

COMMENTARY ON FIRST PETER

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INTRODUCTION

Peter, originally a fisherman, was chosen by Christ to become one of the twelve apostles. He was eager, impetuous, and outspoken. At first his faith lacked substance and he overestimated his own devotion to Christ. When his master was arrested to be tried and crucified, he denied him three times out of fear, swearing that he did not even know the man. Afterward he was ashamed and wept bitterly. But Christ restored him, filled him with his Spirit, and he became a leading spokesman among the apostles.

His life teaches us that our faithfulness to God is not something that is inherent in our personality, nor do we have the "free will" to simply decide to become loyal disciples. But our faithfulness to the Lord is itself a work of his sovereign grace, so that if we are faithful to him, it is not he who owes us, but it is we who owe him! There is no place for boasting, but only for praise and gratitude.

He identifies himself as the author of First Peter (1:1), and states that he writes from Babylon (5:13), which is most likely a cryptic name for Rome. There is some discussion about the role of Silas in the writing of this letter (5:12), as to whether he is merely its bearer, or whether he has a hand in polishing the language, or if he is even the one who puts Peter's thoughts into words. Although this is a matter of interest, it does not disturb the fact of Peter's authorship, that this letter come from divine inspiration through the apostle and that it is sent with his approval.

Commentaries offer arguments dating this letter to some time between AD 60-68, and even 63-64. While I am in substantial agreement with these arguments, there is one that I find problematic. Although it is unimportant to identify the precise year in which the letter was written, since this argument has to do with how one interprets a significant passage in the letter, it is worth a mention.

In July of AD 64, a great fire broke out in Rome that destroyed numerous buildings and left many of its citizens homeless. When suspicion fell on the Emperor Nero, he diverted the rage of the populace by placing the blame on the Christians, who for some time had been preaching that the world would one day be judged and perish in fire. It was not too difficult for Nero to distort the teaching and then slander the Christians with it.

Some scholars find it impossible to reconcile the deadly persecution that followed with the admonition in 1 Peter 2:13-17 that believers are to submit under "every authority instituted among men" and to "honor the king." This is given as a strong reason for dating the letter to some time before the great persecution under Nero, so that it must have been written before the great fire in AD 64.

But the argument is defective, so that even if the letter was written in or before AD 64, the above should not be considered a compelling reason to adopt the date. One of Peter's main points in the letter is that Christians should disprove the slanders against them by their good

behavior. And so the admonition to submit under the government is precisely what we should expect, as it is also consistent with what the New Testament teaches elsewhere (Romans 13:1-7). Except in cases where the Christian must choose between God or man, he is to be a law-abiding person of the land in which he resides.

As for the intended audience, Peter addresses his letter to "God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." The locations named here cover most of Asia Minor, or modern Turkey. The words translated "strangers in the world, scattered..." is better rendered in the HCSB as "temporary residents of the Dispersion." The term "Dispersion" (*diasporas*) typically referred to Jews scattered throughout Gentile territories, and for this reason, some are convinced that the letter's primary readers were Jewish. However, it could be that Peter is applying to the Christians a term that was previously reserved for Jews. This is entirely in accord with New Testament doctrine (Galatians 6:16).

Contrary to some, neither is the abundance of quotations from the Old Testament evidence that the intended readers were mainly Jewish, as if Gentiles were not expected to respect or have any knowledge of the Old Testament even through they were Christians.

On the other hand, a verse like 1 Peter 2:10 strongly indicates Gentile readership: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." This is an allusion to the words of Hosea, which Paul quotes and applies to the salvation of Gentiles in Romans 9:23-26:

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from *the Gentiles*?

As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," [Hosea 2:23] and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" [Hosea 1:10]

It is to *these* people that Peter writes, "Dear friends, I urge you, *as aliens and strangers in the world*, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul" (2:11). Whether Jew or Gentile, all Christians are in one sense "strangers in the world," having been regenerated, and called out of the false thinking and wicked practices of the unbelievers. But because of this and other verses (1:18, 4:3), some even contend that the letter was written to mainly Gentile readers.

After weighing the various arguments, I am content to agree with those who conclude that the letter was intended for a mixed audience, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. At any rate, the most important point is that the letter is for "God's elect...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1:1-2). In other words, its authority and teaching apply to all Christians everywhere, and in all generations. Through this letter

from the apostle, God speaks to his chosen people, encouraging and admonishing them in their pilgrimage, telling them how to behave as a royal priesthood and a holy nation, even in the midst of hardship and persecution (5:12).

1 PETER 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 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.

When you purchase a piece of electronic appliance, it will most likely come with an instruction manual. The typical manual will begin by thanking you for your purchase. It will then assure you that you have made a wise decision by asserting that the item is a product of quality and durability, and very likely to serve you for years to come, if not for a lifetime. Then, it might even provide a brief summary of the advantages and features of the product.

Sometimes the manufacturers seem a little presumptuous, so that rather than thanking the customers in their manuals, they begin by congratulating them. Perhaps they wish to appear confident about their products, or perhaps this is a psychological device to assure the customers about the quality of the products they have purchased, as if they are especially blessed to own them. Another motive behind these introductions might be to alleviate buyer's guilt, that is, when the customer regrets his decision after he has made the purchase.

But whether the manuals begin by thanking the buyers or by congratulating them, they never fail to acknowledge the roles of the manufacturers and the customers, and the relationship between them. The manufacturers produce the items, but it is up to the customers to buy them. The only thing that the manufacturers can do is to woo potential buyers. They can do nothing more to make these transactions happen.

Now, it is a most serious error to think that our relationship with God, or the way we come to salvation, is anything like the relationship between a manufacturer and its customers. In many circles, however, this is very close to how salvation is presented. God has made salvation possible, and now it is up to man to decide whether he wants to accept it. God can only woo him, but man is the master of his own fate, and even his eternal destiny.

This false perspective entails a blatant perversion of the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of salvation. The teaching betrays such an ignorance, distortion, and even a rejection of Scripture that the professing Christian who embraces this school of thought might as well write his own Bible.

The Bible does not say to the Christian, "Thank you for choosing Jesus Christ" or even "Congratulations on your wise decision"; rather, it says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Needless to say, to misunderstand or even reverse this fundamental truth in our doctrine of salvation is to cripple a person's relationship with God at the very beginning. And for this person to perform the work of the ministry is to spread heresy.

No manufacturer would dare say to its customers, "We spit on your money! Your positions and achievements mean nothing to us! You have been selected to own one of our products only because of our graciousness without consideration of your status or worth. This is a special privilege for which you must be eternally grateful and because of which you must serve us forever."

On the other hand, this is the exact teaching of Scripture regarding our relationship with God and the nature of salvation. This is because when you are dealing with the Christian faith, you are not dealing with a mere man, or even a superman, but you are dealing with an absolutely sovereign and powerful God. He has no need of anything that you give him, as if you can give him anything, but you have need of him to give to you, and you are always entirely at his mercy. People sometimes forget that, or they simply refuse to acknowledge it.

Peter begins, then, not by thanking the Christians, as if they have done God a favor in believing the gospel. But he begins by calling them the "elect" or the "chosen." People believe the gospel and receive salvation not because they have a free will, and not because in and of themselves they decide to have faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, whoever believes the gospel does so only because God chooses to save him, to change his inner nature, and to produce faith in him.

Yes, the one who is saved must believe the gospel, and this involves something on his part, in that he must understand and decide about the gospel. However, even this understanding and this deciding is a work of God. Faith in the gospel in no way comes from the person himself – the understanding is sovereignly granted by God as he removes the blindness from the mind and enlightens it, and the willful assent is produced in him by God's power, as a gift that he gives only to those whom he has chosen. Just as God actively and directly controls the mind of every unbeliever, compelling his evil nature and preventing him from believing the gospel, God also actively and directly controls the mind of every person who converts to Jesus Christ, causing him to believe in the gospel message.

It is a false doctrine to suggest that God provides the mere possibility of salvation, and that it is up to each individual to actualize it when he believes the gospel by his own free will. Instead, the Bible denies any free will to man, and depraved and unconverted man is kept in bondage by God's own power, but it is God who provides both the possibility and the actuality of salvation for his chosen ones.

Now, although the Bible refers to God as the potter and the creature as the clay, there are some people who claim to affirm the doctrines of divine sovereignty and of election, but

then proceed to speak as if God has taken his hands off the potter's wheel and evil humanity just spins itself into existence. Only after this does God select certain individuals for salvation.

But this is also false doctrine and a rejection of God and Scripture. It compromises with dualism, deism, and pagan views of the gods. The only and true God never lets go of the potter's wheel, but from it *he spins* out whatever he wishes, whether good or evil, including those he has designed and chosen for salvation, as well as those he has designed and chosen for damnation.

Nevertheless, God's direct control over evil does not make him evil. Any misunderstanding here is probably due to unjustified assumptions and the tendency to judge God as a creature. "If I were to do this, I would be considered a criminal!" A complaint like this is stupid even on a human level. If I were to stop the traffic and search through the cars, I would be considered a criminal also – but this is because I am not a policeman!

That people would judge God as if he is just a creature betrays their sinfulness and defiance. Those who reject the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty and those who accept only some of it – that is, those who reject less of it – should eventually come to terms with the fact that they are not God, and God is not a mere creature. God possesses absolute and unlimited rights over his creation.

It is alleged that there is a tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom. But there is no tension at all, because there is no such thing as human freedom – divine sovereignty is complete and absolute. The Bible does not teach both divine sovereignty and human freedom, but it teaches both divine sovereignty and human *responsibility*. False doctrine results when people confuse responsibility with freedom, or when they assume that responsibility presupposes freedom, so that humans are responsible only if they are free.

However, there is no necessary relationship between responsibility and freedom – the relationship is purely imaginary, and entirely unbiblical and irrational. By definition, a person is responsible if he is accountable to someone for his thoughts and actions. So humans are responsible before God if God has decided and decreed that he would hold them accountable for their thoughts and actions. God has indeed so decided and decreed; therefore, humans are responsible to God for their thoughts and actions.

Human freedom has no logical place in the discussion at all. In fact, the above shows that human responsibility is in reality founded solely on divine sovereignty, on what God has decided and decreed, so that we are responsible precisely because God is sovereign and we are *not* free. Whether our thoughts and actions are controlled by God, again, comes under the question of human freedom, and finds no logical place to be introduced into the discussion at all.

This biblical and rational view has been falsely accused of undermining human responsibility, but the reverse is true. Our opponents claim to uphold responsibility, but

they do so at least partly by basing responsibility on freedom. However, we are not aware of any professing Christian who attributes to man *total* freedom, in the sense that man is as free and as able as God, and as if he has unlimited freedom and ability to create, transverse, transform, and so on. Of course, a person who holds such a view would not be able to defend it, and neither would he be a Christian. Rather, even in their false doctrine, the freedom on which this responsibility is based is small and relative, not complete and absolute.

On the other hand, our view places human responsibility entirely upon divine sovereignty – that is, upon God's sovereign decision to judge, upon his omniscience to know, and upon his omnipotence to execute his will. Therefore, in our view, humans are as responsible as God is sovereign. Just as God is totally sovereign over man, man is totally responsible to him. There can be no stronger view of human responsibility than this. Since there is no room left for God to be more sovereign, there is no room left for man to be more responsible. By necessity, everyone who disagrees with this has a weaker view of human responsibility.

But our opponents undermine both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They think that there is "tension" *within* the Bible, and that we should affirm both sides of this tension, although they feign reverence by claiming that there is no actual contradiction. The real tension, however, is between their false doctrine and biblical teaching. They disagree with God, and blame it on the Bible. And they accuse those who adhere to Scripture as unorthodox, but this is only true if they define orthodoxy by their own opinion and not by divine revelation. The proper solution is for them to exhibit sincere repentance and undergo the renewing of the mind.¹

Peter says that Christians "have been chosen according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father." When completely removed from the context of biblical usage, the English word easily lends itself to the misunderstanding that the word means nothing more than foresight or prescience, an awareness or prediction of the future. From this false conception of foreknowledge, it is then a small step to the unbiblical conclusion that election is based on foreseen faith. This makes election little more than God's acknowledgement of those who would have faith in the future, so that in a real sense, it is not God who chooses the believers, but the believers who choose God by their faith in the gospel.

Of course, this is contrary to the whole pattern of biblical teaching, and it is the result of a false understanding of God's foreknowledge. However, before we explain the biblical meaning of foreknowledge, we can point out that even this false view does not necessarily overturn the biblical doctrine of election, or the view that it is God who sovereignly chooses those who would be saved without any consideration of foreseen faith or merit in them.

The false view of election first takes foreknowledge to mean a passive prescience. That is, they take it to mean that God passively discovers what his creatures would decide in the future apart from his sovereign control, and then he makes a decision regarding the status

¹ For more on divine sovereignty, election, reprobation, and so on, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians*, and *The Author of Sin*.

of these creatures on the basis of this awareness. But this means that his decision regarding the status of these creatures is in a real sense *determined* by these creatures themselves, and the difference between these creatures and other creatures are in the creatures themselves, apart from God's sovereign decision to make a distinction between them. It may be said that God is still the one who determines the principles by which men must be saved, but it is the men themselves who decide which ones would receive salvation.

The problem with this view is that, *even if* we allow foreknowledge to mean a passive prescience, the argument remains incomplete and futile. This is because our opponents must establish something else as well, namely, that faith is *not* a gift from God, but that it is something generated by the creatures themselves. Otherwise, if faith is a sovereign gift from God as the Bible teaches, then for God to base election on foreseen faith would be just another way of saying that he bases election on what *he himself* will do in the future.

That is, if God is the one who grants faith to whomever he chooses, and if men cannot generate faith in and by themselves, then whether foreknowledge refers to mere prescience does not make a pivotal difference for the doctrine of election. In this case, since God knows himself, since he knows his own plans and purposes, and since he knows his own decision regarding how and to whom he would distribute faith, it remains that election is based solely on God's own sovereign will, and not any foreseen condition in the creatures.

Therefore, it is not enough for opponents of the biblical doctrine to assert that foreknowledge means mere foresight or prescience, but they must also establish that faith is not a gift from God, and that men are willing and able to generate in and by themselves faith in Jesus Christ, and that even in their depraved condition, they are still willing and able to choose that which is so spiritually good, that is so against sin and unbelief, and that which is the opposite of their spiritual disposition.

The Bible teaches that the faith that is unto salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8) and that unbelief is under God's direct control (John 12:39-40). God gives faith to whomever he chooses, and he actively causes the rest to remain in unbelief. If our opponents even attempt to refute this, they are in open defiance against Scripture and thus commit a crime that is deserving of official reprimand, if not excommunication. But unless they refute this, their false conception of foreknowledge contributes nothing to their attempt to deny the biblical doctrine of election.

That said, foreknowledge in fact does not refer to the ability to predict the future in a passive manner, that is, to know about the future without causing it. In my admittedly limited research on First Peter, all commentators recognize that foreknowledge means something more or other than mere foresight. But perhaps this just means that I read good commentaries.

Now, there is a personal element in foreknowledge, but before we get to that, we should first mention the nature of God's knowledge of the future. Since God is indeed sovereign over all things as the Bible teaches, not just in the sense of *arranging* things according to his will but in the sense of *causing* things according to his will, then there is no such thing

as passive knowledge in God, whether of things past, present, or future. Since God is sovereign in this sense, then this means that God's sovereignty and knowledge are in fact united. He knows all things because he causes all things, and he knows himself perfectly.

As he declares in Isaiah 46:10, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." He can make known the future not because he passively discovers what will happen, but because everything is in his direct control and he always does what he pleases. Since he knows all that he will cause in the future, naturally he also knows all that will happen in the future.

Foreknowledge is even more specific than this, since in our context the "knowledge" includes a personal element. In the Bible, this knowledge involves a loving fatherly care, and that this is his "*foreknowledge*" indicates that God has chosen to direct this care toward the creature in advance, even in eternity before the creation of the world.

He says to Jeremiah, "Before *I formed* you in the womb *I knew* you" (Jeremiah 1:5). Certainly, "I knew you" here cannot mean "I found out about you," for otherwise this would imply that either the very idea of Jeremiah or at least his physical conception had occurred apart from God, and that God had discovered it only after it was done. But God says, "I knew you" before "I formed you." He had conceived of Jeremiah in his mind and there had established a loving and purposeful relationship with him before he actually formed him in the womb. The "knowledge" here is at least partly relational.

Then, to offer a negative example, Matthew 7:23 states that the Lord would say to some, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" Of course this cannot mean that God himself was never *aware* of their actions or even their very existence. Instead, it means that God never had that willing and loving relationship with them, as he did with Jeremiah and as he does with every Christian, every person whom he has decided to save from death and hell.

Perhaps to clarify the meaning and to prevent misunderstanding, some translations abandon the word foreknowledge and simply say "chosen," or something to that effect. But as we have just seen, "foreknowledge" has a specific meaning that is valuable to a full and proper understanding of God's nature and his eternal loving care toward his elect. So the word ought to be retained, but an explanation in the translators' notes would be helpful. At least one translation say "foreloved." There are disadvantages to this, but it does make the meaning immediately more clear in the English. In this case, I would suggest a footnote that states the original as "foreknowledge."

Let me use the Chinese Bible (United Bible Society, 1988) to illustrate a point. In 1 Peter 1:2, the Chinese translation for "foreknowledge" literally means "*foresight*." In the English, the word "know" can refer to a personal relationship without much of a stretch, so that if a person were to take into account the biblical usage, he should be able to derive the true meaning of the word without a scholar's assistance. Whether he is careful enough to do this is another question – the point is that the translation itself does not prevent the correct

understanding. On the other hand, the Chinese translation in this verse can hardly mean anything other than prescience.

Nevertheless, at this moment, I cannot think of a simple way to offer a "literal" translation without restricting its meaning to prescience. There is more than one verb in the receptor language that I can use, but the result either means foresight, to see in advance, or foreknow, to passively know about something in advance. We can use the Chinese word for "know" that refers to personal acquaintance, but that would be the equivalent of translating it as "foreloved" in the English, and it might have to be stated as a phrase rather than in just two Chinese characters, as it is now. In this case, the more literal translation of the *word* might in fact completely obscure the actual *meaning*.

In another context, or if we were dealing with another document, I would recommend the so-called "dynamic equivalence" approach, and just translate the meaning. But since we are dealing with the Bible, where precision is needed to retain all the originally intended ideas, I would suggest offering the closest literal translation along with an explanatory footnote. This does not really eliminate the problem for the Chinese translation, since one would still have to decide which word to offer as the closest literal translation. To those who have access to the Chinese Bible, also consider the translation of Romans 8:29.

Then, in the Chinese Bible, the "know" in Matthew 7:23 is translated with a word that can refer to personal acquaintance. This is the obvious and the right choice, because this is what the word means *here*, in this context, but notice that a choice has been made. At the moment, I cannot think of a Chinese word for "know" that can equally mean either a personal or non-personal awareness in this context. Now take a look at Jeremiah 1:5 in the Chinese.

I am certainly not against a "literal" translation of Scripture, but some of the proponents of this method of translation have a rather naïve view of language, and to them a literal translation is almost a transliteration of the original. There are already enough problems (not insurmountable) with translating the Bible into English, but once you are dealing with a character-based receptor language rather than an alphabet-based language, and one that has different rules of grammar, it is not nearly so easy to be "literal."

What is considered a "good" translation depends on the purpose of the translation and nature of the original text. For general purposes like ordinary conversations and movie subtitles, the most "literal" translation is often also the worst possible option, and the one that makes it hardest for the audience to grasp the meaning – "dynamic equivalence" is best in these cases.

Let us take an idiom as an example. Suppose I am speaking Chinese to you through a translator, and I am trying to tell you that John Smith is, literally translated, "not three not four." In an ordinary conversation, our translator would be foolish to give you this literal translation, or to give it to you without explanation. And once you learn what "not three not four" means, you cannot assume that you understand me when I tell you to stop being "fifteen sixteen," since that means something very different. In many situations, the most

effective route would be to forgo the literal translation altogether and say, "Vincent says that John Smith is a dubious, shady kind of person," or even that he is "neither fish nor foul." The best translation still depends on the context.

Then, there is the word that, literally translated, says "righteous breath" or "righteous spirit." This translation itself makes good sense, and might fit well into the sentence in which it appears, but the Chinese refers to a strong loyalty that has backbone, and that will go the distance, even to the point of sacrificing oneself. It is the opposite of being a snitch, a coward, or a traitor.

You can find an example of this noble trait in Jesus (John 18:8), and an example of its opposite in Judas. In this case, the most literal translation offers something very different from the intended meaning. However, to convey the full meaning would require many words, and would severely mar the flow of the translation if assigned to the main text. Therefore, although the explanation should be retained, it is best relegated to the footnotes.

Yet the translator must still decide whether to say "righteous spirit" or "strong loyalty" in the main text. The best option, it seems, is to put "strong loyalty," or "backbone," or the most appropriate translation depending on the context, and then include in the footnotes any relevant information, such as the most literal translation and a short explanation on the word or idiom.

That said, the context is a tremendous help to interpretation, so that the reader is not at the mercy of any one translated word or expression. When Jesus says, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" it is obvious that the statement reflects a negative attitude toward the devil, and that he is not just telling the devil to physically position himself behind him. So we should know this much even without any further investigation.

Sometimes the context is so strong that we could replace a word with a blank space, and the reader should still be able to accurately infer the meaning of what ought to be there. But people place so much dependence on the translation of *individual* words that they fail to think along with the flow of the entire context, which is often a much stronger indicator of the author's meaning. General reading comprehension is the most valuable skill in biblical exegesis – in fact, to understanding any written document – but interpreters often neglect it because they are distracted by the technical details, so that whether they get a particular detail right, they sometimes get the whole verse or passage wrong.

Perhaps something like a legal contract would require greater precision, but even here, "precision" can hardly ignore the meaning. Now, if the nature of the original is the Word of God, in which every letter is inspired, meaningful, and authoritative, then a translation should offer a still clearer picture of the original. However, insofar as it obscures the meaning, it is still a poor translation. This is why, again, I suggest a close translation of the original in the main text coupled with a generous use of translators' notes. Overall, this is perhaps the best approach to Bible translation, even if the product might appear a little cumbersome, and this seems to be the direction taken by the New English Translation (NET).

There are many careless Christian readers, and they are even more careless than usual when they are especially sensitive to the issue under discussion. So to prevent misunderstanding and slander, let me repeat: I am *for* a so-called literal translation when it comes to the Bible, even though this approach might not be my first choice when it comes to other documents and informal settings, but I think it is necessary to increase the use of translators' notes. This is the essence of the point that I have been trying to get across.

Returning to foreknowledge, the objection is raised that if this term means something similar to "foreloved," then a verse like Romans 8:29 would not make sense. The reasoning is that since the verse says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined," then if "foreknew" is practically synonymous with "predestined," this would make the usage redundant. On the other hand, as the objection goes, the verse would make good sense if we will take foreknowledge to mean prescience, so that God predestines to salvation those whom he knows will believe in Christ according to his passive foresight.

In response, first, we have already established that to make foreknowledge into mere prescience or foresight does not serve our opponents unless they also establish that faith is a purely human product and not a gift from God. Unless they can establish this, then to equate foreknowledge with prescience would only mean that God knows what he will cause in the future before he causes it, so that it is still entirely up to him as to whom he will save and whom he will damn.

Second, the verse itself makes it impossible to understand foreknowledge as mere prescience, or the object of foreknowledge as foreseen faith, since it does not say that God foreknows *the faith*, but that he foreknows *the people* whom he predestines. So if foreknowledge is taken as prescience, then since the verse refers to God's foreknowledge *of people*, and since he knows all things pertaining to the future, this would necessarily mean that he "foreknows" all people, that is, all of humanity. And if he "foreknows" all people, then this same verse indicates that he has also predestined all of them, and it follows that the next verse concludes that all people would be glorified.

In other words, to suppose that the foreknowledge here refers to God's passive knowledge of the future, instead of a deliberate and loving relational knowledge that does not apply to all people, would necessarily produce the doctrine of universal salvation. However, since the testimony of the entire Bible as well as Paul's letter to the Romans itself (where this verse is found) condemn universal salvation, foreknowledge cannot mean prescience in this verse.

Third, the objection is answered if we would just finish reading the verse! The entire statement says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." It is obvious that foreknowledge and predestination here do not refer to the same stage of God's work in his chosen ones, regardless of how much or how little they overlap elsewhere.

Foreknowledge refers to God's advanced loving disposition toward these people, and predestination refers to his advanced decision concerning what he will do with them. The former refers to relationship, and the latter refers to destiny. To paraphrase, "Concerning those whom God has *sovereignly loved and chosen in advance* (foreknew), he has also *decreed their destiny in advance* (predestined), and this destiny is to become like his Son, Jesus Christ."

This is consistent with how the doctrine of election is spoken of in other places. For example, in John 15:16, which we have already cited in part earlier, Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last." The word "appointed" here is not redundant, because it refers to something in addition to the fact that these people have been chosen. The people are *chosen* to have a saving relationship with God, and then these chosen people are *appointed* to go and bear fruit.²

One objection from those who oppose the biblical doctrine of election is that it encourages licentiousness. This poses no threat to the doctrine, but it does tell us something about how they think. It never occurred to some of us that we would sin without restraint *even if* the doctrine of election implies that we can sin with impunity. Why would we want to? Once converted by his grace, do we not love God and wish to obey him?

But it is as if these people think that if salvation is entirely up to God's sovereign choice, then they would sin without restraint. They seem to think that only if it is entirely up to the human individual to both attain and retain salvation by his own effort would he then want to live a pure and holy life before God. Thus even when we are referring to believers, a sincere love for God is a myth to these people. They speak as if there could never be obedience without the constant threat of damnation, and assurance of salvation is also the enemy of sanctification.

Likewise, there is something sinister in the common objection, "If God has predetermined everything, then why should I pray?" I am suspicious of a person who would even ask such a question. Is this the way he thinks? He implies that unless he has a determinative role in the outcome, and that unless what God does is dictated by this person's prayer, he can find no reason to pray, no reason at all.

It is insufficient for this person that God has commanded him to pray, and to express his needs and desires through humble petitions. His position is that unless his prayer makes a decisive difference, even to the point of directing the divine agenda, he sees no reason to petition God. Surely this is the height of arrogance and wickedness. The very question reeks of defiance and self-importance.

We should despise all such objections, and be suspicious of all those who raise them. On the other hand, for those of us who have even a little reverence for God, the bare permission to approach the throne of grace so that we may address the Father is itself something that we are eager to thank him about in prayer, and certainly not something that we want to complain about.

² For more on divine foreknowledge, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Malachi*.

Then, there is the objection that says if the doctrine of election is true, there would be no point in evangelism. Those who raise this objection might present themselves as champions for gospel preaching, but what I hear is that, unless their disobedience will send people straight to everlasting hellfire, God's command means nothing to them and they see no reason to preach the gospel. That is, unless they are so important that other people's very souls depend on them *instead* of on God's sovereign decree, then they would find evangelism pointless. Their motivation for preaching the gospel rests on how important they are to the salvation of souls and not on God's command. With an evil attitude like this, perhaps we are all better off if they would stay home and let us preach the gospel instead.

Those objections claiming that divine sovereignty eliminates moral responsibility and renders our actions meaningless do not logically follow from the doctrine of election, but they come from depraved minds that are constantly disposed to sin, wretched souls that are motivated solely by a sense of self-importance, and from the anti-biblical assumption that God's grace entails mere pardon without transforming the people that it saves.

Peter writes that God's people are chosen, and they are chosen to live under the "sanctifying work of the Spirit." God the Father issues the eternal decree, and the Holy Spirit carries out this decree as he works in the lives and the hearts of those whom God has chosen. He works powerfully upon each chosen individual even from the beginning of their Christian life.

It is he who resurrects and awakens the spirits of those who would believe. He convicts them of their sins, and calls them to come forth from their unbelief and wickedness into a life of faith and obedience. This call overcomes all resistance, not by *forcing* the human will, but much more powerfully than that, by directly *changing* the will so that it eagerly repents and believes.

This corrects a misunderstanding that is common on both sides of the issue. Those who oppose the biblical doctrine protest that God does not force the will, and those who claim to affirm the biblical doctrine tend to offer unbiblical, incoherent, and misleading explanations on how the elect still somehow come "freely" without being forced. But the answer is not to say that God never forces the will, as if not to be forced is to be free, nor is it to say that man comes freely, as if not to be free is to be forced.

In our context, for someone to be forced implies that the person being forced exhibits a reluctance to comply. However, this in turn implies that God is calling the individual without exercising a direct control over the person's very willingness, but God never needs to "force" that which he directly controls. Man is not forced not because he has some freedom, but he is not forced because he has none at all, so that "to force" does not even apply. He is so totally controlled by divine power that any reluctance is turned on and off at God's will, so that there is nothing left to be forced.

If a little turtle is heading toward one direction and I want it to head toward the opposite direction, I have at least two options. If for any reason I wish to experience a little resistance, I can push against its head with my finger so that it slides backward. Or, I can

just pick it up and turn it around. But it is too slow, so I follow this up by pushing it from behind. Now it is heading full speed and face first toward the direction that I want it to go. Am I forcing it? No, there is no forcing to speak of because there is no resistance at all. But the turtle is far from having any freedom.

Of course, this is an analogy about two creatures (man and turtle), and so it has its flaws even at its beginning. God's control over his creatures is infinitely greater than the limited control that a man can exercise over a turtle. In the analogy, I have not created the turtle and I do not sustain its life. I do not control and energize even its smallest motions. Although I can move it by pushing it or picking it up, it still possesses a relative freedom from me, and it can move by itself apart from my control when left alone. Like me, its power and motion come from God.

So I cannot play God even in an analogy, but it is sufficient to show that when I am not forcing the turtle against its original direction, I am in fact exercising greater control over the turtle. This happens when, instead of pushing against it, I pick up the entire turtle and turn it around. The more power I use to control it, the less it is forced; the more power I exercise, the less opportunity it has to exhibit any resistance. Likewise, God does not force the will – he exercises far greater control over the creature than this. He directly changes the will, and no resistance remains. This being the case, the creature is hardly free in any meaningful sense.

The Spirit's role is not limited to conversion, but he must constantly sustain and nurture the faith of the elect. In fact, Peter's language indicates that God's election of the people is his decree to place them under the permanent influence of the Spirit, that is, "*in* the sanctification of the Spirit." Paul writes, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). Christian life and growth is initiated and sustained by the constant sanctifying work of the Spirit.

The Spirit sets apart those whom God has chosen, spiritually separating them from the rest of the world, "for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (NKJV). Again, God's election entails more than simple pardon for the chosen ones, but he places them under the Spirit's work of sanctification, leading to obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. They are chosen not just to receive forgiveness, but to live a new kind of life.

In the Old Testament, the sprinkling of blood upon the people can refer to initiation, ordination, or purification. Whether or not Peter has any one specific application in this verse, we can affirm that all three are involved in the Christian life. By the power of the Spirit and the blood of Jesus Christ, we are introduced into the covenant of God, separated to obey and to serve, and continually cleansed and purified from our sins.

The blood, of course, refers to the atoning work performed by Christ as the mediator between God and the elect, the chosen ones, in which Christ bore the guilt and the punishment of their sins as their head and substitute. There is no pardon without the shedding of blood, and thus a genuine work of the Spirit will always bring the sinner to

both the belief of Christ's blood atonement for the elect, and the reality of cleansing and purification by this atoning blood. Anything that alleges to be a work of the Spirit but does not acknowledge and honor the blood atonement is a counterfeit.

Peter begins his letter by describing the kind of people that he is addressing. They are elected by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, redeemed and purified by Christ. What is a Christian? A Christian is the object of the combined saving work of the Trinity, and who is related to each member of the Godhead in the way described by Peter in these verses. How, then, can anyone be a Christian who rejects the doctrine of the Trinity? Christianity is defined by this doctrine, and there is no salvation in any creed or religion that denies it.

The Trinity has performed a precious work in their lives, but it has also made them "strangers in the world." A better translation is "temporary residents" or "resident aliens." The Christians are now citizens of the kingdom, and heaven is their true home. Just like travelers in a foreign country, they are in but not of the world. Their allegiance belongs to their homeland of heaven, and it is to heaven that they look forward to return. As Paul writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21).

Some Christians tend to forget this. This is especially true in nations that have deep Christian backgrounds, and also where there is relatively little persecution. They tend to merge their national identity with their spiritual identity, and to confuse favorable political progress with spiritual advancement. Some of them begin to settle comfortably in the world and proceed to explore all the options that it has to offer.

There is a proper application for the truth, "everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected" (1 Timothy 4:4), but this is often distorted to be used as an excuse to justify worldly attitudes and practices, as well as questionable associations. Some people believe that "there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular," and they implement the idea to every aspect of life. The result is not that their lives have become holy, but that they have become profane. However, since they do not make a distinction, this is easy to fix. Now they just *call* everything holy.

Notice the amount of effort that Christians devote to justify their participation in culture, in entertainment, and even in things like alcohol consumption. After all, we are supposed to "enjoy" God's creation, are we not? While the New Testament is against hermitism and extreme asceticism (1 Timothy 6:17), it never stresses the positive indulgence in culture, entertainment, food and alcohol consumption, and many other such things to any great extent. It may be permitted and acknowledged, but not *hammered on* constantly, again and again and again.

So they eventually lose the otherworldliness taught and exhibited by the New Testament Christians. Now when they preach, their message is no longer a word from heaven, but it is little more than a "Christian" perspective on politics, music, commerce, and sometimes

even religion. And so what if they talk about salvation? There is no thunder, no prophetic power. Nobody would think that they are ambassadors from another world. They stress that Christians are to be in but not of the world, but they emphasize the "in" part so much that now fewer and fewer people notice that they are "not of" the world anymore.

Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). As long as we are physically still in the world, then the "in" part is already taken care of, since Jesus' prayer is only that God would not remove us from the earth and take us to heaven right away. The part that requires constant vigilance is to live in the world, which we are already doing, and still remain unpolluted by it, "hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 23).

Right at the beginning, Peter assumes a rich theological foundation, and he will go on for a number of verses to build it up even more. This is essential for the rest of his letter. He is telling the Christians that they have been chosen and separated. But just as this separation brings them into a saving and loving relationship God, it also changes their relationship with the world. It has made them different, as strangers to the unbelievers, and even as a stench to their nostrils.

For this reason, Christians will face opposition and persecution in this world. These may range from the mild to the harsh, and sometimes even the violent and the deadly. By beginning with God's sovereign choice of the believers, Peter has already laid the groundwork for unshakable confidence and ultimate triumph.

God has chosen us in eternity. He has already shown us favor. As the church, we are indestructible because we have a foreordained destiny. And even though our bodies may perish, our spirits belong to heaven. We have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ, and now the Spirit works powerfully in our midst to carry out God's plan for our lives.

On this basis, we find grace and peace in abundance.

1 PETER 1:3-9

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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, 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. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

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. 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, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

In his greeting, Peter addresses his Christian readers as those who have been chosen and appointed by the Father, set apart by and live under the power of the Spirit, to live in obedience and to be redeemed and purified by the blood of Jesus Christ. We have spent so much time on the greeting because it sets the tone for all that follows, and we are just now starting to read the body of the letter. Peter will soon describe this sanctified life, this Christian obedience, in the context of trials and persecutions.

After offering praise to God, Peter proceeds to tell us why he is praising him. So, naturally, the main emphasis in verses 3-5 is on God's actions, on what he has done and what he is doing relative to our salvation, and for which we give him praise and thanks. These verses are so tightly packed with theological ideas that we will not have time to unravel, arrange, and explain them all. But we can at least consider the outline of Peter's thinking.

Again, he begins by talking about God's actions toward us, actions that evoke our praise. Just as he has greeted his readers by referring to the sovereign saving action of the Trinity, now he begins the body of his letter by referring to God's mercy. He does not thank or congratulate the readers for having the moral fiber, the free will, or the good sense to choose Jesus Christ, as if they would have been able and willing to believe without God's sovereign action, or as if they have done God a favor by believing the gospel. Rather, God has shown mercy toward the chosen ones.

The mention of divine mercy takes us right back to the doctrines of divine sovereignty and divine election. This will not be Peter's main emphasis in every verse of his letter, but here the connection is undeniable. As Paul writes, "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18). Based on our passage, and along with this verse from Paul, we may affirm that God's mercy is sovereign, specific,

effective, righteous, generous, and enduring. This in turn gives us joy and confidence in the midst of hardship and persecution.

God's mercy is a sovereign mercy. It is united to his will in a way that nothing outside of him can induce or force him to extend this mercy. He extends it because he wills to do so, and for reasons that reside only within himself. His choice has nothing to do with foreseen faith or merit. Rather, any faith or merit is granted by God to man, and as a *result* of his mercy to man.

His mercy is a specific mercy. It is neither granted by him to all, nor is it simply made available for man to freely appropriate, as if man has such a freedom in the first place. Instead, it is a choosing and a particular mercy, granted to the individuals whom God has selected. As for the rest, he deliberately and individually hardens their hearts, so that they remain unwilling and unable to believe the gospel, and thus ensuring their damnation and endless torment in a fiery hell.

His mercy is an effective mercy. As long as a person is a non-Christian, he is spiritually dead, and wicked to the core. He is morally vile, thoroughly repugnant and despicable. In such a condition, he cannot have faith in God or obey his commands, and he has no desire to become otherwise. But from the midst of depraved humanity, itself the result of divine decree, God has chosen some for salvation. This involves more than mere pardon, but in his mercy, he causes these individuals to be born again, or to spiritually come alive. Now they are responsive to God's voice, able to believe, and willing to obey.

Although it is a basic teaching of our faith, and although no man can be saved except he is born again, this new birth is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented Christian doctrines. It is commonly taught as something that God does in people in response to what they do first. So it is often preached that a person would be born again if he believes the gospel. But this is to overlook the nature of depraved man, the nature of faith, and the nature of the new birth itself. The resulting false doctrine confuses the sinner as to the nature of the gospel, confuses the believer as to the nature of sanctification, and neutralizes the point that Peter is making in our passage.

The sinner is spiritually dead, and one who is spiritually dead cannot have faith. So if the new birth is something that God does in response to a positive spiritual act in the sinner, such as faith, then no sinner would ever be born again. The term translated "born again" also means "born from above." A born again person is someone who has been given birth by God in the spirit. Throughout the New Testament, this is represented as something that is performed solely by God's will and power, and not by human decision. Just as a person cannot decide his physical or earthly birth, a sinner has no place in deciding his spiritual and heavenly birth. So the new birth is not the result of faith, but faith is the result of the new birth. Those whom God has chosen in eternity, he causes to be born again in history at the designated time. And to those whom God has caused to be born again, he also grants faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.³

³ For more on the new birth, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians*, and *Born Again*.

Much of contemporary preaching portrays divine mercy as a dependent mercy, so that God is helplessly waiting for the creature's permission before he could sweep the person into the kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, the Bible describes divine mercy as sovereign and effective, so that God is merciful to whomever he wishes, and to those whom he has chosen, he pours out his mercy in great power and with great effect.

But his mercy is also a righteous mercy. It does not bypass but fully satisfies God's own standard of justice, of good and evil, and of right compensation. This is why he sent Jesus Christ, his own Son and the second member of the Trinity, to take on human flesh, to suffer, and to die for the sins of the chosen ones, and as their head and representative. Then, just as he was raised from the dead, we also have been made alive in him. Thus God extends mercy to us not by overlooking his own justice, but his mercy toward us involves sending Jesus Christ to bear our guilt and punishment, so that we now share in his life and his righteousness.

God's mercy toward us is generous. It involves more than mere pardon, but as Peter writes, "In his *great* mercy he has given us new birth...into an inheritance." Unlike a natural inheritance, or even the Promised Land of the Old Testament, this inheritance "can never perish, spoil or fade," and it is "kept in heaven." Reprobates are destined for hell, and bound for endless agony and torment. In contrast, the chosen ones are made joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17).

Finally, God's mercy is an enduring mercy. There are some people who say, "I believe in divine election, but I do not believe in eternal security." Now these people have no idea what divine election means. God chooses us to win the race – to finish it, not just to enter it. So if a person enters, or *appears* to enter the race, but fails to finish it, then he has never been chosen by God in the first place. But these people suppose that God's choice has to do with who could enter the Christian walk, and then the rest is up to them. And some even think that people can walk in and out of the race whenever they wish, and as often as they please.

No, God's mercy endures forever, both in terms of its disposition and its effect. And again, it is not a dependent mercy, as if it requires the creature's power to uphold it – any power that the creature has would be from God in the first place. Rather, it is divine mercy that upholds those to whom it is given. Thus, Peter says that our inheritance is kept in heaven, and God's power actively guards it for us through our faith. That is, God guards for us that which he has given to us, not regardless of our faith, as if we can renounce him and still be saved, but in conjunction with our faith or *through* our faith, which he upholds by his power. Once God causes a person to be born again and to believe the gospel, he protects this person's spiritual interests by upholding his faith, and thereby also his heavenly inheritance.

Jesus said to Peter, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). He did not ask Peter to maintain his faith so that God could continue to favor him, but it is up to God whether a person's faith fails. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus "always lives

to intercede" for those who come to God through him, and this is why genuine faith will never truly and finally fail. Christ is ever present before our Father, interceding on our behalf, so that God's power will ever continue to uphold our faith, just as his mercy endures toward his chosen ones.

Our enduring faith is a product of his enduring mercy. We are indeed conscious of our perseverance, but we persevere not because we have free will or because we exercise this free will, but because we *do not* have free will – because his power is at work in us, causing our faith to endure.

From its beginning to its consummation, it is God who designs, produces, and maintains all things that pertain to our salvation. In his great mercy, he has given birth to us in the spirit, and has given us a heavenly inheritance. He guards this inheritance by giving us faith and keeping that faith, and then by honoring that faith which he gives and keeps. Our inheritance is forever secure because his sovereign mercy forever endures.⁴

Those who oppose the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty sometimes think that we have made it our "pet doctrine," as if we have some twisted infatuation with it. But one reason why we emphasize it is because they persist in opposing it. Man's sinful tendency is to undermine divine sovereignty in favor of his own non-existent autonomy, or at least to assert an incoherent concept of freedom that is "compatible" with God's absolute rule. Those who acknowledge God's exhaustive sovereignty as something that necessarily excludes human freedom, but that for the same reason establishes human responsibility, are then maligned as "pseudo" this or "hyper" that.⁵ A relative human autonomy, even if it is only an illusion, is thus preferred and asserted over Scripture. This is why the biblical doctrine must be regularly explained and defended.

Another reason why we emphasize the doctrine is because it glorifies God. It exalts him as the ruler of all things, and that nothing happens except by his active decree and power. This is surely one of the reasons why God himself emphasizes the doctrine in Scripture. Anything that God reveals to us about himself is inherently valuable, since God is of infinite inherent worth, so that if there is no other application for the doctrine other than for us to know it, or other than that God would be glorified by our acknowledgement of it, this would more than justify our emphasis of it.

That said, Peter begins by stressing God's sovereign actions in our salvation because he is about to make an application of this teaching for the purpose of his letter. So with verses 3-5 fresh in our minds, we now come to verse 6: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." Peter is writing this letter to encourage Christians who would face hardship and persecution because of their faith. By verse 6 of the first chapter, he has already specified for us the basic attitude with which Christians should face "all kinds of trials," as well as the spiritual and theological basis for such an attitude.

⁴ For more on this subject, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians*, and *The Author of Sin*.

⁵ See Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians*.

As Christians, he indicates to us, we perceive whatever we are facing in the light of the sovereign actions that God has already performed and continues to perform in regards to our salvation. The application of his statement is very broad, as he is addressing people who are suffering "all kinds" of trials. Later, he will mention that God's grace is just as multi-faceted (4:10), and able to satisfy any need and confront any problem that may arise while we live in this hostile world as "resident aliens."

He admits that trials tend to produce grief. On the other hand, he has just been talking about the saving actions that God has performed and is performing for us out of his "great mercy," because of which we have the new birth, a living hope, and a heavenly inheritance. And he says, "In *this* you greatly rejoice"! The verb translated "greatly rejoice" indicates a deep, intense, spiritual joy that is strongly associated with our salvation and an eschatological outlook. For example, Mary says, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit *rejoices* in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). And Acts 16:34 says of the Philippian jailer, "he was *filled with joy* because he had come to believe in God."⁶

Notice the basis of this joy – it is an understanding of our salvation, of God's foreordination, and of his sovereign works of mercy toward us. Peter does not say, "Remember how God chose you because he knew that you would believe in him. And remember that God did not make you to believe him, but you chose him out of your own free will. Even now he is not upholding your faith and guarding your inheritance by his sovereign power, but it's all up to you! So far you have been doing well – just keep it up!" There is no truth in such an exhortation, and there is no power in it.

