

1 Peter 1:1-2
(Isaiah 43:1-7; Matthew 28:18-20)
“A Life of Grace and Peace”

Introduction

Peter opens this letter in a surprising way: He is clearly addressing gentiles living in what was then called Asia Minor, and is today called Turkey. Yet he speaks of these gentiles as if they were Jews, calling them “elect exiles of the dispersion” (1:1). The Jewish people understood themselves to be uniquely “elect,” in that God had chosen them out of all the nations to serve him as his own people. Whenever they were scattered among the nations, they understood themselves to be “exiles of the dispersion.”

Three transforming events changed Peter into a man who could consider gentiles his brothers and sisters, God’s chosen people: First, his three years of as a disciple of Jesus; second, his own personal collapse in the face of Jesus’ arrest when Peter three times denied that he even knew Jesus; and third, Jesus’ gracious restoration of Peter after the resurrection. Yet even then, Peter did not yet fully grasp that the unique mission of the Jewish people had been fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It took Peter seeing the Holy Spirit come in power upon a group of gentiles gathered for worship in the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10). From that moment on Peter finally understood that God is calling those from every race and language and socio-economic group to be his chosen people, people scattered throughout the world as salt and light. And so from that time on, Peter understood that *all* God’s people, whether Jew or gentile, are his “elect exiles of the dispersion.”

Peter begins this letter by identifying himself as an apostle – that is, as one commissioned and sent by God to take the gospel to the nations – and by blessing us: “May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (1:2). What more could we desire? We fear that we will never measure up to our parents, teachers, bosses, customers, even our spouses. When we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we often disappoint ourselves. How can we possibly stand before a perfectly holy God who knows everything about us, and hope to survive such a searing encounter? Peter says, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” Grace is God’s undeserved, unearned, unmerited favor. Peace is the result of that grace, and encompasses all that is meant by the Hebrew word “shalom”: health and wholeness, and peace with God and with one another. In Christ, we live under God’s grace rather than under his judgment, and if we are at peace with God rather than at war with him, if we are increasingly reconciled to other people rather than alienated from them, what more could we ask?

The question is, how does one claim such blessing? How can you and I not only claim, but experience the joy and comfort of such a life? Peter very succinctly describes the means by which we may know and experience God’s gift of grace and peace. Look with me at four things Peter tells us about how this grace and peace become, not merely our inheritance, but the essence of our present experience.

Body

1. **The Father knew us and loved us before time (“the foreknowledge of God the Father”).**

The key is in understanding “foreknowledge” in a Hebrew rather than a Greek sense: not knowledge about something, but personal, intimate knowledge of someone.

2. **The Spirit set us apart for intimacy and fellowship with God and with one another (“the sanctification of the Spirit”).**

The key is in understanding “sanctification” not as a legalistic idea of holiness, but as God’s act of setting us apart for himself, for this intimate and loving relationship, and for the family business of his people, namely extending his kingdom to the ends of the earth.

3. **The Son is our Lord whom it should be our greatest joy and privilege to obey (“for obedience to Jesus Christ”).**

The key is in remembering that Christ’s gracious gospel commandments are not merely to be studied, analyzed and taught, but also to be obeyed. Obedience to Christ is not bondage but liberty, not oppression but freedom.

4. **The Son is also our Savior who cleanses us of our guilt and shame (“for sprinkling with his blood”).**

The key is in remembering that what Peter puts last is foundational of all else: just as it was the sprinkled blood that marked the people of Israel as God’s own people and saved the firstborn son of every Israelite family when God judged the people of Egypt, so now God has given his one and only Son that his sprinkled blood might mark and save from judgment those of us who entrust ourselves completely to his care.

Conclusion

There is so much that we profess to believe but do not experience, so much that the Bible promises that most professing Christians never taste and see in the rough and tumble of real life. If all this is not true, then why do we waste our time talking about it? If it is true, how can we bear experiencing so little of its reality? Peter will invite us in this letter to taste and see the reality of the promises of God, to realize all that is ours who have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” and to stand in wonder at “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.”

I long for us to begin to experience more fully our new life in Christ, to taste and see as never before, what it means to have God’s “grace and peace multiplied” in our lives, and the love of Christ flowing through us to those whom he has entrusted to us, that we might so live that they have reason to believe the gospel of Christ.

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