

HoliMess
Value-Added Living in a Very Messy World!

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

HoliMess: Value-Added Living in a Very Messy World!

Written by: Robert Ismon Brown (bbrown@chicagofirstnaz.org)

Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 2:4-8; 2:13-17; 3:8-22

Introduction

A company which adds features to an existing product and resells it is called a *Value-Added Reseller* (VAR). Additional value comes from professional services: integrating, customizing, consulting, training and implementation. Sometimes the value derives from customizing a specific application for the customer. Customers expect to see real value — something that doesn't already exist in the original product. Software companies regularly take off-the-shelf programs and adapt them to a customer's unique way of doing business, rather than writing new software from scratch.

The human project is God's handiwork, and He remains intensely interested in its ongoing development and to what good purpose it is being put. New circumstances required special involvement on God's part, especially at the beginning when human beings fumbled in their application of free will. In faithful love the Creator remained committed to the human race, and He ultimately invested the life of His own Son in restoring His image — His branding — on this much beloved creation. The result was a new creation where the godly identity of His creatures once more became a light to the world. His human project was back on track, as God brought His values to the original project: forgiveness of sins, new birth, the holy life, and the promise of resurrection. We might say that in Jesus Christ, God became humanity's *Value Added Redeemer*.

As we begin our reading of this week's lesson, the question of identity as God's people occupies a prominent place once more (2:4-8). Who we are, however, results from who Jesus is: *he creates for us the godly values which identify our place in God's creation*. In telling us this, however, Peter diverges from the well-trodden path of ethnic pedigree and turns instead to the reality of a new lineage, based on the new birth (see again 1:3). The language he uses sounds much like the ancient Hebrew Scriptures which he quotes, but he invests that language with fresh meaning.

What are the values which sustain the resident alien people who follow Jesus as Messiah and Lord? Values become essential when a people becomes separated from its original roots and transplanted to a strange place. As we have noted throughout our study, Peter's audience is a people in a strange land. They became that way through a combination of factors, but above all their decision to become Christians had the potential to isolate them from the surrounding society. Of course, such exclusion would hamper their efforts to bear witness to the One True God who had revealed Himself in Jesus of Nazareth. What core values would anchor their mission and sharpen their identity?

This week's study will examine texts which are at the heart of 1 Peter, and that spotlight these values.

We Are the House on the Rock (2:4-8)

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," ⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Spring Green, Wisconsin boasts one of those architectural novelties whose history is even more provocative. Alex Jordan, its creator, was once dismissed from the employment of Frank Lloyd Wright with the words "I wouldn't hire you to design a cheese crate or a chicken coop." Here's a house that was built on a rejection. Anyone who has toured this quirky piece of real estate can see how Jordan might have been trying to simply irritate Wright through a parody of his work. After crawling on my stomach through parts of this structure, I'd have to concur by putting the word "house" in quotation marks. At its best, "The House," is a complex of discontinuously designed "rooms" sitting atop a column of rock sixty feet high on a platform 70' x 200'. "Patchwork" might be a better word than "house." Still, the sheer edginess of its design and the solidness of its foundation attract a certain admiration for the gutsiness of the designer. Mess and all, it is still "The House on the Rock."

Long before Jordan lived, another Architect of a different sort set about the risky business of building His house in the world. His work had started long ago — in a Garden. Many had tried to parody His work, even erecting a "tower to reach up to heaven" (Genesis 11). But this Architect placed greater value on people than on sheer monumental achievements, and so he decided that the building material for His house would be human beings — or as Peter calls them "living stones." When King David wanted to "build a house" (i.e. a Temple) for God, the Lord replied that He was more interested in building a house *out of* David's descendents (2 Samuel 7). Something built from stone inspires confidence in its durability. Yet, for all its frailty, a living being is still stronger than a lifeless stone. Faithful to His word, the Lord fulfilled the promise he made to David by giving Him a Son who became the foundation Stone for a house that would last forever. Jewish scholars have commented on the literary connection between the Hebrew word for "son" (*ben*) and the word for "stone" (*'eben*). That is, the true *Stone* for the foundation was the *Son* of God.

In the background of *1 Peter* is the rich vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible. Of special interest is the use of "stone" or "rock" imagery. For example, a casual reading of the Old Testament uncovers:

1. The stumbling-stone (Isaiah 8:14).
2. The foundation stone (Isaiah 28:16).
3. The parental rock (Isaiah 51:1ff).
4. The rejected and vindicated building stone (Psalm 118:22).
5. The supernatural stone (Daniel 2:34).
6. The burdensome stone (Zechariah 12:3).