Instead, Peter points his readers to a greater power than themselves and a greater reality than the difficulties that they face. God, he says, has foreknown you, chosen you, regenerated you, and given you an inheritance, reserved for you in heaven. And even now, God is guarding this inheritance through your faith, by upholding it and strengthening it. In *this* – that is, his decree, his mercy, and his power – you greatly rejoice. A joy that is based on free will is only as strong as the person who exercises it, and so it easily crumbles under persecution. But Christian joy is derived from God's grace and power. We rest in his foreordained plan and his works of mercy.

Now that we understand why we can rejoice in the midst of hardship and persecution, the question remains as to why they come at all. Christians are accustomed to saying that we cannot know the answer to this question in our lifetime. In fact, they insist on their ignorance on this issue so much that some interpreters make this very assertion – that we cannot know the answer – while commenting on verse 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." Of course, the verse does not say that we cannot know why hardship and persecution come,

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 60-61; Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), p. 33, 37.

because it tells us precisely why they come, or it gives us at least one reason why they come.

What is it that people do not understand about the words, "These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise"? They have already ruled out the possibility that any answer can satisfy them about human suffering and the persecution of the elect, and so even God cannot tell them otherwise. This is also related to the so-called problem of evil. They outright refuse to believe that any explanation that is offered to them in this lifetime can perfectly cohere with God's goodness and righteousness. They suppose that they will obtain the answer and will be satisfied only when they reach heaven. There, they say, they will be able to see things from God's perspective.

To put it plainly, in heaven they will finally believe what the Bible has been telling them all along, and there they will finally stop resenting God and accusing him of injustice. But even though more information will become available, they are not going to get a different or opposing perspective in heaven than the one that God has already revealed in Scripture. With their evil attitude, if they reach heaven at all, the only reason why heaven will satisfy them is because there they will finally abandon their false assumptions and accept the biblical explanation concerning their suffering and persecution. There they will stop hating God for being God.

Meanwhile, they want to use their false and sinful standard to hold even God accountable for his actions. If that cannot be done, then they suppose there is no good explanation for anything at all! This is not an example of the inability of a finite mind to comprehend the thoughts and purposes of the infinite, although this is often how these people present the issue. Rather, it represents a blatant rejection of what the Bible says about why hardship and persecution come to us. The truth of the matter is that although we do not know everything regarding why and how certain things happen, we do know a great deal, and more than enough to put all general uncertainties to rest, so that there is never an excuse for unbelief, defiance, or resentment against the Lord.

Not long after my conversion, I was speaking with someone about the Christian faith when the conversation turned to the fall of man, the initial sin of our first parents. He asked, "If God knew that they were going to sin, then why did he put the tree there?" Among other things, I said to him, "...but I do love God, and to the extent that I truly love him, I would very much like to know that this love is pure and real. I would like to remove all illusion about how faithful I am to him, and to build on what is actually there. I care about that more than anything else."

At that time, I was not nearly as clear in my understanding about God's exhaustive sovereignty (that controls all things, including human thoughts and actions), his absolute righteousness (that is judged by no one, but by which every person is judged), and his supralapsarian eternal decree to glorify himself through Christ's redeeming work (because of which he would first cause the fall of man to occur). So I could not offer him a fuller response, since my weak grasp of these truths prevented me from answering him in a way that consistently had God as the reference point.

Nevertheless, in my limited but heartfelt reply, I had stumbled across a valuable truth, a truth that Peter is teaching us here. He says in verse 7 that trials happen so that our faith may be "proved genuine." A large block of unrefined gold may feel heavy in your hands, but not all of it is real gold. Then, when it is heated, the impurities float to the surface, and the gold that is left is pure. That is the actual amount of gold that you had at the beginning – less than it looked, less than it felt, less than you thought.

New converts sometimes think that their faith and zeal are especially strong, and they even look upon the seemingly sluggish faith of their elders with disdain. They think, "Surely God has called me for such a time as this! God is raising up a new generation, and I am it!" But when the time comes, they cannot even stand up to their in-laws, but cringe in terror. They are like how Peter was at first. Hurrah, hurrah, he went, and said things like, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" and "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Matthew 26:33, 35). But when the time came, his faith could not even stand up before a servant girl (Matthew 26:69-75).

Then, some who are not incinerated by the heat of persecution are nevertheless smothered by the ordinary, and slaughtered by the mundane. Their spiritual aspirations are melted away by nothing other than time, the silent killer. As Proverbs says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (13:12). A strong emotional high can go through the fire and withstand the heat, but since it is not true faith, it dies in the cold.

More often than not, they are not "it" at all, and even if they are, their faith still needs to be tested and refined, so that all that is false and impure may be removed. Their faith is as unrefined gold, and it is not nearly as strong and weighty as their *feeling* suggests. There is an intense feeling in them because they are on an emotional high, but feeling is not faith, and a little persecution still slap them right down to their level. In fact, it will bring to the surface so many weaknesses and impurities they might *feel* as if they have apostatized.

Thus they must finally learn to stop measuring the spiritual by the emotional, and realize that a deep and enduring faith has to do with a mature understanding of God's ways, leading to confidence in his will, his power, and his timing. Of course, the problem is not limited to new converts, for many have been believers for years and still retain a heavy mixture in their faith. Yet it is not for us to invite hardship and persecution, but to apply the word of God for our sanctification. The Father will purify and refine us according to his will and his time.

As for those who are not true converts, they will fall away altogether when persecution comes, or when the troubles of life make it too much of a burden to feign faithfulness. As Jesus says, "Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away" (Mark 4:16-17). At any point in time, it may be God's will to cleanse his church in such a manner, lest it be overwhelmed by false converts and imposters.

Strong and sincere faith is precious in the sight of God. How much is it worth to you? Peter says that it is "of greater worth than gold." As difficult as it is for outsiders to understand, we as Christians truly love the Lord, and true faith that is free from impurities is precious to us as well. We would rather know that our faith is real, than to avoid the agony of hardship and the humiliation of failure. Christians are not just looking for a way to avoid trouble and discomfort as much as possible on our way to heaven, but we truly love God and wish to serve him well.

So if our faith must pass through the fire to be refined, then so be it. If our faith must withstand the cold to be revealed, then we accept. "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Our faith refined and proved genuine will "result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (v. 7).

From verse 8, we can derive two characteristics about faith that are especially important to remember when we are facing hardship and persecution, and when we encourage those who are facing hardship and persecution.

First, faith does not arise from or depend on the senses. To say it another way, faith maintains a loving and trusting relationship with God through Jesus Christ that is established apart from physical sensations. Nevertheless, because of our faith's relation to history, some people have become confused on this point. So let us take a moment to explain.

We begin by acknowledging that much of our faith is based on historical facts, or on what God has performed throughout human history, and especially through Jesus Christ. We can – we *must* – go so far as to say that a person cannot be a Christian unless he affirms a number of facts about history, and in particular, these include the things that God has done in and through Christ to redeem his chosen ones.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 provides an apt illustration for our purpose. In verses 1 and 2, Paul says to his readers that if they would not "hold firmly" to what he preached to them, then they would have "believed in vain." He summarizes some of what he preached in verses 3-8. He preached that "Christ died for our sins," that "he was buried," and that "he was raised on the third day." Note again that if anyone does not "hold firmly" to these things, then he has "believed in vain." Anyone who denies – or merely does not affirm, does not "hold firmly" – these things cannot be a Christian.

Associated with the resurrection, Paul adds that Jesus "appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve" – that is, after he was killed, they *saw* him alive again. After that, "he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, *most of whom are still living.*" And since some of these five hundred people who *saw* Jesus were still living at the time Paul wrote, this means that his readers and others could have interviewed them to confirm the preaching of the apostles. Paul adds that Jesus then also appeared to James and the others, and last of all to Paul himself.

So the Christian message is accompanied by eyewitnesses and empirical corroboration. How, then, can I say that faith itself is entirely independent from the physical senses? And how can I say that our faith actually *denies* the reliability of sensations? We will have to turn elsewhere, but before we leave this passage from 1 Corinthians, there are at least three things that we can point out in connection with this.

First, an essential element in the gospel message is that Christ "died for our sins." This is both logically and chronologically prior to the resurrection. The witnesses could *see* that Christ died, and they could *see* that he was raised from the dead later. However, the message is not that Christ died, but that he died *for our sins*. But no one could *see* – with his physical eyes – the *spiritual purpose* of his death.

So the empirical testimony fails us already at this crucial point. And if we have nothing other than the empirical testimony, then it matters little that Christ was indeed raised from the dead, since we would not know whether he died *for our sins* in the first place. And if we do not know that he died for our sins, then we cannot know that he was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). But these two things are central to the message of salvation; therefore, to rest our faith on empirical testimony is also to destroy it, and we have indeed believed in vain.

Second, what Paul really says here is, "...that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*." The message concerning Christ's death, the purpose of his death, and his resurrection are all affirmed "according to the Scriptures." The eyewitnesses certainly correlate with the facts, but the correlation is not an epistemologically necessary confirmation, since we already have God's infallible word ("according to the Scriptures"), and God's testimony is more certain than any man's testimony, always making the latter unnecessary.

In other words, *even if* there were no eyewitnesses, the message of Christ's death and resurrection would still stand true and we could *know* it to be true with no less certainty, because we already have God's testimony in the Scripture. The truth status of the gospel would be completely unaffected with or without the testimonies of eyewitnesses. Just because someone did not see something happen does not mean that it did not happen. But if God says it happened, then we can be sure that it happened.

Third, when we are reading this passage from 1 Corinthians, we are not sharing or participating in the empirical experiences cited by Paul. Rather, we are reading a divinely inspired, and therefore infallible, testimony *about* these empirical experiences. In fact, the Corinthians, the original readers themselves, were in almost exactly the same position. The only difference is that they could have interviewed those witnesses who were still alive. Still, they were not sharing or participating in these visions of the risen Christ, but they were receiving the inspired and infallible apostolic testimony *about* what other people saw.

These empirical experiences appear to be attestations to the Christian faith, but they would themselves be epistemologically inferior and uncertain if not for the scriptural attestations

concerning these empirical attestations themselves. That is, we do not know that Scripture is true because of what they saw, but we know that they saw what they thought they saw because Scripture confirms their empirical experiences. But this would mean that our faith is in no way dependent on the empirical, nor does it grant a basic reliability to physical sensations. All we know is that God infallibly confirms that *these* empirical testimonies are true.

We turn to Matthew 28 to further buttress our point: "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; *but some doubted*" (v. 16-17). They *saw*, they even worshiped, and they still doubted. Those of us who hold to a biblical rather than an empirical epistemology do not stumble over this. I find nothing surprising or puzzling here, but some commentators go through great pains to muster up an explanation.

There are those who suppose that, instead of just "the eleven disciples," there must have been a larger group there. But the text does not say this, and if one would accept that a person can see and still doubt, then he would not sense the need to suggest that there were many others present besides the eleven. And so what if there were? The text still says that they *saw* him, they *worshiped* him, and then some *doubted*. In fact, to suggest that there were many more people there besides the eleven only strengthens our case, since it shows that one can doubt something that many other people are supposedly seeing at the same time also. Then, there is the verse that says, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

The conclusion is that sensation has no necessary relationship with knowing and believing. For two things to have a *necessary* relationship means that when you have one, you will always have the other. Sometimes this might include a reference to proportion as well, so that when you have more of one thing, you will also have more of the other. If a person can see and still doubt, or if he can believe and not see, then there is no necessary relationship between seeing and believing, or knowing. Just because you see something, or think that you see something, does not mean that it is really there. Faith is based on reality, but reality is not known by the senses.

Rather, if there is to be any relationship at all between seeing and believing, or knowing, it is established sovereignly by God at the moment of seeing, but in fact apart from the seeing itself, but only on the *occasion* of the seeing, since one can see and not believe or know. This is especially important when it comes to saving faith. You can see whatever you want for as long as you want, but you can still doubt just as much, or even more than before. Faith is something that is generated in your heart at God's pleasure and by God's power. It comes through revelation, and not through any of the senses (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

One of the greatest blunders in the history of philosophy, and in the history of Christian thought in particular, is a form of the "presuppositional" approach to apologetics that claims to take Scripture as its starting point, when in fact it places the reliability of sensations as the epistemological prerequisite for even attaining information about Scripture.

But as Spurgeon once remarked on the subject of assurance, "Let me say now, before I turn from this point, that it is possible for a man to know whether God has called him or not, and he may know it too beyond a doubt. He may know it as surely as if he read it with his own eyes; nay, he may know it more surely than that, *for if I read a thing with my eyes, even my eyes may deceive me, the testimony of sense may be false, but the testimony of the Spirit must be true.*"⁷ We cannot say that he had a fully developed biblical epistemology, and we cannot say that he was altogether anti-empirical, but he knew enough to say something like this.

On the other hand, advocates of this "presuppositional" approach presume to be teachers and defenders of the faith, but they cannot grasp even this simple point. Among other things, they have tried to integrate revelation with sensation, not to say intuition as well. Some of the proponents of this school of thought even suggest that we can derive a naïve "I see, therefore I know" epistemology from the Bible. Besides abusing the verses that they cite for support, they proceed without taking account of what the Bible itself asserts and illustrates about the unreliability of sensation, without showing the validity of inferences from sensation, and without defining a standard to show how one might know when a sensation is accurate or when it is inaccurate. At the root, this is just another form of anti-biblical irrationalism. It fails from the start, and in this sense it is no better than any non-Christian system of philosophy.⁸

We have a saving relationship with our Lord through faith. This faith includes a genuine belief in certain historical facts, namely, in what God has done in history through Jesus Christ. However, our belief in these historical facts is *not* in turn based on sensation or empirical testimony, but on revelation. It is true that part of this includes revelation *about* the empirical, yet it is not *itself* empirical, but a divine testimony about the empirical. There is an infinite distance between the two. One is the fallible testimony of man; the other is the infallible testimony of God.

Faith is not a denial of reality, but it is an affirmation of reality. By standing on revelation instead of man's speculation, sensation, and intuition, faith also represents a rejection of an irrational epistemology, an irrational way to ascertain reality, such as one that is based on mere sight and sound and smell.

How is all of this relevant to 1 Peter 1:8? Peter has been a close disciple of Jesus Christ, not only in the spiritual sense, but he has followed him in the flesh as well, and he is an eyewitness to the resurrected Lord. Who would wonder at his great faith? Who would marvel that he stands firm in the face of deadly persecution? Is it not natural and necessary that he would have such faith? Certainly not! Remember that some were looking right at the risen Christ and still doubted. Remember what Abraham said, that if people would not believe the Scripture, they would not believe even if a man were to return to them from the dead.

⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Revival Sermons* (Banner of Truth), p. 77.

⁸ For more on the biblical view of metaphysics, epistemology, and apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.

Seeing does not mean believing; there is no necessary relationship at all between one and the other. Any *correlation* between the two is established only if on the occasion of seeing the Spirit also performs a sovereign work in the heart to produce faith in what has been revealed. This is what happened with Thomas. He did not *have to* believe when he saw Christ, as if the Spirit's work was rendered unnecessary because of mere sights and sounds, but we must credit his belief to God's grace at work in his heart on the occasion of his seeing and touching the risen Christ. But even then, Christ said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Here is the relevance to all of this. Unlike him, Peter's readers have not seen the risen Christ, but the biblical perspective is that they are not in an inferior spiritual position, that they have not been given inferior spiritual equipment, that they do not lack reasons to believe and stand firm, and that they do not possess an inferior faith. Although they do not see Christ, they "love" him and "believe in" him, and they are "filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." There is nothing essentially lacking or defective about this kind of faith. It is well sufficient to weather all that this earthly life can throw at these believers.

The persecution is visible to them, but Christ is invisible. Are they going to go by what they see, or are they going to "see" the whole picture, to perceive reality as it really is? The reality is that, although the persecution is hard and real, Christ has died for our sins and has been raised from the dead, and we have been made alive with him. Now he is seated on the throne at the right hand of God, and we are seated with him in heavenly places.

This is what Scripture reveals. This is what is real. And this is what our faith is supposed to rest on. Yet how much of this have we seen? How much of this do we see? It does not matter that we have not seen and do not see, because sensation is impotent and irrelevant. It cannot perceive all of reality or the true nature of reality, if it can perceive any of it at all. But faith is a sovereign work of the Spirit given through revelation, not sensation.

Persecution tempts us to reduce our perception of reality to what we can see, hear, and feel, but that would be a denial of reality, since we would then be closing our minds to the very aspect of reality that controls all that we see, hear, and feel. And so, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), and "we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (4:18).

This is the character of true faith, and it is *this* kind of faith to which Peter appeals. In this we perceive his great pastoral wisdom. This point is just as important for us as well, because we cannot, and really should not, look to the senses to reassure us or to experience to comfort us. And this is especially the case in times of persecution, for in such times, if we were to depend on our sensation or experience, then it would seem that everything is against us, and that there is no help and no hope for us.

But if by faith we look to revelation, then we will see all that God has already done for us and is even now doing for us, that he has performed for us great acts of mercy, and has given us a new birth and a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The

persecution is real, and we do not have to deny that, but neither do we close our eyes to the facts of revelation.

We have been talking about the first of the two characteristics of faith that we can derive from 1 Peter 1:8. Now we have come to the second one, and it is that faith does not merely survive, but it overcomes and celebrates. The verse says that "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him." So this kind of faith can love and believe in a person purely on the basis of revelation, and apart from sensation. We have pointed out that this faith is not inferior in quality or strength. It establishes a genuine relationship with God, and it can withstand persecution.

However, the verse does not stop there, but it continues to say that Peter's readers are "filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." So they are not only prevented from heading toward despair, but God's acts of mercy toward them (v. 3-5) and their faith that is now being refined as by fire (v. 7) propel them toward the very opposite direction – that of joy, celebration, and triumph! This joy is so great that one commentator suggests that it must be a future joy, the joy of heaven that we will not experience in this life. But the verse says that believers are filled with it. We have heaven's joy now.

This faith does not make life merely bittersweet or merely bearable. But it is an overcoming, overwhelming joy, and it carries a sense of victory. This victory is not based on a belief in the fantasyland that the unbelievers live in, where there is no God, where divine power is not the only thing that upholds and controls all things, and where even man could evolve from the beasts. But this victory is based on a knowledge of reality, of God's election and mercy, and Christ's death and resurrection. This faith does not only believe in a past and look to a future, but Peter says that even now, "you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (v. 9). Although full salvation remains in the future, it begins and grows even in this present life.

We must follow Peter's thinking when we are facing hardship and persecution. And that means we must think of ourselves as the chosen ones, resident aliens in the world and scattered throughout the earth, foreknown, foreloved, and foreordained by God, in the sanctification of his Spirit, and to the obedience of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling by his blood.

Then, we recall God's sovereign actions of mercy, which he has performed and is even now performing to save and preserve us. We understand that trials come to refine our faith, which is of greater worth than gold, and so we greatly rejoice, with a joy that is inexpressible and glorious. Of course, this joy is stirred up only in those who have been truly born again and given a living hope (v. 3).

This line of thinking should also govern our approach to pastoral ministry, in preaching and counseling, and so on. We must build upon an understanding of the biblical system of truth, especially as it relates to salvation. This would include the sovereign nature of God, the depraved nature of man, the two natures of Christ, God's election and foreordination, God's great mercy toward us, Christ atoning and redeeming work, and the Spirit's power

and sanctifying operation. Preach these things to your people. Tell them to think about them.

An understanding of these biblical doctrines concerning God's mercy and our salvation will *naturally* produce an inexpressible and glorious joy, but only in the elect people who have been given new birth and living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although a few translations and commentators take "rejoice" (v. 6) as an imperative – that is, as a command to rejoice – it is most likely in the indicative, a description of the joy that the believers are already enjoying.⁹ The joy is a natural product of an understanding about God's works in salvation.

Thus an approach is in error that *focuses* on commanding our people to exhibit joy and confidence by sheer willpower. They cannot do it, since spiritual things do not come in such a manner. But these will arise naturally as the knowledge of Jesus Christ stimulates and awakens the spiritual life in the elect, implanted into them by God when he gave them the new birth through faith. If there is spiritual life in them, truth will stir it up and the people will rejoice. If there is no life in them, truth will harden them, and perhaps even drive them away. Either way, the church will be preserved and strengthened.

Many approaches that are supposed to comfort and encourage believers are in fact unbiblical, but they are derived from false doctrines, misapplications of Scripture, and erroneous theories of psychology.

By now, there should be no need to mention that the biblical approach to comfort and encourage Christians is to remind them about the reality of God's sovereignty in our salvation, and in the actions of mercy that he has performed and is now performing for them. It follows that any approach that hinges on the existence and exercise of man's free will is unbiblical, misguided, and futile.

But there are other false approaches that are even practiced by those who supposedly affirm God's sovereign actions in our salvation. For example, a pastor might say things like, "We might not understand why these things happen, but..."; however, we *do* understand why, since Peter tells us why. He says that these trials happen so that our faith may be proved genuine and may result in praise, and that this faith is of greater worth than gold. How much plainer can you get? Yet some people outright deny what Scripture says, and insist, "We do *not* understand," when the truth is that they reject God's explanation. And when they do this, they are truly left by themselves. How can comfort come when we reject the source of all comfort? God has spoken, and we do understand.

Or, a pastor might say, "We can't understand how a good God can do these things, but..."; however, the Bible itself has no problem saying that a "good" God can do "these things." The truth is that the pastor is judging God by his private standard, and the question arises as to how God can call himself good when *the pastor* thinks that he does evil. In other

⁹ Grudem, p. 61; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 6* (Broadman Press), p. 83. Our point stands even if it is in the imperative, since the joy would still be based on an understanding of salvation, of what God has done and is doing for believers.

words, his thinking goes, "How can God be good when *I disapprove* of his actions?" But then the pastor has just lost his God, or he thinks that he himself is God. Now, if God is God, then for God to be wrong, he must judge himself to be wrong; it is not up to the pastor. As it is, he blasphemes at least by implication.¹⁰

Then, some pastors advocate practicing prayer as some sort of psychological release. According to their reasoning, God is our "father," and an angry and frustrated child should be permitted to sit on his lap and beat on his chest to receive the father's comfort and assurance. But our earthly father is not God, and we should never assume that our relationship with one is automatically analogous to the other. Otherwise, what is to prevent us from worshiping our earthly father, just as we do the heavenly father?

They say that the Old Testament characters complained all the time. But they fail to notice that God rebuked them almost just as often. And the Old Testament also contains God's answers to their complaints, doubts, and fears, recorded for our benefit. Now the pastors and counselors want us to pretend that God has not spoken so that we could ask him the same questions all over again. Perhaps there are not many better examples of what it means to tempt God than this.¹¹ No, Peter has written verse 7, and we must not pretend that it has not been written: "These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise."

So, we not only endure but we thrive because of God's mercy, which he has already extended to us, and which continues to nurture us. We rest in his foreordination, as he has already taken action, and he has already decided all things for his glory and for our good. Meanwhile our faith is being refined as by fire, being of greater worth than gold, as we are receiving the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls. Because of this, we are filled with an overcoming and triumphant joy, one that no amount of persecution can dampen or destroy.

On the other hand, unbelievers live and die in despair, whether or not they are persecuted for anything. The most miserable soul is one who is a Christian in name only, but who is not one in reality. Because of his profession, even if it is a false profession, at times he might be persecuted for being a Christian, but he lacks the reality, the faith, the life of a Christian. Therefore, he is crushed and downtrodden, without hope and without joy. Heaven's joy sustains the Christian, but hell's despair grips the heart of the pretender. Some sink so low that they eventually betray the faith that they once pretended to profess. Then they turn around and lash out against it, becoming its enemies, and thus reveal their true reprobate nature.

¹⁰ For more on the problem of evil, see Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.

¹¹ See Vincent Cheung, *Prayer and Revelation*.

1 PETER 1:10-13

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

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

One evening, when I was still in high school, I was chatting with several Christian friends at a faculty member's house. We were casually discussing various biblical topics when I made the comment that a certain character in the Old Testament was "not a Christian." But one of them chuckled and said, "Why, Vincent, *none* of those people were Christians in the Old Testament."

I was aware that "The disciples were *called* Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26), but it was obvious that I was not referring to what the people were *called*, or *when* they were first called "Christians," nor did my friend misunderstand me as if this was what I meant. Rather, I spoke out of the assumption that the people of God in the New Testament have enough in common with the people of God in the Old Testament such that both could be called "Christians" in a sense, and so that an Old Testament character who was not one of God's people would be "not a Christian," or a non-Christian.

My friend was correct in a sense, that there were Christians only after Christ had come. But still, his response aroused my thinking on the subject because I knew enough about him to understand that, when he said that there were no Christians in the Old Testament, he meant something very different than what I would have meant if I had said the same thing. His answer came from an extreme dispensational outlook. He was probably the type who would say that the people in the Old Testament had an altogether different way to salvation than those in the New Testament.

So, were God's people in the Old Testament "Christians" in any meaningful sense? How did they receive salvation? Were they saved by faith or by works? And faith in what or whom? Did they merely believe in God, or did they also believe in the person of Jesus Christ and the redemptive works that he would perform? What did they know about the gospel of Jesus Christ? What revelation about it did they possess? What did their doctrine have in common with ours? In what sense, if any, can we correctly call them "Christians"? Our passage provides an outline of the answer.

First, Peter says that the ancient prophets spoke about "the sufferings of Christ" (v. 11). It was revealed from the beginning, as early as Genesis 3:15, that Christ would suffer, that the serpent would "strike his heel." Then, throughout the Old Testament, the various prophets would describe the sufferings of Christ, and they would do so in different ways, sometimes through types and shadows, sometimes through veiled references and their own experiences, but often with explicit statements as well.

Together, these predictions pervade the Old Testament. Right now our purpose is not to study what the prophets said concerning the sufferings of Christ, but to simply note Peter's point, that they spoke of and knew about these sufferings. So we can take time to glance at only several examples.

We read in Psalm 22:7-8, 18: "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him....' They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." This was fulfilled in Christ at the crucifixion:

When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots....Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. (Matthew 27:35, 39-44)

Then, we will quote from Psalm 22:16, Psalm 34:20, and Zechariah 12:10: "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet....he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken....They will look on me, the one they have pierced...." These also find their fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ, as described in John 19:31-37:

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the

truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

There is Isaiah 50:6, which says, "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." This also happened to Christ around the time of his crucifixion: "They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again" (Matthew 27:30).

Of course, there is much more in Isaiah about the sufferings of Christ. Some of the most prominent and explicit verses are found in 52:13-53:12. This passage shows not only that the prophets knew that Christ would suffer, but that they knew the purpose of his sufferings as well. Here we will read only Isaiah 53:3-12. As you read, notice the details of Isaiah's description, and how they were fulfilled in Christ (see Matthew 8:17, 20:28; 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18, etc.):

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

What we have shown so far is that the prophets knew about the person and the coming of Christ, the fact that he would suffer, the details of his sufferings, and the purpose of his sufferings – that "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities," and that "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him." Verse 11 says, "My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." Even if we were to stop here, this is already a tremendous amount of information, and a significant part of the gospel.

But there is more, for second, Peter writes that the prophets also knew and spoke about "the glories that would follow" the sufferings of Christ. These would include his resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to the right hand of the Father over all of creation. Even in Isaiah 53, we notice something about the glories that would follow his sufferings: "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied...Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong."

There is Psalm 45:7, which says, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." The verse addresses "God," and then says, "*your* God, has set you...." This can only be a reference to Christ, who is God and man, the eternal Son of God and also the natural Son of David.

Similarly, Psalm 110:1 says, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" Jesus used this verse to challenge the people: "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" (Luke 20:41-44). Again, the answer is that Christ would be the eternal Son of God incarnate, following the line of David in terms of his human nature. And the Lord God says to *this* Lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The New Testament says that this has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus (Acts 2:34-36; Hebrews 1:13).

Then, there is Daniel 7:13-14: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

The New Testament writers refer often to Old Testament prophecies about the glories of Christ and their fulfillment in him. John 12:41 says, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him" (see Isaiah 6:11). Concerning David and Psalm 16, Peter says, "But he was a prophet and knew...Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay" (Acts 2:30-31).

Remember, the point here is that the prophets knew and spoke about both the sufferings and the glories of Christ. We have been looking at the prophecies that they gave in the form

of explicit statements, but if we will also take account of the Old Testament figures of Christ, such as Moses, Joseph, David, Jeremiah, and so on, we will see that even through the lives of these prophets, God had been telling the story of Christ over and over again to his people, through his many servants, in different words and in various ways. This is why when Christ came, the Jews had no excuse to fail to recognize him, or to reject him once it was evident that he was the one foretold (John 5:39-40).

Third, the prophets also knew "the time and circumstances" in which the sufferings and the glories of Christ would come about. Now, if we are not careful, we might misunderstand 1 Peter 1:11 as if it says that the prophets knew about the sufferings and the glories of Christ, but that they did not know about the time when these things would happen and the circumstances surrounding their occurrence. But Peter is saying the opposite of this, since what he says in verse 11 really leads to verse 12. This latter verse says, "*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."

So they received revelation on top of revelation, and revelation that explained and extended previous revelation. Verses 10 and 11 say that when God revealed to the prophets things concerning the sufferings and the glories of Christ, they researched and investigated further concerning the "time and circumstances" of these events, so that these were revealed to them also (v. 12).

The verse literally says, "what, or what manner of time" (KJV, NKJV), and some argue for the translation, "what person or time" (RSV, NASB). I favor "time and circumstances" (NIV) or "time and situation" (*God's Word Translation*), but the point remains the same either way, since whatever the prophets were curious about, whether "time or circumstances" or "person or time," verse 12 says that it was revealed to them that they were speaking about a future period.

We will offer Daniel as an example, although we cannot take time to reproduce all the relevant verses. In 8:27, he says that a vision that he saw was "beyond understanding." But he was one who searched the Scripture for answers and pleaded in prayer for insights (9:2-3, 22-23, 10:12; 1 Peter 1:10-11).

So God gave him additional revelations: "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble" (9:24-25).

We need not examine the details of this passage to realize that it has something to do with the time and the circumstances surrounding the coming of Christ (see also 12:5-13). This is sufficient to illustrate our point. Another example is Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ, and the circumstances surrounding his birth, including his lineage (7:14, 9:6, 11:1). There is also Micah, who predicted the birthplace of Christ (5:2).

All the way back in Genesis 3:15, God had already preached Christ, as the seed of the woman, to Adam and Eve, and at the same time declared the serpent's defeat. Although the serpent would "strike his heel," God tells the serpent that the seed of the woman would "crush your head."

Galatians 3:8 says that the Scripture "announced the gospel in advance" to Abraham, saying, "All nations will be blessed through you." The verse specifically refers to the gospel of justification by faith, and through this gospel God would justify even the Gentiles. It is by this message that God would make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars. And it is by believing in this same message, then still in promise form, that Abraham was counted as righteous before God (Genesis 15:5-6).

So of course Abraham knew and believed in Jesus Christ. As Jesus himself remarks in John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Note: He *saw it* and was glad. By this it is clear that he had some definite information about the person of Christ, the significance of his work, and the circumstances surrounding his ministry. In addition, he "was glad" about what he knew – he rejoiced at the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that he knew everything that we now know, but however vague and partial his understanding was, it was enough to be described as "seeing" the day of Jesus Christ.

In Luke 24:26, Jesus mentions that the prophets had predicted that Christ would "suffer these things and then enter his glory," as if to refer to these two phases of his ministry is an adequate summary of his redemptive work, and as if these things were what the disciples were supposed to believe from the Scripture concerning himself. So the prophets had received the content of the gospel message.

Peter says that "all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days" (Acts 3:24). Turning back to 1 Peter 1:12, there he says that the prophets "spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you." In other words, the prophets spoke of the *same* things that those who preached the gospel had now told Peter's readers. The prophets spoke of the very contents of the gospel message.

In addition, verse 11 says that these prophets spoke by "the Spirit of Christ," the same "Holy Spirit" (v. 12) that now inspires and energizes those who preach the gospel. To be precise, the verse says that it was "the Spirit of Christ" that "predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." The prophets spoke the same message as those who now preach the gospel because they spoke by the same "Spirit of Christ," or rather, the same Spirit of Christ declared the same message through them both.

Thus it is clear that the Old Testament prophets had received major and detailed revelations regarding the sufferings of Christ, the glories that would follow, and also the time and the circumstances in which these things would happen. In fact, they knew much more than what today's professing Christians know or would care to learn. Moreover, what they knew

and what they believed was called the "gospel," and explicitly described as an advanced knowledge of what Christ would both perform and experience, as well as the spiritual purpose of his work.

Therefore, we conclude that the people of God in the Old Testament, ever since the time of Adam, were aware of and saved by the *same* gospel that we now know and believe. They had less information than we do, their picture of the work of Christ was not as clear and detailed, and perhaps they did not realize all that his redemptive work entailed, or perhaps they did not have a full revelation of the magnitude of the blessings that would follow. Nevertheless, it had always been the same gospel in essence, the same message about the grace of God, sovereignly decreed and executed for our salvation. And insofar as, by God's sovereign control and enabling, they believed what God had revealed – whatever the extent of the revelation was when they lived – they were saved from their sins and righteousness was imputed to them.

It follows that, since they knew and believed the same gospel as we now know and believe, in this sense we can very appropriately call them "Christians" – they were believers, followers, and disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, once we have obtained this biblical perspective, we now see that God's people have always been "Christians" in this sense, and "Christians" have always been the only kind of people whom God has saved. The only true faith – the only faith revealed by God and wherein lies salvation – has always been the Christian faith, whether in the Old or New Testament. Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Malachi, John the Baptist, and so on, were all Christians – yes, with some differences compared to us, but Christians nonetheless.

Before we proceed to something else, there are several important implications that we must draw from this.

First, what we have established above necessarily means that the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is Christian Scripture. No part of the Old Testament can function as "Jewish" Scripture in a sense that denies the Christian gospel. The Old Testament had always been Christian Scripture, even from its very first chapters, and it was entrusted to the Jews (Romans 3:2). But they rejected it (John 5:39-40), and now it is entrusted to the church (1 Timothy 3:15).

Despite what anyone might assert about himself, no non-Christian truly believes the Old Testament. Any Jew who claims to believe the Old Testament should also become a Christian; otherwise, he would have just as little claim to the Old Testament as a Muslim, or a Buddhist, or an African witchdoctor does – that is, none at all.

Second, because the Old Testament speaks of the Christian gospel even since the beginning, this must become a controlling factor in the practice of biblical theology and exegesis. At no time must the scholar or student completely exclude the New Testament perspective in reading an Old Testament text in an attempt to avoid an anachronistic interpretation.

It is often pointed out that, when interpreting a text, one must consider the biblical and historical background of the passage, so that he would not import to the text information that the original writer and readers had no way of knowing. For example, one cannot assume that something that is said in Genesis arose from the background of the fullness of revelation that is in the New Testament. Rather, one must interpret what is said from the background of what had been revealed up to that point in time. Another way of putting this is to say that in biblical theology and exegesis, one must acknowledge the progressive nature of revelation.

Related to this is the principle that one must also consider the culture of the time. For example, even if certain remarks about an object sound to the modern reader like a description of a telephone, this would be an unlikely interpretation since the original readers could never have understood those remarks if this is indeed what the text is talking about.

On the surface, this seems to be a sound and reliable guideline in interpretation, and indeed it has its proper application. To offer an obvious example, we must not interpret something that we find in Jeremiah as if that prophet had read the Gospel of Luke. On the other hand, we know that Daniel had read Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2), so that we can interpret the Book of Daniel with this in mind. However, if we are not careful, or rather, if we fail to acknowledge what the Bible claims about itself, we can apply this seemingly sober-minded principle in a way that in fact results in a false interpretation of Scripture, and even in an indirect denial of its divine inspiration.

As we have seen, although biblical revelation is progressive, the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ had already been announced at the very beginning, and at least in this sense, we must read the entire Bible as Christian Scripture and nothing else. We must never pretend that there was ever a period or section in the Old Testament when the text is not aware of the essential elements in Christ's atoning work and its results, that is, his sufferings and the glories that would follow.

Peter observes that it was revealed to the prophets that "they were not serving themselves but you" (v. 12). That is, the whole Bible was written to be read by "Christians," and especially those who live in the age of the fulfillment of what the prophets said (see also Romans 4:23-24, 15:4; 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, 10:11). So to read the entire Bible as Christian Scripture is not to commit the fallacy of anachronism, but to read it as it is intended to be read, and to understand it better than the original readers could.

We must also keep in mind that the "real" author of Scripture is God himself, and he was thoroughly "Christian" in his outlook even before creation itself. The human writers were mere instruments, and it was the Spirit of God who really spoke and wrote. Although God progressively revealed his mind through Scripture, his own knowledge is not progressive, so that he wrote even the earliest part with complete knowledge of his own plans and purposes. We must not forget this, lest in the attempt to avoid anachronism, we make the terrible error of treating the Bible as a purely human product.

The third implication from what we have established about the unity of biblical revelation is that we must reject the doctrine of dispensationalism. Especially dangerous is an extreme version that think the people of God in the Old Testament came to salvation in a way other than faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Or, in our context, we must reject any doctrine that says there were no "Christians" in the Old Testament.

We must never suppose that the people then were saved by works, or by a general faith in God, or by a special mercy that did not require conscious faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, we must insist that the only kind of salvation has always been Christian salvation, that the only true faith has always been Christian faith, and that it has been this way ever since the time of Adam, and not only since the time of Christ.

Nevertheless, Peter spells out at least one difference between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament believers. And on this difference hangs Peter's point in this passage (see v. 13). As we have seen, the difference is not that God's people in the Old Testament believed another message, or that they knew nothing about the gospel of Jesus Christ; rather, the difference is that, although they knew and believed in the same gospel for salvation, they lived in a time of expectation while we live in a time of fulfillment. How we spurn the grace of God and insult the prophets, if we fail to appreciate this difference, and the privileged position that God has given us! If it had been their choice, the prophets would have gladly changed places with us.

Jesus says in Matthew 13:17, "For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." This does not mean that these "prophets and righteous men" knew nothing about the coming of Christ or his work and message, for if this was the case, they would not have known to long to see and hear what those in the time of Christ would see and hear. But they knew enough about these things so that they could long to see and hear them, to live in the time when they would become true, in the time when their own prophecies would be fulfilled.

What Peter says is that the prophets spoke about "the grace that was to come," and they "searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing." They then received the revelation that "they were not serving themselves but you." So, as Paul writes, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom *the fulfillment of the ages* has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). So this is the difference, and this difference is significant enough that Peter rests on it, or rather the implication drawn from it, the point that he is about to make in verse 13.

The implication drawn from the difference is that Peter's readers, and in fact all those who would believe since the coming of Christ, have the privilege of living in the time of the fulfillment of all that the prophets had said about this great salvation. The prophets longed to experience for themselves all that the Spirit had predicted, but this was not granted to them; rather, God has chosen us to live in these times. The statement that "Even angels

long to look into these things" (v. 12) serves to reinforce this same point. Prophets searched and angels look, but *on you* has come the fulfillment of these things.

Verse 13 begins with a "therefore" and indicates that here is Peter's conclusion from all that preceded – not only verses 10-12, but reaching back all the way to verse 3. God has chosen us for salvation in eternity, and in his great mercy, he has given us a new birth, a living hope, and an indestructible inheritance. Even now he is guarding our salvation through our faith, which is of greater worth than gold. We rejoice in this salvation – the prophets longed to see its fulfillment, and even the angels are stirred to holy curiosity and desire to learn about it.

"Therefore" – because of God's great mercy, because of the inexpressible and glorious joy that this produces in you, and because of the greatness of this salvation and the privilege of living in this time of fulfillment – Peter says, "prepare your minds...be self-controlled...set your hope fully on the grace...."

What is translated "prepare your minds for action" here literally says "gird up the loins of your mind" (KJV). The oriental expression refers to the act of gathering one's long and flowing robe, and tying it around his waist with a girdle, so that he may proceed unimpeded with whatever strenuous activity that he may need to perform (1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29).

The NIV correctly conveys the meaning, for the expression indeed means to "prepare...*for action*." What it does not communicate is that this preparation is done by gathering up our loose garments so as to remove out of the way anything that would hinder our movements or that would cause us to stumble. However, Peter is not referring to physical activity, but he is saying that in light of the greatness of our salvation, we should prepare *our minds* in such a manner.

So when Peter continues and tells his readers to "be sober" (KJV), he is not just warning them against becoming drunk with wine, but he is mainly referring to mental intoxication. The NIV translates, "be self-controlled" and rightly conveys the intended meaning of mental alertness, sobriety, and discipline.

Remember that Peter is writing to encourage those who are facing or would be facing hardship and persecution, especially due to the fact that they were Christians. Later in the letter, he will give specific guidelines regarding the attitudes and the practices that are appropriate for the believers to assume when they come under these trials. Although he will continue to enrich the theological foundation that he has constructed, these beginning verses provide the background for all that would follow.

Here, then, is the conclusion that Peter draws from verses 3-12. Because of the greatness of our salvation, we are to prepare our minds for action by tightening our grip on our thinking, and by putting out of the way all the false beliefs, evil desires, and other distractions that would impede our progress. We must prepare our minds in such a manner so that we may remain spiritually agile, quick to grasp and follow the will of the Lord.

Rather than being mentally intoxicated by what the world offers, we are to remain clear in our minds and to exercise self-control over our thinking. Instead of looking toward the world for acceptance, for strength, or for comfort, we must direct our minds to set our hope on the present and future grace of God. This grace already belongs to us, and even now we are experiencing some of its benefits, but we look forward to its consummation when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Whether by its temptations or by its persecutions, whether by teaching us its attitudes or by presenting us with its rewards, the world tries to intoxicate our minds, by drawing all of our thinking into it, so that we would forget our homeland of heaven. If we do not stay sober and alert, ready to do right and to avoid error, the world would cause us to stumble with all its fanfare about career, culture, reputation, status, associations, entertainment, self-satisfaction, and so on.

But if we would prepare our minds and control our thinking, and then set our hope on the grace of God, then we will retain an otherworldliness that is proper to a citizen of heaven, and the world will neither be able to mold us nor to crush us. It is with this mindset, founded on an understanding on God's grace in our salvation, that we are prepared to follow Peter's upcoming instructions on how to think and behave when we undergo hardship and persecution.

1 Peter 1:14-2:3

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

We have spent much time on the beginning verses (1:1-13) of First Peter because they provide the theological foundation for us to understand and appreciate the rest of the letter. As mentioned, Peter would soon begin to tell his readers how they should think and behave within specific situations and relationships. However, this does not begin until 2:13. The first major portion of the letter, therefore, does not end with 1:13, but continues all the way to 2:12.

Between 1:14-2:12, we find two sections that in some ways are similar to 1:3-13. One similarity is that in all three sections (1:3-13, 1:14-2:3, 2:4-12), Peter appeals to a major theological theme and then draws the appropriate conclusion from it. Thus Peter tells his readers, in effect, God has chosen you and saved you, and you are privileged to live in this time of fulfillment (1:3-12) – therefore, set your mind on grace (1:13). Then, second, you have become children of God, and now you call him your Father (1:14-25) – therefore, feed on spiritual milk and grow up in your salvation (2:1-3). Finally, you have been made priests of God through Christ, and as living stones, you are being built into a spiritual house (2:4-10) – therefore, abstain from sinful desires and live good lives among the pagans (2:11-12).

These themes and conclusions are in turn the basis for the instructions and exhortations that appear in the second major portion of the letter, which begins from 2:13. These instructions and exhortations would lack context and the believers would lack the strength to follow them if not for the understanding that they follow from the nature of their salvation.

That said, there are at least two reasons why we treat 1:3-13 (or 1:1-13) as the ultimate or primary foundation, even though the subsequent two sections (1:14-2:3 and 2:4-12) do not begin the so-called "practical" portion of this letter.

First, although the second and the third sections introduce their own theological materials, they represent specific aspects of the great salvation that has already been discussed in the first. Second, although the second and the third sections exhibit some similarities in content and structure, rather than waiting until 2:13, Peter starts to mix his indicatives and imperatives beginning from 1:14. Unlike the first section, which stresses what is true about the believers, these two sections contain both declarations about the believers and instructions for the believers.

With the above in mind, let us consider 1:14-2:3 in this chapter of the commentary, and then 2:4-12 in the next.

Peter says that his readers had "lived in ignorance" before they became Christians. "Ignorance" is just one of the words used in the New Testament to signify the intellectual incompetence of non-Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. Unbelief does not arise from superior rationality and knowledge, but it is invariably associated with irrationality and ignorance. Scripture regards all non-Christians as defective in their minds.

