

FIRST PETER

Lesson 2

Comfort for the Chosen

1 Peter 1:2

In our last lesson, “Introduction to First Peter,” we concluded that the theme of the book is “suffering which brings glory to God.” Christians in the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor, to whom the book was written, were suffering because they were living righteous and holy lives for Christ. They were suffering social persecution as aliens to this world and citizens of heaven. They were not suffering because of martyrdoms, imprisonments, confiscations or demands of emperor worship. Their suffering was in the nature of malicious gossip and calumnious attacks. They were called “evil doers” (2:12), they were “insulted” (3:9), “slandered” (3:16), “maligned” (4:4) and “reviled for the name of Christ” (3:9). These Christians had such dynamic lives that they brought conviction to those who were not Christians, and this conviction brought the worst out of these unbelievers. This social persecution was severe but not unbearable.

Since these sufferings were so severe, we would think the Apostle Peter would start his letter by writing on the God of comfort, or help them to fix their minds on a God of love, or draw their attention to a God of mercy who takes pity on His people, but Peter does not do this. In the salutation of the letter he begins with a discourse on Trinitarian salvation. He appeals to these suffering saints on the basis that God the Father has chosen them to salvation, God the Holy Spirit has sanctified them, and God the Son has forgiven them in His own blood. A strange beginning? I agree, but when properly understood, the sovereign purposes of God in a Christian’s salvation is the bedrock to persevering in all kinds and types of suffering.

CHOSEN ACCORDING TO THE PLAN OF GOD**“who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”**

Peter states a fact about these Christians—they were chosen by the Father. He is a very practical Christian and does not delve deeply into the theory of election as does Paul in Ephesians 1 and Romans 9. He simply states the fact of election and wants to put that doctrine to work in the lives of these suffering saints.

The Greek word for “chosen” means “to pick out” or “to select out of a number.” Election, therefore, has to do with God choosing for Himself individuals out of the masses of humanity. Election is not some new doctrine taught by the Apostle Peter; it was taught by Christ.

“And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He shortened the days” (Mark 13:20). It was also taught by the Apostle Paul. “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will” (Eph. 1:4-5).

Almost every writer of the New Testament deals with election; therefore, it is an important doctrine to know and live by. Why God would choose some and pass by others is a great mystery to us. We accept the truth of sovereign election because it is a divine revelation from an infinite God although our finite minds cannot totally grasp it. Election to salvation is to be believed, not totally understood. In fact, if a person has come up with a system of theology in which he claims a total grasp of election intellectually, he does not understand it at all. There will always be an antinomy, paradox or mystery between divine sovereignty in election and man's responsibility to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior. As our minds wrestle with this truth, let us remember that biblically the question is not why God saves some and passes by others but why God saves anyone, because all are totally depraved sinners and none deserves salvation. All that a Christian has is by God's pure, unadulterated grace.

This verse says that Christians have been chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." The key to understanding sovereign election is to get a right definition of "foreknowledge." Some believe that foreknowledge is mere prescience, precognition or foresight of what will happen to man. They equate foreknowledge with omniscience and say that God looked down the corridors of time and saw how men would believe and on that basis He chose them to salvation and then predestined them to be conformed to Christ. They see God as some kind of a crystal ball gazer who foresees the future and makes plans on what He sees. This view has some very obvious weaknesses. First, it equates omniscience and foreknowledge which is both biblically and theologically wrong. Second, if foreknowledge is merely foresight, then God's plan originates from man and not God. Third, if foreknowledge is just seeing how men will act and then making a plan, nothing could be absolutely certain. Fourth, if God foresees how men will act and then makes His plan, then the plan is made certain and the number of the elect according to foresight cannot change.

As I said previously, the key to understanding election to salvation is to get a biblical definition of foreknowledge. The Greek word is *proginosko* which means "to know experientially beforehand." This is an active, conscious knowledge between the subject and the object. It is a loving relationship which God the Father, the Knower, sustains to the elect, and this intimate knowledge of them spans eternity past. In eternity, God the Father knew all the elect personally, vitally and lovingly.

It is important to see how the word "foreknowledge" is used in Scripture.

Foreknowledge is connected with the decree or plan of God in the death of Christ. *"This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23).*

Foreknowledge is seen to be a loving relationship between God and His people Israel. *"I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (Rom. 11:1-2a).* This verse tells us that God is not finished with the nation of Israel. Why? They are His chosen people. *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2 KJV).*

Foreknowledge in Romans is definitely an active, vital, loving relationship that God has with Israel. Some scholars have felt strongly that foreknowledge in Romans nine is so directly connected with God's plan that it should be translated "chosen."

