

1 Peter 1:1-12. An Affirmation of Hope

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We have all found ourselves in situations where we need encouragement. Often people of faith will turn to the biblical narrative, often finding answers to many of our questions through the documented experiences of those many people of faith that it contains. When we encounter the New Testament writings, we find a lot of encouraging instruction in the epistles, particularly those of Paul, Peter, and James. Of the New Testament writers, one of the most encouraging presentations is found in the two small epistles of Peter. Where the writings of Paul and James tend to address significant problems within the churches and provide solutions that are consistent with wise Christian ethics, Peter tends to present his material from the context of the blessings of grace and how those blessings inform the person of faith, offering joy and peace in a world that is antagonistic to the gospel. For this reason, Peter's letters can be referred to as a "Gospel of encouragement." His two epistles contain a complete presentation of the gospel message, and can be used to encourage new Christians as they present the blessings of faith and Christian ethics in a very positive light.

"Peter constructed the message of this epistle by weaving together five primary motifs: the believer's behavior, the believer's unfair treatment, the believer's deference, the believer's motivation by Christ's example, and the believer's anticipation of future glory. The apostle emphasized these themes by using a number of words that occur throughout the

document. Taken together the five motifs form the underlying message Peter communicated.”¹

1 Peter 1:1. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,*

The apostle Simon Peter is clearly identified as the author, though the actual original letter was likely penned by Silvanus² his secretary or amanuensis.³ Simon Peter is also referred to in the biblical narrative by the Aramaic form of his name, Cephas.⁴ Note the title Peter used for himself, "An apostle of Jesus Christ", literally means "one sent forth" as a messenger. Though the early Roman Christian ecclesiology limited the annotation of Apostle to those who were taught by Jesus during His ministry, the New Testament narrative does not make this distinction. Acts 14:4,14 uses the same title for Barnabas, and in Romans 16:7 we find Apostles by the names of Andronicus and Junias. Paul also used the title frequently,⁵ though some argue that Paul meets the ecclesiological definition of an Apostle due to his Damascus road experience.⁶ The biblical definition of an apostle is one who is set apart for the evangelical ministry. One method some authors use to provide the distinction is to capitalize "Apostle" when it is referring to those who received their call to ministry directly from Jesus, Christ.

Like the Epistle of James, this letter was written to a relatively general audience of early Christians, in this case the recipients

¹ James R. Slaughter. The Importance of Literary Argument for Understanding 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 152 no 605 Jan - Mar 1995, p 75.

² Silas, 1 Peter 5:12.

³ Sargent, Benjamin. Chosen through sanctification (1 Peter 1,2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13): the theology or diction of Silvanus?, *Biblica*, 94 no 1 2013, p 117.

⁴ Allison, Dale C Jr. Peter and Cephas: one and the same. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 no 3 Fall 1992, p 491.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:7-9 e.g.

⁶ Acts 9:3.

are identified as those were driven from their Jerusalem homes due to persecution and then spread throughout a vast area of what is now modern Turkey,⁷ a distinct group who were also subject to hatred and persecution in the places they “sojourned” to.⁸ This established a persecuted “diaspora theme at the very outset,”⁹ that will continue throughout the letter. Some of these Christians could have been among the three thousand converted at the Pentecost event,¹⁰ and the two thousand more who were converted afterwards. However, the majority of the recipients would not have been “immigrants, but resident non-Jews and formerly worshippers of the locally recognized deities.”¹¹ Also, Paul's first two missionary journeys went through Galatia and Asia, the areas that Peter addresses and many of the recipients might have been a fruit of Peter's work.

Since this letter was not focusing on a single individual or single group, it is identified with the General, or Catholic Epistles.¹² The general form and the lack of personal references, like we find in Paul's letters, would lead us to believe that Peter had not been given an opportunity to visit the communities to whom he writes. Some think the letter was written from Rome since 5:13 refers to Babylon, a common first-century Christian metaphor for Rome.¹³ However, the early Christian historians, and the biblical

⁷ Scharlemann, Martin Henry. An Apostolic Salutation: An Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 1:1-2. *Concordia Journal*, 1 no 3 Jun 1975, p 108.

