

1 Peter 1:17-23 NIV

“When the Lord began planning for you”

“Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

(18) 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, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

“(20) He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (21) Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

“(22) 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. (23) For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

In addition to my inefficiency, ignorance, and laziness, two things frustrate me when I try to prepare sermons.

First, Bible chapter and verse divisions often come in awkward places.

The original writers did not divide their books and letters into chapters and verses as now in our Bibles.

These divisions came much later.

On the good side, chapters and verses help us locate certain teachings, statements, and stories

In one of my Bibles, the Old Testament fills 733 pages.

If I did not know the 23rd Psalm's location, I might have to search 414 pages to find it.

On the other hand, chapter and verse divisions often disrupt important stories and themes.

Suppose newspaper editors did the following to a Sunday Peanuts cartoon:

They don't give you the final caption for today's strip until next Sunday.

They begin next Sunday's strip with today's closing caption, but print only two captions then stop again.

Would you have trouble understanding what Lucy, Linus, and Charlie Brown were doing?

I know Snoopy the dog would be confused.

In the same manner, chapter and verses in the Bible sometimes interfere with the meaning.

The people who designed them wanted to help, but the divisions often make understanding more difficult.



Lectionary readings can disrupt perception, too.

At times, those passages are not in proper context.

In today’s text, we face a double whammy.

- **First, the chapter and verse divisions come in awkward places.**
- **Second, the lectionary verse selection slices and mangles the thought.**

Can we make only bad sausage of what’s left?

Did you hear this story of the 12-year-old daughter helping her mother bake a cake?

Mom said to the daughter: “Check if that cake in the oven is ready. Just stick a knife inside and see if it comes out clean.”

A few minutes later the daughter boasted:

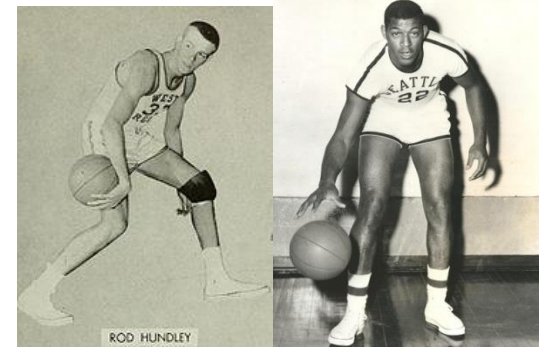
“The knife came out so clean, I stuck in all the other dirty knives.”



Clear communication is vital; so is context. The basketball player turned announcer Hot Rod Hundley (1934-2015), once proved the importance of context. Hundley reportedly said one night to scoring great and teammate Elgin Baylor, **“What a night buddy! Seventy-three points between us!”**

Seventy-three combined points are a pretty good night for two players. But of those 73 points, Elgin Baylor scored 71, Hundley 2.

Chapter divisions and the lectionary separation disrupt clear communication and interrupt the



context making it difficult to understand our text.

Still we can make sense of it.

We start by acquainting ourselves with the truths that underlie the New Testament.

These facts pertain to our past and future.

Why is the past important?

Two vital realities occurred:

First, on the cross, Jesus paid for all of our sins—every one of them.

That includes any untruth we might have told, all cheating we may have done, any hypocritical act; every time we may have gotten drunk or committed a sexual sin.

That even includes the times we might have spent thinking about it; every time we have acted hatefully, all the ingratitude, bitterness, and anger we’ve carried.

Jesus even died for us who are proud because we think we have never stooped to commit the sins that others commit.

Jesus fully paid all the costs and penalties.

“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, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

- When you buy something at auction, the seller and auctioneer want cash.
- Jesus fully redeemed us—as in a cash transaction.
- He covered everything.

Jesus completely paid for our wrongdoing.

Consider another point about our past.

Some naively think that God decided to send Jesus after He had tried everything else.

They compare Jesus’ coming to a desperate or stopgap human effort.

God did not send Jesus as a last chance measure after every other thing failed.

As Peter said about Christ, “He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”

Did you catch what Peter said?

Before He created the cosmos, God planned to send Jesus.

No one knows exactly how old the Universe is.

If it began 5 billion years ago, God planned for Jesus to redeem us before that moment.

Long before He created everything, the Lord had our redemption in the works.