A person who is born with mental retardation cannot function like other people when it comes to learning and reasoning, and one who has suffered severe brain damage would have a difficult time performing the tasks that others regard as ordinary. Likewise, sin has inflicted such a blow to the mind that non-Christians are born with a severe intellectual impediment that only God can cure. This is not obvious to the non-Christians themselves, just as one mentally retarded person might not recognize the condition in himself or in another person. But their condition is clear to God, and it ought to be obvious to Christians as well.

Some Christian scholars try to relegate the mental defect that Scripture attributes to unbelievers to a mere "moral" ignorance, or foolishness in a moral sense. But I have never really come across a coherent biblical explanation of what it means for a person to be morally stupid and not intellectually stupid. In any case, Scripture is careful to distinguish between the moral and the intellectual issues in the unbelievers. It distinctively refers to them both, often as two related but distinguishable problems with the non-Christians.

It is true that when Scripture speaks this way about the unbelievers, it is not referring to only a lack of information on their part, but also the fact that they lack a relational knowledge of God. But the way that Christians scholars point this out is often a little

suspicious. It is as if they want to preserve the perception that unbelievers can be very intelligent in all things except when it comes to spiritual matters. However, since God is the creator and ruler of all things, and all things are intelligible and truly understood only when considered in relation to him, this means that unbelievers are necessarily incompetent in all intellectual matters and on all subjects.

God is not just the crown of knowledge, but he is also the foundation. One cannot have a true view of physics, biology, psychology, or any other subject, unless he first affirms the one true God and his revelation. And contrary to what some Christians teach, once we affirm God and Scripture, we still cannot reason apart from them and arrive at knowledge. We cannot just pretend to embrace the Bible as the foundation of all our thinking, but then proceed to reason without it, and declare by force and without reason that sensations are reliable, that induction is valid, that the scientific method is logical and yields knowledge, and so on. Just as the unbeliever cannot arrive at truth apart from God, neither can a believer arrive at truth if he departs from God in his thinking.

So to point out that Scripture does not refer to only an ignorance of information but also a lack of relational knowledge does not paint a better picture of the unbelievers in any way; rather, it paints a much worse picture of them. It does not make them appear more competent but much less competent. A Christian might lack information, but that is easy to fix – he can simply be told the truth. But a non-Christian cannot change just because you tell him the right information. He is too foolish to rightly process truth or to reason validly from correct premises.

You can tell a mentally retarded person the right information, but he cannot grasp it. He might just stare at you and drool. In some cases, for the person to be able to repeat something that is said to him or to follow some simple instructions would be considered an astounding breakthrough. This is similar to the non-Christian's condition – *not* just when it comes to spiritual things, but when it comes to all intellectual matters. The difference is that his handicap is, to some people, not as obvious as staring and drooling.

What can be done? Just as it is humanly impossible to help someone with severe mental retardation to make beyond the most superficial improvements, mere men cannot help the non-Christian – God must perform a miracle. Thus Scripture refers to the new birth, and to an enlightening of the mind when the sinner is converted and given faith in Jesus Christ.

This is one of the plainest teachings in the Bible, that non-Christians are both sinful and stupid, not just sinful. They are not intelligent, and none of them remain in unbelief because they are too smart for the Christian faith. This is important on several important levels. It is pivotal to a proper understanding of the depravity of man and the grace of God, as well as to the correct approach to apologetics and evangelism. However, it is also one of the hardest teachings for Christians to accept, since it appears that many of them have a perverted admiration for non-Christian scholarship. Because this arises from a denial of Scripture and a distortion of reality, it is both ungodly and unhealthy.

Contrary to their own assertion, unbelievers are never guided by truth or reason, but in their ignorance, they are driven by "evil desires." The word means a "longing" or "craving," either in the positive or the negative sense. For example, Jesus said to his disciples, "I have *eagerly desired* to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). The literal wording there is, "with desire, I have desired" (KJV). And Paul writes, "I *desire* to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). Finally, 1 Thessalonians 2:17 says, "But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense *longing* we made every effort to see you."

Peter always uses the word in a negative sense (2:11; 4:2-3; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:10, 18; 3:3). In these cases, the KJV translates it as "lusts," and the NIV translates it as "evil desires," "sinful desires," "lustful desires," and so on, depending on the context. Later in 4:2, Peter will make the contrast between living for "evil human desires" and for "the will of God." In our verse (1:14), Peter is obviously referring to the longings of the unregenerate, and so it is rightly rendered "evil desires."

Not only are the non-Christians intellectually impaired, as those born with mental retardation, but they are also morally corrupt. Moreover, they do not sin in a detached manner or with an indifferent attitude. Rather, they are driven by desires. They are not in control of themselves, but their sinful urges overpower them to direct their actions and decisions.

But this is not an entirely accurate way to describe it, because these desires are so much a part of them that they do not resist them. They want to follow where they take them. They *are* these evil desires. As Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). They are so much slaves to sin that they never want to be free from it.

Thus their condition is one of ignorance coupled with lust, irrationality reinforced by depravity. From either the intellectual or the moral perspective, they are certainly not in a position to boast or to criticize the believers. Non-Christians would have us believe that they are driven by knowledge, decency, and progress, but they are liars. No, they are guided by ignorance and driven by evil desires.

Christians, including Peter's readers, were once just like these people. But God has chosen them, changed them, and called them to be holy. The basic reason why Christians must be holy is because God, the one who has called them, is holy. Peter appeals to the Old Testament verse, "Be holy, because I am holy" (see Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2). Christians have been called out of their former evil desires and ignorance to imitate the holiness of God.

The word for "holy" is *hagios*, whose root meaning is "different." God's holiness refers to more than his moral superiority, but it first stresses his transcendence. As 1 Samuel 2:2 says, "There is no one *holy* like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." And Isaiah 40:25 says, "'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the *Holy One*." The one who is supremely "holy" stands on his own. No one

can compare to him, and no one is his equal. So the concept refers to a difference and a separation. God is distinct, and aloof in the most noble sense.

Our calling as Christians is to imitate this trait of holiness. God has made us different, and now he commands us to live out this difference. Among other things, this includes a moral separation from those who are profane. Depending on the situation, sometimes this entails a physical separation also, but at this point many people become confused.

There is a school of "holiness" teaching that stresses abstinence from "worldly" pursuits such as secular literature, music, and various forms of entertainment and recreation such as television, movies, sports, and so on. It also places a tight watch over associations with unbelievers. In opposition to this, some emphasize that all of creation is "good," and that the Christian is to fully participate in it. In addition, although we are not to be "of" the world, we must still be "in" it, and therefore we should frequently befriend sinners and socialize with them. They cite the example of Jesus, who often associated with sinners, talking and feasting with them.

However, *the way* that they use Jesus' example ends up condemning John the Baptist. Scripture indicates that these two had different approaches to ministry, and both were legitimate. It was the people's negative reactions to both approaches that were condemned: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'" (Luke 7:32-34).

John the Baptist, for sure, was different: "John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4). Was this part of his "holiness"? Yes. Nowadays he would be criticized by Christians who insist that we must fully participate in the culture of the day. But there is nothing inherently wrong with his style and approach. So what if he went off into the desert, and dressed and lived like a he did? The people went out to hear him.

And here is the difference: I would say nothing to criticize a Christian who wishes to live like a hermit or somewhat like an ascetic if he does not rest in this for his justification before God, if he does not think that there is an *inherent* holiness in such a lifestyle, and especially if hundreds of people would seek him out to hear the gospel. Who can say that he is not "in" the world when he has a bigger audience than most Christians who claim to "engage" culture? If we have a doctrine that *by itself* would condemn some of the prophets, and someone like John the Baptist, then this doctrine must be false, since Scripture does not condemn them.

So John the Baptist was holy, and in his case that was how he lived. But it is true that Jesus did not have to outwardly conform to this lifestyle to be holy. He feasted with the tax collectors and spoke with prostitutes. This is what many Christians wish to emphasize today. Jesus went to parties, and therefore so should we. Everything that God made is good,

so we should dance, drink, draw, and make music! But for some reason, we should still avoid poisonous mushrooms.

Anyway, while Jesus was with them, the tax collectors were not extorting money from the people, and the prostitutes were not luring clients! They were either sinners who were willing to listen, or who had already repented. Jesus' holiness *stopped* the sins of others. He had no intimate friendship with anyone who was not interested in faith and repentance. This is the proper doctrine of association with sinners. He did not join them – *they* joined him.

This is the difference between real holiness and the two false versions under consideration. The first stresses a merely external separation from the world, as if that is inherently holy. The second uses Jesus' external association with sinners as an excuse for worldliness. Thus both of them judge only by appearances and fail to grasp the true nature of holiness.

Holiness is separation. God has called us to be holy. He has made us different, and he commands us to live the difference. A person who walks in holiness may visit the marketplace and associate with sinners, but when he engages the world, he also wields great spiritual power and moral influence. He is not interested in justifying his lusts for worldly learning, recreation, and fellowship. He exhibits an otherworldliness such that, although he is in the world, he is *obviously* not of it.

Continuing in this direction, holy living involves a departure from our former lusts, the evil desires that controlled us while we lived in ignorance as non-Christians. Peter writes, "As obedient children, *do not conform* to the evil desires." The command here is for believers to stop patterning their life and character according to the lusts that they had before they were converted to Christ. As Paul says in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world."

Again, we notice that non-Christians do not shape their lives according to wisdom and charity, but according to beastly lusts, strong sinful urges that drive them to rebellion and destruction. As for us, we are no longer like animals and spiritual rebels. Now we are "obedient children," or "children of obedience." This Semitic idiom refers to those who take after the character of someone or something. So non-Christians are "children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2) and "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), while Christians are "children of light" (Ephesians 5:8; Luke 16:8; John 12:36), and here in Peter, the "children of obedience."

And as children of obedience, we no longer have to conform to the evil desires we had while we were still non-Christians. Now we can throw off the mold to think differently and behave differently. Now we can live in obedience to the truth, and not be slaves to sinful urges and desires. Yes, we will then become an eyesore and an offense to the unbelievers, but we do not try to be different for the sake of being different. If we will only be obedient to the truth, we will already be different enough.

Peter says that his readers had an "empty way of life" before their conversion. Non-Christians portray themselves as rational and intelligent people, but we have seen that this is a lie. They also portray their lifestyles as exciting and meaningful, but this is a lie as well. Their lives are empty, futile, useless, and worthless. And this is the sort of people that they are. Unbelievers are not to be envied.

Many Christians have been unbelievers for years before they were converted, and they have lived this futile life that Peter is talking about. But because of remaining sin in them, and because of hardship and persecution, sometimes they forget how terrible things were before their conversion. Consider the Israelites who complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3). But they were slaves in Egypt! They were not living in comfort and luxury.

Likewise, when facing difficulties incurred by their faith, some Christians forget about the wretched condition of the past, and they become nostalgic, so that they revel in a romanticized version of what life was like before their conversion. But they need to remember that they were slaves to sin. They were ignorant and irrational people – stupid people. They were driven not by reason but by animalistic lusts and urges. Their lives were empty and futile. They were useless and worthless people.

As Christians, we have been redeemed from this kind of life. Now, silver and gold can buy one's freedom from slavery under a human master, but natural commodities like these can never redeem a person who is enslaved by ignorance and depravity. Non-Christians have silver and gold, and these can often buy them out of trouble with men and into a life of comfort and luxury. But these can never buy them out of trouble with God and into life in heaven.

God himself had to pay the price for the redemption of our souls, for otherwise no one could be saved. So he sent his own Son to die on the cross for the elect, those whom he has chosen before the creation of the world. Now we have new life in Christ, and we no longer need to be pathetic and worthless people like the unbelievers, and like we were before our conversion.

Some people are very perverted in their thinking. They are theological deviants, and they can twist any beautiful doctrine into something false and self-serving. I am referring to those who assert that God was willing to redeem us by "the precious blood of Christ" *because* he considered us valuable. That is, he was willing to pay such a high cost to redeem us because we were worth the price.

The teaching is supposed to attract sinners to accept the gospel, to boost the people's self-esteem, and to encourage them to make something of their lives. One preacher even said that the atonement proves that God considered us of greater worth than Christ himself, for otherwise he would have never allowed his Son to die for us sinners. At this point the teaching has reached the stage of blasphemy.

This view makes the atonement a purely business transaction, or an economic decision. However, even from this perspective, the atonement does not prove our worth, not to say that it proves we are of greater worth to God than Christ himself. This is because, although Christ had to suffer, afterward he was not lost or destroyed, but he was resurrected and glorified. The sacrifice was not in a permanent loss of one for the gain of another, but in that Christ had to endure the humiliation and suffering involved in his incarnation, persecution, and crucifixion. So it was not as if God gave up Christ for the elect in the sense of a permanent financial exchange, and there is no basis to think that the chosen ones were of equal or greater value to Christ himself.

Instead, the New Testament presents sinners as unworthy and undeserving, so that there is nothing in them that demanded God's attention or moved him to send Christ to die for them. He did not redeem the elect because he thought that it would be a profitable investment in the economic sense. The atonement proves what Scripture says that it proves – nothing more and nothing less. And from the scriptural perspective, the atonement is a demonstration of the extent of our sinfulness, of God's justice and wrath, and the greatness of God's love and grace toward his chosen ones. In fact, it is because sinners are worthless in themselves that the atonement is rightly said to be an act of divine grace.

We can take a step back and look at this relative to God's eternal purpose, instead of looking at this relative to sin. From this ultimate perspective, God's decrees for Christ to redeem the chosen ones and for man to fall into sin themselves serve the greater purpose of God's glory. In this biblical and supralapsarian scheme, God so valued his glory that he decreed the fall of all mankind, so that there would be a company of elect sinners for Christ to redeem.

Therefore, the atonement demonstrates God's commitment to glorify himself. To look at this from the other direction, if the atonement is all about the worth of the elect, then God could have just decreed for Adam to remain in righteousness, rendering the atonement unnecessary in the first place. God did not decree this because his plan has never been centered on man, contrary to some false theological systems, but on exalting his own glory through Christ.

Creation, election, reprobation, and redemption all work toward this ultimate purpose. And this is where all sound theology begins and ends – not man's worth, but God's glory. It is true that believers have been redeemed at a high price, even the precious blood of Christ, but this should elicit deep gratitude and holy confidence, and not self-esteem or some idea of inherent worth in us such that God could not help but sacrifice Christ to redeem us.

Verse 20 says that Christ was "chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." This tells us what we have suggested above, that redemption was not an afterthought or even a reaction to sin, but it had been God's decree for Christ to redeem the elect by his blood even before creation.

We can say something here about the order of the eternal decrees, and in connection with this, supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Now, because God is eternal and omniscient, there is not a point in his thinking when he does not know everything or when he has not decided everything; therefore, when we speak of order in the mind of God, we are referring to logical order and not chronological order.

Infralapsarianism confuses the order of design or purpose with the order of execution. It complains that in supralapsarianism, God decrees the identities of the reprobates without a view to their sinfulness. But I have established elsewhere that reprobation is unconditional, so this complaint poses no problem.

Moreover, as we have mentioned above, when we consider the plan of God from the ultimate perspective of his glory, then even reprobation is to serve the purpose of redemption – that is, to define those whom Christ would *not* redeem – and not the other way around. In the order of the eternal decrees, once God has decided that there would be the elect and the reprobates, *then* he decrees that mankind would fall into sin to make this possible.

On the other hand, in infralapsarianism, at the point when God decrees the fall of man, he does so without knowing why or what he would do about it! But if he has redemption in mind, and thus the distinction between the elect and the reprobates, so that he knows why he is decreeing the fall of man, then he has already decided on redemption, and thus this becomes supralapsarianism.

Of course the *execution* of redemption comes after man's fall into sin. But in the order of design or purpose, a person first envisions the end that he wishes to achieve, and then he decides on the means by which he would achieve it. Infralapsarianism would necessarily mean that God decrees the fall of man without knowing why he does it or what would come after it. This is just another way of saying that infralapsarianism is logically impossible.

So the glory of God comes first in the order of the eternal decrees, and to achieve this, the decree is made that Christ would subdue all things under the Father. On the way to achieve this is the decree that Christ would redeem from fallen humanity chosen individuals to become his fellow heirs – thus fallen humanity would be divided into the elect and the reprobates. In order to achieve this, the decree is made that all of humanity would fall into sin. Then, in order to achieve this, the decree is made that God would create humanity. This is the order of design or purpose. The order is reversed in execution, so that creation comes first, and the plan of God culminates in his glory.

The major objection against the supralapsarian scheme essentially amounts to an opposition to the idea that God could designate the identities of the reprobates before he decrees their fall into sin. In supralapsarianism, God first decrees that there would be reprobates, and then he decrees the fall *so that* these reprobates could materialize. Again, the objection is against unconditional reprobation. To put it another way, the objection is against God's absolute sovereignty, or the fact that God is God.

Then, in turn, the objection against unconditional reprobation is that it is unjust – that is, not according to any standard stated in Scripture, but according to man's sinful intuition. He is uncomfortable with the idea! In any case, by the time God *executes* punishment upon the reprobates, they have already fallen into sin, so that God does not in fact punish anyone who is sinless and innocent, that is, except when he caused the suffering of Christ. Even then, the punishment inflicted was just in God's mind since Christ was bearing the guilt of the chosen ones (Isaiah 53:10). Thus the principle has been consistently applied.

So the objection against supralapsarianism really amounts to a reluctance to admit that God is God, and not a man or a mere creature. This is a major culprit behind all false theological systems, whether we are thinking of Liberalism, Arminianism, or inconsistent Calvinism. But there is in fact no biblical or rational objection against supralapsarianism, or consistent Calvinism in general.

Once we abandon our false and man-centered assumptions, the offense of absolute divine sovereignty vanishes. Whether we will let go of them is another question. The work of the Spirit in sanctification is needed for us to relinquish all sense of human autonomy and man-centered thinking, including the relative and illusory type of "freedom" that appears in inconsistent Calvinism.¹²

Now, the non-Christians' empty way of life is often handed down to them by their forefathers (v. 18). Sometimes the family has lived as unbelievers for generations, and the latest generation is expected to perpetuate the traditions, values, and beliefs of the family. These might include various forms of idolatry, like Buddhism, paganism, and ancestor worship. Some families pass on traditions of crime, of violence and drug abuse. Many pass on a heritage of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and of "open-mindedness" to irrational thinking and licentious living.

Rich families can appear refined and proper, and outwardly they have just about everything that any depraved man could desire. But of course their way of life is no less futile than everyone else's. As with others, they hand down a tradition of pride, selfishness, hypocrisy, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). And parents everywhere today hand down a tradition of blasphemy – teaching their children atheism, evolution, feminism, and the like.

But now God is our Father (v. 17). As Christians, we have been accepted into a new family, so that we are now inheriting new traditions and learning new values. We have been saved from our old families along with their irrational superstitions (from paganism to scientism), deviant lifestyles, false teachings, false priorities, and false values.

Old beliefs and habits might be hard to break. We must make a conscious effort to rid ourselves of the old traditions and patterns, or else we will continue to conform to them in various ways (v. 14). But it is not as if we have simply changed places – we have been reborn into this new family by divine power. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. We

¹² For more on supralapsarianism and reprobation, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology* and *Commentary on Ephesians*. For more on inconsistent Calvinism, see Vincent Cheung, *The Author of Sin*.

can throw off the yolk of past generations and begin anew. The old traditions will try to force us back into its mold, but now we have the strength to refuse according to the sovereign work that God continues to perform in us (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13). Now we can leave all of that behind us.

Peter writes in verse 17, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." The context is the command, "Be holy, because I am holy," as well as the fact that the elect have been redeemed from their previous empty way of life at a great cost, that is, the precious blood of Christ. In light of this, and in light of the fact that we call on a Father who "judges each man's work impartially," we are to, first, "live as strangers," and second, to do so "in reverent fear."

The word translated "impartially" is rendered "without respect of persons" in the KJV. The KJV is closer to the literal meaning (the word literally means, "does not receive face"), and preserves a significant nuance. A better modern translation might be something like "without regard for persons." But we still have to know what it means, and as it is, some people have misunderstood it or inferred the wrong things from it.

The most obvious error is to think that this means God does not respect anybody, or that he disrespects everybody. A translation like "impartial" would prevent this interpretation, but this allows a different error, and that is to think that God treats everybody the same way. Of course, this is a widespread theological error that comes from imposing on God what is supposedly a righteous standard when it comes to human relationships. However, it is not even true that we must treat everybody exactly the same way in our human relationships in order to deal righteously.

God certainly *does not* treat everyone the same way. Some are born in poor families, while others are born into comfort and luxury. Some are born under abusive parents and relatives, while others are born into families that exhibit all the semblance of love and care that the beastly nature of unconverted people can produce. Some are born into idolatrous countries, while others are born under the light of the gospel.

More significantly, no matter what situation one is born into, and no matter what circumstances one subsequently encounters, some are chosen for salvation and to believe the gospel, while others are chosen for damnation, so that either they never hear the gospel, or they are made to reject it by divine power even if it is preached to them.

Another false inference from the idea that God is "impartial" is that, not only does God treat everybody the same way, but he treats everybody in a *good* way and with the same measure of kindness. This is certainly not the case, as he does not provide even the same natural benefits to everyone, and regarding salvation, he is most unkind and ungracious to the reprobates.

When Paul writes in Romans 2:11, "For God does not show favoritism," he is not talking about something pleasant at all. Rather, we read from verse 12, "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the

law." He is not saying that God treats everybody the same way, with the same measure of goodness, or that everybody is subject to the same blessing. But he is saying that, whether Jew or Gentile, every person is subject to condemnation! In other words, God does not care who you are – whether you are Jew or Gentile, whether you are a king or a beggar – he will damn you just the same, for "there is no respect of persons with God" (KJV).

If you are someone great with men, God is greater than you; if you are someone who has been cheated and abused by society, God will still hold you responsible for your sins, and you cannot play the victim before him. Just because you are rich and powerful does not mean that God will save you or have any regard for you; on the other hand, just because all men think that you are a "nobody" does not mean that God thinks that way about you as well. Of course God discriminates between persons, but he does not discriminate according to the way that men discriminate. He discriminates according to his own sovereign plans and purposes, and not according to what is in the person that he is looking at.

So the Bible does not teach that God treats everybody the same way – he *does not* treat everybody the same way, but he does measure everyone by the same righteous standard, so that everyone appears guilty before him. Then, he redeems some and condemns the rest – not giving everyone the same treatment, but he sovereignly chooses without regard for the stature, the position, or any condition or merit in the individuals. The difference rests in his sovereign will, and not in the individuals themselves. Regardless of whom he is dealing with, he judges according to his own righteous standard, and he treats people in different ways according to his own sovereign will. In this way, he is "no respecter of persons."

As you can see, the errors under consideration are not inherent in translations like "impartial," "favoritism," or "play favorites," for these are in fact acceptable. Instead, they come from people's prejudices about what is good and just, and about what God *must* be like in order to be good and just. And then a word like "impartial" triggers in them thoughts about what the Bible must mean, when it might be talking about something quite different.

Again, Peter says in verse 17 that *because* we have a Father "who judges each man's work impartially," we must therefore "live as strangers here in reverent fear." The grammatical, contextual, and theological considerations make it unlikely that he is referring to the final judgment. It seems that he is instead speaking of the Father's present judging activities, and from this he draws an application about how believers should behave in the world. Thus the "fear" refers to a fear for the parental discipline that Christians would receive from their heavenly Father, who examines our conduct in justice and righteousness, regardless of who we are before the eyes of men.

Grudem is without question correct in saying that the translation "reverent fear" is "too comfortable for modern readers."¹³ Nowadays it is common to teach that to "fear" God is merely to show "reverence" or to be at "awe" toward him, and it is sometimes even reduced to mere "respect." These are diluted versions that make the idea more acceptable or sound

¹³ Grudem, p. 81.

more pleasant to those holding to modern assumptions about what true religion ought to be like. However, all biblical evidence compels us to preserve in the fear of God the idea of terror – of being afraid, of being scared. What a believer should be afraid of is another question. Christians are not supposed to fear final condemnation, but it does not follow that all sense of terror should be eliminated.

A child might be quite afraid of being disciplined by his father. This fear regulates his conduct and keeps him from trouble. And because he does not yield to peer pressure to participate in foolish and immoral activities, he might become a stranger to those around him. Others might make fun of him or even ostracize him. He might feel pressured, but still he is unmoved, for he fears his father's displeasure and discipline more than he fears those who would press him to do wrong, and this fear in fact gives him the courage to resist their temptations. This fear is not a mere respect for his father, but there is a real sense of terror to it.

But although the child fears his father this way, he might at the same time feel very secure about his place in the family. Although he makes mistakes and incites his father's anger on occasions, the thought that his father might cast him out of the family never crosses his mind. So the child feels secure in his relationship to his father, but he feels fear at the thought of receiving discipline from him. These are the two necessary aspects to a healthy parent-child relationship. There is no conflict or paradox here, since we are referring to two different aspects of a relationship, and not two contradictory things about one aspect of a relationship.

Similarly, it is possible to have a genuine fear of our heavenly Father's displeasure even though we are assured of our salvation and confident of our place in his family, and that we will not be finally condemned or cast away. Again, this fear is not mere reverence, or awe, or respect, but it entails a real sense of terror. It is to be afraid to offend our Father and incur his discipline.

This fear, and the awareness that he judges every man's work, regulates our conduct and keeps us from sin. And because our fear of God is greater than our fear of man, it actually gives us the courage to resist temptations. Although holy living makes us strangers to the unbelievers, so that they may make fun of us, ostracize us, or even persecute us, our fear of God also gives us the strength to endure their ill-treatment, for what is man's wrath compared to God's displeasure?

Therefore, the fear of God is far from being an oppressive thing, and it is by no means contrary to having love and security in our relationship with our Father. But it keeps us from temptations, and empowers us to become bold witnesses for Christ in this hostile world.¹⁴

Then, because we have been adopted into this new heavenly family, just as God has become our Father through Jesus Christ, other believers have become our brothers and sisters. Our natural family might misunderstand us or even disown us for becoming Christians, and the

¹⁴ For more on the fear of God, please see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Malachi*.

whole world might hate us and persecute us, but comfort and acceptance ought to be given to every believer from his own heavenly family.

Sadly, we do not always find this to be the case in the church. Instead, we find jealousy, rivalry, gossip, deceit, hypocrisy, and all kinds of destructive attitudes and behaviors among those who call themselves Christians. Infighting is especially dangerous when the church is under attack from the world. But sin is irrational, and cares little for consequences, or about right and wrong. So Peter reminds us to love one another sincerely and fervently (v. 22), and to rid from among us all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy, all envy, and all evil speaking (2:1).

In verse 23, Peter again makes a contrast between the perishable and the imperishable. He wishes to make the difference clear to his readers. Earlier in verse 7, he has said that although even gold could perish, faith refined by fire will prove genuine and result in praise and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Then, in verse 18, he makes the contrast between "perishable things" like silver and gold, and "the precious blood of Christ," which is "without blemish or defect."

In verses 24-25, Peter draws from Isaiah 40:6-8, and says that all men are like grass and all their glory is like flowers. Just as grass withers and flowers fall, men perish and their glory fades away. Then all their accomplishments and all their boastings become nothing. This is another reason why unbelievers are not to be envied. They strive hard to accumulate wealth and to win respect. They strive hard for glory and to leave a legacy. But then "the Lord blows on them" (Isaiah 40:7), and everything they worked for turns to dust.

Scripture exposes the futility of the non-Christian life, and this enrages the unbelievers. While the elect are raised from spiritual death and awakened from their spiritual slumber to faith in Jesus Christ, the reprobates are hardened, so that they would rather destroy the Christian faith and persecute God's people than to repent of their sins. However, the Christian life, the Christian faith, and the Christian community can never be destroyed. It is built on the indestructible, living and enduring word of God (v. 23-25).

Peter applies this truth to his readers. Even though their persecutors might appear to stand strong at the moment, their strength and glory are transitory, and will wither and fade. But the word of the Lord stands forever. And this word is the gospel that was preached to his readers, and which they have believed.

This is to be our attitude when we face persecution today. Whatever we are facing, we must first recall that God's work is indestructible because it is built on God's living and enduring word. Christians are not produced by societies, traditions, by men's free will, or by accident – they are the product of God's word. So even though men may destroy the bodies, their souls are forever secure through Christ, and the works that they have done in God will never fade. The church is not a man-made institution, but as Jesus declared, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). The church is indestructible.

Non-Christians may attack the Bible – they can write books against it and make films about it. Certainly, we should answer their arguments and allegations against Scripture. But even before we begin, we can have the confidence that critics and skeptics may come and go – many have been discredited, and still many will come in the future – but the Bible will stand forever.

This is why, although I care very much about the state of the church, and although I am jealous for God's honor, I am never afraid of new attacks, arguments, and theories against Scripture and against the Christian faith. I am never afraid that one day they will manage to discredit the Christian faith, so that everyone will look at it at nothing more than myths and fables. It will never happen. The non-Christians will never win the intellectual battle against our faith.

Neither can they use political power nor even physical force to wipe out the church. Prisons and guns are nothing against God's omnipotence. Yes, they might jail one brother there and kill a sister there. But I am never afraid that one day the unbelievers will seize all the Bibles and burn them. I am never afraid that one day they will kill off all the Christians.

The Christian faith is a work of God, and as such, it is indestructible. Therefore, although we must preach and defend the faith with all zeal, let us do nothing out from fear of the unbelievers. When we consider the unbelievers in light of God's will and power, and in the light of the church's sure foundation, we will regard them as impotent fools, and their attacks as nothing.

Peter has a very low view of the non-Christian life, the life that his readers lived before they were converted to Christ. In fact, if you will study and consider all the ways that non-Christians have been described in the Bible by the prophets and the apostles, and by Jesus himself, you would realize that this is one area in which contemporary Christians have made their greatest compromise.

This compromise is made not only by those who are often accused of affirming a man-centered theology, such as the Liberals and the Arminians, but also by those who supposedly hold to a God-centered theology, such as the Reformed Christians. They are unwilling to follow what the Scripture actually teaches on how to talk to and talk about unbelievers. Instead, they stress some biblical verses and ignore others, and those that they emphasize, they take out of context and accommodate their interpretations in ways that reinforce the current cultural standard for social interaction.

The result is that the unbelievers are making the rules on how we view them and relate to them. This might weaken the offense of the gospel, but it is not as if the unbelievers will thank us for it. And aside from the fact that to dilute the word of God like this makes us unfaithful stewards of the truth, the problem is that part of the power of our message is in its sting. If you remove the teeth and the claws from an animal, you might make it more approachable, but then you also permit people to ignore it altogether.

Rather than using the same words or the same categories of words to describe the non-Christians in preaching and in conversation, they tend to restrict themselves to using technical theological terms to label the unbelieving condition. So we talk about the "depravity" of the unbelievers. This is entirely appropriate, but what does it mean? The Bible refers to them as dogs, snakes, trash, and even excrement. We talk about the "blindness" of those who refuse the gospel. And what does that mean? The Bible refers to them as brutes and morons.

In an attempt to reconcile how Scripture looks at the unbelievers and how they would like to look at the unbelievers, Christians have made a sharp distinction between the beliefs and behaviors of the non-Christians and the non-Christians themselves. So they say to the unbelievers, "You are smart, but you believe and do some very stupid things." But why do people believe stupid things? It is because they are stupid! Stupid people believe stupid things, else why are they stupid at all?

The same people might become indignant if it is suggested that Hitler was in fact the most compassionate person in history, but it just happened that he did cruel things all the time. No, if a person does evil all the time, it is because he is an evil person. The Bible does not make the distinction between the beliefs and behaviors of a person and the person himself. In fact, the beliefs and behaviors of a person are the things that define or exhibit the nature of the person. Thus a low view of the non-Christian life must necessarily translate into a low view of the non-Christians.

The failure to acknowledge the full extent of the sinfulness and foolishness of the unbelieving condition is ultimately a result of human depravity itself. It is a bias derived from a humanistic theology, that is, from a high view of self and a low view of grace. We take great pains to describe the utter depravity of the unbelievers, using all the vivid biblical terms that we can find, not because we derive a personal satisfaction from insulting them. But we do this because, in acknowledging the truth about the depravity of the unbelievers, we are at the same time magnifying the grace of God that saves such depraved sinners, such stupid and sinful creatures.

When God saves a non-Christian, it is not like he is changing a pair of dirty socks for him. It is much more than that. It is as if he is turning a piece of dung into a handsome prince, or changing a dumb mule into a college professor. This is why we must recognize the full extent of the wicked and stupid nature of the unbelievers, and then affirm that Christians have been redeemed from *this* kind of life at great cost, even by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Only from this perspective do we then fully recognize the extent of the trouble that we were in, and the extent of the grace and power that rescued us out of it.

Then, it is by standing upon this understanding of redemption that we can properly appreciate the admonition of Peter: "*Therefore*, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." Because of where you were and where God has now taken you, the worst thing that

you can do is to profess the faith and then fail to think and behave like a believer. Once you have started, you must go all the way. You must fully invest yourself into this new life.

This is the way to not only survive but to thrive as a Christian in a world that is hostile to the things of God. Do not have a taste and then walk away. Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good, abide in him, and desire the spiritual milk of the word – pure and unadulterated biblical teaching – so that you may grow in the faith, become strong in your stand, and become useful for his kingdom.

We find the same teaching in Paul. Like Peter, he first affirms that the non-Christians suffer from severe moral corruption and mental retardation, and that the Christians have been saved from this pitiful state. Then, from this he draws the conclusion that we must now put away the ignorance and the wickedness of the past, but move forward with Christ to grow in true knowledge and holiness.

There is a full example of this line of thinking in Ephesians 4:17-25. Notice the close correspondence between this passage and what we have read from Peter:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Paul has the same low view of non-Christians. He offers an elaborate description of the unbelievers' moral and mental deficiencies. He says that their thinking is futile (v. 17), their understanding darkened (v. 18a), and that they are ignorant (v. 18b). Their hearts are hardened (v. 18b), so that they have lost all sensitivity, and they are given over to sensuality, indulgence, and lusts (v. 19).

As Christians, once we were also like these people, but Christ has changed everything for us (v. 20-21). And on this basis, the apostle exhorts us to holy living, to put behind past transgressions and ignorance, and to move forward in our faith. This includes putting on a new mind and a new self (v. 23-24), and fully investing ourselves into building up the body of Christ (v. 25).

We have devoted so much effort in considering Peter's low view of the unbelievers and his high view of grace, because it is only when we grasp what he is communicating here can our exposition reflect the pastoral wisdom exhibited in this letter. He is writing to Christians who would be facing various kinds of hardship and persecution. How is he preparing them? He is building his exhortations on a theology of salvation – of God's election, man's depravity, Christ's redemption, and the Spirit's power in regeneration and sanctification.

This is the general approach that we should follow to prepare ourselves, and if we are church leaders, to prepare our people for various attacks coming from the unbelievers. Sound theology is what prepares people for the various kinds of hardship and persecution that they will face.

Apply this to preaching, pastors should not begin with imperatives, but with the indicatives about the realities of Christian salvation. Do not just command the people – feed them, so that they will have the spiritual strength to obey what is commanded. Preach about the grace that has come to them, about the difference it has made in them, and about the new identity, new life, and new community that it has given to them.

Then, begin to mix in the imperatives with the indicatives. In the process, remind the people of their past foolish thinking and sinful lifestyle. Never allow them to imagine a romanticized version of the past. Remind them that they were fools and slaves under sin. Now that Christ has saved them, it is time to invest in this new life, cast away the past, and move forward with Christ.

Steady growth depends on a healthy appetite to feed on the proper foods (2:2). Through sin, neglect, and false teachings, believers can often become spiritually ill and have their appetites spoiled. The solution involves a return to the proper diet (sound doctrine), regular exercise (fellowship and ministry), the shepherd's intercession for the healing and renewal of their souls, and if necessary, spiritual surgery (personal confrontation and counseling).

1 PETER 2:4-12

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Like the previous passages, this one is also rich with theological ideas, and there are several ways to approach it. By that I mean there are several ways we can structure an exposition of the passage. For this study, I have chosen to begin with what it says about Christ, then about those who reject him, and then about those who believe in him. After that we will also discuss the application that Peter draws from what he teaches here.

Peter calls Christ the "living Stone" (v. 4). Some commentators overreacts to this and makes it into something surprising. Grudem calls it "a daring metaphor," and it is daring "for stones do not live."¹⁵ However, once we recognize it as a metaphor, there is nothing especially daring in likening a person to an inanimate object (or vice versa). In fact, as a metaphor, there would be no problem at all in calling Christ just a "stone," and to explicitly call him a *living* stone makes it *much less* daring or surprising.

Hillyer is even worse in calling this "a startling paradox," again, "for a stone is anything but alive."¹⁶ It might alarm us if Peter were to call Christ a *dead* stone, but as a metaphor, there is nothing startling or paradoxical in calling him a stone, and still less a *living* stone. There is nothing startling in calling a knowledgeable person a "walking encyclopedia," even though an encyclopedia is not a living object – we are using a metaphor. Likewise,

¹⁵ Grudem, p. 98.

¹⁶ Hillyer, p. 61.

when Christ calls himself "the gate" (John 10:7), he does not have to say "*living* gate." And when he calls his people "sheep," he does not have to say "*human* sheep"! A metaphor is a metaphor.

The significance of the metaphor is not that there is a tension between the inanimate nature of a stone and the fact that this stone is *living*, but Peter is making a contrast between the inanimate temple of Jerusalem and the living temple that is the church. We will say a little more about this living temple later in the chapter; meanwhile, we must continue to think about Christ as a stone in the context of our passage.

Christ, this living Stone, is "rejected by men" (v. 4) – certainly not all men, but by some or even many men. Again, we will consider what happens to these people when we come to them later, but right now we are interested in what happens to Christ. Peter says that, though he is rejected by men, he is "chosen by God and precious to him."

At one time, to those who did not understand, even God appeared to have rejected him – that is, when he bore the guilt of the elect on the cross. But he was in fact God's chosen Savior, and very soon he was resurrected and glorified. This gives us encouragement as we imitate the life of Christ. At times, to those who do not understand, it might appear that we have been abandoned, and many will say to us, "Where is your God now?" But we have been chosen in Christ, and we are on our way to resurrection and glory.

God has made Christ the "cornerstone." The cornerstone is placed at one corner of the foundation of a building, and functions as the starting point for the entire structure. When used figuratively, it designates one as the pivotal person in relation to whom all others are defined. For an example, see Isaiah 19:13, where it seems that "cornerstones" refer to the "officials" and "leaders" of Egypt.

Now, Peter says that what the "builders" rejected, God made the "cornerstone." This was how Jesus himself answered the opposition of the Jewish leaders, and it is in fact a quotation taken from Psalm 118:22 (see Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11). Commentators agree that it is unnecessary or even wrong to offer the translation of "capstone" in verse 7, as the stone is said to be something that men would stumble over, so that it should refer to something on the ground rather than something that is on top of a structure. See also Romans 9:32-33, where Paul employs the same metaphor.

When Jesus appeared to Israel in his earthly ministry, the Jewish leaders as well as many of the people rejected him, and even set him up to be crucified by the Romans. They refused to have him in their religion, but this "stone" was in fact God's chosen and precious one, and he took what the people rejected and made it the cornerstone of the entire structure of true religion. God has made Christ the defining factor of his living temple, and every person who would come to God must find his place in relation to Christ.

So it is not up to men to design their own religion to reach God and to worship him. And it is not up to them to reject what God provides. God has already placed Christ as the cornerstone of this living temple, and now anyone who would come to God for salvation

must build on Christ. Therefore, the only true religion is the Christian religion, and a religion is only Christian if it is explicitly built on Christ, and if everything and everyone in it is defined in relation to him.

Anything and anyone that is outside of this temple, that is not built on Christ, and that has not found one's place in relation to him, is false and pagan. It is not up to men to say how they would come to God and to worship him. Today many reject Christ and claim that they could reach God through another way, a way of their own choosing and of their own design. But God has laid his cornerstone in Zion. It is futile for people to build their own temple somewhere else and claim that they can come to God or find salvation through it.

This cornerstone, Peter says, does not only provide a foundation on which God would build his living temple, but it is "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (v. 8; see Isaiah 8:14). Thus this stone not only defines the place of every other stone that is built into this living temple, but it also defines the status of all unbelievers. And so we will turn to what Peter says about them.

He quotes from Psalm 118:22, which refers to the stone that "the builders" rejected. In the context of Jesus' ministry, the builders would mainly refer to the Jewish leaders who rejected him and refused to accept him as their Messiah, the chosen Son of David and the divine Son of God. But the application can be broader than this – since Peter is speaking of "those who do not believe" (v. 7), we can apply what he says to all non-Christians.

Peter explains, "They stumble because they disobey the message" (v. 8). Grudem remarks, "It indicates that many who reject Christ do so because of moral disobedience to God in their lives."¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, non-Christians refuse to come to Christ not because there is something wrong with Christ or the message of Christ, but it is because their deeds are evil, so that they hate the light and love the darkness. For one to be converted, God himself must convert the person by his omnipotence (John 6:44, 65). Likewise, non-Christians hate God's people not necessarily because there is something wrong with us (Peter would soon tell us to make sure that there is indeed nothing wrong with us), but because there is something wrong *with them*.

God has made a difference between those who would be saved and those who would be damned. Peter repeatedly stresses this distinction in his letter. For example, in our passage, he says, "Now to you...But to those" (v. 7) and also "They stumble...But you...." (v. 8-9). This distinction is marked by our difference views toward Jesus Christ – God has made him the cornerstone of all true worship. Christ is who and what he is – neither our faith nor the unbelievers' unbelief can change him. But our difference views toward Christ is what exposes our difference – he is not defined by us, but we are defined by him.

As we will soon mention again, believers are "a chosen people" (v. 9). However, it is not as if the unbelievers are sovereign over their own unbelief. Peter says that they were "destined for" (v. 8) disobedience to the message and thus for stumbling over the cornerstone that is Christ. Thus although we demonstrate our difference by our different

¹⁷ Grudem, p. 107.

views toward Christ, we were never the ones who determined our place in relation to him, and therefore we were never the ones who determined what our view would be toward Christ. Believers accept Christ and build on him because God has chosen them, and unbelievers reject Christ and stumble over him also because of what God has determined in advance.

As expected, at this point, some commentators deny the biblical doctrine of double predestination – the idea that God has actively, consciously, and deliberately decreed the identities of *both* the elect and the reprobates. Then, others who claim to affirm double predestination nevertheless wish to make the decree concerning reprobation passive and conditional. But since elsewhere I have established both double predestination as well as active and unconditional reprobation, we shall not spend time repeating all the arguments here.¹⁸

Now we turn to talk about the Christians, the believers in Jesus Christ. Peter mentions a number of things concerning them.

Verse 5 says, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." This verse is especially significant, because among other things, it teaches what is often called "the priesthood of all believers."

First, just as Christ is the living Stone, which God has made the cornerstone, believers in Christ are like living stones who is being built upon him. Again, there is nothing inherently daring, startling, or paradoxical about such a metaphor. Both the cornerstone (Christ) and the living stones (Christians) are said to be "chosen" by God. This is consistent with the biblical teaching that the elect are *individually* selected – individual stones are chosen to join the whole.

Some theologians have invented a view of "corporate" election that denies God's absolute sovereignty over individuals in order to undermine the biblical doctrine of election while at the same time maintain the appearance that they affirm it. But unless God's sovereignty and omniscience are denied, which makes a position thoroughly anti-Christian, a doctrine of corporate election that has no individuals in view is nonsense.¹⁹ In other words, because God is sovereign and omniscient, he never refers to a group without having in mind all the individuals within the group. Therefore, a doctrine of corporate election that is offered as an *alternative* to individual election cannot be biblical.

These stones are being built into a "spiritual house" – that is, the temple of God. This is no ordinary building. What is special about this temple is that it is not made of non-living objects like bricks and stones, and neither is it confined to a small geographical location. United in Christ, it is a *spiritual* house whose members are physically spread all around the

¹⁸ For more on reprobation, see Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians*, and *The Author of Sin*.

¹⁹ For more on collective vs. individual election, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians* and *Commentary on Malachi*.

globe – and the souls of many are already in heaven with God. The presence of God now dwells in this spiritual temple, and not a temple made with hands. For this reason, no physical temple – Jewish or otherwise – can claim to provide access to God. The Spirit of God dwells with and within his people (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

Believers constitute a "holy priesthood." Commentators again exclaim that it is strange that we are the stones that make up the temple and at the same time also the priests of the temple. But there is nothing strange here. Peter is making the point that God's temple is not a physical building, but it is an organic body that is spiritually built on Christ and at the same time physically fluid and widespread. That we are also the priests of God means that we have ready access to him and that our lives are dedicated to serve and worship him.

