



Good morning everyone. I honestly can't believe we are celebrating eight years as a church campus! God is good and God has been so faithful to us. I am also so excited about the future as we look to become an independent church in the fall. So, welcome to NewNorth Church! Wow, that is fun to say BTW—we still don't know what we will call ourselves, but we like NewNorth Church! We are excited about all that is going on in preparation of NewNorth. I also want to welcome our guests this morning. Thank you for coming to check us out. You might be a little confused, Am I at CPC North or NewNorth? You're at both! Welcome.

Today, we begin a new series in a book of the New Testament called 1 Peter. It's a letter written over 2000 years ago to a group of early followers of Jesus. Here at NewNorth, we primarily teach through books of the Bible, passage by passage. And what we try to do is study together an ancient text, understand what it meant to the original audience, and then apply it to our lives today in the SF Bay Area. Why do we do this? We think the Bible is not just any ordinary book; we believe it's the inspired Word of God, that it's alive and active. Since God has chosen to reveal Himself through His Word, the teaching, reading, study and meditation of the Bible is essential to our relationship with Him. This means, even if you are not a Christian, if you open up this book, pray and read it, we believe God will speak to you. God will work in you. And what you'll find is that the Bible is very relevant to our lives today! Hopefully you'll see that in every sermon we preach. So, if you have a Bible, turn to the first letter of Peter, chapter 1.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

(1 Peter 1:1-2)

People of God:

Know where you are

At the very beginning, Peter lets us know he's the one writing the letter. I love how Peter quickly identifies himself as an apostle, like it's no big deal. He does this to establish his credibility. Peter was one of the original 12 disciples and one of the Apostles.

He was the hotheaded fisherman who often put his foot in his mouth. We learn in chapter 5, Peter wrote this letter from Rome, whom he called Babylon. It was written to a mixed group of Jew and Gentile converts scattered throughout Asia Minor (Turkey). In these opening two verses, Peter sets up all of the major themes he will cover in his letter. His main purpose is answering this question: How do Christians live in a non-Christian society? Do we simply accommodate to culture, take it all in and not question anything? Do we separate from culture, stay in our holy huddles and try and keep the world out? Or do we protest culture and speak out loudly about all that is wrong about it? Here's what's so interesting about Peter's teaching: he weaves in and out of all three options. All of them are wrong and right depending on the situation. We will do well to pay close attention.

When I bought my first car, a 1972 Impala, I went out and bought a map. Remember those things? And whenever I got lost, I would pull over at a gas station, pull out the map and see where I was and where I was going. The problem was I often didn't know where I was, so I didn't know where I needed to go! I can't tell you how many times I asked a gas station clerk how to get somewhere! Then the internet came and a glorious thing called MapQuest. Thousands of trees were cut down because so many of us printed out directions to everywhere we needed to go! Then, if you were geeky and had the money, you bought a GPS for your car. I always wanted one of those. It actually gave you real time directions, unless you were Michael Scott and Dwight Schrute of the show *The Office*, and you ended up driving into a lake! Then the glorious iPhone hit stores and suddenly we all had a GPS device in our back pocket. Just ask my wife, it is the one App I cannot live without. Even if I know the way, I still plug in directions.

The first letter of Peter is like a map. In these opening verses Peter tells us where we are before we know where we are going. Peter wants to locate his audience geographically, socially, and then theologically. You too need to know where you are before you know where you are going.

First, geographically—you're scattered. On this map you can see to the top right the regions of Pontus, Cappadocia, Galatia, Asia, Bithynia. This was called Asia Minor, which today is Turkey. It was a large remote area, about the size of California, with small cities few and far between, kind of like driving on the I-5 from Tracy to L.A.. There's not much to see or do. Asia Minor was a diverse

population of both Greeks and Romans, with many different religions that spoke several languages.

The word “scattered” is actually the Greek word *diaspora* and is a technical term used in Jewish literature for God’s people who are away from their homeland. It also can refer to any displaced people group. The question often debated is, “Why are they scattered?” Is it because of the persecution of Christians in Rome? Maybe. Were these people deported by Rome in its attempt to colonize Asia Minor? Maybe. We don’t really know for sure.

Second, socially—you’re exiles. The word “exiles” can also be translated “sojourners, strangers, aliens or foreigners.” But who were these exiles? There are three main options. These exiles could be Jews living away from Palestine. There is no doubt Peter is using language from the OT and placing it on Christians. But, in the OT, living in exile was Israel’s punishment for sin and they were taken away by the Assyrians and later the Babylonians. But, Peter uses the term here positively.

The second view, which is really popular, is that these are Christians (Jew and Gentile converts) exiled from heaven. The idea is this world is not our home, we are just passing through on our way to heaven. Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi put it this way, **“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ”** (Phil. 3:20). It’s true, Christians are citizens of heaven. This is not our ultimate home. That means that all Christians everywhere are exiles, aliens, and foreigners.

