are called, equal in meaning to "in Christ." 3-This is now the identifying mark of the people of God that compose the new Israel. This action refers to the 'setting-apart' work of the Holy Spirit.

In either case, from the New Testament perspective, the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" refers to the initiation of the Christian life. This is its unique and identifying characteristic. This meaning is why Paul can say in Romans 8:9—"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." (NIV)

Both the means and the method by which the "elect" people of God are to carry out their election purpose are implied in the third prepositional phrase "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (KJV). The meaning of the preposition here has been widely debated. To what does obedience refer? Is obedience referring to the way human beings respond to the gospel or to the obedience of Jesus? Many commentators think that the "obedience of faith" to which Paul refers in Rom. 1:5 & 16:26 is in view here, and it may very well be an important aspect of it. Some think that the obedience refers to Jesus' obedience to the cross, which is the basis for election. Grammatically, "obedience" is

active while the “sprinkling” is passive. This seems to support the interpretation that the purpose of the election is obedience and the means by which that obedience is enabled is the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” In the light of Peter’s appropriation of the Old Testament, it seems soundest to take this as referring to Exodus 24 as the background, since obedience there refers to the holy life lived in response to the covenant.

Exodus 24:3-8 describes the ratification of the Mosaic covenant, which is a rite of unparalleled significance in the biblical narrative. It is the rite through which the covenant community was formed: “Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed 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.’ Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” (NRSV)

The account of the words of Jesus at the Last Supper interpreted the significance of his death in the light of Exodus 24 along with Jeremiah’s new covenant promise (31:31-34). In this light, Peter is referring to what happens when the benefits of the sacrificial death of Jesus are applied to believers. The sprinkling of the blood in the case of Christ’s sacrifice means the extension to the persons sprinkled of the value and benefits of the death of which it is the token

Lewis Donelson says,

The image of sanctification leads naturally to an insistence on obedience. As we shall see, obedience sits at the heart of 1 Peter’s theology. The readers will be called ‘children of obedience’ (1:14), and much of the letter seems to be couched to exhort obedience. The classic early Christian tension between election and judgment is evoked here. On the one hand, Christians are called, chosen, and sanctified; but on the other hand, these assurances do not eliminate the necessity of obedience or spare anyone from judgment. The elect must obey, because the elect

will be judged. Much of the theology of 1 Peter is carved out of this classic tension.”⁴⁴

Likewise, Paul, in company with mainstream second-Temple Judaism, affirms that God’s final judgment will be in accordance with the entirety of a life led—in accordance, in other words, with works. He says this clearly and unambiguously in Romans 14.10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5.10. He affirms it in that passage about church-builders in 1 Corinthians 3. But the main passage in question is Romans 2.1-16. Here is the first statement about justification in Romans, and lo and behold it affirms justification according to works! The doers of the law, he says, will be justified (2.13). N.T. Wright says on this passage:

The ‘works’ in accordance with which the Christian will be vindicated on the last day are not the unaided works of the self-help moralist. Nor are they the performance of the ethnically distinctive Jewish boundary-markers (Sabbath, food-laws and circumcision). They are the things which show, rather, that one is in Christ; the things which are produced in one’s life as a result of the Spirit’s indwelling and operation. In this way, Romans 8.1-17 provides the real answer to Romans 2.1-16. Why is there now ‘no condemnation’? Because, on the one hand, God has condemned sin in the flesh of Christ; and, on the other hand, because the Spirit is at work to do, within believers, what the Law could not do – ultimately, to give life, but a life that begins in the present with the putting to death of the deeds of the body and the obedient submission to the leading of the Spirit.

John Fletcher was one of the leading spokesmen for the Wesleyan-Arminian position, John Wesley’s appointed successor. In his *Checks to Antinomianism*, he vigorously defends the biblical truth of a “second justification” as a safeguard against the implicit antinomianism of the teaching of “eternal security” or “once in grace, always in grace.” In a summary statement he writes:

Our first and second justification differ, (1.) With respect to time: the time of the one is the hour of conversion; and the time of the other the day of judgment. (2.) With respect to place: the place of the former is this earth; and the place of the latter the awful spot, in the new heaven or on

⁴⁴*First and Second Peter and Jude* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 27.

the new earth, where the tribunal of Christ shall be erected. (3.) With respect to the witnesses: the witnesses of the former are the Spirit of God and our own conscience; or, to speak in Scripture language, "The Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God:" but the witnesses of the latter will be the countless myriads of men and angels assembled before Christ. (4.) With respect to the Justifier: in the former justification "one God justifies the circumcision and the uncircumcision;" and in the latter, "one Mediator between God and man, even the man Christ Jesus," will pronounce the sentence: for, "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." (5.) With respect to the justified: in the day of conversion, a penitent sinner is justified; in the day of judgment, a persevering saint. (6.) With respect to the article upon which justification will turn: although the meritorious cause of both our justifications is the same, that is, the blood and righteousness of Christ, yet the instrumental cause is very different; by FAITH we obtain (not purchase) the first, and by WORKS the second. (7.) With respect to the act of the Justifier: at our conversion God covers and pardons our sins; but in the day of judgment Christ uncovers and approves our righteousness. And, (lastly,) with regard to the consequences of both: at the first justification we are enlisted by the Friend of sinners to "fight the good fight of faith" in the Church militant; and at the second we are admitted by the righteous Judge to "receive a crown of righteousness, and shine like the sun in the Church triumphant."

Chapter 3

Salvation Benefits

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5)

The typical greeting, "grace and peace," found in most of the New Testament epistles, echoes early Christian worship and derives from the daily Jewish liturgy in the temple, with its priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25-26. It is more than perfunctory in purpose; it actually defines in a nutshell the extent of the mighty benefits of Christ's saving acts. It can even be seen as the whole message of the letter in miniature. Since I dealt in some detail with the significant of these two terms in my earlier work on First and Second Peter,⁴⁵ I will only give cursory attention to them here.

Grace has multiple meanings as Peter himself implies by referring to grace as multifaceted (see 4:10). The popular meaning of grace as undeserved favor is noted in the letter but the primary emphasis is on grace as transforming power or enablement. A sound understanding will recognize the validity of both as well as the proper relation between the two. One is accepted on the basis of grace as mercy and transformed through grace as divine enablement. "Peace" should be seen as informed by the Old Testament understanding of "shalom." This is much richer in content than the popular view of peace and includes all blessings, material and spiritual, bestowed on humankind by God. It includes and encompasses the salvation God will bring about in the Messianic age. All its elements, taken together, basically define the image of God in which humans were created; this is the ultimate goal of God's salvific intention. It is the mother lode from which to mine our understanding of the biblical concept of sanctification.

Both meanings of grace interplay in 1:3-9 as a full description of God's salvation benefits. This passage is a Jewish style prayer in that it follows a pattern found in the Old Testament and in the liturgy of the synagogue. William Barclay says, "there are few passages in the New Testament where more of the great fundamental Christian ideas and conceptions meet

⁴⁵*Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Salem, OH: Schmull Pub. Co., 2006).

and come together.”⁴⁶ That these blessings have come to them by way of their faith in Jesus is emphasized in the doxology that opens the paragraph. In the Old Testament pattern, praise is offered to God but here praise is qualified by identifying the God who provides the benefits as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” “Christian worship is not directed to Deity as such, but to the God Whom Christ has revealed and Whose Son in a unique sense He is.”⁴⁷

New Birth

Two images inform this salvation metaphor. The first, to which we have referred, is the sacrament of baptism in which the believer is made, in an existential sense, a new person. After the middle of the second century the church fathers regularly portrayed baptism as “regeneration.” Beare emphasizes this relation: “with their baptism, the old life of paganism is buried forever, and a new life has begun, a life created within them by God, a life lived in spiritual union with the risen Christ.”⁴⁸ The second image is the Old Testament saving event of the Exodus. In two different places Peter states that the Father has begotten his readers anew (1:3, 23), and in two other places he refers to them as children (1:14; 3:6; cf. Hosea 11:1). These references reflect the Exodus. Deuteronomy 32:18 refers to the Exodus as the event by which Yahweh gave birth to Israel. By saying that God has begotten the church *anew* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:3) Peter is implying that our Lord’s resurrection from the dead was a *new* Exodus bringing into being the beginning of a new creation.

This imagery implicitly sounds the note of the central theological perspective of the new covenant. We have already taken note of this understanding. The centuries long hope of the people of God had been that God would one day bring about a “new exodus” that would usher in a “new creation.” This hope came classically to expression in the little prophecy of Habakkuk. The prophet was struggling with the sinfulness of his own people, and then with the violence of the Assyrians. Why does God not act to remedy the situation? In the final prayer he reminiscences

⁴⁶Barclay, “James, Peter and Jude,” 201.

⁴⁷J.N.D. Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 47.

⁴⁸Beare, *Teaching of First Peter*, 288.

about the mighty acts of God in the Exodus and then prays, “O Lord, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; in wrath may you remember mercy” (NRSV). In a word, remembering God’s intervention in Egypt, he cries, “O Lord, do it again.” According to Luke’s account, when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, they spoke about his *exodos*. His approaching death and resurrection was to bring to reality this long hope of a new exodus.

In the New Testament perspective, when Jesus came out of the tomb, the “new creation” was launched making available to those who by faith enter into its reality and experience the benefits of a new life in a new realm endowed by the Holy Spirit. They would “taste the powers of the age to come.” Thus to experience the benefits of this new creation would be tantamount to being “born again.” Like the Israelites of old, they have embarked on an exodus, not out of society but out of the immorality of paganism. As God called Israel out of the land of Egypt, He has called the members of the church out of the darkness of their former sinful way of life (2:9).

Christ’s resurrection is not seen here as simply an event of the past. It is an event by virtue of which all who believe can in the present, by faith, enter into newness of life through the preaching of the good news (1:23). God wrought a work of newness of life in Jesus’ resurrection and also brings newness of life in the here and now to all who respond to his word. Clowney describes it well: “Christians live in a future that is already present, not just in imagination or expectation but in realization: the reality of Christ’s presence in the Spirit.”⁴⁹

Deliverance

Another salvation benefit present in this passage, to which we have already alluded, echoes the Exodus. It involves deliverance. This theme is picked up again in 1:19 where Peter presents Christ as a new Passover Lamb. Just as Israel was saved by the blood of the Passover Lamb at the time of the Exodus, so Christians are saved by the blood of our Lord, who died on the cross of Calvary. Like the lamb of the Exodus, which had to be without blemish Peter emphasizes that Christ, the Lamb of God was without the blemish of sin (see 2:22-23; 3:18).

⁴⁹Clowney, *Message of I Peter*, 55.

The *motivation* for this act of deliverance is “his great mercy.” Mercy is the usual translation in the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew for *chesed*, the term denoting God’s steadfast love. At three places in the Old Testament the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is said to be the result of God’s great or abundant mercy (Numbers 14:19; Psalm 106:7; Isaiah 63:7). Here we have reference to the meaning of grace as unmerited favor.

The *goal* of this act of deliverance is “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, . . .” “Inheritance” is the word regularly used in the Greek Old Testament for the inheritance of Canaan, the Promised Land. Again and again the Old Testament speaks of the land that God had given to his people *for an inheritance to possess it* (Deut. 15:4; 19:10). It refers to the land of Canaan as the place that the people of Israel were to inherit as a gift from Yahweh. By using the concept of inheritance the apostle indicates that the new Israel has its own promised land that it will inherit, a new Canaan, namely, “the new heavens and the new earth.” Scholars and simple believers alike have considered the inheritance of the saints to be “heaven.” This seems to be supported by the reference that it is “kept in heaven for you.” But this is not the implication. Let me illustrate. My son, who lives with us, works at a profession that takes him long distances and he often returns home too late to eat supper with us. We usually prepare a plate of food and keep it in the oven. When he comes home, he does not have to get into the oven to eat it, it is just reserved there and he takes it out to eat it. In like manner the inheritance of the saints is “preserved in heaven,” but that does not mean we have to go there to get it. The ultimate goal for biblical faith is a “new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness.”

This new inheritance far surpasses the land of Canaan, as it is not susceptible to the destructive power and forces of this world. According to Barclay, the word translated “imperishable” can mean unravaged by any invading army and comments: “Many and many a time the land of Palestine had been ravaged by armies of the aliens.” “Undefiled” comes from a word that means pollute with impurity and the land had often been defiled by false worship (cf. Jeremiah 2:7, 23; 3:2; Ezekiel 20:43), which highlights the reason Israel was expelled from the land in the Babylonian Captivity.

In addition to his emphasis on a preserved inheritance, Peter affirms that the potential heirs shall be guarded and thus protected. The Greek word used for “guarded” is often used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) for a military outpost or garrison set up in

occupied territory. Thus the security forces themselves are essentially “aliens.” Here is a perfect figure of speech to reflect the situation of the believers in Asia Minor.

