

The Trinity . . . At Work

Profiling Christians, Part 3

I Peter 1:2

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Each member of the Godhead is vitally involved in the salvation of every believer. This gives basis for immeasurable grace and peace to every believer no matter the circumstance.

Discussion Points:

We see in I Peter 1:2 that the believer is chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. At the heart of this truth is the reality that God the Father initiates salvation. The key to this interpretation is to understand the term foreknowing as being synonymous with fore-“loving.” As I John 4:19 states, “we love Him because He first loved us.”

- How could the truth of God’s fore-“loving” give us confidence and assurance in the face of any and every possible circumstance?
- As an extension of this truth, consider Ephesians 1:4 which states that God “chose us before the foundation of the world.” This verse teaches that our salvation was predetermined by God in eternity past. This truth simply cannot be comprehended by the human mind. In what ways could God’s incomprehensibility actually be a source of comfort?
- The implication of God’s eternal purposing and planning is that we are not in our present circumstance by accident. We have been placed according to God’s sovereign purposes exactly where He wants us to be. How should this change our perspective regarding our present circumstance?

We also see in I Peter 1:2 that the believer is sanctified by the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God that drew us in salvation, that continues to teach us His Word, and that produces genuine worship in the heart of the believer. God has determined by His Spirit to make us holy and separate from the world. There is no other way for God’s work to be accomplished than by the power of His Holy Spirit.

- Think over your last couple of days. Would you say that you were consciously depending upon the power of the person of the Holy Spirit to do what needed to be done?
- As a follow up to this thought, how many of the things that needed to be done on your list were intentionally attached to ministry or spiritual growth?
- Can you name specific examples of Spirit-produced fruit in your own life or ministry to others?

- What resources could someone use as a replacement for the power of the Holy Spirit? What resources do you think churches use as a replacement for the power of the Spirit?

The work of salvation that was determined in eternity past by God the Father and brought about by means of the Holy Spirit, results in submission to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood.

- Can you give some concrete examples of how your life is marked by obedience to Christ? According to the passage what is it that causes this obedience?
- The sprinkling of the blood alludes back to Moses sprinkling the blood of a sacrificial animal upon the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. This was to signify that they had entered into a covenant with God. The New Testament believer has also entered into a covenant with God but this time he has been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. In what ways is this sprinkling a better basis for obedience than that of a sacrificial animal?

Gospel Connection:

If we understand salvation as only the forgiveness of our sins than we have vastly underestimated the gospel. Salvation was originated in eternity by God and therefore points to an eternal plan that cannot be fully ascertained. What we do know is that God the Father loved us before we ever were. God the Spirit drew us and separated us to Himself so that we who were enemies of God would now bow to God the Son, sprinkled with His blood. The reality of God's Triune work in salvation is the source of immeasurable grace needed for every hour and unfathomable peace that quiets our hearts in the midst of trials.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** This week purpose to consider every circumstance and situation in light of God's eternal purposes and plans.
- Pray:** Confess your tendency to live without consciously relying upon the Spirit in the areas where you are aware. Ask God to expose those areas that you are not aware.
- Do:** Read Galatians 5:16-26. As you go through the lists of "the works of the flesh" and "the fruit of the Spirit" make note of how many from each list are evident in your life. Look up the terms if you need to do so. Are you living a Spirit-led life or a flesh-filled one? To take it to another level, have your spouse, parent, or best friend do it for you.

The Trinity . . . At Work

Profiling Christians, Part 3

I Peter 1:2

In the wake of recent rioting in the UK, coupled with uncontrollable looting and violence, Great Britain's chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks decried what he called the “moral disintegration” of the western world.

In his remarks, which would immediately disqualify him as a presidential candidate today, he made a number of comments that – as you can imagine – provoked a wide variety of responses.

His remarks were printed in a Wall Street Journal article in which he said that what we're seeing is – quote – “the tsunami of wishful thinking that washed across the West saying that you can have sexual activity without the responsibility of marriage, [you can have] children without the responsibility of parenthood, [you can have] social order . . . and liberty without the responsibility of morality, [and that you can have] self-esteem without the responsibility of work and earned achievement.”

He went on to say, “What has happened morally in the West is what has happened financially as well . . . sensible people were persuaded that you could spend more than you earn, incur debt at unprecedented levels and consume the world's resources without thinking about who will pay the bill.