Foreknowledge is definitely linked up with God's purpose and predestination.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Rom. 8:28-30).

Notice carefully it does not say “what God foreknew” (their faith), but “whom He foreknew” (His people). From all eternity, the Father foreknew the Christian and based on that loving, deliberate, personal knowledge, He chose and predestinated the Christian.

Foreknowledge is a loving relationship, based on a deliberate judgment by God in the eternal plan, which He carried out with certain individuals, leading to their choice for salvation. Foreknowledge, therefore, logically comes before election because in the act of foreknowledge, God fell in love with His elect and on that basis He chose them for salvation. We should also notice that “foreknowledge” (Rom. 8:29) comes after God's “purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The foreknowledge of God is much like the way a man chooses a wife. Before a man asks a woman to marry him, he first falls in love with the woman and woos her. Then, based upon his love for her, he chooses her to be his wife. God loved us before He chose us to salvation.

If you are still not convinced that foreknowledge is an active, vital and selective love related to God's plan, I have a final point. Turn back to First Peter 1:20. The NASB uses the correct translation, “*For He (Christ) was foreknown before the foundation of the world.*” Did the Father only have prescience or foresight of what Christ would do, or was His death planned by the Father? Was Christ just passively known by the Father? No! It was an active, vital, loving relationship between the Father and the Son from eternity past.

So confident are scholars that “foreknowledge” in 1 Peter 1:20 is part of the eternal plan of God that the translators of the NIV render this, “He was chosen before the foundation of the world.” The KJV says, “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.” The NEB translates it, “predestined before the foundation of the world.”

If the word “foreknowledge” in this verse means “foreordained, preordination, foredecreed, chosen or predestined” when speaking of Christ, then it must have essentially the same meaning in 1 Peter 1:2. Kenneth Wuest, a Greek scholar, translates 1 Peter 1:2: “*Chosen out ones, this choice having been determined by the foreordination of God the Father.*” Perhaps a good biblical translation would be, “chosen according to the planned, selective love of God the Father.”

What then can we say about our salvation as Christians? God is the author and planner of our salvation and to Him belongs the glory alone. All we can say as Christians is what the Apostle Paul said, “*But by the grace of God I am what I am*” (1 Cor. 15:10).

CHOSEN TO BE SET APART FOR SALVATION

“by the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”

Now Peter connects the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit with the choice of these Christians for salvation. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in this context probably refers not to the Christian's progressive sanctification and moral development in daily Christian living, but is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in preparatory sanctification to bring those who have been chosen to the Cross where they will believe in Christ and be saved. The basic, primary or primitive meaning of "sanctification" is to set apart, and this is the meaning Peter uses here. Later on in this chapter he will speak of practical and personal sanctification.

"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy as I am holy' (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

First Peter 1:2, however, is a reference to a previous work of grace before a person is saved.

Paul taught this same truth in the Epistle of Second Thessalonians.

"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

Notice again that sanctification comes after God's choice and before belief in the truth of Jesus Christ. In His preparatory sanctification, the Holy Spirit sets a person away from his unbelief to an act of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression in 1 Peter 1:2, "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit" includes all the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit from the first gentle knockings to the final sealing of grace.

All Christians, especially those who were saved later in life, can look back and see how God used the hearing of the gospel, the reading of a tract, conviction of sin, unusual circumstances and contacts with Christians to bring them to Christ. Theologically this is called the preparatory sanctification of the Spirit to bring a person to the point where he will bow his heart to Christ as Lord and receive Him as the only Savior from sin and hell.

CHOSEN TO OBEY THE GOSPEL FOR SALVATION

"that you may obey Jesus Christ."

Peter says that these Christians were chosen for the purpose of obeying Jesus Christ. Again this is not a reference to obedience in daily Christian living, but obedience in initially receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In the New Testament, coming to Christ is often spoken of as an act of obedience.

"Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake" (Rom. 1:5).

"Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8).

Even Peter, in the Epistle of First Peter, uses it in this way. *“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* (1 Pet. 4:17) Receiving Christ as Savior and Lord is an act of obedience because men are commanded by God to believe in Christ. To keep this command is to obey. *“And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.’”* (Acts 16:31). This is also true of repentance. *“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent”* (Acts 17:30). What does the sinner do to be saved? He obeys the command to believe in Christ. Inherent within the word “believe” is the thought of commitment to Christ. Who does the believing, God or man? While God chooses sinners to salvation, He does not believe for them. If a person is ever to be saved, he must, by an act of the will, believe in Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. No person will ever be saved until he says “Yes” to Christ and “No” to his old life style. Only after a person trusts Christ can he know he is among the elect.