⁸ Hiebert, D. Edmond. Designation of the readers in 1 Peter 1:1-2. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 137 no 545 Jan - Mar 1980, p 66.

⁹ Tite, Philip L. The Compositional Function of the Petrine Prescript: A Look at 1 Pet 1:1-3. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39 no 1 Mar 1996, p 49.

¹⁰ Acts 2:41.

¹¹ Edgar Krentz. Creating a past: 1 Peter and Christian identity. *Biblical Research*, 53 2008, p 41-57.

¹² Hebrews; James; 1-2 Peter; 1,2,3, John; Jude; and some hold the Revelation also to be a general epistle.

¹³ Catholic Tradition holds that Peter spent his last days in Rome, martyred by Nero, but there is no evidence of this other than in anecdotal histories by early Christian writers. However these writers are respected enough to lend credence to the theory.

content and scholarship all fail to place Peter in Rome at any time in his life.

The general Roman persecution of Christians started in AD 64 under the Roman Emperor Nero after the great fire in the city, an event that Nero blamed on the Christians and Jews.

“The overwhelming majority of these people occupied an inferior economic position. They endured many restrictions, including limitations in intermarriage and commerce, succession of property and land tenure, voting, taxation, and tribute, and they were subject to severe forms of civil and criminal punishment. In addition to slanderous assaults by their neighbors (2:12, 3:9, 16), these believers endured the suppression, indignities, lack of privilege, and general malevolence of the Roman political machinery.”¹⁴

This letter appears to be written during this era. The general theme of the letter seems to be one of encouragement¹⁵ and it serves as a strong affirmation of hope at a time of persecution. It is a declaration of Christian strength, perseverance, courage, and hope in the face of a world that is actively working to diminish or destroy the Christian message. Consequently, the content of this letter is as important today as it was in the early church as the intensity of persecution of Christians is greater today than at any other time in Christian history.¹⁶

The letters of Peter, along with the accounts of Peter's experiences in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, give us a quite detailed account of Peter's personality and theology. His is one of the best examples of what happens in one's life when

¹⁴ Slaughter, James R. Submission of wives (1 Peter 3:1a) in the context of 1 Peter. *Bibliotheca sacra*, 153 no 609 Jan - Mar 1996, p 65.

¹⁵ Winbery, Carlton L. Introduction to the first letter of Peter. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 25 no 1 Fall 1982, p 3.

¹⁶ At the time of this writing, a Christian is martyred somewhere in the world at an average of every five minutes. More Christians have been killed for their faith in the last 50 years than were killed in the sum of all the previous years since the Church was first formed. *Christian Freedom International*.

one truly gives their heart and life over to the LORD. Peter's life is really divided into three parts: (1) prior to meeting Jesus, (2) the period of Jesus' ministry, and (3) the period following Jesus' resurrection and ascension. During the first period he was known by his given name of Simon and along with his brother Andrew and his friends James and John, he was a hardened Jewish fisherman who worked the Sea of Galilee. His period with Jesus was a time of learning; a time where his impetuous and strong, prideful personality was quite evident. He was often the first to speak, the first to lead, and the first to let his deep sense of personal pride and confidence get in the way. His natural gift of leadership was shaped by his learning from Jesus during this second period of his life.

The third period of his life really started when he submitted to the Holy Spirit who came and both informed and empowered his learning following the resurrection of Jesus. God used Peter's dynamic personality and skills to shape him into the premier theological leader among the Apostles, and though Peter still struggled with many issues during his ministry, he serves as an encouragement to us as we all encounter similar struggles. We find an entirely different Peter in his letters than we found in the earlier Gospel narratives. Yet, this is the same man, a man who came to fully trust in God and allow his life to be used of God for any purpose. We can learn a lot from Peter's life through the Gospels, through the Acts of the Apostles and through his letters to the Christians scattered throughout the region of Asia.

