

THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER THE APOSTLE

The following short bible study notes are offered to provide an accessible and easily read overview of this epistle in the hope that readers may be encouraged to dig more deeply into the rich treasure to be found in this and all the inspired and infallible writings to be found in the Word of God. For any who are unacquainted with the Holy Bible we begin with a brief description of what the Bible is. In this short study we will use the ESV Bible unless otherwise stated.

What is the Bible?

We might answer the question this way; the Bible is the story of how God has arranged to save His people. Salvation from sin is the primary concern of the Bible.

The Bible from Genesis to Revelation focuses on one character and that is Jesus Christ.

The Bible has two main divisions called The Old Testament and The New Testament. The Old looks forward to the coming of Christ and the New describes all that follows after Christ. The coming of Christ is the fulcrum or pivotal event in the history of time and space.

The Bible consists of 66 books; 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Christians believe that the books were written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and that the Bible is therefore inerrant and infallible, in its purpose to lead people to salvation, by faith in Jesus Christ.

The great divisions of the Bible may thought of like this:

PREPARATION: THE OLD TESTAMENT

MANIFESTATION: THE GOSPELS

PROPAGATION : THE ACTS

EXPLANATION: THE EPISTLES

CONSUMMATION: THE REVELATION {Schofield]

Why study the Bible?

Simply reading the Bible, book after book, chapter after chapter and verse after verse, while enabling the reader to see the grand sweep of God's saving arrangements, will not yield the benefits which are to be realised from the effort of comparing scripture with scripture and of asking questions of the text. In order for ordinary folk like us to do this privately, we do well to purchase a good Study Bible, which will enable one greatly to achieve this. Honest study will result in riches and blessings that cannot be quantified.

How to study the Bible ?

Christians believe the Bible is THE WORD OF GOD. Study therefore should be begun with prayer asking God the Holy Spirit to humble the heart of the student, to illuminate the mind and give insight and understanding. Of these gifts humility may well be the most important. The Word of God should be approached reverently.

What scripture says about itself is " All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness". KJV 2Timothy 3:16.

I believe we do well to take that to heart as our starting point.

This letter opens with these words: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ".

It will be helpful to ask the question "Who is Peter?" What do we know about him?

All four Gospels record the calling of the first disciples. The Gospel accounts vary somewhat in detail but all make it clear that the man who would become known as Peter was a fisherman called Simon, who fished with his brother Andrew from the village of Capernaum on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:43, Mark 1:29). They had their own boat which they worked in partnership with another pair of brothers, James and John who also owned a boat. (Luke 5:7).

[Just as an aside, it is interesting to note the accuracy with which the fishing operation in this passage is recorded. On the Lord's instruction, Peter let down the net despite the fact they were weary and had toiled all night for nothing. The passage says they "enclosed" a large shoal of fish. They were almost certainly employing a form of fishing called "ring netting", wherein the net is payed out and the boat rowed in a fairly large circle. As more net is let out the bottom of the net sinks because it is weighted. The end, which was first dropped, is then retrieved thus closing the circle, and the net is drawn in. The bottom of the net is closed quickly, by heaving on a rope called the footrope so that the fish cannot escape. This system is best worked with two boats which may account for the reference to the boat of James and John being referred to as their "partner" boat.]

They carried out their work around the time when John the Baptist was preaching in the vicinity. We may deduce from the Gospel of John 1:35-42 that Andrew at least, had an interest in the things of God, for he had been listening to and following John the Baptist. When John pointed to Jesus and declared Him to be the "Lamb of God", Andrew followed Jesus, and having spent that evening in the company of Jesus, declared to his brother Simon that he had found the Messiah (The long awaited great king who would re-establish the great kingdom of Israel and usher in great blessings to God's chosen people). It is important to note that although men may be engaged in menial and humble occupations it in no way inhibits their interest in or appreciation of those things which concern salvation. It is not unreasonable to deduce that Andrew and Simon Peter had discussed the ministry of John the Baptist at length and it makes the rapid response, when they were called to follow by Christ, (Mark 1:20; Matthew 4:20) all the more understandable. From this point onward Peter's life (and the lives of all the Apostles) would be radically changed for Jesus would make them "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Peter would go on to witness the miracles of the Lord. He would hear Jesus preach to thousands (and feed them by miraculous means). He would see people raised from the dead, the lame healed and demons cast out. He would become one of Jesus' - "Inner Circle" of disciples and be a witness to the Lord's Transfiguration. (He, along with the two others would fail to appreciate the significance of this event). He would accompany Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him (he would fail to remain awake), and share in the Last Supper, declaring that he would never forsake the Lord, (he would deny the Lord three times). And yet this was the man of whom Jesus said "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". KJV

Please read Matthew 16:13-20.

The word construction in the Greek naturally requires that Christ is making a play on Peter's name and the foundational statement of faith which Simon Peter had just uttered in Matthew 16:16. "*Petros*" means "a rock," in Greek. "*Petra*" means "bedrock". Simon Peter is also known as Cephas in the New Testament which translates the Aramaic word *Kepha*" meaning "rock". Does this mean that Christ would build His church upon a man (Peter)? Even though he would eventually be forgiven and reinstated (John 21:15-22), the cowardice, vacillation and denial which Peter would soon display, suggest this is unlikely. Rather the Lord would build His church upon the confession which Peter articulated that Jesus was the "Christ, the Son of the living God", which all who come to Christ by faith must make. Similarly the words of verse 19 wherein Christ hands the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" to Peter (and He undoubtedly *does* bestow this duty on Peter) speaks to the discipline and proper ordering of His Church which would be shared throughout all time by those charged with leadership in that Church, until the perfect and pure Bride of Christ (the Church) is presented to Him. (Revelation 21:1-4).

For all that, it is undeniable that Peter took on a leadership role in the early church and this is clear from the first 15 chapters of Acts. (Acts 1:15; 2:14; 3:1; 3:11; 4:3-22; 5:3-11; 5:12-16; 8:20-25; 10:9-48; 12:1-18; 15:7-21. These scriptures provide more than adequate proof that Peter occupied this function. Galatians 2:11-21 also show that Peter could get it wrong and was not above being rebuked.

Most Christians "like" Peter. They like him because they are "like" him. He is obviously flawed and human. They recognize their own shortcomings in him and see their own weaknesses. We all deny the Lord from time to time. We fail to stand up for Christ on every occasion. We all "fall asleep" in prayer and cannot sustain communion with God. We all miss the really "significant" moments which we meet on our pilgrimage. It is a function of our fallenness- our fallen and sinful nature.

But if Peter was a flawed man, we need to remember that it was to him that God the Father revealed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. It was Peter who had the faith to climb out of a heaving boat in a gale of wind to walk to Jesus, and if his faith failed, he showed us that Jesus is willing and able to stretch out His hand to save a sinking soul who cries out "**Lord save me!**" Matthew 14:22-33

An apostle of Jesus Christ.

