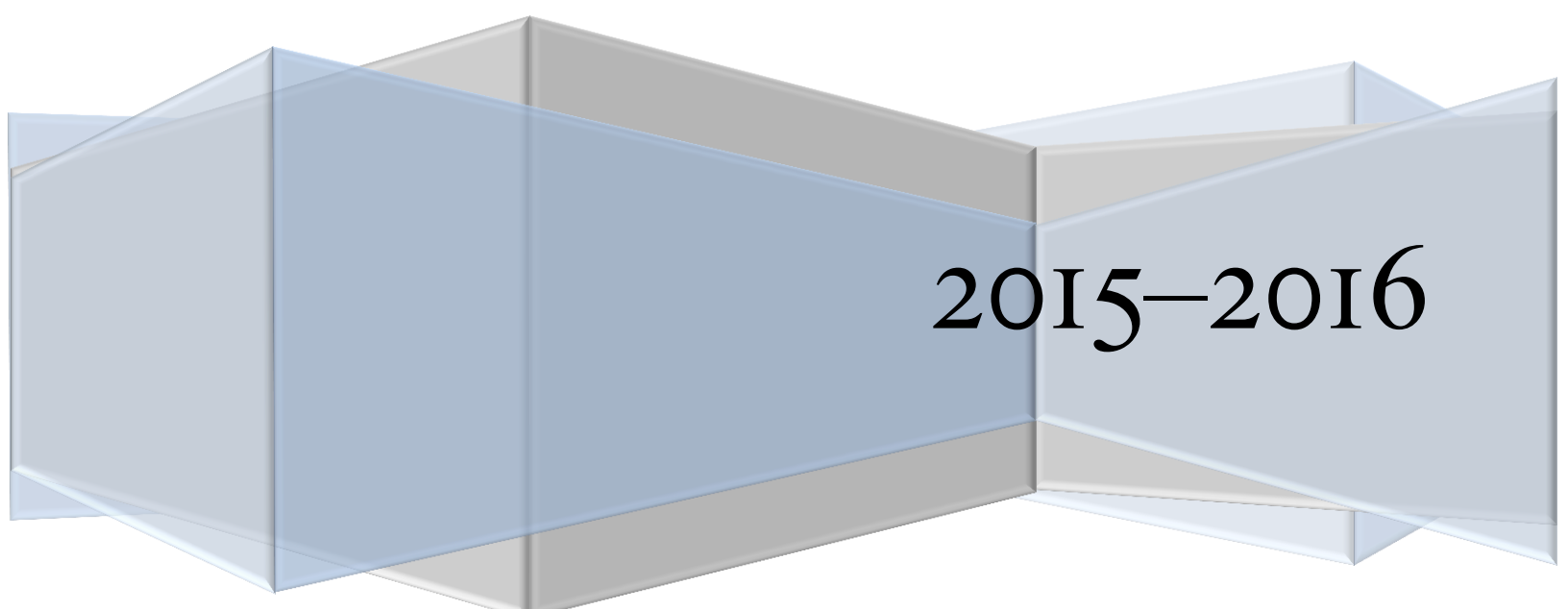


Calvary Baptist Church of Lamar

Discussions on First Peter

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Discussions on First Peter

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These short messages were used in the Wednesday Prayer Meetings of the Calvary Baptist Church in September of 2015 and into March of 2016. Below is a list of titles and references covered in 1 John.

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1.

Glorious Grace (1 Peter 1:1, 2)

I recently read an article by a pastor who shared some of the strange things people have told him over the years. Some were barbs, criticizing him of often very silly things. One that amused me greatly was the charge that he was “trying to preach caffeineism.” I identified with that. Caffeineism, I guess, is sovereign grace with an extra kick. But, then, I am in good company. Peter is also guilty of preaching Caffeineism, long before John Caffeine gave it his name.

Peter addressed his first letter to the “elect exiles” (1:1, 2). Election is *choosing*. God chose certain people to salvation according to His *foreknowledge*, a term relating to their relationship to His elective love. He set His love on them while they were still His enemies (Rom. 5:8).

Election involves *means*, “*the sanctification of the Spirit*.” The elect are set apart to God’s ordered purpose. *Predestination* (Eph. 1:5) is twofold. (1) Predestination is “*for obedience to Jesus Christ*.” (2) Predestination “*for sprinkling with [Christ’s] blood*.” Sprinkling is a *covenantal commitment* referenced in Exodus 24:3–8 where God confirmed and sealed the covenant with sacrificial blood. Jesus sealed the New Covenant with His blood (Mark 14:24; Heb. 9:13, 14). In this, the promised obedience of His people is secured and the full benefits of His suffering are guaranteed (Eph. 1:13, 14).

Verses 3–9 expand on *why* we must praise God for elective love—mercy. He lists ten things to praise the God of grace that caused us to be born again to a living hope in an inheritance that cannot be destroyed, defiled, or wasted. This hope rests on the power of God that shields us through faith as we hold on to His promises while we wait for Christ’s return.

In light of our great salvation, we must also “*prepare our minds for action*” (vv. 10-22) in order to live out the purpose for which God saved us. Four things support this preparation. First, we need to appreciate the glory of God’s salvation. It was a mystery so great that OT prophets carefully searched it out (vv. 10-12). In fact, angels longed to investigate it; it was that glorious.

Second, we must “*prepare our minds*” in order to serve this holy God who saved us (vv. 13-16). The holiness that God requires here refers to *how* His servants present themselves in their service to Him (Rom. 12:1, 2). God expects no less of us than He did of the sons of Aaron who served Him in His temple, bearing the inscription, “Holy to the Lord” (Ex. 38:36).

Third, preparing our minds relates to our duty to conduct our lives in the *fear of God* (v. 17). Our sojourn here is very brief and our God is a just judge. Therefore, we are to fear God and not man, particularly those who would persecute us.

Last, preparing our minds means that we reckon the *cost* as seen in the example of the Son of God, who gave Himself for us (vv. 18-21). That sacrifice is to shape our own pure-hearted love as we love one another in Christ, holding to the example of our Savior (v. 22).

2.

Obedient Children (1 Peter 1:3–17)

In verse 13 of the first chapter of First Peter, the apostle begins to apply the glorious doctrinal truths of salvation to the practical lives of his readers. This application requires preparation, seen in the metaphor of men tucking the hem of their robe skirts into their belts, allowing their legs to move freely. This figure is applied to our minds. We are to have a mindset of sober or serious and clear thinking that leads to sound judgment. Something with respect to the salvation we claim to possess must shape and control our thoughts and resultant actions.

With this caution, Peter commands us to fix our hope completely on this salvific grace that we do not yet fully possess. It will be conferred on us as the reward of obedience when Jesus returns. What we now possess is *hope*, or better, *living hope* (v. 3) in what is promised. But what is promised? Peter calls it an inheritance reserved for us (v. 4). It is an expectation ministered to us by the prophets, announcing the good news to us through the Spirit (vv. 10–12). What is promised is unqualified acceptance with God with full forgiveness of all sin and everlasting life (Jer. 33:8–11; Rom. 3:23–26).

We possess this hope not by wishful thinking; we experience it with confidence. It is a reality now though not fully realized (vv. 8, 9). The evidence of true faith is seen in our rejoicing in the unseen even while we may suffer (v. 6). God’s purpose in this suffering is to test our faith, not prove it false, but to purify it and, thus, demonstrate its genuineness (v. 7).

Peter addresses our responsibility (v. 13). First, we must not see responsibility as an effort to *earn* grace by doing something. Our obedience is not to provoke a response from God. Rather, we obey in order to demonstrate grace already at work in us (Phil. 2:13). Neither is our responsibility automatic. We are to learn obedience by trusting God as we struggle to keep His commandments and exhortations (Heb. 5:8). That is our goal, and we will not deviate from the course or compromise in our pursuit of it.

To encourage obedience, Peter cites one issue that we must overcome and two behavioral modifications to help us to govern obedience (vv. 14–17). First, our new position, as “obedient children” requires that we overcome and abandon worldly “conformity” due to former patterns of desiring. These deeply ingrained desires produce habits of sinning established through long practice. We fail to take them into account and deal with them because they come so naturally. Second, in order to establish new patterns of right conduct, we need to establish habits of holiness in the fear of God (vv. 15–17). Holiness refers to *how* we are to present ourselves to God in His service (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10). The fear of God is the conscious awareness that God really does see us and will impartially judge our works according to His established standards, not ours (Isa. 40:10).

3.