1 Peter 1:2. *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

Peter described the state of those to whom he writes as chosen, elect, or destined, a reference to God's eternal knowledge and acceptance of those who have placed their trust in Him, an acceptance that was declared as far back as God's promises to

Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the infant nation of Israel. Paul often used similar words to refer to God's omniscience.¹⁷ The Greek term that Peter uses, *prognoson*, does not carry the idea of supernaturally predetermined or prophesied behavior, but rather alludes to God's complete and eternal knowledge of that behavior. The word refers to God's omniscient knowledge of all things, past, present and future, and His omnipotent power as it is He who is sovereign, establishing by His own choice the means of the salvation of mankind. God does not manipulate man's behavior in order to save them, but rather gives man a free choice to reject or choose him by faith in response to the gentle prompting of the Holy Spirit's call as He chose to sanctify those who turn to Himself in faith and trust.

We find in this verse that God has a very specific purpose for His choice, that those who He chose would be sanctified: the consecration or dedication of the individual by being set apart from this wicked world for a relationship with Him, profitable for God's kingdom purpose, and resulting in a changed life and a resulting maturing pilgrimage towards the final goal of an eternity with God in heaven. Note that the Holy Spirit does the actual work of sanctification, not us. We are called to obedience, called to live a life that serves that purpose of sanctification. Peter maintains this central theme of obedience throughout the letter.¹⁸ Yet, since the Holy Spirit does that work of sanctification, we are not able to point to our own good works and claim that we have set ourselves apart and accomplished any form of righteousness on our own.

Peter clearly states that the power behind this work is the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. The "sprinkling of blood" is a direct reference to the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat or on the people by the

¹⁷ C.f. Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4-5.

¹⁸ Agnew, Francis H. 1 Peter 1:2 - an alternative translation. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 45 no 1 Jan 1983, p 68-73.

ancient High Priests of Israel,¹⁹ an act that had one purpose: to identify the forgiveness of sins that comes only through the obedient act of sacrifice.²⁰ This ancient practice was established and ordained by God as an illustration of the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ that would serve this same purpose for all people who would turn to Him in faith. The graceful gift of forgiveness comes only through the atoning death of Christ.

Some deny a Trinitarian view of God's total person because the word *Trinity* is never used in any English translation of the biblical narrative. However, this verse is one of many biblical references to the identity of three unique persons of God, a position held and written of by each of the New Testament writers, as well as taught by Jesus Christ Himself.

Peter closes this salutation with a prayer similar to that used in all of his and Paul's letters. It reflects a desire on the part of the writer that the recipient of the letter experience the fullness of the grace (*charis*) and peace (*eirene*) of God. Such fullness can only be found in a life that is given totally to God, a fullness that God promises to all those who place their trust fully in Him.²¹

It may be instructive to note that the word *charis* is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term for *grace*, and the word *irene* is a Greek term that is usually translated as *peace*. By choosing these two words the writers have formed a bridge between the two cultures that are included in the membership of the Church of Jesus, Christ.

¹⁹ Exodus 29:16-21, Leviticus 1:5,11; 3:2,8,13; 3:13; 4:6,17; 5:9; 7:2; 14:51; 16:14-19; 17:6; Numbers 18:17; 19:4.

²⁰ Hebrews 9:13.

²¹ John 10:10.

AN AFFIRMATION OF BLESSING

1 Peter 1:3. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

The introduction to this letter is strikingly similar in both structure and content to introductions in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, and Ephesians 1:3-14,²² pointing to a shared source such as a document or the use of the same amanuensis. Peter starts with an exclamation of praise or blessing to God. Why would he be moved to do this? Peter lists five motives behind his praise as he testifies to the tremendous blessing that God has provided for those who trust in Him.