What is an "apostle?" The Greek word means "one who is sent" or a messenger. Within the context of the New Testament Church it has the meaning of one who is specifically commissioned by Jesus to carry His Gospel to the world. The word is properly applied to those who were His first followers (the Twelve) along with Paul who was commissioned by the risen Christ after His Ascension on the Damascus Road. (Matthias was, after prayer, chosen to replace Judas Iscariot. He had been with the disciples from the beginning and had seen the risen Christ). (Acts 1: 21-28). This is the restricted use which we are most acquainted with, but it is used in several other places to simply mean one who is sent, and indeed in Hebrews 3:1 the Lord Jesus Himself is described as having been sent (apostolon) by God the Father.

{People who refer to themselves or are referred to as “apostles” today are in fact no such thing. They were not chosen by Christ in the original sense; they were not witnesses to the Risen Christ, they cannot perform miracles nor can they bestow the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands}.

CHAPTER 1

Verses 1-2

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood,

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

To those who are elect exiles.

The word “elect” translates the Greek word *eklektos*. It means “Chosen; picked out”. The idea of being “chosen” speaks to the sovereignty of God and is dealt with clearly, and at some length, by the apostle Paul in the ninth chapter of his epistle to the Romans. Briefly it is summarised in the scripture which Paul quotes from Exodus 33:19 “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy”. God is not surprised by any man’s response to His gracious arrangements in salvation, because the salvation of His elect has been foreordained in His eternal decree involving all three Persons of the Godhead. Notice that this verse actually encapsulates the various operations of each Person of the Triune God. Salvation is brought about *according* to the foreknowledge of the Father, *in* the sanctification of the Spirit *for* obedience to Jesus Christ and *for* sprinkling with His blood. (The word translated *for* is the Greek word *eis*. This word with an accusative case as here can be translated *into* or “*for the purpose of*”. That is to say those who are elect are elected for the purpose of obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood. This sprinkling with blood is an allusion to the Old Testament for purification from sin under the old dispensation. There are 3 instances in the Old Testament which Peter may have had in mind here

1. Leviticus 14:1-9 referring to a leper who had been cleansed of his disease.
2. Exodus 24:5-8 wherein Moses sprinkles blood on the Israelites to symbolise the covenant with God at Mount Sinai.
3. Exodus 29:19-21 To prepare the sons of Aaron to be priests of Israel.

See Hebrews 9:22- **Indeed under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.** So the elect sinner is made obedient to Jesus Christ by the gift of faith in Him and receives forgiveness for sin by the shed blood of Christ. The Holy Spirit carries out the work of regenerating the heart of the sinner that he might be born again, and the ongoing work of making holy (consecrating) the elect believer.

There is much more we could say about *election* but this is sufficient to convey the truth that the salvation of sinners begins and ends with the grace of the Sovereign God.

Exiles:

When Peter refers to “exiles” he is not referring simply to a Jewish Diaspora but also to Gentiles. We know this from the warnings and instructions which appear later in this letter which are clearly aimed at Gentile believers. See 1:14, 1:18, 4:3-4. In a broader sense he is addressing all believers who find themselves on a pilgrimage of faith with “no continuing city” in this world. In a very real sense

Christians find themselves walking a path in life which does not accord with the ways of the world and the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are not to be conformed to the world in Romans 12:2; and the Lord Jesus in His high priestly prayer in John 17:14-16 prays as follows: I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia:

These regions make up most of what we now regard as modern Turkey, bounded by the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean. It is easy to fail to appreciate the enormous physical effort required to visit these areas in order to preach the gospel. These journeys were carried out on foot, through hostile country under unbelievably arduous conditions with minimum facilities. We cannot begin to appreciate the debt which we owe to the apostles for their extraordinary drive and dedication to spread the Gospel. When we consider their efforts, and the hardships they underwent, anything we endure pales into insignificance.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

This benediction, which resembles so many of the Apostle Paul's introductory salutations is offered by Peter in the hope that the readers will enjoy these gifts in abundance. There is an extraordinary degree of similarity between the theology of Peter and Paul. Perhaps not so surprising when one considers that they were both inspired by the same Holy Spirit. As we read on, it will become clear that Peter was concerned to prepare and reassure his readers for times of persecution which would surely come. In the fullness of time the area to which Peter addresses his letter would be comprehensively evangelized and yet today there are approximately 120,000 Christians of Armenian Apostolic, Greek Orthodox, Roman and Eastern Catholic, in a total population of 80 million. This should provide a salutary warning to us who take our freedoms for granted.

What is grace in the context of the Bible? Should we require a definition for this word we could do worse than state that: Grace is the Free and Unmerited Favour of God. You will find, that if you substitute these words in almost every case in Scripture it will highlight in greater relief the meaning of the passage you are reading.

In fact the entire creation, visible and invisible, is the result of the grace of God, but specifically in the sphere of salvation our definition is absolutely apt.

This is made clear, for instance, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

It is important to notice, that the initiative in this saving work lies entirely with God and not within us. It is also important to note that the Greek construction means unequivocally that "faith" is also a gift. You and I do not *naturally*, possess faith- it is a gift. There is a species of faith that we all place in, say, the pilot who flies the aeroplane in which we travel; the surgeon who is operating on us; or even train timetable, but that is not saving faith. Saving faith focuses entirely on

Jesus Christ and requires that we relinquish all reservations and cast ourselves entirely upon Him and His saving power.

What kind of peace? In using this word in his salutation, Peter like Paul is actually praying that his readers will experience the peace of the Lord Jesus. In order to understand this “peace” we need to understand what Jesus meant by it, so we look at John 14:27 where Jesus says:

Peace I leave with you; My [perfect] peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled nor let it be afraid. [Let My perfect peace calm you in every circumstance and give you courage and strength for every challenge.] AMP

The first thing to realise is that these words are addressed to his disciples including all who would believe on Him. These words have no currency or meaning for unbelievers, because the peace which is bequeathed, comes with, and out of faith. In fact peace is one of the greatest gifts of faith in Jesus. This peace is a peace which takes up residence in the heart and mind. When Jesus said these words He knew that His church would soon undergo and continue to undergo throughout history, into this present day, times of great adversity and persecution. So the Lord’s invitation to allow His peace to calm and reassure us is as important today as when He first uttered the words. Paul reassures us that this is the case in Philippians 4:7 **And the peace of God [that peace which reassures the heart, that peace] which transcends all understanding, [that peace which] stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [is yours].** AMP Laying hold of that peace can be challenging when life seems to be crumbling all around us, but remember that He who said these words has overcome the world John 16:33. **I have told you this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.** NIV

But how to realise this peace? The fact is, when you believe on Jesus and trust on Him, and commit your all to Him the gift is already given. It is yours, so do not look at your troubles; lay hold of the fact that peace is already yours. **Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.** NIV Luke 11:9

Verses 3-12

Verse 3:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Almost every word in these nine verses contains several sermons and it is impossible in a brief study like this to do justice to the doctrine contained in these words, but we shall try to pick out some of the more obvious doctrines. Peter, with characteristic exuberance exclaims **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”** He cannot contain himself. He is overwhelmed in wonder, love and praise to God the Father for the mercy shown to sinners like himself and all believers through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Resurrection is the guarantee that the unique sacrifice which Christ made on the cross actually achieved its purpose which is the salvation of all who believe in Christ. Christ paid the redemption price for sinners by giving **his life as a ransom for many.** Mark 10:45. The phrase “caused us to be born again” translates the

Greek words *anagenneas humas* which literally means “having regenerated us”. Or “having brought us again to birth”. It describes the initial work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about a complete reorientation of character in the sinner so that he is enabled to see his own sin and his need of a Saviour. The hope thereby kindled in the heart of the believer is a living hope based on a personal, experiential realisation that if he repents of his sin, God is willing and able to save him.