We must always remember that part of the salvation process is belief in Christ.

“But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

Unless a person trusts in Christ, he will never be saved.

CHOSEN TO BE FORGIVEN BY CHRIST

“Be sprinkled with His blood.”

Now Peter relates God’s choice of these individuals to God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. It is Christ who cleanses the elected sinner in His own blood. When Christ died, through the shedding of His precious blood, He substituted for and forgave every sin of God’s people.

The sprinkling of the blood goes back to the Old Testament ritual of sprinkling God’s people with the sacrificial animal blood, and Peter probably has in mind the time when Moses sprinkled blood on the people in the ratification of the Mosaic Law, the Old Covenant.

“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Ex. 24:6-8).

This ritual was designed to teach the people the nature of atonement. The oxen were slain and were offered first as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God by the sprinkling of the blood on the altar. The sacrifice satisfied God’s righteous demands against sin and He set aside His wrath to display His grace, love and mercy to undeserving sinners. Then in

the Mosaic ritual, after the blood had been sprinkled on the altar, the Law was read and the people voluntarily accepted the covenant God had proposed. Then finally the blood was sprinkled on the people to show that they had been forgiven and accepted into the Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 9:19-20).

CHARGE TO PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING

“May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

Up until now Peter has been speaking about the sovereign work of the Trinity in bringing a sinner to Christ. He was addressing the issue of positional truth, but now he writes about the experiencing of truth. He desires that these Christians experience the grace and peace of God. “Grace” refers to the enablement from God for everyday living, which is given to the chosen saint who is yielded to and dependent upon the Holy Spirit for power. Christians are to be constantly growing in the practical grace of God. “But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18). “Peace” refers to the experiential peace that the elected saint can have as he is occupied with Jesus Christ in this life.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).

This is the practical peace of God which passes all human understanding.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Grace and peace are to be “multiplied” as it literally states in the Greek. Grace and peace are to be multiplied to these chosen ones as they learn dependence on Christ in everyday life. Experiencing grace and peace is an on-going process because they are multiplied to the chosen saint who keeps on believing.

Christians through the centuries have greeted one another with the word “peace.” When my wife and I were in Romania in 1977, everywhere we went the Christians gave us a handshake and said, “Pachae” which means “peace” in Romanian. They wanted us to experience the peace of God as they were experiencing it in their lives in a Communist dominated country.

Martin Luther gave a wise comment on the meaning of grace and peace when he said,

“Peace is the favor of God which now begins in us but must work more and more and multiply unto death. If a man knows and believes in a gracious God, he has Him; his heart finds peace, and he fears neither the world nor the devil, for he knows that God, who controls all things, is his friend and will deliver him from death, hell and all calamity; therefore his conscience is full of peace and joy. This is

what Peter desires for believers; it is a right Christian salutation, with which all Christians should greet one another.”

CONCLUSION

How does 1 Peter 1:2 relate to these Christians in Asia Minor who were suffering? Peter reminds them, of the Trinitarian, sovereign God who saved them according to His own will and good pleasure. The Father chose them; the Holy Spirit convicted and regenerated them, and the Son forgave them through His blood. It was God who ultimately brought them to Himself. Their personal choice of Christ, while absolutely necessary for their salvation, was only a secondary cause. The primary cause of their salvation was God. Remember these saints were suffering severe social persecution. They undoubtedly were discouraged, for no one really likes to suffer. Perhaps some of these saints were so distraught that they thought they would abandon Christ so as to get out of suffering. Peter reminded them that they were Christians by the sovereign choice of God, and even if they wanted to bolt out of Christianity they could not do it. They were God’s people and as God’s people they had to learn to endure, persevere and be victorious in suffering.

First Peter 1:2 is just as practical and applicable for us today as it was for the first century Christians. When we feel discouraged and want to quit, when we have our backs up against the wall, when we are in a pit because of intense suffering and want go back into the world, remember who saved us. The Trinitarian God saved us: The Father chose us; the Holy Spirit convicted and regenerated us, and the Son purchased us and forgave us. If we are true Christians, we cannot quit, even if we try to do so. We belong to God; we are among God’s people; we have God’s stamp upon our souls, and we are sealed until the day of redemption. When we are suffering, let us remind ourselves that we cannot get out of being a Christian. When this is settled in our minds, then there is only one course of action to take—persevere by faith and push on in obedience so as to learn the lessons God has for us in the suffering.

Perhaps you are wondering, “How can I know whether I am one of those God has chosen?” The answer is simple. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Believe that He died for your sins and humbly bow your will to Him as Lord. If you will do this, then God will save you. Then and only then will you get the assurance that you are numbered among God’s elect.