Obedience (1 Peter 1:13–16)

Paul Tripp wrote about the importance of obedience in his blog recently.* He addressed the fact that our attempts at obedience could never gain God’s favor. Nevertheless, the Scripture is full of commands, laws, ordinances, and exhortations for us to obey. In light of this, Tripp wrote:

“We all live under the same weight of the law, crippled by the inability of sin. We’re better at rebelling than submitting, more inclined to arrogance than humility, more skilled at making war with our neighbors than loving them. We leave a trail of evidence every hour that we’ve fallen short of the glory of God one more time.*

So, does God really require obedience? Yes, He does. Peter refers to the believers as “obedient children” (1 Peter 1:14). Indeed, the whole context presses believers to obedience in light of the glorious change in us wrought by Christ’s salvation. The grace that saves is the same grace that enables obedience. That is why He saves. God intends to restore His kingdom on earth, so, the disobedience that characterized our fallen condition should also be reversed.

Peter calls upon believers to prepare their minds for action (obedience) in three ways (vv. 13–16). First, they are to set their minds fully on the grace that is to complete their salvation when Christ returns (v. 13). They do this by refusing the old desires that shaped them in their ignorance and disobedience. However, if the grace of salvation is to conform believers to the image of Son, then conforming to the image of the world must stop.

Second, what negatively controlled their desires before salvation, causing them to obey the desires of their evil hearts, must be replaced with the positive control of the Spirit in new desires to be holy, as God is holy (vv. 15, 16). The term that Peter uses (*anastrophe*, translated “conduct” [ESV], “conversation” [KJV]) refers to deportment—one’s manner of living or life-style. One’s life must demonstrate the change wrought by grace (Eph. 4:22; 1 Peter 1:18; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16; 2:7; 3:11). The point is simply this, if salvation takes away the old heart of rebellion and replaces it with a new heart of submission, should not obedience to God characterize our life-style before the world. If we are children of God, then, we must act like it (1 John 3:7–10).

Third, even though we are saved from the penalty and power of sin, we, as God’s children, still face God’s judgment (v. 17). He will impartially judge all on the basis of their works (Rom. 14:12). So, let us be motivated to living that conforms to God’s righteous standards and holiness. Our life-style will be scrutinized by God, not for salvation, but to weigh our progress in becoming more like Jesus. Let us “perfect holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). This fear is necessary because of remaining sin. Thus, a continual awareness of God’s purpose of grace in us and His careful attention to us and supervision of us should make us careful in our obedience before the world as His witnesses.

*<http://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/why-obedience>

4.

True Faith (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Believers in Christ Jesus have a glorious inheritance that is being reserved for them in heaven while they, the heirs, are kept on earth by the power of God (vv. 4, 5). This inheritance pertains to the complete deliverance from the effects of Adam's fall. Such prospects are worthy of rejoicing in the anticipation (v. 6).

Faith itself is nothing but trust in an expectation from another outside of us. The real question involves what we are expecting. This problem is illustrated for us in Luke 22. In verse 29 Jesus informed the disciples that they were appointed a place in His kingdom and that they would sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The very next thing Luke records is that Jesus turned to Peter and informed him that Satan wanted to sift him in the brutal mill of trial. Satan would destroy Peter, but Jesus prayed that his faith would not fail in that hour (v. 32). In fact, his emergence with faith intact would be the means of strengthening others, which seems to be the purpose that God designed in his trial. I wonder if this incident was the foundation of what Peter wrote in this chapter.

Peter's faith did not fail because of the intercessory work of the Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14, 15). The test came against Peter's own self-assurance (v. 33). In spite of his insisted loyalty, he denied the Lord as predicted (v. 34). Discouraged by his own failure, Peter attempted to return to his former fishing career, only to fail again (John 21:1-3). However, when Jesus prays that your faith will not fail, He takes it upon Himself to assure that end (John 21:4-14).

On the other hand, there is faith that rests on false assumptions. While God does not withhold what He promises, no one can force Him to grant what He never promised. This principle is illustrated in Matthew 13. When people hear the word of the kingdom, they must also *understand* what they hear (v. 19). Understanding is a work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14 and 12). Nevertheless, the Word was readily and joyfully received (v. 20). Why was there joy? That is not explained, but we may assume that hope was set on what God never promised. And, as with Peter, Satan was there, testing faith with tribulation. The false believer fell away. Why? His faith was not supported by the prayers of the Great High Priest. Believers are not kept by their faith but by the power of God (v. 5).

Faith that flourishes in the fire is like refined gold, resulting in praise, glory, and honor at Christ's appearing (1 Pet. 1:6-9). Tested faith increases love for Jesus, trust in the Word, and inexpressible joy in the experience of waiting for faith's outcome. As A. W. Pink observed, "The best is yet to come."

We have been appointed a kingdom. We are preparing now for that kingdom. Although it is often very difficult here, true faith enables us to rejoice in suffering, understanding that we are destined to share in the glories of our overcoming Lord.

5.

Joyfully Redeemed (1 Peter 1:18-23)

The focus of the believers' quest for joy cannot be that God would relieve them from suffering. It is necessary that before the appearing of Christ, believers will be called upon to suffer various tests (vv. 5, 6). What makes them jubilant (literally, "much leaping") is that salvation works for them even in the midst of their trials. The trial itself will cause grief ("sorrow"), so how do believers balance the command to be joyful with the sorrows that suffering brings? The answer is found in understanding salvation's glorious hope in the end.

First, they needed to understand that trials reveal the genuineness of faith (v. 7). Saving faith always results in praise, glory, and honor at Christ's revelation because fiery trials prove Christ faithful. Seeing God faithful in trial results in love for Christ, continued trust, and settled joy (a *state of being* as compared to the *act* or *expression* of emotion, v. 6), waiting faith's full revelation (v. 9).

Second, they needed to understand that this salvation is a work of such grace that it captivated the attention of the prophets and angels to whom it was first revealed. They saw that their message was serving future generations of Gentile and not merely their own Israelite peoples. So, they were driven to search it out deeply (vv. 10–12).

Third, they needed to understand the purpose of this salvation to produce a holy and obedient people who refused to shape their lives by the passions that ruled them in their former ignorance. They were now to be governed by godly fear, protecting them in their sojourn (vv. 13–17).

Fourth, they needed to understand how this salvation accomplishes the purpose just stated (vv. 18-23). These believers needed to know that they were *liberated* from the slavery of futile ways inherited from their forefathers. This is a reference to v. 14 and their having been enslaved to the sin-conforming immoral passions of their pagan past. *Redemption* or *ransom* means that a payment was made to free them from sin's bondage. The ransom payment consisted of Christ's own blood. Here is the wonder that captivated prophets and angels: the sinless Son of God became the perfect sacrificial lamb, bearing the sins of His people. How can this be?

Our election (v. 1) rests on the election of Christ ("*foreknown before the foundation of the world,*" *cp* Acts 2:23). Foreknowledge cannot be understood here as God's foresight of something Christ would do. It was determined before the first man sinned that the Lamb would die for sinners (note verse 21). Christ shed His blood and because of that, God raised Him from the dead so that, through Him, we can believe to salvation.

Now you see why we can jump with joy in the midst of trial. Our faith and hope are in God so that in the test our souls are purified through obedience to truth. The clear mark of sonship is obedience to Christ, manifesting genuine love from a pure heart (John 14:18–24). We do this because we are born again (vv. 22, 23; 1 John 3:9, 10, 16–18).

6.

Born Again but Not Transformed (1 Peter 1:3)

Peter praised God for His mercy in causing His people to be “*born again to a living hope . . . an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven*” (v. 3). This hope is a present reality that will be fully realized at the “last time” (*eschatos*), the second “appearing” (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ (vv. 5, 7). Familiar with Second Temple Jewish theology, Peter uses several apocalyptic terms to encourage the suffering saints that the best was yet to come (vv. 5, 7 9–13). Thus, the issue is that we are born again but not yet transformed.

The people of God are “elect exiles” (vv. 1, 17), foreigners in a strange land. Indeed, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:20, 21). This anticipation requires us to live differently in that culture of our exile because it has eternal consequences that we know only a little about.

The message of the prophets concerned the coming of the Christ, His sufferings, and subsequent glories. The Spirit of Christ announced this message through the prophets, a gospel message preached in the power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 10–12). This message called God’s people to obedience (v. 14), a soul-purifying obedience characterized by holiness of life (vv. 15, 16). Such a life conforms to Christ’s goal in redemption. This purifying through obedience is qualified by three things: (1) *truth* because we are so easily deceived; (2) *power* through the Holy Spirit because we have none; and (3) *pure motives* as evidenced by sincere love of the brethren because of hypocrisy (vv. 22).

The Lord cannot fail in this mission because He is God and has birthed children, not with perishable seed, but imperishable (v. 23). The focus here is that God’s seed produces immortal life, eternal life. This work of regeneration was accomplished through God’s speaking (*logos*). God said it, and it was so. Citing Isaiah 40:6, 8, Peter points to the contrast between mortal flesh (grass) and the eternal Word spoken by God. It is not, as many suggest, that God keeps His promises. Peter argues that it is the Word itself, living and abiding, that accomplishes this new birth (Heb. 4:12; John 3:5–8).

The Lord cannot fail; His purpose is sure because “*the mouth of Yahweh has spoken*” (Isa. 40:3–5). This is good news and is to be heralded from a high mountain (Isa. 40:9–11; 1 Peter 1:25b).

