

Election and Exile

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter 1, verses 1-2 The International Organization for Migration, the IOM, which tracks migrations of people throughout the world, says that more than a million Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, and others have fled war and persecution in their homelands and migrated to Europe.

In addition to these million refugees who made it to Europe, almost 4,000 migrants have died while trying to cross the Mediterranean in 2015 alone. Just last month, in April 2016, 400-500 refugees drowned in the sea as their ships sank.

Unwanted in their homelands and unwanted in the foreign lands where they sought refuge, they relied on illegal smugglers to take them in secret, and their shoddy ship lost balance and tipped over.

This sad picture of a ship full of refugees drowning at sea captures the plight that faces all aliens, strangers, and exiles.

They are different. They are foreign. They do not belong. And this is precisely the situation that Peter's audience find themselves in.

[1 : 46] Peter himself would be martyred between 64 and 65 AD under Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians, and he is writing this letter shortly before his death, in order to comfort persecuted Gentile believers by reminding them of their present identity as God's holy people and exhorting them to set their hope on their future inheritance in Christ.

We know that Peter is writing to Gentile believers because he writes in chapter 1, verse 18, of how they were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from their forefathers.

And in chapter 2, verse 10, he says that they once were not a people. And in chapter 4, verse 3, that the time that is passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

These Gentile believers had shunned their former ways of idolatry and immorality and converted with great hope and joy. But they were discouraged by the persecution they faced. They thought their living conditions would improve when they became Christians, but instead they got worse.

So Peter has these people in mind as he writes his first epistle. So as we go through our first sermon series as a church in 1 Peter, I want to encourage you to keep this main purpose of Peter in view.

[3 : 08] And in this passage in particular, Peter comforts the Gentile believers throughout Asia Minor by reminding them that they are elect exiles who have received God's grace and peace.

I'm going to preach this passage by following this simple outline. First, the exiles. Second, the elect. And third, grace and peace.

First, the exiles. What does it mean that Christians are exiles in this world? The concept of exile is a recurring theme throughout the Bible because God's chosen people, Israel, were exiles and sojourners for much of their history.

So Deuteronomy 10, 18-19 commands, Here, the command to care for sojourners and aliens is rooted in the fact that the people of Israel were themselves once sojourners and aliens.

And even in the Old Testament, the exile refers to more than just a physical exile. After having entered the promised land and conquered Jerusalem and in the midst of making preparations for the temple of God, King David prays to God, We are strangers before you and sojourners as all our fathers were.

[4 : 31] Our days on the earth are like a shadow and there is no abiding. This is from 1 Chronicles 29-15. There is embedded in this prayer the idea that all God's people are exiles, no matter where and how they live, because they are sojourners on earth for a brief time.

And this is not where they will abide. As Paul writes in Philippians 3-20, We are exiles on earth because our citizenship is in heaven. And as the author of Hebrews writes, Christians are strangers and exiles on earth.

It's from chapter 11-13. So Peter is not speaking of a literal exile here, but a spiritual one. Believers long for their true home in the new world that is coming and for their end-time inheritance, for they do not conform to the values and worldviews of this present evil age.

You see this also in Peter's reference to Babylon in chapter 5 verse 13. Babylon is a codename for Rome. In the Old Testament, mentions of Babylon are actual references to Babylon, the nation.

But since the New Testament writers are removed from the great Babylonian empires, they use the name Babylon as a representation of the center of worldly influence, which in their day was Rome.

[5 : 51] For example, check Revelation 18. Peter himself is an exile in Rome. And he writes two exiles as an exile. And this status as exiles is fundamental to the identity of the Christian.

That's why local churches are sometimes called parishes. Parish is a word that comes from a Greek word that means to sojourn or live as aliens. A church, then, is a group of sojourners and aliens.

We, as a church, are defined as being exiles. This is why Peter warns in chapter 4 verse 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.

It would be strange indeed if we faced fiery trials in our homeland. If we belonged here on earth, it would indeed be strange to face marginalization and persecution. But we do not belong here.