The third view, which is the one I hold, is exiles refers to Christians (Jew and Gentile converts) socially exiled from society. It refers to the relationship between Christians and an unbelieving society. Later in the letter Peter will tell us exactly why they feel like exiles, **“For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you”** (1 Peter 4:3-4). These early Christians became strangers in society because they became strange! They became foreigners because they were foreign! They came aliens because they were alien! They no longer participated in the lifestyle of their unbelieving neighbors and because of that, they were social exiles.

Do you ever feel like an exile as a follower of Jesus today? Do you ever feel socially marginalized and mistreated because of your commitment to Jesus? Ever feel completely out of sync with popular culture because you love Jesus, go to church, strive for holiness and believe in the Bible? If you did not grow up here, does your family ever call you and say, “How in the world can you live in the Bay Area? It’s so liberal, it’s so hectic, etc.” If you feel like a minority in the SF Bay Area—which you are—you will love Peter’s letter, because it will help you learn how to live here.

On the other hand, if you are a Christian and you never feel like an exile, I wonder if you really understand what it means to follow Jesus. The moment you become a Christian, you are transformed and made completely new. Suddenly you have different priorities, values and allegiances than your neighbors. Sadly many Christians today look just like the unbelievers around us. We divorce at the same rate. We struggle with the same addictions. We seek the same forms of entertainment. We wear the same fashions. Drive the same cars. Go on the same vacations. Etc. Etc. But, this is why I love the Bay Area! If you are a follower of Jesus Christ and you don’t stick out, something is wrong! In the Midwest or the South, supposedly everyone is a Christian! Not here. I often have to explain to people what a pastor is. I love it.

Listen to what was written about second century Christians, long after this letter was written: “For Christians are no different from other people in terms of their country, language or customs. Nowhere do they inhabit cities of their own, use a strange dialect, or live life out of the ordinary....They live in their respective countries, but only as exiles; they participate in all things as citizens, and they endure all things as foreigners...They share their meals but not their sexual partners. They are found in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth but participate in the life of heaven. They are obedient to the laws that have been made, and by their own lives they supersede the laws. They love everyone and are persecuted by all. They are not understood and they are condemned. They are put to death and made alive. They are impoverished and make many rich. They lack all things and abound in everything. They are dishonored and they are exalted in their dishonors.” (5:1-14 [LCL]) Epistle to Diognetus

You have been chosen before time by God

With respect to society, you are exiles, that is what Peter says first. But with respect to God, you are chosen, that’s what he says next. And it’s because of your relationship with God that your relationship with society is messed up. In verse two Peter moves from geography and society to theology. Theologically, you are the “elect-exiles,” the people of God; you were chosen. That is where you are on the map. I also want you to see the beautiful trinitarian language as well—Father, Spirit and Jesus. Peter shows them how each person of the Trinity had a role in their conversion, how each person of the Godhead placed them on the map of their true identity.

Peter gives us three answers to help us understand our identity, who we are before God. All three help us to understand where we are on the map. Scot McKnight says, “Peter intends his readers to understand who they are before God so that they can be who they are in society.” Peter is explaining to them (and to us) how they became Christians. He says first, you have been chosen

before time by God to be His. The attribute of God Peter begins with is God's eternal foreknowledge. The word foreknowledge can also mean "foresee" and "forelove." It's the idea that God foresaw and foreloved all those whom He would chose. Peter is emphasizing God's sovereignty—God is totally in control—and God's initiative in salvation. Here's what Peter is saying, "Your identity as one of God's people was known before time. You are safe in the foreknowledge of God. No matter your family history, ancestry, or ethnic identity, you are part of the people of God in the same way Jews are in the Old Testament."

If you are a Christian, you have been chosen by God before the beginning of time! Long before God formed a people to be His, He chose you. Just let that sink in for a moment. It's incredible. Long before I entered a church auditorium in Castro Valley on November of 1994, God knew I would be His. In fact, He was working in my life before I had any idea of who He is. God always takes the initiative first. Karen Jobes, who wrote the best commentary on this letter said this, "Peter reminds his readers that the God who took the initiative in their lives has drawn them into an intimate, loving, and redemptive relationship with him, but also one in which God claims supreme authority over their lives. Such a reminder is apt at a time when Christians are troubled by the circumstances in which they find themselves, confused about how to live, and tempted to doubt God's goodness or faithfulness."

If you are not a Christian, this means God has revealed Himself to you, but you have not responded. God never forces unbelievers to believe against their will. But please hear me, I believe God is working in you and drawing you to Himself. You are not here by accident. And you do not come to faith purely on your own. God is working behind the scenes of your life.

The second act of God that forms our identity as the people of God is the work of the Holy Spirit.

