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Sovereign Grace and Peace

Please read 1 Peter 1:1–2

Chosen by God (1:1)

‘Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,’ (1:1) states that this apostolic letter, as the Word of God, is addressed to Christians who live as aliens, scattered across Asia Minor. They are a people who feel the realities of being strangers in society; they are marked as different by their purpose, life direction, faith, hope, and godliness. They are set apart as belonging to a different society, a different kingdom. Peter, as Jesus Christ’s messenger, assures them that the Triune God knows their situation. Jesus, God Incarnate, understands their situation and is coming to speak to them in it. Through Peter, he tends and feeds his sheep.

The way in which our Lord speaks through his servant here is wonderful. Tenderly addressing them in their circumstances, he now begins to open their eyes to glorious spiritual realities. Jesus wants his church—wants you—to know and remember who he

is, what he has done, and is doing for his people. While they are scattered, suffering strangers in this world, and feel this acutely, there is a larger reality: they are his ‘elect’ (1:1).¹

The word “elect” here is one form of a group of words that Scripture uses in contexts referring to the doctrine of election (cf. Matthew 22:14; 24:22–31; Romans 8:33; 2 Timothy 2:10). Sometimes we may balk at election or we may wrongly understand it. But it is not as though people are trying to crowd into heaven, and God is picking a few and saying no to the rest. The reality is that we are all rebelliously running headlong away from God, running to destruction and judgment. Election is God graciously reaching out and, in the mystery of his love, effectually taking hold of and retrieving some so that they willingly come to him.² In using the term “elect,” Peter draws believers’ attention to a glorious, mysterious, and deeply comforting reality: God speaks here to men, women, and children whom he has chosen out of a futile way of life (1 Peter 1:18, 4:1–3; cf. Romans 3:10–11; John 6:37; Ephesians 1:4–5, 2:4–5). In his sovereign love and powerful redemption, they are brought to salvation and new life in Christ. The elect are the objects of God’s mercy and grace, selected from rebel humanity not because they were any better, not because God saw in advance that they were different than others or more willing to believe. No, it was the Triune God who in love and mercy worked in them both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Triune comfort and purpose (1:2)

Verse two opens the idea of “elect” even more. Three phrases show us God’s sovereign, saving choice of believers. The first of these is that the Christians addressed here as the scattered church of Asia Minor are elect ‘according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.’ (1:2) Peter tells us, “Christians, you are known and chosen by God the Father. God the Father has known you

whom he purposed to redeem from all eternity—long before our created existence.” By the Spirit, Peter tells us that our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer knows us intimately. Yet, no reason can be given for election apart from God’s sovereign free love and perfect will. Alexander Nisbet says that the Father, “having all persons ... under his all-seeing eye ... did out of his free love condescend upon some in particular, while others were passed by.”³ He has mercy on whom he will have mercy and compassion on whom he will have compassion (Romans 9:17). We simply know that it is not because of anything good in us (cf. Ephesians 2:1–10; Romans 3). John Brown illustrates that this is the pattern declared across Scripture: “when the Lord set his love on Israel, and chose them to be his peculiar people, the cause was not in them, but in himself; it was just because he loved them ...”⁴ The foreknowledge of God the Father is his choosing to love, knowing and loving in advance, simply because it is his delight to love his people.

Peter describes how the Father carries out this election in the second modifying phrase: ‘in the sanctification of the Spirit.’ (1:2) These scattered believers are chosen by the Spirit’s sanctifying work. While we often think of the Spirit’s sanctifying work in relation to our growth in holiness, Scripture also uses the term more broadly to refer to a “setting apart” or a spiritual separation. It describes the change from identification with a rebel world, to an identity in belonging to God, living a new life in and for Him.

Old Testament Israel was to be an illustration of what spiritual separation was; they were a people whom God had set apart. In the Old Testament era this separation was civic and national in part, but ultimately spiritual. In the New Testament era there is a glorious continuity and global expansion of this spiritual setting apart: God’s elect are set apart to God by the work of the Holy Spirit, becoming strangers and pilgrims in this world.