1. God's character is that of great mercy. None of us deserves God's love, nor any blessing from Him in any way. The human race has insulted God by failing to hold Him in the awe that the LORD of creation deserves, preferring our own concept of Him that serves to meet our own self-fulfilling viewpoints. The lost have rejected His offer of grace completely. Even the faithful have consistently denied His true immensity and grandeur, preferring their own minimal definition of God that allows them to retain their pride and arrogance, picking and choosing their own theology. We have all lifted ourselves up, as if we are better or more deserving than others, making little gods of ourselves. As we lower God and raise ourselves we come to treat God as our colleague in the religious enterprise, and justify all manner of sinful behavior that is characterized by our own self-serving motives. Why would God reach down to such a self-centered and arrogant people? God loves us despite our sin, and it is only because of His great mercy that He extends grace to us, seeking to establish a love relationship with us rather than seeking to grant us the eternal judgment that we truly deserve. Without God's mercy we are all doomed to an eternity separated from His

²² Scharlemann, Martin Henry. An Apostolic Descant (An Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 1:3-12). *Concordia Journal*, 2 no 1 Jan 1976, p 9.

love and grace. However, because of God's mercy He provided a way for us to have a saving relationship with Him.

2. We have been given new birth. Without exception, every person made their original entrance in this enterprise of life on their own terms, heading in a direction opposite of God's purpose for us.²³ An adjustment in our heading simply would not work. The Old Testament describes how we cannot follow a different heading on our own, as we simply cannot live a sinless life. God points us to the way of righteousness through His law, but try as we might we always choose our own pathway. We simply cannot keep every tenet of God's Law, and to break any tenet is to be a lawbreaker. Jesus described how we must be born first of water, the natural childbirth process, and then of the Spirit, a rebirth that comes only from placing our faith and trust in God.²⁴ Those who have made that choice to follow God have been given a new birth, a completely new start. That new birth, a birth of the Spirit, occurs when one comes to the LORD in faith, and the Holy Spirit comes to reside in their hearts for eternity. His presence serves as the mark of faith when one comes to the LORD in the final judgment.

3. We have been given a living hope. Without God there is no hope after this life for anything other than separation from Him for eternity, a state that the scriptures describe as hell, with the most graphic and agonizing language available to describe it. There are no words to describe the horror of an existence where the Holy Spirit has been totally removed and satan reigns with utter impunity. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit gives the faithful a real and true hope for eternity that transcends simple knowledge. It is a hope that lives within us. It is a hope that has the power to carry us through tough times and tough experiences. It is a hope that carries us over the deadly chasms of false doctrine. It is a hope that leads us through the

²³ Romans 3:23.

²⁴ c.f. John, Chapter 4.

experience of death with the peace that comes from the surety of the knowledge of the blessed eternal home that awaits us.

4. We have been given forgiveness through the cross. Paul taught us, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, that God has revealed His righteousness to all people, and that all people are keenly aware of their own unrighteousness. Consequently all people are responsible for their choice to rebel against God. Later in the letter Paul states that, because of this, all people have sinned and fall (not fell) short of the Glory of God. Because of our sin nature, none of us deserves a relationship with a perfect, righteous, and holy God. The only possible way for us to have a relationship with the LORD is for us to receive forgiveness from Him, something that we have no power to attain on our own, and something we will never deserve because of our continued sinfulness.

Peter uses a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the proof that God has an eternal plan for those who place their faith and trust in Him. Jesus, through His crucifixion, performed the sprinkling of His own blood upon those who place their faith and trust in Him so that forgiveness would be found. Forgiveness only comes through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.²⁵

Though others profess to believe in systems of religion that seek to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there are many who reject the true nature of God by rejecting the nature of Jesus Christ: His deity, and the power of His resurrection to bring forgiveness of sin. The distinction of Christians is found in their acceptance of God's plan, by faith: a plan that included the descent of YAHWEH, Jehovah, from heaven in the man, Jesus²⁶ who then communicated the gospel message and performed the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. God's plan is simple: He has provided that forgiveness to all who will place their faith and

²⁵ Hebrews 9:22.