You have been chosen by the sanctifying work of the Spirit

Typically sanctification is a word used to describe the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to make Christians more holy, more like Jesus Christ. But here, the word is referring to their conversion, to the time they became Christians. At that moment, God set them apart, sanctified, and consecrated them by the Holy Spirit. Again, the emphasis is on God's work. This means that you and I cannot become a Christian on our own. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. The process typically goes like this: you hear the Word of God preached, the Holy Spirit stirs in your heart and gives you an understanding of the Gospel (The Good News of Jesus Christ), He convicts you of sin, reassures you of forgiveness, and begins to transform you from the inside out. This happens in an instant, but the sanctification process takes a lifetime.

I remember as a kid I went to several different churches from time to time and heard the gospel, but nothing changed in me.

But, when I was 17 years old, I got invited to church again and suddenly it seemed like I was hearing it for the first time. I was drawn in, open and hungry for God. How does that happen? Through the Holy Spirit. What I want you to see here is that this work of the Spirit is specific. Today, we live in a culture where everyone says they are spiritual. Part of that is because God created us as spiritual beings. But, the work of the Holy Spirit has a specific goal. He does not bring a person into some general spirituality. He brings people into what's called the new covenant founded on the blood of Jesus Christ. That's what he says in verse two and brings us to the third identity marker on the map.

You have been chosen for obedience and by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

The Christians to whom Peter was writing to were chosen in God's foreknowledge by the work of the Spirit for a specific purpose—obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Peter's logic is this: you were chosen, you were known, and you were set apart for obedience. Apostle Paul in the New Testament book called Romans calls this the "obedience of faith." This obedience refers again to conversion. Peter then connects obedience to Jesus's blood.

They were chosen and sprinkled with the blood of the covenant ushered in by the death of Jesus. Now, if you are new to church, this talk of sprinkling of blood seems really weird! But, it's actually a metaphor from the Old Testament used to describe what Jesus has done by His death. In three cases in the OT blood was ceremonially sprinkled on the people themselves. In the Old Testament book called Exodus we read, "*Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'*" (Ex. 24:8). Peter is likely referring to this sprinkling of blood that was used for healing and forgiveness. It means these elect exiles are cleansed of their sin and accepted by God.

Peter's getting at this: The Old Covenant was powerless to bring about obedience to God. The New Covenant, which has been established by the blood of Christ, can transform your heart so that you can obey God. Sanctification, obedience, and the sprinkling of blood are three different ways of describing what God has done in the life of these Christians. You have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ. The Father foreknows, the Spirit sanctifies, and the Son cleanses (Schreiner). All of this was God's work. This is who you are before God. This is where you are on the map.

So we see here that Father, Spirit and Son all worked together to bring about our election. It's kind of like this: Say a family is trapped in a forest fire, so a helicopter team undertakes a rescue. One fireman flies the helicopter over the smoky blaze to coordinate the operation and see the big picture. A second

fireman descends on a rope into the billowing smoke below to track down the family and stand with them. Once he locates the family, he wraps the rope around them, attaching them to himself, and they're lifted up together into safety.

In this rescue operation the first fireman looks like the Father, who can see the whole field unclouded from above to sovereignly orchestrate the plan. The second fireman looks like the Son, who descends into our world to find us and identify with us in our humanity and even in our sin. The Spirit is like the rope, who raises us up with Him—from sin and death into the presence of the Father.

Of course, like all analogies, this one falls short. The Spirit is a person, not a thing, like the rope. And the Father, Son, and Spirit aren't separate individuals but the one God, sharing a divine nature and essence as one being. But our rescue required the interdependent action of all three persons of the Godhead. Each has a distinct and necessary role. And yet, zooming out, they are undertaking one united joint action: our rescue from sin and death. The Father, Son, and Spirit are working together in a united, joint action for our salvation.

Peter ends his greeting with a declaration of God's blessing to those who are in Christ, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance." The result of all this is that grace and peace are being multiplied (abundance) to you. Grace—the unmerited favor of God. Peace—the inward state when you're experiencing the goodness of God. It's shalom, wholeness. This is Peter's desire for

the people of God, that they would know, enjoy, live in and from the grace and peace of God toward them.

What does this mean for all of us? Here's my big idea: People of God, know who you are so you know how to live. Theologian Thomas Schreiner put it this way, "Those who understand themselves as God's elect have the ammunition to resist the norms and culture of the society they inhabit." If you are going to make it in the Bay Area as a follower of Jesus, you will need to learn how to live as foreigners and exiles in a society that thinks we are irrelevant and extreme. If you go to church regularly, read the Bible, pray to Jesus, believe in only one way to heaven, give money away to the church, and do many of the things we see in the life of Jesus, people will say, "What is wrong with you?" In North America, we might not be persecuted like the early church or Christians living in hostile countries, but don't be surprised when it comes.

Do you understand who you are before God? Is your primary identity in being part of God's family or part of society that does not accept you? Do you find your primary identity as Americans or Christians? Peter tells us to find our identity in being God's elect. You may be exiles in respect to society, but you have been chosen by God!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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