So the doctrine is called "the priesthood of all believers," and teaches that every Christian is a priest of God. But what does this mean? People have drawn various false inferences from this. For example, some have concluded from this that every occupation is holy and acceptable for believers. As Robert Morey writes, "Since all believers are priests, this means that all jobs are holy."²⁰ But we can be sure that prostitution is still far from holy, even if it is done by a Christian.

If the reply is that no true Christian *would* engage in prostitution, then the teaching is no longer that every occupation is holy for believers, but that believers would engage in only those occupations that are holy or that are consistent with holiness. Or, if the reply is that no Christian *should* engage in prostitution, then the same conclusion results – there are such things as unholy occupations, and not all occupations are holy or consistent with holiness.

False inferences like the above example are often made in the context of appealing to the priesthood of all believers. It is often accompanied by the assumption that there is to be no distinction between the sacred and the secular, and then following from this, there is the denial of the distinction between the clergy and the laity.

But should we deny a distinction between the clergy and the laity? It depends on what we mean by "clergy." If, as *Merriam-Webster* defines the term, we mean, "a group ordained to perform pastoral or sacerdotal functions in a Christian church," then there is certainly a sharp distinction between the clergy and the laity. You are either a minister in this sense, or you are not. Notice that we have said nothing about whether the clergy is superior or inferior in any sense, but only whether there is a real distinction – and there is indeed such a distinction.

Now, the dictionary definition refers to ordination, probably as a church ordinance. That is, *the believers* formally recognize a Christian as called and gifted by God to serve a special ministerial function. But in God's providence, the believers can often err, so that they may ordain some who are not called and gifted by God, and fail to recognize others

²⁰ Robert Morey, *Worship Is Not Just For Sundays*, or under the title, *Worship: It's Not Just Sunday Morning*.

who are so called and gifted. In fact, by the dictionary definition, many members of the clergy can be unregenerate altogether and still properly be defined as part of the clergy.

So the clergy refers to those whom *the church* has separated for the ministry. But then we must make another distinction for those whom *God himself* has called and gifted, *whether or not* the church formally recognizes them as such. The religious authorities of the time did not award John the Baptist or Jesus himself with formal credentials, but they were ordained by God and endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ordination thus has to do with church order, but real spiritual authority comes with God's sovereign call. We may admit that it is wrong to make a distinction in terms of degrees of holiness (Acts 3:12), but this can be misleading if we are not careful, as there can be a *vast* difference in grace and power (Romans 12:3, 15:15; 1 Corinthians 3:10, 15:10; Galatians 2:7, 9; Ephesians 3:2, 7-8). So there is a difference between the minister and the "ordinary" believer, but the distinction is not in terms of a difference in holiness, but in calling, grace, authority, and power. From the perspective of church order, the difference is in ordination. And along with the difference, along with the greater grace and power, there is a greater responsibility, and a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

Precision must be restored to our understanding of this doctrine. We shall consider two popular misconceptions, and after that, the correct way to understand the distinction between ministers and believers.

On the one hand, there are those who use this doctrine to elevate all believers to the position of ministers, resulting in confusion and even anarchy. At the least, there is diminished respect toward the teachings of those who have been called by God to feed the flock. There are those who assume that they can wield just as much spiritual authority in the church as any who has been divinely called, and that their own interpretations of Scripture are just as accurate as any minister, even if they have no actual basis for this confidence – no calling, no training, no spiritual endowments – other than the belief that all believers are priests.

Then, on the other hand, there are those who overreact against a false view of the distinction between ministers and believers, so that they deny the distinction altogether. Catholic ministers, for example, are called "priests" in a sense that attributes to them special access to God, so that in many ways the flock must go through them in the worship of God, in the confession of sins, and so on. No doubt this is an atrocious doctrine, and even an usurpation of Christ's unique position and authority. Nevertheless, such an anti-biblical system does not imply that all distinctions between ministers and believers are illegitimate.

One way to illustrate the real distinction between ministers and believers is to consider the difference between the public officials and the private citizens of a society. The analogy is not perfect, but it is tolerable. Of course the officials are also citizens, and of course the citizens are equal to the officials *as citizens*. But the officials have received delegated authority to function in a public capacity in order to serve the common good and to follow whatever mandate that has been imposed upon them. When a person is functioning in his

official position, he is acting on behalf of the citizens of his society. This happens, for example, when he arrests a criminal or when he negotiates a treaty with another society.

Likewise, believers are not inferior or shortchanged in any way *as believers*. Also, there is no need for them to go through the ministers in worship, in prayer, in confession of sins, and so on. They have access to God through Jesus Christ, and no other mediator is necessary, nor is any other available. But this is not to say that they are called and gifted to perform public ministry.

The ministers have the added responsibility, and with it the spiritual endowments, to perform the public functions that God has called them to do. Their authority is real, and it is from God. As Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." Church leaders have genuine authority from God, so that believers are to "obey" them. But they also have the responsibility, and must "give an account" for their work. God has established them for the benefit of the church, and it is self-defeating for believers to deny their calling and make their task difficult.

Although ministers possess additional grace and power from God to perform their public function, it would be a grave error for believers to underestimate their position as priests of God. They have been seated in heavenly places with Christ, and now the very spirit of the prophets is upon them! They have free access to approach the Most High at any time and at any place. They may pray, sing, weep, and rejoice before the heavenly throne.

As priests, they can intercede and plead the cause of others, and they can expect God to hear and respond. They have the right and the grace to proclaim the words of God to any person, to lead him to faith in Christ, or to oppose the children of disobedience. They have the authority to counsel and admonish anyone about his life, to inform him about God's righteous demands, and to speak words of comfort to the weary in the name of Christ.

Under the right settings and following the proper procedures, and without a spirit of rebellion, they even have the right as fellow priests of God to rebuke their ministers for straying from biblical doctrines and practices. Although church protocols must be followed, no "man of God" is too high and mighty to receive counsel and correction from his fellow Christians, even if the counsel is coming from an illiterate old widow, or if the correction is coming from a small child.

Then, even if we discard all of the above for the moment, the very right to utter the divine name overwhelms me with a sense of honor and gratitude. The unbelievers are able to *say* the name, but each time they do, the wrath of God is multiplied toward them – for even when they do not utter it in blasphemy, they never say it with love and reverence. And "if anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him" (1 Corinthians 16:22). Each time a non-Christian speaks the word "God" or even thinks the name "Jesus," he ought to be pierced through by a thousand swords.

Now, it is not for us to execute judgment upon the unbelievers – our place is to instruct, implore, and rebuke. But very soon God will hold them accountable for every idle word that they have spoken, including all those instances when they have used his name without sincere faith and love toward him, or even in contempt. At any rate, I marvel that Christians can boil over with indignation when others mention their wives and children with just a hint of disrespect, but they seem utterly unmoved and detached when the non-Christians blaspheme the name of God. Then they distort Scripture and call this lack of zeal "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15) – it is supposed to be a virtue.

On the other hand, God's priests call on his name and converse among themselves about him with unfeigned gratitude and adoration, from hearts overflowing with words of praise and worship. When I say, "Jesus..." or "My Father..." it is as a sweet aroma to his nostrils. Therefore, let every believer treasure the high privileges that he has in Christ, and may none dare to despise his honored position as a Christian.

As priests of God, believers offer "spiritual sacrifices" to him (v. 5). This aspect of the priesthood reflects yet another privilege that they possess. They do not need a special class of priestly believers to offer sacrifices on their behalf – they can do this themselves because *they* are priests. Moreover, there is no need to perform elaborate rituals to cleanse themselves before they could offer these sacrifices, for they have already been purified in Christ.

Although Peter does not specify these sacrifices, the Bible mentions several examples. Romans 12:1 tells us to offer our bodies as "living sacrifices" – not to be slaughtered as a blood sacrifice, of course, but to dedicate ourselves to worship and holiness. Hebrews 13:15 mentions the "sacrifice of praise." The verse is referring to a vocal adoration of God, whether in speech or in song – it is "the fruit of lips that confess his name." The next verse indicates that doing good and sharing with others are also sacrifices that are pleasing to God (v. 16). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul refers to their financial donations as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (4:18).

So our "spiritual sacrifices" to God include a variety of things, and they are offered in the forms of thoughts, words, and actions. A common but erroneous expression of the doctrine teaches that, because we are priests of God, now all our activities are spiritual sacrifices. This must be false because we can still commit sin as priests, and when we do, we are not offering acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God.

Instead, the proper expression of the doctrine is to say that, because we have been chosen and made priests of the Most High, now all our activities *ought to* be spiritual sacrifices, holy, pure, and pleasing to God. This means that even if we refuse to make a distinction between the sacred and the secular, for perhaps this distinction is illegitimate *in some contexts*, we must surely make a distinction between the sacred and the profane. And from things that are profane, Scripture instructs us to *abstain* (2:11; Jude 23). This fits perfectly with the idea that we are priests of God, chosen and separated to serve him alone, with clean hands and pure hearts. The fact that you have become priests of God does not mean

that everything you do is now holy, but it means that you have been consecrated to do only those things that are holy and acceptable.

As for the sacred-secular distinction, those who refuse to acknowledge it is trying to honor the biblical teaching concerning the basic goodness of all creation. Sometimes there is the ulterior motive to seek biblical justification to pursue their personal interests. But some activities and some occupations are indeed more sacred than those that are usually considered secular. This does not mean that what is secular is inherently evil.

In fact, if a believer is called to a "secular" occupation, then he is regarded as a faithful servant if he would pursue it with diligence and a good conscience, with the intention to please and glorify God through it. There is nothing wrong in accounting, but the ministry is indeed in a different category altogether. There is nothing evil in washing dishes or cleaning toilets, and any believer can do these things to the glory of God and be accepted by him. Yet, the believer steps upon holy ground when he enters into prayer.

So it is possible to affirm the biblical doctrine concerning the goodness of what God has created, and at the same time affirm the sacred-secular distinction. This is sufficient to provide legitimacy for believers to "engage the culture" and to participate in secular occupations and endeavors with full confidence, without guilt and shame. A believer does not have to enter public ministry to live a holy life or to become useful for the kingdom. But the proper doctrinal foundation for this view is not the denial of the sacred-secular distinction, or the assertion that all occupations are equally holy as the ministry, which is simply not true.

I may never have to listen to an accountant in my life, but all accountants must listen to preachers. Or, the accountant could give up accounting and go fishing instead – but he better not give up prayer or the reading of Scripture. Anyone can become a janitor or a businessman, although some will be better at some things than others. But most believers are warned to *keep out* of the teacher's office, since it incurs a stricter judgment. In God's system, some things are just more important and even more sacred than other things. To acknowledge this does not mean that we must become Catholics or Gnostics, or that we reject the priesthood of all believers. Rather, to deny the sacred-secular distinction, to the extent that this is improper, is to denigrate that which is in fact more sacred than the secular.

The above goes against a strong *tradition* that is held by many and a doctrine that is beloved by the same, so it might not be well-received, and perhaps vulnerable to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. With such a short treatment on the subject, this cannot be avoided. And of course, people can have divergent views on the topic even if they seem to affirm the same doctrine in principle, and so to some people it might appear that I am attacking a straw man. But if it is true that they do not affirm that which I reject here, then let them not perceive this as a straw man, since I might not be talking about them at all. But it is true that many indeed believe as I have described.

In any case, as an attempt to clarify, remember that I do not deny the principle that all creation is basically "good," *in the sense* that Paul means it in 1 Timothy 4:4. The problem

is that many wild inferences and false generalizations have been made from this, and then an entire Christian approach to society and culture has been constructed upon it, at the expense of many other parts of Scripture.

Again, we can fully acknowledge the priesthood of all believers and the goodness of all creation, and reject the teachings of the Catholics and the Gnostics, and still maintain a sacred-secular distinction. In one book, there is a picture of a minister, and next to him in a circle is the word "Holy." Then, there is a picture of a truck driver, and the circle next to him reads, "Unholy?" No, the occupation is not unholy, and one can glorify and please God in it – but it is still properly called a secular occupation.

Now, an unbeliever can fill a secular position, but let him take the office of the pastor, or let him counsel others in the name of Christ, or let him handle the word of God, whether in private or in public, then it is a transgression and a blasphemy, and the jealousy of the Lord burns hot against him. There is a difference. A big difference.

Returning to the "spiritual sacrifices," these are not foreign to the Old Testament. As Psalm 141:2 says, "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." All Christians are to offer spiritual sacrifices to God, but none of these are blood sacrifices. There is only one atoning death, and that is the death of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice is sufficient, and its efficacy is permanent. Thus there is no need to repeat it, or for us to supplement it with other blood sacrifices. But our sacrifices are "spiritual," and consists in holy thoughts, words, and actions.

These sacrifices are "acceptable to God *through Jesus Christ*" (v. 5). He is the necessary and only mediator between God and man. He is the High Priest under whom all the priests of God serve and have access to the throne of grace. In turn, this means that all the prayers and good deeds of worshipers who do not come through Christ, such as the adherents of non-Christian religions, are in fact unholy sacrifices, rejected and condemned by God. They are not priests, but they intrude into our rightful place as those consecrated for worship, and attempt to dupe or force God into accepting their sacrifices. Needless to say, these arise to God as a stench to his nostrils, and he will rain down his wrath upon them in multiplied measure. Will God have no regard for their sincerity? But if they do not come through the only right way, then they are not sincere worshipers of God, but they are sincere rebels and imposters. That is, they are not pretending to be wicked and disobedient, but they are sincerely so.

Continuing with what our passage (2:4-12) teaches about the Christians, verses 6 and 7 appeal to the ideas of honor and shame: "The one who trusts in him will never be put to *shame*. Now to you who believe, this stone is *precious*." Although it is true that Christ is of great worth to those who believe, here the NIV errs in translating *timē* as "precious" (also KJV, RSV, NASB, NLT, NRSV). Grammatical considerations demand the translation "honor" instead.²¹ The context also supports this, since Peter is talking about the honor of believing in Christ (v. 7; "not...shame" in v. 6) and the dishonor or shame that is the lot of "those who do not believe" (v. 7), for they shall stumble and fall (v. 8). The

²¹ Grudem, p. 104-105.

ESV gets it right and reads, "So the honor is for you who believe." The *God's Word* translation is not as precise but manages to capture the meaning: "This honor belongs to those who believe." See also the HCSB and The New Jerusalem Bible.

Commentators suspect that many translators are afraid to attribute honor to the believers, and therefore opt for "precious" instead, attributing worth to Christ in the minds of believers. But Peter is making a point here, namely, that Christians would not be "put to shame" for believing in Christ, that there is honor in their faith. This is an encouraging insight for those who live in cultures that think in categories of honor and shame, that to believe in Christ will not lead to shame but to honor, and that it is those who disbelieve who will stumble and fall.

In some cultures, great shame is attributed to one who abandons the family religion. It would not be surprising for a Christian to receive hostile treatment from his Jewish family. As Jesus says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36). Elsewhere he predicts that "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death" (Matthew 10:21).

Or, how about a Chinese Christian who departs from his family's Buddhist heritage, and who then renounces all idolatrous practices, including ancestor worship and other forbidden religious ceremonies? It depends on how much emphasis the family places on their traditions. In some cases, great shame may be heaped upon the believer. The family members might give him the "cold shoulder," or even outright hostile treatment. It is not inconceivable for the parents to remove from their will a child who has been converted to the Christian faith.

Parents might boast before friends and relatives that their children are doctors, bankers, and lawyers. They are not as proud if their children are janitors and taxi drivers, but for someone to become a pastor, why, that is just a waste of time and talent. Of course, this line of thinking also appears in Westerners in various forms and degrees, as they also think in terms of honor and shame, even if their mentality is not as saturated and influenced by these categories.

Peter accepts the honor-shame mentality, but he reverses its application. Unbelievers regard Christ with hatred and scorn, and so to them it is shameful to trust in him. But what does God think? He is the only correct standard by which all things are judged, and he has made Christ the cornerstone of all true faith and worship. Those who believe in him "will never be put to shame," but "the honor is for [them] who believe." As for "those who do not believe," it is this very stone that they have rejected that trips them up, and causes them to stumble and fall. To them is the shame and dishonor.

Therefore, the greatest honor that has come upon my family is that God has chosen me and converted me, and in addition to this, that he has separated me to serve him in the ministry.

I am the greatest honor that God has ever attached to the Cheung family. Members of my family should not be ashamed of my faith as a Christian and my profession as a minister. But I cannot say the same about them, that is, those who do not believe – they are an embarrassment to me. I regard their unbelief with great disdain and shame.

Some Christians might feel strange and uncomfortable to hear me say this, perhaps for a similar reason that many translators select an inferior rendering for verse 7. And this is precisely why I must say it, because this is Peter's point, so that until a person can apply it this way to his own situation, he probably does not believe it at all. Once we renew our minds and adjust our thinking toward this direction, the benefits of this teaching to those enduring persecution from unbelievers becomes evident, and requires no elaboration.

The only thing to add is that when we speak in this manner about the honor of faith, we are not boasting in ourselves, since our faith did not arise from our own holiness or wisdom, but it came from God's sovereign grace. We believe because God has chosen us in his mercy and has caused us to believe by his power. So when we talk like this, we are boasting about what God has done through Christ. As it is written, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). In fact, the Christian who never boasts this way – that is, from the perspective of what God has done in him, and to extol the works of God in his life – does not really understand or appreciate his salvation.

Peter calls the Christians "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (v. 9). The Greek word translated "people" here is *genos*, which means "race" (NASB). We have already discussed the priesthood of believers (see also Revelation 1:6 and 5:10). So he asserts that God's people are not Abraham's physical descendants, but Christians are the chosen *race*. God's priests are not the sons of Aaron, but Christians are the royal *priesthood*. And God's nation is not the earthly Israel, defined according to geography, but the church is his holy *nation* (Exodus 19:6).

Then, Christians are "a people belonging to God" (v. 9). Similar expressions are found in Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, Isaiah 43:21, and Malachi 3:17. It seems that Peter mainly has in mind the verse from Isaiah, since the next phrase "that you may declare the praises of him" parallels the Old Testament prophet, who says, "the people I formed for myself *that they may proclaim my praise*." The sense here is that God has chosen the Christians to be a special treasure for himself. Hillyer notes, "The corresponding Hebrew term is twice used of the personal treasure of a king, as distinct from the national revenues that he controlled (1 Chron. 29:3; Eccl. 2:8)."²²

Peter is obviously applying the promises and blessings that God gave Israel to Christians, or to the church. Of course, God never changed his mind or altered his program, but as we noted earlier, it has always been true that a person is saved, not by becoming a Jew outwardly, but by becoming a Jew inwardly – he has to become a Christian (Romans 2:28-29, 9:7-8). This has been the case even since the beginning – every natural Jew who refuses to become a Christian is no Jew at all, and will suffer eternal damnation just as readily as any non-Christian Gentile (Galatians 3:7, 29; Romans 4:11-12). Christians are a chosen

²² Hillyer, p. 71.

race of people, with exclusive blessings and privileges, not according to race, tradition, or geography, but according to faith. Verse 10 is an application of verses like Hosea 1:9 and 2:23, and reinforces the same idea.

It is not exactly correct to say that the Jews were the chosen people in the past, but now Christians are the chosen people. Rather, once we have defined our terms, it is more correct and precise to say that the chosen people – not the outward covenant community, but those chosen for salvation – have always consisted of Christians, and *only* Christians. The difference is that most Christians used to come from the Jews in the past, but now God makes Christians out of people from all races and all nations. In contrast, non-Christians have never been God's people, whether in the past or present, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, and even when some of them have infiltrated the covenant community.

Christians have been called "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (v. 9). Again, this reflects Peter's unflattering view toward the unbeliever's condition as well as the magnitude of the grace of redemption. The non-Christian dwells in darkness, both intellectually and morally. But God has brought the Christian out of darkness and into the light of knowledge and holiness. This is a recurring metaphor in the New Testament (Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:6, 6:14; Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

To recapitulate, at the beginning of this chapter, we considered what our passage says about Christ and what it says about the unbelievers. Then, we spent a great deal of time on what it says about the Christians. They are living stones that are being built into a spiritual house. They are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation – a people that is God's special treasure, and whom he has called out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The passage mentions two things that Christians have been redeemed by God to do. First, they are to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (v. 5). We have already discussed this. Second, believers are to "declare the praises of him who called" them (v. 9). The word translated "praises" is *aretas*. The English translations attempt to capture different aspects of what the word means, and they have done so in two main ways. The first takes the word as referring to the "excellent qualities" of God (GWT), and thus the NASB has "excellencies" here. The second observes contemporary pagan usage of the word as well as the context of Isaiah 43:21, from which Peter obtains the phrase, and so concludes that the word refers to God's actions and miracles. Thus the RSV offers the translation, "wonderful deeds," and the REB reads, "glorious deeds."

The God of Isaiah 43:21 is the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt with signs and wonders, and he is the one who would bring them out of Babylon, where they were held captive. In our passage, he is the one who called believers out of darkness into his wonderful light. Therefore, the "praises" that we are to declare would no doubt include the mighty acts that God performed in redeeming us from death, sin, and hell. It would include his eternal decree to redeem his chosen ones, and the fulfillment of this decree in Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

The phrase also calls attention to the fact that, although we are the one needing and receiving salvation, redemption is ultimately not about us, but about God. Back in Isaiah 43, God says that he would blot out transgressions "for my own sake" (v. 25). This idea is consistently taught throughout the Bible (Psalm 25:11, 79:9; Ezekiel 20:9, 36:22; Ephesians 1:6).

In other words, our theology of salvation must be *consistently* God-centered and not man-centered. It is not enough to acknowledge that the reason for our election rests within God's sovereign will alone, and not in our own inherent worth and merit. We must also affirm that, although God does love us and intend to benefit us through redemption, the ultimate end or purpose for which God saves us is for himself and not for us.

Some have taught that it is in a sense appropriate for believers to adopt a sanctified hedonistic attitude toward the Christian life, for God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. However, the biblical basis for this assertion is questionable. Moreover, such a principle brings our *immediate* focus upon our own satisfaction, even though the satisfaction is supposedly enjoyed within the context of faith, and the ultimate goal is allegedly to glorify God.

It is far better to say that *both* our immediate focus and ultimate goal must be to glorify God. If a Christian cannot live a fulfilling and productive life with this attitude, it just means that he is either not a believer at all, or that he still needs to grow in maturity and sanctification. The solution is not to change the biblical principle. This other teaching almost makes the glory of God a by-product of our satisfaction, even though it is allegedly the real ultimate end. Also, it makes our satisfaction based on something other than the glory of God. That is, we are not satisfied because God is glorified; rather, God is glorified because we are satisfied, and we are satisfied because of *something else*. On the other hand, the biblical principle makes our satisfaction a by-product of God's being glorified. If God is not glorified, we will never be satisfied.²³

It is true that the teaching encourages us to delight *in God*, and in itself this is correct. But again, to say that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him diverts our *immediate* attention from God's glory. Those who have studied the presentations and defenses of Christian Hedonism will protest that this is a misrepresentation of the teaching, since it does affirm the place of self-denial and sacrifice. The problem is that at the points where the presentations and defenses of this teaching are biblical, they invariably make it inconsistent to still call it a form of hedonism. Failing to notice this, my comments would appear to be a misrepresentation.

To offer a rather simplistic analogy, if we say that a form of "atheism" fails as a system of thought because it does not believe in God, but then it defends itself by showing that it does

²³ Here I am referring to satisfaction in a difference sense. That is, even if God is not glorified, we can still be satisfied *in him*, although we will not be satisfied about the general situation. It would make the text more precise but too cumbersome to say "satisfied in him" or "satisfied in general" in every instance. Notice that this does not affect the point I am making, which is that we cannot make God's glorification a by-product of our satisfaction.

believe in God, then even if it succeeds in defending itself against the charge, it can no longer consistently call itself a form of atheism.

The least we can say is that the teaching is poorly expressed, to the point that it becomes misleading and unbiblical. There are better ways of teaching the biblical elements in this teaching without adopting its perspective, emphasis, and gimmicky expressions. In any case, we must have a *truly* God-centered theology of salvation – not one that is just *ultimately* God-centered, but one that is God-centered *at every point*.

Commentators regard verse 11 as the beginning of the second major portion of Peter's letter. There is no need to dispute this, but we are considering verses 11 and 12 along with verses 4-10 because it is important to note the connection between the two major sections, that the second is based on the first. Peter calls the Christians "aliens and strangers in the world." Why are they aliens and strangers? It is because they have been called out from the world. He tells the Christians to "abstain from sinful desires"? Why must they abstain? It is because they are priests of God, so that they must engage in that which is holy and avoid that which is profane.

One of the major issues that Peter writes to address is how Christians should respond to the slanderous accusations coming from the unbelievers (v. 12). Some of these accusations relate to the seemingly subversive nature of the faith, and it is concluded that Christians are unruly individuals that would overturn the established institutions of government and family.

Christians, of course, must be prepared to offer a verbal explanation of their beliefs and actions whenever the situation arises (1 Peter 3:15). But the other aspect of our response is to constantly "live such good lives among the pagans" (v. 12) that it will become obvious that their accusations are false, so that "they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (v. 12). The idea here is that our good conduct will contradict their slander and help remove the obstacles to faith in the unbelievers, so that some of them will be converted and believe the gospel.

Nevertheless, our good conduct is not a mere outward display, as Peter says that we must first abstain from sinful desires, "which war against your soul." True religion always deals with the inner man first, and the outward conduct is a natural reflection of the inward condition. Here Peter points to a crucial aspect of our sanctification. Sinful desires, or lusts, war against our soul. They seek to capture it, to corrupt it, and to destroy it. Every Christian must confront this inward reality. Prior to our conversion, we were enslaved by them, but now we have the power to "abstain" (v. 11). The sense here is to continually avoid and keep away from something.

As Christians, we are as holy priests living among a profane populace. It should be our constant concern to remain in purity and to avoid contamination. We do this not only for the sake of self-preservation, but knowing that we represent God, Christ, and the gospel before the world. So our greatest concern is to counteract the people's slander against the Christian faith by magnifying the work of God in our lives. Rather than to disgrace him

with shameful living, we must always seek to make him look "big," and to make him look good before the pagan world. It is for this that God has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 PETER 2:13-17

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

There is a central purpose to Peter's letter – it is to encourage and instruct Christians who would face harsh persecution and unjust treatment at the hands of unbelievers. Until now, he has been testifying to the greatness of the salvation that his readers have received – that is, about what God has done, about what he has made them in Christ, and about how all of this has made a difference between them and the unbelievers. This provides the Christians with the necessary theological perspective from which they can understand and endure their sufferings. It also provides the foundation for the rest of the letter, as Peter now turns to consider how Christians ought to behave within specific situations and relationships.

He prominently addresses three items, namely, the believers' relationship to government (2:13-17), to masters (2:18-20), and to spouses (3:1-7). Of course, believers also function in spheres other than those Peter mentions; however, keep in mind that he is writing to instruct them on how to think and behave in the face of persecution, and one form of persecution is slander, or false accusations about what the Christians believe and how they behave. It could be that Peter is especially concerned about the false accusations regarding the Christians' view toward human authority, that the Christian faith has been misinterpreted as a religion that stirs up rebellion in its adherents.

Some false accusations are especially dangerous, such as those that portray Christians as lawless and unruly troublemakers, or even insurrectionists plotting to overturn the existing government. When circulated and believed, these false ideas about the faith would naturally lead to harsher forms of persecution, including the state's official opposition. Then, for the believers, what is even worse is that these false accusations attack God's honor, our chief concern. Therefore, although wicked men will always slander the faith, believers must seek to minimize the damage and even glorify the Lord by their holy speech and conduct.

We begin with verses 13 and 14: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right."

The injunction refers to "every authority instituted among men" (or NASB: "every human institution"), and not only those that Peter would specify. Thus we can extend it to other authority figures such as parents, teachers, employers, and church leaders. The proper application requires a degree of care and precision, since the various authorities wield different types and levels of power. Their spheres of authority are defined according to biblical precepts and legitimate inferences from them.

The verb translated "submit" is originally a military term meaning to arrange or place under the authority of another. For this word to mean what it means, obedience is naturally implied. One submits to authority, so that one obeys that authority. Why we need to mention this at all will become clear when we come to 3:1, where Peter speaks about the submission of the wife to her husband. Right now our focus will turn to submission – and obedience – to the civil government.

At the time that Peter wrote, "the king" would have been the emperor Nero, who ruled from AD 54 to 68. According to history, he was a fair ruler for the first five years, perhaps influenced by Seneca. But afterward he threw off all restraints. In biblical discussions, he is most often remembered for the brutal persecution that he unleashed upon the Christians.

Nevertheless, Peter states that believers are to submit even to such a one, "as the supreme authority" of the land. Of course, in absolute terms, only God is "supreme" over all things. But Peter has already narrowed the discussion to "human institutions," so that he is speaking about the civil authorities, their relationship to one another, and their relationship to the citizens. And from this perspective, the king or emperor is indeed the supreme authority, and believers should honor him as such.

Unlike God, who exercises constant and direct control over all things, it is impossible for a human ruler to have a direct hand in all that occurs under him. It is true that God himself delegates authority to his creatures, but this is not because he could not manage without their assistance, nor does this mean that his creatures can function without his active power and control at every moment. But a human ruler *must* divide his responsibilities and delegate authority, since he is limited in every way.

Thus under the king or emperor, there are "governors" (v. 14) assigned to specific territories. This is the title of Pilate (Matthew 27:2), Felix (Acts 23:24), and Festus. These are "sent by him" – the king – "to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right." There is no need to assume that this constitutes the complete description of what human government is supposed to accomplish. Peter is instructing believers on how they should think and behave when faced with the accusation that Christians are anti-government, a subversive group of anarchists that have no respect for the established authority. It is appropriate, therefore, for Peter to discuss human government relative to its role in responding to those who do wrong and those who do right.

The word for punishment here carries the connotation of retribution and vengeance. There are those who think that we should focus on reforming and "curing" the criminals, Peter does not express any interest in that. Whatever the state does with its criminals, it must be

a top priority to punish them. Deterrence is an intended effect, as those who do wrong are supposed to fear the authorities (Romans 13:3-4). Some argue that punishment does not deter, but this is only because the modern examples cited include no actual punishment – no painful and destructive acts of vengeance against the criminals.

However, even those who affirm that deterrence is possible must not make punishment a solely practical affair, since again, the idea is retribution – to make the criminals suffer for the wrong that they have done. On the one hand, the public official acts on behalf of the society to protect the common good (Romans 13:4). But he is also God's representative to give wrongdoers a small foretaste of hell, where there will be only vengeance, and no chance to repent or reform.

Many people think that Scripture teaches against the very *principle* of revenge, but the opposite is true – it insists on it as the necessary demand of justice. As Paul writes, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you" (2 Thessalonians 1:6, NASB). What Scripture does teach is that it is not up to the offended individual to execute judgment upon the wrongdoer, and thus elsewhere Paul writes, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

So God is not saying, "Do not take revenge, because revenge is wrong." Rather, he tells us, "Justice demands revenge, but you must *let me* do it." Then, for the sake of justice and order, God has established human government and authorized public officials to punish wrongdoers in a limited measure. Human abilities and methods can never exact upon a criminal what he truly deserves. Even execution kills only the body, but God can and will do much more.

In fact, from what God has commanded human government to do to criminals, we see a dim reflection of what he plans to do to all non-Christians in the life to come. If this is the kind of government that he establishes, and if this is the kind of treatment he orders for criminals, what horrors will sinners face in hell? Surely this is an apt analogy for preachers to declare the justice and the wrath of God, and to proclaim the only way of escape in Jesus Christ.

The government also has the positive function "to commend those who do right" (v. 14). Some commentators doubt that this portion of the verse could apply to the original readers of Peter's letter, or for that matter, to Christians living under any form of secular government. It is unlikely that Christians would receive praise from human authorities that are hostile to their faith. At least one scholar writes that Christians should not care about it. Along with this is the observation that the phrase is perhaps part of the instruction given to governors at the time, or that Peter is reflecting how the governors' function is described by the culture.

The above line of thinking is irrelevant, and misses the point of the text. First, whatever the source for verse 14, the two aspects of a public official's responsibilities are cited by Peter as a basis for the Christian's submission. Second, the very purpose of the command

is to contradict the negative ideas that non-Christians believe about the faith and its adherents.

So to note that the government might be hostile against Christians is precisely the reason, within this context, to observe that its function ought to be to punish those who do wrong *and* to commend those who do right, *so that* the Christians should not do wrong but do right. Whether we can expect the government (or any human institution) to do what it ought to do is a separate question, and one that we will address as we continue with Peter's letter.

In any case, here we note that Christians are not only to refrain from becoming criminals, but they are to be model citizens, so that they may make a positive impression upon society on behalf of the faith.

Now, Peter refers to the two offices of king and governor because this reflects the Roman system of government that he and his readers operate under. But the application goes beyond the Roman system and beyond the original historical setting, since the principle is that believers must submit to every human institution (v. 13).

That said, it is true that, as citizens, Christians have different rights under different forms of government. At times these rights permit believers to influence policy, air grievances, and protest injustice (Luke 18:3). These rights are built-in to the system of government that they live under, and to take advantage of them does not signal rebellion. Nevertheless, Christians must remain true to the principle of submission to authority and exercise these rights in a cooperative and orderly fashion.

On the other hand, Christians living under an oppressive system cannot pretend that they are living under a democracy, for to do so would amount to subversion. How should believers behave in such a situation? Should they suffer injustice? The possibility has never occurred to some Christians, especially those who seem to understand nothing but democracy, and who tend to complain, protest, and grumble all they want in every sphere of their lives, not just when it comes to the government, but also in their families and their churches. Submission is foreign to them because they are infatuated with their "rights."

Of course, it is not that democracy produces rebellion, but it does less to suppress it. The point is that Christians with a western and democratic mentality should do more to examine themselves in this area, and become more conscious and deliberate about submitting to authority.

Commentators hurry to mention that there are exceptions to Peter's instruction, that there are instances when civil disobedience is biblically justified. However, if we mention it at all, we must not rush into this phase of our discussion, because Peter's emphasis in this passage is not disobedience, but obedience to the government.

Although they acknowledge that these instances would be the exceptions to usual Christian behavior, several commentators devote considerable effort in citing examples and scenarios in which Christians should disobey the government. This is typical of those who

are nervous about a given biblical teaching. Consider those who emphasize the exception clause (Matthew 5:32) to Christ's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, when his own emphasis is the opposite, that "what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).²⁴ It is proper to emphasize an exception when the target audience fails to acknowledge it, but it is unlikely that the intended readers of these publications would have much trouble opposing authority. Most of them need to learn submission.

With this in mind, it is true that at the moment Peter is focusing our attention on the proper function of human government, that it is established "to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right" (v. 14). Under the control of evil and godless men, a government will fail to fulfill this function, and it might even do the opposite – that is, to punish those who do right and commend those who do wrong. However, as Peter will soon point out, an unjust government is not necessarily to be disobeyed. Instead, he calls us to suffer under it.

So if there are exceptions to the Scripture's command to obey human government, the principle for determining such instances should be carefully defined. We will first consider an instance when Peter himself disobeyed the authorities. When he, along with John, were commanded "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18), they replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (v. 19-20).

Of course, the phrase "judge for yourselves" is an expression that does not necessarily imply submission to the hearer's opinion. Instead, it indirectly asserts that the speaker's position is evidently correct, as when we say, "You decide" or "You tell me!" Indeed, the apostles were not waiting for a verdict, since they said, "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." To paraphrase, they were saying, "It is evident that we should obey God rather than to obey you. So, although you have told us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, we must continue anyway." Later, the apostles were brought before the high priest, who confronted them and said, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (5:28). They answered, "We must obey God rather than men!" (v. 29).

Several examples appear in Daniel. Although the Jews were under the rule of a pagan king, they submitted and served under him. However, when they were told to worship idols, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused. They were thrown into a blazing furnace (Daniel 3). Later, when they were forbidden to petition or worship any god or man except the king, Daniel disobeyed and continued his daily prayers to the one true God. He was thrown into a lions' den (Daniel 6). God delivered his people in both cases, but the most relevant point for our purpose is that they had the same reason that Peter had for disobeying human authority.

²⁴ For more on Christ's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, see Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

It is clear from these examples that the time to disobey human authority is when to obey man means to disobey God. When a human authority issues a law that is not only inconsistent with God's commands and precepts, but that requires believers to neglect or violate them, then we must disobey the law. That is, we disobey human authority not just when we prefer not to obey it, but when we are forbidden to obey it by the command of God.

Scripture's teaching on submission to human authority is not limited to the civil government but to all human institutions (2:13), and the exception is also stated in general terms, that we must obey God rather than man when the two are in conflict (Acts 5:29). Therefore, the same principle applies to all situations in which we must deal with human authority, such as the relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, and church leaders and church members.

This is a good place to say something about divine command ethics. This system of ethics affirms that right and wrong are defined by God and revealed to us through his commands. Thus we may affirm that it is immoral to commit murder just because God has said, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

One philosopher notes, "The chief objection to the theory is that dependence on divine commands would make morality unacceptably arbitrary. According to divine command ethics, murder would not be wrong if God did not exist or existed but failed to forbid it."²⁵ This statement summarizes the objection,²⁶ and we cannot expect from it all the details that would be included in a philosophical treatise. However, since the objection is fundamentally indefensible and not just flawed in its details, my response will apply to any expression of the objection that is based on the above line of reasoning.

First, the objection fails to define "arbitrary." The word can refer to randomness or capriciousness on the one hand, but also absolute authority on the other. Then, it fails to explain why it is wrong for a system of ethics to be "arbitrary." If there is a problem with a system of ethics that is arbitrary in the former sense, why is there a problem with the latter sense?

Second, the objection already presupposes a system or standard of ethics other than divine command ethics, and by which it judges divine command ethics. Notice that it challenges divine command ethics based on whether this system would necessarily make murder wrong, when whether murder is wrong is precisely one of the questions that a system of ethics should answer.

Here it is assumed that murder is wrong and then a system is evaluated by the assumption. That is, a person who makes such an objection is not seeking a system to define right and

²⁵ Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, second edition (Cambridge University Press, 1999), "Divine Command Ethics," p. 240-241.

²⁶ Note that the statement comes from a dictionary of philosophy in which the writer is explaining the objection rather than making the objection.

wrong for him, but he is seeking a system to explain and justify what he already thinks. Therefore, as a challenge against divine command ethics, the objection begs the question.

This is a common error in arguments and discussions about ethics, so that if a system does not condemn murder by necessity, then for this reason alone it could be considered wrong. However, to reason this way, a person must first establish that murder is wrong, and once he has already done this, he already has his ethical system. Many believers also succumb to this faulty line of reasoning, and so they argue as many do, for example, that a religion that condones or even commands violence, such as Islam, must be a false religion. But this also begs the question.

The problem is that ethics cannot be judged by ethics. The proper foundation for ethics can be established only by first dealing with metaphysics and epistemology. Once we settle the questions concerning the nature of reality and knowledge, then we can settle the questions on ethics.

One prominent Christian apologist made the statement that unless God is presupposed, an objective standard of ethics is impossible. To this an atheist philosopher responded, "So what? Then let us have no objective standard of ethics." This Christian apologist was accustomed to emphasizing biblical theism as the precondition for an objective standard of ethics, perhaps because he thought that to focus on ethics would immediately bring to the surface the relevance of the debate about the existence of God.

Of course he was correct in asserting that biblical theism is the necessary precondition for an objective standard of ethics. However, it is unwise to make this the thrust of our argument for biblical theism. It could give the impression that we believe in God *because* we affirm a particular view of ethics or *because* we affirm the necessity of ethics, rather than the other way around. Or, to say it another way, we should not give the impression that we are using our ethics to determine our metaphysics and epistemology rather than the other way around.

This applies to both our defense and refutation. So, for example, we should say that Islam is wrong not because it commands its followers to deal in violence with its detractors, but it is wrong for them to do so because Islam itself is a false religion, and a false religion is false not because of its ethics, but because of its metaphysics and epistemology. If we must use ethics as an illustration or as a starting point – that is, the starting point of the conversation, and not the logical starting point of our belief system – we must clearly and quickly point out that our view of ethics is derived from our metaphysics and epistemology, namely, biblical theism and biblical revelation.

There are those who believe that ethical dilemmas can occur within the divine command system of ethics. This is when we face situations in which two divine commands appear to demand contradictory responses. That is, in an ethical dilemma, one divine command appears to demand one response, but at the same time this response appears to be forbidden by another applicable divine command, and which demands a contradictory action. The question is, when two divine commands appear to contradict, which one should we obey?

This is what makes our discussion on divine command ethics relevant to our passage. Our case involves a conflict between divine and human authorities, with divine authority on the one side (Christ, Scripture, etc.), and a human authority functioning by divine authority on the other (human institutions). But before we address this, let us first consider a situation in which each side of the apparent conflict directly involves a divine command.

Here is a favorite test case, or mental experiment: Suppose a person comes up to you with a deadly weapon demanding you to disclose the location of another person, whom he intends to murder. It appears that two moral duties apply in such a situation. First, there is the duty to preserve the life of another. But if you lie to divert the man from his target, then it seems that you would be violating your duty to tell the truth. To put this negatively, on the one hand, you are forbidden to contribute to the unjust death of another person, and on the other hand, you are forbidden to lie.

A number of solutions and perspectives have been proposed. Among them, a favorite one is called "graded absolutism." It affirms that there is an absolute standard of ethics, and this standard is revealed to us in God's commandments. To transgress God's law is to commit sin; however, some moral duties are greater than others. Then, it proceeds to acknowledge that there are situations in which moral duties genuinely contradict one another. In these cases, a person must choose the "greater good," and when he does so, he is counted as righteous, and the fact that he violates the lesser commandment in order to fulfill the greater one does not count as sin.

When applied to our test case, according to graded absolutism, in order to fulfill the duty to preserve life, you would be morally obligated to lie. In fact, it would be a sin not to lie. Amazingly, many Christians consider this line of thinking a good solution to moral dilemmas. But there are several major problems with it.

First, graded absolutism is unbiblical, and permits men to sin. Although it claims to be a form of absolutism, in reality it is just a form of relativism. Moreover, it avoids sin by redefining it, and not by obeying God's commands. Scripture acknowledges that some commandments are greater than others, but it never acknowledges that they could ever contradict one another, nor does it say that we are to follow only the greater ones when they seem to contradict. When Jesus speaks of "the more important matters of the law," he adds, "You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" (Matthew 23:23). And when he refers to the first and second greatest commandments, it is not to make the point that they are to be obeyed instead of the lesser ones. Rather, he adds, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:40). In both cases, he acknowledges a ranking among God's commandments only to insist that we should obey all of them.

Second, graded absolutism is unnecessary, because it deals with false dilemmas. Using the above test case as an example, there are many more options other than to lie or not to lie. By the biblical principle permitting one to defend himself and to defend others, the person faced with the decision could try to subdue the would-be murderer. Or, he could outright

refuse to disclose the location of the intended victim and accept the consequences – whether injury, torture, or death. Depending on the situation and the many variables that are at play, a number of other options could be open to the person confronted with the decision. Of course he could even choose to lie! But instead of defining it away, let us still call it sin.²⁷

Third, graded absolutism is unbelieving, in that it doubts the wisdom of God's revelation and providence. Many situations appear to be moral dilemmas only because we insist on doing God's job for him. This is when we judge for ourselves the best outcome and then manipulate the situation to attain it. Rather than obeying God's commandments as they have been revealed to us, we attempt to predict the consequence of obeying each of them, judge the desirability of each outcome, rank our moral duties accordingly (that is, not according to revelation but according to the projected outcome), and then make the one on the top of our list the highest obligation, excusing ourselves from obeying the rest.

There are numerous occasions in which I would give someone a set of clear instructions only to find him do something quite different because he thought that his way was better or that it produced a better outcome. Someone like this often expects to be commended for his creativity and resourcefulness, but what I see is someone who is rebellious, and who cannot follow simple instructions. What I see is someone that I cannot trust, since I can never know whether I will get what I ask for from him.

The problem is that, whereas I know precisely what I want when I make the instructions, I do not tell the person everything that is on my mind. And why must I exhaustively explain every request to a person, if he could perform the task perfectly just by doing what he is told? If I ask for a kitchen knife, I do not want someone to give me a gun just because he thinks that it would make a better weapon – perhaps I just want to make dinner. And if I

²⁷ As for Rahab, Scripture does not commend her for lying anymore than it commends her for being a prostitute. It commends her faith, and only her faith. In Hebrews 11, all it says is, "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient" (v. 31). It commends her because she "welcomed the spies," and not because she lied to save them. Her faith involved hearing and believing, and then acting according to her faith in the God of Israel (see Joshua 2:8-13).