Peter further emphasizes what might be termed the goal of these blessings as “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” He seems to use the concept of “salvation” to refer to the final consummation of the Christian life. Thus the believer is living in the time between deliverance and salvation. This implies that the final justification or vindication of the believer is based on the whole life and not one moment in the beginning. It has been said that “eternity is settled at the first work of grace,” however this is misleading since it implies that whatever one does subsequent to that moment will not impact the final outcome. Peter’s emphasis clearly rejects that implication by his urgent insistence on living out one’s initial conversion through a lifestyle consistent with who one is as a child of God. (see chapter 2)

Both images--new birth and deliverance--imply the idea of a beginning. The imagery of rebirth suggests significant implications for developing a mature Christian life. Birth is to be followed by growth and development toward maturity and adulthood. The concept of deliverance derived from the Exodus does not mean that one escapes to simply camp just outside the boundaries. As Israel was delivered from Egypt to go forward to possess the land of promise, so the believer who is delivered from the darkness and slavery of sin is to press on to the Canaan of promise. This characteristic is graphically pictured in 2:1-3 and entails both a negative and a positive aspect. They must rid themselves of attitudes and behaviors that undermine “genuinely mutual love” (1:22), such as malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander.

On the positive side, “like newborn infants,” they are to “long for the pure spiritual milk” of the word. Other New Testament writers have used milk to describe the diet of the weak and immature. Peter uses the imagery in a positive sense as the proper diet that will foster growth. They have already had a taste of the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 34:8) that should whet their appetite for more. The more we learn about the significance of Christ and his gospel, the greater will be our love and gratitude for his benefits that will in turn foster deeper commitment and more intelligent discipleship. Robert Mounce is right in saying that “perhaps the greatest need in contemporary Christianity is a renewed appreciation of the role of Scripture in the personal and spiritual growth of believers.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰Peter and Jude, 25.

Chapter 4

The New Temple

“Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight, chosen and precious; and like living stones, be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner, and ‘A stone that will make men stumble, and a rock that will make them fall;’ (1 Peter 2:4-8)

The indicative that identifies the people of God in Christ as a “new temple” is presented in a rather complex passage in which Peter weaves together the experience of the church with the identification of Jesus as a “living stone.” The simplest approach to interpreting this passage is to first explore the “stone” imagery and its implications applied by the early Christians to the Lord. Then we may be able to see clearly the application of these meaning to the church in identifying its nature.

Jesus as a Living Stone

To make his point, Peter combines three Old Testament texts that the early church appropriated and interpreted as having Christological significance. Verses 6-8 consist almost exclusively of quotations from these passages. The first is Isaiah 28:16—“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.’” (NKJV) In context, the prophet is contrasting the truth of his message with the “lies” on which the people are basing their security.

The second reference is Psalm 118:22, which is quoted in full in verse 7. In the original the stone stands for Israel, harried by the world powers and thrown away as useless, but in spite of all appearance given marvelous honor by God. It is significant that this psalm is in the final collection of Psalms (113-118) usually recited at the conclusion of the Passover celebration. It was doubtless the final stanza of the “hymn” sung by Jesus and his disciples at the last supper where rejection hung heavy over the Master’s head (Mark 14:26).

No wonder Christians early began reading this verse as a prophecy of Christ’s passion and death at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities and his vindication by God in his resurrection and glorification (see Acts 4:11). Of course, Jesus himself made this connection in Matthew 21:42 in explaining the meaning of his parable of the householder. This

parable obviously refers to Israel’s history long rejection of God’s prophets culminating in the rejection of his son. These words would be a comforting and encouraging message to Peter’s readers who were likewise experiencing rejection by their contemporaries.

The third passage appropriated from the Old Testament is Isaiah 8:14-15, which speaks of a “stone of offence and a rock of stumbling. Peter is well aware how both Jesus’ teaching and his practice were offensive to the religious traditions of the Jerusalem elite. Their preconceptions resulted in blindness to who Jesus was and thus they rejected him to their own peril. Paul spells out this emphasis explicitly in Romans 9:32-33. Several New Testament texts apply this image to Jesus as Messiah who came to his own but his own did not receive him (John 1:19). Referring it to Jesus using the terminology of “living stone,” points to the crucified Jesus as resurrected.

There is a further implication not explicitly stated in this passage but that Peter assumes in relating the meaning of Jesus as the “living stone” to the church as “living stones.” This meaning has to do with the fact that Jesus himself usurped the function of the Temple by becoming the locus of the Spirit, the place where heaven and earth intersect and interlock. This understanding reflects how Israel interpreted the significance of being in the Temple. In a real sense when they were present in the Temple they were literally in heaven. In Jewish thought heaven was not a place up in the sky but referred to God’s realm, God’s space. If we imagine a thin veil between the earthly and the heavenly with the possibility that in key moments the veil could be drawn back and the two were intertwined, we can see how being present in the Temple was conceived. This concept helps us understand the significance of Jesus’ words about destroying the Temple and raising it up in three days. Here the theme of replacement is clearly implied if we grasp these cryptic words.

The Church as a “Spiritual House”

Jesus’ status as the “New Temple” is then transferred to the church. This relation is introduced by the invitation that opens this “stone” passage. Peter picks up a phrase from the Greek translation of Psalm 34:8—“come to him.” “Him” refers back to the previous verse so that we can identify its antecedent as “the Lord,” making it clear that it is Jesus to whom the pronoun refers. It is by coming to Christ that people enter the church. It is not by entering the church that people are joined to Christ.

As Jesus is the “living stone,” so those who believe in him (2:6c) are designated as “living stones,” suggesting again the “born again”

designation. The terminology of "spiritual house" refers to the temple (see NIV footnote). Peter is making two points in this passage: (a) as baptized and united with Christ, his readers formed the true temple of God as a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit; and (b) that this new temple, in contrast to the localized and material temple of the old law, is a spiritual one.

Just as Jesus usurped the function of the Temple by becoming the locus of the Spirit, the place where heaven and earth intersect and interlock, so those who are joined with him through faith become the new temple in which the Spirit resides. It is no longer a building of stone and mortar but a living body of believers energized by the Spirit.

Paul makes this implication explicit in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17—"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroy God's temple, God will destroy him, For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." The image of "temple" reinforces the corporate nature of the Christian faith. As one writer put it, stones scattered around do not make a building and people scattered around do not make a church. We shall see this emphasis repeated in the subsequent identifying marks. "Christianity stands in marked contrast to all the religions of solitary mysticism, . . . It has nothing to do with an isolated individualism of experience or of privilege."⁵¹

The corporate character of the faith is reinforced by the fact that this discussion of the stone imagery is in the middle of a larger passage beginning in 1:22 whose central emphasis is the church as a corporate body. It includes an imperative to manifest those qualities that foster community life. They are to demonstrate their conversion to Christ by manifesting "genuine mutual love:" "love one another earnestly from the heart." In 2:1 the exhortation is to eliminate or avoid attitudes that would militate against community: "So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander."

In relating the "church" to the "living stone," Peter does not emphasize the identity of his readers by contrasting them with their culture but rather by their relationship with Christ. Like Paul he describes that relation in 3:16; 5:10, 14 as "in Christ." Thus the character of the church's life is defined throughout the letter in Christological terms with particular reference to the redemptive and exemplary journey of Jesus through suffering and death to his exaltation.

⁵¹Francis Wright Beare, "The Teaching of First Peter," 290.

Jesus, the "living stone" has been rejected by the builders (Israel) but honored by God. One can hear the same emphasis in Philippians 2:8-11. The same honor accrues to those who are identified with him. This honor has both a present and a future implication

The term identifying Jesus as the "cornerstone" has a special significance for describing the nature of the new people of God brought into being by the Christ-event. The Greek term is used twice in the New Testament, here and in Ephesians 2:19-22. Both passages connect the people with the Lord Jesus and depict the church as a new temple. The reference in Ephesians spells out the implications more fully: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place for God in the Spirit." The Greek word translated "cornerstone" is an architectural term referring to "the primary foundation stone at the angle of the structure by which the architect fixes a standard for the bearings of the walls and cross-walls throughout."⁵² The cornerstone defines the nature of the structure. The modern builder would use it as the reference point from which to both level and square the building.

As a result of the work of Christ, the new temple is significantly different from the Temple in Jerusalem. The temple in Jesus' day symbolically emphasized distinctions among persons. There was a wall beyond which a Gentile could not go and if this happened the penalty was death. Paul was accused of violating this restriction in Acts 21:27f resulting in mob violence that became the occasion for his arrest. Furthermore, the court of the Gentiles was constructed at a three foot level below the remainder of the structure, suggesting not only exclusion but inferiority. There was also a court of the women since they were forbidden to enter the most sacred precincts. The elimination of these distinctions in the "new temple" is the primary emphasis of the Ephesian passage. While Peter does not make this transformation explicit in referring to the church as living stones, the point is implicitly made in the immediately succeeding passage in a quote from Hosea (see below in chapter 5).

As God's dwelling place, the church has both a status and a function: ". . . like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy

⁵²A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 5 vols. (N.Y.: Harper and Brothers Pub., 1931), 528-9.

priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5). This verse summarizes these two points. Peter then goes on to support and expand them with quotations from Scripture. Their status is a “spiritual house” and a “holy priesthood.” Their function is to offer spiritual sacrifices meaning that they are empowered to do what is otherwise reserved for priests: to come near to God and serve him, a possibility only for the “holy one” who is pure and belongs to God (Ex. 29:44-46; Lev. 8) so the mark of genuine priesthood is holiness.

“Spiritual sacrifices” are offerings in a transformed sense, i.e., of a person, object or deed dedicated to God, prompted and enabled by the Holy Spirit. They involve a whole-hearted emphasis on surrender and dedication of the self to the holy will of the holy God, through Christ. Such exhortation is familiar especially from the Old Testament prophets. (cf. Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-22; Micah 6:6-8; Isa. 1:16-17)

Furthermore, while the sacrifices of the Old Testament consisted largely of material offerings, the sacrifices of the new Israel are “spiritual” (*pneumatikas*) sacrifices (2:5). With the word “spiritual” the apostle indicates not only that the sacrifices of the New Testament are for the most part of a non-material nature (e.g., prayer, thanksgiving, and works of love) but also that such sacrifices are a result of the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are a variety of interpretations regarding these offerings. The context of 1 Peter suggests that they encompass the totality of Christian activity, understood in two different ways, both touching on the relation of believers to outsiders. First, commitment necessitates a separation or abstinence (2:11; 1:14; 2:1 cf. 3:21). This is not a retreat from the world, but a disciplined life lived within the given conditions. Second, it involves a positive witness to those around (esp. 2:9, 12; 3:15).

This passage is an explicit expression of the New Testament focus on the church as the New Israel. The Jews of Second Temple Judaism lived in the hope that the glory of God would return to their Temple as it had in Solomon’s day. From the time that Ezekiel saw the glory depart from the Temple, resulting in national destruction, the post-exilic prophets had voiced the prediction that in the future God would return to his people and the glory would again adorn the sanctuary. Certain aspects of Jesus’ ministry had symbolically predicted that the temple system was being suspended and in fact God was through with the material building. It is implied in his enigmatic statement that if the temple was destroyed he would rebuild it in three days. It was enacted in his cleansing of the temple. This action was the occasion for Caiaphas, the high priest, asking

him bluntly if he was the Messiah (Christ) since he knew that one of the anticipated actions of the Messiah was to rebuild the temple.

Like much of the letter, this passage is an implicit word of encouragement to these suffering followers of Christ. The reader of an English translation might not likely catch the subtle point being made and even more probably would not identify with it because this section of the letter reflects a significant cultural perspective that is quite different from contemporary Western culture. This fact highlights the importance, emphasized in our introduction, of making the journey into the situation of Peter and the Asian Christians. Western culture tends to evaluate matters in term of guilt and innocence, whereas “scholars in recent years have recognized the importance of the values of honor and shame in the ancient Mediterranean world.”⁵³ There are five terms used in these four verses from the honor/shame vocabulary: “rejected,” (vv. 4, 7); “precious” meaning honored or esteemed (vv. 4, 6); “acceptable” (v. 5); “put to shame” (v. 6); and “precious” (different Greek word from vv.4 & 6, meaning honored), v. 7.

In emphasizing shame, honor, respect and acceptance, Peter is making an important distinction for ethical consideration. It has very practical implications. We used to make a similar argument to our children when they were feeling peer pressure toward a behavior we felt was inappropriate. They were concerned to be accepted (honored) on the basis of what others thought was o.k. Our argument was that it is important to be evaluated by the “right people” rather than the ones about whom they were concerned.

