

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter. For years I have said to turn to Matthew, but now we are going to go through this wonderful epistle, because it has profound relevance to issues within our culture. Before we look at 1 Peter 1:1-2, think with me. As I was living with these passages, it came to my mind that even in my lifetime I have witnessed a phenomenal growth of apostasy in the church of Jesus Christ. The gospel has been so misrepresented by those who name the name of Christ it quite frankly bears little resemblance to the gospel that Jesus preached. Compromise is now pandemic. I fear that very few Christians have sufficient discernment to see the apostasy that's present and the apostasy that is gaining momentum.

From the Christian home schooling movement to Christian schools, from Bible colleges to seminaries, compromise and confusion now dominate even Christian education. False gospels now make best sellers. False teachers attract enormous crowds as they systematically seduce the desperate and naïve with their wide gate version of the gospel. Churches, therefore, are becoming filled with people who do not know Christ. Our children are growing up in a world that is utterly dominated by religious deception. What makes it even more frightening and dangerous is the fact that the greatest threat now comes from within the so-called church rather than outside of it. Many, if not most, Bible schools and seminaries are a far greater threat to authentic Christianity than the cults. Quite frankly I fear the Purpose Driven Life movement far more than the ACLU or the ideologies of political liberalism.

I fear all of the wildly popular movements that are manipulating people to make superficial commitments to Christ, but never really asking them to count the cost of discipleship. They never really tell them that if they are going to come to Christ they must deny themselves and abandon all their past priorities. Coming to Christ may cost you your relationships, it may cost you your self-interests, your material goods, it may even cost you your life. People aren't told that any more. Very few people are told that the key to eternal life is through repentance. Many people don't even know what that means. We now live in a culture where nominal Christianity is the norm. Show up for church every now and then, say a few religious things from time to time, but live just like the rest of the world. Theological compromise is now considered a virtue. For the most part truth is systematically sacrificed on the altar of tolerance. Al Mohler said it very well when he said, "(many churches have) substituted technology for truth, therapy for theology, and management for ministry."

Beloved, I have to tell you that with all of my heart I believe the church is in crisis today. We are drowning in the apostasies of neo-evangelicalism. We are like the church of Laodicea, the lukewarm church, the one that made God vomit. They thought they were rich and wealthy and that they knew everything and had need of nothing, but God

said they were wretched, miserable poor, blind and naked, and therefore “I stand on the outside of the church and I knock, wanting to come in.”

Biblically, we see that apostasy inevitably evokes divine judgment for the non-Christians, and persecution for true believers. That is my great fear for the Church—for this church and all churches that truly desire to honor Christ in all that we do. And as in the days of Jesus, the greatest source of opposition will come from apostate religious systems that align themselves with pagan political systems. We saw that in the life of Jesus, where the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees—all of the religious elite—aligned themselves with the political system of Rome. This will reach its zenith during the time of the tribulation when the Antichrist and his unparalleled political empire will be aligned with the false ecumenical religious system of the false prophet. That will be a time of great apostasy, marked by unprecedented persecution and martyrdom for the saints living in that day, and unprecedented suffering for unbelieving Israel, until God in His mercy opens their eyes and leads them to a saving knowledge of Himself.

Where I want to begin is with this understanding: apostasy inevitably leads to persecution. In these last days, the growing contempt for the truth that we see even in our culture is going to continue to give rise to increased hatred for all who are committed to the truth. I believe the storm clouds are gathering. I see the clash of the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. I see it in the church, as do many others. Indeed, persecution today in the United States is quite mild. None of us are fearing for our lives. Bible-believing Christians are merely tolerated as another fringe group of weirdoes in a pluralistic, democratic society. I was listening to a political commentary the other day and the lady asked the question, “Is the mid-east crisis a prelude to Armageddon?” That’s a very appropriate question. The pundit had others come on to define such terms as the rapture, Revelation, tribulation, Armageddon, and then people debated the pros and cons of it all. Clearly the sense that I got from those people, for the most part—especially the host—is that anyone who believes this stuff is really delusional. “It’s hard to believe but there are actually people who believe all this.” That is the mood today.