Many skeptics agree with H.L. Mencken who stated, “The cosmos is a gigantic flywheel making 10,000 revolutions a minute. Man is a sick fly taking a dizzying ride on it. Religion is the theory that the wheel was designed and set spinning to give him a ride.”¹

¹ H.L. Mencken, *Prejudices*: Third Series, 1922

Some religious people agree with James Russell Lowell, the poet and Harvard English Professor:

**“Behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
keeping watch.”²**

I understand Lowell to mean: “God is watching, but not doing much.”

In other words, God silently observes, kind of like parents at a ball game helplessly seeing their kids get knocked around but unable to help them.

Lowell seemed to think that way, but the Bible didn't lead him to that view.



Scripture tells us that from a human perspective, it's often hard to understand life's events.

But God fully controls His master plan and He'll draw things to a close when His plan is complete.

His design included sending Christ to pay for our mistakes--a decision he made before time began.

That's what happened in the past.

And what about our future?

Jesus took care of that, too.

When you believed in Christ and accepted him as God's only son, Jesus rescued you and gave you permanence because of who he is and because of his resurrection.

Before we accept Jesus, we have what Peter called an “empty way of life.”

Living apart from God leaves us drained.

Imagine going through life, and after all your effort and investment, you have only zilch.

If you are living apart from God and His plan in Christ, that's what you'll have in the end—nothing, nada.

Recall Mencken's view of life?

“The cosmos is . . . a flywheel making 10,000 revolutions a minute. Man is this dizzy, sick fly taking a ride. . . Religion is the theory that the wheel was designed and set spinning to give us a ride.”

Many prominent people today believe according to Mencken's premise—life is accidental, capricious, and pointless.

Life goes nowhere.

This viewpoint results in hopelessness, bitterness, despair, and selfishness.

² James Russell Lowell, *The Present Crisis* 1844

This perspective is not new.

People in Peter’s time believed this, too.

You move along thinking you are progressing, but finish in a cul-de-sac.

Here’s what God’s Spirit tells us through Peter:

We got here because our moms and dads gave us biological life that God began.

This biological life ends when we’ve put in 70-120 years; it always terminates.

We face choices during this brief time.

We can continue going our own way.

Or we can choose a new life from God that Christ made possible and certified by his resurrection.

Our parents gave us a start in a temporary life.

Christ gave us something our parents couldn’t give us.

Christ gave us imperishable life.

Many of us get taken in by human promises.

Political hucksters, scientific hucksters, educational hucksters, and religious hucksters insist they know how to give us better lives.



Here’s what they really offer:

They’ll improve our short time on earth.

But they can give nothing permanent.

Look at the bottom line of what they offer.

- Politicians tell you how good they are, how they will take care of you, and how proud they are of their records—records you rarely see in full.
- Every leading politician will be in the grave in fifty years or less.
- Many politicians engender hate, dissatisfaction, and bitterness.
 - That way leads to sudden foreclosure.

Look at the bottom line of God’s offer.

- **God demonstrated his love, his goodness, and his eternity.**
- **He backed his offer with love: “We love because he first loved us.”**

That’s how you can tell religious truth from any type of hucksterism.

- **Hucksters create fear, anxiety, bitterness, hypocrisy, and hate.**
- **True followers of Jesus foster love and forgiveness.**

Peter said that in our text: “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.”

God wants us to love others that way.



Earlier I lamented chapter divisions and lectionary selections that interrupt understanding.

Peter explained the difference between being born of mortal parents and being born of God.

“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

The lectionary reading ends here.

Chapter one ends here, too.

But if we keep reading into chapter two, Peter tells us what Christ’s new birth requires of us:

“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” (2:1-3).

God is good, His way is love, and He wants us to live forever with him.

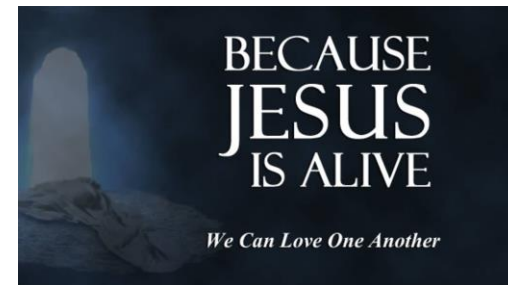
If we choose to love God and serve him with all of our heart, we’ll begin working on emptying our minds, wallets, and actions of greed, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

God’s love and mercy have no bounds.

“Through him (Christ) you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

Glory, honor, and service to God, who created all things in the beginning, and has plans for you—if you endure lovingly in Him.

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