So Scripture affirms the positive aspect of what she did, but it does not give us a direct interpretation on the negative aspect of lying. However, from the Ten Commandments and all other portions of Scripture, we must interpret Rahab act of lying as sinful. Remember that she was a prostitute in a pagan nation, under a pagan religion, and she only heard "rumors" about this nation of Israel and its God. She was not accustomed to the commandments of God, and indeed, even the Israelites had trouble obeying them. This is not to excuse her, but to let us see that she did the only thing that she knew to do out of her faith. It was an immature and ignorant faith, but it was faith as far as it went. The lying was never commended, nor was it even mentioned afterward.

The case of Rahab is often cited to support graded absolutism (or other forms of relativism), but notice that whereas our interpretation draws from actual texts from Scripture (that lying is sinful, etc.) and actual silences from Scripture (that it does not commend her for lying, etc.), to use Rahab to support graded absolutism, one must first assume graded absolutism already. That is, since the Scripture never commends her for lying, to use her as an example to support graded absolutism, one must interpret her case from the viewpoint of graded absolutism, and infer without actual warrant that the Bible's praise of her faith as inclusive of her lying or that the lying was not counted as sin.

ask for a gun, I do not want someone to give me a nuclear bomb just because it could cause greater destruction – perhaps I just want to hunt a bear. If I ask to have my photograph taken, I do not want someone to paint my portrait just because it has more artistic value. Perhaps I do not care about artistic value – perhaps I just need the photograph to renew my passport.

A person who often gets creative with straightforward instructions sometimes puts great effort into performing the task – *his way*, that is – but in reality he is useless and unreliable. He takes great pride in his work, partly because he gets creative with it and invests himself into it, but he fails to perform what has been asked of him. So he is reprimanded, but because he is thoroughly self-centered in his perception, he considers himself unjustly accused and becomes indignant.

Likewise, graded absolutism is nothing but creative rebellion. Scripture indicates which moral duties are greater and lesser, and therefore provides an objective (God's viewpoint) way to determine moral priorities – not to excuse us from the lesser duties, but to determine the degree of guilt and the severity of the punishment deserved when we disobey. But graded absolutism always takes more than this to make a decision when confronted with what it perceives to be a moral dilemma. It relies heavily on the person's human judgment to predict the outcomes of his actions, at times far from his immediate control and involvement, then to relate these outcomes to the applicable commandments, and then to choose the appropriate actions based on the ranking of the commandments. It has no confidence in God's wisdom in giving these commandments in the first place, and it takes his providence out of the picture altogether. In other words, it assumes that we are smart and God is stupid, and that we are in control while God is helpless.

The correct solution is simple. Rather than predicting the outcomes of my actions and then choosing which commandments to obey on that basis, my immediate responsibility and attention is to God's commandments, and I leave it up to the Giver of these commandments to take care of the outcomes. He knew what kind of world we live in and he knew what he was doing when he gave these commandments. It is not up to me to make things come out "right" when I might not even know what he wants out of the situation or why he wants it. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Our duty is to "follow *all the words* of this law," and not to follow what we determine to be the right course of action by predicting what would happen if we indeed follow all the words of this law.

Even when we follow this biblical and straightforward principle, there will still be difficult moral decisions. However, they will be difficult not because we must resolve moral dilemmas generated by divine commands that contradict one another – that never happens. Rather, one difficulty lies in the continual effort to attain a faithful and precise understanding of God's commandments and their implications for our thoughts and behavior. And the other difficulty is in the continual struggle against sin, exhibited in the tendency to think that we know better than God (as in graded absolutism), as well as in the tendency to outright refuse to do what we know is right and to insist on doing what we

know is wrong. Moral decisions are often difficult not because there are so many dilemmas, but because there is so much sin and rebellion.

The above deals with the alleged conflict between two moral duties when one faces a situation in which each side could directly appeal to a divine command. We have seen that the conflict is in fact not generated by the divine commands themselves, but by the human factor. This is when people refuse to follow instructions as they are actually given, but instead they wish to choose which instructions they would follow and the way in which they would follow them depending on outcomes that they cannot really predict, and consequences that they cannot really control.

Now we will turn our attention to another type of so-called moral dilemmas, in which divine commands conflict with human commands. The alleged conflict arises because these human commands come from human authorities that are in turn established by divine authority.

This part of our discussion follows from our acknowledgment that there are exceptions to the obligation to obey these human institutions. These exceptions, however, are not justified by an approach like graded absolutism. So here is what we *do not* say: God commands one thing and man commands another, but God also commands us to obey this man, so that the two divine commands contradict one another. However, since God's command to obey God is greater than God's command to obey man, we will follow the former but violate the latter, only this violation does not count as sin in such a situation. This line of thinking acknowledges a genuine contradiction, a genuine dilemma, and resolves it by ranking the commandments and defining sin out of the way.

All our previous comments about graded absolutism apply here as well. As we have noted, this approach is unbiblical, unnecessary, and unbelieving. But there are several other specific observations that we can make about this type of conflicts, where human authorities that are in turn established by divine authority are involved. The additional factor of human authority at first seems to complicate the issue, but the solution is in fact just as plain.

Let us state the problem again. In the context of our passage, the human authority is the civil government. God commands us to obey the government, but what if the government then tells us to disobey God? Or, to consider another relationship, God commands us to obey our parents, but what if our parents tell us to disobey God? If it is just a case of divine authority against human authority, then the solution is obvious. Confusion occurs because the human authority is established by divine authority.

But the problem is the solution. That is, what at first appears to be the problem, namely, the observation that the human authority is established by divine authority, is in fact not the problem but the answer that we need.

We will take as an example the commandment to honor our parents, and we will suppose that we are in a situation in which our parents are telling us to disobey God. For this

commandment (to honor our parents) to truly contradict another divine command, we must have on the one hand, "Obey God, even if he contradicts your parents," and then on the other, "Obey your parents, *even if they contradict God.*" For there to be a genuine contradiction, God himself must state or imply the idea "even if they contradict God" in an instance or situation in which he delegates authority to a human institution over people.

However, if the context and intent for delegated authority is for the human institution to maintain God's program rather than to delegate authority just for the sake of delegating authority, then there is the opposite implication instead. That is, since human institutions receive their authority from God, it is implied that this authority does not include the power to command men to rebel against God. Therefore, when a human authority issues a command that contradicts divine authority, it does not generate a contradiction between the moral obligation to obey God and the moral obligation to obey the human institution, since at least in that instance, the human authority has gone beyond its assigned limits and the command that it gives thus lacks divine endorsement. The case, then, is not one of divine authority versus divine authority, but divine authority versus human authority.

In giving the Ten Commandments, God begins with the declaration, "I am the LORD your God...You shall have no other gods before me..." (Exodus 20:2-3), and so on. And it is under this context that he then gives the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother" (v. 12). Because the commandment appears under the declaration of God's exclusive deity and supreme power, it is implied that parental authority functions under the authority of God.

As Paul writes, "Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:1). Parental authority is not in itself absolute and independent, but it is derived from and dependent on the absolute authority of God. Thus when our parents command us to disobey God, we can refuse their command without facing a moral dilemma, since our moral obligation is to obey our parents in the Lord, and to obey our parents under the context of obeying the God who gave the Ten Commandments. A moral dilemma can only occur when we wrest the commandment away from its context and puts delegated authority on the same level with God's absolute authority.

Likewise, although the authority of the civil government is based on God's absolute authority, God never gave them the same absolute authority. Therefore, when a government commands us to disobey God, we can refuse their command without facing a moral dilemma. We can say, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29) – not because we are choosing the greater good and receiving an exemption from the lesser good, but we are choosing good over evil. God has never given any human institution absolute authority; rather, by his absolute authority he has given various human institutions a derived and limited authority over men.

Admittedly, we have not answered every question and challenge posed to divine command ethics, but this is a commentary on First Peter after all. A fuller discussion on the subject will take us too far away from the immediate context of our passage, and therefore must be reserved for a more appropriate setting.

Peter has been telling his readers that they are to submit to every human institution (2:13). He will mention several of them as he continues his letter, but he begins with the king and his governors, or the civil government (v. 14). We can assume that the injunction is consistent with the purpose of his letter, which is to instruct and encourage those Christians who are facing persecution from the unbelievers.

So why does he mention submission to authority here? He has already indicated in verse 13 that it is "for the Lord's sake" that we are to submit under every human authority. Our allegiance does not finally belong to any human nation or government but to God. Neither do we recognize any human institution as possessing inherent or ultimate authority, but we know that its authority is derived and relative. We submit to human authority for the Lord's sake – that is, because he has established it, because he has commanded it, and because we have the duty and the desire to promote his honor.

Peter further explains the purpose and the effect of our submission in verse 15: "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." We should not infer from this that submission to government is for a purely pragmatic reason, or that submission is morally neutral in itself.

Paul writes in Romans 13:1-2, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." So we are bound by God's command to submit under the government even if such submission does not silence the people's slander about our faith. As he continues in the same passage, "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience" (v. 5). We submit not only for the practical effect, but "also because of conscience."

That said, Peter's letter intends to encourage and instruct Christians who would face false accusations, including their attitudes toward human government, and verse 15 mentions one effect of submission that corresponds to this purpose. Our response to false accusations is to contradict them not only by our words, but also by our actions. If it is said that our faith incites political unrest and even insurrection, then we must explain the teachings of our faith, which teaches that God is behind all human authority, and we must demonstrate this teaching by becoming model citizens of our countries and societies.

Peter describes these false accusations against the Christians as "ignorant talk" (v. 15). The word here simply means "ignorance" (KJV, NASB), but it is clear from the context that he is referring to an ignorance that is expressed in slander. And thus "ignorant talk" (NIV) and "ignorant charges"²⁸ are acceptable.

False accusations against the Christian faith never come from intelligent people, but from "foolish men" (v. 15). Again, Peter has a very low view of the non-Christians' intelligence.

²⁸ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 101.

These are stupid people who draw uneducated conclusions about the Christian faith. The Bible never wonders how smart people can believe stupid things – it realizes that *stupid* people believe stupid things. Neither is the Bible worried that so many intelligent and educated individuals reject the faith – *none* of them are intelligent and educated. If a person is a non-Christian, then he is stupid and unlearned. He is irrational and ignorant. There is no reason to think otherwise.

Therefore, all unbelieving questions, objections, and accusations are intellectual garbage. None of them are thoughtful or intriguing. All of them are foolish and laughable, and easy to answer. It remains that we may, and often should, accommodate their intellectual handicap and respond to them with great patience, reinforcing our verbal explanation with exemplary conduct. However, we do so "for the Lord's sake," and never because their challenges can put any real pressure on us.

Moreover, since false accusations come from the ignorance of foolish men, this means that we must never flatter unbelief. When unbelievers raise questions and objections, they never do so out of a love for God and a desire to know God. As long as they remain in unbelief, even a seemingly sincere and humble inquiry is in fact a "pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Yet many Christians begin their answers by saying, "That's a good question." But can any inquiry arising from unbelief really be a "good" question? Yes, we can answer any challenge that unbelievers throw at us, and we should often do it with patience and kindness. But every question that does not presuppose the supremacy of God and of Christ is an evil inquiry, a sinful question, a foolish objection – the ranting of a wicked moron.

For example, in light of what Scripture teaches about the nature of God, someone might protest, "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" (Romans 9:19). How many Christians have responded, "That's a good question"? But it is not a good question. Or, how many Christians have responded, "That's a difficult question. I am not sure I have the perfect answer to it, but let me explain the best that I can"? But it is not a difficult question. Rather than flattering the person, and before providing the simple and obvious answer, Paul rebukes him: "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Romans 9:20).

Therefore, although unbelievers might misinterpret our patience as weakness and timidity, may Christians never make the same mistake. No, when dealing with unbelievers, we always speak from a position of superior knowledge and authority. But we endure their insults and abuses "for the Lord's sake." As the stronger ones, we accommodate their weakness and incompetence so that God may be honored and glorified.

Although all non-Christians are stupid and sinful, and inferior in every way, believers must remain submissive to human institutions on account of the Lord. Thus Peter continues, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God" (v. 16). In Christ, we are free – among other things, we are free from the bondage of sin and the wrath of God. We are even free from the power of men, in the sense that human

institutions *in themselves* have no authority over us. We do not belong to them, and they cannot control our hearts and our destinies.

Here some commentators again discover paradox where there is none. They enjoy pointing out that Peter says we are to "live as free men" but at the same time "live as servants of God." To them, it is as if God is not God unless he speaks in paradox, and revelation is not profound enough unless it appears self-contradictory. But how frustrated we are at their incompetence! How indignant we are at their irreverence!

For verse 16 to even appear paradoxical – that is, for "live as free men" and "live as servants of God" to even appear to contradict – one must understand the freedom in "free men" as referring to a freedom *from God*, or an absolute freedom. Do these commentators really think that this is what Peter means? Does Peter even appear to be saying, "Live as men who are free from all things, yes, even free from God...but, live as servants of God as well"? Only then can we speak of a paradox or apparent contradiction.

Now, the context of the letter includes redemption, persecution, and submission. The freedom is relative to the immediate context of Peter's discussion, and not relative to all things including God. How twisted does a person have to be to see a paradox here? A paradox occurs when two things appear to clash. Where is the clash?

The point is that although we are citizens of heaven, along with all the rights and privileges that this entails, we cannot say, "I am seated with Christ in heavenly places, so that I am above all earthly authorities and institutions. Therefore, I can steal whatever I want, kill whomever I want, and ignore all human laws." This would be to use our freedom "as a cover-up for evil." Neither can we feign piety and say, "I submit to no man, but I will obey God alone," since it is God himself who has established these human institutions (Romans 13:1-2).

So, although we do not bow to men, as if they possess inherent and absolute authority over us, we submit to them "as servants of God," since God has ordained them to rule. On this basis, we may submit to even a pagan emperor or a pagan government without resistance and without inciting unrest. This is not to compromise our loyalty to God, but it is to live as servants of God, submitting to that which he has designed and established. Indeed, there are cases in which we must refuse to obey human authority – the principle for determining these exceptions has already been noted earlier.

Verse 17 consists of four phrases. The first is an aorist imperative, but the next three are present imperatives. The NIV makes the first a heading for the rest, and so it says, "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king." That is, loving believers, fearing God, and honoring the king fall under the command to show proper respect to everyone.

Commentators suggest that this is a false understanding of the verse, although some of their reasons are unconvincing. For example, Grudem observes that believers, God, and the king do not exhaust the "everyone" (*pantas*: "all people," "all men," "all persons") to which the

first phrase refers.²⁹ However, there is no reason to think that the three phrases must completely enumerate what "everyone" includes, rather than to simply give examples that are especially pertinent to Peter's context. So this reason is irrelevant to our discussion.

On the other hand, Grudem then points out that it is unnatural to include God in the category of "all men." A parallel usage of "all" that would include God is not found elsewhere in the New Testament.³⁰ This seems a much better reason for rejecting NIV's interpretation. When we also take into account other arguments, which we will not mention here, it seems best to understand the verse as conveying four commands.

Moreover, the word translated "show respect" in the first phrase is the same one for "honor" in the fourth. The NIV would make better English provided the first phrase is a heading for the other three, and if the first instance of "honor" means something more general than the fourth. But since both of these are improbable, the NKJV is preferable here: "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

In our context, to "honor all people" means that we are to respect each person relative to his position. By no means are we saying that we should show favoritism or flatter the rich and powerful. But as the verse itself indicates, to "honor all people" does not mean that we should treat every person in exactly the same way.

For example, the fear that is due to God is certainly not given to all people, and the submission that is shown to a king is not shown to others. However, this does not mean that we may disdain and mistreat those who apparently have no important earthly position in life, such as the beggars and the orphans. Neither may we treat unbelievers as if they are brutes and stones. We are, after all, to *honor* all people, and each person should be respected if for no other reason than that he has been made in the image of God (James 3:9-10).

The relationship among Christians is more intimate, and so Peter says, "Love the brotherhood." This love (*agapao*) is to be sincere, deep, and enduring. The word translated "brotherhood" (*adelphotes*) "describes family ties established by covenant relationship."³¹ It refers to the Christian community, and the family relationship that they now share – believers have been made brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, we call one another "brothers" and "sisters" in church, but the real test of whether we really believe this rests on whether we have this love that Peter is talking about. If we love other Christians less than we love our natural family, then the truth is that we regard the brotherhood as less than family. However, unless our natural family also belongs to the faith, we in fact have more in common with our spiritual family than our natural one. The natural family whose members hold to opposing spiritual commitments is divided, but believers are united in Christ. Paul writes, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). So, *honor* all people, and *love* the brotherhood.

²⁹ Grudem, p. 122.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hillyer, p. 82.

As expected, many deny that the command to "*Fear God*" includes the idea of terror, of being afraid. We have addressed this in connection with 1:17, noting that it means more than mere respect, reverence, and awe. Although our redemption through Christ removes the fear of ultimate doom, it does not – should not – remove all sense of terror, first generated by a recognition of God's majesty and transcendence in contrast to our creatureliness, and then even when God is considered as Father, a fear of his fatherly displeasure and discipline. Thus Robertson asserts that which few are willing to accept, that we are to *fear God* "in both senses of reverence *and dread*."³²

Although the Roman emperor claims to be divine, and is acknowledged as such by many, Peter does not tell his readers to regard him with the same holy fear that they should have toward God. Rather, just as he says to "Honor all people" at the beginning of the verse, now he writes, "Honor the king," as if to reduce him to the level of "all people." After all, the emperor is no God, but a mere man. He is to be honored, and honored as a king, but not feared as God.

That said, it remains that this is a positive command and we must not overemphasize its negative implication. In other words, here Peter instructs his readers to positively honor the king, and to do no less than this, even if the emperor is a godless pagan, and even if he is Nero.

³² Robertson, p. 102.

1 PETER 2:18-20

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

People are highly sensitive when it comes to the subject of slavery. Seeing how slavery could involve great cruelty on the one hand and great suffering on the other, perhaps they should be sensitive about it. However, sometimes they can get to the point where they will hear no arguments, make no distinctions, and refuse all discussions on the subject other than to affirm their understanding of slavery and their opposition to it. That "slavery" without qualification is evil has become a nonnegotiable assumption by which other ideas are judged, so that some have attacked the Bible on this subject concerning both what it does say and what it does not say about it. And to those Christians who have failed to make truth the starting point of their thinking, the subject can sometimes cause them great confusion and embarrassment.

Whenever we enter a discussion concerning a sensitive ethical or social topic, we must first keep in mind that metaphysics logically precedes ethics. That is, our view of reality is the necessary foundation to our view of morality. The truth that there is a God (and that it is inconceivable that there is no God, so that to affirm that he exists is merely to bring the necessary fact to our attention, and does not imply that it is possible to affirm that he does not exist), that he is the way that he is, that he has created all that there is, that there is spirit and there is matter, that he has foreordained all things, that he directly controls all things, that he knows all things, that so-called secondary causes in fact have no inherent causative power in themselves, that he is the sole standard of right and wrong, that he has made man in his own image, that he has decided to judge every person, and so on, all determine what we can deduce about ethics.

For example, we may consider the question, What kind of world is this in which murder is immoral? It is a world in which God reigns supreme, in which he is the creator of all things, in which he is the sole standard of right and wrong, in which he has made man in his own image, in which man has sinned and fallen, in which God has commanded man not to murder, and in which to murder is to attack God's image and to transgress God's command. In this kind of world, and admittedly the only kind of world that there is, murder is immoral. But in the fantasyland of the unbeliever, in which humans came about from an impossible process of evolution, or in which the world is explained by some other absurd fable, even if murder is undesirable for the victim, the unbeliever would have no solid reason to tell us why it is immoral.

So we must never begin with an ethical principle and then find a view of reality to match it. Neither can we take an ethical principle and test a worldview by it, since one would need a worldview before he can have an ethical principle in the first place. What happens is that when it comes to a sensitive ethical issue, people often make their view on the subject the nonnegotiable starting point, and then judge and filter everything else by it. The result is that they become blind to all arguments and distinctions, and when Scripture is involved, they are blind to its context, meaning, and application.

When it comes to slavery, we must again begin with a right view of reality. Assuming the work that we have done elsewhere, we can affirm that the only right view of reality is the biblical view.³³ Because all non-Christians have a false view of reality, they can assert nothing about slavery. Then, we must define what kind of slavery we are talking about. And again, this might sound strange to some, especially to those who are blinded by their sensitivity to the subject, but it is irrational to condemn slavery of all kinds and in all relationships, if for no other reason than that it is a privilege and a delight to be *God's* slave.

Now, the mention of slavery often invokes ideas connected with the situation in nineteenth-century America, and for many people, this is the only kind of slavery that they know about. However, Peter was writing to readers in the first century. Thus the same English word might refer to things that slightly or widely differ. Although the preceding comments about ethics and our current passage can certainly teach us something about how to interpret American slavery, we must instead focus on what Peter tells the slaves to do in verse 18, and then on the principle that gives rise to his instruction as stated in verses 19 and 20.

The word translated "slaves" here in the NIV, and translated "servants" in the KJV and NASB, is *oiketai* rather than the more frequent *douloi*, or bondslaves. There is really not an English term that gives us the exact meaning of the word – "slaves" seems too harsh and "servants" seems too weak³⁴ – and so it is best understood from a description of what these people were.

In earlier Roman history, slaves were acquired through conquest and kidnapping. By the first century, the slave population consisted of mainly the descendents of these slaves. Most slaves had been born into the households that they served. In our passage, Peter is addressing some of these household servants that have become Christians.

There were several kinds of slaves. The mining slaves labored under the worst conditions and accordingly had the shortest life spans. The situation for household slaves was more pleasant. They were not only unskilled individuals assigned to hard physical labor, but many of them were trained professionals responsible for important household duties. So these slaves could be doctors, teachers, musicians, manager of finances, and so on.

³³ See Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, and Captive to Reason*.

³⁴ Hillyer suggests "unfree house servants" (p. 83), and Grudem describes them as "semi-permanent [employees] without legal or economic freedom" (p. 124).

Household slaves were often well-treated. Many of them were considered trusted members of the family. They were usually paid for their service, and those who managed to save enough could purchase their own freedom. Some of the freed slaves even became quite wealthy. Thus household slaves often lived better lives and enjoyed greater prospects than free peasants. As Keener writes, "Economically, socially, and with regard to freedom to determine their future, these slaves were better off than most free persons in the Roman Empire."³⁵

So it would be wrong to think that all slaves lived under constant oppression and suffering. On the other hand, a slave was a slave. His service was not voluntary. He was not regarded as a full person, but as property, and he had no civil rights to protect his interests as an individual. Under Roman law, the head of a household could even execute his slaves. Thus the exact condition that a slave worked under depended on the kind of master he had. A demanding and unreasonable master could make a slave's life extremely difficult.

Christian teaching does not abolish the institution of slavery, but it does address the relationship between masters and slaves. On the one hand, it instructs the masters to treat their slaves well, and to regard the Lord as their common Master (Ephesians 6:9). On the other hand, Christianity does not simply favor those who are typically characterized as oppressed – many people who call themselves victims get into trouble because they are rebellious.

Slave uprisings were never successful but quickly crushed. Passive rebellion was more common, such as in the form of working slowly. Thus masters often complained that their slaves were lazy, especially when they were not being watched. But the biblical work ethic is superior, so that Paul writes, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart" (v. 5-6).

Applying this to the modern society, Scripture opposes the tendency to think that in a labor dispute the management is always at fault and that the workers are always oppressed. Scripture advocates justice for all – yes, even for the rich. The poor are not to be regarded as righteous just because they are poor, and the slaves are not blameless just because they are slaves. Being poor or even enslaved is not a sufficient defense for laziness, rebellion, or criminal activities.

A group of college students were asked to consider a real life case in which a man and a woman were dismissed from employment for having sexual relations on company premises and while they were on duty. The written company policy prohibited such behavior and granted management the right to terminate. In response, the couple sued to regain employment as well as for lost wages.

³⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 643.

An arbitrator was asked to settle the case, but the students were given the opportunity to write their own conclusions before reading the verdict. Almost all of them ruled against the management. In fact, I can recall only one (a Christian) who favored the management's decision. One reason that the students gave for ruling against the management included the tiresome and often fallacious "that's not fair" remark. But what was really unfair was that the company even had to explain and defend its decision. At any rate, unlike those college students, the real-life arbitrator had his sanity intact and ruled in favor of the management.

Paul suggests that a slave should gain his freedom if he is able to do so (1 Corinthians 7:21); otherwise, he says, "Don't let it trouble you" (v. 21). The primary aim of the gospel is not to incite political and social revolution – at least not directly – but to call out a people to be God's special treasure, and who would worship him in spirit and in truth (v. 22). Christian teaching does strike at perhaps the greatest evil within the institution of slavery, and that is the idea that some men are less than persons. It instead affirms that all men are made in God's image.

In Galatians 3:28, Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Of course, this much-cited verse from the Bible is also one of the most misused and abused. One cannot infer just anything he wishes from the statement. The verse affirms only that believers "are all one in Christ Jesus," so that *in Christ Jesus*, there is no ranking of persons in terms of race, status, and gender.

However, this says nothing about the racial, social, and sexual distinctions that remain. The verse is talking about equality in the context of justification by faith. It does not abolish or even address the natural institutions and relationships that exist in society, which God himself has established. Racial distinctions are still as clear as ever, only that one race is not favored above another in Christ. Paul tells the slaves to obey their masters, so he continues to recognize the institution of slavery as it exists in society. But slaves and masters are equal in Christ. Or, to speak in terms of the rich and the poor, in Christ the rich are not more favored than the poor, but this does not change the fact that the rich still have more money.

Accordingly, it is asinine to use this verse to argue for gender "equality" in institutions such as marriage and the church. Still less can we use it to defend a view that contradicts what God commands elsewhere in Scripture. For example, we cannot argue, "There is no male and female in Christ, therefore a wife does not have to submit to her husband." The verse cannot be applied beyond its context in such a manner. Also, Paul asserts the exact opposite elsewhere, that wives must submit to their husbands in everything, even as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24).

Moreover, once we wrest a verse like Galatians 3:28 from its context, then we cannot turn around and limit its application. In other words, if we take this verse out of its context so that we could use it to erase the gender distinction that we oppose in a given context, or in a given institution or relationship, then we cannot stop it from being applied to all institutions and relationships, and to all contexts – from the social to the ecclesiastical, and even to the physiological.

This results in all sorts of absurdities. True, the husband will no longer be the head of the wife, which is the intended purpose of misusing Galatians 3:28. But if this is inferred from "neither male nor female," then gender distinctions cannot suddenly reappear when the subject changes. Thus there can no longer be women's health clubs, women's restrooms, women's clothes, women's medicine, or even women's rights. There is no longer any need to protect women's welfare – people are people. There can no longer be fathers and mothers, but only genderless parents. For that matter, reproduction no longer requires a man and a woman, at least for Christians – since there is neither male nor female in Christ! – it just requires any two people.

If we base our doctrine and practice of gender "equality" based on Galatians 3:28, and apply it beyond its context, then the doctrine immediately self-destructs, and the practice immediately becomes irrelevant. This is because once we falsely apply Galatians 3:28 in such a manner, the topic itself disappears – there is "neither male nor female" in Christ. The point is that once we take the verse out of context and abuse it one way, we cannot then arbitrarily forbid other misapplications.

While Galatians 3:28 and other verses oppose racism, classism, and sexism in relation to how we must regard people's standing before God, they do not erase all distinctions concerning race, class, and gender. Neither do they eliminate roles and ranks in the society, the family, and the church. How Scripture addresses a given context must be settled separately using other biblical passages.

Of course men and women are equal in Christ, and this means that God does not save men more readily than he does women, and vice versa. They are all justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and women can believe just as readily as men can. Christians coming from one race is just as much justified, sanctified, honored, and blessed as Christians coming from another race. But this says nothing about their physiological distinctions, their roles in marriage, or even their places in the church. We must not distort Scripture and use it to overturn what God has said elsewhere in Scripture.

When it comes to ontology and soteriology, husbands and wives are without doubt equal. In terms of competence, the husbands will be better at some things, while at other times the wives will excel. However, in light of Ephesians 5:22-24, when it comes to authority and order in the family, there is no question but that the wives must submit to their husbands. Within the context of that passage, to deny this would in fact amount to a rejection of Christ's authority over the church. We marvel at how some people could love their gender pride more than Christ, so that they would even spit in his face in order to gain a sense of "equality" (sometimes superiority) with the leaders that God has ordained. But then, with a knowledge of Scripture about the human condition, sin should no longer surprise us.

These remarks about gender and marriage as they relate to Galatians 3:28 serve to illustrate the importance of the right use of Scripture, and that we must never take it out of context and use it to promote our favorite agendas. We must start with Scripture and be told about

how we should view slavery, rather than to start with a particular view of slavery and then interpret Scripture from such a viewpoint.

Also, we must keep in mind that God himself has ordained certain structures and institutions in human society, and Scripture's emphasis on the spiritual equality between people of various races, positions, and genders does not directly address the moral status of these structures and institutions. They must be considered separately, even if informed by the principle of spiritual equality in Christ.

Now we will turn our attention to verse 18. Addressing the household servants, Peter writes, "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh." For them to "submit" means to place themselves under the authority of their masters. Obedience is the necessary implication, and also part of the word's meaning. They are to submit with all "respect" (NIV, NASB, ESV). The word *phobos* refers to fear, and thus the KJV and NKJV have "with all fear," but New Testament teaching is such that only God is worthy of a sense of terror. Yet "respect" is probably too weak. One commentator suggests that Peter is trying to instill an attitude of "healthy apprehension of [the masters'] displeasure."³⁶

Some masters are "good and gentle" (KJV, NASB), but others are "harsh" (NIV, NKJV). Although "harsh" contrasts well with "gentle," the word *skolios* means "crooked," and metaphorically speaking, that which is morally perverse. The NASB says "unreasonable," and the ESV has "unjust." A word that conveys the moral crookedness or perversity of these wicked masters is to be preferred. Naturally, those masters who are morally perverse are often also harsh, unreasonable, and unjust. They might overwork and underpay their slaves, and subject them to brutal working conditions while holding them to unrealistic expectations, punishing and depriving those who fail to measure up.

Slaves who come under the authority of masters like these would necessarily experience tremendous suffering. Yet Peter says to obey them as well. Scripture does not teach a convenient and pragmatic ethic. It requires men to do what is commanded rather than what seems comfortable.

Upon learning what the Bible teaches about submission to authority, whether to the government, to church leaders, to parents, or to husbands, more than a few Christians tend to respond, "But within reason, right?" Or, they would sound a weak moan and mutter under their breathe, "Well, as long as they are reasonable." By "reasonable" they usually have in mind what is within the limits of *their* comfort and preference. But if they are the ones setting the limits, then there is really no true submission to authority.

Therefore, such a reaction is not different from outright rebellion in principle, only that it is far less honest. It makes one's subjective standard rather than God's command the line which even God-ordained authorities must not cross. This teaching is anathema to those who are obsessed with their personal rights. One can still seem to hear them wonder in

³⁶ Grudem, p. 125.

astonishment: "So you *are* saying that we should submit to unreasonable authorities?" The answer is YES.

Resistance to authority, of course, is part of man's fallen nature, and it appears within the context of all kinds of political climates and in connection with all kinds of philosophical trends. It is easier to submit to "good and gentle" masters who make realistic demands and who provide at least a minimal level of security and comfort. Perhaps for this reason, Peter does not comment on them any further. However, he finds it necessary to stress that submission applies even when the masters are crooked and perverse.

The very fact that he takes time to emphasize this shows that he is no naïve apostle, churning out moralistic platitudes without any awareness of the realities of life or the actual conditions of his readers. In other words, his instruction for the slaves to submit does not come under the assumption that they would all receive favorable treatment from their masters. There is no need to ask him, "But what about those who are harsh and unreasonable? What about those who are crooked and perverse?" He writes, "submit...also to those who are harsh."

Besides the tendency of a reprobate or unrenewed mind to resist authority, there is another reason why some believers need to be taught and reminded to submit under human authorities, even to those who are unwise and unjust. It has to do with the deep transformation that individuals undergo when they become believers.

Doubtless many of the slaves in Peter's time are destitute and beaten down, with no hope and no prospects. And even if those who are not severely oppressed are probably accustomed to the way things are. They might appear submissive, but mere compliance does not satisfy Peter's instruction to submit "with all respect" – it might simply mean that they lack the courage and the strength to put up a decent uprising.

But faith changes everything.

First, God has given Christians new status in Christ. They have been justified, sanctified, and adopted by the Most High. They have been made kings and priests in Christ, and now they are seated with him in heavenly places. Those with only a partial understanding of what has happened to them might think that their newfound dignity as Christians conflict with their lowly natural positions. But as mentioned, their spiritual exaltation does not necessarily demand a social revolution, or a tearing down of existing social structures.

Second, God has given Christians new power in Christ. Conversion involves much more than a shift in thinking, or the acceptance of a new philosophy. No, in conjunction with accepting the biblical system of belief, those who turn to Christ undergo tremendous spiritual and psychological changes. As the Scripture says, "The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person" (1 Samuel 10:6).

Christians are no longer limited to their own resources, but they are preserved through faith by the very power of God. From the Holy Spirit we receive joy, life, boldness, and supernatural power! He grants to us spiritual illumination and an awareness concerning God, his holiness, as well as human sinfulness, both in ourselves and in others. We become more sensitive to injustice, more indignant about it, and now we have the boldness to stand up against it.

Imagine what the faith of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit could do to the first-century slaves. No deprivation or oppression could suppress the acute moral sensibilities and the explosive spiritual power that God has produced in them. But they must be taught the proper way to interpret and react to the world. One pastoral concern, then, is to direct this otherworldly power in believers, and to ensure that their actions and reactions are informed by an understanding of God's verbal instructions as revealed in Scripture, so that they will use this new strength not to defy human authorities, but to obey them even in the face of oppression and injustice. They must be told what Peter writes in verse 16, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God."

In the previous passage (2:13-17), Peter begins with the instruction to submit to the government. After telling his readers what they are to do in verses 13 and 14, he proceeds to explain why they are to do it in verse 15, that is, the purpose or principle underlying the instruction that he has just given.

Likewise, in our current passage, Peter begins in verse 18 with the instruction that slaves are to submit to their masters, including those who are harsh and crooked. Then, in verse 19, he proceeds to explain the underlying purpose or principle behind this instruction. He writes, "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God."

As noted earlier, the fact that Peter instructs the slaves to submit to "those who are harsh" (v. 18) tells us he is aware that not all human authorities are good and kind. He acknowledges that slaves must sometimes face "unjust suffering." The "pain" of the unjust suffering refers to the sorrow or mental anguish generated by harsh treatment from the masters. Verse 20 refers to a "beating" that a slave might receive. There the word means to strike with the fist.

The question is how Christian slaves should respond when they come under such pressure. It is with this in mind that Peter says that even having morally perverse masters does not exempt them from submission. Rather, it is "commendable if a man" would endure the unjust punishment. Although he is addressing the slaves, in stating the principle he refers to "a man," that is, any person. Thus it is not just commendable for slaves to endure unjust suffering, but the principle has a wider application.

Nevertheless, it is not possible for non-Christian slaves, or non-Christians in general, to practice this principle and become commendable before God for it. Peter adds that it is commendable for a person to endure unjust suffering if he does so "because he is conscious

of God." There is a grammatical difficulty in the Greek phrase, but commentators generally agree that it refers to an awareness of God's presence, an understanding and knowledge of his ways, and a deliberate obedience to the teachings of Christ in the midst of unjust suffering.

There are at least two inferences that we can make from this. First, it is meaningless for non-Christians to endure unjust suffering, since when they do so, it is always because of something other than to please and to honor God. Second, it is not commendable even for Christians to endure unjust suffering if they do so for reasons other than their awareness and knowledge of God.

Verse 20 takes an informative angle on suffering that has far-reaching implications for modern society, including labor and racial issues. Since Peter repeats the point several times in the letter (2:20, 3:17, 4:15), we will not exhaust the discussion here, but will mention something more about it each time he brings up it up again.

The first part of verse 20 is the negative counterpart to verse 19: "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?" What is "commendable" according to verse 19 is the endurance of *unjust* suffering by the God-conscious man. But if one suffers for doing wrong, then it is not *unjust* suffering, and there is nothing commendable about the person who endures it.

Notice the extent to which the principle applies. The verse is referring to "a beating," in which the wrongdoer is punished by blows of the fist. Since slaves are considered valuable property, masters tend to exercise restraint, but we can assume that sometimes a master who is beating his slave in anger might not care too much about the amount of pain and damage he is causing.

Some people tend to think that whatever a person has done, the moment he is subjected to physical punishment, he immediately ascends to the moral high ground. No one "deserves" to be violently beaten. A murderer who is beaten becomes a hero; a rapist who is executed becomes a martyr. But Peter is not so stupid and perverse, and he shows no such sympathy. Rather, a person who is beaten and abused for doing wrong cannot really complain about it. So what if people strike him across the face again and again? So what if people whip his back until it cannot stop bleeding? Who told him to do wrong? This is not unjust suffering.

Peter has in mind the fact that some of his readers will experience unjust suffering, perhaps sometimes because of their faith, and often this will involve undeserved beatings. Depending on what kind of society a person lives in, sometimes there will be regulations and procedures that are built-in to the system by which he may obtain deliverance from unjust treatment. One is not rebellious if he takes advantage of them with the right attitude (Acts 25:11). However, such protection is unavailable for many people, and thus Peter assures the Christians in the second part of verse 20, "But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God."

1 PETER 2:21-25

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Peter proceeds to expand on what he has said in the previous passage, appealing to Christ as our example. Although the passage teaches us something about the atoning work of Christ and the believers' relation to him, for most of this passage, we must keep in mind that the context is mainly about undeserved punishment and unjust suffering.

Verse 21 connects itself to the previous passage by saying that we are called to endure unjust suffering, because this is the example that Christ, who redeemed us by suffering for us, has left for us to follow. In fact, we are to follow him so closely that we are to walk "in his steps," that is, on the very footprints that he has left behind him.

This is metaphorical, of course. Some people gets an emotional high by spending hundreds of dollars to visit the "holy land," just so they could retrace the physical paths that Jesus had treaded. This is fine as far as it goes, but it is carnal, fleshly thinking to suppose that one can become more holy or get closer to the Savior this way. Anybody can take a vacation to Jerusalem if he has the money. The real test is whether someone follows Jesus where it actually counts, in doctrine, in faith, in love, in zeal, in boldness, and in enduring unjust suffering.

Peter describes for us the three aspects of Jesus' example of suffering. And since we are to follow his example, the way we endure suffering must also correspond to them.

First, Jesus was without sin. Verse 22 says, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." The statement refers to his sinlessness in both speech and action, and thus covers all of life. He was completely innocent and righteous before God, so that the Father said of him, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Hebrews 4:15 says that he was tempted in every way just as we are, yet he was without sin.

When the Jews put him on trial, intending to put him to death, they could not find any false evidence against him (Matthew 26:59). So they brought forward false witnesses (v. 60), but even then they could not get their statements to agree (Mark 14:56). They brought him before Pilate and cried, "Crucify him!" to which Pilate responded, "Why? What crime has he committed?" (Matthew 27:22-23). After he questioned Jesus, he concluded, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 18:38). But he perceived that "it was out of envy that

they had handed Jesus over to him" (Matthew 27:18). Even his wife knew that Jesus was innocent, and she warned, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man."

Still, Jesus was treated as a criminal. At his execution, two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left (Matthew 27:38). When one of them hurled insults at Jesus, the other one rebuked him, and said, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40-41). So this criminal testified to the innocence of Jesus and professed faith in him (v. 42-43).

This sinlessness of Christ accentuates the fact that, as far as his own speech and action were concerned, his suffering were undeserved and therefore unjust. He was, however, bearing our sins and our guilt, and therefore the punishment that these deserved was poured out upon him. But at this point, Peter's emphasis is that Jesus himself did not deserve the suffering that he had to endure.

Of course, although we have been made righteous through Christ, none of us are sinless in ourselves. So if absolute sinlessness is the example that we must follow, then we must give up before we even begin. However, Peter is making a point about a kind of suffering that is undeserved relative to those who persecute us. That is, we must see to it that the punishment we receive cannot be directly connected to something wrong that we have done. As he writes earlier in verse 20, "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?"

Second, Jesus did not retaliate. Our first point describes Jesus' condition as he entered the situation – he was without sin. This second point proceeds to describe the negative aspect of his reaction to unjust suffering, or what he *did not* do in response. Verse 23 says, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats." The "insults" refer to verbal assaults, and what he "suffered" could include physical torture. He did nothing to deserve these abuses from people, but in neither case did he respond in kind.

A man was filling out a school application on behalf of his infant son. Some of the questions on the application were directed to the parents, apparently designed to gather information about the child's character. Perhaps these were included so that the admissions committee could get a picture of what the applicant was like other than what they could piece together from his academic records.

One of these questions asked the parents to specify the one thing that, if it was done to the child, would have incited the greatest negative response from him. The man wrote that his child reacted most strongly whenever he was wrongly accused of something. Of course the parents never intentionally accused the child of doing something that he did not do, but as there were other children in the home, one could imagine how that might have sometimes occurred.

The child knew that he was not perfect, and at that time he probably took pride in his frequent unruly behavior. Yet he would react most strongly to unjust accusations. If he was going to be accused of something or even punished for it, then at least let the accusation be true and the punishment be just! Likewise, imagine a hardened criminal who, although he is guilty of many things, is falsely accused of something that he did not do. Oh, how indignant he becomes and how he longs to set the record straight!

Now consider how Jesus himself – altogether sinless, and the very definition of holiness and perfection – was unjustly insulted, accused, and punished. The most holy was treated as if he was the most vile. He was acutely aware of his own moral perfection and the injustice of the treatment that he received. He challenged his enemies, saying, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46). But he did not retaliate, and he did not threaten.

This, then, is the second aspect of his example on how we should endure unjust suffering. He has left us an example of supreme restraint and patience in the face of the greatest injustice. To follow "in his steps," we must first make sure that we have done nothing to warrant the suffering that is being inflicted upon us, and then we must exercise self-control, so that we will not respond to insults with insults, to cruelty with cruelty, and to violence with violence.

Third, Jesus entrusted everything to God. This is the positive aspect of his reaction to unjust suffering. Our previous point, taken from verse 23, has to do with what Jesus *did not* do when he was mistreated. But he was not entirely passive in his suffering. The rest of verse 23 says, "Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." The word "himself" is absent from the original, and it is better to understand the statement as saying that Jesus entrusted everything about the situation to God, including himself but also those who made him suffer.

When facing undeserved abuse from people, it is not enough to just endure it – even some unbelievers can do that. Just as verse 19 says that a man is commendable not just because he endures, but that he endures *because* "he is conscious of God," here verse 23 says that Jesus' example consists of more than passive endurance, but he exercised a positive trust in God while he suffered.

This, the unbeliever cannot do, and so in the face of unjust suffering he would give in, lash out, or quietly endure, drawing from his own strength and guided by his own godless beliefs. He can only produce sinful reactions that intensify the wrath of God that is already upon him. Nothing constructive ever comes out of the suffering of non-Christians. All their tribulations are meaningless.

This third aspect of Jesus' example is a defining factor. Not only must we see to it that we do not suffer for something wrong that we have done, and not only must we refrain from responding in kind to undeserved abuses, but there must be a positive faith while we endure, entrusting to God everything about our situation. Some people might quietly endure simply because they are cowards, but Christians endure because they are strong, and the power of the Holy Spirit sustains them (Psalm 3).

This positive faith is specific, for in our context Peter refers to God as "him who judges justly." To refrain from responding to insults with insults and to violence with violence is by no means to surrender to injustice, that is, if we will turn to trust him who judges justly. He declares, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Romans 12:19; also Colossians 3:25; 2 Thessalonians 1:6).

Justice might mean that God will repay those who caused us to suffer with everlasting hellfire. But on the other hand, God may cause some of our persecutors to repent and turn to Christ. When that happens, the Christian who truly understands salvation and cares about God's program will rejoice, knowing that he has also been forgiven of his debts through Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:23-35).

The Christian is vindicated either way. On the one hand, some of his persecutors are rewarded with ultimate damnation. On the other hand, others are made to confess their wrongdoing and become like the one whom they have unjustly accused and punished. The Christian entrusts everything to God and leaves it up to him to determine the fate of each individual.

In considering how Jesus endured his undeserved suffering, we do not want to forget that it was more than an example, and more than a demonstration of character. His suffering carried special significance, and accomplished something unique, namely, the redemption of all those whom God had given him.

How did he do this? Peter writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." From this statement, there are at least three things that we can infer about his redemptive work on behalf of those who would believe.

First, he became our substitute. He "bore our sins" and took our guilt upon himself, and thus also the punishment that was meant for us. Second, although he also suffered much in his soul (Matthew 26:38), a significant part of his suffering was physical. This fact serves as one of the foundational propositions in constructing a biblical view of the body and its relation to the soul, and to spiritual things.