Then he concluded, “There are large parts of Britain, Europe, and the United States where religion is a thing of the past, and there is no counter-voice now to the [prevailing] culture of buy it, spend it, wear it, flaunt it, because you're worth it. The message today is that morality is passé, a conscience is for [the weak] and the single overriding command of life is [now] – “Thou shalt not be found out.”ⁱ

It's true . . . but the greater point for the believer isn't so much how the darkness has grown, but how shall we demonstrate the light? How do you live, as a believer, in a world that is returning to the times of the Apostle Peter.

Peter was writing to disenfranchised believers; marginalized followers of Christ who had lost their careers, their homes, their credibility and any semblance of compassion from their world around them. They were simply no longer wanted.

As Peter writes to them his first letter – and I invite you to turn to Peter's first letter and to chapter 1, you find the Apostle Peter addressing these believers whom he describes in *verse 1* as scattered like seed in the wind throughout *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia* – a region that covered 750,000 square miles.

This was no quick postcard to a dozen people. And the questions on tens of thousands of Christians' minds would have been something like:
What in the world just happened?
How'd I get here?
Is God in control of the chaos around us?
And, what in this new world, does God want us to do?

And Peter's letter will do nothing less of providing instruction.

J.I. Packer once gave an illustration of the Christian life by imagining how difficult it would be for someone in a helicopter to drop somewhere into the Amazonian jungle, pick up a tribesman who'd never been out of the jungle before, fly him immediately to London [or New York], drop him off in the middle of the city and then tell him, “You're on your own, try to make the best of it . . . bye bye!”

Packer goes on to write, We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who happens to run it. Disregard . . . God and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you.ⁱⁱ

So it's little surprise that in beginning to address the subject of how to live for Christ in an unwelcoming world, Peter begins by describing God – who is our refuge and strength. And more specifically, Peter describes how each member of the Godhead – Father, Son and Spirit – has intersected the life of the believer.

And he does it in three statements – you might want to number them in your text:

- the first statement begins with *verse 2* – *according to the foreknowledge of God* – that’s the first prepositional phrase;
- the second phrase follows – *by the sanctifying work of the Spirit*
- and the third phrase follows – *to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.*

This is the long way of making the theological point that every member of the Godhead (Father, Son and Spirit) is involved in the gospel. Every member of the Godhead is involved in the salvation of every believer. And it’s much more than that.

When you read on, at the end of *verse 2*, you discover that on the basis of every member of the Triune God investing in redeeming and sanctifying and cleansing every one of us, the believer can actually experience – in any country, in any generation, under any government, through any season of life, in the 1st century and the 21st century, *grace and peace in the fullest measure.*

Now let’s break apart these phrases and get to the heart of why this would be so encouraging for struggling, marginalized, suffering, unwelcomed, unwanted believers.

And let me take these three phrases and turn them into our outline.

1. The first point is this: the believer is saved and scattered by God the Father

Let’s go back and get a running start with *verse 1*. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asian and Bithynia, who are chosen – now notice – according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*

Peter specifically relates this particular aspect of the gospel to God the Father. God the Father did the choosing.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God the Father chose the believer *before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).*

God the Father is portrayed in scripture as the initiator of salvation – the first Mover in the eternal movement of redemption.

John writes, in *1 John 4:19 that we love Him because He first loved us.*

And now Peter is revealing that God’s love for us actually preceded the creation of the universe – that from eternity past, God the Father foreknew His beloved.

And keep in mind that foreknowing, in the Bible, carries much more than mental awareness; it involves a deep, intimate love – for God to foreknow us is for God to ‘forelove’ us.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Apostle John again defines God’s saving initiative as an act of love for us before we ever knew Him or chose to love Him in return. He writes, *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the satisfaction for our sins (1 John 4:10).*

Now there are many who would say that this phrase in Peter’s letter means that God elected those whom He foreknew would believe. It kind of sounds like that here doesn’t it? *Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God . . .*

And they would say that God, in His omniscience, simply looked down the corridor of time and saw all who would believe the gospel and He then called them His elect and chose them for salvation and guaranteed they would reach heaven.^{iv}

That’s actually a reasonable explanation . . . in fact, it’s one I can understand . . . which automatically gives me pause.