²⁶ John 1:14.

trust in Him, and by so doing, are placing their faith and trust in Jesus as LORD (YAHWEH) Jehovah, King, Messiah, and Judge. Muslims and most Jews profess to worship God, but they reject God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and because of that rejection, they remain unforgiven. Paul agrees with Peter when he states that if we will confess Jesus as our own LORD and place our trust in the resurrection, then we will be forever saved. It is through that profession of true faith in God that eternal forgiveness is found and not through any additional work, rite, process, or system of extra-biblical beliefs.

1 Peter 1:4. *and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -- kept in heaven for you,*

5. We have been given an eternal inheritance. Though the word *family* is not used, the concept is implied through the use of the word "inheritance." Though we may place great interest in the subject of inheritance if we are children of wealthy parents, we are still not even close to realizing the importance that ancient Jewish culture placed in the practice of family inheritance. We think of inheritance as a one-time material windfall, and many families fight in court with one another in order to maximize their slice of the pie. The ancient Jews defined themselves by their far broader understanding of inheritance. Disbelieving in any afterlife or resurrection, they felt that their only permanence, their only future after death, came through the process of inheritance. Consequently, they lifted the state of their ancestors to a level approaching worship, not dissimilar to pagan religious practice, and looked toward being treated with this same deference after they die.

The landed Jews also defined their world by their land, a land that was provided to them by God when Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River and into Canaan, and maintained the identity of that land in their families through a formal process of inheritance. So when Peter uses this word, it really serves to draw the immediate attention of his Jewish readers. As

important as their physical inheritance was, it was still subject to the vagaries of this world's intrigue. An inheritance could be stolen, bartered, or given away.²⁷ Today an inheritance can be lost the same way. Consequently, Peter's description of the inheritance we receive from God is significant in its permanence.

First, it cannot perish. It is not subject to death or decay, a characteristic of all of the things of this world.

- **Second, it does not spoil.** Literally the word refers to a cleaning stone that is used to clean fabric. The inheritance does not weaken or become defiled by the stain of sin.
- **Third, the inheritance does not fade.** This word refers to the state of an olive branch crown won by athletes that only withers soon after it is worn.
- **Finally, it is not up to us to keep the inheritance,** a practice that was idiomatically referred to as “burying one's father.”²⁸ The inheritance of the faithful is kept in heaven by God Himself. Our sinful nature prevents us from being able to keep the inheritance ourselves.²⁹ The word *kept* is in the perfect/aorist tense, identifying action that has already taken place in the past, still continues, and will continue to hold true in the future.

AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

1 Peter 1:5. who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Here Peter further assures us³⁰ of the integrity of our inheritance. It is by faith that we are saved, and it is through

²⁷ Genesis, Chapter 25, e.g.

²⁸ c.f. Matthew 8:21, Luke 9:59.

²⁹ John 14:1-5.

³⁰ Horrell, David G. Whose Faith(fulness) Is It in I Peter 1:5? *The Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 48 no 1 Apr 1997, p 114.

God's power that our salvation is maintained to the end of the age. A Roman soldier typically did not wield his own shield. He had a shield-bearer who would be focused upon incoming threats while the soldier's hands were free to wield his offensive weapons. Peter makes reference to the shield of faith as that weapon held up by the LORD that serves to protect us. The LORD is our shield-bearer. God uses His own power to protect our inheritance until we finally receive it. Martin Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress," a poem that illustrates God's defense of our faith using the metaphor of an impregnable stronghold.