We are strangers. And because we are strangers already, it is not at all strange that we are marginalized, alienated, and persecuted. We should not be surprised, then, when those who dismay us are elected as political leaders of our nation, and we are labeled political losers because we are exiles and this is not our home.

[7 : 05] We should not be surprised, then, when the celebrities of our culture flaunt vulgarity and promiscuity because we are exiles and this is not our home. We should not be surprised, then, that the way to get ahead in society, in this society, is not by being humble and selfless, but by being prideful and selfish.

That's because we are exiles. This is not our home. But this reality of exile does not mean that we ought to withdraw and isolate ourselves from society.

Peter continues in verse 1, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Though we are aliens, we are resident aliens. Though we do not belong here, we do live here. So Peter's writing to believers who are dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, which are territories within the Roman Empire in what is modern-day Turkey.

And we, Trinity Cambridge Church, are elect exiles of the dispersion in East Cambridge. Jesus' prayer for His disciples in John 17, 14-18 captures this truth.

[8 : 19] 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.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth, as You sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

We are not of this world, but yet we are sent into this world. That means we are not to form our own exclusive communities and industries at the expense of relationships with unbelievers.

It is possible in the U.S. where there is an extensive Christian subculture to do only so-called Christian things, like reading Christian fiction, listening to Christian music, going to Christian schools, wearing Christian clothes, playing Christian video games, surfing on Christian GodTube, and hanging out with Christian friends.

And none of these things are bad in and of themselves, but they can be if we do them as a way to exclude unbelievers and separate ourselves from them. Because our goal is not to remove ourselves from this world, but to redeem this world.

[9 : 28] Our goal is to be a city on a hill that is a model for the world to see, not a city on an island. We are called to be set apart, but not separated, to be distinct, but not distant.

A Christian is by definition an exile and a stranger. But if our identity consisted only of being exiles here on earth, it would indeed be discouraging and depressing.

Why must we live this way? Why must we suffer this way? Peter gives us hope by telling us that we are not merely exiles, but that we are elect as exiles.

And this brings me to my second point. I'm going to talk about what it means to be the elect. Immediately after identifying himself in verse 1, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, he identifies the recipients, to those who are elect.

Our identity as God's elect is prior to and even more fundamental than our identity as exiles. That's the first thing he tells us about the believer's identity.

[10 : 35] Christians are elect, meaning that we are chosen by God. We did not choose him, but God chose us. Jesus says to his disciples in John 15, 16, You did not choose me, but I chose you.

And 1 John 4, 19 says, We love because he first loved us. God's choosing us precedes our choosing him. God's love for us precedes our love for him.

Yes, we must choose him and love him, but we can only do that because God first chose and loved us. It is very important that we get this order right because emphasizing our choice rather than God's choice gives more credit and brings more glory to us than to God.

We see God's decisive action clearly in verse 2. We are elect exiles 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.

We see the redemptive activity of the triune God here. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all working in concert to redeem his people. First, let us turn to the activity of the Father.

[11 : 51] It says that we are elect exiles according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. This doesn't mean that God knew beforehand who would choose him and believe him and then chose those people knowing that they will eventually choose him.

See, this logic gets the truth exactly backwards. As we noted earlier, Jesus says in John 15, 16, You did not choose me, but I chose you. And 1 John 4, 19, remember it says, We love because he first loved us.

You see, God's foreknowledge does not merely refer to prescience, but includes God's choice and determination. In Acts 2, 23, it's the only other place in the entire New Testament where the same noun foreknowledge is used.

And there it says that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. God's foreknowledge is related to his definite plan.

His foreknowledge is his foreordination. In other words, God's foreknowledge is not merely an awareness of what people will do. It is a covenantal acknowledgement.

[13 : 02] In Amos 3, verse 2, God says to Israel, You only have I known among all the families of the earth. This does not mean, of course, that God was only aware of the existence of Israel and ignorant of all the other people groups on earth.

He knew Israel in a special covenantal way. Israel was his people. The same word for knowing is used to refer to conjugal relations in Genesis 4, verse 1.

Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain. You see, again, referring to a covenantal relationship between husband and wife.