Similarly, Peter emphasizes that it is more important to be honored by God rather than the surrounding culture. As David deSilva stated it, “In such a world, it became essential to define carefully who constituted one’s group of significant others—those people whose approval or disapproval mattered—and to insulate group members from concern about the honor or dishonor in which they were held by outsiders.”⁵⁴

⁵³Green, “First Peter,” 56.

⁵⁴Quoted in Ibid, 57.

Addendum
The Stone of Stumbling

In Chapter 2, verse 8, the reference to a stone of stumbling raises some interesting and important questions. Quoting Isaiah 8:14 our author's intent is to distinguish between the Asian Christians and the surrounding culture. The difference is simple. The Christian believer has obeyed the "truth" (1:22) whereas the pagan has "disobeyed" the "word." This distinction is based on the significance of the truth/word that is equivalent to the gospel. Obedience should not be taken here in terms of works righteousness or in any legal sense. Rather, in the light of the essential meaning of the gospel, which is the announcement that the crucified and resurrected Jesus is thereby Lord of the world, the necessary response is to acknowledge his lordship and our servanthood. This is Paul's meaning when he speaks of "the obedience of faith." This understanding is the basis for his statement in Romans 10 that if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved.

It is, in a sense, the change from the servitude to sin to another form of servanthood which is perfect freedom (cf. 2:16). J.N.D. Kelly sharply identifies the crucial issue that this verse opens up: "Just as in i.2 he represents his readers as marked out by God for salvation, so here he envisages their adversaries as predestined to destruction; but in both cases his mention of obedience or its opposite implies that the personal decision of the individual is involved. No more than other NT writers does he provide a clue to the solution of the baffling problems which this tension raises."⁵⁵

The last phrase of this verse, "as they were destined to do," appears to imply an understanding of divine sovereignty that does not allow for the reality of human freedom. It is possible to interpret the statement to mean that those who "disobeyed" were destined to do so meaning that there was actually no free choice on their part. A major segment of evangelical Christianity has been committed to this interpretation.

In the light of the broader picture of God and humanity, we who are Wesleyan-Arminians in persuasion, would see this matter differently. Put simply, God does not predestine who would obey (believe) and who would disobey. He did, however, predestine that all who believe would be saved and those who refuse to accept Jesus as Lord would by that refusal

⁵⁵Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 94.

exclude themselves from God's provision for salvation. An early church father from the sixth century commented on this verse: "God is not to be held responsible for this, for no cause of damnation can come from him who wants everyone to be saved. It is they who have made themselves into vessels of wrath, and unbelief has followed naturally from that."⁵⁶

Robert Mounce reflects the same perspective: This clause "does not say that man's disobedience was *destined* but that his stumbling as a result of disobedience was determined beforehand."⁵⁷ Or, as J.B. Phillips translates it, disobedience "makes stumbling a foregone conclusion."

⁵⁶Quoted in Daniel G. Powers, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude, New Beacon Bible Commentary* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), 85.

⁵⁷Mounce, 27.

Chapter 5

The New Israel

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10)

In this culminating indicative, Peter brings together all the identifying characteristics of his audience to which he has referred up to this point. In doing so, he transfers to the Christian community a series of honorific titles that in the original applied to Israel. These verses represent a conjunction of two major Old Testament texts: Ex. 19:5-6; Isa. 43:20-21. In applying them to the churches in Asia Minor, the connection between the Church and the community that was formed at Sinai under the old covenant is made explicit. This further reinforces the identification of the Gentile believers as included in the restored Israel with different parameters from the old.

Ex. 19:6 describes a special relation of Israel to Yahweh. It is the original proclamation of God's formation of Israel as the elect and holy nation of God. They had been delivered from Egyptian slavery and led to Mt. Sinai where they were offered a covenantal relationship to Yahweh. Within that relationship they were given a status and a mission, both of which are now transferred to the new Israel. So we find here the themes of holiness—the special status, the special character, and the special purpose—focused on the people of God in Christ. As in the Old Testament, it is the language of election and holiness that marks out God's people. On this basis an appeal is made to Christians that they be distinguished by their behavior: "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:12).

Peter introduces this indicative of identity with the emphatic "But you." In this way he intends to contrast them with those disobedient persons who have stumbled over the "living stone." The singular pronoun, "you," also emphasizes that he is not referring to individuals as such but to the corporate body of believers. He identifies them with a four-fold description: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's own people.

A Chosen Race. When applied to Israel, this designation had both theological and ethnic dimensions. It implied the concept of election

which we explored in an earlier chapter. But the ethnic dimension eventually came to overshadow the theological, or missional aspect. Thus the idea of a chosen race was restricted to the physical descendants of Abraham. This perspective became more and more rigidified until it resulted in some perverted consequences. For example, this narrow ethnic perspective came to be the criterion for protecting the purity of the nation. An extreme instance of the sad consequences of this mentality is found in Ezra 10:2-5 where Ezra in his zeal for the law and purity required Jewish men who had married non-Jewish wives to divorce them. This kind of mentality is graphically described by John Bright, pointing out its positive significance despite its unloveliness: "The law was the snow-covered, frozen ground which protected the seed till the fullness of time. It was an armor plate, rigid indeed; but we may well wonder if an armor less stout would have saved Israel from assimilation in the Gentile world, and her heritage from dissipation like so much water poured on the sand."⁵⁸

It is no wonder that those who were jealous for the purity of the race and the sanctity of the law were upset with Jesus for associating with folk who were not conforming to the rigid rules along the lines of purity and why there was such a struggle over the issue of including Gentiles in the emerging church as is reflected in the book of Acts.

Calling these Gentile Christians a chosen race demonstrates a discontinuity between the Old Israel and the new. Instead of the boundary markers of this "new race" being ethnic characteristics such as circumcision, Sabbath observance and kosher diet, as a result of the work of Christ it became inclusive of all, exclusive of race. This characteristic is why the early church considered itself a third race, neither Jew nor Gentile. Thus all who came to Christ were now recognized as being the children of Abraham.

A Royal Priesthood. Peter has earlier described his readers as "a holy priesthood," and now uses a different adjective, "royal." Since there was no priestly class within the New Israel, this obviously applies to the entire body rather than a special class of individuals. What is the significance of this designation? Since the identity traits of the church through this larger passage are derived from their relation to Christ, the same would be true here. This relation is dependent on the belief that Christ is King. So every believer has a royal function derived from Christ's kingship. Several passages in the Gospels report Jesus himself stating that his followers will exercise a royal or kingly function.

⁵⁸John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1943), 177.

There is a further distinction between the church and the old Israel. Within the latter, the priestly function was the prerogative of only a portion of the people of Israel. In the new Israel, all the people offer sacrifices to God.

A Holy Nation. Here we have another instance of a status based on a relationship. Since inherent holiness belongs only to God with anything else being holy in a derived sense as a result of a relation to God, this is simply another way of speaking about the special relation that God's people enjoy by being his "treasured possession." Kelly's description is on point: "[The church] is holy, not in the sense that either it or its members are in actual fact paragons of virtue, but because it has been set apart for God's service and is inspired and sustained by His Spirit."⁵⁹ It is in this sense that we should understand "holy" as one of the four classic marks of the church.

After describing their identity with these exalted titles, Peter turns to their function, which is to "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This description harks back to the purpose for the choice of Abraham and his descendants as expressed in Isaiah 42:6 and spelled out in 43:21—" . . . the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise." For the Israelites the redemptive deed that made possible their covenant relation to Yahweh was the Exodus. Thus they were both a redeemed and redeeming people. For the new Israel, their redemption is the result of a faith identification with the resurrected Jesus. It was his resurrection that the early Christians recognized to be the fulfillment of the long hope of Israel for God to perform a "new Exodus," that would result in a renewed people.

In the larger context of this passage, Peter is graphically reminding his readers of the darkness of paganism from which they had been delivered. They were now in the light and consequently they were to be the light of the world. This was the calling of the old Israel but instead of letting the light shine on the outside world, they surrounded themselves with mirrors so that the light was reflected on themselves. No doubt this was Jesus' point in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-15, NRSV) He was setting forth a new way of being

⁵⁹Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 99.

Israel, but history demonstrated how that way of being Israel became the task of the church.

A Transformed People. In the final identifying mark, Peter draws upon the experience of Hosea the prophet. Instructed by God to marry a prostitute, the prophet was to learn about the heartbreak of God over the "adultery" of his people. Children were born in the home that, under God's direction, were given symbolic names reflecting both Gomer's unfaithfulness and Israel's. A little girl, the second child, was born and given the name that meant "not pitied" for "I will no more have pity on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all (Hos. 1:6). Finally a third child, a son, was born. He was given a name that meant "not my people," for "you are not my people and I am not your God." (1:8)

After Gomer's departure from the marriage, possibly to become a Temple prostitute, she ended up in the slave market. Hosea was instructed to go and "redeem" her, that is, buy her back. As a result of this redemption the children's names were changed from "unpitied" to "she has obtained pity" and the boy's name from "not my people" to "my people." God's steadfast love would not let his people ultimately go but would ultimately redeem them.

Peter's use of this moving story can have two meaning. It can refer to the conversion of these pagans from the darkness of sin to the light of salvation. Or it can refer to the fact that these Gentiles who were outside the redeemed race have now become members of the Kingdom of God by faith in Jesus the Messiah. This is how Paul uses the same reference in Romans 9:25-26.

PART TWO
IMPERATIVES OF
MORAL CONDUCT

Chapter 6

The Nature of the Holy Life

"Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." 1 Peter 1:13-14

With the "therefore" of verse 14, Peter launches into some ethical implications of the benefits and blessings he has described up to this point. As Kelly says, "In 1:13 to 3:12 he draws out, in various ways, the practical consequences of their regenerate status, stressing in particular that the hope they look forward to with such certainty demands a distinctive pattern of behavior."⁶⁰

Our author's admonitions begin with an appeal to "prepare your minds for action." (NRSV) This is an interpretation; a more literal translation is "gird up the loins of your mind." (KJV; RSV) Some interpreters believe this imagery is taken from the athletic practices of the day. Men usually wore long flowing robes that would decidedly hamper their physical activity, such as running a race. Thus, in such events, they would bind their garment around their waist so as to move unhindered.

However, the extensive imagery from the Exodus employed by Peter strongly suggests that he is thinking about the instructions given to the Hebrews as they prepared to flee the land of slavery. On the night of the Passover, they were to eat the meal *with their loins girt*, their sandals on their feet and the staff in their hand. (Exodus 12:11)

If we carry through the exodus imagery we can see a number of echoes of that event in this passage. First they were to abandon the old life of pagan corruption. Repeatedly Peter reminds them of the futility of pagan immorality because it is a dead end street.

Not only was the land of Egypt to be left behind but they were also instructed to abandon their former habits of life: "Say to the people of Israel, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt" (Leviticus 18:2-3).

But there is a significant difference between physical separation and having the appetites or desires transformed. We see this demonstrated among the Hebrews after they had crossed the Red Sea and were journeying through the desert. During periods of hardship particularly, when food was scarce, they longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt (Exodus

⁶⁰Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 65.

16:1-3). Strangely, this longing came on the heels of the mighty act of deliverance reflecting how quickly unsatisfied desire can change one's perspective.

It is possible, even likely, that this is what Peter has in mind when he exhorts his audience to not "be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance." His emphasis on girding up the loins of the "mind" doubtless echoes the same concern. According to Peter Davids, it emphasizes strong mental activity in terms of "mental resolve or preparation." It carries the same emphasis as Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world (age) but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. . ."

Anyone who has been converted from a life of debauchery will recognize that simply ceasing the practices of the old life, while not necessarily easy, is only the beginning of the process of becoming Christian in every aspect of one's life. Only rarely is it the case that one's desire for those things that gave pleasure in the old life is immediately transformed. Rather the transformation of desire and appetites sometimes takes a long process and in many cases one may have to struggle with these acquired desires to the end of life.

This is not suggesting that in the process of time, by commitment, the exercise of discipline and the grace of God, they cannot be meliorated and even completely transcended. But Robert Robinson expressed the experience of many when he wrote "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for the courts above." (3rd stanza of "Come Thou Fount") In the first half of the 20th century (1931), as a result of the overly optimistic preaching of the holiness revivals that appeared to teach that all desire for anything contrary to the will of God was eradicated in an experience of "entire sanctification" that stanza was re-written to "O to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be. Let that grace now like a fetter, bind my yielded heart to thee. Let me know Thee in thy fullness; guide me by thy mighty hand, 'til transformed in thine own image in thy presence I shall stand." Taken in context, there is truth in both versions.

Paul has an almost identical passage, more fully spelled out, in Colossians 3:5-11. Laying behind both Peter and Paul's admonition is the central New Testament pattern both of history and the personal life. As we have noted earlier, present history is seen as an overlap of two "ages." There is the "present age" that continues to the eschaton but the "age to come" has broken into history with the advent of Jesus.