It should be noted here again that Peter applies what was originally meant for Israel to the church. What we need to understand is that it isn’t Israel versus the church, or that the church replaces Israel, but who God’s people of are. The whole thing is about the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). There are only two peoples in the world: God’s seed and the serpent’s seed. Is God’s seed in you (1 John 3:4–10)?

7.

The Lord's Portion (1 Peter 1:14)

“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people” (Deut. 32:8, 9).

Believers are instructed, *“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance”* (1 Pet. 1:14). Paul echoes this admonition: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed”* (Rom. 12:2). The issue here is huge. It is not that we must stop enjoying a few morally questionable habits for an austere life of joyless conformity to God's law. If that is your view of the Christian life, you are not a Christian.

True believers have been born again to a whole new life (1 Pet. 1:23) from a former existence compared to grass that withers and perishes. The new life is like the seed that produces it—eternal life (1 Pet. 1:24, 25). The powerful image described here is the operation of the living God. His word, spoken by the Spirit, is the creative force that brought all things into existence (Psa. 33:6–12). *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor. 4:6). *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation”* (2 Cor. 5:17).

The point is that the Lord is gathering out of the world a new race, a new nation, a new people, the Lord's portion (2:9, 10). Each believer is a “stone” in the construction of God's spiritual house (v. 5). The purpose of the house—a temple with priesthood—is to *“offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* This purpose *“stands in Scripture”* (Gk., to surround or encompass). In other words, this project of the Lord's gathering His portion is *the* central subject matter of Scripture.

Jesus Christ is the focal point. Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16, to which he applies, *“You believers see His value, but unbelievers stumble over Him”* (1 Pet. 2:7, 8). Why is this? It is because, as Peter declares, *“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own”* (v. 9). Every new creature in Christ now enjoys a glorious new privilege and opportunity. Believers, by their transformed lives, are to *“proclaim the excellencies of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (v. 9).

Believers have received mercy. They were once *lo-ammi*, *“not a people”* (Hosea 1:9, 10; 2:23; cf. Jer. 30:22) now they are the people of God. What a responsibility! Peter started the passage by urging believers to put away *malice* (Gk., to lack something, thus, be incapable), *deceit* (Gk., crafty), *hypocrisy* (Gk., to wear a mask), envy, and slander. Instead, they are to long for “pure spiritual milk” in order to grow into salvation, the transformation they were saved for (v. 1). He finishes the passage with the same charge (vv. 11, 12). You do this if you have *“tasted that the Lord is good”* (v. 3; Matt. 11:28-30).

8.

The People of God (1 Peter 2:9–12)

Peter uses terminology that once identified ethnic Israel as the sole people of God. For example, “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*” (1 Peter 2:9). The reference is Exodus 19: 5, 6: “*You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” It would appear that Peter was writing this letter to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He referred to his readers as “*the elect exiles of the dispersion*” (1:1). A wrong understanding here can lead to confusion when it comes to correctly interpreting Peter.

Most commentators lean towards Hebrew Christians as Peter’s target audience. He was the apostle to the circumcision as Paul was to the Gentiles, was he not (Gal. 2:7, 8)? However, Peter also uses language informing his readers that salvation brought them into a new covenant relationship with God that so they were no longer to “*be conformed to the passions of [their] former ignorance*” (v. 14). *Ignorance* was a term used of Gentiles outside the old covenant community (Ephesians 4:18; Acts 17:30). Also, note that verse 9 is followed by this: “*Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people*” (v. 10, citing Hosea 6:9, 10). Paul cites the Hosea passage in Romans 9 to argue that Gentiles were also being called as a people for His name (vv. 24–26). The gist of the Hosea text is that Israel’s unfaithfulness made them like the Gentiles, “not a people of God.”

The confusion of many is due, quite frankly to dispensational error that insists that God has two separate and distinct peoples: the nation of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ. They teach that while Jews are being saved in this gospel age, most will not have God’s particular attention until the end times when He will remove the church and focus again on the nation of Israel. (I do believe that God will save a remnant of the Jewish nation when Christ returns as per Zechariah 13:8, 9.) This confusion is particularly noticeable in interpreting end-time prophecy.

Paul’s discussion in Romans 9 is key and pertinent to defining who the people of God are. In verse 6, Paul’s problem is stated: God’s promise and covenant to the seed of Abraham seems to have failed and His Word voided because, save a few, God’s people rejected their Messiah. Paul’s response is that God never intended to save all of ethnic Israel (vv. 6–13). He will save a remnant, but not all ethnic Israel is to be included into spiritual Israel, the true people of God.

The purpose of ethnic Israel was to bring in the true Israel, Jesus Christ. The gospel privilege was never intended to be limited to the Jewish nation but to include Gentiles as well (Eph. 2:11–22). The New Covenant people of God are not an extension of the Old Covenant community but a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:5).

9.

Honorable Conduct (1 Peter 2:12)

The “builders” rejected God’s “*cornerstone*,” which became to them a “*stone of stumbling*” (1 Peter 2:6–8). This stumbling occurred because they “*disobey the word*” (v. 8). However, the obedient were found to be “*a people for his own possession*” (v. 9). Thus, Peter instructs them on how to live as the people of God in a pagan world (vv. 11–17). “*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*” (v. 12). *Gentiles* (Gk., *ethnos*) refers to people groups who do not worship the true God (Deut. 32:8, 9).

Believers are to live life in keeping with God’s reputation. That is what it means to be *honorable* (Gk., *kalos*, “powerful,” “vigorous,” “excellent”). To be *kalos* is to have everything in proper order; thus, to reflect God’s character. This is important when believers are maligned as offenders. The accusations come because Christ is offensive to pagan principles. If one claims to be a Christ follower but is not spoken against, he is not living the Christ-life. The obstruction to his witness may be that his soul has surrendered to his fleshly passions, obscured his calling (v. 11). The Lord gave the Holy Spirit to believers in order for them to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in every situation of life (Gal. 5:22–26), especially when they are reviled (1 Pet. 2:23; Matt. 5:11).

The obligation of God’s people living among the pagans is to be a witness against them on judgment day because those being judged will have no excuse. They will have seen a *Christ-like* proper response (Gk., *kalos ergon*, how one does excellence) to their malicious accusations, forcing them to “glorify God”—to reluctantly admit that the Lord is just in their condemnation.

What follows in the next verses is instruction on how to live honorably in an evil culture. First, believers must be law-abiding citizens. They are to submit to every God-ordained human institution for the Lord’s sake, and this submission includes authorities at every level (v. 13). God instituted human authority for the welfare of the race by encouraging good behavior in a fallen world (Rom. 13:1–7). Remember, Peter wrote this instruction during the reign of Nero and with considerable personal experience in persecution (Acts 4:19; 5:29). The principle here is that authorities must be obeyed except when they claim for themselves what belongs only to God.

It is God’s will that believers’ doing good—properly responding to reviling—foolish *ignorance* (used only twice in the NT, meaning the willful rejection of the Word of God, 1 Cor. 15:34) will be silenced. The foolish are those who deny God any place in their scheme of life (2 Pet. 3:5, 8). The truth is self-evident but is overlooked when people refuse to investigate the facts (Acts 26:26).

Second, believers are to live free by not covering up evil (v. 16). Freedom is not the absence of restraint but willing submission to God’s plan to restore true liberty in Christ. Ironically, this freedom is enjoyed by those who become the slaves of God, not self (Rom. 6:16, 17).

10.

A Gracious Thing (1 Peter 2:18–25)

The issue that Peter expounds in these final verses of Chapter 2 is how believers are to conduct themselves when they are suffering unjustly under human authority. Peter has already commanded them to be under submission to institutions ordained for people (v. 13) because doing so is in the will of God (v. 15).

There is a plan that God's people must understand in order for them to endure suffering and not be discouraged by it. Without this understanding, our tendency is to buckle under the stress of suffering. Although we know that a certain level of trial is beneficial to our character building (James 1:2–4), we assume that God will grant us deliverance as quickly as possible. Our general welfare requires freedom from the stress of the trial. When that does not happen, we are tempted to unbelief, disappointed and thinking that either God was not caring or that we were unworthy.

The fact is God uses suffering as a means to get victory over the evil and bring glory to the Savior. *“For to this you have been called”* (v. 21). *“For what credit [glory] is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God”* (v. 20). Peter, then, gives an argument to support this thesis.

Christ established this principle in His suffering, leaving an example for all believers to follow (v. 21). Peter is very clear that this suffering has nothing to do with sin, either yours or God's. Jesus promised to support His own (Heb. 13:6); and He does not lie (v. 22).

