

## Chosen . . . With Enthusiasm

### Profiling Christians

*1 Peter 1:1b*

### Discussion Guide

**Main Idea:** The biblical doctrine of election is meant to encourage us, not divide us, as we sojourn in a world that is not our home.

#### **Discussion Points:**

Scripture makes it clear that the world has opposed Jesus and will oppose those who follow Him—John 15:18. This was indeed the experience of the audience to which Peter writes and is the present experience of the Church around the globe today. While our natural response might be to flee the hardship or to fight back against those who hate our Savior, we have a glorious opportunity before us to make clear God’s truth and represent the Lord of the universe.

- Identify one concrete way that you have suffered for the name of Jesus. How is/was this situation an opportunity to represent Christ and the truth of God’s Word?
- As you are surrounded by others who do not understand or appreciate your views, how have you prepared to graciously answer any questions or articulate definitions? How are you strategically seeking out those opportunities?
- How strong is the temptation to stay “hidden” and escape opposition? On the opposite side, how strong is the temptation to fight/argue with those who don’t agree with you? What do these temptations say about our hearts?

Peter refers to this audience of believers as aliens/foreigners who are scattered like seed throughout that entire region. This speaks to the tension that we as believers experience as we live in this world but belong to another. As believers we belong to a world that is yet to come, the Kingdom of God!

- When you consider the reality of belonging to another world, how should that change your view of life in this present world?
- In what tangible ways would an unbeliever identify you as being markedly different from them?
- List some major goals that you have for yourself or for your family. As you consider these goals are there disconnects between them and the reality of belonging to a different world? If so, how could they be reoriented to the Kingdom of God?

## **Discussion Guide cont.**

The doctrine of election as taught in scripture is meant to be an encouraging doctrine for believers as they live in a world that is not their home, giving a steadfast assurance and hope in Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

- Has there ever been a time that you have considered yourself a lost sinner and turned to the death and resurrection of Jesus as your only hope of salvation? Is there a verse/passage in God's Word that promises salvation to you if you will believe upon Christ? Spend some time recounting with others the decision that you made for Christ and the work of God in your heart to bring you to that point.
- Our limited minds cannot comprehend the eternal truth regarding God's gracious work in initiating salvation even though scripture clearly teaches it. Give a scriptural basis for why it is absolutely necessary for God to initiate our salvation.
- In what ways does this truth give you great encouragement and assurance?

**Gospel Connection:** If you have placed your faith in Christ alone for salvation then you have scripture's unalterable testimony that you are elect, chosen by God. Do not let academic debates divide or distract from what should be an encouraging and glorious truth. We who were the enemies of God have been chosen by Him in His Son, not because we were lovely but because He is a God of unfathomable love. Now as sons and daughters we love Him because He first loved us!

### **Practical Implications:**

- Think:** Spend some time reflecting upon the truth that God chose you before the foundation of the world and how that should encourage you.
- Pray:** As you spend your time in prayer this week, modify your requests to reflect the fact that you belong to another world.
- Do:** Strategically choose an unbeliever in your life to engage in gracious conversation—not debate—where both of you answer one or more of these following questions: Who is God? What is sin? Are there sacred scriptures and if so what are they? What is marriage or family? Is there a final judgment? Is there truth? Is gender something we choose? Is sexual orientation a choice?

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## Profiling Christians

*1 Peter 1:1b*

Just a few weeks ago, an anti-terrorism bill passed both houses of the Russian Parliament and signed into law by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. The bill was labeled anti-terrorism, but in reality it was a smokescreen to pass nothing less than what insiders are calling a new Russian Anti-Missionary law. The bill severely restricts any unsanctioned religious activity by any religious organization, with one exception – the Russian Orthodox Church, which is closely aligned with the Russian Government and – for many decades – the enemy of the gospel.

It is no surprise that the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church is a former KGB officer – the highest religious leader in the land who calls Putin's reign in Russia a miracle of God.