As you look at persecution today it’s things like that, mostly mild. We seldom see Christians represented on panels or talk shows. Certainly they are not allowed to hold political office, for the most part. Christians are considered ignorant, religious fanatics. After all, we deny the theory of evolution, and we actually think that everything was created! It’s fashionable in our culture to consider Bible-believing, fundamental evangelicals as knuckle dragging Neanderthals that someday will hopefully be converted to the more sophisticated virtues of religious tolerance and moral relativism. After all, that’s what’s made our nation great, right? And if not, we have to gradually

consider them as hate mongers. Even now we hear rumblings of how fundamental Christians are being compared to fundamental Islamic terrorists. So, we see an increasing hatred of Christianity. More Christians are being treated with derision and scorn in our country. I believe this is going to escalate. We've seen this all through history, and we know the prophetic Word.

This was precisely the dominant mood of the first century. Christians were marginalized and they were considered a fringe group of religious fanatics. They were maligned, and after Jesus' ascension, much to the chagrin of the Jewish religious authorities, the Church exploded in growth, resulting in increased hostilities and persecution. You will recall that they tried to stop Peter and John from preaching in Acts 4. They threw them in jail and beat them. They got out and continued to preach. Soon after that Stephen was martyred. Saul of Tarsus led the charge. Satan continued to sow tares among the wheat. False prophets began to spring up everywhere within that early church. But the Church continued to grow, along with the apostate churches. And hostilities grew with every new convert. You will recall that Herod had Peter and James, the brother of John, arrested. Steadily the contempt for Christians grew. Since Christians rejected the state religion of Rome, they were considered to be subversive rebels, insurrectionists, and as a result, persecution became the official political position of Rome.

By the time Peter wrote this epistle to the saints scattered abroad in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), the discrimination and hatred of Christians was inexorably descending into the abyss of inconceivable savagery. It hadn't come completely yet, but it was getting close to that. In fact, the barbaric and insane Emperor Nero was about to unleash his fury against the Lord Jesus Christ and all who follow Him. Because of his insatiable appetite to build, he decided to glorify himself through new buildings. To get rid of the old ones he set Rome on fire. Of course he needed a scapegoat. The lowest life form on the planet of that day was Christians, like us, so they got the blame. The Roman historian Tacitus tells us that Christians were blamed not only for the burning of Rome, but for their hatred of the human race. If you read about Nero, you read of the fiendish tortures he used against Christians. It was great sport to attach hides of beasts onto Christians and to allow them to be killed by wild dogs while spectators laughed in glee. Thousands of Christians were crucified. He would also dip Christians in wax and burn them alive to illuminate his gardens while he would drive furiously around them on a racetrack in his chariot. Dear friends, it was just before all that broke loose that Peter and Paul were martyred. It was on the precipice of this inconceivable era of persecution that they penned their epistles.

Finally, if we think through the history to give you further context, by the fourth century, the Emperor Diocletian tried to utterly destroy Christianity until Constantine came on the scene around 313 A.D. But soon after Constantine, during the Middle Ages, the apostate church evolved into a well organized and politically powerful machine called the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church took up the satanic banner of destroying the gospel of Christ. It continues to do so until this very day. Millions of Christians were tortured since that time, and during the time of the inquisition, tens of millions were killed. Some estimate that, if you consider the Jesuits and their alliance with Communism, there have been well over 200 million Christians that have been killed since that time. Today the persecution continues. It's mild here, it's a little worse in the countries of Europe, but it is catastrophic in Communist countries as well as Islamic governments where thousands of Christians are killed every year.

Knowing the suffering that was coming upon the saints, the Spirit of God inspired Peter to pen this epistle, preparing thousands of saints for what was coming upon them. Although I do not know the severity of that which awaits us, I believe it's going to get much worse. I believe if the Lord tarries, ten years from now we will look back on this day and say how true that is. I believe we need to be prepared, even as the Lord prepared the saints of that day, and therefore all of us, for the persecution, the inevitable suffering that comes when we follow Christ. I fear that as the fires of apostasy intensify, Satan knows his days are numbered. Any discerning Christian can smell the smoke of the flames of persecution as they inexorably make their way towards all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and refuse to compromise.