Suffering is vital to service. The passage began with the command for servants (slaves) to be subject (submissive and obedient) to their masters in every respect (v. 18). However, we live in a culture that is very sensitive to personal wrongs. We demand justice and recompense, going to whatever lengths needed to insure that the offense is challenged. Christ, on the other hand, teaches us to bear with wrong (v. 23). We are not to repay evil with evil but bless (do good) to those who mistreat us (3:9). Serving with kindness and generosity those who don't deserve such treatment provokes a response of wonder. Christ served in this way, blessing us with salvation while we were His enemies (Rom. 5:8).

Believers can follow Jesus in this way because we, of all people, should understand what it is like to be on the other side. Christ served the undeserving by taking their sins and enabling them to die to sin and to live unto righteousness (v. 24). That Christ suffered for His enemies ought to continually occupy our hearts with awe and wonder. His suffering made the impossible a reality. Our sin wounds were healed and our desertion from God arrested. We have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (v. 25). Jesus did all this by entrusting Himself to the just Judge of all the earth (v. 23). We must also entrust ourselves to Him in our suffering.

11.

Gospel Obedience (1 Peter 1:18–21)

A great deal of confusion arises when grace is emphasized in contrast to law-keeping. Law is looked on by many as being at enmity with grace, and therefore any call to obedience is immediately suspected of being anti-gracious. Returning briefly to 1 Peter 1, we recall Peter's admonition that we are to be holy (vv. 14–17). God's people have escaped judgment on their sinful ways through the atoning work of Christ in their behalf (vv. 18–20). The qualification for enjoying this benefit is that one *believes* (v. 21).

Here is where understanding often goes awry and false conclusions are drawn. Careful attention to the text should clarify things, but how often does one's preconceived opinions cloud what the text actually says? Does believing the gospel save? Yes, but how? Is faith the activating cause of God's responding and rewarding the believer with salvation by grace? No, and Peter is very clear on this point. It is Christ's work that saves, and it is through Christ that one believes to salvation. Reread verses 18–21 carefully. You *were* ransomed or redeemed (a passive verb). Believers believe because they were ransomed to believe. Thus, every ransomed person escapes punishment for his sins because Christ paid the debt in his stead. Through Christ, the saved believe God for what He did on their behalf. In other words, faith is the evidence of salvation, not the cause of it.

Notice also that grace did not remove the obligation to holy living because each one's deeds will be judged by God (v. 17). Believers have nothing to fear in the judgment because they are covered by Christ's blood (vv. 17–21) and because they continue to purify their souls *in* (Gk. *en*, "in") obedience to the truth (v. 22, pointing back to vv. 14, 15).

Now, where do law-keeping and grace fit into this discussion? Right here. Obedience is a work of grace, fulfilling the obligation of the law. How? Peter does *not* tell us that we are to obey the law, *per se*, but we are to obey the *truth*. Obeying the truth results in keeping the law. Read verse 22 carefully again. We purify our souls by obeying the truth *unto* (Gk., *eis*) "*a sincere brotherly love*." That is how the NT defines law keeping—loving others (Rom. 13:8–11). The one who loves God supremely and his neighbor sincerely fulfills the obligation of the law (Matt. 22:34–40).

A final question remains. What is the *truth* we are to obey? It is not the law because Peter states that we are to obey the truth *unto* sincere brotherly love, which is the law (4:8–11). What the truth is is implied in verse 21 with God's raising Jesus from the dead in order that our faith and hope should be in God. The *gospel* is the truth we are to obey. We obey by believing and hoping in God's promise to save us through the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–4). God works through the gospel with great power to transform our lives as we put our whole trust and hope in Him.

12.

Called to Endurance and Faith (1 Peter 2:13–3:6)

How are believers to behave in oppressive, difficult, or dangerous situations for which they are not at fault? Peter tells us that these situations are in the will of God for saints in order for Him to deal with “*the ignorance of foolish people*” (1 Peter 2:15). Foolish people are those who refuse to give God His rightful place in the order of things (Psalm 53:1). Their ignorance is willful rejection of good due to moral blindness. That ignorance often makes their response to Christians quite hostile. So, how do saints cope with such people? It is by the saints’ continuing to *do good*. It is to this that they are called (v. 21). Christ Himself is their example. When reviled, He would not match their ignorance. Instead, “*He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly*” (v. 23). He accepted the wrong by understanding that God would set it right eventually.

Revelation 13 makes it clear that God is sovereign because “*the beast was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.*” Satan and his beast-minions are on a leash. They need permission to do anything. Thus, when God allows them to make war on the saints, He has a glorious purpose in their being beaten down and conquered. The saints should not be discouraged by this because Christ was beaten down, and through it He conquered Satan, sin, and death. So, the question is, why does He continue to allow the evil one to make it difficult for saints? John does not reveal the reason for this allowance; he informs that “*here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints*” (vv. 7, 10). In their patience and trust, they commit themselves to “*Him who judges justly.*”

Peter, however, does give us the answer to the question. It is to “*put to silence the ignorance of foolish people*” (1 Peter 2:15). As we have stated, the means of doing this is through “*doing good.*” This is a problem because Paul makes it clear that “*All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one*” (Rom. 3:12, citing Psa. 53:1–3). Psalm 53 states that the foolish person says no to God. He rejects God. He does not want to acknowledge God because he chooses evil. Thus, the psalmist writes that “*they are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity.*” Corrupters are those who spoil, ruin, and destroy. In Romans, Paul puts it that they have turned aside and become worthless. They are of no use to God’s kingdom, but they make a lot of noise. That is, “*there is none who does good.*” *Good*, in this text is a quality of morality that reflects the very character of God. Jesus told the rich young ruler that there is none good but God (Mark 10:18). Only those who are of God do good by being kindly disposed to others, especially those who oppose and abuse them.

13.

Called to Endurance and Faith, Part 2 (1 Peter 2:13–3:6)

To pick up where we left off, Peter tells us that the reason we are called to “do good” to those in authority who abuse and hurt us is because God wants to use us to “*put to silence the ignorance of foolish people*” (1 Peter 2:15). We should also note that the Greek term found here (*agathosune*) refers to God’s moral character reflected in us (Mark 10:18). Saints cannot “do good” naturally because, when God is ruled out of the equation, “*no one does good*” (Rom. 3:12). The flesh profits nothing. However, when one is born of God, he takes on the character qualities of God, practicing righteousness—doing good because he is born of God (1 John 3:10).

In other words, Peter calls upon the believers to behave toward those who spitefully use them or abuse them with kindness and gentleness by doing good to them. Good in God is essential, absolute, and consummate. God is the only good. No one can do good who is not of God. Thus, the good that believers do is morally honorable, pleasing to God, and beneficial.

In this fallen world where “*no one does good, not even one,*” how do we account for the apparent goodness around us? The world often puts the church to shame by acts of sacrificial generosity. It takes discernment to understand the root issue, which is, who gets the glory? That is why we are not to be “*conformed to this world*” but by being “*transformed*” so that we may, by testing, prove “*what is the will of God, what is good*” (Rom. 12:2). Why do we do “good”? Is it to promote self or glorify God? “*Whoever serves, let him serve by the strength which God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 4:11).

If one retaliates to wrongful treatment, he proves that he is self-driven. When one responds with goodness, he proves that he is empowered by God. David is an example here (1 Sam. 25:9–39). Rebuffed by Nabal’s demeaning rejection of his plea for assistance, David sought revenge in anger (vv. 13, 22). His personal expectation of respect as Israel’s future king had been met with disdain and contempt (v. 10). His pride hurt, David thought that he had a right to retaliate. However, to do so would have tarnished the throne he was to occupy (v. 26) and would have brought dishonor to his God (vv. 31–34). God graciously intervened in the person of Nabal’s wife, Abigail, who did good to her foolish husband by humbling herself to David and assuaging his anger. Abigail saved Nabal’s life by owning Nabal’s folly in her own person. What sounds to western ears as criticism (v. 25) was, to a near-eastern woman, an admission of her own status. In a godly act, she owned that she was the wife of a fool by degrading herself before David. In that, she “*put to silence the ignorance of foolish [David].*”

14.

Ready to Shame Revilers (1 Peter 3:8–17)

In Acts 16, leaving Phrygia and Galatia, Paul and Silas were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into Asia Minor. They turned to go north into Bithynia but were stopped there also. In Troas, Paul had the vision urging him to cross the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and Greece. Arriving at Philippi, they found no synagogue of Jews but spoke to a few women gathered at the riverside for prayer and worship on the Sabbath. A stranger, Lydia, from Thyatira, a city in the forbidden Asia Minor, was the first convert to Christ.

Returning to the place of prayer, the company was met by a slave girl possessed by a demon of divination. Her supernatural skills brought great profits to her owners. For some reason, this girl began to follow the apostle, loudly proclaiming that he and his helpers were servants of the Most High God. After many days, Paul, greatly annoyed, commanded the spirit to leave the girl, which, of course, meant that the girl was useless to her owners' fortune-telling enterprise. They seized Paul and Silas, had them arrested on trumped up-charges, beat them with rods, and turned them over to the Roman jailor to imprison them. Bruised, bloodied, and bound, they sat in the darkness of the inner prison, no doubt, confused and questioning God's purpose. However, instead of complaining, protesting their ill treatment, and demanding that their rights be upheld, they worshiped the Lord in prayer and song for all to hear.