According to the Slavic Gospel Association, this Anti-Missionary – officially called, Anti-terrorism Bill, will demand that the gospel can only be preached inside the walls of a registered church building; in a facility rented by a registered church and only by a pastor or church leader who has obtained official state-sanctioned identification.

Everything outside the registered church, performed by an unlicensed church official will bring heavy fines and punishment.

As we pray for our brothers and sisters in Russia, keep in mind that 90% of the evangelical churches meet in homes, because during Communism, churches weren't allowed to own property. Even in post-communist Russia, local churches have been unable to obtain permission to purchase property or construct buildings.

This law will pave the way for the government to shut down 90% of the evangelical churches in Russia. Also, this bill requires the citizens of Russia to report any violation to the authorities.

The door that had opened in the former Soviet Union is beginning to creak and groan as it swings shut. And the true church will once again, adapt to secret meetings and underground churches and quiet, careful, winsome, joyful lives and testimonies that attract curiosity and then questions about the gospel of Christ that has transformed them.

If you broaden your prayer for the gospel worldwide, according to the Voice of the Martyrs, each month on average around the world: 322 Christians are killed for their faith in Jesus Christ; 214 churches and church properties are destroyed; 722 acts of violence are committed against Christians such as beating, abduction, rape, forced marriages and prison sentences.<sup>i</sup>

Frankly, the church in every generation experiences:

- far more violence than safety;
- far more antagonism than appreciation;
- far more threats and abuse and ridicule than agreement and appreciation and respect.

The church worldwide is experiencing what Jesus Christ promised, through His Apostles when He said, ***“The world hated me and it will hate you (John 15:18).*** Being maligned and mocked and mistreated isn't new . . . in fact, it's normal.

If some of this sounds like it's coming close to home:

- where it is becoming increasingly difficult to verbalize your Christian convictions without being sent to sensitivity classes at your school or company;
- where to disagree with the moral depravity of your co-workers is to invite open rebuke and perhaps the loss of your own job;
- where as a teacher in one school district, you are now told, for instance, to no longer refer to your children in class as boys and girls – because that will pressure them while they are in the midst of determining for themselves if they are a boy or a girl.

If all this sounds like you've been sleeping and surely you'll wake up and find it was just a bad dream, think again. We have awakened to a new normal – with new definitions and cultural norms that have been developing for decades.

And I want you to know that at this juncture in American church history, I am filled with a sense of anticipation for the sake of the church. The church can now realize the opportunity to bear witness in a

culture that no longer pretends to believe what we believe. <sup>ii</sup>

We are going to realize an opportunity where true Christians will become obviously different – because what we believe is nowhere near what our culture believes. Just ask your co-workers and neighbors and classmates to now define words like these:

God (who is God?)  
Sin (what's sinful?)  
Sacred scriptures (what are they?);  
Sexual preference;  
Gender identity;  
Truth;  
Family;  
Marriage;  
Judgment;  
Eternity

And then hold on to your hat – because not many will agree with your definitions derived from scripture.

You see, we've entered a pre-Christian culture where we have to begin with the definitions that are no longer shared or even understood culture wide. What an incredible opportunity – and if we understand the word of God, and our mission, we can approach this future and this culture – without clenching our fists in anger or wringing our hands in fear. <sup>iii</sup>

We have the promise of our Lord that He will be with us to the end of the age – and evidently that age isn't over yet.

And our end goal remains the same – it is the exaltation of Jesus Christ and a completed church, made up of every tongue and tribe and nation.

And we get to do the same thing that Jesus Christ did – and His Apostles did – and the early church did – in a first century culture that defined;

- god as plural;
- the origin of life as a guess;
- sacred scripture as basically saying the same thing;
- they considered a future judgment nothing more than a religious scare tactic;
- they defined marriage as a short-term contract;
- and bisexuality as the normal practice;
- and truth, as whatever you wanted it to be.