Conversion is seen as being transferred from the present age to the age to come. In this idiom the Christian is still a resident of the "present age" but his commitment, values and priorities are to be shaped by the "age to come." These two ages struggle with each other both in history and the individual life. This is the import of Paul's admission in Ephesians 6:12 where he says, "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic power of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (NRSV)

For both Peter and Paul, the grace of God that has become a present reality in the Holy Spirit can keep one secure in the midst of that conflict and offer hope that the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" will signal the final end of the "present age" and the full reality of the "age to come." Thus the Christian is living in a "time between the times."

This truth implies that we are no longer what we once were but we are not what we will be. The grace of God that appeared with Jesus, longed for and searched out by the Old Testament prophets, makes possible the transformation from darkness to light (an idiom for the two ages) but also offers hope for the future.

Actually the analogy of "girding up the loins" suggests not only leaving behind but also that one is going somewhere, not in aimless wandering but to a destination that the New Testament describes as a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. The "present age" with all its evil will have come to an end and God will have ultimately put all things right. The surety of this hope is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead resulting in his elevation to the right hand of God where he reigns until all things are put under his feet.

Chapter 7

Human Holiness as Response to God's Holiness

"... but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16)

A central expression of Peter's indicative/imperative pattern is in a briefly stated form based on a fundamental Old Testament text found three times in the book of Leviticus (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26). His appeal to this principle is another clear example of the way he appropriates Old Testament theology to inform his Christologically shaped perspective. To understand the rationale for this imperative we must first explore the meaning of the holiness of God since this characteristic is the indicative from which the imperative is derived. God's holiness refers to his innermost essence, his quintessential being, his deity in contrast to all things creaturely. This means that God is "wholly Other." In this sense holiness communicates God's transcendence. Yet God as holy is neither remote nor unknowable.

One of the most important implications of this understanding is that holiness is not primarily a moral attribute, as if it meant merely the perfect goodness of some super being with a white beard. Rather it refers to that absolute "otherness" that distinguishes the divine from all that is creaturely, and so characterizes every aspect of God. Every attribute of God must be prefaced by this qualification. For instance, this is why we must refer to God as "holy love." It further implies that God alone is holy inherently or within himself. Persons, places or things can be designated as holy only in relation to the inherently Holy One.

The designation of the people of God as holy is an implication of election, the theme identified in the opening of the letter and that informs much of its contents. As we saw earlier, election entails a special relationship that constitutes the people as holy because of their relation to the holy God. Thus "election" equals "holy" in this context. *This* holiness is a "status." It is crucially significant to recognize the importance of this qualification. There is a difference between a status and a function. For instance, as a result of a wedding a man becomes a husband and a woman becomes a wife. These terms describe a status. But there is a significant difference between the status and functioning as a husband (or wife), which entails a certain type of behavior.

It is impossible to understand Peter's call to holy living, which is based on the theology of the Old Testament call, without grasping the significance of the distinction between status and function. The status of holiness is the result of entering into a relation with God. It is this relation that constitutes the believers as derivatively holy, since anything other than God is holy only by relation to Him. Function refers to living out this status in a consistent lifestyle. We need to explore this Old Testament theology that informs the New Testament understanding.

Holiness and Purity

The order of events in the Old Testament account reflects the proper understanding of holiness and its prerequisites. This order alerts us to the fact that a relation to the holy God that results in the derived holiness of a person, or place or thing must be preceded by purification as the elimination of anything that is defiling or profane.

The first explicit biblical reference to the holiness of God appears in Exodus with Moses' experience at the burning bush. This encounter initiates the narrative that consummates with the establishing of the covenant at Sinai. From this event, we begin to learn essential characteristics about the holiness of God. In Moses encounter, the *place* is designated as holy. It is not holy in itself but becomes so as a result of its relation to God. It was not holy before this encounter, but apparently remained a holy place to which Moses later led Israel for the covenant establishing ceremonies.

Because the ground is holy by virtue of the presence of Yahweh, Moses is instructed to remove his sandals before approaching the theophany. Sandals that have trod secular (profane) soil must be removed symbolizing *purity as the qualification for coming into the presence of the holy, not to be equated with it*. The same order occurs when the freed slaves return to Sinai prior to Yahweh's appearance on the mountain. The people are instructed to prepare themselves by both rituals of purification (washing) and avoiding contamination by sexual contact (19:14-15; cf. 1 Samuel 21:4-6). When the relation to God is formalized by the Tabernacle and instructions are given for approaching the structure as the dwelling place of God, careful provision is made for the prerequisite of purity. Everything and every priest must be ritually cleansed or else dire consequences will occur.

This necessity makes it important to explore the concept of purity. The concept has been the subject of intense scholarly study in recent years.⁶¹ The results provide us with a clear picture of our subject.

Instructions regarding the map of purity are found in Leviticus 10:10 where the Lord says to Aaron: "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean" (NRSV). The two pairs to be distinguished are antitheses, i.e. the holy is the antithesis of the common and the unclean is the antithesis of the clean, which implies purity. Gordon J. Wenham's explanation makes their relation quite clear: "Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy when they are sanctified. However, unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean."⁶² The fundamental principle here is that only that which is clean or pure can be sanctified or made holy.

This principle makes it clear that holiness and purity are not synonyms but that purity is the prerequisite to sanctification, which is the act of consecrating or setting apart something or someone that has been cleansed for a relation to the holy God whereby it/they become holy. There are two kinds of impurity, both of which must be cleansed in order to enter into or maintain the divine-human relation. "Moral impurity" is the result of intentional violations of the law. "Ritual impurity" is the consequence of unintentional failure to conform to the law's requirements. These types correspond to the distinction between "high-handed" or willful sin and unintended sin, what John Wesley referred to as "sin properly so-called," and "sin improperly so-called." The purification or sin offering of the Hebrew cult is the remedy for unwitting or unintentional sin that must be cleansed to maintain the covenant relation.

Paul makes the relation between purity and [initial] sanctification clear in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy,

⁶¹See Andrew Brower Latz and Arseny Ermakov, eds., *Purity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

⁶²Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), 29.

nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." To be washed is to be cleansed from "moral impurity" resulting from the activities listed and sanctified, or brought into the realm of a holy God. The same pattern of purity by way of the forgiveness of sin is found in Titus 2:11-14: "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in the [present age], awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to *purity for himself* a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." (emphasis added)

This finally brings us to 1 Peter. It is this theology that informs Peter's identification of the "resident aliens" as "elect." We can see it first in the ritual of baptism that, as we have noted, appears to inform the entire letter of 1 Peter. Note 3:18-22 that speaks explicitly about baptism and implies purification or cleansing as the consequence of the work of Christ. Purification is also explicitly referred to in 1:22. "Obedience to the truth," which results in purification, refers to responding in faith to the gospel but we will have to explore this in another section. He is thus referring to the result of becoming a Christian believer, what we might call, "the first work of grace. The theological order for establishing the Sinai covenant demonstrates this theological order. It is the same in New Testament theology.

Purity resulting from Forgiveness of Sins

Biblically, "purity" understood in the cultic sense as transformed via the Christ event, is more appropriately used of the forgiveness of sins, the "washing of regeneration," "cleansing from all unrighteousness" (as a possible Hebraic parallelism to "forgive us our sins" in 1 John 1:9). At least in one passage, John Wesley affirms this understanding in his sermon on "Sin in Believers:"

We allow that the state of a justified person is inexpressibly great and glorious. . . . He is washed, he is sanctified. His heart is purified by faith; he is cleansed 'from the corruption that is in the world,' the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him.' And so long as he 'walketh in love,' he worships

God in Spirit and in truth. He keepeth the commandments of God, and doeth those things that are pleasing in his sight; so exercising himself as to 'have a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men:' And he has power both over outward and inward sin, even from the moment he is justified.⁶³

In this sense of being cleansed and entering into a right relation to the holy God, one may be referred to as "sanctified" and enjoy a *status* of holiness. This enables us to make sense of 1 Corinthians 1:2 where Paul identifies the Corinthians as "sanctified" even though they were functioning in a less than ideal way ethically. This status is the basis for one to "consecrate" herself or himself to God completely as in Romans 12:1-2 to a holy lifestyle not conformed to "this present age." The indicative of the status as holy is the basis for the imperative to "become what you are," holy in life as well as holy in status. That is the real significance of Peter's quote from Leviticus to "be holy in all your manner of life," what we should be referring to when we talk about sanctification as implying a holy lifestyle.

Exegetical Errors of 19th Century Holiness Theology

Now let me say a few words about the tradition perpetuated by the American Holiness movement that emerged out of the holiness revivals of the post-Civil war 19th century. It was self-consciously a continuation of the 18th century revival under John and Charles Wesley. However certain critical changes in the doctrine of holiness occurred in the American context. The whole focus and emphasis of Wesley's doctrine shifted from the positive emphasis on holiness understood as the renewal of the image of God expressed as love to a negative emphasis on sanctification understood as cleansing. This concept, along with its concomitant terms (especially purity), came to be used almost exclusively of entire sanctification in a group of writings traditionally referred to as the "holiness classics." H. Orton Wiley, whose *Christian Theology* was probably the most comprehensive and influential expression of this theological tradition, treated the doctrine and experience of "entire sanctification" exclusively in terms of cleansing. This shift dramatically changed the atmosphere of the Wesleyan teaching and it was made worse as the result of two exegetical errors

⁶³John Wesley, *Works*, 5:146-7.

made in the interpretation and application of the concept of cleansing. Our analysis has exposed the first of these errors, namely the applying the concept of cleansing to entire sanctification rather than to conversion as is the case in scripture. The second was interpreting cleansing in a substantive sense rather than in a biblical sense, namely, as the removal of a foreign element, commonly called "carnality," from the soul. The result turned out to be detrimental since it led to the near claim of sinless perfection, which Wesley himself explicitly rejected. The result has been a general silence in the pulpit and there is an implicit recognition that the holiness movement is presently in an identity crisis regarding its so-called "distinguishing emphasis."

From about the middle of the 20th century there has been an ongoing attempt by the theologians of the church to modify the understanding of sanctification to avoid the implications of the "extravagant claims" for "entire sanctification" that marked the 19th century holiness message.

Ethical Implications of God's Holiness

But to return to First Peter! His call for a holy lifestyle based on the holiness of God has significant implications for the contours of that lifestyle. Since the holiness of God means that he has no peers, he alone is God, he has the right to claim exclusive love and loyalty. This is the basis for the commandment to "have no other gods before (or beside) me." It also is the possibility of the Israelite central text, the Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Whole-hearted love cannot be shared with another "deity." All the prohibitions spelled out in the "holiness code" in Leviticus 19 and following reflect this restriction. Everything and anything that compromises total loyalty and obedience to the holy God is out of bounds for the follower of the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 8

Holy Living between the Times

"The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; . . . Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:10; 1:13)

We have noted that Peter uses the concept of *deliverance*, derived from the Exodus imagery and doubtless implied in 1:10, for the present benefits of the redemptive work of Christ. He then uses the term, *salvation* to refer to the final consummation of the believer's life of faith. This is implied in 1:13. Thus the Christian is to live out life in the interim between the initial deliverance from sin and the final realization of full restoration in the life to come.

There is a significant pattern running throughout both First and Second Peter that addresses the nature of this interim life. This pattern has profound implications for one's understanding of living the holy life in the time between the times. It revolves around a series of five terms that interplay throughout both First and Second Peter, some of which are rather difficult to interpret, partly because they are used in multiple ways, like many of our English words. For example, the word "strike" has multiple meanings, depending on the linguistic context in which it is used. "Strike" in baseball, in bowling or in labor relations has a significantly different connotation. But these terms used by Peter are crucial for understanding the nature of the Christian life as it is lived out in the interim between the first coming of Christ and the second coming. It is in relation to two of these terms that holiness theologians and biblical scholars had the most difficulty with the "translations" of the earlier NIV, as we shall notice. These five terms are: *desire (epithumia)*, *flesh (sarx)*, *self-control (egkrateia)*, *sober (nephentes)*, and *knowledge (gnosis)*.

Desire. While the term "desire" can be used in a positive sense, as for example in Luke 22:15, Philippians 1:23, and in First Corinthians 12:31 where "Paul says desire earnestly the best gifts," in the Petrine letters the term indicates what may be called the unsanctified longings of fallen humanity. In First Peter 1:14, he describes the pre-conversion way of life of his readers as being conformed to their former *desires*. It is also used in 1 Peter 2:11; 4:2; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:18; 3:3. The NIV adds the word "evil" to the word "desires" but that is not in the original and leaves the impression that desires are evil whereas "desire" in itself is not evil, or

sinful, but as a result of the fallenness of human persons the tendency of desire is toward self-gratification or self-centeredness. They, like human persons themselves, are essentially good but existentially estranged. This distorted aspect of desire is identified by the term *flesh (sarx)*.