Verse 4

To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

The word ‘inheritance’ refers to that which is the expectation of all who have placed their eternal security in Jesus Christ. (See 2 Timothy 1:12). When the sinner is brought to faith in Christ, he becomes an adopted son of God, as is made clear in Romans 8:17 – “And if children, then heirs; and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together”. KJV

The three words imperishable, undefiled and unfading, highlight three aspects of what heaven is. Heaven is not blighted by the principle of decay which pervades the creation now, following the Fall. In heaven there will be no disintegration of its fabric and structure. Similarly Heaven will not lose its light or luster. This is because God Himself is the light of Heaven. Revelation 21:23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Nor can Heaven be polluted or defiled by any uncleanness of thought or action. Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death. NIV

Verse 5

Who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

It is nothing less than the power of Almighty God that ensures that His gift of faith is able to sustain the believer on his pilgrimage through life. Real faith is indestructible because it is entirely of God. No matter the nature of the trial, saving faith in Christ cannot be overcome or lost. The book of Job, traces the spiritual journey of a man subjected to the most appalling trials as he endeavours to cope with brutal suffering. There is a purpose to his suffering but he does not realise it until the end of the book. In the end he is able to say “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you” Job 42:5. For our part we seldom understand fully the suffering we experience until God reveals it to us. In the final analysis all we can hold on to is faith in God. It is to the great credit of the Reformers that they developed the doctrine called the “Perseverance of the Saints”, which recognizes that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord and that they will persevere until they are glorified with Christ..

Verses 6 &7

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more

precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here we see the frequent reason for trials and suffering – the proving of the believer’s faith. It should give the hard-pressed saint comfort and strength to know, with certainty that God who knows the end from the beginning of all things is in control of all things. (See 1st Corinthians 10:13).

When Christ Jesus returns what praise and glory will be due not only to Christ, but also to those who overcome. (See Revelation 3:21).

Verses 8&9

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

It is one of the mysteries of faith in Christ that although believers do not see Him and will not see Him till that day when they go to meet Him or that Great Day of His return, yet they love Him. Whence comes that love? Not from our sinful hearts but rather from hearts which are renewed and regenerated by the power of a Sovereign God. (See Ezekiel 36:26) that He might have all the glory. Here is joy that God should have such love for the sheep of His pasture that He would provide this so great salvation. When the sinner is able to view the staggering complexity of God’s saving arrangements he needs must fall to his face lost in wonder, love and praise.

Verses 10-12

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Developing the theme of the salvation of believer’s souls, Peter makes it clear that the prophets, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit knew that a Messiah would come and searched diligently as to when it would occur, and who it would be. We know that the Old Testament prophets both greater and minor are replete with Messianic utterances, some of the best known being Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, regarding His birth, and Isaiah 53:5 and Psalm 22 concerning His sufferings. It is an invaluable exercise to search the Old Testament Scriptures for prophetic Messianic utterances.

Notice that the Holy Spirit is described as the “Spirit of Christ in them” – as clear an indication of the inspiration of scripture as might be found. But while the grace of God shown in His Messiah was the basis upon which the prophets believed and were saved in anticipation, they understood that He was yet to come and that the fullness of the Gospel would only be realised after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, when the Holy Spirit would come in power. (Ezekiel 36:27). We are told that this Gospel, ignored and scorned my sinful Man, is a subject of intense fascination for the angels in Heaven.

Verse 13

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The introductory “therefore” indicates that this verse flows logically from all that precedes it. We move from doctrine to practical application. The Greek phrase which the ESV translates as “prepare” literally says “girding up the loins of your mind”, implying that we are to make ready for strenuous activity. In the ancient world where people wore long robes, a precursor to any work or activity required the tucking of the long robe into the waistband. These words are addressed to us, and so it is a valid question to ask “How are you preparing your mind for action?” We, believers, are expected to be ready go into action for Christ at any time in obedience to His revealed will for us. Are we in training for Christ? What kind of army does not constantly prepare for battle Are you aware there is a battle of the deadliest sort raging, right now, all round you, for the souls of men and women?

We are surrounded by men and women and young people who are caught up in the pursuit of self-gratification, and materialism. In hot pursuit of any and all forms of escape and diversion from an arid and vapid reality. They are hounded by relentless demands on their desires and aspirations for that which cannot satisfy. In this tiny land of Scotland with less than 6 million people almost a million of them are being treated for depression. That is only one manifestation of lives lived without Christ – without faith in God.

Peter’s instruction to believers then, is to be sober-minded. The Amplified Bible is helpful in expanding the meaning of the phrase to mean – **in spirit steadfast, self-disciplined, spiritually and morally alert.** Not taken up with every whim and fancy and every new idea or attraction which appears in the media. Rather, believers are to put on the full gospel armour, which Paul explains in the 6th chapter of his letter to the Ephesians.(See Ephesians 6:10).

Christians should set their hope on the grace (free and unmerited gift of glory) that will be theirs when Christ returns.

Verses 14-16

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “you shall be holy for I am holy.” {See Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2}

When a person becomes regenerated and turns to God in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, nothing in that person’s life is the same, for they have undergone a complete transformation of character. They have been totally re-orientated. Many facets of their former life are no longer acceptable. Dubious and harmful activities that they heedlessly and happily participated in before become unattractive. There is a new direction in their thinking towards God and they find themselves wanting to please God and are aware that their lives have taken on a new purpose. Where before, they seldom thought about God they now want to know more and more about Him and they are drawn to His Word. They find that they are being called to a different type of life wherein holiness (being separate from all that is unclean and harmful to them) and consecration to God is of the utmost importance. The reason for this is that God is utterly and absolutely holy and that by becoming His adopted children they wish to be like their heavenly Father. They find themselves **“hungering and thirsting after**

righteousness". Matthew 5:6 and looking for the promise that "they shall be satisfied".

Verses 17-19

Verse 17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, Having introduced the idea of obedient children, he now describes a logical development of that thought, by stating the implications of being part of God's family. Firstly believers should realise that the judgement spoken of here is not about salvation but rather a judgement on how they have employed their Christian liberty in their work for His kingdom. {See Matthew 25:14-30}. How Christians use the talents and time they have been given will be judged by God, and that judgement will inform the reward they receive when God says "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Matthew 25:23. *Let us be absolutely clear, this reward, is the reward to believers who have repented of their sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Moreover, the fear that Peter refers to here is not the fear of a sinner in the hands of an angry God, but rather, the reverence, awe and respect of a loving, and beloved child. Paul develops the idea in Romans 8:15-17

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Verse 18. knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,

The tenor of this verse indicates that Peter was addressing his letter to primarily Gentile hearers. The injunction to avoid and eschew the "futile ways inherited from your forefathers" would not be appropriate to Christians from a Jewish background. Peter is speaking about the futility of false gods. {See Psalm 115:4-8; Psalm 135:15-18.} This speaks very forcibly to our day and age when false gods proliferate under a myriad of disguises. Examples of this are not hard to find – materialism, the adoration of celebrities, and the obsession with "self". These false gods are the product of a technological age, but the old false religions are still there- all with the same age-old errors and teaching - "How to save yourself by good and meritorious works". This is entirely opposite to biblical Christianity which recognises that this is a fallen world sold under sin and trespass of God's law, and teaches that the lost sinner can only be saved by the initiative and power of the Sovereign God. Hence the word *ransomed*, synonymous in this instance, with *redeemed*. The sinner must have the ransom paid for his sin and be redeemed from the power of sin and death. That ransom can only be paid by Christ the Redeemer.