Welcome to the 1<sup>st</sup> century . . . say hello to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Say hello, church, to the growing

tension of living so obviously suspended between two worlds.

The world you currently live in and work in and bless and pray for and warn and witness to . . . between this world and the world to come where Christ will reign one day.

I can't think of a better time to open the first letter from the Apostle Peter, than at this point in our lives. Because when Peter wrote this letter, persecution was not official nor empire wide; it wasn't sanctioned by the Senate of Rome. But it was growing; it was localized, random, brutal in some cases, as in the practice of Nero who hated Christianity; but not the persecution that would eventually erupt in a decade or two.

But even as this letter opens, the signs are all there . . . the marginalization of Christianity had begun. Death threats were common. Some had already lost everything they owned.

Like the Jews in Germany during the years leading up to the Holocaust; their shops were being boycotted or vandalized; their personal rights and privileges were being erased; they were targeted with mockery and violence without repercussion.

It was only a matter of time. You need to understand in the context of First Peter, that when the church began just 30 years or so earlier in Jerusalem, the Roman Empire regarded the church as a sect of Judaism.

Among all the pagan religions in the Roman world, Judaism was the only legal religion not required to offer annual sacrifices to the Roman emperor. Instead, they were allowed to offer prayers on the Emperor's behalf. So long as Christians were viewed as a sect of Judaism, they were under the umbrella of a religious exemption. <sup>iv</sup>

But when the Christians courageously began to leave the synagogue and worship, not in the synagogues on Saturday, but in homes and buildings on Sunday – calling it, the Lord's Day – they were fully aware that they were revealing to the Empire of Rome that they were not a sect of Judaism – but entirely different.

And with that, their exemption . . . and their protection would end. It would become illegal to be a practicing Christian – just as it is in many countries today – where, for instance, to convert from Islam to Christianity is a capital offense worthy of death. So, by the time you read the opening words of this letter, the believers have been uprooted . . .

unwanted, rejected, preparing for even more waves of persecution, which would indeed come.

Now, when you're facing ridicule, mockery, persecution of some form or another, your instincts tell you to either flee or fight back. Persevering and responding with grace would be incredibly difficult – if not unnatural.<sup>v</sup>

What do you do when you've been wronged . . . in fact, you've been discriminated against for what you believe; imagine, you've lost your home; your job; everything you've worked for is now up for grabs; it's not right . . . it's not fair . . . you want to say, "Listen, this is my country too – in fact, I'm older than you are – so it was mine before you ever got here."

To defend yourself; to lash back; to get even is our first reaction. And it was there's here in this chapter. And Peter writes to them so that they can gain their composure and find hope in the truth he's going to give them.<sup>vi</sup> And he does it in the most interesting way.

### **First he acknowledges, so to speak, their pain.**

Notice in *verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ; to those who reside as aliens*

- a. That's the first term; *alien*, or you could render it *foreigner*.

He refers to them as strangers in their own country. And they would have responded, "Yea, that's how we feel, Peter . . . you understand!" This term here translated alien, is a term that refers to a temporary resident, a traveler whose stay is only a matter of weeks or months.

In today's world, this person would have a tourist visa and more than likely pack only a bag or two. Whenever they arrive, it's pretty clear that they're not from around here . . . they're here for only a short time and don't perfectly fit into the culture where they are.

They don't necessarily like the same food . . . they miss their lives as they used to be. Depending on how hospitable their temporary home is, their stay will be affected.

By the way, you are hosting, without even knowing it, international students who've had their visas stamped and they are now attending Shepherds seminary.

This past weekend, we held Convocation as our year began. If you're new around here, Colonial birthed Shepherds seminary as our church planting initiative – we've watched it grow to now include 135 graduates serving in 12 different countries and more than 20 different States.