Sarx (flesh). *Sarx* has a variety of meanings, meanings that must carefully be distinguished. It is used both as an adjective and a noun but when used in a negative sense, it is normally an adjective describing attitudes, behaviors, and disposition. In the Petrine letters, *desires* carries this denotation. It does not refer to something that can be removed from human nature. This is why "carnality" (a noun), which is one form of *sarx*, is not a biblical word. Used in this way, as some popular preaching and teaching does, it would refer to an entity that has an independent existence separable from the human person.

In his 2008 commentary on Romans W. M. Greathouse explains why the earlier NIV translation of *sarx* created problems for the holiness interpreter. He points out that prior to its appearance in 1973, all standard versions of the English Bible translated the Greek *sarx* literally as "the flesh." This version rendered the word as "our sinful nature." A committee of Wesleyan scholars protested that this rendering is not a translation but a commentary on the text. The 1978 version made a small concession by eliminating the word "my" or "our" but retained the term "the sinful nature". Dr. Greathouse says, "sin indeed resides in the flesh but the flesh is not inherently sinful. It is weak, calling for the resident indwelling power of the Spirit to liberate humans from sin's power. Neutrally, *sarx* is my total human nature 'before' or 'apart from' Christ's grace and the liberating power of the spirit." He quotes John Wesley's comment on Romans 7:18: "the flesh here signifies the whole man as he is by nature," i.e. in contrast to grace.

Greathouse concludes: "the NIV's rendering of Romans eight makes it virtually impossible to use it as the basis for a faithful interpretation of the original Greek of this important chapter." He proposes instead using the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, or the New Revised Standard Version, all of which are in the classical King James tradition.

Thankfully, subsequent to the publication of Dr. Greathouse's commentary the most recent version of the New International Version (2011) discontinues this most unhappy translation. However, unfortunately, the translators continue their unsatisfactory interpretation by qualifying the concept of desire so as to make it appear to be inherently evil and in a footnote to 2 Peter 2:10 state that the Greek word

for flesh (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit. This reflects substantival thinking whereas scripture is always relational.

In 1 Peter 2:11; and 2 Peter 2:18, “flesh” and “desire” are connected. The question here is whether “fleshly” is being used in the general sense of that which belongs to fallen human nature, that is, all that partakes of the self-centeredness of human beings, or whether it refers specifically to the sins of the body, especially sexual sins. It is likely that the former is closer to the truth than the latter, for nothing in the context indicates sexual sins in particular.

Both Jewish and Christian scholars recognize that desire in itself is good and necessary: there was no wish for the absence of desire as was the case with the Stoics, whose ideal was apathy or the absence of desire. On the Beatitude, “blessed are the meek,” Wesley distinguishes meekness from the absence of desire, saying “Apathy is as far from meekness as from humanity.” The problem Jews and Christians struggled with was that desires, good in themselves, were out of control.

Self-control. Peter does not assume that these people are sinful, nor does he feel a need to describe the tension they may be experiencing. He rather exhorts the readers to live out what they know they should, that is, not to yield to unbridled desires—in a word, *self-control*. Wesley makes the same point: Christian meekness “does not destroy but balance[s] the affections, which the God of nature never designed should be rooted out by grace, but only brought and kept under due regulations.”⁶⁴ And further, “They who are truly meek, . . . do not desire to extinguish any of the passions which God has for wise ends implanted in their nature; but they have the mastery of all: They hold them all in subjection, and employ them only in subservience to those ends.”

The point is not the elimination of desire but *self-control*. The same thing is indicated by the use of the term *sober*. This is an appropriate imagery since the absence of sobriety, namely drunkenness, is obviously a condition of being out of control of one’s faculties. In three different places (1:13; 4:7; 5:8) Peter uses the term *sober*, which the earlier version of the NIV correctly interpreted as self-control. Second Peter 1:3–6 highlights the significance of this relation. After having referred to his readers as “having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (another case of the NIV’s translation) Peter says for this very reason make every effort to add to your faith, goodness: and to

goodness, knowledge: and to knowledge self-control: and to self-control, perseverance.

Since the tendency of desire is toward self-gratification, or self-centeredness it is necessary that self-control be exercised over desire. It is interesting that Peter makes minimal reference to the Holy Spirit, but we can legitimately assume that he is not suggesting self-control on the basis of merely human resources but rather that it is enabled by the Spirit. To understand the significance of the role of knowledge we need to make a further analysis of desire.

Not only is desire, in itself, morally neutral but as pointed out by Peter David’s in his commentary,

desire in the biblical view is also totally undifferentiating, for it makes no difference to desire whether the desired property belongs to you or to a neighbor or the man or woman is bound to you by covenant love or not. Desire is attracted to anything that satisfies the drive. It is indeed these proximate desires (tempered by the wish to avoid undesirable consequences of certain behavior) that controls most people, and to conform to these desires is to slip right back into the life-style that the Christian should have abandoned at conversion.”

The philosopher Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, has a particularly enlightening analysis of what he calls the “appetitive soul.” He is referring to the same aspect of human psychology as the word “desire,” which is used here. He suggests that there are two aspects of appetite or desire: one is rational and the other irrational. The irrational aspect of desire is blind, in that he does not distinguish between objects of desire in terms of whether it is legitimate or illegitimate to satisfy one’s desire with the objects to which one is attracted. If I am hungry and see an apple, and recognize that it could satisfy my desire, and am drawn to pick it up and eat it, my hunger (appetite, desire) does not distinguish between whether it is mine or someone else’s. But, as Aristotle points out, reason can make that distinction, and pass that information on to the rational aspect of appetite which has the capacity to restrain the irrational facet of appetite from satisfying itself illegitimately. It is this rational capacity that distinguishes human persons from the brute creation.

The question then becomes what is the basis on which to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate satisfactions of desire. It is here that Peter’s emphasis upon *knowledge* becomes critical. Peter stresses the

⁶⁴Works, 5:263.

formative nature of the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faced with a decision concerning the satisfaction of desire the question should be asked, is this consistent with the nature and character of Christ. Is this what Jesus would have me to do?

John Wesley makes an important contribution to this point in his translation of First and Second Peter. He renders the term in question as temperance rather than self-control, but he is obviously using it in the same sense. So substituting self-control for temperance, his words are insightful:

Christian [self-control] implies the voluntary abstaining from all pleasure which does not lead to God. It extends to all things inward and outward: the due government of every thought, as well as affection. It is using the world, so to use all outward, and so to restrain all inward things, that they may become a means to what is spiritual; a scaling-ladder to ascend to what is above. Lack of [self-control] is to abuse the world. He that uses anything below, looking no higher, and getting no further, manifests lack of [self-control]. He that uses the creature only so as to attain to more of the Creator, is alone [self-controlled], and walks as Christ Himself walked.

In the light of this we have a key to understanding temptation. The source of temptation is clearly marked out in James 1:14-15—"But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death." (NRSV) Desire is the subjective source of temptation. When an objective behavior appeals to a desire, there is an attraction to that behavior to satisfy the desire. Where there is no desire, there is no temptation. This is the point at which self-control becomes significant. In the context of a knowledge of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the satisfaction of desire, one has the God-given capacity to either yield or resist the satisfaction of desire. Grace enables but does not override the pull (or push) of the desire.

Many of the existential problems of the early American holiness movement stemmed from a failure to recognize this biblical truth. In particular, popular preaching often taught, or else implied, that the experience of entire sanctification eliminates desire for whatever is seen to be illegitimate. The result, it was often explained, meant that temptation becomes outward rather than inward since the "carnal nature" that had been eradicated was the point of contact for temptation. In a

word, there is no inward response because of this conception of what transforming grace effected. Of course, simple logic to say nothing of experience, will lead one to see that this is a ridiculous claim.

This insight has real significance for counseling adolescents and failure to understand this probably accounts for the early phenomenon of teens repeatedly going to the altar because the previous experience didn't work the way they were led to believe it would. A realistic understanding of the nature of grace and the biblical perspective on the nature of the holy life in our experience of our time between the times will result in a spiritually and mentally healthy view of the Christian life.

Chapter 9

Holy Living as the Imitation of Christ

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21)

It has become fashionable for folk who identify themselves as holiness people to describe holiness as Christlikeness. This way of describing the sanctified life avoids the onus of claiming to be “perfect,” or “without sin” since the criterion of Christlikeness implies a lifelong pursuit of the ideal. Claims of perfection, accompanied by many disclaimers, characterized the earlier American holiness movement. This changed terminology, however, does not mean that they have succumbed to antinomianism. It rather reflects a realistic recognition of the depth of fallenness that impacts the human race. It also avoids the potential charge of hypocrisy since, as John Wesley taught, we all fall short at times of the perfect law of love and need the priestly work of Christ to atone for those shortfalls.

While there are other scriptural supports for referencing the holy life in terms of the character of Christ (e.g. 2 Cor. 3:18), Peter makes perhaps the most straightforward exhortation to walk “in his steps.” In doing so he draws on what most scholars believe is a traditional hymn informed by the servant song found in Isaiah 52:13—53:12. Of the numerous Christological hymns found in the New Testament, this one and Philippians 2:6-11 are the most moving. This benchmark is the lens through which he interprets the holy life in its relation to the surrounding culture.

It is instructive to note that no explicit references to the life of Jesus are used in the New Testament as a pattern for Christian living. As George Eldon Ladd says of Paul’s ethics, “It is true that Paul does not hold up the *earthly* life of Jesus as a standard of moral excellence. Christ is, however, to be imitated in his self-effacing love and in the giving of himself in suffering and death.”⁶⁵ A classic example of this is in Philippians 2:5-8 where his obedience to death exemplifies the “mind” that should characterize his disciples. Peter does the same.

⁶⁵George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1993), 560.

There are three passages in Mark’s gospel--which is traditionally attributed to Peter’s influence--that are considered atonement passages. All of them reference his suffering and death and each is linked to a call to discipleship. The implication is that the nature of discipleship is *cruciform* in its shape. Following the revelation of the nature of his mission to his disciples—and Peter—he said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” In Mark 9:31 he reiterates his destination as being death and resurrection. Shortly thereafter his disciples begin arguing about who was the greatest, to which the Master replies, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” and illustrates the principle by identifying those who are to be served, represented by children. (9:36-37). And in 10:32-44, out of another debate about prominence by the disciples, Jesus tells them that they will share the same fate as himself. Edmund Clowney highlights the significance of this fact:

Peter does not hold forth the meekness of Christ simply as an abstract pattern, a pattern that might have been offered by any uncomplaining sufferer. Christ’s suffering is our model because it is our salvation. It does not simply guide us; it is the root of all our motivation to follow. Our “living to righteousness” follows in Christ’s steps because we died to sin in his atonement (2:24). Remove Christ’s atonement from the passage and its point would be lost.⁶⁶

Peter’s exhortation is in vivid contrast to his own response prior to his Master’s resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. When Jesus first announced that his messianic mission would entail suffering and death, Peter vehemently resisted that path for him. When faced with being identified with Jesus in the midst of his arrest and trial he cursed and swore to avoid sharing his suffering. On the other side of the coin, he no doubt was deeply impressed as to the importance and nature of Christlike character in the upper room as Jesus, assuming the role of the lowest servant, washed Peter’s feet. But he still protested.

The central point Peter is emphasizing is Jesus’ silence before the authorities: before Caiphas (Mk. 14:61), before Pilate (Mk. 15:5), and

⁶⁶Clowney, *The Message of Peter*, 118.

before Herod (Lk. 23:9). David Hill comments on this remarkable response.

Silence in circumstances like these would have been especially surprising in the ancient world where the accused had to prove his innocence by the vehemence of his protestations and win pity from the judge by his pleading. We must therefore interpret Jesus' silence as a sign of the utter confidence with which he entrusts himself to God rather than to human authorities.⁶⁷

Since the suffering the Christians to whom he is writing are experiencing is the result of living under an authority, whether governmental or domestic, the attitude the Christ pattern he enjoins is a spirit of submission. Floyd Filson argues that "The dominant note of the ethics of First Peter is submission to authority, even to those who exercise their authority in a harsh and unfair way."⁶⁸

What Peter is doing here is spelling out the implication of the imperative stated in 2:13—"for the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution." Or, "every institution ordained for human beings" (NRSV footnote). A proper understanding of what this means is crucial for properly interpreting the ethical instructions we will be exploring in the next two chapters.