Verse 19. but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

So we may ask what ransom can be paid to atone for the sin of a fallen world and fallen humanity to redeem Christ's sheep, the elect of God? The answer of course is only the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. The concept of a perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin begins in the Old

Testament with Abel {Genesis 4:4} and is developed through the Levitical priesthood up to the ministry of John the Baptist. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). There would be no more sacrifices after the Resurrection of Christ. The reason why blood was the only sacrifice which could atone for sin was that the blood contains the life force in all animals. If blood was not shed there could be no remission of sin. {See Hebrews 9:11-28}.

Verse 20. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.

There is nothing haphazard about God's Plan of Salvation.

Many translations substitute "chosen" or "foreordained" for the word "foreknown. All three are possible and convey different aspects of God's divine decree not only to create a world and then a people in His own image and likeness, but also to save a people of His choice. Within the Counsel of Redemption, which seeks to describe the purpose of the Triune God in saving; all three Persons of the Godhead are active in their purpose to create and save a "special, chosen people". Having created, the Father would give His only begotten Son, the Son would be willing to die in the stead of sinners having taken upon Himself flesh, to live a sinless life, suffer, die and be resurrected, and the Holy Spirit would apply this remedy to the hearts of sinful men. In this way God is the Initiator, Executor and Consummator of the Plan of Salvation and so to Him is due all the glory. The Good News is that this Saviour has been revealed in these last times for our sake. Matthew 11:15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Verse 21. You, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

It is through Christ that we are believers in God. "Through" translates the Greek preposition *dia* and may also be translated "by" or "because of". Without Jesus there could be absolutely no conception of the true character and nature of God. Jesus is able to say to Philip "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father how can you say show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" John 14:9-10. In John 11:26 Jesus says to Martha "everyone who lives and believes in me, shall never die". We are trying to lay hold of the idea of being in Christ and in God, so please notice "lives in me". Moreover the preposition *eis* can also mean "into" conveying the idea of believers possessing, by faith, more than a simply academic belief in God, but rather an all embracing, overwhelming, personal relationship with God. The resurrection of Jesus is the quintessential and categorical proof that sin has been utterly dealt with by Christ's work at Calvary. That is the only basis upon which anyone may entertain hope in eternity.

Verse 22. Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

The believer's soul is purified by belief in Christ as stated above, but the reality of that purification is only made manifest or apparent by obedience to the truth. It is clearly a folly to declare that Christ has saved you, and for you to behave unrighteously to your fellow believer, (or anyone else for that matter). The injunction to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart", is based on that fact that the believer is already in such a relationship with God.

Verse 23 Since you have been born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

Sinners, having been born again by hearing and believing the living and abiding Word of God - the Gospel; now belong to the same family, so that if brotherly love is natural between natural brothers, of how much greater quality should the love be among true believers?

Verse 24,25

Peter now brings this series of connected thoughts to conclusion by quoting from Isaiah 40:6,8. In doing so he illustrates the frailty of flesh by contrasting it with the word of the Lord that remains forever, particularly the Gospel.

CHAPTER 2

Verse 1

Having considered the correct state of relationships between believers who are members of the family of faith, Peter issues a directive to “Put away” five sinful aspects of character which interfere and detract from the loving relationships which should exist in the church. The sins are *malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander*. It will be immediately apparent that these five negative characteristics all have their root in the seat of the affections, which is the heart. The prophet Jeremiah says “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick who can understand it?”. (Jeremiah 17:9). Any and all of the above sins is capable of destroying the love that should exist between believers, and the fact that the Apostle commands us to “put them away” should inform us that it is possible to do so! We are personally responsible for fighting against these evils.

Verse 2-3

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Anyone who has been blessed with a child will know that a newborn infant almost constantly demands to be fed. It is necessary not only for their immediate survival, but also for sustained growth. These demands are always accompanied by cries and wails that the loving mother is incapable of resisting. In this metaphor then, the Apostle likens the insatiable appetite of the newborn to the appetite of the believer for the Word of God. A desire to read, hear and study the Word of God is a mark not only of faith itself but also a healthy faith. Without the nourishment of the Word the Christian will become spiritually weak and sickly. The words of verse 3 come almost as a challenge to the reader and ask “Have you tasted that the Lord is good – in other words – are you believing savingly in Jesus Christ?”

Verses 4-8

It is as though the Apostle whose name is “Rock” has scoured the Scriptures in order to convey to believers the nature of the living, spiritual house or temple which God is building.

Verse 4

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious

The opening phrase speaks to the ongoing and developing relationship which the believer has with Christ, who is described as a living stone. It is clear that the Apostle has in mind an exegesis of Isaiah 28:16 Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. wherein he inspirationally weaves together the status of the believer as a living

stone in the temple being built by God; and as a member of a holy priesthood capable of offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. To those who believe, Christ is the chief cornerstone – the entire edifice is built on, and depends on Him. To those who do not believe, Christ is a “rock of offense” causing them to stumble because they do not believe the Word. Perhaps the Apostle may have been recalling how this was brought into sharp relief in Luke 20:18 when Jesus said, having been asked to explain Psalm 118:22 {The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone}; Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone it will crush him.” This was directed at the teachers and chief priests who then looked for ways to arrest Him, but it is equally true of all who reject Christ, to this day. There is a price to pay for rejecting God’s beloved Son. The Apostle Paul further explains this stumbling by attributing the stumbling of Israel to attempting to obtain righteousness by the exact observance of the law as opposed to those Gentiles who obtained righteousness by faith. {Romans 9:30-33}

Verse 8 ends with the very solemn words: they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Verse 9-10

The Apostle Peter begins these verses with an introductory “but” in order to contrast the status of the Christian believer.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This is the clearest description we could have of what defines the “Church”. The church is comprised of people who are chosen (*eklectos*). The Sovereign purposes of God are to the fore in the Apostle’s mind as he seeks to describe the defining features of the church. They are also a people who are called out of darkness (*kalesantos*) into his wonderful light. They are a royal priesthood that is to say they are inheritors of royal status by virtue of their adoption as sons and daughters of God. {Romans 8:14-17} The office of priest is that of one who goes between God and Man, and that is a vital part of the ministry of all believers. By their witness to the saving work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection, and by their holy living, they fulfill the office, and at the same time offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ, by prayer, precept and example. In their praise and worship they offer sweet-smelling sacrifices to God. Personal testimony is an important part of the ministry of believers. It authenticates the claims of the believer that Christ has radically changed their life. Believing on Jesus Christ causes a person to become part of the people of God; part of this holy nation that God in His mercy is creating! The word translated “mercy” also means “pity”, and the two words combined convey a wonderful impression of the mighty, loving heart of God.