Peter is now at the close of his life. He's probably writing from Rome. Persecution is already there, but it's ready to explode into a much more severe form of barbaric savagery. He's also fully aware—because the Lord has told him—that he is going to be crucified. So what is on his heart? What would be on your heart? What would you say to the saints during that time? What would dominate your thoughts? What would be the theme and purpose of your epistle? The answer is simply this: How to live triumphantly in days of apostasy and mounting persecution. As we look at 1 Peter we see that he, through the power of the Holy Spirit, tells us how to maintain a confident and vibrant faith in the face of suffering. He tells us how to avoid becoming bitter and losing hope in a world that hates us. We will learn about evangelizing the lost through obedient, victorious living. He explains the importance of the priesthood of the believer. He will help us understand how we should live in a world governed by secular, pagan governments. He is even going to get practical and spend time telling us how a Christian lady should conduct herself, and how a believing wife can win her unsaved husband to Christ, as well as many other practical, theological issues.

Dear friends, the dominant theme is how to live a triumphant life in the face of suffering. Where does he begin? Where would you start? I find it fascinating that he begins with the doctrine of election; the most despised and misunderstood and maligned doctrine in all of Scripture. In fact it is avoided like the plague in most all pulpits in not only this country but around the world. There is no greater comfort in the fires of adversity than to know that you serve a sovereign God that is in control of all things. There is no greater encouragement than knowing that God has ordained even our afflictions for our good and His glory. Why? Because we know that He has even ordained our salvation, and that's where you must begin. What an encouragement to be reminded that God deliberately ordained your salvation in eternity past. What a glorious confidence that is for people who are suffering. Thus my sermon title is "Election: Triumphant Hope for Spiritual Aliens."

Look at the first two verses of Peter's epistle. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure." What a powerful salutation. As we look at this salutation we will find that it is packed with glorious truths. We will look at four key elements of our election, elements that are indispensable when it comes to living a triumphant Christian life in the face of mounting hostilities. We must remember four crucial truths: we are chosen, we are sanctified, we are sealed and we are blessed.

First, notice who he identifies as his readers in verse 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." By the way, an apostle is one that has been divinely appointed, he is the authorized spokesman for God. "...to those who reside as aliens." I love that word. Alien. As we think of it in our culture we see all sorts of goofy looking critters that run around, but actually in the original language an alien was someone that was a temporary resident, a sojourner—a foreigner who is temporarily living in a place that is not his home. A person in a place that is very different than his home. He's not a permanent settler. It has the idea that it is one who has an allegiance or devotion to another place and longs to be there. Ring any bells?

As Christians, we are all aliens. We're like refugees in this world. I've had the privilege of being in some third world countries. When I was in Kenya I was definitely the alien there. There was no cultural identification. The values and language were radically different. Likewise, as Christians, when we're around non-Christians our worldview is a radically different paradigm. They cannot understand us. They think we're crazy. Our

unbelieving friends cannot understand us. We are spiritual aliens in this world, citizens of another kingdom. Our home is in heaven. We are not suited to live in this world. We're not even ultimately residents of this earth, but we're here temporarily as sojourners, as aliens. We need to live our lives for the eternal, not for the temporal. Don't invest all of your life in the things of this life or on this earth. What is important is not this life, but the next. What's important is not what's happening on earth but what's going to happen in heaven. We shouldn't be surprised about how we're treated in this kingdom of darkness. We need to be like Abraham in Hebrews 11:10 who was "looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

I think of the words of Jesus in John 14:1-2 where He said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." That should be the preoccupation of our hearts. Very practically, let's not be obsessed with the wickedness of this world. Don't get consumed with politics or live for earthly treasures. We're aliens here, and that's who Peter is addressing.

He says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens," and then he says "scattered." In the original language it is the word *Diaspora*. We get our English word "disperse" from that. It's a reference to believers who were geographically scattered all over the place, especially he says, "throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Primarily these were provinces in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. He's writing to spiritual aliens that are scattered throughout Asia Minor, a region that was exceedingly hostile to them. It remains so to this day. Ultimately the Spirit of God is speaking to all of us, who are also aliens scattered all around this world. He reminds them of the quintessential doctrinal truth that is crucial for triumphant living in a hostile world. He says in verse 1 at the end, "(you) who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Chosen, in the original language, comes from *eklektos*, it's translated "elect." It's the "called out ones," it means to choose or to select. The first crucial truth we must concentrate upon as we live in this world of increased apostasy and hostility is that we are chosen.