Third, his suffering culminated in crucifixion. The word translated "tree" is not the usual *dendron*, but *xylon*, which refers to an object made of wood. But Peter does not just say *stauros*, or cross, probably so that the connection could be made to Deuteronomy 21:23, which says, "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."

This explains something about the nature of the redemptive work of Christ, namely, that he became our substitute so that he could absorb into himself the covenant curse incurred by our sins. And by this act of sacrifice, we are saved from divine wrath. As Paul writes, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13).

He did this "so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." He bore our sins as our representative, and this also means that we were identified with him in his suffering and death. Paul explains and applies this idea in Romans 6:

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. (v. 5-12)

The general meaning here is clear. Having died to sin means that "we should no longer be slaves to sin." And that Christ was raised from the dead means that we can now "live for righteousness."

Although this is significant in itself, in Peter's context, it means that we are able to follow Christ's example of how he endured suffering precisely because of the suffering that he endured. In other words, the way he endured undeserved suffering was not only an example for us to follow, but because it had redemptive power, it also enables us to follow the example that he has left us.

Based on verse 24, some Christians teach that physical healing is "in the atonement" – it is an accomplished fact, so that it is possible for Christians to receive healing by faith on demand. Those who do not believe this doctrine sometimes respond by denying that healing is "in the atonement" in the first place, but that the atonement applies only to redemption from sin. It is true that the words "by his wounds you have been healed" probably refer to the healing of the soul in this context. However, it is unintelligent and heretical to answer that physical healing is not included in the atonement, or that it is not one of the benefits of the atonement.

First, since sickness came as a result of the Fall, then if healing is not in the atonement, or if it is not one of the benefits of the atonement, this must mean that there will still be sickness in heaven. However, the Bible teaches that Christ's redemptive work is complete, that our glorified bodies will be immortal and imperishable, and that in heaven the effects of sin will no longer remain (Revelation 21:4). There will be no sickness in heaven.

Second, Matthew applies the atonement directly to Christ's ministry of healing: "When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out

the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases'" (Matthew 8:16-17). Therefore, to deny that healing is in the atonement is to deny the atonement. It is an attack on Jesus Christ.

Healing is indeed "in the atonement." But then, the objection is that this does not mean it can be received by faith on demand. The fact that a benefit is included does not indicate how or when it would be received. For example, our immortal body is included in the atonement, and as such it "belongs" to us now, but we will not receive it until later. Thus theologians refer to the "already" and "not yet" aspects of redemption.

However, this is an excuse. Although the immortal body is explicitly reserved for the future, physical healing is explicitly offered for the present; otherwise, even Jesus could not have healed people on the basis of the atonement (Matthew 8:16-17). The theologians throw out all kinds of theories to explain it, but often, the reason for the "not yet" of God's blessings is nothing other than unbelief.³⁷

These final words in verse 24 emphasize again the nature of Christ's saving work as one of substitution and sacrifice. His wounds brought us healing. He endured pain so that we could be well. He suffered affliction to save us from destruction. This idea is central to Christian faith and living, and to our outreach in evangelism and charity.

Before we became Christians, we were "like sheep going astray," but now we have "returned to the Shepherd and Overseer" of our souls. Non-Christians are without spiritual direction, and they live purposeless lives as aimless and useless people. Whether they live or die, and whether they prosper or suffer, it is all meaningless and without significance. Because of the work of Christ, we have been saved from all of this, and our lives take on purpose, direction, and value.

Once again we perceive the pastoral skill of the apostle. He acknowledges the difficulties that his readers might have to face without allowing them to make excuses for sin, or to use their freedom in Christ as cover-up for evil. He consistently maintains the necessity of being conscious of God and entrusting everything to him. And he grounds his entire discourse on the person and the work of Christ. Preachers would do well to learn from his approach.

Moreover, Scripture pervades Peter's thinking. The passage is interwoven with quotations and paraphrases of Isaiah 53, where the prophet speaks of the atoning work of the Messiah, the one who was to come. Specifically, verse 22 corresponds to Isaiah 53:9, verse 23 to 53:7, verse 24 to 53:5, and verse 25 to 53:6.

In preaching, although we must always be consistent with Scripture, there is no need to provide a direct biblical quotation for every minor point that we make. This is usually impossible in the first place, since it would make the presentation so cumbersome that it becomes difficult to follow. Nevertheless, it is better to follow Peter's example in having

³⁷ For more on healing and the atonement, see Vincent Cheung, *Biblical Healing*.

the very thoughts, categories, and expressions of Scripture pervade our speech. This requires the man of God to study not only to make sermons, but he must so immerse himself in the Word of God that his mind becomes obsessed with it, and therefore possessed by it.

1 PETER 3:1-6

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Let us first recall the background and purpose of Peter's letter. He is writing to people who have been converted to the Christian faith out of a society steeped in pagan religions, false philosophies, and sinful lifestyles. They have been saved from idolatry and damnation, but this has also made them "aliens and strangers in the world" (2:11). As such, they would sometimes come under persecutions, which are often founded on misrepresentations and false accusations regarding Christian beliefs and the implications of these beliefs.

After presenting an elaborate theological foundation on which Christians are to construct their thoughts and actions, and through which they are to interpret their situation, Peter instructs his readers to counter slander with godly behavior. He writes in 2:12, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Then, he proceeds to describe how Christians can live "good lives among the pagans" within specific situations and relationships.

Submission to human institutions is emphasized. This is perhaps because with all its talk about having one Master and the freedom that he brings, it has been inferred that Christian doctrine incites rebellion against authority and aspires to overturn the existing social structure. But the truth is that the Christian faith both commands and enables believers to function under human authority with sincerity, patience, and excellence. It is important that we explain this to those who have misunderstood the faith (3:15), but then we must also demonstrate its teaching in our conduct. As Peter writes, "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (2:15).

So, the command is to "submit yourselves...to every authority instituted among men" (2:13). We have already considered two examples: submission to the civil government (2:13-17) and submission of the household servants to their masters (2:18-20). Peter now turns to address the submission of wives to their husbands.

The above review reinforces the context within which we find our passage. It brings to the forefront the first point about 3:1-6 that we are about to consider, namely, the possible misconception about the Christian faith that the wives are supposed to counter and correct by their submission.

Ancient civilization recognizes the husband as the head of the house. His authority is so extensive that his religion is also the household religion, which everyone under him is expected to follow. A husband who is converted to Christianity would lead his wife and the rest of the family to join the church as well.

On the other hand, trouble arises when the wife converts to Christianity while the husband rejects the gospel and remains in paganism. To leave the husband's religion for another could be taken as a sign of insubordination. Then, for the wife to abandon the former beliefs and abstain from all pagan rituals could be seen as a direct challenge to the husband's authority. Naturally, the teaching of this new religion that has so transformed the wife would become suspect as well. Therefore, it is a matter of utmost urgency and importance to convince the husband that the Christian faith does not encourage rebellion in the wife. In fact, it reinforces her submission, not by the authority of tradition or culture, but by the very command of God.

The wife could no longer affirm pagan religions and participate in their worship rituals, and this could not be helped. But other than this, the Christian faith does not repudiate the husband's authority, but rather reaffirms it. It does not take the wife away from her husband, but it makes her a better wife than before. The Christian wife ought to be gentle, feminine, intelligent, responsible, hard-working, fiercely loyal and devoted, not vain, and without private ambitions and selfish agendas (Proverbs 31). Instead, she submits to her husband as her head, with sincere love and for the Lord's sake.

We should mention that, in observing the context of the passage and thus the reason for Peter to discuss the topic, we are by no means suggesting that the command for wives to submit is merely pragmatic, or that it is only a matter of convenience. Rather, the principle that wives must submit to their husbands has been true since the beginning of creation. Here Peter gives it emphasis to address the situation faced by his readers.

To illustrate, if we were to address a group of Christians whose parents oppose the faith because of its alleged negative effects on the children, then we would naturally emphasize the command, "Obey your parents." But the command is in force whether or not the particular situation requires us to emphasize it. Likewise, wives must submit to their husbands. In fact, if the submission of women is considered undesirable or offensive in a given culture, the church would still have to teach and practice it, only that the command would receive attention from a different perspective.

Proceeding now to 3:1, Peter states the command in this manner: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands." The verse does not say that every woman must submit to every man, but that every wife must submit to her own husband. Although this is the

consistent testimony of Scripture (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5), it is opposed by many professing Christians, who use various tactics to neutralize it.

One popular attempt is to dilute the word's meaning into nothing more than a respectful attitude that in principle can exclude obedience altogether. However, as we have noted in connection with submission to the government (2:13) and to masters (2:18), the word translated "submit" is originally a military term meaning to arrange or place under the authority of another, and that for this word to mean what it means, obedience is naturally implied. One submits to authority, so that one obeys that authority. So when Scripture commands the wife to submit, it includes the idea to obey. She must *do* what she is *told*, and with a respectful attitude as well. Nothing less will do.

In one place, Paul writes that "the wife must *respect* her husband" (Ephesians 5:33). The KJV is slightly stronger and says "reverence." Perhaps this has contributed to the false teaching that Scripture commands only a respectful or submissive attitude and not also obedience in action and behavior. But the word is "fear" – the same one Peter uses of slaves when he says to them, "Submit yourselves to your masters with all *respect*" (3:18). As mentioned earlier, although the word does not carry the strength that it does when it refers to the *fear* of God, in our context it means at least a healthy apprehension of another's displeasure. It is not the kind of fear that one has toward God, but it is fear nonetheless, and it is more than mere respect.

Attempts in Christian scholarship to undermine the Bible's command range from the amusing to the ridiculous, and often include falsehoods and deceptions. For example, Paul writes in Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." Commenting on this verse, we find the following in the Tenth Anniversary Edition of the *NIV Study Bible*:

To submit meant to yield one's own rights. If the relationship called for it, as in the military, the term could connote obedience, but that meaning is not called for here. In fact, the word "obey" does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5).³⁸

According to this, the word could mean obedience, as in the military, but it does not mean that here in Ephesians 5:22. Instead, it means merely "to yield one's own rights." The submission required of the wives is contrasted against the obedience required of children and slaves. In other words, children and slaves must obey, but the wives only need to "submit" in a sense that does not imply obedience.

The result is no ordinary theological error, but outright blasphemy. This is because, in that very passage, Paul asserts that the relationship between husband and wife and the relationship between Christ and the church are analogous to each other. He writes, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ

³⁸ *The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition*; The Zondervan Corporation, 1995.

is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (v. 22-24).

If the submission of the wives means anything less than obedience, then the submission of the church to Christ would also exclude obedience. That is, at least in principle, the church could exhibit perfect *submission* but complete *disobedience* to Christ. If to say that "wives should submit to their husbands in everything" means that they only need to "yield their rights" (whatever this means) to their husbands in everything without having to obey them in anything, then this is the attitude that the church may take toward Christ as well.

Also, in the context of this passage, to say that submission means to yield one's rights to another also means that the church possesses certain rights against Christ himself, that even he must honor, only that we are admonished to surrender these rights to him. Very few blasphemies can rise above this level.

We must have more sense and reverence when reading Scripture. The two relationships are so tied to each other in this passage that it prevents all equivocation. Submission cannot mean one thing when it comes to husbands and wives, and then mean something altogether different when it comes to Christ and the church – all within the same passage, or even the same sentence!

Besides its blasphemous implications, it also begs the question to impose "to yield one's own rights" as the definition for submission on this passage. That is, if the church must obey Christ – to actually do what he commands – then it really possesses no rights against him that it could yield in the first place.

We know that the church must obey Christ, and Paul says that, *likewise*, "wives should submit to their husbands in everything." Therefore, the wives have no rights against the husbands in the first place, so what is there for them to yield? They never had the right to oppose or disobey their husbands to begin with, so it is not something that is up to them to give up.³⁹ If anything, because of the analogy to Christ and the church in this passage, the submission of the wives is asserted in much stronger terms than the obedience of children and slaves, whose relationships with their superiors are not compared to Christ and the church.

In fact, in Ephesians 5, the only ones who are told to yield their rights are the husbands. Paul instructs them, "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (v. 25). The church never gave up anything for the benefit of Christ, but Christ sacrificed himself to save the church. Likewise, the husbands are the ones told to make the sacrifice. They are the ones who possess the rights that they may surrender for the benefit

³⁹ Women indeed have certain rights in the marriage relationship. For example, she possesses conjugal rights (1 Corinthians 7:3-5), and the right to expect her husband to remain faithful. However, these are not really rights that she can surrender. It is not as if she can allow her husband to commit adultery! These rights do not apply to our context, which refers to the general headship of husbands over their wives, and the broad authority that this gives to the husbands. Also, the point is that they have no right to *disobey* in the first place, and therefore they have no rights to surrender in this context where we are referring to obedience to the husbands.

of their wives, but it is said that the wives must submit to them in everything, just as the church submits to Christ. Now if anyone says that the wives do not need to obey in everything, he must also say that the church does not have to obey Christ in everything. No one should call a Christian anyone who asserts something like this.

Then, there is the claim that "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives, though it does with respect to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5)." However, we have just noted that the word "submit" already implies obedience, both in itself and in this context. Also, in the context of Ephesians 5 and 6, because it is used to maintain an analogy to Christ and the church, it in fact carries a much stronger force than the obedience required from children and slaves.

But we can offer a more direct answer – the claim that Scripture never applies the word "obey" to wives is outright false.

Again, the commentary states, "the word 'obey' does not appear in Scripture with respect to wives."⁴⁰ Now, the word translated "submit" in Ephesians 5:22 is *hypotassō*, and the word translated "obey" in 6:1 and 6:5 is *hypakouō*. Thus the commentary is asserting that the word *hypakouō* is never used of wives in the Bible.

However, Scripture uses *hypakouō* (obey) when it speaks about Sarah in the very passage that we are now studying: "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive [*hypotassō*] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (1 Peter 3:5-6).

Sarah was the *wife* of Abraham, and Peter writes that she obeyed (*hypakouō*) her husband. It cannot be said that Peter is only applying the word to Sarah, and not to wives in general. This is because the reason he mentions Sarah in the first place is to call all wives to imitate her example, and this means that we must equally apply *hypakouō* (obey) to all wives.

Moreover, in this passage, Peter either equates *hypotassō* (submit) to *hypakouō* (obey), or he at least assumes that *hypotassō* (submit) implies *hypakouō* (obey). This is because he writes, "They were submissive [*hypotassō*] to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed [*hypakouō*] Abraham and called him her master." That is, they were *submissive*, like Sarah, who *obeyed*. Here submission implies obedience.

Therefore, whether Scripture uses *hypakouō* or *hypotassō* (and now we see that it uses both words), it commands the wives to *obey* their husbands.

Paul leaves no room for doubts and excuses when he writes, "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:24).

⁴⁰ This statement has vanished from the 2002 fully revised edition. However, it retains the assertion that the term does not refer to obedience in this passage. In other words, the assertion remains, but the erroneous reason for the assertion has disappeared. Is this a case of intellectual dishonesty, or does this reflect only an "innocent" editorial decision? I cannot tell.

Any exegetical maneuver that strips the husbands of their authority over their wives must also strip Christ of his authority over the church. And anyone who would strip Christ of his authority over the church, of course, cannot rightly claim to be a Christian at all.

Since there is no biblical escape, anyone who denies that wives must submit to their husbands *in everything* and *as to the Lord* is a blasphemer as well. In other words, because Paul has so joined them together by analogy, one relationship cannot be discussed in a way that is inconsistent with the other. Once it is known that the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23), anyone who denies that the wife must obey the husband in everything also defies Christ's authority and renounces the Christian faith.⁴¹

For at least three reasons, we understand that the biblical command for wives to obey their husbands is a universal teaching that transcends culture, tradition, and even the fall of man. First, it is rooted in creation. It did not arise from sin, although sin has made it likely for men to abuse their authority and for women to resent this authority. Second, all of the passages related to the topic are immune from being neutralized or condemned to irrelevance by an appeal to the culture in which they were written.

Third, because the marriage relationship is analogous to the enduring and transcultural relationship between Christ and the church, and because this is stated in the context of the submission of wives, the command is therefore likewise enduring and transcultural. It will apply until there is no longer such a thing as marriage between men and women. As Jesus says, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

Even then, it will be different not so much because the divine command will be annulled, since Christ will still rule over his church, which is his bride. But the command will no longer apply between human creatures only because they will become as the angels, who do not marry one another. Therefore, until the resurrection, the command that wives must obey their husbands remain in force.

That said, the next question is why Peter mentions it here in our passage. In other words, the command itself is universal and not occasional – it is for all times and not just for a particular situation or period in history – but Peter brings it up here for a purpose. What is this purpose?

We have already discussed the first part of verse 1. Now we will read it in full, along with verse 2: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."

As mentioned earlier, as the head of the family, it is common for the husband's religion to be the household religion as well, so that for the wife to convert to another religion could

⁴¹ For more on the wife's submission and obedience, see Vincent Cheung *Commentary on Ephesians*, and "Unfading Beauty" in *Renewing the Mind*.

be considered an act of insubordination. And it is natural for the Christian faith itself to receive at least part of the blame. What kind of religion is this that demands the wife to follow a different faith from her husband, and against his will? What kind of faith is this that requires the wife to renounce all other religions, including her husband's? It is, therefore, easy to think that the Christian faith poses a danger to the authority structure in the home.

Like Peter, there are not many good things that I can say about non-Christians. Men are foolish and wicked without Christ, and this is why they need salvation. But if I must commend non-Christian men for something, it would be the way that they put up with their Christian wives. What a testimony to the strength of the human spirit, even in its depraved condition!

In fact, without exaggeration, I marvel that there are not many more cases of divorce, suicide, domestic violence, and even murder incited by the nagging, domineering, self-righteous Christian wives. Speaking superficially, some unbelievers are quite tolerant of their wives' faith, at least in the beginning, and they are even supportive of their church activities. But many wives appear to have an almost supernatural ability to make the Christian faith repulsive.

There are so many types of examples that we cannot possibly consider them all. Some wives are just self-righteous and hypocritical. They profess the faith and put themselves on a moral pedestal, only that their bad attitudes seem to be getting worse and worse with time. Or, because they consider themselves morally superior (even though they are not so in behavior), they feel that they have the right to condemn their husbands for everything and to manipulate family decisions.

Some wives embarrass their husbands by acting like lunatics before friends and relatives, and think that by this they are being brave witnesses for the gospel. They do not seem to understand (or care) that their husbands are unlikely to be converted just because they constantly irritate them, referring to God in a thoroughly unrefined manner before other people, praying and praising in the most unexpected and inopportune moments, as if to test their patience.

I have known women who would scream "Praise the Lord!" after their husbands spent several hours or more trying to fix a problem or to avert a crisis. Christians would understand this behavior, but what would non-Christian husbands think? Will they fall on their faces and repent of their sins because of this? No, they would resent the fact that they have devoted so much into serving their families only to have the credit go to some God that they do not believe in. To them, this is not piety, but a slap in the face. But the wives think that this is what it means to be spiritual. What a difference it would make if they would say, "Thank you for doing this," or if she must mention the Lord, say, "I thank the Lord for a husband like you." Now, God can use that to melt hearts and change minds!

Some wives try to be less obvious, but they are just as irritating. Their husbands, being respectful of their faith or at least curious about it, might sometimes attend church with

them. But whenever the preacher says something that the wives think their husbands need to hear, they would turn their heads and stare at them to see if they are exhibiting the desired reaction to the sermon.

Whenever a woman does that while I am preaching, there is the temptation for me to change the topic or take the husbands' side, just so I could give these poor men several minutes of rest from their wives. One can only imagine what happens at home. I have had women contact me to see if I would include statements in my sermons that they thought their husbands needed to hear. In other words, after all the manipulation that they performed at home, they tried to make me their mouthpiece so that their husbands would get the same thing at church also. Of course I rebuked them.

Some women think that because they are Christians, they know better than their husbands about everything, and they are always more correct than their husbands on every occasion, so that they disobey them. These are the same people who think that the Bible's command is to "respect" the husband instead of to obey him. But there is no real respect there at all. Now, of course Christians are intellectually and morally superior, but that is only if they truly believe and behave like Christians! Otherwise, they are just annoying hypocrites.

A husband might think, "My wife is bossy and self-righteous enough as it is. If I were to convert and admit that she has been right about the Christian faith all along, why, this is only going to get worse! I am just going to get even more of this. I am already in hell as it is!" He might think that the Christian faith has taken away his wife, and if this is what Christianity is all about, then he would have nothing to do with it. But what Christian wives should do, instead, is to give their husbands a small taste of heaven. Constant nagging and manipulation must not be part of their repertoire.

Christian wives present one of the greatest obstacles to the conversion of their husbands. They drive these men away from the faith precisely because of the irritating behaviors that they exhibit when flaunting their piety and the infuriating tactics that they use when drawing attention to their religion. Therefore, if you are one of these women, the best advice that I can give for facilitating your husband's conversion is to SHUT YOUR MOUTH. Stop making the Christian faith appear as unintelligent and repulsive as you are.

Yes, upon your conversion, find an opportunity to present the Christian faith to your husband, and explain to him what Christ means to you. But if he rejects your initial witness for the gospel, then do not nag him, and do not manipulate him. Do not drop hints here and there. Do not play sermon tapes and make him overhear them. Although I would not condone it, it is a wonder that he does not slap you across the face. You certainly deserve it. Just shut your mouth, and be quiet and submissive. You have already preached the gospel to him, now show him its power by your transformed attitude and behavior.

Peter's general instruction for his readers is, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (2:12). For wives in particular, he emphasizes the importance of an inner beauty that is exhibited in submission, obedience, purity, and reverence. It could be

that their good behavior would counteract the misconceptions that their husbands have about the Christian faith. By their behavior, the wives could show their husbands that the Christian faith has made them better wives, not rebellious and subversive troublemakers.

Our passage is often used by preachers to denigrate the preaching of the word of God. This is done not only by the anti-intellectual types, but even those who are widely known as champions of biblical preaching, when it comes to this and similar passages, would suddenly exalt holy example above preaching. Some of them would even quote the irrational anti-Christian slogan, "Actions speak louder than words," when the fact is that actions never speak at all. Rather, actions must be explained by words, but it is never necessary for words to be accompanied by actions in order to demonstrate their meaning, truth, and coherence.

We should make clear what we mean here. We do not deny that Scripture commands us to believe *and obey* the word of God. It requires us to both preach it to others *and demonstrate* its message and power before them in our lives. It condemns as hypocrites those who preach but do not practice what they preach. Let us keep in mind that we affirm all of this in what follows.

Problems arise when we make our example more important than our preaching, or to make the effectiveness of the proclamation of the word of God dependent on its demonstration. It is common for Christian preachers and writers to insist that our lifestyle is the most eloquent sermon, the most powerful apologetic, or something to that effect. Some goes as far as to say that, "No one will believe you if your life does not match your message."

However, the Bible teaches none of these false ideas. It affirms that a godly example is important, but it never says that it is *more* important or *more* effective than the verbal message, nor is the message impotent without our godly example. The Bible requires our godly example as a moral necessity, meaning that we are morally required to practice what we affirm and preach. But it never presents our godly example as an intellectual or practical necessity. In other words, it never says that our ministry to others will be totally ineffective if we were hypocrites, or if we fail to practice what we preach. Still less does it permit sinners to ignore the gospel just because it is delivered to them by hypocrites.

Let us examine several relevant passages. These do not exhaust the list of relevant passages, but after looking at them, it will become evident how the others have been distorted as well.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." He never says that his ministry would become ineffective if he fails to subdue his body, only that *he himself* would be "disqualified" before the Lord.

Related to this is the so-called "love chapter," which in fact mainly concerns the spiritual gifts. It says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all

mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). He never says that the spiritual gifts would fail if believers exercise them without love, but he says that *those who exercise the gifts* without love would gain nothing. The person could still "fathom all mysteries and all knowledge," and the mountains are still moved.

Then, consider all the instances in Scripture where the people believed the gospel upon hearing it. They never had the chance to observe the lives of the disciples. How can anyone claim that the preaching is ineffective unless it is backed up by a godly life? No, Paul says that some people even preach Christ out of "selfish ambition" and to "stir up trouble for him" (Philippians 1:17). He does not say that the message would be ineffective, but he rejoices that Christ is being preached (v. 18). The gospel carries great power even if preached by a overtly wicked man. He shall reap fire and brimstone, but the Spirit can still use his words to convert multitudes without having a godly example to show them.

Jesus even tells his disciples to obey the message of the hypocrites: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matthew 23:2-3). Truth is truth. God condemns hypocrisy – we do not deny that. But just because the one who preaches it does not live up to it does not excuse the one who hears it from believing it and obeying it.

Many unbelievers and apostates claim that they have rejected or discarded the Christian faith because of all the hypocrites that they see. Those preachers who exalt godly example over verbal presentation provide the excuse to perpetuate this kind of thinking, but what they should do is to oppose it. The truth is that only stupid people never believe hypocrites. They fail to make the simple distinction between what people say and what people do. As a result of their irrational thinking, and perhaps also moral arrogance, they refuse to examine what a person says to determine whether it is true. Instead, they conclude that a person who does not live up to what he says must also be saying the wrong things. Jesus is not so foolish – he makes the distinction very clear and teaches his disciples to do the same.

If no one else believes the truth, *you* believe the truth! If no one else lives for the truth, *you* live for the truth! Have some spiritual spine and moral courage. Never use other people's failure as your excuse. The coward's way out is to say, "He is a hypocrite, so he is not credible and his message must be false. He does not practice what he preaches, so I will not, either. He is a hypocrite, therefore I will remain a consistent and thoroughgoing sinner."

This was one of the things that I wondered about when I was little. I marveled at how "Christian" hypocrites could cause others to stumble. Of course the hypocrites were wrong, and Scripture even states that they were wrong in causing others to stumble. I understood that. But I also thought that those who stumbled for this reason must have been incredibly stupid people, and that their faith was never genuine in the first place. The message is true even if there are hypocrites. In fact, our message itself tells you that there would be

hypocrites. So how stupid can a person be, to stumble over hypocrites? Thus both the hypocrites and those who stumble over them are culpable. They have no excuse.

Therefore, rather than allowing all the blame to fall upon the Christians, even the hypocritical ones, we must expose the fact that unbelievers are stupid for reasoning the way they do. The sinner is never exempt from believing and obeying the gospel message, since in rejecting it he sins by defying God's word – the hypocrisy of those who claim to be Christians (whether these are real Christians or not) is logically irrelevant. The preaching of the gospel alone provides a sufficient basis for faith, and the hearer is responsible for accepting it. It is often effective as well – there are those who, having been regenerated by God, perceive that the gospel is true despite the evil behavior of some professing Christians, and who then come readily to repentance and faith in Christ.

On the other hand, we cannot say the same thing about a moral example alone, although many people falsely believe that one may win others to Christ without giving priority to a verbal message filled with relevant information. The common misconception that one may be a witness for Christ primarily through his holy lifestyle does not originate from a careful exegetical study of Scripture, but it reflects the infiltration of non-Christian philosophies in the church.

What about our passage, and verses 1 and 2 in particular? Does it not say that the husbands who "do not believe the word, may be won over *without words* by the behavior of their wives"? Yes, but won over *to what*? To Hinduism? To Mormonism? Eventually, the wives or others must preach the message to the husbands. This either comes at the beginning, to be reinforced and made attractive by the godly pattern of living that the wives then demonstrate, or it comes after their life of submission and reverence has gained the attention of the husbands. That these husbands are said to be those who "do not believe the word" probably presupposes that they have already heard it and rejected the initial attempt at converting them.

Since the word has already been preached to them, this means that the husbands are fully aware that the "purity and reverence" of their wives are exhibited as Christians. Unless the word of God is preached to them, it would be impossible for the husbands to associate the good behavior of their wives to the Christian faith. Peter is indeed saying that godly behavior may sometimes be instrumental in conversion, but he presupposes the necessity of a verbal message. The reverent conduct of the wives is only the means by which God may use to cause some of the elect husbands to reconsider and then accept "the word" that they must believe to be saved.

Whether the preaching of the gospel comes before or after, it is without doubt the key in conversion, and not the godly example. In fact, whether it comes before or after the godly example, the husband could still reject the message. A number of verses later, Peter will say, "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you" (1 Peter 4:4). So godly behavior does not automatically convict and convert. Some people might just "think it strange." Without an explanation, people would not even know what it means, why a believer behaves as he

does, or what has caused the change in him. On the other hand, a husband could believe the message in spite of her wife's ungodly or hypocritical life. So the principle is a command for the wife, and not an excuse for the husband.⁴²

In two previous passages, Peter first begins with the instruction to submit to the government (2:13-14) and to the masters (2:18), and then he proceeds to explain the purpose or principle underlying the instruction that he has just given (2:15, 19). Christians submit to the government, "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." And slaves submit to their masters, even the harsh and unreasonable ones, "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God."

Likewise, in our passage, after instructing the wives to submit to their own husbands, Peter proceeds to specify the purpose for mentioning it. That is, if any of the husbands do not believe the gospel, they might be won over by the behavior of their wives. Now he continues, in verses 3 to 6, to explain the principle underlying his instruction: "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful" (v. 5). "The way" that he is referring to in this verse, and by which these women made themselves beautiful, is the pursuit of inner beauty (v. 4).

Outward beauty is characterized by "outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes" (v. 3). Peter is probably applying a common Christian teaching, as a very similar instruction appears in 1 Timothy 2:9-10: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God." There Paul speaks to the proper behavior of women in the church in general, whereas Peter speaks to women in the context of marriage, or wives in particular. But notice the similarity in theme, as well as the same three categories of outward adornment: expensive coiffures, jewelry, and clothes.

Wealthy women in Peter's day tend to devote an inordinate amount of time and money on beautifying themselves. Those interested in the details should consult the relevant sources on ancient practices. In any case, the point is that women, especially Christian women, should not focus on outward beauty.

However, contrary to some who go to the extreme with this teaching, the Bible does not say that one should pay no attention at all to his or her appearance. Neither is Scripture altogether neutral about outward appearance. It often takes time to acknowledge a woman's physical beauty, and it is referred to as a blessing in Job (42:15). Nevertheless, it should not receive too much of our attention. The danger is to elevate it to something that it is not. Indeed, outward beauty does not indicate spiritual superiority, and God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

Women should be characterized by modesty, decency, and propriety (1 Timothy 2:9). And consistent with the teaching in our passage from Peter, as much as possible and appropriate,

⁴² For more on the subject, see Vincent Cheung, "By Word and Deed" in *The Light of Our Minds*.

they should select the type and amount of outward adornment that will please their husbands.

Thus, Peter says, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment," and he continues, "Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (v. 4).

The "inner self" is literally "the hidden person of the heart" (NASB), and refers to the incorporeal and invisible part of a person. Some theologians assert that Scripture teaches a "holistic" view of man that does not make a sharp distinction between the incorporeal and the corporeal, the soul and the body, or mind and matter. They say that man is not "a ghost in a machine."

However, the very opposite is true. To employ their somewhat pejorative expression, the Bible's view of man is precisely that he is a ghost in a machine, and that the "ghost" is the essential part of the self that can survive and maintain its identity outside of the "machine." Our passage is only one of many examples (Romans 7:22-23; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 3:16; James 2:26). The motive of the holistic view is perhaps to maintain the basic goodness of all creation and the importance of the physical. But one can acknowledge this point without denying the sharp distinction that Scripture makes between the soul and the body.⁴³

Whereas outward beauty is temporary, inward beauty is unfading. A noun must be supplied by the reader since none accompanies the adjective "unfading," which means imperishable or incorruptible. Judging by the context, "unfading *beauty*" is acceptable (also see NASB, NEB, RSV). This unfading beauty is the quality of "a gentle and quiet spirit." This is the direct opposite of the multitudes of Christian women who consider themselves spiritual, but are at the same time boisterous, manipulative, and self-righteous. Some Christian subcultures in fact encourage this type of personalities.

Even unbelieving husbands should consider "a gentle and quiet spirit" refreshing and attractive. But reprobates are unmoved by godliness. Following Peter's instruction does not guarantee a husband's conversion, although it can be one way that God uses to reach a man's heart with the gospel. Still, women should remember that a gentle and quiet spirit "is of great worth in God's sight," and ultimately it is he whom they seek to please. This also reminds us that the call to submission and gentleness is not a merely pragmatic command. It is what God requires from all women of all generations, regardless of its effectiveness for winning over their husbands to the faith.

To illustrate and reinforce his point, Peter then urges the wives to pursue inner beauty by following the examples of holy women of the past. Notice that although he proceeds to cite

⁴³ It is true that the Bible often refers to the human person as one unit, this occurs when the context or topic does not require it to make a distinction. On the other hand, it always makes a sharp distinction between the soul and the body when the context or topic demands it. In our daily speech, we may say, "Tom is driving down the road," without making a distinction between the person and the car, but that does not mean that we consider them fused together as one unit!

Sarah as a specific case, he begins by referring to "holy women" in general. Therefore, Christian wives are not to follow only Sarah, but all the women in Scripture who exhibit a life of faith and submission, and a gentle and quiet spirit.

As for Sarah, she provides a perfect example in the context of our passage, so that Peter's wisdom is once again evident. Sarah is one of the most significant figures in biblical history, but even more relevant than that, she was known for her outward beauty, even when she was old. In fact, she was so beautiful that it became a problem for Abraham, who thought that even kings (who had many concubines) would kill him so that they could have her. Thus in appealing to Sarah's case, right away it is ruled out that the pursuit of inner beauty is just an excuse to take the attention away from a person's frightful appearance.

No, Sarah was outwardly attractive, but what made her beautiful in the true and enduring sense? How about these other holy women of the past? Why were they approved and praised, and mentioned as examples for Christian wives to follow? Peter writes, "They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master" (v. 5-6).

There is something else that we can say about them, something that the wise apostle does not fail to consider. One may point out that, for women to so totally submit to their husbands, and for them to adopt a gentle and quiet spirit, might also make them vulnerable before abusive husbands and an unkind world. If they do not fight for their personal rights, who would fight for them? If they do not strive for survival, who would preserve them? This concern fits right into our context where Christians must live as strangers in a hostile world, where governments might persecute them without cause, where masters might unjustly punish their servants, and where men might view their wives' new religion with suspicion.

So here is another reason why Sarah's example is so relevant to the instruction that he gives to Christian women. God's calling to Abraham required him to leave his established way of life and to set out as a pilgrim for a land that he had never known. Of course Sarah had to follow. Surely the discomfort and uncertainty could prove oppressive even to a man, let alone a woman whose husband was called by God in such an unusual manner. We must also add to this the troubles incited by Abraham's own errors, which affected Sarah in very personal ways, and at times even threatened her purity and safety.

But Sarah, and these other holy women of the past, did not maintain an attitude of submission by relying solely on their husbands' spirituality or resourcefulness. Rather, they knew to "put their hope in God." Of course their husbands were not perfect and sinless, and still less were they omniscient and omnipotent. They succumbed to temptations and made errors in judgment. They were not able to foresee future events, options, and dangers, nor were they able to control or prevent any of them.

However, the one who was pleased with their gentle and quiet spirit was also the one who could see them through their troubles. It is a mistake for women to obey the God who commands submission to the husbands, but at the same time depend solely on the husbands

to make things turn out right. These holy women serve as excellent examples for women because, just as they obeyed the one who commanded their submission, they also trusted in him, so that their obedience would bear good fruit. The spiritual "daughters" (v. 6) of Sarah are those who "do what is right," so that they practice submission, and who "do not give way to fear" (whether under threat from their husbands or from the unbelieving world), so that they place their trust in God.

Without excusing unbelief, women who fail to comply with Peter's instructions constitute one of the greatest hindrances against the conversion of men. Their rebellious nature and overbearing "piety" intensify their husbands' aversion to all things Christian. Pastors should rebuke these women in the most urgent spirit and the harshest terms possible. Do not spare those who resist. The church should let the unbelieving husbands understand that the behavior of these women do not represent the Christian faith. Pastors should humiliate these wives in preaching and strip them of all spiritual credibility so that the husbands can examine for themselves the gospel of Christ, and its true wisdom and power.

The pastoral dimension of our topic demands significant attention. The church has been either so influenced or intimidated by feminist ideologies that it often tiptoes around the subject. Now it is so afraid to appear sexist or chauvinistic that even those who affirm the biblical teaching find the need to dilute, soften, and qualify the divine command so much that it loses its force on the people. But the biblical command amounts to saying, "Wives, obey your husbands. And that means you must do what they tell you – yes, all the time and in everything, just as the church submits to Christ."

Other than in preaching and in official theological statements, there are other important ways by which the church may reaffirm the biblical teaching of male headship in the home. Specifically, the church must not only tell wives to submit, but it should also act like it expects them to do so. And not only must the church tell the wives to regard their husbands as their heads, but it should also act like it regards them as the heads of the wives as well.

In practice, this might mean that the church should not ask the wives to make major decisions without going through their husbands. In my own ministry and personal life, as much as possible, I see to it that I either do not communicate with a woman without her husband's knowledge or permission, or I see to it that he knows about it afterward. This can be impossible or extremely inconvenient in some cases (e.g. when speaking to a female storekeeper), but I am referring to encounters that involve personal conversations, and especially those of significant length and content. The husbands should know about these.

Indeed, sometimes circumstances prevent me from observing the proper protocol, but there is no excuse when it is easy, which is often the case. If I tell a woman to regard her husband as her head, then I should also regard her husband as her head. Jesus was most likely not just trying to expose the woman when he said to her, "Go, call your husband and come back" (John 4:16). Another application of this is that I must never allow a woman to speak ill of her husband or to dishonor him in any way, even in counseling.

If a person is dealing with an institution with an authority structure, such as a family or a church, then there are protocols to be observed. People are unaccustomed to thinking this way about the family. However, imagine a person who disagrees with how something is being done in a church, but instead of speaking to the leadership, he goes directly to the people and tries to convince them without the knowledge or permission of the church leaders.

With our society's emphasis on independence and freedom, I suppose that many Christians would find nothing wrong even with this example. But make no mistake about it: such a person who bypasses the chain of authority in the attempt to wield direct influence over the people is a troublemaker and trespasser. Even if the changes he desires are beneficial, it is not up to him to bypass the leadership. As it is, he is as the snake in Eden who sneaks past Adam so that he could speak with Eve directly, and so that he could corrupt the institution from the bottom up. Regardless of his motive or ability, we should be suspicious of someone who disregards authority and protocol. The same applies to the family.

For many Christians, their favorite portion of any discussion on submission to authority is the one that defines the exceptions. In other words, whenever the Bible commands obedience, they wish to know, "But when may we *disobey*?"

The correct answer, of course, is that a wife may disobey her husband whenever he commands something that is sinful. For example, if the husband commands the wife to commit adultery, or to worship a false god, then the wife will have no choice but to disobey. This sounds straightforward, but additional comments are needed to prevent abuse. This is because wives often take it upon themselves to call something sinful when it is only contrary to their personal preference or standard.

Once a farming couple was taking a truckload of newly harvested wheat to the market for sale. The details of this story are hazy to me, but it seems that there are government regulations limiting the moisture on each unit of crops. The reason for the law is that water adds to the weight of the product, and the wetter something is, the less of the product the buyers are getting for the price. So the purpose of the law is to prevent fraud.

In this instance, the wife thought that the wheat was too wet, and she urged her husband not to sell it in such a condition. The husband, however, informed her that the amount of moisture on the wheat was well within the limits specified by the government, and therefore he sold the wheat against his wife's protest. Now the wife felt that her husband had committed fraud, and she could not help feeling that she had participated in a dishonest transaction herself. She complained to her pastor, who was wise enough to inquire about the details of the case without assuming the worst of the husband right away. He then informed the woman that she was in fact the one at fault.

The husband had done nothing that was against either divine law or human law, and yet the wife felt that what he did was immoral, and worse, he made her a part of it. The truth is that she had no respect for either the Lord or her husband, but she was evaluating the husband's action by her private standard and subjective judgment. In effect, she had made

herself the head over her husband, and even defied the Lord in the process. She was not more honest than her husband – she was just more self-righteous.

Therefore, when we acknowledge that there are exceptions to obeying the husband, we are probably not saying enough. Are the wives able to distinguish actual immorality from personal distaste? Or are they going to regard as an exception anything that they do not like, anything that runs contrary to their own hang-ups?

Business decisions cover one area in which wives may disagree when in fact they just want to take control of the situation. Another area is sexual inhibitions. Here many wives have frustrated their husbands for no good reason, labeling certain activities as perverse and immoral when they can offer no biblical reason for their opposition. Their aversion probably comes from their personal hang-ups, perhaps inherited from their family and church traditions. Unbelieving husbands then blame the Christian faith for draining the joy and excitement out of their marriage, when the real culprit is their wives' scriptural ignorance and self-righteous attitude.

These are just examples – wives illegitimately defy their husbands in every area of life. The church should affirm the place for exceptions, but also help the women define them, so that preference does not become law, and personal inhibitions do not become divine prohibitions. In any case, it is time that Christians respond to God's command with a "Yes, Lord" rather than the tiresome "Yes, but" that has become the spiritual reflex of many believers.

1 PETER 3:7

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Peter now turns to address the Christian husbands. Commentators wonder about the significance of the brevity of his instruction to husbands, especially compared to the ample attention that he gives to wives. Some suggest that perhaps there are significantly fewer Christian men among his readers, but this inference is unnecessary and seems to be mere speculation. What we can say for sure is that it takes fewer words for Peter to get his point across to the husbands. Once he has said enough, there is no reason to write more about it.

But if we must find a reason that carries some relevance to the context, we might mention the different social positions of the men and women. It is quite possible for the wives to come under suspicion and suffer mistreatment from non-Christian husbands who are unsympathetic toward their wives' new religion. Therefore, detailed instructions and encouragement are appropriate.

But it is unlikely that the women could inflict any suffering upon their husbands, and thus the men only needed to be told to treat their wives with understanding. Also, there are other passages that discuss the roles and duties of husbands in greater detail. As Christians who possess the entire New Testament canon, we must heed those portions of Scripture as well.

The phrase "in the same way" is translated from a word that means "likewise." It can mean several things. Here it cannot mean that husbands are to submit to authority "in the same way," since the verse does not deal with submission to authority, but to how they are to use their authority. So, here the phrase appears to be a connective that introduces the next item of discussion. In any case, the topic is doubtless related to the previous verses concerning the wives' submission, and to the larger context of submission to authority.

The NIV tells the husband to be "considerate." This overly interpretive translation captures part of the meaning but also loses most of it. Preferable options include "according to knowledge" (KJV) and "with understanding" (NKJV). Peter does not specify exactly what the husbands are to know or understand, but from the immediate and general context, it is likely that he is referring to knowledge of the command of God and understanding of the nature of women, and their own wives in particular.

Husbands are to gain a firm grasp of God's command concerning their roles and duties in marriage, and they are to become experts when it comes to their wives – that is, their personalities, beliefs, needs, desires, talents, strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. Then, they must make constructive use of this knowledge as they dwell with their wives.

God's command in this area is very clear, and the analogy in Ephesians 5 is nothing less than graphic (v. 25-33). When it comes to understanding their wives, as the husbands live with them day by day, it is not difficult to learn the most intimate details about them if they will just pay attention. Other than to live with their wives with understanding, they must also "treat them with respect." Although the translation is not wrong, it does seem too weak. A stronger translation like "bestowing honor" should be favored.

The verse includes three reasons for living with the wives with understanding and for bestowing them with honor.

First, the wife is "the weaker partner." Several common reactions are fatal to correct interpretation. Some people are simply offended by this. Among them, those who affirm biblical inerrancy become confused, and those who do not just choose to disagree with the verse. Then, some people attribute this to the culturally accepted belief of the day. Still others dilute the verse to a point that it completely loses its significance in this context. But Peter offers it as a reason to treat the wife with understanding and honor. Apparently, one of the things that the husband should understand is that his wife is "weaker."

Peter does not specify in what sense the wife is the weaker partner. Spiritual inferiority is ruled out by the next phrase, since he writes that Christian wives are "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life." This is the very point that Paul makes in Galatians 3:28. Remember that this – that is, spiritual equality *in Christ* – and nothing else is in view both in this verse and in Galatians. Peter has just stated that the wives are to submit to their husbands, so that when he mentions their spiritual equality here, we are not to think that he suddenly contradicts himself. Husbands and wives are spiritual equals, but husbands have the authority in the home.

Commentators rush to deny that Peter is referring to intellectual inferiority. My opinion is that women are not intellectually inferior. Or more precisely, I have not come across any persuasive argument or evidence showing that women are inherently less capable than men in learning and thinking. However, to suppose without reason that Peter does not have this mind is to beg the question. Not many commentators even attempt to justify their exclusion of intellectual inferiority from the meaning of "weaker" in this verse, and those who do invariably fail to convince.