The problem is, among other problems, it strips away any biblical concept of God choosing you and me first . . . of God loving you and me first. It makes God simply respond to us – which is tantamount to making us the author of our salvation – the initiator of our salvation, and not God.

When Peter used the word prognosis – *foreknowledge* – in *verse 2*, he was not talking about God simply knowing in advance what would happen, but that God had planned – predetermined by His loving and saving intention – to redeem His beloved.

Peter in fact, uses the verb form later down in *verse 20* to tell us that the death of Jesus Christ to redeem sinners was foreknown by God the Father.

This cannot mean that God the Father looked into future history and saw that Jesus would choose to die, so God the Father made Him the Savior.^v

Peter, in fact, preached on the Day of Pentecost that the death of Christ was according to – and I’m quoting him – *according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23).*

From eternity past, the plans of God were made – which defies our comprehension.

And if you’re thinking, man, this all staggers my thinking – then I think we’re on the right path.

- God the Father chose you and me in a way that is beyond our comprehension;

- God the Son paid the penalty for our sin in a way that is beyond our comprehension – I mean, how did He do that?– pay the penalty for a sin nearly 2,000 years ago that you’re going to commit 2 weeks from tomorrow. His payment is beyond our comprehension.
- And while we’re at it – the Holy Spirit indwells us in a way that is beyond our comprehension – He an eternal Person, indwells us? How you doing on that one?
- And don’t forget, our Triune God has destined us and prepared for us an eternity that is beyond our comprehension.

And here’s where it immediately mattered to these believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia and Raleigh and Cary and Apex and Holly Springs – Christians who are now recognizing that they are really foreigners on earth, maligned and unloved and unwanted . . . here’s where they would have breathed in a deep breath of hope and security.

Peter is telling them that the foreknowledge of God the Father doesn’t just relate to their salvation, but their situation.

You can just as easily understand Peter to be saying here in *verse 2*, “**You have been chosen by God** to not only be *saved*, but to be *scattered*.” This is all according to the plan of God, from eternity past.

And listen, if before the creation of the world, God chose you – He isn’t going to lose sight of you now.^{vi}

Like seed, from the hand of the gardener, you haven’t just been scattered, you have been planted by the foreknowledge and forelove and foreplan of God the Father.

The chaos of the Roman empire hasn’t caught God by surprise . . . in fact, God is in control of the chaos – and as I said in our last session, the world is never falling apart – according to the foreknowledge and plan of God – the world is always falling into place.

The believer is saved and scattered by God the Father.

Secondly,

2. The believer is sanctified and set apart by God the Spirit

Look again at *verse 2 where Peter writes, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father* – now notice – *by the sanctifying work of the Spirit*.

Now watch this – Peter is moving us from the foreknowledge of God the Father in eternity past to the work of God the Spirit as He intersects our lives in time-present.

And the word Peter uses here refers to the sanctifying activity – the ongoing process – of making us holy and separate as God’s people; this is a sanctifying activity by means of the Spirit of God that starts and never stops.^{vii}

- By the way, it was the Holy Spirit, according to scripture, who drew you to a saving relationship with God.
- It is the Holy Spirit who resonates in your heart regarding the truth of scripture – **for someone without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14)**
- The Holy Spirit fuels true and genuine worship and even prayer – **for the Spirit helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us (Romans 8:26)**

All of Christianity – the beginning, middle and end of the Christian life – is the work of the Holy Spirit.^{viii}

There are two different ways to interpret this ongoing work of God’s Spirit in your life; you can say it one of two ways: God *never leaves us* alone . . . or . . . God never leaves us *alone*!

Both are true. In fact, one of our biggest mistakes is to think that you can somehow get through today – much less life – without the indwelling sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

One of the most tragic mistakes of the church is to think that our programs and our plans and our strategies can produce fruit independently of the power of God’s Spirit.

I remember one class where Howard Hendricks asked this question, with great passion – “If the Spirit of God checked out of the average church in America, how long do you think that church could operate before they figured it out?”

How long would it take in your own personal life to discover you were doing it all on your own?

We’ve had some thunder storms lately and our power has cut off. It’s always sudden . . . and so far,

temporary, fortunately. It's amazing how primitive life becomes all over again, without power.

In fact, when the power in your house goes out, it doesn't matter how much you paid for your washing machine or dryer or refrigerator or microwave or LED lights or cell phones that can no longer be charged or computers . . . they are all worth about as much as the cardboard boxes they came in.