This year is a record incoming class of 50 students – here and at our teaching sites; and we also welcomed our largest group of students from other countries – and they're sitting around you – homesick perhaps – nervous – this is all new. We have students moving here to Shepherds and to this church to prepare for ministry – from foreign countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, England, Argentina . . . and Wyoming. This is all new to them. It'll take a while for all of them to get used to sweet tea, but that's required for graduation!

This term Peter uses for *alien or foreigner* also indicates that these scattered believers are without any legal protection or personal individual rights that would be provided the citizens of these nations where they had moved.<sup>vii</sup>

They are alone and do they ever feel like the words of that little chorus – this world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through.

- b. Notice the second term Peter uses here in *verse 1* for them; *to those who reside as aliens, scattered*.

This is a compound noun that has the nuance of scattering seed. It also formed the technical term – *diaspora* – or people of the dispersion, and it referred to the Jewish exiles who were dispersed among the Gentile world as a minority.

But Peter here drops the definite article and uses it as a metaphor, not to refer to the scattered Jewish nation, but to both Gentile and Jewish believers who make up the church. The believers were scattered like seed; wherever it seemed the wind would take them – wherever they could find a place to settle down and survive . . . they were always going to be in the minority and they never felt like they belonged . . . and that was because they didn't.

Now Peter goes on to tell us **where** this letter was traveling; it was intended as a circular letter to be handed off time and time again throughout this region.

He refers to a region we know as modern day Turkey. In the New Testament, the geographical term is Asia Minor.

You'll notice that Peter refers here to:

- **Pontus**, in the far north, which was the home of Aquila and Pricilla;
- **Galatia**, in the central region where Paul often traveled;
- **Cappadocia** which was located in the eastern portion of Asia Minor; Jews from this region traveled to Jerusalem and were there to hear Peter preach on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9) – and they returned to Cappadocia as the first missionaries;
- Peter next mentions **Asia** – this included most of Western Asia, with cities like Lydia and Phrygia.
- Finally, Peter mentions **Bithynia** – which was on the southern shore of the Black sea, just west of Pontus.<sup>viii</sup>

This area that Peter mentions represented millions of people. The area he writes to is roughly the same size geographically if you started with Texas and went all the way west to California.<sup>ix</sup>

This wasn't a little postcard for a few churches – this was extensive, desperately needed revelation for thousands and thousands of Christians who were feeling like they didn't belong anywhere – and what were they supposed to do about it?!

I'll tell you what they did best . . . Pliny, the Younger, a Roman attorney near the end of the first century, wrote a letter to the Emperor in which he described Christianity as having influenced all ages of Bithynia, both young and old, both in the country and in the cities, so much so that the pagan temples were almost completely deserted.<sup>x</sup>

What a testimony of the power of the gospel of Christ as it went with these believers who were scattered like seed over 750,000 square miles.

What do you say to them . . . they are vulnerable . . . without protection from their government . . . they've been uprooted . . . they've been marginalized and mocked and reminded that they do not belong! What do you say?

Exactly what Peter says next. Notice again near the beginning of *verse 1*. ***To those who reside as aliens – foreigners – scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.***

What do you tell someone who feels like they don't belong to this world. Tell them they belong to the world that is to come.

Peter effectively says, “You might be an outsider as it relates to the kingdom of this world; but I want you to know that you are an insider, in the kingdom of God.”

Now what Peter does here is reveal the work of salvation as it relates to all three members of the Godhead. In fact, this is a powerful text to prove the existence and unique role of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit, in the matter of your salvation and mind.

But before we get there, we need to address this word that has caused so much heartburn throughout church history – and still divides believers and kindles the fire of debate in the church today.

It's this word at the end of *verse 1* – ***the word, chosen.***

It's from the word *eklektos* which gives us word, *elect* or *election*. That word *elect* or *chosen* was a word that was once reserved for Israel alone.<sup>xi</sup>

In fact, most Christians don't seem to have any problem with the fact that God chose the Israelites even though they proved to be no more deserving than any other nation which God did not choose, like the Amalekites or the Hittites or the Jebusites or the Perrizites or the Moabites or any of those other mosquito bites. But He chose the Israelites.