Verses 11-12

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Beloved is an easy word to say but not an easy word to mean and carry into practice. Peter means that he loves his readers with a love that comes from God. It is the love, which every true minister of religion should have for his

flock as he seeks to lead them on their earthly pilgrimage. Believers have only temporary residence in this world, and should not therefore be *of* the world. Similarly the passions of the flesh are constantly at enmity against the soul, nevertheless the Christian is urged, indeed required, to put up a robust fight laying hold of the spiritual weapons available to him. {See Ephesians 6:10-18; 2Corinthians 10:4-5}. In His high priestly prayer the Lord Jesus prayed for His people {John 17:14-19} with words of exquisite and eternal comfort to believers, and continues to make intercession for them at the right hand of God the Father! The Apostle Peter then, is not urging something which is impossible for believers to achieve, but rather is well within their capabilities, with God's help.

One of the most powerful and effective sermons a believer can preach is to live a godly life in the midst of a godless generation. The Christian's life should be able to be scrutinized at all times, because it is under scrutiny at all times – by God! His personal piety should be of such a sort that he is able to stand before any human tribunal and be declared blameless. This is a mighty witness to unbelievers.

Verses 13-14

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 evil and to praise those who do good.

By the common grace of God, which He extends to all humanity, He has arranged that the world be ordered so that chaos and anarchy do not abound but rather all people are able to live lives wherein fear and uncertainty are not the order of the day. Rather, good governments make good laws and so arrange the mechanisms of a country that all might dwell in relative peace and security. It is the duty of Christians, insofar as they are able, to live within these arrangements in order to live lives which are an example to all around them. The blessing of living in a country where liberty of thought and action is the norm cannot be overrated. Examples throughout the world where this is not the norm are sadly all too numerous. It should be noted that we are to be subject to every human institution – *for the Lord's sake!* That is to say that the Lord's name might be glorified. The only occasion when civil disobedience can be sanctioned is when believers are required to behave in ways which are contrary to the will of God revealed in Scripture.

Verses 15-17

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

The ignorance of the pagan world, in which the early church endeavored to grow, was thoroughgoing. Superstition and misinformation abounded and Christians were accused of absurd and disgusting acts. The Apostle therefore encourages his hearers to live lives which are so manifestly good that false accusations might be refuted and deemed ridiculous. This injunction applies equally to Christians today. Nothing undermines the cause of Christ more effectively than the witness of a life wherein the profession is not matched by the performance.

Christians are a liberated people. They are no longer in thrall to sin or Satan's devices but are made new so that having been cleansed of their sin by the blood of Christ, Christ may be more and more formed in them. Being in possession then, of this freedom, the Apostle warns believers not to misuse

the freedom they have or to persuade themselves that since they are saved they have license to commit wrongdoing of any sort. Quite the contrary; the Apostle Paul makes this quite clear in Romans Chapter 6 verse 1:ff. Interestingly, Peter says believers are free, yet finishes the sentence by reminding us that we are *douloi*, which mean bond-servants or slaves of God. Free yet slaves! Believers, are to honour all men, (*pantas*) as image-bearers of God, for their humanity's sake, but then goes on to require that Christians love the brotherhood. This word in Greek conveys a type of love which carries ideas of generosity, kindly concern, and devotedness. Whilst the power of the state is to be honoured, only God is to be feared with reverential awe.

Verses 18-20

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

It is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the experience of a first century Christian house-servant and a sophisticated twenty first century Christian dwelling in a Western democracy. Few in this modern world would endure unfair and abusive behaviour on the part of an employer for any length of time without having recourse to some form legal relief, or simply exercise their right to walk away from the situation. This was not an option for many of the first hearers of this epistle. They were in positions which, so far as they were concerned, were permanent, and without any civil rights. But there are principles in operation in this section which are as important in this day as they were when the Apostle Peter wrote then.

There are two phrases which are key in these verses namely:

1. "For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God"
2. "this is a gracious thing in the sight of God"

The word translated *gracious thing* carries a fuller meaning of *a pleasing circumstance or matter of approval*. This translates the Greek word *charis*.

In the first phrase the believer is to be mindful that God observes and sees all that His people endure and suffer. This is not to say that God takes pleasure in suffering in itself but rather that He is pleased when His child is able to behave like Christ in whatever circumstance he finds himself. The believer should bear in mind that God sees them and cares for them and should remember the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:13 - **No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the ay of escape, that you may be able to endure it.** The word *temptation* conveys the idea of trial, calamity or affliction.

The second phrase focuses more on the idea of unjust suffering. The book of Job deals with the problem of unjust suffering and we all have to come to terms with the reality of such suffering whether at the hands of a wretched employer or more importantly, the multifarious vicissitudes of life. No one endured unjust suffering like the Lord Jesus Christ. We are staggered and humbled by His quiet acquiescence to His death on the cross for sinners like us and we need to take Him as our example when beset by hard adversity of any kind. The thing to remember is that God sees all of our calamities and

trials and is proud of His children when they endure like the Lord, and will ultimately reward them for suffering righteously.

Verses 21-25

For to do this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In these verses we come to the crystallization of the argument which Peter has been building up to and in a few words he provides a wonderful summary of not only a rationale for the believer's suffering, which of course does not atone for sin, but also the redeeming work of Christ on the cross which does. Following the Lord Jesus is never easy and is always attended by all kinds of difficulty. That is why Jesus said in Matthew 16:24 "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" In following Christ we must learn His secret of entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. Sin must no longer have dominion over us for that old man has died and the new man must live to righteousness, for we have been healed by the wounds of Christ. The fact is that before we encountered Jesus savingly, we lived aimless and purposeless lives being driven this way and that by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Ephesians 4:14. We now follow the Good Shepherd.

Chapter 3

Verses 1-7

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,² when they see your respectful and pure conduct.³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear—⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands,⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

The introductory adverb "Likewise" at the beginning of Chapter 3 and at verse 7 of this chapter indicates that Peter is continuing the thread of thought on the principle of submitting to authority in various aspects of life and now focuses attention on the relationship between wives and husbands. We have already provided some background to the relationship between husband and wife in our study of Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, and so for convenience we repeat those comments here in italics.

It is important to first recall the role of women within marriage in both Jewish and Graeco/Roman cultures. Briefly, the life of women was severely curtailed in comparison to men. Jewish custom expected women to remain for the most part within the confines of the home with strict limitations on personal freedom. They could not as a rule be called as witnesses in a law court nor could they worship with men. In the main only the daughters of Rabbis could be educated to the age of thirteen and there were limitations on the owning of property. They could be divorced at the whim of the man for as trivial a reason as burning the dinner! Their Gentile sisters fared little better if at all, with married women fulfilling the role of child bearer and home manager under the absolute authority of the husband, whilst a wealthy man might have both mistresses and concubines. If a woman became cast out or disconnected from her male protector her existence was perilous and may well end up in prostitution, exploitation or death. Scholarship has unearthed a great deal of information about the life of women in both Jewish and Graeco/Roman cultures of the first century which can be summarised by saying that they were looked upon almost as things to be owned and used and of little intrinsic value. This attitude may well account for the fact that there was a disproportionate number of men to women brought about in part at least by female infanticide, crude abortion and insanitary childbirth.