The key content of the stone metaphor includes 1) strength; 2) reliability; 3) truth; and 4) faith. Above all, God is "our Rock," and He is more certain than the gods of the nations (Deuteronomy 32:31, 37), or than the nations themselves (Isaiah 28:16-17). In a dramatic scene from the visions of Daniel comes the "rock hewn out of the mountain" — extracted without human hands — which strikes the based of the monumental nationalistic image, bringing it crashing to the ground. This supernatural stone then fills the whole world. This symbolism is, of course, eschatological, referring to how things will turn out *in the end*.

In the New Testament, the stone/rock metaphor evolves substantially, and Jesus shaped his teaching and stories around its themes, especially as they pertained to his mission and rejection by the ruling authorities (see Mark 12:1-11 and parallels; also, Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; and the present context in 2:4-8). In the famous exchange between Jesus and Peter (Matthew 16:16ff) which climaxes with the "on this rock I will build..." text, we have a clear word-play on the name "Peter" (Aramaic, *Cephas*), and the idea of stone/rock. I suspect Peter thought about this as he penned his letter.

1 Peter 2:4-8 cites three key Old Testament texts:

...therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste' (Isaiah 28:16).

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22).

And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Isaiah 8:14).

In addition, we have echoes of these additional passages:

²⁰ The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹ the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise (Isaiah 43:20-21)

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel" (Exodus 19:5-6).

²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:23)

From these texts Peter discerns the backplane for his comments in this week's reading. God has chosen a people, led them into the way of holiness, and placed them into priestly service. The overwhelming affirmation is that *God invests His people with value*. Terms like "honor" apply to this people because God honors them with His choice. In response they honor Him by trusting and obeying Him. God's valuation counts decisively over against the judgment of human critics.

Values express what human beings think is truly important. We often hear about "family values" — those things deemed essential to families. Values are like the stones with which human beings build significance for their lives. Lying at the base are those "stones" considered necessary — bedrock values. In the opening section for this week's study, we encounter fundamental values as introduced by the words "As you come to him, a living stone..." Here is where the building project begins; this is the foundation, the groundwork, and the indispensable value for the whole Christian enterprise. We come to Jesus, "a living stone."

1. The Greek word for "come" is *proserchomai*, normally translated "come, go to, approach, agree with, associate with." It can also mean "surrender to." Usually, the meaning is a favorable "coming." There is definite intention and expectation about the coming. That is, coming to the "living stone" is something desirable. The writer uses the present participle, suggesting a continuing process.
2. Calling Jesus "living stone" (Greek: *lithon zōnta*) combines irony with metaphor. This may be due in part to the wordplay we noted above on "son" (*ben*) and "stone" (*'eben*). However, as becomes evident in what follows, Peter intends to contrast the sort of building constructed from ordinary stones with that which is made out of human beings. But we have an even richer range of meaning for "stone." Not all stones are building stones, as we shall see. Some stones function as "testing stones" which measure or determine the value of other stones which end up in the building. To say that Jesus is the "living stone" means that he is the "active stone," able to endow other stones with their place and significance. Scholars cite Isaiah 28:16 as evidence of this additional meaning. Hillyer explains:

This is a stone cut beforehand by the architect. As the final stone to be dropped into place, it had two purposes. It bonded the building together, and also demonstrated—by how well it fitted—whether the architect's plans had been faithfully followed. In Christian eyes, the symbol is peculiarly appropriate to Jesus Christ. The various Messianic prophecies knit together into a pattern whose final form may not be clear, but which can yet be inferred. Bring their fulfillment in Christ and drop them into place as the topstone and the house is perfect and complete.

For one who will work or expound without thought of God's Messiah, the testing-stone has been laid by God in Zion. It cannot be avoided and 'he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces' (Lk. 20:18). There is, however, a worse fate foretold for the man who in theory accepts the testing-stone, but in practice 'builds' falsely, that is, by his own wisdom and will. When the topstone is hoisted into place on the summit of the building, it will come crashing down, and 'when it falls on any one, it will crush him'—not an extravagant expression when one bears in mind the massive nature of these stones. Among the ruins of the Phoenician city of Baalbek at the foot of Mount Lebanon were found three such stones, each 12 feet thick and together 175 feet in length.³⁴ Megiddo has provided other examples.¹

¹ Norman Hillyer, "'Rock-Stone' Imagery in 1 Peter," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 58-81.