Considerable light is shed on this injunction by a proper grasp of the Greek word (*ktisei*) translated as "institution." In secular Greek, *ktisis* means "institution" or "structure." But for an author so attuned to biblical imagery, it is hard to imagine that the root meaning of *ktisis* as *creation* is without significance. Donald Senior highlights the implication of the term in this context: "Christians, then, are exhorted to become involved in society because this is the Lord's work, the creative process that is edging the world towards its glory."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Hill, "To Offer Spiritual Sacrifices," 55.

⁶⁸Filson, "Partakers With Christ," 407.

⁶⁹Donald Senior, "The Conduct of Christians in the World," *Review and Expositor*, August (1982) 79, 430. Kelly recognizes that the term signifies "creation" or concretely "creature" and concludes that the writer is laying it down that the principle of the redeemed Christian life must not be self-assertion or mutual exploitation, but the voluntary subordination of oneself to others." *Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 108-9.

This interpretation implies that certain social structures, like the state and the home or family, are divinely ordained to maintain order, peace and justice when functioning as intended. The significance of this truth may be seen in the Old Testament book of Judges, which depicts the darkest days of Israel's history, days marked by total chaos. The key to the situation is voiced several times in the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." In other words, God wills that there be structures of order in his world. Without this there would be chaos, the weak and the poor would suffer, the bullies and malevolent would win.

Furthermore the Greek word translated "subject to" appears on the surface to imply a demeaning conformity that would more than likely entail a compromise of Christian ethical values. But it has a different connotation. According to Leonard Goppelt, the meaning is clarified if one asks what the alternative is that the author is rejecting. Does he intend to say "submit" as opposed to "rebel?" There is no evidence in the letter (or in the rest of the New Testament for that matter) that Christians were contemplating rebellion against Rome, or slaves against their masters, or wives against their husbands. The more probable alternative was *withdrawal*. Rather than risk the integrity of their faith, Christians may have been tempted to be uninvolved with politics or family life or domestic duties. They would ride out the time remaining for the world by a safe withdrawal from or non-involvement in lures of the pagan world.⁷⁰

In this light the idea of "submission" might better be translated as "be committed to," even though in this context a Christian must walk a tightrope between inner integrity and active involvement in a non-Christian world.

So Peter is not urging them to submit in a spirit of resignation or cowering. His intention is more appropriately to maintain a Christlike attitude and behavior so as to disarm their critics and silence gossip. It is in this context he advises them to be prepared to give an account of the hope that is in them (3:15). Modern persons, misled by contemporary analogies, might think this verse simply calls for rational defense of the doctrinal tenets of the Christian faith. But apologetics in this early period also involved a defense of one's lifestyle. (see Acts. 26:4-7) Academic

⁷⁰Referenced in Senior, "The Conduct of Christians," 430.

arguments are of little value in the face of skepticism, a transformed life speaks with greater meaning. David Hill's summary is on point:

It is an example of patient confidence that Jesus has given, not of passive resignation; for at the moment when he was silent he was committing himself completely to God. How better could one characterize the intensity of the hope and the genuineness of the love which transformed the most unjust of deaths into an offering that redeems? Faced by cruel masters, slaves are encouraged to plant their feet in the imprint of Christ's and to live their lives entirely by that hope which transfigures the present world and its structures.⁷¹

Even though the social structures of the culture in which we live are quite different from that of the first century, the readiness to suffer evil rather than to retaliate is still the criterion for Christian ethics. Three aspects of "submission" exemplified by Jesus in his arrest, trial and death are involved in following "in his steps." First is to endure unjust treatment. Jesus was subjected to abuse in spite of his innocence. Second, Jesus did not retaliate. This is the key to all Peter's exhortations. Third, Jesus suffering was redemptive. While not redemptive in the same sense, yet it may be redemptive since pagan master and husbands "may be won over without a word by their slaves/wives conduct" (3:1)

St. Augustine's comment about his mother, Monica, is an apt illustration of Peter's advice. "she served her husband as her master and did all she could to win him for You, speaking to him of You by her conduct, by which You made her beautiful. . . . Finally when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for You." The exact opposite is depicted in Proverbs 19:13—"the nagging of a wife is an endless dripping" (Moffatt).

We now turn to the three relationships addressed by the letter.

Chapter 10

Holy Living in a Pagan State

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil. . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." (1 Peter 2:13-17)

Our analysis thus far has made clear that one of the major purposes of 1 Peter is to affirm Christian identity and to live out this identity in a non-Christian world. We have also seen that the recipients of this circular letter are clearly experiencing suffering because of their Christian lifestyle. Few recent interpreters believe that the references to suffering that dot the letter reflect a situation of formal persecution by the Romans state. They rather seem to speak more of ridicule and misunderstanding than actual legal proceedings. The main source of alienation between the Christians and the majority culture seems to have been a difference of values (cf. 4:4). At several points, the letter references the gap between the values of the Christian community and its surrounding world (1:18). Thus allegiance to Christ and to the Christian way of life had earned ridicule and alienation from the surrounding non-Christian culture apparently resulting in a strong temptation to at least moderate the difference if not abandon the Christian lifestyle altogether. Notice the correlation between the situation and the contemporary concept of "political correctness." There is considerable pressure from the general ethos to avoid doing or saying anything that is not politically correct even if it is a central expression of the Christian faith.

The author emphasizes the source of this situation as the result of the followers of Christ being "resident aliens." They are citizens of "heaven" living as "exiles" in a foreign country. This raises the issue of how these "exiles" are to relate to the various relationships in which they are living as resident aliens. What is remarkable about this letter is its refusal to allow this alienation to become a totally world-denying or world-fleeing viewpoint. It calls them to abandon their sin but not their social and political responsibility, as we saw in the previous chapter.

⁷¹Hill, "Spiritual Sacrifices," 55.

Unlike the Qumran community, who created their ghetto; or the aristocratic leaders of Israel and temple authorities who compromised with Rome for their own gain, Peter recommends the same approach as Jeremiah in giving advice to the Israelite exiles who had been relocated from the homeland to the foreign lands of Babylon.

In 597 B.C. the political leaders and the most influential citizens of Jerusalem (including the prophet Ezekiel) had been removed from the country in order to minimize the reactionary behavior of the Judeans. The faulty theology of the people led them to believe that this was a temporary state of affairs and the exiles would soon return home. In order to address this unfounded hope, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon, which is recorded in Jeremiah 29. He advised them to “unpack their suitcases” and prepare for a long exile since God had decreed their situation due to the sin of the nation and was not going to short circuit their displaced situation. Their captors were hated partially because they made fun of their religion (cf. Psalm 137) so there was no need to feel kindly toward them. Nonetheless, Jeremiah advised them to engage the community life in which they found themselves and respond redemptively by being good participants in the life of the people: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (29:7). This is substantially the same admonition given by Peter.

The premise that informs Peter’s instruction to be “submissive” to those in authority is that the Creator wishes order in his world and to that end, he wills a governing power that will provide for that order. It is clear that Peter intends the Christian to respect the governing powers but not to compromise Christian moral standards. It is in this light that he advises them to be good moral examples (2:12). Not only will this stance possibly minimize opposition but it also has a missionary intent. The “day of visitation” could mean either the day of final judgment or the day when God “visits” each person who turns to him in faith. In the light of the larger context of the letter the latter meaning is sounder. If the former meaning is intended, it would be extremely odd to think that one would give glory to God at the moment of their final judgment.

If we adapt what N.T. Wright said about Paul’s perspective we can see precisely what Peter is also saying:

We should note carefully what is being said, and what is not being said. What is here ruled out is an attitude which would flout magistrates and police; which would speak and act as though it were above or outside all law and social restraint. What is enjoined is not a meek submission to whatever an authority wishes, but a recognition that, by being Christian, one has not thereby ceased to be human, and that, being human, one remains bound in ties of obligation to one’s fellow-humans, and beyond that to the God who, as creator, has called his human creatures to live in harmony with each other - and such obligations are, to a lesser or greater extent, enshrined in the laws which governments make from time to time. P[eter]’s point is not the maximalist one that whatever governments do must be right and that whatever they enact must be obeyed, but the solid if minimalist one that God wants human society to be ordered; that being Christian does not release one from the complex obligations of this order; and that one must therefore submit, at least in general, to those entrusted with enforcing this order.⁷²

The possibility of formal persecution seems to be suggested, however, in the latter part of the letter (cf. 4:12ff). Some scholars suggest that this section comes from a later period of time when Rome began legal persecution of Christianity. However that may be, the basis of the possibility for official opposition to the Christian faith is found in 1:22—“Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth . . .” Peter does not use the term “gospel,” but “truth” here is a synonym for it. This verse is virtually identical to Paul’s word in Romans 1:5 where speaks of the obedience of faith. N.T. Wright spells out the implication of this understanding:

When Paul thinks of Jesus as Lord, he thinks of himself as a slave and of the world being called to obedience to Jesus’ lordship. His apostolic commission is not to offer people a new religious option, but to summon them to allegiance to Jesus, which will mean abandoning other loyalties. The gospel issues a

⁷²N.T. Wright, “The New Testament and the State,” *Themelios* 16.1 (1990): 11-17.

command, an imperial summons; the appropriate response is obedience.⁷³

When Paul (or Peter) refers to 'the gospel' he is not referring to a system of salvation, though of course the gospel implies and contains this, nor even to the good news that there now is a way of salvation open to all, but rather to the proclamation that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from the dead and thereby demonstrated to be both Israel's Messiah and the world's true Lord. 'The gospel' is not 'you can be saved, and here's how;' the gospel, for Paul and Peter, is 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.

Although the Christian has confessed that Jesus is Lord resulting in freedom from the civil law (3:16), this freedom should not be used as an excuse for doing wrong. Neither is the believer free from authority. Rather there is a hierarchy of authorities expressed in 3:17. Everyone is to be honored but members of the community are related in agapeic love. God is to be feared and the emperor is to be "honored. The Christian owes "fear" only to God that is, an attitude of respect and religious awe. The emperor is on the level of everyone else. Confessing Jesus as Lord relativizes every other allegiance.

This clearly has the potential to bring the Christian faith into conflict with the Roman state, particularly when the emperor proclaimed himself as divine and required all to confess that "Caesar is lord." This situation did in fact come to pass. As a result early Christianity suffered sporadic persecution until 313 A.D. when Constantine made it the official religion of the Roman Empire, which could be viewed either as a triumph or a curse.

⁷³N.T. Wright, "Romans," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.), 420.

Holy Living in a Divided Family

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. . . Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives. . ." (1 Peter 2:18; 3:1)

This section of Peter's ethical instruction is perhaps the most difficult section of the letter to appropriate in the contemporary situation in the Western world. It *appears* to authenticate an institution (slavery) and a culture (patriarchal) that most modern Christians would reject as, at least, sub-Christian. In this circumstance, the interpretive method we advocated in the introduction becomes crucial. We must carefully make that journey to the ancient world of the first century in order to see the significance of what scholars refer to as the *housfeltd* (domestic code). Then we must face the difficult task of trying to see how this aspect of Peter's code might be applied in our contemporary situation.

These ethical instructions have been extensively explored for many years. German scholars in particular have scoured ancient literature for comparable household codes in both philosophical and religious sources. The New Testament domestic codes (Ephesians 5:21—6:9; Colossians 3:18—4:1; Titus 2:1-10 and 1 Peter 2:18—3:7) have been attributed in turn to Stoic, Hellenistic Greek and Jewish influence. Unlike the other domestic codes in the New Testament, which are addressed to Christian families, Peter's code is addressed to persons who are in a family relation to pagan relatives. And these were the most vulnerable, slaves and wives. Another uniqueness of Peter's "code" is its explicit Christological focus.

In order to understand the situation to which these instructions are addressed we have to be aware of the Roman context. As with most ancient cultures, the head of the household was normally a man. An interesting exception to this custom is found in Acts 16:13-15 where a woman, Lydia, was the head of a household. It was a socially accepted custom that members of a household, including slaves, wives and children would accept the religion of the head of the household. This practice explains the account in Acts of the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his household, like Lydia's household (Acts 16:31-33). This phenomenon is often used as a justification for infant baptism.

Peter is not speaking about slavery in general but rather to domestic slaves who were considered a part of the family. There are two Greek words for slaves. Peter uses the one that refers to those domestic servants both men

and women. Hence, the word to these slaves entails the same rationale as the word to wives of non-Christian husbands.

The Roman government regarded the household as the foundation of the empire so anything that created disruption in the home would be looked on with disfavor. Actually the Roman constitution insisted on proper worship of the state gods. The code described the behavior *demand*ed by the governor (2:14) even of "aliens" so there would be a legal basis for a negative reaction when Christian slaves rejected the worship of their master's gods, insisting on an exclusive worship of their own gods. Thus there was a tension between Roman society and foreign, eastern religions. These tensions produced stereotyped "Roman criticisms of foreign religions, including certain aberrant household relationships."⁷⁴

Several texts in 1 Peter should be read in the light of this social situation. Since Christians refused to preserve the religious customs of their ancestors (1:18), or to perform cultic acts which were centered in pagan religion, the result was that Christians were slandered or persecuted.