We see this amazing doctrine all through Scripture. Without question I believe it is the most humbling and comforting doctrine in all of Scripture, making it also the most hated. You see, proud man cannot stand a God that acts independently of him. We just don't like that. Quite frankly, divine sovereignty, especially over salvation, assaults man's rabid commitment to self-determination. Moreover, man cannot stand any doctrine that he cannot fully comprehend. So it takes all kinds of mental and exegetical

gymnastics created to excuse God from this terrible thing that somehow He would choose some and not everyone, and bail Him out of this horrible dilemma—that in the minds of many—would mean that God deliberately chose to send some people to hell. My purpose here is not to go through all of the facets of the doctrine of election, but simply to remind you that it is a hated doctrine, but one that is very clearly taught in Scripture. It is hard to understand. There is a tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, because both are taught in Scripture. It is an inscrutable mystery and you’ll never be able to understand it, and I would argue that we cannot understand any of the major doctrines of Scripture. From creation to inspiration, from the Trinity to the incarnation, it’s all a mystery to us. But sovereign election is an undeniable truth. It’s interesting that Peter just mentions it – he doesn’t try to defend it. That’s the way we see it throughout Scripture. The Lord said in John 6:44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” Later in chapter 13:18 He differentiated between the elect and the non-elect and said, “I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen.”

In Ephesians 1:4 we read that, “He chose us in Him before the foundations of the world.” And in verse 11 it goes on to say, “We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 1:9, “(the Lord) saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” In the original language it’s literally saying “before time began.” He says the same thing to Titus in chapter 1:1-2 where Paul described himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God.” And later in verse two he tells us this was “promised long ages ago,” literally, before time began. We see it all through Scripture. In Romans 8:30 the Spirit of God speaks through the apostle Paul who describes believers as “(those) He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Scripture is abundantly clear that God took the initiative in our salvation. In eternity past He sovereignly and graciously chose certain ones to be saved, not based on any foreseen merit or act on the part of that individual. Those whom He chose, which the Bible calls the elect, will certainly be saved, those and no others. All whom He has chosen are made to be voluntary partakers of Christ’s salvation. I want you to notice what Peter says here, “(those) who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” Some will be quick to say that God’s election, seen all through Scripture, is due to divine foreknowledge, it says it right here in this verse: foreknowledge of those whom He sees believing in Him in the future. In other words, God looks down the corridors of time and He can see which ones decide on their own, through their own free will, that

they're going to believe in Him. He sees who those people are, writes their names down, and then ordains that these people are going to get saved. Proponents of this view argue that man, not God, takes the initiative in salvation, that God in eternity past graciously chose to save those whom He foreknew would respond in faith to the Gospel of Christ. They would cite Peter's words here. They would also go to Roman's 8:29 where it says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined." I must confess that when I was a young man, especially when I first entered seminary, this was the view that I held. I hadn't thought it through very well but it made sense to me. Later I realized that this is a man-centered definition of foreknowledge, it is not a biblical definition of foreknowledge, and it is utterly contrary to the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

I want to give you six brief reasons why I believe that to be so. I'm sure there are others, but I don't want this to be the point of what I'm sharing with you today. First of all, when we look at these texts in 1 Peter 1 and Romans 8:29, with respect to the word foreknowledge, there is absolutely no hint as to what God foreknew. We do not see that here in these texts, it is merely conjecture to assume that this refers to some supernatural foresight or foreknowledge of who would and would not believe.

Secondly, in the Old and New Testaments we see that it is God, not man, who is sovereign over salvation. Jesus told His disciples in John 15:16, "You did not choose Me but I chose you." In Romans 9:16 Paul describes salvation. He says, "Salvation does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Indeed, God is sovereign over all things, including, and especially, salvation. We read in Isaiah 46:9-10, "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'"

We see a third reason why this concept of foreknowledge cannot mean the idea of just looking and seeing who would and wouldn't be saved. It's the very issue of grace. We are saved by grace alone, "it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9.) We cannot initiate our own salvation and thus share in the glory of our salvation. That frustrates grace.