***A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel
hate,
on earth is not his equal.***

***And though this world, with devils filled, should
threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to
triumph through us.***

***The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.***

***Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would
be losing,
were not the right man on our side, the man of God's
own choosing.***

***Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabbaoth, his name, from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.***

***That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them,
abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours, thru him who with us
sideth.***

***Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill; God's truth abideth still;***

***his kingdom is forever.*³¹**

God has a plan for us. Peter identifies that our salvation in him is eternally secure, and God will keep it until the end time when it will be revealed to all.

1 Peter 1:6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Continual Rejoicing. Peter notes that true and lasting joy is found in an understanding that our salvation is protected by the LORD Himself as He shields us against any power that could take it away. This joy is neither past, present, or future, but is a continuing process that informs and strengthens us in times of difficulty.³²

Tried by Fire. Peter's theology cannot be separated from the consequences of the discrimination and oppression that faithful Christians face at the hands of a secular, pagan, and evil culture.³³ Peter's concept of faith was not based on a "pie-in-the-sky" theology. He did not teach that one's coming to faith would bring with it a life of leisurely bliss and prosperity. His own experience shaped in him an understanding of the "here-and-now" real-life dimensions of the Christian faith. His is a realistic view. First, we do have reason for rejoicing because our inheritance is eternally secure. However, coming to faith will bring with it a life view and behavior that is in conflict with that of this wicked world, a conflict that will only increase dramatically as the world slips further and further into ungodliness. If one's faith is lived out without compromise, it will contrast sharply with the pagan and godless world in which we live, a world that detests and seeks to destroy anything that

³¹ Martin Luther. *The New Hymnal for American Youth*. Trans. by Frederick H. Hedge

³² Martin, Troy W. The present indicative in the eschatological statements of 1 Peter 1_6,8 *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111/2. 1992, p 314.

³³ Kirkpatrick, William David. The theology of First Peter. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 25 no 1 Fall 1982, p 59.

is different or outstanding. Because of this, the faithful will always suffer conflict, persecution, and tribulation as they interact with this wicked world. However, Peter understood that this experience will be short because this life on earth is short. Compared with the blessing of an eternity with the LORD, these few days we spend on earth are short enough to almost dismiss.

The word rendered *trials* in itself identifies that this conflict is not without God's ordinance. This word refers to the process of purifying metal by placing it in a fire, burning away the dross and leaving the material cleansed. When we look at these trials in this context, we can understand better how Paul taught that these trials would serve God's purpose to make us more like Christ,³⁴ and James,³⁵ taught that these same trials can even produce joy when we submit ourselves to their true purpose, knowing that the period of trial is short, and we have the sustaining hope of a future reward.³⁶

1 Peter 1:7. *These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Faith's nature. We may have a simplistic definition of faith, thinking that is something that we chose for ourselves, by our own power, and serves only to promote our soul to salvation. This is not faith. This is religion that carries no more power or value than the individual who holds to it. In fact, true faith itself is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and so empowered, carries with it a value and purpose beyond anything of this world. Peter describes the value of your faith in a comparison with gold, arguably considered the most valuable commodity of their day. Not only is the value of faith immeasurably beyond that of gold,

³⁴ Romans 8:28-29.

³⁵ James 1:3 ff.

³⁶ Martin, Troy W. The present indicative in the eschatological statements of 1 Peter 1:6, 8. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 no 2 Sum 1992, p. 312

it is eternal where even all the gold (in California?)³⁷ will some day perish. Furthermore, gold only to bring honor and use to those who own it. Genuine faith serves to praise and honor Jesus Christ, and in this way the true value of faith is found.

1 Peter 1:8. *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

Peter further describes faith in a manner similar that the description we find in Hebrews 11:1.³⁸ How do you love and believe in something or someone whom you have never met? An individual recently asked of me, “You don’t really believe all of that gobbledygook in the Bible is true, do you?” I was able to give a short testimony of the nature and power of faith. Faith is a choice, and faith in God is a choice that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, a power that is only fully found when we turn control of our lives over to God.