The Lord wanted a Roman jailor for His kingdom. The means He used to secure him was the odd behavior of two strange prisoners and an earthquake at midnight. All of this illustrates Peter's instructions in 1 Peter 3:8–17.

Summarizing his argument developed from verse 3 in the first chapter, Peter reiterates the point made in 2:20 and 21. We have been called to suffer wrongfully, and as we respond in a godly way, God uses our testimony against sinners. Thus, Peter repeats his command that his readers to be unified, sympathetic, loving, tender-hearted, and humble (v. 8). With this state of mind, we are to face persecution and tribulation. When wrongfully treated, we are to bless, just as Jesus instructed (Luke 6:28; Rom. 12:14).

Peter quotes Psalm 34:12–16 for support because this kind of response is not natural. Even those who are guilty of the crimes for which they are being punished will loudly protest their treatment as unfair and excessive. On the other hand, what harm comes to those who are good and do good?" (v. 13). The natural law of fairness demands that those who do good be rewarded in kind. However, what are we to do when we suffer for righteousness' sake? We are to honor Christ the Lord, ready and able to make a defense to any who would ask a reason for the hope in us—that living hope unto which we were born again (1:3). We must do so for the sake of our good conscience and as a testimony to shame those who would revile our good behavior.

15.

Proving the Worth of God (1 Peter 3:18–22)

Peter concludes his summary of the argument that we, as followers in Jesus Christ, have been called by God to suffer, even wrongfully (1 Peter 3:8-17). *“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil”* (v. 17).

Why would it be God’s will to suffer wrongfully? The simple broad answer is the cosmic conflict between God and Satan. God’s soldiers are His people on earth, living out the gospel in the grace and power of God. Satan and his minions will do everything that they can to defeat God’s army through compromise, deception, discouragement, and persecution.

Yet, there is an even greater purpose for suffering than warfare. John Newton, the famous slave-trader-turned-preacher and author of the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” had a profound understanding of suffering and its purpose. He saw trials as heavy weights on a grandfather clock, necessary for the Christian life to operate properly. We are sinners, but heaven is our home. We are as ships on the open sea, navigating to our destination. Everything we encounter has been appointed by God and made subservient to our sanctification and happiness.

Tony Reinke* has gleaned ten specific things from Newton’s letters about God’s sovereign design in our trials. I offer three. First, trials reveal the hidden idols of our hearts that we tend to overlook and think less vile than they really are. Trials smoke out these vile and evil vipers. Reinke writes, “Trials make us feel the power of the sins residing in our hearts, and such awareness is essential to the cure.”

Second, suffering drives us to prayer. We have a natural aversion to prayer, and we make every excuse to avoid it. We find it a chore to commune with the Almighty. Our praying is often mindless and remote. As Newton saw it, “We are dragged before God like slaves, and we run away from prayer like a thieves.” Suffering breathes necessity and desperation into our praying, bringing new energy to our seeking after God.

Third (number 8 in Reinke’s list), trials reveal God’s grace in our lives. Suffering reduces life to the bare essentials. It drives us to Christ and His Word, and we see just how much we need Him and how tightly we cling to His promises. In that hour, when all the artificial supports are gone, we begin to understand that our lives are anchored in His grace. We could not survive without it. That realization is massive to our faith and confidence. We see that He never fails us, and that is strong medicine in our most painful hours.

One of Newton’s favorite metaphors was to compare the suffering saint to Moses’ burning bush (Ex. 3:2). Christians are called to a disproportionate amount of suffering so that they might be a spectacle of grace to the world. Those outside the church will see them as burning, yet unconsumed. Only God’s amazing grace enables this miracle. It is this perseverance of faith by which Christians prove the worth of God in this sinful world.

*Newton on the Christian Life, by Tony Reinke © 2015, Crossway, from chapter 9, “Discipline in Trials.”

16.

Fear No Evil (1 Peter 3:18–22)

The passage before us has raised some interesting questions. Why does Peter bring up “spirits in prison” (v. 19)? Who are they? Why was it important that Jesus preached to them? What does this fact have to do with our suffering (v. 14)? How does this event relate to baptism (v. 21)? What does Peter mean when he declares that baptism saves us? How does baptism save us? Why does Peter bring in angels, authorities, and powers (v. 22)? One thing is clear; those to whom Peter wrote understood what he was saying.

Context is extremely important to proper interpretation. Also, we must keep an open mind and let Scripture interpret Scripture. The overall emphasis is to encourage the elect saints in their struggles to live holy lives in the midst of an evil world. Compromise is always a temptation when one is threatened for standing for what is unseen and tangibly uncertain. We are truly “strangers and pilgrims” as we live among the Gentiles (2:11). We must never retaliate with evil for the evil inflicted upon us (3:9). We are to turn away from the evil and pursue peace because the unseen Lord sees and hears the righteous (3:11–13).

Ordinarily, no harm should come to those who always do what is good (3:13). However, righteous people will suffer for righteousness’ sake (because of God’s standard of right). That is, the evil doer hates God and His righteousness as seen in His character and in His law. Thus, he will hate the godly also, and the godly will likely suffer in some way for it. So, since the Lord sees and hears all, the godly must have no fear of evil doers or be troubled by their threats and persecution (3:14). Instead, through deliberately setting the Lord Christ apart in the heart as holy, His people are to prepare to defend their steadfast (but seemingly futile) hope (that God will reward them for doing His will) in a reasonable way (v. 15). In this, one keeps a good conscience while he suffers for doing what is right.

That is the way Jesus acted (v. 18). In doing what was good in the will of God, He, the righteous One, suffered once for all in the stead of the unrighteous ones in order to bring them back to God. In His death and before His resurrection, in the spirit, He went and proclaimed (announced) something to “spirits” in prison (v. 19). These spirits are not human souls in hades, waiting for the resurrection and judgment. The Bible never uses *spirit* to refer to a human soul, especially those who are dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1; 1 Cor. 2:14).

There are some clues here to identify these *spirits*. First, they are in “prison” (literally, “to be kept under watch”). They are being kept because “they did not obey,” but we are not told the nature of their disobedience. We are told *when* they were imprisoned—when “God’s patience waited in the days of Noah” (v. 20). What does this mean? The obvious reference is something that occurred in Noah’s time and in connection with the flood.

17.

The Big Picture (1 Peter 3:17-22)

Our individual existence in the world seems almost irrelevant in light of everything that takes place all around us. We are mere droplets in the vast ocean of existence. All the dreaming big in the world would not likely make our splash in life more than mere ripple, quickly lost. Yet, Peter informs us that we have been called to suffer in the will of God. Suffering itself seems like a total waste of our brief potential. What possible eternal value would my suffering accomplish? Nevertheless, Jesus informed His followers that suffering was the path that they must take (Matt. 16:24–26).

Peter, aware of this necessity for God-ordained trial, points to the great example of Jesus' suffering. The eighteenth verse is one of the most succinct and profound statements in all of scripture, summarizing the work of Christ in salvation. He suffered in order to bring us to God. While our contribution pales in comparison, it is, none the less, valuable in the overall scheme.

Jesus was put to death in the flesh-wise, but made alive spirit-wise. By this, Peter expresses the fact of Mark 15:37, that Jesus *breathed* His last. Breath and spirit are related, signifying that Jesus died physically in that His spirit left the body. His body was buried, waiting the three days for His spirit to return for His resurrection.

Peter goes on to explain what happened to His spirit between His death and resurrection. He went to proclaim something to spirits in prison. His first-century readers knew what he meant; thus, Peter is scant on details. There are sufficient clues for us to come to a sound conclusion. However, the main purpose in writing these things is to inform the suffering saint to take courage by looking at the big picture.

Jesus suffered for all the saints who were suffering then and now. His suffering secured their eternal life. This means that the persecutors will suffer judgment and eternal loss. Pointing back to Noah, Peter assures us that just as God judged the antediluvian world, he will judge the present world. (See 2 Peter 3:1–11).

Who are these spirits in prison? They are the angels that did not obey God in the time before the flood and are now in Tartarus, awaiting their judgment and condemnation in hell (Genesis 6:1–4, 11–13; 2 Pet. 2:4–10; Jude 5–7; 1 Enoch 1–10). The question is what does this have to do with salvation and the struggle for holiness? It has to do with the big picture—that because of the fall of Adam, God declared war on Satan and promised that the seed of the woman would defeat him and his offspring forever (Gen. 3:15). Satan's strategy was to defend himself by corrupting the human race, thus preventing the seed of the woman from ever even coming into the world. It is a seed war and the Seed of the Woman, Jesus Christ, won. He went to the prison house and announced to the fallen angels that Satan's plan failed and that his defeat was assured.

18.