Moses informs the nation, ***“The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6).***

And now Peter uses this term for these scattered believers, made up of both Jews and Gentiles who were chosen by God. In fact, he presents this verbal adjective “elect” or “chosen” as passive, which further highlights the fact that the believer is the object of the electing action of God.<sup>xii</sup>

Which is exactly what the writer of Hebrews means when he writes that God is ***the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9)***; that means – God takes the first step. He writes the first sentence; He takes the initiative – He makes the first move.

And He has to, ***because we are dead in our sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1). We love Him because He first*** – what? – ***loved us (1 John 4:19).***

Paul tells the church in Thessalonica that he always ***gives thanks to God for you, brethren,***

*beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13)*

Throughout His ministry, Jesus never hesitated to teach the truth of election. For instance, in *John 6:44* he said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” *John 13:18*, “I know the ones I have chosen.”

In the upper room before His crucifixion he again referred to divine election when He told His disciples in no uncertain terms, “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain” (*John 15:16*).

When the gospel was preached after the resurrection and the early church began to evangelize their world, Luke records that following a sermon by Paul and Barnabas, “the Gentiles ... began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (*Acts 13:46-49*).

Now keep in mind a couple of thoughts. First, the writers of scripture don’t answer all the questions or issues that obviously cluster around this doctrine; in fact, they don’t even try to harmonize it with the other side of the coin that stresses our response to God’s initiative in believing the gospel and repenting of our sin.<sup>xiii</sup>

That would be an attempt to harmonize an eternal truth, from God’s perspective, with an earthly truth, from our perspective.

We can understand our will – and the decision we made to believe the gospel and trust Christ – we can understand that part of it.

But we can only believe the Godward side of it, because the Bible clearly and simply reveals to us that we were chosen by God before we were even born. But we can’t understand it.

So the believer not only lives in tension between two worlds; he lives in tension between two truths.

God chose us – in eternity past – that’s divine election. We chose God – in a moment in time – that’s human will acting in faith on God’s initiating work of grace.

And by the way, the Bible makes it clear that both are absolutely necessary for salvation. In fact, scripture tends to emphasize one of these truths in certain settings and the other truth in other settings. Salvation involves both.

When Paul and Silas were miraculously released from prison following an earthquake, the Jailer, who

had evidently been listening to Paul preach and Paul and Silas sing duets in the prison – he rushed out to where they were and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved.” And Paul did not say, “Well, listen, if you’re asking that kind of question, you’re obviously elect, so don’t worry about it . . . you’re obviously in.”

No, he responded to this Jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (*Acts 16:31*).

I find it interesting that Paul also did not say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus because you have already been saved.”

I mean, since you’re asking how to be saved, it’s obvious that God the Father has already taken the initiative in opening your eyes to the gospel – and so you really don’t need anything more. No, Paul said, “Believe in – place your trust in – the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” And he was.

Maybe you’re wondering, how do I know if I’m one of the elect? How do I know if I’ve been chosen by God?

I mean, didn’t Peter say for the believer to *make his calling and election sure?* (*2 Peter 1:10*). I don’t feel sure about it. Well, Peter didn’t tell you to feel sure about your election, but to make your election sure.

It has nothing to do with how you feel. It has everything to do with Who you trust in order to make your election sure.

Charles Spurgeon, the great pastor/teacher in London during the mid-1800’s, often spoke on the doctrines of grace. He was a prolific author as well and in one of his books I read this not too long ago – it presented just an incredible balance and encouragement to the believer.