Our lives are like those appliances. There is not one function you can fulfill for God's glory without God's power.

And the Holy Spirit is more than power, by the way – He is a Person. And by means of a relationship with Him, comes the power to live and work and disciple and evangelize and function in your world.

And I think Peter would be encouraging these believers to not only know that God hasn't left them alone. He's at work through the Spirit sanctifying them – making them different and distinctive and holy and separate from the world.

I don't know what nuance was in Peter's mind, but I can't help but believe that he knew it would be incredibly encouraging for his scattered readers – who felt so separated from the world – to be reminded that the work of the Spirit of God was to keep them separated from the world!

If you feel more and more like a foreigner . . . if you feel more and more separated and different from your world – guess what?

It is the Spirit of God at work reminding you that you belong, not to the kingdoms of earth, but to the kingdom of Heaven.

You, like all these scattered believers in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia, are in the world, but not really a part of it!

- The believer is saved and scattered by God the Father
- The believer is sanctified and set apart by God the Spirit

3. Thirdly, the believer is surrendered to and sprinkled clean by God the Son

Notice the last part of *verse 2 - according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.*

To obey Jesus Christ – the word used here conveys the picture of listening to and submitting to

that which is heard. It refers to daily practice – though imperfect – of reversing the attitude that characterizes the unbeliever of rebellion to what God has said.^{ix}

They don't want to hear what God says. But we do. And Peter is going to stress this kind of obedience – in fact, down at *verse 14* he challenges us to be like *obedient children*. I mean, how different is that?! Maybe you've seen that in your children from time to time.

Down further *in verse 22* he'll use the same word again to challenge us to be obedient to the truth.

In other words, the work of salvation that was determined in eternity past by God the Father, brought about by means of the Holy Spirit, ought to somewhere along the line show up in us.

Peter goes on to reference the cleansing we have by the *blood of Jesus Christ*. And this is a most timely reminder, simply because we do not obey Christ perfectly – and sometimes – not at all.

But our assurance is based on the blood He shed and the payment He made on our behalf.

If you go back to the Old Testament Book of Exodus, Moses gathered the people at Mount Sinai and delivered to them the commandments and ordinances of God. And the Israelites heard God's word and said, "*Everything the Lord has said we will do.*" And Moses then sprinkled the people with sacrificial blood and they entered into an eternal covenant as God's people (*Exodus 24*).

Peter is no doubt dipping back into this context because he now refers to the people of God as those who've effectively said, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." And the believer has been sprinkled with the blood of the final sacrifice, Jesus Christ, for their sins and entered into an eternal covenant as God's people.

If you dig around in the Old Testament you also discover that there were two other occasions where an individual was sprinkled with blood.

- When Aaron and the priests were set apart for their ministry unto God as priests, the sign of them being set apart was the sprinkling of blood.

So also, the New Testament believer is called, by Peter, *a royal priest (1 Peter 2:9)* – able to serve for God – sprinkled and set apart by the blood of Christ.

- Secondly, when a leper had been healed, he was sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificial animal to symbolize that he was now cleansed.^x

The writer of Hebrews picks up on this illustration as he encourages the New Testament believer to *draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22)*.

We were once leprous with a terminal case of sin . . . but we listened to the gospel and obeyed its command to *call upon the Lord and be saved (Romans 10:13)* – and we did – as the Spirit opened our eyes and drew us in faith to Christ – and we were cleansed forever by the blood of the Lamb of God – Jesus Christ our Savior.

- All the penalty for all your sin – forever forgiven.
- All the guilt of all your sin – forever swept away.

I read just recently an article about George Washington. It seems that when he was in his first term as president of the United States, he borrowed a book. The book he borrowed was entitled, The Law of Nations and he borrowed it from New York Society Library.

And then . . . George Washington promptly forgot to return it . . . ever. And the library never brought it up. After all, he was a national hero, and the first president. You just don't ask people like him for your book back.

For the next 221 years, it sat on a shelf in Washington's Virginia home, until 2010. In 2010, the Mount Vernon staff finally noticed it, I suppose, and sent it back.

The overdue book fine was \$300,000 dollars. Fortunately, the head librarian decided to forgive the fine.^{xi}

Can you imagine the fines – the penalties – against us.

And having been forgiven, what more would you want to do than turn around and obey Jesus Christ your Redeemer – the one who graciously forgave you and continually cleanses you from all sin.