Baptism Saves Us (1 Peter 3:18–22)

The meme showed a picture of Noah’s Ark with these words, “Grace did not save Noah; obedience did. This is not exactly right. Grace *did* save Noah because grace enabled obedience (Phil. 2:12, 13). Now, if the meme had said, “Faith alone did not save Noah; obedience did,” then it would have been biblical (James 2:14). True saving faith evidences itself in obedience.

Peter spoke of the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:18–22) in which God determined to destroy the world because “*all flesh had corrupted their way*” (Gen. 6:12). However, the promise of Genesis 3:15 would have failed if God destroyed all mankind; so, “*Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD*” (Gen. 6:8). God kept His promise intact with an ark to save Noah and his sons, which Noah was commanded to build. God gave him instructions, but Noah built it (Gen. 6:13–22). “*Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.*” “*By faith Noah . . . constructed an ark for the saving of his household . . . and became an heir of righteousness that comes by faith*” (Hebrews 11:7).

Peter applies this truth: “*Baptism, which corresponds to this [eight persons ‘brought safely through water’], now saves you*” (v. 21). This verse has been used to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation because the soul is regenerated when the command is obeyed—baptismal regeneration. Others see baptism as covenant loyalty in sign and seal, replacing physical circumcision and involving infants. (How does an infant have faith?) We believe that baptism is an emblem of the salvific work of God involving believers in union with Christ. God alone saves the sinner by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:8, 9), but true faith gives testimony to salvation by way of obedience in baptism.

Baptism saves us in the same way that the ark actually saved Noah from the judgment of God. Noah believed God and built an ark. Likewise, baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience (v. 21) through its public pledge of loyalty to God. As an act of obedience one’s baptism proclaims to the community that the believer’s union with Jesus Christ results in a new life evidenced in a new lifestyle based on Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–7; Col. 2:11, 12).

Baptism is also a symbol of the cleansing or removal of sin’s stain—of its consequences (Act 22:16) and a testimony of the work of the Spirit in regeneration (Titus 3:5). In other words, baptism stands as a living illustration of both *justification* (the removal of one’s sin record) and *sanctification* (the purification of one’s life), bringing the believer into conformity to God’s holiness. It is by this means that we declare our sonship to the Father, following the example of Jesus (Matt. 3:17). The many of Noah’s day were unrepentant; a few testified of their repentance and faith symbolized in the ark. So it is today.

19.

Are You a Phony Saint? (1 Peter 4:1-6)

Suffering in the flesh in 1 Peter 4:1 is not to be taken as enduring physical or mental affliction. It is, rather, a reference to one's identification and union with Jesus Christ in His suffering. This is evident by Peter's reference to arming oneself with the same mind or intention. If you understand and identify with Christ's reason for suffering—the salvation of souls, how could one ever want to return to a sinful lifestyle? God enables His people to wean themselves from their carnal ways, for “*whoever has suffered in the flesh [vicariously through Christ] has ceased from sin.*” Or, to put it another way, whoever has understood how and why Christ suffered in the flesh will refrain from the sins for which Christ suffered.

This understanding is further supported by what follows: “*so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God*” (v. 2). The unregenerate live in obedience to their fleshly desires (passions, Gk., *epithumia*, the longings of the heart). The term is associated with what is evil and ungovernable (unlike the Gk., *pathos*, controllable affections; 1 Thess. 4:5). This is what Paul means in Romans 8:3–10. “*Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh*”—“have carnal mindsets” (Rom. 8:5). They are driven to obey the flesh. They have no control over it (v. 3). However, true believers have the Spirit and His power to crucify the flesh (Rom. 8:13).

The facts presented by Peter make it abundantly clear that there is no such thing as a carnal Christian. There are believers whose immaturity is evident by their lingering carnal conduct (1 Cor. 3:1ff), who quench and grieve the Spirit. Such saints are treated as children to be corrected. However, many who profess to be Christians live by the passion of the flesh. They are like the pagans who order their lives by “*sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry*” (v. 3) “*in a flood of dissolution*”—a total lack of self-control (v. 4). The point Peter is making is not that pagans live in total abandon to their base nature (they may do that) but that they really have no desire to control their passions. Neither can they understand why true saints have no desire to chase after them in the pursuit of sin and self, berating them for abstaining (v. 4). Such behavior is the object of certain judgment (v. 5).

Verse 6 presents one of the arguments that pagans use to criticize the saints. They say, in effect, “Your gospel is no good to you because your people die just like our people do. So, what good is your abstaining from the things that make living more enjoyable since you are going to die anyway?” The response of Peter is, “Yes, believers will die because that is way of all flesh, but because of Jesus Christ, they will live on in the spirit.” There is an existence after death. Where will you spend eternity?

20.

The Rest of Our Time (1 Peter 4:1, 2)

To keep it in context, the first verse of chapter 4 must be interpreted in light of the last verses of chapter 3 concerning baptism and how it saves us. Of course, the rite of baptism itself cannot save, for we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8, 9). Baptism is the testimony of our passing through the waters of judgment, like Noah, who survived in the safety of the ark. Jesus Christ is our ark.

Jesus triumphed over the fall of Adam with all its consequences. He journeyed (*poreuomai*, to lead in a journey) into Tartarus to announce His victory to the fallen angels responsible for the judgment of the flood (1 Pet. 3:19). Then He led the deceased redeemed host in triumphal procession into heaven (v. 22, “*who has gone (poreuomai) into heaven*”; Eph. 4:8, citing Psa. 68:18). He now occupies the throne at God’s right hand, ruling over all spiritual authorities and powers.

Nevertheless, what is symbolically pictured in baptism has practical use in the saving process. Our salvation is not a once-and-final transaction that takes place in a moment of time. It is an ongoing process of perfecting what is to be finished in final redemption when Christ returns (1 Peter 1:3–7). We are not just saved; we are being saved, and that saving work will be completed when we see Jesus (1 Cor. 15:50–56).

The salvation that God works in the believer, which is pictured in baptism, involves the believer’s sharing in Christ’s sufferings. The believer enters a spiritual union with Christ and, in so doing, participates in all that Christ does in the course of His saving work. For this reality to have practical value, the believer must “arm” himself with this way of thinking. Paul puts it like this: “*Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph. 4:24; see vv. 17–24). We are to arm ourselves with the same *mind* or intention that Christ had when He suffered for us and died in our place (Rom. 6:6–11). Dead men don’t sin.

Just as Jesus died and rose again, so the believer in Christ dies only to be raised again to newness of life. When we understand how God is working our salvation, then we must start thinking in that way, and that right thinking will show itself in our everyday living. We will no longer live, yielding to the desires of the flesh. We will live for the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2).

To take the analogy to Noah further, he went out of the ark and built an altar to the Lord, offering burnt offerings which the Lord smelled as a pleasing aroma (Gen. 8:20, 21). Nevertheless, Noah drank wine and in some unspecified situation involving his son, Ham, he succumbed to the same flesh that God condemned in the flood (Gen. 9:11–17). The truth that we must see here is that Jesus Christ alone will accomplish the full and final victory over our sinful flesh.

21.

The Last Times (1 Peter 4:7)

Luke records Jesus' warning to the disciples during His Olivet Discourse. Their inquiry as to when the temple would be destroyed and the end of the age was answered by the Lord indicating that the disciples would soon witness the horrific events described. Indeed, Jesus clearly stated that "*this generation will not pass away until all has taken place*" (Luke 21:32). This assertion was followed with a kind of oath of confirmation (Luke 21:33). In light of this, Jesus urged them to "watch"—to stay awake and alert, focusing on the times and events of their days (Luke 21:34–36). Terrible judgment was coming. In order for them to stand with the Son of Man (a reference to Daniel 7:13, 14) in those days, they must have the strength that comes from vigilant and earnest prayer (v. 36).

Without question, these words of the Lord shape Peter's exhortation. Written from "Babylon" (5:13, which is probably Jerusalem—see Rev. 11:8; Gal. 2:1, 7–10), this epistle seeks to encourage the persecuted saints scattered in northern Roman provinces where Paul labored. The date of writing was about A.D. 62 or 63. (Both Paul and Peter were martyred between A.D. 64–67.)

This period was a time of great suffering under the Emperor Nero as he waged war on the church for a period of three and a half years. No wonder Peter writes that "*The end of all things is at hand*" (v.7). The expectation of consummation is consistently echoed in his letter (1:5–7; 2:12, 23; 4:5, 7, 13, 17; 5:4, 10). The expectation of immediate fulfillment presents a problem to interpreters. How do we resolve the tension between the expectation and the reality of passing time?

Peter's anticipation of a soon end to suffering at Jesus' return clearly rests on the promises of Jesus Himself (Luke 21:32). Was Jesus wrong or did He not know? "*Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only*" (Matt. 24:36). Nevertheless, Jesus did say that their generation would see these events, indicating that He knew something was to take place, even if it was not His final second coming. The prophets often viewed a future fulfillment through the glass of an immediate realization. Should we not expect to see Jesus coming in judgment against repeated times of evil resistance to the progress of His kingdom?