David Balch proposed that the author of 1 Peter wrote to advise the Christians who were being persecuted about how they might become socially-politically acceptable to their society. The author was clearly aware, however, that even if his readers conformed socially and politically, their new and different religious attitudes might remain unacceptable to society. (1:18; 3:13-17; 4:15-16; 5:8)

However, some scholars soundly disagree with Balch. His interpretation runs counter to the general emphasis of 1 Peter. "He overemphasizes the apologetic intent of the author while neglecting the letter's concern for Christian identity and non-conformity with Roman society."⁷⁵ Peter's emphasis is to encourage his readers to maintain a firm commitment to distinctive Christian values. To affirm allegiance to the Christian faith in the context of a divided family where the head of the household was not a Christian would itself become the occasion for suffering because it would violate the custom and practice of the culture.

Unsurprisingly, feminist theologians have been quite vocal about these passages and for good reason. They see them as having an overwhelmingly negative influence on the lives of Christian as well as non-Christian women in the centuries up to our own time. Perhaps naturally they particularly emphasize the circumstances of the female

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Senior, "Conduct of Christians," 437.

slave who may be pressured to submit sexually to her master, her master's friends or other slaves. This would create a crisis situation for a female slave committed to the Christian stance of chastity. But more generally, all slaves were in a vulnerable position of having no recourse when abused. The point of Peter's message is to exercise "passive, non-violent disobedience, which included a rejection of some of their socially demanded household roles. We can infer from the text [that] the women operated bravely on the margins, negotiating between their commitment to the Christian community and their non-Christian families and masters."⁷⁶

Peter emphasizes that should they suffer from these choices and actions it should be for doing good and not wrong. The word of comfort he offers is in the context of a suffering that they are powerless to avoid.

In no sense can this passage be used to justify either slavery or the abuse of a wife. Bauman-Martin attempts to offer a positive spin on this situation with her suggestion that what we have here is a very early pressure toward women's liberation from male domination.

In that light she rightly insists that "the advice to the Petrine women should be left to the first century; the women are an example of courage in a situation that no longer exists." Thus "to use the Petrine exhortations as a universal behavioral standard, as some priests and pastors do, or to condemn the text as universally destructive because it has been used destructively in the past, as some feminists do, is to ignore a positive example of the courage of ancient women and to indulge in the timeless, absolutist hermeneutic most scholars reject."

The brevity of Peter's advice to husbands is obviously because their role as the master of the house would not entail suffering as the result of a conversion to Christianity. The implication of the few words used suggest that the husband must allow his Christian perspective to transform his marital relationship. The phrase, "co-heirs of the grace of life," implies a veiled challenge to a culture of inequality.

⁷⁶Betsy J. Bauman-Martin, "Women on the Edge: New Perspectives on Women in the Petrine *Haustafel*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123/2 (2004), 276.

PART THREE

SECOND PETER

Second Peter

Second Peter and Jude—with which it is closely related—along with Second and Third John have generally received scant attention from biblical scholars. Three reasons have been proposed for this neglect: 1) they are very short and stand in the shadow of the extensive Pauline letters. 2) They were only lately and with difficulty accepted into the canon and most importantly (3) Second Peter in particular seemed to reflect a later period from its professed origin. The characteristics involved in this third point, which were assumed to have appeared in a developed form only in the 3rd and 4th centuries were 7-fold: 1) faith as belief in certain tenets; 2) the inspiration of scripture; 3) the idea of a canon; 4) the theology of priesthood; 5) the doctrine of the sacraments; 6) the struggle against heresies, and 7) the resultant claim to “represent the only true exposition of the Scriptures together with the abandonment of eschatology as the focus of faith.”⁷⁷

This judgment has been more recently called into question since some of these emphases with the exception of a closed canon that was not finalized until the 4th century can be documented in Paul’s letters. In Richard Bauckham’s words, this “early Catholic” thesis is “ripe for radical reexamination.”⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the dominance of scholarly opinion is still convinced that the letter was written under a pseudonym. Kelly puts it succinctly: “Scarcely anyone nowadays doubts that 2 Peter is pseudonymous, although it must be admitted of the few who do, that they defend their case with an impressive combination of learning and ingenuity.”⁷⁹ Whether or not we agree with this perspective, the research helps us understand the situation of the churches to which the letter is addressed.

In general the arguments of the letter suggest that a moral decline has occurred among the persons addressed.⁸⁰ This situation can be explained for two reasons. First, there had obviously been a decline in the

⁷⁷Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society*, trans. Jean Gray (Lund, Sweden: Carl Bloms Bjoktryckeri, 1977), 4.

⁷⁸Jude, 2 Peter, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 50 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1983), 8.

⁷⁹Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 235.

⁸⁰Fornberg, *Early Church*, 96.

expectation of an imminent second coming of Christ (3:3-7). As Fornberg says, "An eschatological and an ethical slackness would therefore go hand in hand."⁸¹

Second, the recipients were dominantly, if not exclusively, Gentile converts to Christianity. In addition, many of the letter's characteristics imply that it is addressed to a situation influenced by Hellenistic (Greek) culture. It is common knowledge by biblical students that converts from Judaism had a background of strict moral conduct. In the case of pagan converts, there was a pressing need for instruction in Christian moral behavior as is evident in Paul's letters. As the first glow of Christian conversion faded, the pressures of the culture would begin to influence one to relax the more stringent standards of conduct and return to the common cultural ethos. This kind of seduction had apparently begun to take place.

These factors provide a reasonable explanation for the fact that "even a hasty glance at 2 Peter demonstrates that the letter contains an abundance of ethical material." Fornberg's summary of the concrete situation of the recipients is instructive since it clearly has contemporary relevance:

The Christians were a small minority who lived under a strong cultural and social pressure from the world around them. Their environment was characterized by an advanced pluralism. The belief in a supernatural being was by no means self-evident. The faith of many Christians waned after a time. They were influenced by the society in which they lived with its heathen values on which they themselves had been reared. The Jewish influence on the Christians addressed in 2 Peter, on the other hand, seems to be weak. The Christians no longer lived under the aegis of the synagogue. "The God-fearers" no longer represented the Church's major point of contact with the outside world. The Church came instead face to face with the utterly Hellenized society.⁸²

This context described by Fornberg points toward an explanation of the "conspicuously pagan metaphysical terminology being utilized in the

epistle." J. Daryl Charles puts this fact in focus for us in relation to 2 Peter 1:5-7, a central ethical passage:

As a component of the Christian paraenetic [ethical] tradition, 2 Peter 1:5-7 presents us with a window into the moral thought world of Hellenistic culture. Although the grouping of ethical values into lists surfaces in diverse cultures of antiquity, the rhetorical use of ethical lists comes into full bloom in the moral doctrine of the Socratic philosophers, and particularly, in the teaching of the Stoa, the chief ethical propagandists of the Greco-Roman period. Interaction of Stoic and Christian world views reveals a shared moral grammar, even when divergent understandings of the means to the moral life are to be detected. The use of the ethical catalog by NT writers derives from the function in Hellenistic and Jewish literature. In the NT, both strands—Hellenistic form and Jewish theological assumptions—merge in the Christian paraenetic tradition.⁸³

We propose to explore the message of 2 Peter in the light of the situation as identified by a number of scholars, namely that the nature of the message implies that there has been a decline in the moral life of the recipients. The author creates a sense of urgency because of this situation by casting his message in the form of a valedictory or last testament. In this sense it is similar to 2 Timothy with some of the same concerns where, like Paul, he indicates that he is coming near the end of his life (1:13-14), referring to the prediction of Jesus about his destiny in John 21.

We will need to first explore *the source of the moral laxity*. This can be identified through an analysis of the teaching of the false teachers or prophets condemned by the writer. While we do not have direct access to them, we can get a clear picture from Peter's critique.

Peter's opponents evidently present an argument that has parallels in both Hellenistic and Jewish sources. In both it is based on the assumption that delayed justice implies that there is no judgment on injustice at all. This perception includes the conclusion that there is no afterlife and no judgment after death. This assumption is essentially a practical atheism as is depicted in Psalm 14 where the denial of God is not a theoretical atheism but the logical implication of living sinfully as if there were no God.

⁸¹Ibid, 97.

⁸²Ibid, 146.

⁸³J. Daryl Charles, "The Language and Logic of Virtue in 2 Peter 1:5-7," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998), 55.

This conclusion explains Peter's preoccupation with the return of Christ. The "delay" in its occurrence has led the false teachers to both conclude that there is no judgment and practically to antinomianism. That this teaching has led, or is in danger of leading, his readers into moral failure is clear throughout the letter. "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned." (2:1-2) "First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?'" (3:3)

The false prophets also preach a doctrine of freedom that liberates one from the restraints of law and is simply antinomianism. Jerome Neyrey explains the context of this claim: "If freedom for the opponents is placed in a meaningful context, it should be interpreted as implying an acceptance of this world as the only world (no afterlife) and a corresponding rejection of the Parousia which ends the world and brings judgment in the world to come."⁸⁴

Peter offers counter arguments based on God's benevolence. The delay is to give opportunity for repentance (3:9). In summary, Peter responds to each of the claims of the false teachers. He defends divine judgment (3:9; 2:3b-9; 3:7, 9-13), afterlife/another world (3:7, 10-13); and an after-life retribution (2:4, 9, 17; 3:7, 10). For our purpose in this study, we will give attention to his positive counter to this moral laxity by examining what can be rightly termed as a virtue ethic.

In addition to the above factors, many believe that Peter's reference to the letters of Paul in 3:15-16 indicate that the teaching of the apostle to the Gentiles has been twisted to support a freedom from moral restraints. Paul, himself, had to counter this perversion of his teaching (Romans 6).

Peter's Virtue Ethic

We can best understand the form of Peter's argument by first examining the form of a virtue ethic, which was given classic expression in the work of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. We have already noted the influence of Greek or Hellenism on this

letter. Very simply put, Aristotle first identifies the highest good (*summum bonum*) that people seek. For him, it was happiness but this is content, we are concerned for the *form* of the ethic.⁸⁵ It is important to understand the meaning of *good*. Succinctly put, good is the correlative of function. Everything, including actions and persons, has a function and the good is the result of fulfilling that function. A hammer is good if it does what hammers are expected to do. A carpenter is good if he fulfills his function as a builder. This would be true for all the crafts and professions. Humans as human have a function, which for Aristotle is to function rationally. When this occurs this is the highest good. The moral life is then structured in such a way as to seek the actualization of that highest good, which briefly means cultivating the virtues of the good life. For Aristotle this involves the rational control of the passions. In brief, the moral life entails the practicing of *means* that will actualize the end or goal. This basically summarizes the *form* of a virtue ethic. The Christian content is different in several ways, ways that are exemplified in 2 Peter.

I would propose that the *summum bonum* for human persons as identified by Peter is found in the phrase, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (1:4). This phrase has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Western theologians, in particular, have been quite uncomfortable with this concept because it seems to imply that humans can actually share the nature of God. But for Eastern theologians, it has been the central emphasis in describing the result of the Incarnation and they express it as *divination*. However, further research has uncovered the fact that this concept is extensively found in many of the Western church fathers as well, including St. Augustine. But it was from the beginning the central emphasis of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, embodied in the famous saying of St. Irenaeus that "he [Christ] became what we are that we might become what he is."

Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia provides us with a succinct statement of Orthodox teaching on this subject:

In the Orthodox understanding Christianity signifies not merely an adherence to certain dogmas, not merely an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort, but direct union with the living God, the total

⁸⁴Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (99/3 (1980), 420.

⁸⁵See my recent work, "The Quest for Happiness," from Amazon.com.

transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory—what the Greek Fathers term “deification” or “divinization.”⁸⁶

Wesleyan scholars have come to understand that John Wesley was profoundly influenced by Eastern thought. The explanation of Bishop Kallistos resonates with Wesley’s definition of sanctification as a “real change” in contrast to justification as a change of relation. This perspective can be found clearly stated in some of Charles Wesley’s hymns:

He deigns in flesh to appear,
Widest extremes to join,
To bring out vileness near,
And make us all divine;
And we the life of God shall know,
For God is manifest below

I have discussed this matter quite fully with copious scholarly support elsewhere⁸⁷ so will only cite one source to enable us to turn a corner prior to proceeding.