Contrast all this with the teaching of Jesus, which constantly emphasised the value of all human life and affirmed the status of women by prohibiting divorce. The attitude of Jesus to women was transformational, primarily because He offered eternal life, but also because He gave them abundant life now, valuing them for who they were as individuals and equal with men in their membership of His body – the *ecclesia* – those called out of the world. A few examples will serve to illustrate this:

Luke 7:11-17 The raising of the son of the widow of Nain demonstrates the amazing tenderness of Christ for this woman who was bereft of all support.

Luke 8:43-48, the healing of the woman with a chronic issue of blood displays Christ's revolutionary disregard for rules of ritual cleanness.

John 4:1-42 Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar. This is an astonishing break with the mores of that culture. He amazes her firstly, by requesting a drink from her which no Jew would ever have done since Samaritans were regarded by Jews as unclean; then by offering her living water which would slake her soul-thirst forever; next by relating her true marital status of living with a man out of wedlock, and finally He declares to her that He is the Christ! By her testimony many Samaritans came to faith in Jesus.

Within this context Paul says "Wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord". Why; since we have just been discussing Jesus egalitarian treatment of women? The Greek word here for "submit" or "be subject to" is *hupotasso* it means to place under. It recognises Paul's conviction that the man should carry out the function of leader (protector and teacher) within the family, being responsible and accountable to God in his execution of that duty. Paul relates this function to the creation narrative: 1 Corinthians 11:8 **For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.** Reading on, Paul goes on to emphasise the complementarity of man and woman, but then again in 1 Timothy 2:13,14 he returns to the creation narrative: **For Adam was formed first then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.** Is there an implied constitutional weakness, which Eve passes on to her daughters? Certainly Adam, having all of mankind potentially in him as the federal head, passes on his constitutional weakness- sin! (1 Corinthians 15:22) If we continue to look at the Genesis account of the Fall we come to these words said to Eve in 3:16 **I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall**

bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

These words suggest the **desire** of the woman is nothing to do with sexual desire, but rather to dominate the man (compare same word for **desire** in Genesis 4:7). The marriage ideal of complementarity envisaged by God is frustrated and replaced by conflict between the sexes with each effectively seeking to dominate the other, the man with less subtlety, by acting as a tyrant.

Of course this is precisely what Satan excels at. He is **diabolos** – one who divides and separates. One who creates division and trouble, employing every weapon of his not inconsiderable arsenal to frustrate and spoil God's plan. We know that in this he will be ultimately unsuccessful; Jesus Christ has seen to that, by His death and resurrection, but in the meantime the innate predilection of humankind to sin provides a continuing and fertile seed bed of possibilities for Satan to exploit.

Interestingly in 1 Timothy 2:15 Paul says: *Yet she will be saved through childbearing-if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.*

Notice the change from singular to plural "she" to "they" implying this will be the experience of all believing women.

This verse seems to provide an antiphon to what we read in Genesis 3:16. This does not teach that salvation of a woman comes by childbearing, for it states clearly that she must continue in faith, however it does seem to indicate a closing of the circle of the curse pronounced by God on Eve and her daughters, wherein their pain, their unconditional loving care for their children, and life-long maternal concern for these children, effects a work of grace in a believing woman's soul which a man cannot experience. It is almost like a special compensation from God. (I am speculating).

Returning to the doctrine of the Apostle Peter, he confirms Paul's teaching on the relationship between husbands and wives and introduces a consideration of the difficulties which might pertain in a relationship wherein the wife was a believer and the husband was not. His argument is that by her respectful and pure conduct the wife will not only help to shape her husband's character but may even bring him to saving faith. The idea of transforming influence being exerted upon another person by love, respect and purity of life, is a powerful one, and actually works, not only within the exclusive domain of marital relationships but also in interpersonal relationships in the wider scheme of things! The Christian should be a living, breathing sermon!

Continuing in the vein of purity and righteous living, Peter encourages women to follow the examples of strong and faithful women of the past, encouraging them to seek those qualities which they exhibited: strong faith, trust in God and a willingness to fulfil the role of helpmate to their husbands, which is simply reflecting what is God's blueprint for successful marriage. Peter's warnings about dress and self-adornment are a caution about becoming self-obsessed and ostentatious rather than recommending outward drabness and ugliness.

Likewise, in the same way, husbands should hold their wives in honour and respect, loving and cherishing, and protecting them. Wives are described as the weaker partner which they usually are-*physically*; but this does not teach that they are in any way inferior morally, intellectually or religiously. Rather, Peter is continuing his thought about a mixed marriage, in this case from the perspective of the believing husband. He may well have had Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:12 in mind, which should be compared. Peter finishes this section by referring to the husband (believer) and wife (non-believer) as co-heirs of the grace of life. That is to say the shared free gift of life within the marriage with all its benefits and challenges. The prayer referred to here must

mean those prayers which are made for the conversion of the non-believing spouse. Those are the prayers which will be hindered by a failure to treat the unbelieving spouse as directed here, thereby providing a powerful incentive to not only live by these instructions but also to continue faithfully and ardently in prayer on their behalf. This is important because it is easy over the course of long years in a marriage to accept the status quo, but that is unacceptable. We are joined together in marriage within the will of Almighty God that His purposes may be fulfilled and these prayers are part of His will.

As he brings his doctrine on submissiveness to a close the Apostle Peter states **Verses 8-12**

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

The Apostle sets out five essential attributes of the Church – those called out of the world to be God's people.

Unity of mind. The New Testament is peppered with exhortations to unity beginning with the words of the Lord Jesus Himself in John 17:21-23. We could fill the page with examples from the epistles - Romans 12:4,16; 1Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 2:13,14, to name only three. It is a useful exercise to search the New Testament for other examples.

Sympathy is a word taken straight from the Greek. It means to be compassionate. It means to feel as the other person feels and to indentify with and realise their point of view. It really requires love on the part of both parties.

Brotherly love Acknowledges the status of others in the church as sharing the same Father in heaven, through the saving work of Christ communicated by the Holy Spirit.

A tender heart is a heart which has been transformed by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It is a heart which overflows with the desire to seek the best for the other, even to the detriment of oneself.

A humble mind. Pride, the opposite of humility, may well have been the first sin in the universe, and was the reason why Satan and other fallen angels were cast out of heaven. Pride lurks at the door of every heart and needs to be resisted. A consideration of the humility of our Lord and Saviour will teach us what it means to be humble. **³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.** Philippians 2:3. That's it.

The implications of returning evil for evil and reviling for reviling are obvious. Situations are created wherein love has no locus. The loving ambience which should exist among brothers and sisters in Christ, is utterly impaired by this behaviour. Proverbs 15:1 speaks to this situation – a soft, answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger. Conversely, believers are called out of the world to be a blessing to all, particularly the church, and behaviour which is consistently beneficent carries the promise of an inheritance. Matthew 5:9. By way of scriptural endorsement of his teaching above the Apostle Peter cites Psalm 34:12-16.

Verses 13-17

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

We should bear in mind, that the thrust of the Apostle Peter's doctrine in this section, is to prepare his readers for possible persecution in the future.