The answer rests in a careful consideration of the terms used. The most common terms are *parousía*, "coming" (Jas. 5:7–8; Heb. 9:28; note Dan. 7:13, 14 and compare Matt. 26:62–68); *apokálypsis*, "revelation" (1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13) and *epipháneia*, "appearing" (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). Clearly, the first term, *parousía*, (coming in personal presence) refers to His first and second (final) comings. This, however, does not limit Him from "coming" in other ways, for example, in judgment (Rev. 2:5) or blessing (John 14:23). Thus, we may conclude that the end of all things at hand was true for Peter and is equally true for us.

22.

The End of All Things (1 Peter 4:7–11)

In His first coming Jesus brought salvation (Luke 19:10). He is coming again to bring judgment (1 Pet. 4:17; John 5:22–25, 27 [note the reference to the Son of Man, Dan. 7:13, 14], 30). The Jews in John 4 could not understand Christ’s revelation of Himself to them because they did not have His word abiding in them (v. 38); therefore, they could not believe the Father who sent Him. On the other hand, the disciples had eternal life (v. 24), hearing His word and believing (trusting) the sending Father (1 Pet. 1:22, 23), would not come into judgment when Jesus returns.

Peter has already informed us of our unique and privileged position as believers. “*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*” (1 Pet. 2:9; Deut. 7:6; Rev. 1:6). We are here to reveal and promote His glory and dominion. To be effective in this task, we have two major obstacles to overcome: suffering and sin (1 Pet. 4:1–3). God’s grace has provided the means to live victoriously by His Spirit (v. 6). Our surviving the judgment will be because we will have satisfied the requirements (John 5:29; Rev. 20:12, note 1 Pet. 4:18). At the same time, the Spirit enables us to live out our privilege as *priests* of God before the world, bearing witness to the light (Prov. 6:23; cf. 1 Pet. 4:4, 5) in the corporate setting of the church (*chosen race and holy nation*).

Thus, in the verses before us, we have the means of grace provided for us to function in this calling. Recognizing that judgment is imminent, we are (1) to be praying with earnestness and vigilance (v. 7); (2) to continue loving others fervently, constantly, and intensely (v. 8); and (3) to show ungrudging hospitality to each other (v. 9; Matt. 25:34, 35; Micah 6:8). We are able to do this, if we are truly born again, because we have been gifted (Gk., *charisma*) to serve in this way (v. 10), and, as stewards of that grace, we shall be judged (1 Cor. 4:1–4).

We are to practice these disciplines in the strength that God provides (v. 11). God always supplies the ways and the means to enable us to accomplish His will. Indeed, it is only those who do the will of God who will be given entrance to the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:10, 11; Matt. 7:21). There is no excuse for saints’ not engaging these basic Christian disciplines. Certainly the rewards are great (John 15) and worth any sacrifice one might make.

Finally, Peter addresses the purpose for which all this is to be done—“*that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*” (v. 11). This is why we exist in the first place. “*To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*”

23.

Surviving the Last Times (1 Peter 4:7–13)

The theme of Peter's letter, in finding the suffering saints struggling, presses them to set their minds on the grace that is to be fully experienced at the appearing of Christ (1:13). Believers are to recognize that they now possess in Christ a salvation, although not fully perfected in them, promised in the prophets of ages past (1:3–12). As they wait for Christ, their experience and hope must be informed and motivated by their calling to this new life of obedience to Christ, a calling which also demands that they abandon conformity to their former passions (1:13–17).

In this epistle, there are four arguments for the saints to devote themselves to this calling. First, they are to be holy because their Lord is holy (chapter 1; Heb. 12:14). Second, unlike unbelieving physical Israel, the new spiritual Israel (1 Pet. 2:6–10) is, through obedience, to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called them so as to glorify God on the day of visitation (chapter 2). Third, they are to incorporate and manifest Christ-like character (unity, sympathy, brotherly love, tender hearts, and humble minds) as they live amidst their enemies (chapter 3). Fourth, they are to resist both their own sinful flesh and their detractors by finding strength in their union with Christ by partaking of His sufferings and arming themselves with His way of thinking (chapter 4).

Expanding on this fourth point, it is Christ's sufferings that motivate us to mortify our sinful flesh when we draw on that virtue. Focusing on Christ weakens the love of sin in our hearts. If we do not do this, the propensity to sin with all its strength and vigor will prevent us from denying ourselves and taking up the cross (Matt. 16:24). Thus, to encourage us, Peter lays out five arguments to pursue mortification of the flesh in pursuit of holiness. First, we are to recognize that we are no longer slaves to sin, having judicially suffered in our substitute, Jesus Christ (vv. 1, 2). Second, we are to regret our long history in the filthy fashions of the profane (v. 3). Third, all who refuse this course, censuring and condemning others for following it, will face the just Judge (vv. 4, 5). Fourth, we are to recall that we also were once dead in trespasses and sins but now have been raised to newness of life (v. 6). Fifth, we are to recognize that the end is in sight, which should dig in and renew our resolve in the Spirit to fight harder to be holy (vv. 7–11).

There is a "fiery trial" that is to test us (v. 12). That trial is necessary, for Zechariah prophecies: "*In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish [Rev. 2:10, 12:11], and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested [1 Pet. 1:7, Mal. 3:3, James 1:7]. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'*" (13:8, 9).

24.

Vigilant Praying (1 Peter 4:7)

With the coming of judgment at hand, believers are to get their thinking straightened out. The term translated *self-controlled* (ESV) or *sober* (AV) is found in the NT six times. It is used of the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35). Both Luke and Mark record that after the demons were cast out, the man was in his right mind. This tells us what Peter means when he exhorts his readers to be self-controlled—right minded. Paul supports this understanding of the term when he tells the Corinthians, “*For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you*” (2 Cor. 5:13).

We may be sure that as the end draws near Satan will redouble his efforts to destroy God’s kingdom (Rev. 12:12). Therefore, the first line of defense is *prayer*: “*be self-controlled* [right-minded] *and sober-minded* [clear-minded because you are sober, not dulled by drinking wine] *for the sake of your prayers.*” These two things work together to enable us to correctly focus in our stand against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:10, 11). Part of the powerful and effectual means the Lord has provided us in this conflict is *vigilant prayer* (Eph. 6:18, 19). Prayer enlists the Lord in our struggle (1 Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:6; Rev. 3:2, 3; 16:15).

Jesus warned Peter, James, and John to “*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation*” (Matt. 26:41). They disobeyed and slept because they, like us, have a false confidence that we are sufficient in ourselves to stand against Satan (Rom. 12:3). Because of this failure Peter allowed Satan to “sift” him (Luke 22:31). It was only Christ’s praying for him that saved his faith (vs. 32).

Sin creates in us a kind of insanity that makes it easy for our thinking to be either dulled or controlled and manipulated. As the advertising industry uses subtle and not-so-subtle mind-control to sell its wares, so Satan blinds minds to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4). The entertainment industry pushes its worldly and satanic philosophy in movies and television through hidden messages that get past the natural sentinels of the mind. The viewer is so taken up with flow of the story that he easily misses the symbols and ideas that he would otherwise reject. Satan wants to turn our hearts from God and His ways. Echoing the Savior (Matt. 24:42, 43; 25:13; 26:38, 40, 41), Peter urges his readers to be sober and vigilant with respect to Satan’s prowlings after them (1 Pet. 5:8).

In the verse following our text (1 Peter 4:8), Peter gives us the motive for vigilant praying, our need to love one another deeply. As believers, we must learn that we serve Christ primarily for the benefit of others. Sin makes us selfish; grace makes us selfless. Vigilant prayer is difficult and self-sacrificing but it defeats Satan who wants us to be like God (Gen. 3:4), equal and independent. God’s will is that we seek to assist others to be like Christ (Gal. 6:2).

25.

Loving and Judgment (1 Peter 4:8)

In light of the impending return of Christ and the judgment He brings to earth, Peter urges his readers to disciplined prayer, deep loving, and deliberate hospitality. These things seem a bit strange as a response to the danger and disaster that are to accompany the last days. Of course, the first admonition to pray with vigilance and sobriety is a must for the Christian soldier (Eph. 6:18). But where does loving one another earnestly and showing hospitality without grumbling fit it?

The problem with most contemporary Christians is that they have little Old Testament foundation for interpreting New Testament truth. It is not that they can never understand what Peter is saying but that they have to dig deep in order to do so. Reading the Bible through regularly helps a great deal to unlock its unity of message. One begins to see the threads and how they relate in drawing out the whole scheme.

In comparing Israel with Christ followers, similar themes begin to present themselves. God called Israel to Himself and designated that His people are to be a holy people, the Lord's particular possession (Deut. 7:6). That applies to New Covenant saints also (1 Pet. 2:9). The purpose of this unique relationship was that the Israel of God would serve as an example of what a people among whom God dwelt should look like (Deut. 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:11–12, 4:2–5). It should be a community so distinct as to draw attention (Eph. 5:1–16).