It is true that Athanasius did not always pause to clarify what he intended by his conception of the deification of man, but there are places where he took the trouble to do so, and from these, as well as from the whole tenor of his theology, it is obvious that he was not thinking in terms of an ontological change, but of the reintegration of the divine image of man’s creation through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit conforming the redeemed into the likeness of Christ, and also of the believer’s transition from mortality to the immortality so that he is enabled to participate in the eternal bliss and glory of the kingdom of God.⁸⁸

Thus we conclude that *partakers of the Divine nature* is St. Peter’s way of speaking about the “function” of human persons as created in the

⁸⁶“Foreword” to Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, trans. Lindain Sherrard (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 7.

⁸⁷H. Ray Dunning, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Salem, OH: Schmull Pub. Co., 2006).

⁸⁸Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), 281.

image of God. This is the *summum bonum* of the Christian life and constitutes the ideal as embodied in Jesus Christ. Thus, as we shall see, Peter’s antidote to the moral laxity that appears to have infected the churches to which he writes is the pursuit of this ideal. In spelling this out he begins by affirming that God has provided adequate resources for doing so.

After his introductory greeting (1:1-2), he launches into his message: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his own precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.” (1:2-4)

This marvelous gift from our benevolent God flows out of the greeting in which the author prays, “May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Thus God has, through Christ, made available to the believer abundant grace to enable him to live above the debilitating desires that, if indulged in, result in corruption. Peter knows the abundant grace in his own life, whether freely accepting him even after denying the Lord or empowering him for boldness and service through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He reiterates its generous character in 1:11—“so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Since the “glory” refers to the manifestation of the Divine character of Christ, this provides the pattern of the “image of God” that is the essence of being a partaker of the divine nature. A further insight into the provisions for the pursuit of the goal is suggested in verse 4: “. . . he has granted to us his own precious and very great promises.” The idea of fulfillment of promise harks back to verse 1 where he speaks of “those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The use of the term “precious” seems to tie them together but it is the meaning of “righteousness” that is the real key. If we take the meaning of righteousness as the “covenant faithfulness of God” the whole passage comes together. God’s promises in the Old Testament as found in Deut. 30, Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 were that God would provide inner strength through a transformation of the heart by the Spirit to enable his people to become what he intended them to become. Although Israel was chosen to be a blessing to the nations, her history is littered with faithlessness and apostasy. It seems

possible that what Peter has in mind in this passage is that the abundant resources available to God's people to "escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion" is the faithfulness of God to keep his promises through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. All of this is designed to demonstrate that the successful living out of the Christian life is not something achieved but something that is received. This emphasis then takes us to the next element in his counter to moral laxity.

The Dynamic of Holy Living

We have noted the correlation between the form of a virtue ethic as formulated by Aristotle and that of 2 Peter. At this point we take a major departure. Aristotle, along with other philosophers influenced by Socrates, assumed that if one knew the truth, they would pursue it. The fact that this did not happen in many cases was a puzzle to them. They referred to this as *akrasia* (incontinence). Christians both know the reason and the solution to this anomaly. Peter describes it in terms of *knowledge* similar to the pagan philosophers but with a major difference.

While there is only one English word, the Greek has two terms for knowledge with a significantly different implication. Informed readers would probably recognize the term *gnosis* because of the widespread use of *Gnosticism* to describe one of the earliest heresies to threaten the early Christian church. *Gnosis* refers to the common understanding of the term, namely awareness of information. The other term is *epignosis*. While it has nuances of meaning in other parts of the New Testament, in 2 Peter it carries the connotation of "coming to know," an experiential knowing. It is used in 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 3:7 and Hebrews 10:26 with the same implication. Robert E. Picirelli, in a definitive analysis of the relevant terms, concludes, ". . . a reasonable conclusion can now be drawn that the Petrine usage of *epignosis*, . . . is in a sense which is exactly equivalent to conversion."⁸⁹

Rudolf Bultmann, famed New Testament scholar of the last generation comes to the same conclusion:

Curiously enough, the compound *epignosis*, like the compound verb, is almost a technical term for the decisive knowledge of God which is involved in conversion to the Christian faith . . . This is not

the case at Rom. i.28, but clear examples of it appear in the Pastoral Epistles . . . at Heb. x.26 . . . II Pet. i.3,8; ii.20.⁹⁰

We can further see the significance of this truth by looking at the book of Hosea in the Old Testament. The prophet struggled with the lack of covenant faithfulness by Israel and experiences the pain of God through his own pain as a betrayed husband. The Lord gives him the answer to his dilemma in 4:1—"There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land" and 4:6—"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." In 6:6 God virtually equates "steadfast love" (Heb. *chesed*) with "knowledge of God"—"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

When we bring this truth to bear on 2 Peter 1:2 and 3 we are able to see how subtly the author includes the transforming experience of the "new birth" (cf. 1 Peter 1:3) as a resource that provides the dynamic of the triumphant Christian life that enables the believer to overcome the pressures that test the resolve to maintain faithful adherence to the distinguishing lifestyle of the faith. We must keep in mind here that the "new birth" entails the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the power of the resurrected Christ.

J. A. Bengel, pioneer biblical exegete who profoundly influenced John Wesley and whose work informed Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*, sees *epignosis* as united with the cleansing from sins. This is clear from the reference in 1:9. As with 1 Peter 1:22, the concept of cleansing in the Bible is the proper description of what might otherwise be referred to as the forgiveness of sins. Rooted in Old Testament theology of the holiness of God where purity is the prerequisite for entering into a relation with the holy God, forgiveness or cleansing is the initial phase of that relation. Although somewhat of an aside, 2 Peter offers a devastating rejection of any idea of an unconditional eternal security in 2:20-22—"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world (cleansing) through the knowledge (*epignosis*) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It

⁸⁹Robert E. Picirelli, "The Meaning of 'Epignosis,'" *The Evangelical Quarterly* 47 (1975), 92.

⁹⁰Quoted in *Ibid.*

has happened to them according to the true proverb, “The dog turns back to its own vomit,” and “The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud.”

The Process (Growth in Grace)

While the benefits provided for the believer’s security are adequate and the establishing of a transforming relation to God through Christ is tremendous, Peter recognizes that this is intended to be only the beginning. Thus he goes on to provide one of the most compelling discussions of the process of Christian growth in the New Testament. He describes the process in 1:5-7, highlights the benefits of following that pattern in 1:8-11 and concludes the letter with the most familiar exhortation to actualize it in experience (3:18).

The writer utilizes a common means of giving direction to the moral life present in the Hellenistic world in which these churches existed, a catalog of virtues. As Charles says, “not only would a catalog of virtues be an appropriate way of countering a deterioration of the moral life of the community, it would be all the more relevant based on the catalog’s popular usage.”⁹¹

The Petrine catalog begins, “for this reason make every effort to add to your faith . . .” Although abundant resources have been made available, the believer is not a cipher or inert recipient but an active participant in the process of growth. The word translated “add” or “support” is a word with a rich background. It comes from a word that literally means “the leader of a chorus.” Greek plays and dramas needed large choruses that were integral parts of the play, which made it very expensive to produce one. Beneficent citizens would volunteer at their own expense to collect, maintain, train and equip such choruses. A form of this word was applied to these persons and another form for undertaking such a task. “The word, therefore, has a certain lavishness in it. It never means to equip in a cheese-paring and miserly way: it means lavishly and willingly to pour out everything that is necessary for a noble performance.”⁹²

Theologically, this exhortation is a direct expression of what is termed *synergism*. It stands in direct contrast to a position that denies all human participation in the salvation process, known as *monergism*. This contrast stands at the heart of one distinguishing characteristic of Wesleyan

⁹¹Charles, “The Language and Logic of Virtue,” 65.

⁹²Barclay, *James and Peter*, 353.

theology vis-à-vis Reformed theology. In no sense does it compromise the priority of grace in the divine human relation. As J. Klinger says “No dichotomy exists between . . . human cooperation and divine initiation.”⁹³

The words of 1 Peter are simply another way of saying what Paul stated in Philippians 2:12-“ . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” On this passage John Wesley seeks to show that there is no opposition between God’s provision and our working by summarizing: “. . . on the contrary, the closest connection; and that in two respects. For, First God works; therefore you *can* work; secondly, God works, therefore you *must* work.”⁹⁴

A list of “virtues” follows this exhortation to put forth a great effort in cultivating the Christian moral life. Such lists are found elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 6:6; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:12-14), but unlike these 2 Peter 1:5-7 manifests a logical progression with each successive virtue rooted in and issuing from the one that precedes it. Such lists were also common in the Hellenistic environment in which the churches addressed in this letter were located. Charles comment here is enlightening.

While the form and function of the ethical list is borrowed by NT writers, it should be emphasized that Hellenistic philosophical assumptions about moral progress are not carried over into the NT by its writers. To the Hellenistic mind, ethical requirements do not issue from a transcendent moral authority; rather they are the fruit of reason (*logos*) and knowledge (*gnōsis*), by which one comes to realize the fullness of human nature. . . . By contrast, while the Stoic is called to rationality, the Christian is called to be transformed by a full knowledge (*epignōsis*) of divine grace.⁹⁵

The list begins with “faith,” which is the foundation of the Christian life. While there are several meanings that may be given to the term, here it does not mean belief in orthodox doctrines or traditions but rather

⁹³J. Klinger, “The Second Epistle of Peter: An Essay in Understanding,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973).

⁹⁴*The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (K.C.: Nazarene Publishing House, n.d.), 6:511.

⁹⁵“Language and Logic of Virtue,” 59.

subjective trust in the Gospel. To one's faith is to be added "virtue." It is the same word used in verse 3 as applied to Christ and may be translated as "moral excellence." The writer may intend these two uses to be correlated to suggest that the virtue or "moral excellence" that the believer is to add to faith is defined by Jesus. This possibility is reinforced by the third virtue to be added, namely "knowledge."

Here, the term *gnosis* is used, the normal word for the acquirement of information. If we look at the closing exhortation of the letter, where the same word for knowledge is used, we get a clearer picture of what is involved. It is knowledge of Jesus that informs the "moral excellence" that the believer is to add to his/her faith. Eliza E. Hewitt's prayer hymn captures the mood of this emphasis:

More about Jesus would I know,
More of His grace to others show;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love who died for me.

Once having identified the criterion for moral excellence, the growing believer must now exercise "self-control." This expression is included in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit and in Titus 1:8 it is a prerequisite for the spiritual leader. Once again we find common ground between philosophical ethics and the Christian perspective, since self-control plays a major role in the moral treatises of the time. And once again, Charles highlights the difference between the two:

While the power and motivation of the Christian ethic are distinct from a Stoic counterpart, they nevertheless share common ethical ground. Given the fact that the trajectory of much of the material in 2 Peter is aimed at the lawless and morally depraved, that is, those who revel in their freedom (2:13). [Self-control] is the essential and very practical expression of the ethical life.⁹⁶

The result of self-control is steadfastness or endurance or perseverance. In classical use it has the meaning of "courageous endurance that fully defies evil." To this is to be added "godliness" or

⁹⁶Ibid, 68. See our fuller discussion of this quality in chapter 8.

"piety," suggesting a particular way of life that is worthy of praise. This letter uses the word four times (1:3, 6, 7; 3:11). "Brotherly affection" (*philadelphia*) is included next, not as an afterthought but as always in scripture, an essential aspect of authentic love of God. This ethical progression then climaxes with love (*agape*), the crown of all Christian virtues.

Joseph A. Mayor offers an illuminating summary of this ethical list:

Faith is the gift of God already received; to this must be added (1) moral strength which enables a man to do what he knows to be right; (2) spiritual discernment; (3) self-control by which a man resists temptation; (4) endurance by which he bears up under persecution or adversity; (5) right . . . behavior toward God [piety]; (6) toward the brethren [brotherly love]; (7) [and] towards all [love].⁹⁷

Peter then offers both a negative and a positive incentive to progress in the Christian life. The negative is suggested in verse 8. The positive has both a present and a future dimension. The earnest and diligent pursuit of the goal of Christlikeness validates one's calling and election. These terms have a different significance from their use in the greeting of 1 Peter. Here they are suggesting that the Christian has been chosen for a purpose that is ethical in nature. In the actualization of that purpose by the focused pursuit of the ethical ideal one assures that she will find security against "falling." That this is a possibility is abundantly manifested in the letter. What we have here is God's program of eternal security. It is neither automatic nor guaranteed but is conditional on what Paul described as "pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

The other positive incentive is "eschatological" in nature. First Peter 1:10-11 emphasizes that ethical conduct has eschatological consequence. Peter lays great weight on the eschatological, not only for its own sake but also as a justification for ethical conduct. In a word, as we saw in 1 Peter, this letter regards good deeds as essential for salvation, which was a widely accepted belief (Matt. 25:31-46; Romans 2:1-10, 13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal 5:19-20; Eph. 5:3-5). In a word, the conduct of the Christian will be of critical importance for their eschatological fate.

⁹⁷J. A. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second epistle of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1965), 93.