In the main, the world grudgingly regards Christians as an unthreatening, or even benign influence. Peter asks the question "if you are zealous for what is good what is to fear?" However the world is not always ambivalent to the followers of Christ.

We know that Satan and his cohorts are active in fomenting trials and trouble for Christ's people that can manifest itself rapidly without any apparent cause. The Lord Jesus Himself instructed us to pray that we might not be led into trials and tests but that we might be delivered from evil. And the Apostle states that even if believers are made to suffer they will be blessed. This resonates with the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:11-12. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." In these circumstances, believers should honour Christ the Lord as holy and be ready to make a defence of the hope that is in them. The old hymn went like this:

*"My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust my sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus Name.
On Christ the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand."*

It is easy to fail to do this, as we all know too well, nevertheless we should all have a rational witness within us whereby we can convey our hope in a winning and respectful way, in the knowledge that we are living as Christ would have us live.

Verse 18

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, This is a powerful and key statement on the Atonement. It contains all the essential elements of the doctrine: Christ is Subject – He carries out the work. He suffered “once” and for all {See Hebrews 10:14} the righteous One for the unrighteous, that we might be covered by His righteousness and have it counted to us by faith. He was put to death in the flesh (that is His body died in the visible physical realm) but His spirit (His divine spirit which could not die) was quickened to the spiritual realm where he now dwells at the right hand of the Father.{Colossians 3:1 Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20}.

Verses 19-22

19 in which^[a] he went and proclaimed^[b] to the spirits in prison, **20** because^[c] they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. **21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

We now come to what may well be, and probably is, the most difficult scripture to comment upon. Many great minds have proposed several solutions to explain these words and there continues much debate as to their true meaning. It is outwith the scope and ability of this small commentary to attempt to add anything new to this debate and so we satisfy ourselves with stating the obvious points.

- In the spirit, Christ proclaimed to the spirits in prison. It is not clear which spirits are referred to but the plural of the Greek word for spirits almost universally refers to demons in the New Testament.
- The purpose and effect of this proclamation is not clear.
- The deliverance of eight persons out of the entire population of the world in the Flood is seen as an antitype of baptism. **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4.
- Christ now sits at the right hand of and reigns supremely.

Chapter 4

Verses 1,2

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

Jesus Christ suffered in the flesh and submitted to death in order to save His people. He was resolved with adamant purpose to achieve that end. That was the state of His mind; we might respectfully say that was His mind-set. The

Apostle Peter encourages his readers to arm themselves with the same attitude which, rather than fearing and running from suffering and death to accept it as a likely or even probable outcome. When this mental bridge is crossed the fear of suffering and death diminishes, and of course when the believer dies, sin no longer assails them.

Some years ago there was a series on television about a unit of American soldiers called "A Band of Brothers". It was an outstanding production on many levels and was based on factual events. In one scene a young officer is dealing with an equally young soldier who is in terror of dying and cannot function. The officer says to the private soldier words to the effect that he was labouring under the misconception that he might survive the war. He then baldly states this was unlikely, and the sooner the soldier accepted that the sooner he would be able to function as a soldier.

We all entertain fears of suffering and death but the sooner we mentally adjust to the fact that both suffering and death are certainties the sooner we can profitably serve in the will of Almighty God.

Verses 3-5

³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The list above informs us that the practises of the first century are entirely similar in nature to those of the twenty-first. When a person is regenerated and is converted to Christ a complete change of mind and personality takes place, causing the new believer to recoil more and more from the past life. This inevitably brings censure and separation from erstwhile companions. Peter informs us that those who scorn and abuse Christ's people for pious living will have to give account to God.

Verse 6

⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. NIV

⁶ For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. NKJV

⁶ That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead^[a]—so although they were destined to die like all people,^[b] they now live forever with God in the Spirit. NLT

⁶ For, for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. KJV

This is another notoriously difficult verse to comment on with certainty. For this reason, we have given 5 translations of the same verse. There are at least four different explanations for this verse, but the simplest, and the one which does least violence to orthodox Reformed doctrine is that the gospel was preached by the Apostles to all men with whom they came into contact and that some of these in common with all mankind have now died. That is the judgement and wages of sin which we all share namely death. However if they believed the Gospel in life they now dwell with God in the spirit., as will all believers when they die.

Verses 7-11

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. **8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. **9** Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: **11** whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The Apostle Peter was an eyewitness to the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was well aware that all the elements of the great plan of salvation were in place and that he now lived, as do we, in the time when God's people are being called in. The work of redemption is complete and the work of spreading the Gospel continues until Christ returns. We should therefore live in a state of preparedness being diligent about our business for the Lord, and being particularly assiduous about prayer. Self-control and sober-mindedness are the opposites of abandonment and frivolity which are the hallmarks of the unregenerate, and it behoves God's people to practice these qualities. We should be serious about prayer, and our duty to God and fellow believers. In this vein Peter encourages believers to love (*agape*) one another with a consistent, fervent, generous, kindly devotedness, because this attitude not only prevents sinful quarrels but also allows the faults of others to be overlooked and quickly dealt with. The need for hospitality in the early church was essential, for foot journeys over long distances in hostile country were extremely dangerous. Indeed without generous hospitality on the part of believers, the transmission of the Gospel would have been significantly inhibited. Although this need is no longer as pressing as it was, the grace of hospitality without selfish grumbling is still sometimes required and lovely to behold. Each believer has received a gift or gifts from the bounty of God's grace. These gifts are to be used for the benefit of the fellowship of believers. Whether the gift is the gift of preaching or serving in some capacity or other, these gifts are not private possessions; they are given that God may be glorified. Peter completes this section with a kind of doxology as he contemplates the glory and majesty of God.

Verses 12-19

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer

as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Verse 12

We have seen in verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 4 that suffering and testing will come upon the faithful Christian in the normal run of events in life, and we have already noted that to be reviled and abused for the sake of Christ Jesus is a blessing as explained by the Lord Himself in Matthew 5:11,12. Peter says that we should not be dismayed by this but rather consider it normative behaviour on the part of the world to abuse Christ and his followers. Suffering for Christ may be regarded almost as a badge of honour, for the believer is sharing in the sufferings of Christ. This is not of course to compare the sufferings of the believer with those of Christ, nor does anything need to be added to Christ's perfect finished work, but insofar as the believer is part of the body of Christ he suffers in Christ and the Spirit of glory and of God rest upon him in an intense way. The name "Christian", having been coined in Antioch {Acts 11:26}, was used pejoratively in the New Testament by opponents of "the Way" except in this case. The Christian's life must therefore be above reproach so that if they suffer it must not be for doing evil. God allows suffering to test and prove the faith of believers. It is a purifying judgement for the family of God, and, if it begins with the family of God what will the nature of the judgement be for those who do not obey the Gospel and have not been made right with God by faith in Jesus. Peter then poses the question "If the righteous are scarcely saved (i.e. with difficulty or hardly- Greek *mōlis*), what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" The Christian therefore who is suffering according to God's will, while doing good, should entrust themselves to His kind Providence knowing that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose.