How can you love Jesus without meeting Him as Peter had done? Like faith, the expression of love is also a choice, and expressing the unconditional love of the LORD is a choice that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Knowing the resurrected Jesus is to know that He is alive, He has returned to His place in Eternity as Jehovah, that He loves us, and is preparing a place for us for when we leave this world and enter eternity to be with Him. It is easy to love one who loves us, and Jesus loves us more than we will ever fully come to understand.

A full knowledge of this love gives us a joy that knows no worldly equal. It is a joy that transcends circumstance, even the circumstance of death. Unlike faith and love that are choices, joy is a product of the blessing that comes from that faith and

³⁷ Apologies to Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers Band.

³⁸ “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

love, a gift that God has given to us as a small reward for our faithfulness. However, the greatest reward is yet to come.

1 Peter 1:9. *for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

The greatest reward of faithfulness is the salvation of our souls. It is interesting to note that the Greek grammar is clear and unambiguous in the verb tense that he uses. Peter did not say you have received the goal. He does not say that you will receive the goal, an argument that is used by those who profess that one can lose their salvation. Peter clearly states that the faithful are in a continual process of receiving the goal of faith: salvation. The salvation of the faithful is possible only because of the forgiveness that is given by God to all who truly place their faith and trust in Him, given through the authority of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and that forgiveness is an on-going process. Having received forgiveness, we find that we are forgiven for the sin that we continue to commit every day. Sin has lost its power to separate us from God,³⁹ though it certainly affects our relationship with Him and our relationship with others. Death has lost its victory over the faithful; satan is ultimately defeated. The faithful are now part of the family of God, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, and no power on earth or in the earth can take that away.⁴⁰

AN AFFIRMATION OF GRACE

1 Peter 1:10. *Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,*

Biblical prophecy in the Old Testament referred to two primary subjects: Israel and Christ. The profound majority of biblical prophecy describes in amazing detail the birth, life, death and

³⁹ Romans 8:1.

⁴⁰ Romans 8:38-39; 2 Timothy 1:12.

resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as His purpose of providing a permanent remedy for sin. We find these prophecies throughout the Old Testament, included in the books of Psalms, Daniel, and Ezekiel among others. Even the tenets of Mosaic Law, particularly those establishing celebrations and sacrifices, were formed within the context of God's purpose in the coming Messiah, and contain a great deal of Christological prophecy.⁴¹

The prophets inquired diligently as they sought anything they could glean from sacred texts, the testimony of other prophets, and of course, the Spirit of God. How many of these prophets lived to see their prophecy fulfilled? Very few prophets experienced the vindication of their faithfulness.⁴² Consider the rejection and ridicule many endured because of their faithfulness to speak the truth to a people who wholly rejected it.

1 Peter 1:11. *trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.*

Just as many search today to find a date upon which we can expect the second coming of Christ to take place, the ancient prophets and rabbis searched the resources that they had with the intention of determining when the Messiah (Christ) would come. There was no little controversy among the rabbis of when this would take place. One of the great paradoxes of Old Testament Christological prophecy referred to a seeming impossibility: Referred to as the "messianic paradox," three

⁴¹ Note that some make passionate arguments that the prophets that are cited here are not Old Testament prophets, but rather, contemporary prophets. However, it is the position of this author that those same arguments that are used to pose the latter position may also be used to argue the former. C.f. Warden, Duane. The prophets of 1 Peter 1:10-12. *Restoration Quarterly*, 31 no 1 1989, p 1-12.