God's knowledge is not a mere awareness, but a covenantal acknowledgement. And Peter gives a clue to this understanding later in verse 20 of the same chapter, chapter 1, where he writes that even Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world.

Christ, as a member of the triune Godhead, was already in relationship with God the Father before the foundation of the world. And it's because Christ was already foreknown before the foundation of the world, it says in Ephesians 1, 4, that God the Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

[14 : 19] Before we were created, before we had done anything good or bad, God already knew us and chose us to be His. As it says in verse 3, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His great mercy, has caused us to be born again.

We are born again into God's family so that God the Father is through Christ, our Father. How else did God make us elect exiles?

Peter says that we are elect exiles in the sanctification of the Spirit. When we hear the word sanctification, we usually think of the work of the Holy Spirit in which He progressively sanctifies us to be more like Christ.

That is what we call progressive sanctification. But what is in view in this verse is not progressive sanctification, but definitive sanctification, which is simultaneous with conversion and justification.

That is an instantaneous act of the Holy Spirit that sets believers apart for God in such a way that even the vilest sinners who repent and believe can truly be considered saints.

[15 : 27] That is what this sanctification is referring to. You can see this in 1 Corinthians 6, 11 where Paul tells the Corinthian believers, you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The sanctification in view here is something that has already happened in a definitive sense. It's what God did when we repented and believed in the gospel. The good news that Christ died and rose again to save us from sin and death.

The Holy Spirit indwelt us and sanctified us and this definitive sanctification serves as the basis for our progressive sanctification. Because we are God's people, God's holy people, we increasingly reflect His holiness.

The third prepositional clause says that we are elect exiles for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood. The obedience in view here also is not primarily the ongoing obedience of Christians as we seek to do God's will.

The word obedience is actually not linked to Jesus Christ, only the sprinkling of blood is. So the King James Version, which is usually an inferior translation compared to the English Standard Version, actually gets this one right.

[16 : 46] It reads, So obedience is used absolutely to refer to the acceptance of the gospel.

To attempt to link Jesus Christ both to obedience and blood would create difficulty by making it an objective genitive in relation to the first, obedience to Jesus Christ, and a possessive in relation to the second, Jesus Christ's blood.

Rather, it refers to decisive initial obedience of faith, the acceptance of the gospel. Peter writes in chapter 1, verse 22, that Christians are those who have purified their souls by their obedience to the truth.

A parallel verse in 2 Thessalonians 2, 13 makes this clear. But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

We're more familiar with the language of believing the truth, but the Bible often speaks also of obeying the truth. Paul similarly speaks of the obedience of faith among the Gentiles in Romans 1, 5 and 16, 26.

[17 : 59] So the second statement, and for sprinkling with his blood, also proves this point. The sprinkling with his blood alludes back to Israel's covenant with God after the Exodus on Mount Sinai, where Moses sprinkles the blood of the burnt offerings on the altar and then on the people, saying, this is the blood of the covenant, Exodus 24.

So the sprinkling with his blood refers to Christ's atoning work on the cross, where all our sins were covered by his blood. It is important that we understand faith as an act of obedience because the two cannot be separated.

Sometimes people say, if you have faith, if you believe in Jesus, then you are saved. Your obedience and good works do not matter. There are others who say, who think that you're saved by obedience and not by faith.

They say it doesn't matter how much faith you have. If you disobey and sin, then you cannot be saved. Both of these get only partially at the whole truth because obedience is required, but all our obedience flows from the initial obedience of faith.

If you are an unbeliever, this is a crucial point because no matter how moral your lifestyle is, no matter how many good deeds you perform, your lack of faith is a decisive act of disobedience that separates you from God.

[19 : 17] God created us to be His representatives on earth. But if we do everything that He wants us to do, without reference to Himself, we are not doing His will at all. Imagine an ambassador of the United States of America.

Let's say that he is traveling with all the pomp and prestige that comes with being an ambassador of the most powerful country in the world. He exercises his power, confers with other heads of state, and makes decisions of national and international import.

He somehow manages to get Iran and North Korea to dismantle their nuclear program. He talks to Vladimir Putin. He talks him out of his territorial ambitions in Ukraine and beyond.