He comments on the text in I Thessalonians 1:4 where Paul writes, “For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you.” Spurgeon writes, Many persons want to know of their election before they look [or trust] in Christ. But election cannot be known that way; it is only to be discovered by looking to Jesus. If you desire to ascertain your own election – this is how you shall assure your heart. Do you [consider] yourself to be a lost sinner? Go straightway to the cross of Christ, and tell Jesus so, and tell him that you have read in the Bible, “Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.” Look to Jesus and believe in Him, and you shall make proof of your election; for as surely as you believe, you are elect. If you will give yourself wholly up to Christ and trust Him, they you are one

of God's chosen ones; but if you stop and say, "I want to know first whether I am elect," you do not know what you are asking. Leave all curious inquiry about election alone. Go straight to Christ and hide in His wounds, and you shall know your election. The assurance of the Holy Spirit shall be given to you, so that you will say, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him." Go and put your trust in Him, and His answer will be – "I have loved you with an everlasting love." Then he ends with this profound, yet simple and wise statement . . . there will be no doubt about His having chosen you, when you have chosen Him.<sup>xiv</sup>

Keep in mind that Peter here is bringing up the issue of election as an encouragement to these scattered believers. Not for them to start heated debates . . . not to create doubt . . . but to cause them to thank God for His eternal grace and divine sovereignty.

And here's the practical application to this doctrine – these scattered Christians had every reason to believe that perhaps God wasn't in control of the chaos . . . or that they had somehow slipped off the Divine radar . . . that that He lost track of them – or worse yet, that He no longer loved them or cared about them!

And they would have had many failures in their scattering . . . many self-centered moments . . . plenty of doubts and misgivings . . . and plenty of sin . . . maybe God was finished with them.

And so Peter informs them that they were chosen by God to be the people of God . . . as if to remind them that if before the creation of the world God had chosen them, He wasn't about to lose sight of them now! And you either.

If He loved you from eternity past . . . and opened your blinded eyes to the truth of the gospel .

. . . He isn't going to stop loving you until eternity future comes to an end . . . and it never will.

You are not an accident . . . you are a divine choice . . . everything about you – from your conception to your birth to your new birth to every ability and every disability – everything about your past, present, and future is according to God's divine sovereign plan.

And lavish grace and incredible eternal divinely initiating love has been given to you simply because He chose you! We love Him because He first loved us!

Garrison Keillor recalled in one story he told of the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball teams that would start up after school. The captains are down to their last grudging choices; a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick in the outfield where nobody hit the ball. They choose the last ones two at a time – "You and you" – because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids – the scrubs, the excess – are [bartered] – "If I take him, you gotta take him," they say.

Sometimes I would get chosen as high as the sixth choice, but usually lower. But just once I hoped Darrel would pick me first and say, "Him! I want Him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c'mon!" But I've never been chosen with much enthusiasm.<sup>xv</sup>

When I read that, I couldn't help but think – imagine, God chose you, beloved, with enthusiasm! Not . . . you and you and, yea, you . . . but I choose you!

Can you imagine how much this truth was an encouragement to these scattered, marginalized, unappreciated, misunderstood, displaced, mistreated Christians . . . and to every Christian to this day?

Rejected by the world . . . chosen by God forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/28/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> Juan R. Sanchez, *1 Peter For You* (The Good Book Company, 2016), p. 15

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from Russell Moore, *Onward* (Broadman & Holman, 2015), p. 9

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from Moore, p. 7

<sup>iv</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 147

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- V Adapted from Swindoll, p. 147
- vi Swindoll, p. 147
- vii Scot McKnight, 1 Peter (Zondervan, 1996), p. 47
- viii Adapted from John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 15
- ix Daniel M. Doriani, 1 Peter (P & R Publishing, 2014), p. 5
- x Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1992), p. 49 & from Duane F. Watson and Terrance Callan, First and Second Peter (Baker Academic, 2012), p. 8
- xi William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 166
- xii Hiebert, p. 46
- xiii Adapted from Hiebert, p. 46
- xiv Charles Spurgeon, Morning and Evening (Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1995), p. 398
- xv Citation: <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/june/12499.html>