Fourthly, man is spiritually dead. He has no ability to respond to God's gospel. In Ephesians 2:1 we read that man is spiritually dead. A corpse cannot respond to anything unless it is somehow revived. People are quick to say, "What about man's free will?" Well indeed, man has a free will, that's not the issue. The issue is his *desire*. Man has the will to believe in Christ, but he has no desire to do so because he's spiritually dead. He has no desire to exercise that will and be saved. I fed my horses this morning. They

ate a certain type of grain. I could have brought them hamburgers. They have the will to eat those hamburgers. They could do that if they chose to. Why wouldn't they do that? Because that's not their nature. They have no desire to do that, any more than fallen man has a desire to give God the glory and confess and repent of his sin, and make the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of his life. He has no capacity to respond to truth apart from divine regeneration. Paul said in Romans 3:11, "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." Therefore, any definition of foreknowledge that assumes that man can initiate his own salvation and then God elected him on that basis is simply incompatible with the doctrine of man's depravity, not to mention the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

A fifth reason is the Old Testament concept of the word "to know." It means to have a special regard for, or to look upon something with special concern. The Greek term used here in Peter, *prognosis*, has a meaning far beyond mere knowledge of the future. It has the idea of fore-loving. It has the idea of a prior establishment of an intimate relationship with someone. In the Old Testament, knowing sometimes even refers to sexual intercourse. In Exodus 33:17 it says, "The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have *known* you by name.'"—again the idea of an intimate, fore-loving, prior established relationship. He told Jeremiah in chapter 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I *knew* you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Repeatedly we see this reflected in the language of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

If foreknowledge merely referred to an advance knowledge of some future event, I would have to say that Jesus' words in Matthew 7:22-23 would be absurd. You will recall in that text He's describing the danger of self-deception and the time when people will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ as their judge thinking they were saved but they weren't, that time of ultimate rejection. "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' and then I will declare to them, 'I never *knew* you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Of course He knew who they were in eternity past. But that's not the issue, He's not referring to that. He's saying "I never *knew* you" in the sense that "I never set My saving love upon you in eternity past. I never predetermined to have a saving relationship with you."

A sixth reason is that such a definition of foreknowledge would be no encouragement at all to persecuted saints. In other words, if it meant just an awareness of something that's going to happen in the future, then Peter was just saying to them, "Hang in there folks. I know things are tough. But remember, you initiated your salvation, not God, so it's

going to be up to you to persevere to the end.” What type of encouragement is that? But rather what he’s saying is, “Remember folks, it was God, not you, who initiated your salvation. He is the One that set His love upon you before time began. Because of His sovereign rein over all things He will strengthen you and He will sustain you and help you to persevere to the end.” Indeed, Peter later reminds them of this very thing in chapter 2:9 when he says, “You are a *chosen* race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” So 1 Peter encourages them to live triumphant lives in the face of adversity because they “have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

Not only are we chosen, but we are also sanctified. Verse 2 says, “...by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Christ.” Sanctify, or *hagiosmos* in the original language, we get the word holiness from that. It means to be set apart, to be consecrated, to be separated from sin to God.

If I may digress, biblically speaking there are technically three distinguishable phases of sanctification found in Scripture. There is a *positional sanctification*; we have that in our justification when we are delivered from the penalty of sin, where we are declared righteous by God. There is also *progressive sanctification*; which is a process of being delivered from the power of sin. And thirdly there is *perfected sanctification*; which is the ultimate consummation of the process of sanctification, where in glory we will be delivered completely from the very presence of sin. All of this begins with regeneration, when we are born of the Spirit. That’s why Peter is saying *the sanctifying work of the Spirit*.

Our sanctification, our setting apart, begins with regeneration. The Holy Spirit initiates that work in our heart. In Titus 3:5 there is a description of the rebirth of the human soul, the human spirit. There it says, “He saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” *Palingenésia*; *genesis* meaning born, and *palin* meaning again—the idea of being born again. You’re dead, you need to be born again. How does that happen? You’re regenerated by the power of the Spirit of God, and when that happens you are set apart. Regeneration is that instantaneous, supernatural impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead. At that point there is an amazing change that occurs in the human heart at that moment of salvation whereby the governing disposition of that person is forever altered as that person is born again, regenerated, and thus set apart in sanctification, set apart from sin unto God.

When we’ve become a new Christian we become a new creation in Christ. There is a transformation. We begin to love what God loves and hate what God hates. We’re

empowered by that indwelling Spirit of God to obey Christ. When we look at the Scriptures, we see that the *Author* of regeneration is God, the *Agent* of regeneration is the Holy Spirit, and the *Instrument* of regeneration is the Word of God. But regeneration is merely the initial transforming power that sets into motion our sanctification. That is what Peter is reminding these dear people of in this text. What a precious reminder it is, especially to beleaguered saints in the first century, and all who have followed Christ thereafter. To know that the Holy Spirit of God has set you apart—what enormous encouragement to know, as Paul said in Philippians 2:13, “It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” John MacArthur has well said, “At salvation the sanctifying work of the Spirit sets believers apart from sin to God, separates them from darkness to light, sets them apart from unbelief to faith, and mercifully separates them from a love of sin and brings them to a love of righteousness.”