⁴² Some prophets who did experience some fruit of their prophecies include Noah (flood), Jonah (salvation of Nineveh), Jeremiah (fall of Judah), John the Baptist (coming of the Messiah).

different prophets declared that the Messiah would rise from three different places. He would be born in the City of David (Bethlehem),⁴³ would come out of Egypt,⁴⁴ and would be a man of Nazareth of Galilee (a Nazarene).⁴⁵ This paradox stumped the early Jewish rabbis as they tried to interpret the prophecies based upon their limited world view, a view that was not illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Upon Jesus' birth we found how these prophecies were all fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of the Roman Census, He came out of Egypt because of the Herodian exile, and was a Nazarene because the village of Nazareth was his family home, chosen because of its safe distance from Jerusalem's zealots.

The purpose of biblical prophecy is to prepare us to recognize when God's purposes are fulfilled, but they do not inform us of when they will take place. Prophecy gives us the opportunity to recognize what God is doing, not to ascertain when God will do it.

We still have many would-be prophets who try to declare their secret knowledge concerning the date and time of the second coming of Jesus, Christ, and often their false prophecies lead to embarrassment at best, and sometimes mass suicides at worst. What differentiates the modern day "prophets" who make predictions and those Old Testament Prophets? Many of the Old Testament prophecies have come to pass, and those prophets who were describing the identity, nature, and purpose of the Messiah are proved 100% accurate! What does the accuracy of these prophecies imply about those prophecies which are not yet fulfilled? We can trust that what the Bible states about the end of the age is true and reliable. We can stand on that, alone, and not be swayed by those who offer an alternate viewpoint.

⁴³ Micah 5:2

⁴⁴ Hosea 11:1.

⁴⁵ Matthew 2:23.

1 Peter 1:12. *It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.*

The prophecies were not written to instruct those who have rejected God, but rather to encourage and prepare those who have placed their faith and trust in Him. They were not written for those who are self-serving individuals who would use them to manipulate others for their own personal gain. Peter identifies that the work of the prophets were intended for his readers, quite a novel idea to the Jews who left the prophecies to the rabbis and scribes, considering the Christian cult to be entirely outside of the prevue of their religion. Likewise the entire biblical content was not written for interpretation only by the school of priests, theologians, pastors, or ministers. The contents of all Holy Scripture was written for all those who would trust in God so that all can know the purpose, nature, and assurance of their salvation. John wrote,

1 John 5:13. *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

Peter writes to give his readers the assurance that they also would know that their salvation is secure. When John wrote, he used a word for “*know*” that refers to uncompromised certainty. We can know *for certain*, without any shadow of doubt, that the gift of eternal life is, indeed, eternal.

The grace of God that was foretold by the prophets was first experienced by the early church and continues today. The prophets could not fully understand God's grace as it would be dispensed through the blood of Jesus Christ. It was not until Jesus came and shared the gospel of Grace and then demonstrated that gospel on the cross could we fully understand God's purpose.

Like the prophets, we have been given the opportunity to learn God's plan and purpose for mankind. Peter makes an interesting comment about angels. We may recall from Jesus' interaction with demons that satan has no power when confronted by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit chases demons away just as light chases away darkness. God created man higher than the angels. Humans are not struck powerless when confronted by the Holy Spirit: they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is satan, a fallen angel, who is struck powerless when confronted by a person of faith who is fully submitted to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works a radical and positive change in the lives of those who place their faith and trust in God. This is a privilege that even the angels cannot fathom.

Why did Peter add this little point? The church was being told by false prophets that they could lose the salvation that God had given them when they first professed faith and trust. Some even taught that they had already lost it. Peter wrote this passage to remind us that our salvation is securely held in the hands of God. We have been given a gift that even the angels cannot fathom, yet He has revealed Himself and His purpose to us so that we can fully understand His purpose.

God does not want his children to be cowered by a spirit of fear. Christian hope is the opposite of despair. Christians are the recipients of the grandest good news that has ever been told. Let us not let any person, any group, or any teaching dissuade us from the wonderful truth that God's promise to eternally save those who trust in Him is sure and reliable. We can know for certain that we have eternal life. Let us never fail to praise God and thank Him for this wonderful gift.