Chapter 5:1-4

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

With astonishing and winsome humility the mighty Apostle Peter describes himself to the leadership of the churches in Asia as "a fellow elder." There is not a

trace of him trying to set himself above other leaders or puffing himself up. He gives all who would be called to leadership in the church of Christ an outstanding example. There are three words in the New Testament which are used to describe the office of elder: *presbuteros* – which means a senior man, older, more advanced in years, a leader; *episkopos* – which means an overseer, a watcher, a guardian; *poimen*- which means a shepherd, one who tends flocks or herds. The terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament and together describe the office of elder. The Apostle Paul further amplifies the requirements for an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, which it is helpful to read. It is profoundly important that these requirements are met in men who are elevated to the office of elder, and any compromise or dilution of these requirements will quickly result in deterioration in the quality of leadership with concomitant hurt to the health and witness of the church.

Elders are to watch over the flock willingly, taking their lead from the Good Shepherd who tenderly, bravely, vigorously and lovingly watches over His sheep. They are to execute this duty wholeheartedly, remembering how God values His sheep. They are to be eager in the fulfilment of this commission, giving of themselves, in their time and talents, without any thought of personal gain. They are never to be domineering, bullying, hectoring or overbearing, but on the contrary remember they are to serve. {Matthew 9:35}

It goes without saying that elders should be converted men who have a sound, experiential knowledge of the faith they profess and are able to articulate their beliefs in a kind and winsome way. Sadly these parameters are not always met.

Verse 5

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Humility among the people of God, is of paramount importance. Believers take their instruction from their Master and Lord who, above and beyond all our comprehension humbled Himself to a degree which we cannot begin to fully appreciate.

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:6-7

His humiliation consisted in coming from the eternal realms of glory to be born in a stable in a manger. He was willing to be subject to his parents. He carried out His ministry during which He would be constantly harried and abused by Pharisees, Scribes and other learned Jews, who despite the clear manifestations of His power and deity refused to accept who He was. He demonstrated the meaning of humility by washing the disciples feet. He allowed Himself to be captured; subjected Himself to a farce of a trial, to be condemned to die, to be scourged, beaten, mocked and abused, and nailed to a cross. He died and was buried and He who was LIFE itself subjected Himself to death. They buried Him in a tomb but death could not hold Him and He rose from the dead.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:8

Following the example of the Lord, the Apostles all teach that humility is a virtue to be cultivated and practised. Indeed Peter says believers should clothe themselves in humility as though it was a garment to be put on and tied. Both Peter and James quote from Proverbs 3:34 – **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** The Apostle James goes on to say in James 4:10 **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

Verse 6-7

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

This is a verse which many, including the present writer, have oftentimes taken shelter under, when enduring hard times and difficult experiences. It simultaneously recognises the Providence of God and the loving protection and care of God for His child. The invitation to cast all our anxieties on Him is like an elixir that takes away all fear and uncertainty. It is interesting that both James and Peter describe the eventual exaltation, which follows humbling, in very similar terms.

Verses 8-10

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

The Apostle Peter now issues a serious warning regarding the activities of the devil (Satan). It behoves the believer to be on guard (serious minded and alert) at all times, never allowing his guard to drop lest the evil one find a means to lead him into sin and ruin. Whilst Satan has been utterly vanquished by the perfect work of redemption on the cross by our Lord Jesus, nevertheless he has been given a degree of liberty to test and try the believers, before he is finally consigned to the lake of fire. {Revelation 20:10}. In this spiritual warfare, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 6:10-18 wherein he describes the full panoply of God which is available to the believer. This is so important that we include the Apostle Paul's teaching on this subject here.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

This warfare is not academic or figurative for the believer. Satan's devices and his demonic forces can and do manifest themselves in an outpouring of hatred and oppression against God's people. This is real and can result in all manner of pain and misery and even death. Christians therefore should pointedly pray they are not led into temptation (testing) and are in fact delivered from evil, as our Lord instructed when he taught the disciples how to pray.

The Apostle Peter's command to resist the devil, again echoing the teaching of the Apostle James {James 4:7} – (he uses exactly the same word –*antistete*) requires a strong response from the believer. The strongest antidote to Satan's evil overtures is to solemnly consider what God has done in love, through Christ, to rescue the sinner. Moreover there is a promise attached to this suffering which is the common experience of the brethren everywhere, and that is that the God who called the believer out of the world to share His eternal glory in Christ will Himself **restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish** the believer.

Whatever the believer might have lost in his suffering in this life will be more than compensated and **restored** when he meets the Lord God in glory. To **confirm** means to make certain or to stabilise that which may not have been certain. Doubts will be swept away and be replaced by unshakable certainty. The believer will be **strengthened** both now and in eternity. Strengthened to bear up under suffering here and now but also strengthened for eternity. The believer will also be **established** so that they are permanently and perpetually immovable from the presence and love of God.

Verse 11

¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. This appears to be another spontaneous doxology where Peter must give glory to the Sovereign Lord.

Verses 12-14

¹²By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. ¹³She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. ¹⁴Greet one another with the kiss of love.

These represent Peter's final greetings to his readers and us in this epistle. Many scholars regard **Silvanus** as the same person who is elsewhere called Silas. {Acts 15:22;16:19;17:4; 2 Corinthians 1:19;1 Thessalonians 1:1} A cursory reading of these scripture references will reveal that Silas was leader in the church entrusted with preaching the Gospel. He was seized along with Paul in Philippi and severely beaten and imprisoned. He was there when the jailer and his household were saved (Acts 16:31). He was a Roman citizen(Acts 16:37-39). In 2 Corinthians 1:19 he is described along with Paul and Timothy as part of the preaching team. He may have acted as an amanuensis for the Apostle Peter in this epistle which may explain the quality of the Greek which some scholars have suggested Peter would not have been capable of. Silvanus or Silas was a trusted and vital member of the outreach of the infant church.

The reference to "She who is in Babylon, who is likewise chosen sends greetings", many scholars believe is code for the church in Rome. This seems likely given the current hostility the church was experiencing. It also forms an *inclusio* or literary envelope, wherein the opening verse of Peter's letter refers to exiles (resonant with the OT exile in Babylon) and finishes with the reminder that though they are exiles they are elect exiles.

We have already written about Mark in a study of Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and so for convenience we will copy these comments in italics here.

Mark (also called John) the cousin of Barnabas, is well attested by the church fathers as the author of the Gospel of Mark. It is believed that that gospel is really the recollections of Peter the Apostle in which Mark, who followed Peter in his ministry, wrote down all that Peter could remember about the words and actions of the Lord. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas of the First Missionary Journey but left them from Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem for an undisclosed reason which Paul did not deem sufficiently important, resulting in his being refused a place on the Second Missionary Journey. This caused Paul and Barnabas to separate. Mark was later reinstated in Paul's good estimation, because he is here with Paul in prison, with the possibility of being sent to take up a post at Colossae. John Mark may well have been led to Christ by Peter, for we find him being described by the Apostle in 1Peter 5:13 as "my son Mark". There is an interesting brief interlude in the Gospel of Mark described in Chapter 14:51,52 which says "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind". This event concerning an unnamed young man has all the hallmarks of an autobiographical recollection and it has long been thought that this young man was Mark. Whether this is the case or not, we owe Mark an inestimable debt of gratitude for his Gospel, for in its 16 Chapters it conveys the Gospel of Jesus with driving immediacy and urgency.