As the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ goes out to the ends of the earth, those on whom God has set his love, are transformed and set apart. By Christ's redemption accomplished and applied, believers are made different where there is no natural difference.

Connected to this "setting apart" work of the Holy Spirit is the third phrase that modifies what it means to be elect. To what are God's people chosen, or elected? They are chosen 'for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.' (1:2) As a Christian, you, with God's people, have been chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ. This is really the result of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work: by his regeneration, people come to faith in Christ and at the same time begin to obey Christ. Transformed by grace, they obey the gospel call and pursue a life of thankful obedience to God's whole law. A similar, though negative, use of the term "obey" is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 where Paul speaks of those, "who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Obedience is an inseparable fruit of faith. The very act of faith in believing the gospel reflects obedience (cf. Romans 6:17).

Peter states that believers are not only chosen to obey Christ, but also to "be sprinkled by his blood." These words bring to mind an image which would have been particularly vivid for the Jewish believer. In the Old Testament, God had ordained the ceremony of His people being sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices which were the picture of the sealing of His covenant of grace with them. It was a picture of removal of the guilt and pollution of sin—a picture that, just like the Passover lamb, Jesus perfectly fulfilled as his hands and feet were pierced, his blood shed, while he took the full weight of God's wrath against the sin of his people.

When God selects individuals, sets them spiritually apart to be his people, and brings them to faith in the gospel, it is so that they gain personal inclusion in blessing in Christ, through his

atonement sacrifice. Now their sins can be and are forgiven; their guilt can be and is removed. Christians are enabled and brought with a true heart to God and come to live in spiritual fellowship with him. God conforms the elect to his will: they now want the perfect good he wants and obedience becomes delightful and good to them. This is not only because he has made them, but because the precious blood of Christ has redeemed them⁵ (1 Peter 1:18).

This, then, is the identity of the people of God declared by the Holy Spirit: you are those who belong to God, redeemed in Triune wisdom and love. It is as if Peter, Jesus' messenger, says, "Look at how God loves you. He knows your trials. Listen as he tells you his sovereign love; would he have chosen you, brought you to faith, and sprinkled you with the blood of his only begotten Son, if he were not willing to bless you today, tomorrow, and for all eternity?"

Grace and peace multiplied (1:2)

Then comes the Lord's blessing: 'grace and peace be multiplied to you.' (1:2) Grace is free favor, God's sovereign kindness. The New Testament often uses the word as a general term for all the blessings that flow from God's sovereign, saving love, including those that Peter just described. Peace is contentment and trust in God's wisdom, will, and power, received as we are restored to communion with God in Christ. Peter declares to the church, alien in the world, "May you have continued, increasing, multiple proofs that God loves you, in the continuing, increasing, the multiplying of His blessings. May you know that you are heirs with Christ, children of God, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken."

You and the Word

Do you feel that you are a stranger in the world, even as you

live by faith? Have you felt the cold shoulder of co-workers, the distance of former friends, or separation from family members who are not in Christ? Do you feel the loneliness of ostracism or the pressures of outright persecution?

John Calvin, writing in the midst of the difficulties of the Reformation, said of this passage,

all other things will be deemed worthless when we consider what Christ and his blessings are ... for this reason [Peter] highly extols the wonderful grace of God in Christ, that is that we may not deem it much to give up the world ... and that we may not be broken down by present troubles, but patiently endure them ...⁶

Listen to God as he speaks to you in these verses. He is telling his people how highly he esteems them. Doesn't it soothe and refresh your soul to hear the Lord remind you of his love at the cost of his Son's sufferings and death to bring you into a life of peace with him? Let the Lord put your present sufferings and struggles in this glorious context. Be glad, give thanks to God, praise him, rest in him: grace and peace be multiplied to you.

But if you have not experienced this, if your heart does not resonate with these words, then realize that his grace and peace, his eternal love can be yours by coming to Christ. His promise is simply, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and you and your need will be satisfied in him.