He does what the President of the United States wants. But what if this ambassador were not representing the United States of America, but only himself? Even though he is an ambassador of the United States, he acts for himself and speaks for himself, and therefore takes all the credit for himself, for all his accomplishments.

This is a great offense to his country and a failure of his duty as an ambassador. He is exercising his authority without proper representation. He is not being a faithful ambassador.

[20 : 32] So it says in Hebrews 11.6, Without faith, it is impossible to please God. In a similar way, Christians whose faith is not evidenced in their ongoing obedience ought not to have false security.

Because even though we are saved by grace through faith, true faith is always accompanied by ongoing obedience. Charles Blondin was a famous tightrope walker and acrobat in the 19th century.

Large crowds used to watch him, particularly when he was crossing the Niagara Falls. There is a story of one time when a royal party came over from England to watch it, and the party included the Duke of Newcastle.

And on this particular occasion, what Blondin did was, having walked across and back on the Niagara Falls, he then took a wheelbarrow and he wheeled that across and back on a tightrope.

And there was a huge crowd there cheering for him. And so Blondin went up to the party, the royal party, and he said, Look, do you believe that I could put somebody in the wheelbarrow and wheel them across?

[21 : 37] And they all said yes. The Duke of Newcastle said yes, emphatically. So then, Blondin turned to the Duke of Newcastle and said, Hop in. Well, at that point, the Duke of Newcastle did not have enough faith.

Because even though he said he believed that he could do it, he didn't believe enough to entrust his life to the tightrope walker. See, that's the kind of faith that is involved in being a Christian.

True faith always leads to action. True faith involves an entrusting of your whole life. It always leads to obedience. So we are elect exiles, 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.

We are elect exiles by the Father's foreknowledge, the Spirit's sanctification, and Christ's atonement. The Father plans our redemption, the Son executes our redemption, and the Spirit manifests our redemption, and we respond with the obedience of faith.

And it's important to note that we are not exiles in this world by virtue of our intrinsic strangeness, but we have been estranged from the world by virtue of our election. It's precisely because we are chosen by God that we are not strangers here on earth.

[22 : 59] We are not strangers by race, birth, custom, or circumstances, but by the election of the triune God. This should give us great hope because our strangeness here, our foreignness here, our alienness here, are all because we are no longer strangers in the kingdom of God, no longer foreigners in the kingdom of God, no longer aliens in the kingdom of God.

And it is this reality that Peter reminds us of when he concludes his introduction with the greeting, may grace and peace be multiplied to you. The standard Greek greeting was greetings, as it says in James 1.1, a Greek term related to the word grace.

Jewish people greeted one another with the greeting of peace, and the Jewish letters often began greetings and peace. But Paul adapts this standard greeting, a well-wishing, into a Christian prayer.

Now greetings is now changed to grace. Ephesians 2.8 tells us, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

From this we can see that grace is a gift, and that it goes hand in hand with faith. It is a gift because we do not earn it. Nobody pays someone back after receiving a gift.

[24 : 29] It is related to faith because we receive grace through faith rather than through works. Faith itself is not work. When someone is stuck in a pit and unable to rescue himself, and someone else comes along and extends his hand out, saying, Grab my hand and I'll pull you up.

Grabbing hold of the hand and depending on the other person to pull you up is not work. The person doesn't go around saying, Oh yes, I did my part and pulling myself out of the pit. No, he knows that he was rescued by somebody else when he was unable to rescue himself.

So Ephesians 2.14-15 speak of how Christ himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two.

So making peace. Biblical peace is not just the absence of conflict, but echoes the Old Testament concept of shalom, where a person's life with God and with everything else is in ordered harmony, both physically and spiritually.

It reflects a time when, both physically and spiritually, all is well. And this is how Peter ends the first part of the greeting, the beginning of his letter.

[25 : 47] He reminds believers of the grace that came to us and the peace now that we have with God and through him with one another. And that grounds and undergirds the fact that we are now elect exiles.

So as believers, we are called to live as elect exiles who have received God's grace and peace. What a wonderful truth that is.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.