So Peter is reminding these dear folks, and us, that not only are we chosen and sanctified, but we are also *sealed*. Notice what he says, “(you) who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.” There is a great text in Exodus 24, and this is the text to which Peter is now appealing. It is a powerful Old Testament metaphor where Moses returns from Mt. Sinai and reads the Law of God to the people. They agree to obey the Law so Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain and they offer peace offerings of young bulls. He separates half of the blood into two basins. One basin is splashed upon the altar, and the other basin is splashed upon the people. The crimson stain that is on the clothing of those people becomes a tangible, visual reminder of the covenant they are now making with God. It’s mediated through the sacrifice. The blood on the *altar* symbolized God’s commitment to forgive. The blood on the *people* symbolized their commitment to obey. Of course many years later the blood of Christ made that *final* atonement for sin and when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, His blood seals God’s covenant of grace upon us. There’s so much more to be said here with respect to the great doctrine of the security of the believer. The blood of Christ seals us for eternity. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

So Peter refers back to that ceremony of consecration, reminding the people that the blood of Jesus has sealed you, it has secured you. There is a glorious covenant here of forgiveness that provides for you a perpetual cleansing of sins. Here again is another astounding benefit of election. How easy it would have been for the persecuted saints in those days to think that their suffering was a consequence of their own sin, that it was an act of divine judgment upon them. They, like us, know that they keep sinning, not that

we want to—that's not the pattern of our life and not the desire of our heart—but, because we remain incarcerated in this unredeemed humanness, we continue to sin. What are we going to do? Praise God, there's no condemnation – we've been sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb. The covenant secures us; the forgiveness goes on.

Finally, you can live a triumphant Christian life, even in the crucible of grace if you remember that you've not only been chosen, sanctified and sealed, but finally, because of election you must remember that we are *blessed*. Notice what he says in the end of verse 2, "May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure." Without grace there can be no peace. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *chen* or grace, has the idea of "to stoop" or "to condescend." It means to have "condescending favor," or *charis* in the New Testament. That's what grace is all about. Grace is God's favor to sinners who do not merit His goodness, who cannot earn His goodness, who cannot in any way repay His goodness, and quite frankly who of themselves do not even want God's goodness. This is the passion of God's heart for these beleaguered saints and all of us, expressed here through the pen of the inspired apostle. He wants all of us to enjoy the benefits that belong to the chosen ones, whereby the triune God condescends to our lowly estate and lavishes His love upon us. "Grace and peace be yours in fullest measure."

Beloved, please understand, as we think about the importance of this crucial, God honoring, God exalting doctrine of election, here's the long and short of it: God has chosen us because we would never have chosen Him. And had He not done so, we would perish in our sins. Apart from sovereign election man has no hope of being saved. What a humbling truth that is, and therefore what a source of great blessing. As Peter says in chapter 5:5, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." I can think of no greater motivation to praise God and obey Him than to know that He, on His own initiative, set His love upon me in eternity past. These are practical, transforming truths that should resonate in the heart of every believer. How sad that most never understand it. They don't know it. They won't apply it. It's too deep or too divisive. Child of God, may I say to you, when—not if—you experience persecution and suffering in your life because you're a spiritual alien, when that happens I want you to remember, based on this passage, that God has chosen you in eternity past. He set His love upon you to establish an eternal relationship with you. Remember that God has also sanctified you through the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Spirit of God that therefore empowers you to obey the Christ that we love. Remember that God has sealed you by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, promising to forgive your sins until that day comes when it's no longer an issue and we're in glory. God has blessed you.

I want to close with Ephesians 1:3-14 This is one of the most beautiful, remarkable, watershed passages that describes the blessing of the saints because of our election,

because of our position in Christ, because we've been chosen and sealed. Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 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, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

May I close with this thought: I believe with all my heart that one cannot deny the sovereignty of God over salvation and still claim to glorify and worship Him. For if God is not sovereign, then He is not God. There can be no greater evidence of His glory than in His sovereign reign over every aspect of His creation, nor can there be a more profound act of humble worship than to praise Him for setting His love upon us simply because He chose to do so.

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