To do what George Whitefield did – the Puritan theologian and chief spokesman of the great awakening in the 1700's – he once said, "I have put my life, as a blank [canvass] into the hands of Jesus Christ my Redeemer, and desire Him to write upon it whatever He pleases."

Now Peter has written here a truckload of truth. But the point of his declaration is again simply this – **every member of the Godhead is involved in the salvation of every believer.**

Salvation comes to us from the Trinity; it happens through the Trinity and will one day bring us home to the Trinity – to our great God, three in One; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.^{xii}

You are chosen by God the Father
You are inhabited by God the Spirit
You are under orders and constant cleansing by God the Son

I love the way John Phillips summarized it so simply and so wonderfully,

It is the Father who thought it;
It is the Spirit who wrought it;
It is the Son who bought it.^{xiii}

Peter concludes his opening thoughts by writing at the end of *verse 2, May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.*

This is no throwaway line. Peter is writing to both Jewish and Gentile believers here. And in this greeting he very wisely combined expressions from Jewish and Gentile customs.

Gentiles would say hello to one another with a derivative of *charis, or grace*. Jews wished each other peace, from *eirene* in the Greek language or, *shalom – peace*, in the Hebrew.

But to the average Gentile or Jew, these were shallow greetings and blessings. Wishing **grace** in the first century was like saying, "Good luck . . . I hope all your deals work out."

Wishing **peace** or shalom on someone was nothing more than saying, "I hope everything stays calm and trouble free."

The peace Peter has in mind isn't the lack of conflict or trouble – in fact, these believers were in trouble – and still are today. For the believer, peace is internal . . . it is the conscious awareness that God is in control.

And the grace Peter has in mind here isn't good luck – it is in understanding the gracious providence and plans and purposes of God . . . that even hardships have the purposes of God behind them.^{xiv}

Peter wants grace and peace *to be multiplied* in their lives – and he writes very personally to these scattered, wandering believers. He specifically emphasizes that he wants grace and peace, not just multiplied, but multiplied to them.

The verb he uses for *multiplied* is in the passive voice – which is a gentle reminder from Peter that

grace and peace aren't something believers can run after and get, or create on our own – we could only receive them.

And the giver and multiplier of grace and peace aren't mentioned here. Who's the multiplier? Who's the giver – the donor of these gifts?

Though not immediately mentioned, the donor is obviously, in this context, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.^{xv}

And so Peter concludes his introduction – by reminding us of who God is – and what God does in and through the gospel – and who we are as we relate to our Triune God.

All three persons have been, from eternity past, in perfect harmony and unity working out so great a salvation – and they will continue into eternity future.

I close with the personal testimony of Warren Wiersbe, the former pastor of Moody Church and for years a Bible Teacher on the syndicated radio program, Back to the Bible.

He writes on this text from his own experience. And I want to close with this because I want to leave with you the question – is this your testimony as well? The dates will be different, but the action points remain the same. I can tell you, this is my testimony. Is it yours?

Wiersbe writes; As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. As far as the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross and paid the penalty for all my sin. But as far as the Spirit is concerned, when He came to indwell me, I was saved one night in May 1945 when I heard the gospel and placed my faith in Jesus Christ. Then it all came together. It took all three Persons of the Godhead to bring me to salvation. And if we separate these ministries, we will either deny divine sovereignty or human responsibility. We cannot explain it . . . but we can [experience it] and we can rejoice in it – forever.^{xvi}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/02/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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ii J.I. Packer, Knowing God (InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 19

iii R.C. Sproul, Chosen by God (Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), p. 137

iv Adapted from John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 19

v Ibid, p. 20

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vii Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (Moody Bible Institute, 1982), p. 50

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ix Hiebert, p. 51

x Barclay, p. 170

xi Mark Mancini, "11 Ridiculously Overdue Library Books (That Were Finally Returned)," *Mental Floss*, (3-18-14)

xii From Heaven He Came and Sought Her. David Gibson & Jonathan Gibson editors (Crossway, 2013), p. 366

xiii John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 30

xiv Adapted from Life Application Bible: 1 & 2 Peter/Jude (Tyndale, 1995), p. 23

xv Adapted from Hiebert, p. 53

xvi Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, 1 Peter: Be Hopeful (David C Cook, 1982), p. 31