It might not be what Peter means, but we cannot discard the possibility just because we think it would be insulting to women. Our interest is not to put down women in any way, although it is healthy to crush the gender pride that women have built up over the years – not that men should have any such pride. So what if the Bible calls you weaker in some way? Would you rather renounce the Scripture than to be humbled?

That said, there might be biblical reasons to exclude certain kinds of inferiority from consideration. We have already mentioned that Christian women are spiritual equals with Christian men. Since the spiritual is inseparably connected with the moral, we may assume that Peter is not referring to spiritual or moral weakness. Then, Proverbs 31 states that women can possess excellent character (v. 10), skill (v. 13), economic sense (v. 16-18),

strength (v. 17), compassion (v. 20), and wisdom (v. 26). However, although it says that all these qualities might be found in women, verse 10 implies that there are not many who possess them (but neither does it say that the percentage is lower than that of men). So Proverbs 31 alone cannot overturn the possibility that women are in general "weaker" in any or all of these areas, that is, except for the spiritual and the moral, which we have legitimately excluded.

Sometimes preachers use certain passages to flatter women. For example, it is often said that the disciples who remained with Christ at his crucifixion and who first visited his tomb were women. It would seem, then, that women tend to possess greater spiritual courage and devotion. But the assertion cannot be proved in this manner. This is because women were so disrespected at the time that they were not regarded as threats or people of any significance. This is not to belittle them in any way, but we cannot say that they possessed superior spirituality over men just because of what they did, since they were not in as much danger as the male disciples.

My point is that we cannot assume comprehensive equality just because the idea is fashionable, especially when Peter says that one gender is "weaker" in some sense.

Now, based on a general reading of Scripture, it seems that at least Peter could be referring to bodily strength. That is, in general but not in every case, the husband tends to be physically stronger than his wife. This also fits the context quite well. A physically weaker wife is in danger of her unbelieving husband's abuse. But rather than giving way to fear, she should put her hope in God, following the examples of the holy women of the past (3:1-6).

The context also strongly suggests that Peter might be referring to social inferiority as well. Because of the woman's position – imposed not only by culture, but also by God's command – she is much more vulnerable to mistreatment, not only by her husband, but also by society in general. With this *understanding* in mind, and if there is any other way in which the wife is weaker, the husband should accommodate her, protect her, and honor her according to her needs.

Second, husbands are to treat their wives with understanding and honor because they are "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life." In other words, although they may be weaker in some sense, they are completely equal to men where it really counts. They are joint heirs in eternal life and the blessings of heaven. They are not hindered by or inferior to their husbands in any way when it comes to growth in knowledge, faith, love, courage, and the various spiritual gifts. They have direct access to God through Jesus Christ without the need for mediation by their husbands. And it is to God to whom they will give their final account.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention again, this changes nothing when it comes to the roles of husbands and wives in marriage. The husband is still the head of the wife, who must obey him in everything as she obeys the Lord himself. We have already observed the connection to Galatians 3:28. And there, Paul also affirms that Christian women are "heirs

according to the promise" (v. 29). On this point, there is no difference between male and female.

Third, Peter tells the husbands to live with the wives according to knowledge, bestowing honor upon them, "so that nothing will hinder your prayers." This will sound strange to those who conceive of their faith as a strictly individual business. Although the Scripture acknowledges a private aspect of religion, it also affirms a communal dimension of faith. But even considered as an individual, the husband can hardly expect God to hear him while he mistreats his wife or harbors hostility toward her, whom God tells him to love and cherish even to the point of death (Ephesians 5:25). By the same token, no woman should suppose that she is spiritual or that she has the ear of God when she resents her husband, or if she is not entirely submissive and obedient toward him.

If Sarah is the model for Christian wives, Jesus Christ himself is the model for Christian husbands, in the way that he sacrificed for the church and cares for her (Ephesians 5:25-33). Earlier we mentioned that the command for wives to "submit" to their husbands cannot mean that they should simply "yield their rights." This is because in such a context, in which they are told to obey their husbands in everything, they have no rights to yield in the first place. It is not as if wives can have their own way whenever they wish, only that they should surrender to their husbands instead. By God's command, they have no such authority, so that there are no such rights for them to surrender.⁴⁴ Rather, the command for them to submit refers to humble attitude and obedient behavior.

But when we turn to the husbands, they do possess rights that they may either exercise or surrender. From Ephesians 5, we understand that husbands must love their wives as Christ loves the church, and we deduce from the passage that this love translates into two broad guiding principles – namely, following Christ's example, it should be spiritual in focus (v. 26-27) and sacrificial in practice (v. 25).

Just as the wife's attitude toward the husband is characterized by submission and obedience, the attitude of the husband toward his wife is characterized by sacrifice. This means that, as far as it is biblical and possible, and as far as it advances God's program in the home, he should constantly yield his rights for the benefit, comfort, and security of his wife.

This applies to all areas of life, from the mundane items to critical situations. Sometimes he might have to offer her his coat and endure the cold himself. When funds are limited, he will have to forgo his own gratification so that his wife may purchase what she needs and wants. He might have to be "the bad guy" to protect her from a controlling mother-in-law. These may seem like insignificant things, but they are what daily life consists of.

⁴⁴ Women indeed have certain rights in the marriage relationship. For example, she possesses conjugal rights (1 Corinthians 7:3-5), and the right to expect her husband to remain faithful. However, these are not really rights that she can surrender. It is not as if she can allow her husband to commit adultery! These rights do not apply to our context, which refers to the general headship of husbands over their wives, and the broad authority that this gives to the husbands. Also, the point is that they have no right to *disobey* in the first place, and therefore they have no rights to surrender in this context where we are referring to obedience to the husbands.

Then, there are the emergency situations. The husband must be willing to sacrifice his life for his wife without hesitation. Now, of course the devoted wife would also sacrifice herself for her husband. And here is where his authority could prove useful – he must order her to save herself, and she must obey. This might sound too dramatic, but it is in fact unrealistic to suppose such a situation will never arise. Moreover, if the biblical teaching is that the husband must love his wife in the same way that Christ loves the church in his sacrifice, then until a husband considers this point, he has yet to make the kind of commitment to his wife that is required by a biblical conception of marriage.

However, this does not mean that the husbands should always allow their wives to have their way. When it comes to matters of personal comfort and security, the husbands may sacrifice his rights for their wives, but spiritual concerns must take priority, so that if the wives are disobedient, then for the sake of their sanctification, the husbands must stand firm and teach their wives biblical submission. The trouble is that many husbands are selfish when they should yield their rights to the wives in love, and they are lenient when they should remain firm against the wives' sinful tendencies. In demonstrating sacrificial love, the husbands should never hand over the headship of the family to the wives.

Ephesians 5 does not only teach that the husbands should be sacrificial in their love, but that their love should also be spiritual in focus, just as Christ purifies his church through the word of God. So when it comes to the major decisions in the home, and especially those that may affect the spiritual condition of its members, the husband must take the lead. Here is one area in which the husbands must assume leadership and wield authority without compromise.

A husband must exercise constant authority and oversight concerning the general direction that the family takes. As the head of the home, he could consult with his wife and other family members, but the final decision and responsibility rest with him. By now it should become evident that although the husband's authority in the home is second only to the Lord, there is little room for self-serving decisions. He is to use this authority to serve, protect, and direct his wife and family, often to his own hurt, and he must give an account for his decisions. Therefore, let every man exercise his authority with soberness and godly fear.⁴⁵ And in light of this, women should not dare complain that they must obey their husbands.

But still, it is common to object, "I have no problem obeying a loving husband, but what if I married a man who does not follow the example of Christ?" These women are liars. The truth is that they will not obey their husbands even if they are as holy and loving as Christ himself. This is because the command to obey their husbands comes from Christ in the first place! So in suggesting reasons to dismiss the command to obey, they have already disobeyed Christ. Thus the problem is not their husbands, but their sinful resistance to authority.

Remember that Peter's instruction to the wives (3:1-6) is written precisely to prepare them on facing hostility and mistreatment from their husbands. He does not say to be submissive

⁴⁵ For more on the Bible's instructions for husbands, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians*.

only when the husbands treat them with understanding and with honor. Rather, he writes to wives whose husbands might be unbelievers altogether, so that there is no telling how they might treat these women. Christian wives must submit even to these men. They are to "put their hope in God," "do what is right," and "do not give way to fear."

Make no mistake: the husbands could abuse their authority, and indeed many of them do. But if the proper use of authority is the precondition for obedience, then 3:1-6 would be meaningless and unnecessary. In fact, this would defeat the purpose of 2:13-25 as well, and also much of Peter's letter. Those women who say that they will be obedient as long as their husbands are "reasonable" completely miss the point, and in this they sin against the Lord just as much as their uncaring and abusive husbands.

When Peter pressed Jesus about another disciple, the Lord replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:22). Although it is true that the husband's behavior carries tremendous consequences for the wife's welfare, the same principle applies. The command to obey the husband comes directly from God, and it is to God that the wife must give account. So we say to the wife, "If the husband sins, what is that to you?" As Paul writes, "To his own master he stands or falls" (Romans 14:4). But you must follow the Lord.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that unloving, unfaithful, and abusive husbands are rampant in our society, and even in our churches. One reason for this is that church leaders have not been insistent enough on teaching and enforcing the biblical commands in this area.

Now, if we take a harsh tone with rebellious and overbearing women, we offer a still stronger rebuke toward husbands who do not cherish their wives. We think that they are not men, but ignorant and savage beasts. They must repent, turn from their sins against the Lord and their wives, and follow Christ's example.

In addition, what we have just said about the women also applies to the men. That is, they are to love their wives even as Christ loves his church and gave himself for her, whether or not these wives follow the biblical command to submit and obey. Yes, a woman without a gentle and quiet spirit can be so intolerable that she could drive a man to utter despair, and sometimes even to suicide. Some would rather perish than to bear her nonsense any longer. But this is also where sacrifice comes in. Christian love is not mere animal affection, but it mirrors God's self-giving attitude toward his elect sinners.

Just as women should look to God for preservation when dealing their unloving husbands, the husbands can find strength from the Spirit and inspiration from the love of Christ when dealing with their rebellious wives. And perhaps by their strong leadership and unfailing love, the husbands will even win over some of these women to the way of the Lord.

1 PETER 3:8-12

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Peter is wrapping up the large section that we have been studying (2:13-3:7). He has been instructing his Christian readers to submit to government officials, masters, and husbands, many of which are probably unbelievers who are unsympathetic to their faith, and who might unjustly inflict hardship upon them. The general approach that Christians should take toward these authority figures is stated earlier: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (2:12).

Now Peter comes to the final item on this list for this section. He has been telling his readers how to face outsiders, but it is also important for them to learn how to treat one another. And on this, he writes, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." The statement is directed toward believers, since Peter speaks to "all of you" and tells them to "love as brothers."

To "live in harmony" is literally to "be of one mind" (NKJV) or to "be like-minded" (HCSB). The NIV gives the correct meaning of the word. The NASB is similar and reads "be harmonious." The RSV says, "have unity in spirit," but the meaning is the same. Although the New Testament stresses unity between brothers and sisters in Christ, it appears to be an uncommon trait among Christians today. Happy is the man who finds it among his community of brothers.

For those facing persecution for their faith, such as Peter's readers, it is not only a virtue and a duty to maintain unity, but it would also give them some practical advantage. That said, it is for this advantage that some choose to suppress even essential doctrinal differences in order to put up an united front before the world.

But once they suppress these essential differences, there can be no genuine and permanent unity, since they in fact differ on the most essential things. Unless they abandon their beliefs, these differences will seep through the cracks and generate conflict and distrust. Then, sooner or later, they might even erupt into full scale infighting and division.

On the other hand, if they do abandon their beliefs for a superficial unity, then this unity becomes worthless altogether. They no longer promote God's program in the world, so that

they no longer carry an offense against the world, and there is no longer anything for which the world would persecute them. Thus there is really no point in maintaining a superficial united front. In addition, if the unity produced involves a suppression of doctrinal differences, it in fact falls short of the kind of oneness that Scripture requires.⁴⁶

To "be sympathetic" is to share in other people's joys and sorrows, and to identify with them in their condition. As Paul teaches in Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn," and in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." The context of the verse from 1 Corinthians provides the basis for this sympathy – all believers belong to the same Body of Christ.

The command, therefore, is not just an encouragement to identify with other believers in our imagination. Rather, it is a call to let our attitudes reflect the reality that we are one people in Christ. In a real sense, what happens to one or some of us happens to all of us. Thus it is unbiblical for a Christian to be concerned only about himself, and what happens to himself. More improper still is it to gloat over another Christian's suffering, or to envy another's blessing or deliverance.

To "love as brothers" is to maintain a self-giving affection toward other Christians. Of course, it refers to both male and female disciples. Grudem thinks that the NIV obscures the emphasis of loving *fellow believers*, and seems to prefer the RSV's "love of the brethren."⁴⁷ However, I am unconvinced that the NIV's rendering, also shared by the KJV and NKJV, indeed presents such a problem. His criticism seems more relevant to the ESV's "have...brotherly love" and even more so to the NASB's "be...brotherly." But even these translations are not wrong, especially the ESV.

There is to be a special love among Christians. In heaven, the bond between believers shall be much more intense than the affection that exists between natural relatives on earth. Such a bond is seldom evident in the church today, and this can only mean that we are failing to regard other believers as family here on earth.

Yet Scripture never refers to this brotherly love as something that resides only in especially holy and mature saints. It ought to be the ordinary sign of discipleship. As Jesus states, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). John puts it both positively and negatively, and writes, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). The person who has no love for Christians is himself not a Christian at all.

Now, we partake of the bread and wine of the covenant, and rejoices that God has come to dine with men. We argue over the spiritual presence of Christ in the sacraments, and make fine distinctions to preserve the orthodox view. But have we neglected the fact that, when we eat the bread and drink the wine with one another, we reaffirm not only our fellowship with Christ but also to one another, and that we are as blood brothers in him? And when

⁴⁶ For more on unity, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Philippians*.

⁴⁷ Grudem, p. 146.

we sin against one another, when we sin against the brotherhood, we also sin against the blood of the covenant by which we are joined.

To "be compassionate" is to have a "tender heart" (RSV, also see NKJV and NLT) toward others. The NASB has "kindhearted," which is also correct. KJV's "be pitiful" is now archaic, although to be compassionate certainly includes the idea of showing "pity" as we understand the word today. However, the word is in fact too rich for a simple English translation to satisfy. Hillyer thinks that translations referring to a "tender" or "kind" heart are too passive, and "pitiful" is condescending.⁴⁸ He favors the NIV as the closest possible English translation, although I am not convinced that these other translations are so bad.

In any case, the word literally refers to the bowels, the intestines, or the "gut," if you will. It depicts strong feelings in the inner parts. Thus the KJV refers to "bowels of compassion" in 1 John 3:17. There the NKJV and NASB say "heart," and the NIV has "pity." Christians should have this attitude toward all people, even their enemies, but the emphasis here is how believers should treat one another. So, to paraphrase, Peter says that believers are to have "gut-wrenching compassion and sympathy" for one another, and one that moves them to action (1 John 3:17-18).

To "[be] humble" is not only to reflect the character of our Lord, but it is also a practical necessity for a church under persecution. Most of those who are prideful really have little to be proud about, and of course no one can boast about himself before the Lord. But humility is not blind self-abasement. It is honest, and does not deny a person's virtues and abilities, even relative to that of others. However, it is so honest, and it sees so clearly, that it understands not only a person's relation to other people, but also his relation to God and his grace. Thus he acknowledges God's transcendence and superiority, and relative to God, his own creatureliness and undeserving condition. The Greeks considered humility a sign of weakness, but the truth is that the lack of humility is a sign of ignorance.

However, humility cannot be attained and explained solely by honest self-assessment, for Christ understood that he was able, perfect, and sinless in every way, and yet he was the very example of humility. Therefore, like other Christian virtues, humility is deliberate. One is not compelled to be humble, and one does not become humble by accident. Christ acknowledged that he was Teacher and Lord to his disciples, but he *stooped* to serve them, even to wash their feet (John 13:13-14). And this explains how we can remain humble before others even when we know that, by God's grace, we are genuinely superior to them in some respects. Humility is not an acknowledgement of inferiority, although it can include this when it reflects reality. But in its higher expression, it is the deliberate act of stooping in one's attitudes and actions in order to serve others according to the will of God.

Our modern corporate world considers it healthy to always compete and compare, but this attitude can prove destructive to the Christian community. Yet one can often find it in the contexts of Christian discipleship and ministry. To the extent that we are concerned about becoming better and bigger than our brothers, and exhibiting our superiority before men, we are no longer serving God, but self. A humble man has a true assessment of himself,

⁴⁸ Hillyer, p. 104.

but there is also the spiritual strength to practice deliberate abasement and service before others.

Humility often works itself out in very practical situations. For instance, Paul tells his readers, "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position" (Romans 12:16). A man who is rich, powerful, or educated is certainly superior to one who is not at least in these ways. A humble man does not flaunt these things, and he does not use his credentials to belittle or subjugate others. Rather, he associates with his brothers and sisters as equals in Christ, using his talents and resources to promote their welfare.

Then, Peter continues in verse 9, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing." Because the verse begins by telling Christians how they should respond to evil and insult, some commentators assume that he is now referring to how they should deal with outsiders, or unbelievers.

This naïve interpretation is puzzling. Perhaps these commentators attend churches that are far better than those that we have seen, and so they think that Christians do not suffer evil and insult from other believers. But even then, the New Testament contains more than a few warnings against jealousy, deception, and infighting among church members (1 Corinthians 1:11, 3:3, 6:6-8; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:15, 26; Ephesians 4:25, 31-32; Colossians 3:8-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15; James 4:1). Thus even if Peter is referring to outsiders, his instruction must also apply to conflict among believers.

Some of the cruelest treatments and scathing insults that a believer will receive will come from his Christian brothers and sisters. Sometimes the ministers are the favorite targets, but even when they are not, they will always get their share of criticisms and accusations. And sometimes ministers steal from one another, or plot to destroy one another. God's work is the greatest joy, but young ministers would do well to put aside romantic ideas of ministry life. It can often be a thankless job, and their greatest enemies will often be other professing Christians. But as Paul says, "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). So we fix our gaze on the Lord and move forward with determination.

When assailed by evil and insult, believers are not to respond with more of the same, but with blessing instead. To imitate the Lord in such a manner pleases the Father. Moreover, it serves to counteract the unbelievers' false accusations against our faith (2:12). It promotes peace within the Christian community. It is the stronger brother who could absorb the evil and the insult, and return a blessing instead. An immature and hotheaded believer would act on his indignation and perpetuate the hostility.⁴⁹

Along with this instruction, Peter adds an incentive, as he continues in verse 9, "...because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." That is, Christians are called to act in the way specified in verses 8 and 9, so that they may "inherit a blessing" from God.

⁴⁹ For more on this, see Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Although the verb "inherit" is often used in connection with the Christians' heavenly inheritance (1:4), context must dictate the meaning, and the emphasis here is temporal blessing. Verses 10-12 refer to those who would "see good days," and that the Lord has his eyes on the righteous, being "attentive to their prayer." These verses are taken from Psalm 34:12-16, where the context also relates to God's attentiveness, deliverance, and protection in this life.

Taken from the Psalm, these verses exhibit clear parallelisms, making them almost self-explanatory. Thus to "love life" refers to the desire to "see good days" (v. 10). The "evil" that one must "keep his tongue from" is "deceitful speech" (v. 10), although other kinds are not excluded, of course. To "turn from evil and do good," in this context, is to "seek peace and pursue it" (v. 11). For the Lord to have his "eyes" on the righteous, among other things, means that he would be "attentive to their prayer" (v. 12). The other side of this is that "the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (v. 12).

1 PETER 3:13-17

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

From 3:13 all the way to 4:19, Peter provides an extended exhortation to those Christians who would suffer various kinds and levels of persecution at the hands of unbelievers. We understand that he has unbelievers in mind because verse 15 mentions the need to answer for the gospel hope itself from those who "harm" (v. 13) the Christians. Now Peter is no longer focusing on specific relationships (2:13-3:8), but he paints the big picture and gives us broad principles, all the while keeping in mind the suffering of Christ as our example (3:18, 4:1, 13).

Verse 13 is a rhetorical question. The implied answer could be that no one would ever harm a person who is eager to do good, but this is prevented by the theme of this letter as well as the first part of verse 14, which says, "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed." The idea is that, overall, it is unlikely for a person to receive punishment for doing good. We are not referring to possibility, but likelihood. Indeed, most government officials and other people with power do not enforce a systematic persecution of upright individuals. But even righteous men can suffer if they displease those with the authority to cause harm. Peter says that they are blessed for enduring unjust suffering.

The second part of verse 14 says, "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." The NIV assumes that this is a quotation from Isaiah 8:12, but the translation does not seem to fit Peter's context, although it fits Isaiah's. The construction does not require such a translation here, and although Peter borrows the expressions from Isaiah, there is nothing to imply a rigid quotation. Thus the alternate reading of "Do not fear their threats," provided in NIV's margin, is preferable. The NASB reads, "And do not fear their intimidation." See also the NKJV, RSV, and ESV.

After this, Peter continues to say, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord" (v. 15). To "not fear" the unbelievers' threats is not a purely negative attitude, nor does it put us in neutral. Rather, the positive counterpart to "do not fear" is to sanctify Christ in our hearts, to reverence him inwardly, to look to him confidently, so that we will never be shaken. The more we know Christ, and the more he fills our hearts, the less we will have to fear from men.

The rest of verse 15 is frequently cited as a foundational verse for the practice of Christian apologetics, the defense of the faith: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." The word translated "answer" (NIV, KJV) or "defense" (NASB, NKJV) is *apologia*, from which we derived the English word "apologetics." This is to be given in response to the demand for a "reason" (*logos*), which suggests that the answer or defense would come in the form of a *rational* argument or discourse. Since the topic concerns "the hope that you have," we understand that Peter is referring to an answer or defense that is both rational and biblical, or Christian.⁵⁰

Commentators suggest that by now Peter has broadened the context to include all kinds of unbelievers. Although some of the previous passages deal with our response to public officials and other human authorities, our verse says to Christians, "Always be prepared" to answer "everyone who asks." But this is awfully careless. Everyone should know that "everyone" almost never means everyone! That is, seemingly universal terms like "all" and "every" often occur within contexts that restrict their meanings, so that "all" means all that is within the defined boundaries, and "every" means every one that is within the specified restrictions.

With this in mind, the previous passages, at least from 2:13 to 3:6, all deal with submission to human authorities. But lest anyone should say that 3:8-12 has severed the continuity, our verse is itself enclosed by other verses that refer to those who have the power to "harm" (3:13) Christians, the potential to make threats and incite fear (3:14b), and cause them to "suffer" (3:14a and 17). The text continues to say that Christ "died" (3:18) for the unrighteous, that he was "put to death" (3:18), and that he "suffered in his body" (4:1). The "everyone" is no ordinary fellow.

The point that we need to make is that this context restricts the words, "But do this with gentleness and respect." The statement has been used to prescribe the proper attitudes, mannerisms, and even the vocabularies that Christians are to use when answering challenges from all kinds of unbelievers. Thus the verse has been reduced to something like, "Always be ready to do apologetics, but do it nicely."

However, such an interpretation of the verse would condemn the prophets, the apostles, and even the Lord himself, as there are times when they conducted themselves with anything other than "gentleness and respect" toward the unbelievers, at least as these words are now understood. Rather, they called the disobedient and unbelieving such things as whores, dogs, pigs, foxes, snakes, fools (or morons), hypocrites, wicked men, blind men, dead men, brutes, rubbish, dung, and so on.⁵¹ And do we need to repeat all the negative remarks that Peter himself has made about the unbelievers in this very letter that we are studying?

⁵⁰ For instructions on biblical apologetics, see Vincent Cheung, *Ultimate Questions, Presuppositional Confrontations, Apologetics in Conversation and Captive to Reason*.

⁵¹ For more on the use of biblical invectives, see Vincent Cheung, "A Moron By Any Other Name" in *Captive to Reason*.

On the other hand, the prophets and apostles usually answered *authority figures* with gentleness, doubtless "for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13) and acknowledging the fact that "there is no authority except that which God has established" (Romans 13:1). In one instance, Paul answered his interrogator with some of the harshest words possible, even with a curse, but he softened once he discovered that he was speaking to the high priest:

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:1-5)

Thus the strong tendency among apologists and interpreters to universalize 1 Peter 3:15 and condemn those who do not adhere to their standard of "gentleness and respect" is unbiblical (since it removes the words from their context, and distorts and misapplies them) and irreverent (for it indirectly criticizes the prophets, the apostles, and even the Lord).

And I say that they use *their standard* of "gentleness and respect" because, whether in context or out of context, they do not use Scripture itself to define these words, but the non-Christian notion of social propriety. The result is that the unbelievers are controlling how Christians must deal with them. This in turn takes away the sting that is part and parcel of a biblical defense of the faith. It is not that we must be constantly harsh and insulting – that is not the point at all – but we must remain free to display the variety and intensity of expression as prescribed and exhibited by the relevant biblical commands and examples, and as necessitated by our encounters with different types of unbelievers.

In any case, Christians should no longer allow teachers of apologetics to get away with the misuse of 1 Peter 3:15.

Our rational defense is to be accompanied by "good behavior" (v. 16). Again, the gospel message is a sufficient basis for faith, and makes the unbelievers culpable. And although some sinners might be convicted by our good behavior and thus become "ashamed of their slander," many of them might not respond this way.

In fact, our good behavior might sometimes infuriate them, harden their hearts and incite greater persecution (4:4). But we do what is right no matter what, "keeping a clear conscience," which sinners cannot see. Yet if the unbelievers persist in their persecution, how should we think? Peter writes, "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (v. 17).

1 PETER 3:18-22

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

This is said to be the most difficult passage in the letter, and one of the most difficult in the New Testament. Entire books have been written to deal with the language, theology, sources, and controversies related to the ideas contained in it.

As we come to this passage, we must decide on what kind of treatment we are to give it in terms of level and depth. Given the type of commentary that this is intended to be, we will not mention all the interpretations that have been suggested by scholars and consider the arguments in support of each. Such a procedure, while profitable, must be reserved for a more specialized study.⁵²

Instead, as we examine the passage, we will interact with only two major interpretations and the basic arguments for them. These are also the only two plausible positions. There are variations of these two interpretations, but the differences are not so significant as to warrant separate treatment in an elementary commentary such as this.

As for the other options that are more different, they are in fact quite contrary to the context and content of the passage, as well as against the general and consistent teachings of Scripture on the relevant topics. Therefore, any ordinary reader should be able to see through their flaws after some careful reflection. In any case, the exposition that follows will at least indirectly eliminate many false and impossible interpretations associated with the passage.

According to the first interpretation, these verses say that Christ went into hell, hades, or some place in the spirit realm, and declared his victory to those who were held there as prisoners. The details may differ among those who favor this view. Some believe that this occurred between Christ's death and resurrection, while others believe that it happened after he was raised. Some think that those held in prison were human spirits, but others think that they were fallen angels.

⁵² For example, see Grudem, p. 203-239, and his commentary, p. 155-166.

Then, in the second interpretation, Peter is saying that Christ preached by his Spirit through Noah to those who eventually perished in the flood, and who are now "in prison."

The latter part of verse 18 reads in the NIV, "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." The Greek does not distinguish between "spirit" and "Spirit," so this translation is one option. However, after stating "put to death in the body," some scholars argue that Peter could hardly expect his readers to have such a different understanding of the parallel portion of the sentence, written in the same grammatical structure. The RSV appears more natural and accurate: "being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

The contrast is thus between "death in the flesh" and "alive in the spirit." However, this translation in turn lends itself to a dangerous misunderstanding, that Christ was killed in the body but raised only in the spirit, so that there was no physical resurrection. But this misunderstanding is excluded for at least three reasons.

First, the rest of the New Testament insists that the death and resurrection of Christ were physical. His body was killed, and the same body was raised, albeit in an enhanced form. And second, Christ's spirit was never dead previous to the crucifixion, and it was never killed in any sense that required its resurrection. In other words, if the resurrection was not physical, then he would not have needed *any* resurrection in the first place.

Then, third, both flesh and spirit in fact lack the definite article, so that the verse literally reads, "put to death in flesh but made alive in spirit." Thus the verse is not referring to two parts of Christ – his body and his soul – but it makes a contrast between the human sphere of life and the "spirit" sphere of life.

This in turn influences our understanding of verse 19. Given what we understand about verse 18, rather than beginning verse 19 with the translation "through whom" (NIV), it is perhaps better to say, "in which," that is, in the realm of the spirit. The meaning is "in this sphere" or even "under this influence."⁵³ Contrary to some, it does not have to mean "in the resurrection body" or "in the resurrected state."

Following "in which" is the word *kai*, which means "and" or "also." This introduces *something else* (other than being "made alive in spirit") that Christ did in the sphere of the spirit – namely, "he went and preached to the spirits in prison." And here is the crux of the problem for interpreters.

Who are these "spirits in prison"? Those who favor the first interpretation assert that the word "spirits" must refer to either angels or demons. However, biblical usage does not in fact support this; rather, the meaning is determined by the context.

Peter indicates in verse 20 that he is referring to those "who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built." Again, those who favor

⁵³ Edwin A. Blum, 1 Peter, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, edited by Frank E. Gaebelain (Zondervan, 1981), p. 242.

the first interpretation say that these were fallen angels, and some cite Genesis 6:1-4 as support. In this view, the fallen angels married human women and mated with them to produce offspring. However, Jesus said that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:30), and to put it mildly, it is not at all certain if it is even possible for angels to have sexual intercourse with humans and produce children.⁵⁴ Instead, those verses can very well be talking about intermarriages between the godly and the ungodly.

On the other hand, Genesis 6:5-7 indicates that it was the wickedness of men that God witnessed ("The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become"), and it was mankind that he then set out to destroy ("I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth"), that is, with the exception of Noah and his family. Therefore, it is best to understand the "spirits in prison" as referring to the wicked men that lived at the time of Noah.

Now, 2 Peter 2:4 says, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment." And Noah is mentioned in verse 5. So the passage is sometimes used to support the theory that the "spirits in prison" were fallen angels. However, once we read the entire passage, it becomes clear that it proves exactly the opposite:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men... (2 Peter 2:4-7)

Notice that the four verses focus on different persons and events. Verse 4 refers to fallen angels who were sent to "gloomy dungeons." It has no direct relation to verse 5, which refers to Noah in connection with "ungodly people," and not fallen angels. Verse 6 refers to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in connection with "the ungodly." Then, although verse 7 refers to a related event, the focus is no longer on Sodom and Gomorrah, but on Lot in relation to the "lawless men" of those cities.

Therefore, there is no reason to connect the fallen angels in verse 4 to the time of Noah in verse 5. Rather, the verse is talking about the angels that fell even before the fall of Adam, if not before his creation. As for verse 5, it explicitly indicates that the flood was sent to destroy "ungodly people," that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," and that the preaching was done in that generation. This lends strong support to the second

⁵⁴ We mentioned that there are alternative views. The verse cannot be referring to all disobedient men in the past, since it explicitly states that it is talking about those who disobeyed while the ark was being built. And Peter does not have the Old Testament saints in mind, since these men were disobedient, and again, they lived while Noah was building the ark.

interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19, that the "spirits in prison" were ungodly humans, and that Christ in spirit had preached through Noah.

As for why these spirits are said to be "in prison," it is because Peter is referring to them from the current point of view – these ungodly men of the past are *now* in prison. It is not uncommon for us to speak this way. For example, I could say, "I warned these prisoners not to rob the bank." But this does not mean that I warned them after they had already robbed the bank and become prisoners. It is understood, and the context of the conversation could make it even more clear, that I warned them before they robbed the bank, but they did not listen, and now they are in prison. So it is appropriate to call these people prisoners even though they were not in prison when I warned them, since they are *now* prisoners indeed.

Likewise, the ungodly men who disobeyed in Noah's time are, as the NASB reads, "*now* in prison." A similar expression will appear in 4:6, where it refers to "those who are now dead." This also explains why Peter refers to them as "spirits," for these ungodly men have longed perished. As for the idea that Christ preached through Noah "in spirit," this is not foreign at all to biblical thinking, and the interpretation is especially appropriate here given 1:11.

Thus the second interpretation of verses 19 and 20 appears exegetically superior, that is, Christ preached through Noah to the ungodly men in the days before the Flood. It also serves the context very well. Like Noah, Christians are preachers of righteousness – speaking by the Spirit of Christ – in the midst of an ungodly population that oppose and mock the faith. By their words and their lives, believers bear witness to the judgment that is to come and the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ alone. Verse 20 adds that in Noah's day, "only a few people, eight in all, were saved," assuring believers that, even though they may be in the minority, they will be preserved and vindicated.

As verse 20 transitions into verse 21, another difficulty appears. We read, "In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The questions for interpreters include the sense in which Noah was "saved through water," the relation between the flood and baptism, and the sense in which baptism now "saves" us.

Peter does not say that Noah was saved *from* the water, but that he was saved *through* or *by* the water. In other words, the text does not say that Noah was protected from the water and preserved while he went through the water, but that it was *by means of* the water that he was saved. God did not save Noah from the water, but God used the water to save him.

This can be very puzzling as long as we focus on the destructive power of the flood, and being strongly oriented to the natural and the physical, this is what many of us tend to do. In natural terms, it is true that the water was a force for destruction from which Noah required protection, which the ark provided. There is nothing wrong with looking at what happened to Noah from this angle.

However, right now Peter is looking at the same event from a more spiritual point of view. That is, although the flood drowned the ungodly men, before the flood, Noah was already drowning in their filth! Man's wickedness filled the earth, so that "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). Verse 12 says, "God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways." He had made the promise that one born of a woman would crush the serpent's head, but now evil was so pervasive that even the messianic bloodline was under threat – only eight people were saved.

Therefore, from the perspective of judgment and disaster, Noah was indeed saved from the water by the ark, no doubt a type of Christ. But from the perspective of God's plan of redemption, it was the flood that saved Noah – not from God's judgment, but from the wickedness and corruption that surrounded him. And it is from this perspective that Peter writes to his readers.

As an illustration of this kind of thinking, consider 2 Peter 2:7-8, which says, "[God] rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)." Of course God rescued Lot from the "burning sulfur" that he rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24), but the text does not focus on this here, and neither does it say that Lot was bothered by the danger and destruction of the judgment. Rather, he was "distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men" who tormented his soul.

The application for Peter's readers is obvious. They are surrounded by ungodly people, who as a later verse states, are "living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry" (1 Peter 3:3). And some of them actively revile the believers who refuse to act like they do: "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you" (v. 4). It is easy to see that Peter's point is just as relevant to believers today.

Then, verse 21 says in the RSV, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you." The flood is not a precise type of baptism, and the two do not correspond at every point. But given what we have said, it is easy to see the specific relevance and correspondence in this context. The water of the Red Sea was a force for destruction, and the Lord protected the Israelites through it when he made them to pass through on dry land. But the same water then destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army, and in this manner saved Israel. This water is also a type of baptism (1 Corinthians 10:2).

Likewise, Christians are "saved" by baptism in the sense that it cuts us off from the godlessness and wickedness of the world. And one day, our salvation will be complete when God throws all ungodly men – all non-Christians – into the lake of everlasting fire, while believers are taken into the presence of the Lord. However, it is not the water or the rite of baptism that saves Christians from God's wrath. This is because when the subject is

salvation from divine wrath, it was the ark that saved Noah, and it was Moses and his staff that enabled Israel to cross on dry land. These are types of Christ.

Therefore, we are saved not because of the water and the rite of baptism, but because we are hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3) as Noah was shut up in the ark, and because we follow Christ and cling to him, as Israel followed Moses and crossed over the Red Sea on dry land. And of course, the verse itself prevents misunderstanding, for it adds, "not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

That is, it is not the water or the rite that saves, but the fact that God has placed us in Christ, who "died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous" (v. 18), and who then rose from the dead (v. 21) and ascended to the right hand of God – "with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (v. 22).

We have offered a credible interpretation of the passage. Although it has been considered difficult and controversial, it is unlikely that Peter intends for it to be this way, and indeed his main point is very clear. Therefore, if any uncertainty remains about it, there is still no need to miss its thrust and intent.

The passage is prefaced by the statement, "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (v. 17). Serving to illustrate and reinforce it, the subsequent verses cite the work of Christ, that he endured and died under unjust punishment, but then he rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of God with all power and authority. God has ordained something similar for us, so that as we follow Christ's example, we shall also inherit his destiny. Our suffering shall lead to vindication and exaltation.

1 PETER 4:1-6

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

This passage is closely associated with the previous one and presents its own difficulties, but what we learned from 3:18-22 will help us here.

Just several verses earlier, Peter tells us, "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (3:17). Then, he gives Jesus Christ as the supreme example of enduring unjust punishment: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" (3:18). Remember that the latter part of the verse literally says, "put to death in flesh but made alive in spirit."

The beginning of 4:1 – "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body" – continues the thought that Peter started in 3:18. If we will keep this in mind, it will guide our interpretation at least by narrowing our options, since what appears inconsistent with the context and the purpose of the surrounding verses is far less likely to be correct.

The word translated "arm" means what it sounds like – it is a military term referring to taking up weapons. As for the word translated "attitude," it can also mean purpose, intention, way of thinking, point of view, or mindset. Davids observes that it can also mean "insight."⁵⁵

At the forefront of the apostle's concerns is the state of mind of the believers – their beliefs and attitudes. Do they affirm the right doctrines? Do they look to the grace and power of God for their hope and assurance? Do they ground their belief and behavior on the person and work of Christ? Are they humbled and encouraged by the example of Christ? Are they inspired by his resurrection and exaltation?

He says earlier, "prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled" (1:13), and after our passage he will say, "be clear minded and self-controlled." Right now he is saying, "Arm

⁵⁵ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 148.

yourselves with this mindset, this insight about Christ's suffering." He says to put on this way of thinking as a soldier would put on a weapon.

The mindset, attitude, and purpose that the believers must adopt is, "he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." Here we face the first major difficulty with the passage. What does Peter mean? Several interpretations have been proposed.

The statement could mean that suffering promotes sanctification, so that believers should welcome suffering in order to advance in holiness and spiritual development. To some people this appears to be the plainest meaning of what Peter is saying, but there are several problems with it.

First, it cannot be directly applied to Jesus, since that would imply that he had been sinning until his suffering, and that his suffering put a stop to his sinning. This is impossible because Peter has already acknowledged the sinlessness of Christ, calling him "a lamb without blemish or defect" (1:19). Hebrews 4:15 says that although he was tempted, he was without sin.

Second, from our understanding of other portions of Scripture, and the whole Bible regarding the ground and method of sanctification, the idea that suffering *in itself* could increase holiness or do away with sin is not true at all. Many believers suffer but continue to sin. For that matter, if there is an inherent relationship between suffering and breaking from sin, then it should apply to unbelievers as well. But for them suffering could only increase their unbelief and bitterness.

Third, it appears that we must take "suffer in the body" to mean death in this verse, since this is what Peter has in mind ever since 3:18, where he says that Christ "was put to death in the body." Therefore, when he says "since Christ suffered in his body," Peter has nothing less than the death of Christ in mind. And thus when he says "he who has suffered in his body," it seems that he must be referring to suffering to the death as well. But if so, then the principle is no longer relevant to an increase of holiness or the break from sin in this life.

Perhaps, some proceed to suggest, the believer's physical death is precisely what Peter is talking about. Just as Christ suffered martyrdom, a Christian should arm himself with the same readiness to suffer to the point of death for his faith. And indeed, the believer who dies can no longer sin – he is done with sin – so that martyrdom is in fact a blessing for him.

All of this is true, and it is even relevant to Peter's letter, but it cannot be what he is saying. This is because the very next verse refers to a person who continues to live: "As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God." The correct interpretation must accommodate the idea that the believer could be "done with sin" and continue to live out his earthly life.

Some take a similar approach to the verse, but from a slightly different angle. According to them, Peter is exhorting the believers to arm themselves with the attitude of a readiness to suffer for their faith, since one who demonstrates such willingness and determination also indicates that he has made a clean break with sin.

In other words, it is not so much that suffering advances one's holiness and delivers him from sin, but that one who has the mentality to suffer for his faith has himself made a break with sin. He has committed himself to righteousness, and his suffering reveals it. Then, there is a variation of this interpretation that says the two contribute to each other. That is, the more one suffers for Christ, the more one breaks from sin, and the more one breaks from sin, the more one is willing to suffer for Christ.

However, the above interpretation, as well as its variation, cannot be true. As we have indicated, the suffering that Peter has in mind in this verse is like the one he talks about in 3:18, which leads to death. In addition, in "he who has suffered...is done with sin," the word "suffered" is in the aorist tense, indicating a completed act, and "is done with" is in the perfect tense, indicating a past event with lasting results for the present and future. It is much more likely that he is referring to a "once for all" (3:18) suffering like Christ's, along with its enduring effects.

Another theory is that the statement does not apply to believers, but it refers to what Christ has done in this redemptive work. The verse begins by saying, "since Christ suffered in his body," and so later when it says, "he who has suffered in his body," it is still referring to Christ. The idea, then, is that by his suffering, Christ has dealt with sin decisively, permanently, and effectively, so that he has thoroughly defeated it – he is "done with sin."

To paraphrase, Peter would be saying, "Christ has suffered in the body, and he has defeated sin. Arm yourselves with this mindset and insight." This is in fact consistent with sound theology, for indeed Christ has defeated sin by his suffering. The question is whether the structure and language of the verse allow such an interpretation. Some commentators point out that the verb in "*done* with sin" could be taken in a passive sense, so that it would mean to be released from sin. This cannot be true of Christ, since although he bore our guilt, he was never enslaved by it.

Now, the most appropriate interpretation is also the most consistent with the context. What does the context tell us? We must recall several ideas. First, following from 3:18, the suffering in 4:1 refers to death. Also, 3:18 mentions that Christ was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." Then, Peter mentions Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness to his generation. When the flood came, Noah was saved by the ark from the water, but from another perspective, the water saved him from the wickedness and corruption that surrounded him. In this sense, baptism saves us as well. The work of Christ cumulated in his resurrection and ascension, or exaltation. In all of this we are identified with him.

Right after this comes 4:1. Peter does not suddenly change the subject, but there is a natural progression that leads to application. The attitude and insight that we are to have is that

Christ suffered to the point of death, and that we are identified with him in this redemptive work. Just as he died for sin, in him we have died to sin. Thus we are now "done with sin" – released from its power. Paul expresses the same truth in Romans 6 – note the parallels to Peter in thought and expression:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (v. 1-7, 11-14)

The ideas in these two passages from Paul and Peter so closely correspond that we will not take time to point out the obvious.

Nevertheless, there are objections to this interpretation of 4:1. We will mention only one here. In arguing for another view, Davids writes, "Sin in 1 Peter always indicates concrete acts of sin, not the power of sin over people (i.e., the evil impulse...or the sin principle of Paul). Thus it is not a breaking of a power, but the ceasing of concrete acts that is intended."⁵⁶

We may grant the point about Peter's usage; however, to suppose that this destroys the parallels to Romans 6, so that we cannot use Paul to explain Peter, is to say that only rigid and exact parallels are true parallels. But there is nothing wrong with drawing two applications out of the same truth, provided they are both valid implications. This is especially true in this case. How is it that we are set free from having to perform concrete acts of sin? It is because we have been set free from the principle of sin! On what basis do we say that we have died to *sins*? It is because we have died to *sin*!

Indeed, what Paul says in Romans 6 is the basis for the ethical instructions that appear later in his own letter. Even in the portion of Romans 6 cited above, he makes it clear that,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

because we have died to *sin*, we have died to *sins*. Therefore, we should stop sinning. And this is exactly the point that Peter is making, so that he says in 4:2, "As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

Peter indeed speaks of sin in a concrete way in his letter, so that in verse 3, he proceeds to list some of the evil behaviors that believers have abandoned: "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry."

The word for "debauchery" (*aselgeia*) is variously translated "licentiousness," "lasciviousness," and "wantonness" in the KJV. It characterizes a person who has no moral restraints, especially when it comes to his sexual behavior. The same word is also used in Romans 13:13, Galatians 5:19, and Ephesians 4:19. The word for "lust" (*epithymia*) here is the same one for "evil desires" back in 1:14, which we have already discussed. It refers to a longing for that which is contrary to holiness and decency. In the previous verse (4:2, "evil human desires"), it is contrasted against "the will of God."

"Drunkenness" (*oinophlygia*) comes from a compound word that means an overflow of wine, or as the KJV has it, it is an "excess of wine." The "orgies" (*kōmos*) refer to banquets, feasts, and parties that are given to sexual immorality and excessive drinking. These are often associated with pagan worship. Similarly, "carousing" (*potos*) can refer to a drinking party or drinking bout.

