

THE MINISTRY OF THE TRIUNE GOD

1 Peter 1:1-2

Introduction:

Suffering – not something any of us look forward to. But the Apostle Peter lived in an age when Christians suffered intense persecution at times. The world was ruled by Rome, a powerful and at times vicious empire. Many of the Roman emperors were actually indifferent to Christianity but a few were malicious and cruel when it came to the persecution of Christians.

Much of the persecution and suffering in the very early days of the church came, not from the Romans, but from the Jewish leaders and those zealous Jews who viewed this new sect as a threat to their religion and their way of life. The stoning of Stephen in Acts 8 had nothing to do with the Romans. It was the Jewish people, at the instigation of the high priest and the elders who put Stephen to death. And we know that Saul, who later became the great apostle Paul, was the source of a great deal of suffering for the early believers.

In Acts 12, we read of the death of James, which was ordered by Herod, Rome's puppet king in Judea. This was done in order to maintain peace by satisfying the Jewish leaders as well.

However, as the years went by, there were also pockets of persecution initiated by Roman emperors. Claudius, who ruled from AD 41-54, expelled all the Jews, including Christians, who were viewed as a Jewish sect, from Rome. Because of ongoing conflict between the Jews and the Christians, they were seen as a disturbance to the peace of the realm and were banished from Rome.

The emperor who followed Claudius was Nero, a savage madman who is described by one writer as *"a crazed and cruel emperor, a pleasure-driven man who ruled the world by whim and fear."* He ruled from AD 54 – 68, and it was during his reign that both Paul and Peter were martyred. He blamed the great fire of Rome in AD 64 on the small enclave of Christians living there, bringing additional persecution on them.

It was during Nero's cruel reign, near the end of Peter's life that he wrote his two letters to the churches of Asia Minor and the believers living throughout that region, to encourage and strengthen them in the face of persecution and suffering. Most scholars place the writing of 1 Peter around AD 62-63.

The recipients of his letter, identified in v. 1, are the pilgrims, or exiles (strangers) who are scattered throughout the regions of ... the area of modern Turkey. As early as 5 years after the birth of the church, we see the believers in Jerusalem being scattered throughout Judea and Samaria because of persecution following the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). As time went on, these believers moved farther and farther, taking the Word of God with them. In the meantime, Paul was converted, and eventually began travelling taking the message of Christ to the world. On his first and second missionary journeys, he took the gospel into many of these areas and planted churches.

So, by the time Peter wrote this letter, there were probably thousands of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, scattered throughout this region. Peter could see what was happening as persecution and hatred toward Christians was growing and he wanted to encourage these believers to stand firm and even rejoice when suffering came their way.

As Peter begins his letter, he starts, as usual, with a greeting. However, this is more than just your typical greeting. He could have said, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are ... exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia... May grace and peace be multiplied to you." That would be the usual greeting, as you find it in most of Paul's letters.

Instead, Peter inserts a theological statement, that I believe is designed to already provide encouragement to the believers to whom he is writing. It is a statement regarding their salvation and the very foundation of their faith. They are chosen, elect, *"... 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..."*

In that simple, yet profound statement, Peter reminds his readers that their salvation is complete and that it was accomplished jointly by

all three members of the Trinity. In that verse, Peter points to God the Father, God the Son, Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. This morning, I would like to examine his statement a bit more closely and consider our relationship to each member of the Trinity as we consider our salvation and subsequent Christian life. There are three elements: Election, sanctification, and atonement which leads to obedience.

Elect [Chosen] ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father

Election – if you ever want to start a heated debate among theology students just bring up the subject of election. Peter tells his readers that they are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. That sounds simple enough – God knew who would believe, and they are the chosen ones. He chose those he knew would believe. But the Greek word that is used here is literally *“prognosis.”* It carries the idea of not only knowing what will happen, but fore-ordaining, pre-arranging something.

By the pre-arrangement of God the Father, we have been chosen. He calls us the elect, just as Paul says in Eph. 1:4, *“...He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”*

I am not going to pretend to know how the mind of God works. In Isaiah 55, He reminds us that *“...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Somehow, in the mind of God, the idea that we must believe, that whoever will may come and believe and receive forgiveness and eternal life—that concept that we must make a choice—fits perfectly with the truth that from before the world ever existed, he knew and planned that you and I would be saved and brought into a relationship with him.

We are chosen according to the foreknowledge—the pre-arrangement and fore-ordination—of God the Father. When facing opposition and persecution, suffering and distress that ought to be a comfort to us. After all, as Paul said in Rom. 8:32, *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”*

If he chose us and saved us, will he not keep us in the palm of his hand? Can we not trust him with our very lives?

In the Sanctification of the Spirit...

NIV – *“...through the sanctifying work of the Spirit...”* Peter has a rather convoluted way of saying things but let’s try to break this down. As believers, we are chosen, elect by God the Father. We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?

The word **sanctify** means to make holy, literally to consecrate or set apart for a special purpose. The word sanctification is used in theological terms in a two-fold way. It can refer to conversion, when we are taken out of the worldly realm, the kingdom of darkness and set apart for Christ and his kingdom of light. Or it can refer to the ongoing process of spiritual growth in the Christian life.

The ESV Study Bible says this in the study notes: *“The Spirit sets apart God’s people into the sphere of the holy, so that believers are now holy and righteous in their standing before God, and they grow in actual holiness in their lives.”* In this case it could refer to either of those or perhaps both.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of sanctification both as a past action and an ongoing process:

Heb. 10:10 – *“And by that will we **have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

Heb. 10:14 – *“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who **are being sanctified.**”*

The Apostle Paul used the same kind of terminology as Peter when he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, *“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.”* (2 Thess. 2:13)

So, the Holy Spirit’s role in our salvation is to set us apart to be holy, consecrated, sanctified, and then to mold and shape us into a life of holy living by an ongoing process of sanctification or consecration.

For Obedience to Jesus Christ and for Sprinkling with his blood

Again, the wording here is a bit ambiguous. ESV Study Bible – **“For obedience to Jesus Christ may also refer either to conversion, when Christians confessed Jesus as Lord, or to God’s purpose for their lives, that they obey Christ.”**

1 Peter 1:22 – *read it...* It is our obedience to the truth of Jesus Christ, by believing in him, that has resulted in our salvation and the purification of our soul.

For sprinkling with his blood is clearly a reference to the atoning work of Christ on the cross. It is his blood, shed on the cross that washes away our sin, just as it was the sprinkling of blood that inaugurated the old covenant.

Read Exodus 24:3-8 – the institution of the covenant with the nation of Israel. In the same way, the new covenant was instituted with the sprinkling of blood – *Read Hebrews 10:19-22; 12:24.*

It is the sprinkling of his blood, the application of the blood of Christ to our lives that atones for our sin and cleanses us and frees us from the penalty for sin. But that is tied in to our obedience.

1 John 1 reminds us of the importance of walking in obedience to Jesus Christ. *Read 1 John 1:5-10* – It is his blood that provides the atonement, and satisfies God’s righteous requirement for sin.

Conclusion

Peter was writing to believers who were facing persecution and suffering. Every indication was that it was only going to get worse. How could he encourage them in the face of such pain? He begins his letter, right in the greeting, with a theological statement to remind them of the wonderful salvation that is theirs.

They belong to God, who chose them for his own, sanctified them through the ministry of the Spirit, and redeemed them by the blood of Jesus Christ, that they might live in obedience to him.

Romans 8:32 – “He that spared not ...” – Application...