To live a godly and exemplary life among pagans is not easy. Moses exhorted the people, *"Only take care, and keep your soul diligently"* (Deut. 4:9, see also v. 23). It is very easy for us to let our own sinful hearts draw us away to self-interests and to self-seeking. To avoid this, God gave us His Word with its teaching, statutes, and rules (Deut. 4:14). The whole of these rules are summed up in just two: love the Lord and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37–39). God knows your heart, but your neighbor does not (Rom. 13:9, 10). He sees your attitude and your conduct. Will he know you love the Lord? You show your neighbor that you love the Lord by keeping His rules (Deut. 11:1). Through obedience, you love your neighbor and show Him what God is like (1 Cor. 15:34). This background fits the context of Peter's challenge (1 Pet. 4:7–11; cf. 1:22).

There are lots of opinions on what Peter means when he says that love covers sins (v. 8; see Prov. 10:12; James 5:20). It may be best to understand these sins as potential and that loving acts prevent potential sins that would otherwise come into judgment. Whatever this means, the first part of the verse is clear. We must love each other earnestly, as with every muscle stretched. That takes supernatural strength, for we are far more likely to preserve our presumed dignity than risk pursuing others for the love of Christ.

26.

Hospitality (1 Peter 4:9)

In light of the coming end of the age, Peter exhorts his readers to pursue three areas: (1) vigilant and sober praying (v. 7); (2) continued earnest loving of each other (v. 8); and showing hospitality to others without complaint (v. 9). Peter assumes that his readers are already practicing these Christian virtues but urges them to raise them to a higher level. He reasons (vv. 10, 11) that these are spiritual gifts for which all must give an account to Jesus when He comes to judge (1 Cor. 3:10–15; Matt. 25:35). These gifts are indispensable in building the kingdom for the glory of Christ (vv. 16, 17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Hospitality is a major consideration in the Scriptures because of its importance in advancing the mission of the kingdom. Thus, it is an identifying mark a true believer. Hospitality is simply welcoming strangers to do them good, helping them with needs and encouraging them in their journey (compare Gaius with Diotrephes, 3 John 5–8 with 9, 10; Gen. 18:1–5).

Under the Old Covenant, God's people were expected to demonstrate the same care for the stranger that the Lord showed (Psa. 146:9). Hospitality reminded them that they were once strangers in Egypt (Ex. 23:9; Lev. 19:33, 34). Very severe judgment was pronounced against Ammon and Moab because they refused to accommodate Israel in their journey (Deut. 23:3, 4). It was so important to God that he required hospitality, among other things, as a condition for their remaining in the land (Jer. 7:5–7).

In the New Covenant era, hospitality serves both a practical and symbolic function. Christian hospitality made it possible for apostles, missionaries, and evangelists to move about safely and conveniently among the churches. Commercial accommodations were rare and dangerous morally and physically (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; Phile. 21, 22; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Hospitality is an extension of brotherly love and serves to identify with and welcome other believers as Christ welcomed us (Rom. 15:7; cf. 14:1–3). Eating with others is a way to show love and compassion (Acts 2:42–47). We celebrated the Lord's Table as a reminder of His cordial welcome of us. Thus, we also are to encourage and help others in their spiritual walk, especially when it is difficult with trials and hardships (1 Tim. 5:10). Paul severely rebuked Peter for showing bias against Gentile believers at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14). However, vigilance and discernment must also be used. True saints are welcomed, but false teachers and enemies of the gospel are to be renounced (2 John 9–11; Rom. 16:17, 18).

When He sent out the disciples, Jesus designated hospitality as a clear signal of willingness to receive the gospel message (Matt. 10:9–15). He, too, was received by sinners because they were open to hear His message. On the other hand, the Pharisees severely criticized Him for eating with sinners because they refused that message (Matt. 9:11).

Are you eager and willing to welcome others into your home? Do you cherish opportunities to help those who give their lives to advancing His kingdom?

27.

Fiery Trial (1 Peter 4:12–19)

Peter introduces 1 Peter 4:12-19 by using a word that originally meant to welcome a guest or to show hospitality to strangers: “*Beloved, do not be surprised*” (lit., from the root to lodge a stranger; see 4:4).” In other words, “Do not look at the fiery trial as if it were an unexpected foreigner who comes to you for lodging.”

In this section Peter returns to the suffering that saints must expect (1:6, 7). Here he expands on the nature of that suffering, being a means of testing and purifying the faith of God’s people. Believers should expect these trials because in them they share or, better, partner (*koinoneo*, “to fellowship”) with Christ. Here is a clear mark of one’s belonging to Christ. If one suffers with Christ, he identifies with Christ, proving that he is in Christ.

The negative implications of suffering and trial cause one normally to cringe and recoil due to the pain and loss endured. However, Peter argues that sharing Christ’s suffering will not end in disaster but, rather, in the sharing of Christ’s glory when that is revealed (v. 13).

The unspoken scenario here involves the cosmic war of the ages. The seed of the serpent is at war with the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). The seed of the woman will be bruised (through persecution) by the seed of the serpent. He will suffer and the attack upon Him will be brutal because Satan must defeat the woman’s seed if he is to prevent his head from being crushed. This conflict is life or death.

Despite the certainty of the outcome, Satan is unrelenting in his effort to inflict as much pain on Christ and those who are in Christ as he can (see 5:8–11). Nevertheless, understanding this conflict and one’s role in it enables one to rejoice in the midst of the pain (see 1:6).

Suffering as a Christian means that you are despised by the world. *Christian* is a derogatory term used by the enemies of Christ to insult His followers. To be called a Christian (Acts 11:6; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16) is to be reviled for the name of Christ (v. 14). If this occurs, the believer is to consider himself blessed and happy (see Matt. 5:11, 12; 10:24, 25).

God’s purpose in the temporal suffering of believers is to test and refine (1:7) in order to make them holy (1:14–16). It is referred to by Peter as *judgment* (*krima*, the sentence passed on the offender at his trial; v. 17). This sentence is executed on the household of God as a refining judgment (a refining of remaining sin in the believer) and the instrument of it is the unbelieving world.

Persecution shocks the unregenerate who observes it. If he understands it, it will cause him to reflect on his own standing before God’s judgment: “*If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*” (v. 18, quoting Prov. 11:31). Thus, as we joyfully endure the scorn of the world, let us entrust our souls to the faithful Creator (v. 19).

28.

Tested In the Prayer Closet (1 Peter 5:5–11)

Have you ever considered prayer as a trial under which you are tested (1:6)? There is no arena under which one's faith is tested more than in prayer, and when it is thus tested and found to be genuine, it will result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:7).

Peter has called all believers to holiness of life (1:13–25), which is evidenced in four areas: (1) living stones in Christ's spiritual house, (2) holy priests offering spiritual sacrifices (2:4–10), (3) honorable aliens sojourning in this vile world (2:11–3:22), and (4) diligent stewards of God's varied grace (4:1–19). All this is necessary preparation for the final exhortation before us (5:5–11).

In this text Peter drills down on necessary aspects of faith with a list of instructions, all of which pertain to prayer. Citing James 4:6 and 10, he first points to the singular necessary principle for success in every test: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"* (v. 5b). No one can hope for success in getting answers to his prayers when God opposes him.

While not specifically mentioning prayer, every phrase in this passage involves praying. First, if you want God's ear, humble yourself before Him (v. 6; 2 Chron. 7:14). Humbling moves the mighty *hand of God* to lift you up. The hand is symbolic of His great power to deliver His people (Psa. 98:1). Much of our prayer is pleading for deliverance, is it not? Indeed, prayer is an enigmatic work of weak and powerless children through which He moves to act in mighty power. *"Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us"* (Psa. 68:28; Jer. 33:3; James 5:16). Humble, fervent, believing, earnest prayer gets God's ear and moves His hand in powerful and effective ways. It lifts up and exalts the praying saint and gets glory to God.

Second, the closet of prayer is also the dumping ground for worldly cares (v. 7). Quoting from Psalm 55:22, Peter exhorts the burdened heart to *cast* or *hurl* its burden on the Lord. This *casting* is a participle: being part of the humbling process, it also involves praying. Worldly cares reflect unbelief; they distract and unduly burden the Christian life. These must be given to the Lord. Interestingly, this whole section mirrors James's instructions on drawing near to God (James 4:6–10).

The great object of our praying is our warfare against Satan (v. 8). We need to take the devil on in the closet, wrestling in prayer (Eph. 6:12; 18–20). We are to *"resist him, firm in faith."* We are not alone this, for *"the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world"* (v. 9). Jesus defeated Satan on the cross; the saints carry this victory to the prayer closet.

The fruit of this suffering—and praying is suffering—is that *"the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen"* (vv. 10, 11).