Finally, the "detestable idolatry" (*athemitoi eidōlōlatriai*) is literally lawless or illegal idolatry. Grudem thinks that this cannot mean "against God's law," since all idol worship is against God's law. Therefore, he claims, the term must be referring to pagan practices so immoral that they are forbidden by the human civil government. But the reason is insufficient for such an inference. It could be that the term merely stresses the detestable nature of idolatry. Such a usage would not be strange. The other instance of the term appears in Acts 10:28, where it refers to the Mosaic law. In any case, Paul writes that "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20), and it is in this context of pagan worship rituals that the previous items are often practiced.

A number of Peter's readers have been converted to Christianity from this background. This is the kind of life that they used to live, but Peter says to them, "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do." The "for" connects this back to the previous verse, which says that the Christian should spend "the rest of his earthly life" living for the will of God and not for evil human desires. This implies that when he says that they have "spent enough time" in paganism, he means that the time prior to their conversion has been wasted. Now as Christians, they must spend the rest of their lives serving God instead, for this is the only worthy use of our years.

In light of verses 2 and 3, consider again what Peter means by "done with sin" in verse 1. He is not asserting that anyone who identifies with Christ in his death and resurrection will immediately achieve sinlessness in his behavior. Indeed, in Christ we have been made perfect, since his perfection has been imputed to us. But Peter speaks about sin in concrete

terms – Christians have departed from the kind of life described in verses 2 and 3. Those who are still "living in" these things exhibit no sign of conversion at all.

Making a complete and permanent break from a sinful lifestyle because of faith in Christ will often draw opposition from sinners. One of Peter's major reasons for writing this letter is to encourage believers in persecution and to instruct them on how to deal with it. He writes in verse 4, "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you." When considered both in the historical and the general context, a person's Christian faith might be interpreted by unbelievers in several ways that lead to their hostile reactions.

The Christian may be considered impious or sacrilegious. This may sound strange until we remember that the Christian is one who has abandoned and renounced all the pagan gods. This point is still relevant in many cultures of the world, and the principle applies to situations other than a person's departure from paganism. For example, Judaism, although it now has very little to do with Old Testament religion, is not paganism; nevertheless, one who is converted to Christianity might be cut off from the family. A similar reason for the unbelievers' wrath is that a departure from the pagan religions and rituals might be considered an insult to ancestors.

A Christian may find that, once he leaves behind a life of drunkenness and sexual immorality, he no longer has much in common with his friends and neighbors. Thus in their eyes the Christian faith has made him antisocial. Nowadays, some Christians have made it an important aspect of evangelism to prove to unbelievers that Christianity is not boring and that Christians can have fun. But we wonder if a Christianity that is not boring *to unbelievers* is still Christianity. And if Christians can have fun, they certainly cannot have the kind of fun that many non-Christians enjoy. The truth is that they should no longer consider those things fun at all.

While Christian devotion, ministry, and worship are indeed great fun, it is silly to even make this a point in evangelism. Truth is to be affirmed whether one finds it boring or exciting. And if the hearer finds it boring, we should attack him for having this attitude rather than to present the faith as an accommodating lifestyle. It will never be satisfying until the faith is so compromised that it is destroyed, or until God transforms the person's heart and grants him new attitudes and desires.

It is true that there is a misconception concerning Christianity that should be corrected, and that is the idea that believers cannot enjoy God's creation at all. Scripture teaches otherwise, and says, "God...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). But one cannot infer from this permission to do just about anything that he wishes to do. The apostle certainly does not mean that God provides prostitutes for our enjoyment. Neither can we participate in idolatry, homosexuality, drunkenness, any kind of obscenity, coarse joking (Ephesians 5:4), and many other activities that unbelievers enjoy.

The result is that, compared to the range of things that unbelievers wish to do, Christian enjoyment remains extremely narrow and restricted. Many times Christians argue to widen

the range of things that are considered permissible – not to remove stumbling blocks for unbelievers, but to justify their own lusts. How many times have I heard the objection, "But Jesus went to parties"? Yes, he did. But what kind of parties did he attend? Did he go to drinking parties (not just parties where there were drinking)? Did he go to parties where there were sexual promiscuity? And what did he do once he was there? Did he do nothing more than to socialize and enjoy the food and drinks? Or did he take over the parties to teach the people?

Yes, Jesus went to parties, wedding feasts, and banquets; therefore, at least in principle, we may as well. But we need to consider the kinds of parties and feasts that we are going to, our motives for attending, and what we will do once we get there. Of all the people who said to me, "But if I go, then perhaps I may preach to them," *not one* has actually preached to the people. The reason is obvious. They wanted to socialize, not evangelize, and they wanted approval for something that they knew to be questionable. If they had really intended to preach the gospel, they would have gone and did it without asking me. But they used the mere possibility that they might preach to the people as the license to live like they did before they became Christians.

To prevent misunderstanding, I am not saying that a Christian must not even attend an unbeliever's birthday party or a wedding feast without taking it over with the preaching of the gospel. No, as long as there is no blatant immorality, a believer may attend, but he must not justify something with the mere possibility or intention of preaching the gospel when he knows full well that he is not going to do any of it. But if the situation is, say, a bachelor party that promises heavy drinking, coarse jokes, and sexual immorality, then a Christian must not attend unless he seizes it for the gospel so that these things do not happen at all.

What I sometimes find is that those who constantly advocate the "cultural mandate" and the "goodness of all creation" – true doctrines when correctly formulated – condemn those who do not participate in these things. But whether they are in the wrong depends on their reasons to abstain. As stated earlier in the commentary, we must not interpret the example of Jesus in a way that condemns John the Baptist, since Scripture approves them both.

A related reason for opposition is that a Christian's pure lifestyle, even if he does not actively call attention to it, condemns the unbelievers. As John 3:20 says, "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Their curiosity becomes confusion, which quickly turns into indignation, and soon they lash out, as Peter says, to "heap abuse" on the Christians. Pure conduct becomes an object of ridicule.

"But," Peter continues, "they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (v. 5). This is said in the context of both verses 3 and 4, so that it means the non-Christians must give account for both their sinful lifestyles and their mistreatment of believers. To "give account" is a bookkeeping expression that refers to an employee's relation with his employer (see Luke 16:2).

Every non-Christian must one day offer an explanation before God for every little thing that he did in this life (Matthew 12:36). They will not get away with anything – not their manner of living, not their blasphemies against the Christian faith, and not their abuse of believers. God will repay them with torture and hellfire for each thought, word, and deed. He is "*ready* to judge the living and the dead," that is, all those who will be living and all those who will have died when he comes. It matters not if a person is an atheist, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or a Catholic; it matters not if the person is living or if he has already died. This is the fate that awaits every person who is not a Christian.

Then, verse 6 reads as follows: "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit." The verse presents several problems for interpreters. Since the relevance and validity of the our interpretation is easy to see, we will not spend the time to interact with alternate views.

"For this is the reason" relates what follows with what we have just read from verse 5, so that Peter is saying, "Because there will be a judgment, the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead." Then we infer from the rest of the verse that he is referring to people who have believed the gospel, and who have died afterward.

The second part of the verse contrasts "judged according to men" against "live according to God." Again, recalling verse 5, the non-Christians think that there is something wrong with the believers because they "do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation," so that they "heap abuse" on those who follow Jesus Christ. This is their evaluation of Christians, and they even persecute some of them to the point of death. Whether they do or not, it is true that Christians die physically just like the non-Christians, and many who believed are now dead. How will God vindicate them? He will do so in and through the judgment of all men.

Therefore, just as God will punish every non-Christian for their every evil deed, he will vindicate all those who have believed the gospel, whether they are living or dead when he comes. The day of punishment for the unbelievers is also a day of vindication for believers. In that day, he will reverse the negative judgment that men have passed on his people.

1 PETER 4:7-11

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

There is a *de* in verse 7, which can be translated "but," "and," "now," or "moreover." It appears in the KJV ("but"), NKJV ("but"), HCSB ("now"), and NET ("for"), but a number of other translations omit it (NIV, NASB, RSV, ESV). It indicates that verse 7 follows from the previous verses. Nevertheless, the connection is not dependent on the word, since the relationship is clear by the content.

Verses 5 and 6 discuss the judgment that is to come upon both the living and the dead. So when verse 7 refers to "the end of all things," it is to be understood in that context. We find here an example to remind us that "all" seldom means to be inclusive without limitation. Although sometimes it means that, usually it embraces everything only within a defined context.

Otherwise, "the end of all things" could mean the end of the human race, the end of heaven and hell, or even the end of God. No, the context forbids these absurd interpretations. The end of all things would be the judgment, and refers to the completion of redemptive history. In other words, the next great event – the event that every believer is waiting for – is the return of Christ, and along with this the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. God is "ready" (v. 5) to consummate his plan.

Because the end "is near" (v. 7), Christians are to adopt the appropriate attitude and lifestyle. Peter tells them, "Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." "Therefore" (accordingly, this being so) introduces the connection between eschatology and the ethics and spirituality that follow from it. Verse 7, then, tells us that a particular spiritual stance or posture follows from the imminence of the consummation of God's plan, and then a spiritual action – or better, a lifestyle – follows from this spiritual stance.

The spiritual stance is the state of being "clear minded and self-controlled." English translations offer slightly different renderings of the two terms, but the idea is clearly to maintain a mental soundness and discipline that makes deep piety possible, especially in the form of intense and persistent prayer. This is the opposite of being occupied by

concerns, lusts, and distractions that tend to damage one's spiritual focus and heavenly perspective.

Remember, this call to soberness and prayer follows from the idea that "the end of all things is near." The context is eschatological. With this in mind, we find a similar teaching from Jesus in Luke 21:34-36: "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

It can be argued that Luke's passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (v. 32), but it is at least analogous to our passage from Peter, if not an exact parallel. Both teach that eschatological imminence should produce spiritual watchfulness. The danger is in being "weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap." Thus the Christian must "watch and pray."

In contrast, a wicked servant says to himself, "My master is staying away a long time" (Matthew 24:48), and he begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards (v. 49). The master will return at a time when that servant does not expect him (v. 50). Again, the lesson is, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (v. 42). The end of all things is near. As faithful stewards, we must remain in prayer, and to pray, we must maintain a state of mental soberness and discipline.

Proceeding to verse 8, Peter writes, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." "Above all" highlights the importance of love, especially for the purpose specified in this verse. As for "love," the word is *agape*. Contrary to those theologians and expositors who try to force an emotional element into it, Blum is basically right when he says, "Agape love is capable of being commanded because it is not primarily an emotion but a decision of the will leading to action."⁵⁷ The only flaw in the statement is the implication that God cannot command something that we are unable to perform. Ability and responsibility are two separate questions with no necessary relationship to each other.⁵⁸

Peter calls for love here because "love covers over a multitude of sins." Without dealing with alternate views, a simple explanation of what this means will dispel the misconceptions that some have derived from it. The statement is either taken or derived from Proverbs 10:12, which says, "Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs." There the context, as it is here in Peter, is the degree of harmony between people. In other words, this is not referring to redemption from sin but relationship among men.

So to "cover" sins in this sense is to pardon or overlook personal wrongs. Instead of perpetuating conflict, the person who walks in love ends it by enduring the offense. Paul asserts, or rather applies, this teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:7: "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be

⁵⁷ Blum, p. 246.

⁵⁸ See Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology, Commentary on Ephesians, and The Author of Sin*.

wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" God requires believers to show this kind of love toward one another, and in Peter's context, it is also a practical necessity, that is, in order to preserve the solidarity – and thus perhaps to ensure the very survival – of a community that is under persecution.

Speaking of solidarity and survival, Peter continues and teaches, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" (v. 9). The hospitality that he has in mind is a practical quality, and does not mainly relate to social gatherings and dinner parties. Ancient travel could be arduous and perilous. The inns were of questionable character, and besides, most believers had limited means. Therefore, travelers preferred to find lodging with friends and relatives, or other private parties.

Traveling teachers and evangelists were among those who required accommodations. The uncertain economic and social positions of many believers was another reason why such hospitality was needed. Moreover, there were no church buildings dedicated to Christian gatherings at that time, and so believers congregated in private homes for teaching, worship, prayer, and the breaking of bread. Thus the hospitality is not reserved for the occasional traveler, but it is extended to the local community of believers for frequent gatherings.

One can imagine the strain that this kind of hospitality would place on the host. Other than the inconvenience, the guests might often fail to reimburse him, who might be making barely enough to provide for his family to begin with. Then, some guests might deliberately take advantage of his generosity. But as we have observed before, Peter is no naïve apostle. He understands the problems, but still he says to offer hospitality *without grumbling*. Although Christians might very well assist unbelievers, Peter is mainly referring to the mutual support that believers offer "one another."

Now, although we are considering the historical context, we should not suppose that hospitality is no longer necessary in the modern world. The need is almost as great, if not as great, in many parts of the globe, and even in the most prosperous places and societies, opportunities to practice hospitality are not as rare as we might first imagine. The more we are willing to welcome and assist members of the brotherhood, the more we are able to take advantage of the existing global network of believers for the furtherance of God's kingdom.

Although hospitality is of special importance to believers living in certain circumstances, Christian service is not limited to it, so that in verse 10, Peter widens the scope of the ways they should serve one another. He puts the matter in broad terms, and writes, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

The word "gift" is *charisma*. It denotes a spiritual endowment, or some talent or ability given by the Holy Spirit. The New Testament includes several lists of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11). The lists are not the

same, and there is no reason to suppose that they exhaust the full range of spiritual endowments even when we combine them.

Although Peter splits the gifts into two main categories (v. 11), he has no interest in a list. Instead, he calls the gifts "God's grace in its *various forms*." Several translations say "manifold" (KJV, NKJV, NASB). Others read "varied" (RSV, ESV, HCSB). "Multi-faceted" is another good translation. This is the word Peter uses when he refers to "*all kinds* of trials" back in 1:6. God's grace is as varied as our needs and his purposes, and sufficient to meet any challenge in this world. His charismatic endowments cannot be fully enumerated in a short list. Even the same gift, such as the ability to teach, can manifest in a great variety of ways, although legitimate expressions are defined by the word of God (1 Corinthians 12:36-38).

Peter says that "each one should use whatever gift he has received," and this implies several things. First, just as each Christian has been assigned a place in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7, 18), each one "has received" the corresponding spiritual endowments to perform his function. Therefore, every believer is able to contribute in some way "to the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). But, second, Peter's point is not just that each one is *able* to contribute, but that each one *ought* to do so. Thus no believer should remain a mere spectator at church.

Then, third, there is a negative application of Peter's statement. Since he says that each one should use the gift that he has received, it also implies that no single person is expected to perform all the functions necessary to an effective church ministry. The principle is violated most often when Christians consider some of the most prominent agendas of the church, such as evangelism.

We have often made the overt *act* of evangelism the equal responsibility of every believer, when in fact Christ assigned it to the entire Christian community to be performed as a whole. Thus each believer should contribute to evangelism in some way, corresponding to the gift that he has received, but not every one has the equal responsibility – or the ability, for that matter – to preach the gospel directly to unbelievers.

Of course, every Christian is a priest of God, and may perform any function that is proper for such a position, including evangelism. But when a person has received an enhanced ability from God, then it is natural and appropriate for him to dedicate more of his attention to that type of ministry. For many people, this will be something other than evangelism. In any case, it ought to be clear that all of this is not to belittle evangelism, but it is a complaint against extreme individualism in the church.

Something similar can be said about the ministry to the poor, the sick, and the disabled. Can we say that someone who spends most of his time performing evangelism cares nothing about these people? No, the question is whether he is faithfully using the gift that he has received to contribute to the mission of the church. Now, if he avoids using his gift – whatever it may be – to benefit the poor, the sick, and the disabled even when the opportunity arises, then we can say that he cares nothing about them.

The purpose of spiritual gifts is to "serve others," or as Paul says, to build up the church and to promote the common good (1 Corinthians 14:12, 12:7). This fits well with what Peter has just said about love. Love is the proper motive for the exercise of spiritual gifts, which are not given for self-promotion and self-exaltation. On the other hand, love is frustrated without the gifts, since by itself it cannot perform the service that it wishes to render. Christian love is a volition dedicated to obeying the law of God in how a person treats others, resulting in actions that promote their welfare. Spiritual gifts enable this kind of love to express itself *with effect*.

In some circles, a common error is to pit love against gifts. But both are of God, and we must not pit God against himself. Now, in 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul says, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way" (NASB). He does not say that love is better than the gifts, but that love *as a motive* is superior to mere desire in receiving and exercising the gifts.

Then, in chapter 13, he proceeds to note that the person who exercises spiritual gifts without love is nothing. That is, it is not that love is greater than the gifts (the idea is not here at all), and it is not that the gifts will fail without love, since Paul says that he could even move mountains. But *the person* is nothing who has the gifts but has no love. So Paul concludes, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts" (14:1).

This is also the solution for those who think that they have no spiritual gifts, or that they have but very weak endowments from God. They should reach out to serve the church in love, to serve other people, and the spiritual gifts will manifest themselves. And then they will discover that God has given them a place in the body of Christ after all.

However, in their zeal to rid the church of mysticism and fanaticism, and perhaps also to preserve their own dignity and conceal their inadequacies, some believers have adopted an extreme anti-charismatic agenda that is equivalent to an assault against the gifts of God. Anything that they cannot handle belongs to a past era. But the gifts of God represent his manifold grace, and believers must not persecute these manifestations of grace just because their unbiblical scheme prohibits them or because they have no faith to accept them. Then, of course lunatics abound, and some manifestations are indeed fleshly counterfeits. Nevertheless, discernment that is biblical does not "discern" away the manifold manifestations of divine grace and power.

Christians are to be "*good stewards* of the manifold grace of God." The word for "good" is *kalos*, which can also mean faithful or honorable in this context. As for "stewards," they are usually household slaves who manage the family's affairs, including its business and property. Some translations say "managers" instead, as in the HCSB. The NIV's "faithfully administering" is disappointing, although it is not entirely outrageous. It is an accurate description of what a good steward does, but a literal translation here would help retain the original implications.

The fact that Christians are "stewards" tells us something about how we must exercise the spiritual gifts.

First, a household servant manages his master's possessions and not his own, so that he must give an account of what he does with the duties and assets that have been assigned to him. He must faithfully carry out his master's intentions and maximize his master's interests. The negative side to this is that he has no option to sit still and do nothing, whether due to fear or sloth. A passive servant, and not just a deceitful one, is nevertheless called "wicked" and "worthless" by the Lord (Matthew 25:24-30).

Second, for believers to be stewards over the spiritual gifts means that they are not to wander aimlessly with them or to exercise them only on random occasions. Rather, a steward is a *manager*, so that he administers his master's assets purposefully and strategically, making plans and calculations to achieve his master's goals.

Likewise, Christians should be deliberate and systematic in their use of the spiritual gifts. It is easy to imagine how this applies to a preacher. He trains, he studies, and he preaches. But even the ordinary pastor should be more deliberate and systematic in exercising his gift of preaching and teaching. There should be a design and a purpose behind every major ministry decision. Then, the problem is that many preachers settle into a comfortable routine and stop taking new steps to advance his master's cause.

In any case, once we give it some thought, it is not difficult to realize how those with other spiritual gifts can also better fulfill their assignments with a greater sense of purpose and a more organized approach. Consider, for example, those with the gifts of hospitality and financial giving. In the main, the church is responsible to facilitate the use of spiritual gifts, so that everything might be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Although we have already derived from verse 10 so much about what it means to be a good steward of spiritual gifts, Peter himself elaborates on the issue in verse 11. As mentioned, although he does not offer us a list, he splits the gifts into two broad categories, or into two types of activities, namely, speaking and serving.

Regarding the speaking gifts, he writes, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God." Under this category would belong preaching, teaching, exhortation, among other manners of public speech. One who exercises a speaking gift must not spread his own opinion, prejudice, and speculation, but he is to do it as if he is speaking the very words of God, with utter dependence on divine revelation and spiritual unction.

As for the serving gifts, he writes, "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides." Under this category belong those so-called practical tasks, or all the legitimate church duties that do not fall under the speaking gifts. These includes administration, giving, hospitality, and mercy (such as attending to the sick and the poor). Again, one who exercises a serving gift is not to perform his duties out of his own human resources, for

Peter refers to a God-given ability that is distinguished from mere fleshly power. Rather, the spiritual endowments of God imparts an otherworldly quality to one's service.

The word translated "provides" denotes an abundant provision, suggesting that God is generous with his spiritual gifts. Thus a properly functioning congregation should overflow with spiritual blessings and heavenly endowments. There should be no shortage of words of wisdom and knowledge, expressed through faithful teaching and forceful exhortation, and no shortage of the strength and the will to serve.

In combating excess, some have unknowingly adopted the exact viewpoint of the fanatics regarding the spiritual gifts, only that they respond differently, so that they become things to be shunned. They are regarded as gimmicks for entertaining and for boasting. The difference is that, with such an idea about the spiritual gifts, the fanatics still gladly embrace them, while the rest refuse to give them any place.

But we know that this is a false conception of the gifts. They are not as the fanatics present them, but neither are they merely christianized versions of natural abilities that even unbelievers possess. No, the true manifestations of the Spirit are characterized by a divine quality, a heavenly power. It is not up to the church to accept or reject them, for we are in desperate need of them. To put it another way, these gifts are God at work through men, and we are in desperate need of God in our lives and ministries.

Our disagreement with the fanatics, then, has to do with their false understanding of the spiritual gifts and their weak emphasis on spiritual power. Our disagreement with the others, on the other hand, is that they relegate God's activities almost exclusively to "hidden" events, such as in conversion and what is called ordinary providence. For all we know, they could be deists and few would notice the difference. But God provides in overwhelming abundance, and not in a barely detectable measure. Our homes and churches should be flooding over with spiritual riches, divine blessings, and heavenly power. And to this end we pray, "so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." Amen.

1 PETER 4:12-19

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Since we have been quite thorough in dealing with Peter's letter, most of the ideas in the current passage have already been discussed in some way. We will, therefore, permit ourselves to be brief.

Whereas for generations the Jews had been subjected to persecution in the forms of ridicule, exile, subjugation, and even slaughter, Peter's readers, among whom are many Gentiles Christians, have never been part of a religious or cultural minority. So at first the hostile reactions against their conversion to Christianity might shock and alarm them (v. 12). But Peter tells them that they should not find anything strange with it. In fact, this is the kind of repercussions that we ought to expect.

As Jesus says in John 15, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (v. 18-19). Non-Christians hate Christians because non-Christians hate Christ. Christians follow Christ and identify with him; therefore, non-Christians hate Christians also.

And why do non-Christians hate Christ? It is because, as John 3:20 says, "Everyone who does evil hates the light." Or, as 1 John 3:12 says, Cain murdered his brother "because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous." In other words, non-Christians hate Christ and Christians, not because there is something wrong with us (4:4), but because there is something wrong with them. It is not because Christians are antisocial, treasonous, subversive, and so on, but it is because non-Christians are evil people. Therefore, John says, "Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13).

Peter applies this line of thinking in verse 13: "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." As Christians, we are condemned by association in the eyes of unbelievers – that is, by our

association with Christ, the real object of their hatred – and so the world persecute us. But how overjoyed we are, when we realize that what happens to us is because of our association with Christ (Acts 5:41)! The reason for their persecution, and the reason for our suffering, is also the reason for our rejoicing. Moreover, not only are we identified with him in suffering and humiliation, but we shall also be identified with him "when his glory is revealed" (also Romans 8:17).

Now, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (v. 14). The impact of the verse relies on one's appreciation of the blessing specified here. The "glory" is most likely an allusion to the *Shekinah*, or the glory cloud of divine power and presence. It is the most valuable blessing that any man could hope for. And to have divine glory rests of a person, well, one wonders if even heaven could get any better, since this glory *is* the very presence of the Most High.

However, Peter does not say that such a blessing belongs to all those who are insulted, or even to those Christians who are insulted, but only to those who are insulted *because* of the name of Christ. He has already made the point earlier (2:20, 3:17), but here he says it again: "If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler" (v. 15).

The fact that he repeats and expands on the issue indicates a serious concern. It is the erroneous notion that all the things that a person suffers is automatically unjust suffering and pleasing before God just because he calls himself a Christian. But there is no divine glory when one suffers for wrongdoing. That is called justice, not persecution. Peter is warning against a kind of victim mentality that considers oneself the one who is being wronged no matter what, just because this person belongs to a particular group.

We may use racial discrimination and oppression as an analogy. Some people have argued that because there is a much greater percentage of black prisoners, this necessarily implies discrimination against blacks in the judicial process, from the police officers who make the arrests all the way to the judges that pronounce the sentences. Of course, not all black advocates assert this, and some of them will even agree with what is said below. Here we are using this particular argument, favored by some, only as an analogy for Christian behavior and to illustrate Peter's point.

There is no need to deny that racial discrimination is sinful, and that this is something that black people often encounter. For the sake of argument, whether it is true or not, we may even grant that the judicial process is harsher against blacks than against non-blacks. But the significance of this point is limited until we answer the question as to whether these black people are convicted because of discrimination, or whether they are convicted because they are criminals.

Are they murderers? Are they rapists? Are they robbers? If not, then they are indeed victims of injustice, and we must defend them. But if they are criminals, then we must rejoice in the fact that they have been arrested, convicted, and imprisoned. The only cause for indignation is the typical leniency of their sentences. So what if the police arrests a black

criminal and not a white one? Yes, justice demands that both should be arrested, but still the black criminal cannot play the victim. He is arrested precisely because he has made someone else a victim. What happens to the white criminal should be the least of his concerns.

Thus the proper response is not to complain against racism, but if one cares so much about his race, then he should work with his own people to reduce their criminal activities. Warn them. Admonish them. Rebuke them. Threaten them. But it is a disgrace to tell them that they have been mistreated, that they are victims of racial prejudice, when all the while they are giving people reasons to discriminate against them.

There are people whom we would call racists that have not learned their views from white people or from their parents. But many of them are prejudiced against people of a particular race precisely because of repeated contact with them. And when people declare that we should stop judging others by the color of their skin, but only by their character, these people can sincerely respond, "Right, and that's exactly why we are racists!"

You notice other people's prejudices against you, but are these attitudes based on facts, even if exaggerated? If so, then since you care about the people of your race so much, take responsibility for them and work with them to correct the problem, and to present a better image of your people before the world.

Otherwise, you are going to reinforce the very prejudices that you complain about, and people will know that you are just trying to divert the attention from your own sinful behavior by blaming others. If people are going to mistreat you or discriminate against you because of the color of your skin, the least that you can do is to take away every excuse from them by exhibiting a lifestyle that is beyond reproach.

Now, if the call is to see people as individuals and not as members of a given race, then we should gladly do so, just as soon as they stop reminding us about their race and how they are all victims all the time.

Anyway, do not forget that our main discussion is not really about race, but about an unwarranted victim mentality *in Christians*. Non-Christians will always blame others for their own problems. If it is not going to be from the perspective of race, it is going to be something else. But Christians ought to know better. So all that we have said in our analogy applies here with even greater force. If you are "a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler," then how dare you drag the name of Christ into it when you are punished? You are not punished as a Christian, but as a criminal. "However, if you suffer *as a Christian*, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (v. 16).

Verse 17 gives us a glimpse into God's program for humanity, although it is stated in broad terms. It says that judgment begins from the house of God. The "judgment" here is not condemnation, but the "painful trial" in verse 12. The term is more literally translated "fiery trial" (ESV) or "fiery ordeal" (NASB). Thus the suffering and persecution are as God's refining fire, purifying the elect. But then this judgment spreads outward toward the

unbelievers – this time not for purification, but for condemnation. Now if God so refines and purifies those whom he loves and preserves, imagine the suffering of those whom he intends to torture with everlasting punishment!

Verse 18 reinforces the idea with Proverbs 11:31: "If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!" Verses 17 and 18 inform the believers that, even though they may come under intense persecution because of their faith, their conversion is nothing to be regretted. This is true even when considered purely from the viewpoint of suffering, for if God has ordained such things for the righteous, we just simply do not know how to describe the horrors that await the unbelievers. So, even from the viewpoint of suffering, it is better to be a Christian than a non-Christian.

Peter concludes, "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (v. 19). In connection with this, recall our discussion on 2:23 and 3:5. That is, the Christian approach to suffering entails more than a passive endurance. Rather, in the midst of unjust treatment, the believer puts his hope in God, looks to him who judges justly, and persists in doing that which is good and right.

1 PETER 5:1-5a

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.

Although it is possible to perceive from its contents alone the connection that this passage has with the previous one, Peter himself establishes the relationship with the word *oun*. It is appropriately translated as "so" (RSV, ESV, NET) and "therefore" (NASB, HCSB) in some translations, and as "now" in the NRSV and NLT. Others strangely omit the word altogether (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NIV).

The word "elders" translates *presbyteros*, from which we derived the English word "presbyters." So Peter is addressing church leaders here.⁵⁹ The word itself can refer to age or rank, and although the two are often connected, the relationship is not necessary and proportional. In other words, sometimes qualified men who are comparatively young can assume the office of elder (1 Timothy 4:12). And needless to say, just because a person is old tells us nothing about his qualifications for taking up spiritual authority.

For Peter to write, "*Therefore*, I exhort the elders among you" (NASB) means that he is not changing the subject, but that what he is about to say is relevant to what he has already said. The context, of course, is suffering and persecution. Thus we understand that sound leadership is important to a church under such a situation.

Although he does not hesitate to declare his apostleship at the very first verse of this letter (1:1), here he appeals to the elders not as an apostle, but "as a fellow elder." Is there a reason for this? Upon reflection, the wisdom of this approach quickly becomes evident. For an apostle to appeal to them as a fellow elder, as someone who is "in the same line of work," exhibits a humility that captures the attention and respect of his audience. He speaks as one of them – as one who has the same needs and concerns, but more importantly, as one who testifies to the suffering of Christ, and who shares the same hope concerning "the glory to be revealed." He speaks as one who understands and empathizes with these church elders, and what they have to face, both within and without the congregation.

Thus as an apostle, he humbles himself by identifying with the elders and appealing to them on that level. But for precisely the same reason – that he is an apostle – the fact that he presents himself as an elder immediately imparts dignity to the office. This is not just

⁵⁹ For more on the office of the elder, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Philipians*.

for the benefit of the elders, who must speak and govern with confidence, but it is also for the benefit of the rest of the church, who must submit to their leadership (v. 5).

After calling for the elders' attention, Peter says to them, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care" (v. 2). A more literal translation is "Shepherd the flock of God" (NASB, NKJV, ESV). There is a play on words in the Greek, since the verb "shepherd" and the noun "flock" come from the same root, so that one can translate, "shepherd the sheep."

The metaphor informs us of the relationship between ministers and believers in the church. Sheep are dependent, vulnerable, and some tend to wander. But they also know the shepherd and his voice (John 10:14, 27). Accordingly, the shepherd feeds, protects, and guides the sheep, and when necessary, seeks and finds those that are lost. Unlike a hireling, he cares for the sheep and calls them by their names (John 10:13, 3). Now, we must not forget that although from this perspective the minister is said to be a shepherd, from another angle he himself is a sheep under Christ, "the Shepherd and Overseer" of our souls (2:25).

Continuing with verse 2, these shepherds or pastors are to be "serving as overseers." The ESV has "exercising oversight." This phrase translates the verb *episkopēō*. The noun is *episkopos* (Titus 1:7), translated "bishop" or "overseer" in the English versions. Reading verses 1 and 2 together, we see that Peter tells the *elders* to be *shepherds* (pastor) and serve as *overseers*. Thus they refer to the same church office, but each stresses a particular aspect of it. "Elder" emphasizes the authority (maturity, dignity, etc.), "pastor" the relationship, and "overseer" the function.

Using three contrasting statements, Peter then instructs the elders on how they should approach their office: "not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (v. 2-3). Each contrast first presents a negative, as in how not to be an elder, and then it presents a positive, as in how one ought to be an elder. Although simple and concise, each item carries far-reaching implications for a biblical philosophy of ministry. Together, they deal with the minister's drive, agenda, and method.

First, regarding the minister's drive, he is to serve not because he must, but because he is willing. No one should become a church elder because he is pressured into it, or if he does not want to do it. A person may carry a strong sense of duty in connection with the elder's office – that is not wrong – but the question is whether he is willing to take up this burden.

Second, what is the elder's agenda? Does he pursue the office because he is "greedy for money," or because he is "eager to serve"? A better translation for "greedy for money" is "for *shameful* gain" (RSV, ESV). So this does not say that an elder must not desire or even accept compensation for his labor, but it warns against covetousness and dishonesty in dealing with church finances. An elder's agenda, then, must not be to obtain a stable and sometimes well-paying job, and still less should he have in mind to swindle the people of God.

Paul's instruction is that excellent elders are to be not just paid, but well-paid, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). He reinforces this view with the scriptural statements, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain?" and "The worker deserves his wages" (v. 18). Wages are not voluntary donations, but it is a worker's just compensation. Likewise, what the people of God pay the minister is *owed* to him – it is not charity – so that to withhold payment or to pay less than what he deserves is to cheat him of his wages, a practice that Scripture condemns (Malachi 3:5; James 5:4).⁶⁰

Sometimes people cite 1 Corinthians 9:12 to defend the idea that ministers should not be paid. However, the verse proves the very opposite. Verses 7-12a offer an elaborate and somewhat excited argument from Paul that ministers possess the "right of support" from God's people, and to "reap a material harvest" from them, only that verse 12 says "we did not use this right." This does not mean that Paul never exercised this right, since he did receive support from the Philippians, among others. But the point is that he considers it a *right* for the preacher to receive payment. A right, by definition, can only be cast aside by the one who possesses this right, to be taken up again whenever he wishes.

Therefore, it is not up to God's people to withhold financial support from the minister, although it is up to him to turn it down whenever he considers it necessary to give the gospel free course. Nevertheless, a Christian must never pursue the elder's office out of greed for money, and especially for *dishonest* gain. Rather, he must be "eager to serve." In other words, an elder's agenda must not be to exploit others to serve himself, but he must eagerly serve others through the use of his office.

Third, not every style of leadership is legitimate. An elder must not lord it over those entrusted to him, but he must become an example to them. He must remember that the people have been merely assigned to his care. He does not own them – they belong to God alone. The minister must reflect this understanding in his attitude, speech, conduct, and in the way that he directs the affairs of the congregation.

A minister can exhibit Christian character in a myriad of ways. He can demonstrate a reverence for God's word in the way that he carefully dissects Scripture and submits under its teachings. And he can impart confidence in the people by the way that he declares and defends the Bible. A minister who spreads doubt and rebellion should be thrown off the pulpit and out the window.

A minister can demonstrate boldness by the way that he affirms "Jesus is Lord" in the face of persecution. He exhibits true manliness by the way that he respects and cherishes his wife. He shows people what compassion is by the way he attends to the sick and the poor, and what humility means by the way he cheerfully scrubs the church floor along with the young volunteers.

A minister's life is full of opportunities. These are opportunities to show people that, "Yes, someone can believe this good news and live this life – all of it. Yes, faith can be strong,

⁶⁰ For more on the subject of ministry and money, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Philippians* and *Commentary on Malachi*.

bold, and ever-increasing. Christian compassion can be deep, sincere, and enduring. Yes, someone can really believe this way, live this way, feel this way. I do, and you can too, for this is Christ's legacy to you."

And when Christ "the Chief Shepherd" appears, Peter adds, the elders "will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (v. 4). This "*unfading* crown (*stephanos*)" (NASB) might be a contrast against the victor's crown given to the winner of public games. It is a wreath made of laurel leaves, which soon wither. Thus elsewhere Paul writes, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (1 Corinthians 9:25). Non-Christians toil for a fading reward, but Christians labor for a glory that will endure forever.

Although a minister's life is characterized by service and sacrifice, and although he is not to lord it over God's people, this is not to say that his influence comes from his example alone. Rather, Scripture grants him genuine authority to command obedience from the people. As Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Accordingly, Peter writes in verse 5, "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older." The word for "older" is the same one translated "elders" (*presbyteros*) in verse 1, and should also be translated thus in this context, especially since there is no indication for a change in subject. Here Peter addresses the "young men" or "*younger* men" in particular, perhaps due to the fact that they lack the gravity and the insight of those who are more spiritually mature. They are more likely to act out of pride, idealism, and foolish audacity. This can generate a great deal of trouble in a world that is hostile against the faith. Thus a special call to submit under the elders is in order. The rest of the church, of course, is not exempt.

1 PETER 5:5b-11

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Most of us realize that the chapter and verse numbers in our Bibles were not in the original. They were added later apart from divine inspiration, so that we should not be surprised if the chapter and verse divisions sometimes get in the way of comprehension, that is, if one pays too much attention to them.

Sometimes a new chapter begins before the final thought in the previous chapter ends. And sometimes the text heads toward a new direction while we are still in the middle of a verse. This is what happens in verse 5. The first part of this verse belongs with verses 1-4, since it addresses the "young men" in the context of Peter's discussion about elders. But the second part of verse 5 begins a new section, since Peter turns from speaking to the elders to address all the Christians.

He says, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." The previous passage (5:1-5) concerns the relationship between the elders and the church. Here the focus is on the interpersonal relationships among Christians. Of course the elders are also part of "all of you," and therefore the admonition applies to them as well.

They – all the believers – are to "clothe" themselves with humility. The rare verb *enkomboomai* paints the picture of a slave who ties his apron over his other clothing in preparation for service, and generates a fitting metaphor for Christian humility. As for humility itself, although we have discussed it in connection with 3:8, what follows in the current passage will add to our understanding.

Believers ought to clothe themselves with humility *because* "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." This is a quotation from Proverbs 3:34 in the Septuagint. It is also used in James 4:6. If the proud is a reference to unbelievers in general, then the humble are the believers, and the exhortation is for Christians to remain lowly in their attitude and

behavior in the midst of trying circumstances, so that God may deliver and exalt them at a time of his choosing (v. 6). The unbelievers, on the other hand, consider themselves self-sufficient and invulnerable. They see no need for repentance and humility, and mock those who believe the good news of Jesus Christ. God opposes all such people.

"Therefore," because of verse 5, "humble yourselves...under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (v. 6). God's "hand" is a prominent metaphor with a strong background in the Old Testament, and often refers to the operations of divine power for judgment against sinners and for the deliverance of his people (Exodus 3:19; Deuteronomy 3:24).

The image is consistent with our context. Thus by saying "humble yourselves...under God's might hand," Peter is telling his readers to submit themselves to God's providence and to entrust themselves to his judgment. The idea has already been taught in 2:23, 3:5, and 4:19. Those who humble themselves under God's hand this way will be lifted up "in due time." The theme of "humiliation to exaltation" recurs in Scripture. As Luke 14:11 says, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (also 18:14).

Verse 7 does not begin a new sentence. "Cast" (*epiripsantes*) is a participle in the Greek that is dependent on the main verb "humble," and not a separate imperative. A number of translations obscure this by starting a new sentence with verse 7 (NIV, RSV, NRSV, NLT, NCV). Several translations are accurate on this point, including the KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, and HCSB.

For example, the ESV says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." In other words, "casting all your anxieties on him" explains what it means to "humble yourselves...under the mighty hand of God." The NET Bible makes a strong connection between the two verses: "And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand *by casting* all your cares on him because he cares for you."

As for the meaning of the word, to "cast" is to throw something upon someone or something else. It is used one other time in Luke 19:35, where it is said that the disciples "*threw* their cloaks on the colt." As we have said, then, to humble ourselves is to submit to God's providence, trusting in his providence and judgment. This is the opposite of someone who tightly grips on to every aspect of his life, who insists on his own way, and who believes that he can and must vindicate himself.

This particular teaching in verse 7 is taken from Psalm 55:22, where it says, "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." Peter specifies the basis of our trust as "because he cares for you." The Christian is assured that when the people are unfriendly and the circumstances are unpleasant, it is not because God is indifferent about him, or that he is too insignificant to occupy a place on the divine

agenda. Consider Matthew 6:26-33. The lesson there is similar: mind your spiritual duties and entrust all things to God the Father, and he will take care of your needs (v. 33).

Nevertheless, for us to cast all our cares upon him does not mean that we must become spiritually passive. Proceeding to verse 8, Peter hastens to say, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." The RSV is better: "Be sober, be watchful," although "alert" is also fine. The idea is to maintain a clear mind and to pay attention. Why must we do this? It is because the devil, our enemy, is prowling around like a lion looking for someone to devour.

"Devil" translates *diabolos*. The word means "false accuser, slanderer," but in many cases it refers to that spirit or person, also called Satan, who is the chief of demons. He and his cohorts are in active rebellion against God, and are constantly at work against his people. Among other methods, his attacks can come in the forms of temptation to sin, promotion of heresy, and various cultural and political maneuverings in opposition to the gospel and the church.

In connection with the devil, the danger in theological reflection is to accord him with autonomous will and independent power. The error has been committed by every system of theology, including the Reformed tradition, which supposedly takes the pride of place in its emphasis on the sovereignty of God. The motive is the unbiblical and unnecessary motive to distance God from exercising direct control over evil. However, the result is a form of dualism. On the other hand, Scripture teaches that God's sovereignty is absolute and his influence is direct. Evil is under his active control.⁶¹

The "lion" metaphor fits well with the need for Christians to "be sober, be watchful," for Satan is as a lion "looking for someone to *devour*." Christians must keep a clear mind so that they can recognize his strategies and pay attention so that they can notice and respond when he approaches. There is no use talking about resisting the devil's attacks if they come undetected, so the warning to be sober and watchful must come first. Those with confused and distracted minds are easy prey.

When the devil comes to attack, and he will, we are to "resist him, standing firm in the faith." Peter does not say, "Run for your lives" or "Beg for mercy." He tells the Christians to put up a fight! To resist the devil is to refuse his demands, to foil his devices, and to even seize his domains. But we do not just say, "I resist you, devil!" – a silly practice. When you want to punch someone in the face, you do not say, "I punch you in the face!" No, you *punch* him in the face – with your fist!

So, then, our resistance consists of countermeasures that correspond to the attack. If the devil tempts us to sin, we resist the temptation by saying "no" to it and pursue holiness instead. If he spreads strife in the church, we resist him by preaching and practicing selfless love, by rebuking the troublemakers, and even by expelling the unrepentant. If he incites slander against us, we will answer by a rational discourse and our good conduct. And if he

⁶¹ For more on God and evil, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians, The Author of Sin*, and the article, "The Problem of Evil."

introduces false doctrines to seduce the minds of God's people, we resist him by refuting the error and teaching the truth.

Revelation 12:11 says, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." We resist and overcome the devil by our active commitment, sacrifice, and testimony (see also James 4:7 and Ephesians 6:10-18).⁶² Like this verse from Revelation, Peter does not present our resistance in individualistic or mystical terms. Our resistance, rather, is a corporate concern and a corporate effort, "knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (ESV). The Christian brotherhood around the world is undergoing the same opposition. We are in the same fight; we are not alone.

Divine support and ultimate victory are promised to believers: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (v. 10). God owes us nothing – his blessings come because of his grace, which he extends to those whom he has sovereignly "called." His "eternal glory in Christ" is contrasted with what we must suffer for "a little while" (see 2 Corinthians 4:17-18). And he is the one who will restore us, and make us strong, firm, and steadfast.

Peter appropriately concludes the main part of his letter with a doxology: "To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen" (v. 11). In all things, we must keep in mind that it is God who possesses the dominion over all things and over all times. It is him that we ought to fear, and it is to him that we make our appeals and petitions for help and deliverance in the face of persecution, entrusting all things to him and casting all our cares upon him.

⁶² For an exposition of Ephesians 6:10-18, see Vincent Cheung, *Commentary on Ephesians*.

1 PETER 5:12-14

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

I have already said something about Silas (v. 12) and Babylon (v. 13) in the Introduction of this commentary. Now that we have reached the conclusion of this letter, we should make sure that we grasp its purpose and message. We could go back and distill all the details of this letter into a brief statement, but this is unnecessary because Peter does it for us as part of verse 12. Therefore, we shall direct our attention to it as we conclude this commentary.

He writes, "I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."

He says that he has been "encouraging" his readers. The word also refers to admonition and exhortation. Indeed, the letter is full of admonitions and exhortations, encouraging them to persevere in faith toward God and in holiness before men in the face of persecution and hardship. These exhortations are repeatedly illustrated by the example of Christ's suffering. And the readers' hope and confidence are reinforced by the Lord's exaltation.

Then, he says that he has been "testifying" to his readers that "this is the true grace of God." The letter constitutes an apostolic attestation that these readers have received the true message of the gospel and that this message is a true revelation of divine grace (1:3-13). Thus rather than letting difficult circumstances cause them to waver from their position, to instill fear into their minds, or to intimidate them in any way, they are to "stand fast" in this revelation of grace.

Therefore, even though they must suffer for a little while, peace belongs to all of them because they are in Christ Jesus.