3. The “living stone” and the “living hope” (1:3) belong together since both are rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whereas the cross seemed to be a sign of shame and rejection, God’s raising of Jesus vindicated him, qualifying him as the source of life everlasting for His people.
4. Rejection corresponds to the ancient concept of “shame.” Peter’s readers share this shame with Jesus. If the surrounding culture regards Christians as outcasts and aliens, the followers of Jesus must remember that the world regarded him in the same way. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18), Jesus told his disciples. Following the pattern of the Suffering Servant Song (Isaiah 53), Jesus was “despised and rejected by men...” (53:3). Similarly, his followers experience the same response.
5. Two kinds of building is taking place: the work of God and the efforts of those who reject the “living stone.” Consequently, two kinds of structures take shape in the world: God’s house and the man-made house. Peter envisions the building of God in terms of a New Temple made, not from brick and mortar, but from living stones — human beings. The purpose of this building assumes the form of priestly service involving “spiritual sacrifices.” All of this echoes Romans 12:1-2 where the bodies of Christ followers become “living sacrifices wholly acceptable to God” and which take the form of a new *latreia* — service.
6. The language of priestly service further implies consecration and devotion to the purposes of God in the world. As priests, the Christ followers serve not only themselves or their own people but the whole world. No longer limited to the narrow confines of national Israel, the renewed people of God extend the boundaries of kingdom work into places like the Asiatic communities where Peter’s readers find themselves.
7. God is the builder of this new house — this New Temple. Moreover, the Temple *continues* to be built. The Greek word *oikodomeisthe* is a present tense verb. The passive form suggests that God is the agent of the process. Peter calls the house a “spiritual house” (*oikos pneumatikos*). This could mean: 1) that the Spirit is the principal builder, or 2) the house is inhabited by the Spirit. Paul’s letters help clarify this: “...in him [Christ] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:2); “...you are God’s Temple, and God’s Spirit dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16); “...your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you...” (1 Corinthians 6:19). The pronoun, “you,” is plural in these cases, suggesting the collective sense that the Spirit lives within the whole people of God as his Temple.
8. Holy priesthood is the purpose of the New Temple. The early apostles saw themselves as implementers of this priesthood. One helpful passage appears at the end of Paul’s letter to the Romans, in which he summarizes his own work:

...To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16).

Notice how preaching the “gospel of God” lies at the heart of the “priestly service” (Greek: *hierourgounta*), and how the Gentiles are an “offering” acceptable to God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Similar language appears in our Peter text through the phrase *hierateuma hagion* (“holy priesthood”) which “offers up” (*anegkai*) “spiritual sacrifices” (*pneumatikos thusias*) “acceptable to God” (*euprosdektous*) through Jesus Christ. The language reminds us of the “firstfruits” offerings in the Old Testament which functioned as signs of what was coming in the final harvest, but also served as signs of ownership — that God was the true object of human devotion and consecration (see Exodus 23:16-19; 34:22-26). Even as early as Jeremiah’s prophecy, we read how Israel itself was conceived as “holy to Yahweh, the firstfruits of his harvest” (Jeremiah 2:3). Thus, Paul could address the Thessalonian Christians much as he had the Romans, a thought also echoed by James in his letter:

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits [*aparchēn*] to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18; see also Revelation 14:4).

In these cases the function of the New Priesthood is the earthly sign of God’s holiness in the world, not only as the Temple where God is worshipped, but also as the instrument for consecrating the Gentiles to become His holy people as well. That was Israel’s purpose all along: to bring the nations to the light of God’s holiness (Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 60:3).

9. Belief and unbelief mark out the difference between the builders of God's new house and the builders of the man-made house. Second Temple Judaism had an honest opportunity to embrace the "living stone" as the *alignment stone* for a restored Temple and a New Priesthood. The New Testament allowed that Israel had acted in ignorance when it put Jesus to death (Acts 3:17), and after the resurrection the apostles made a fresh offer of the kingdom to all Israel. Perhaps the Jesus of the cross remained an offence for national Israel. Had not the resurrection vindicated him? Was not Jesus, "the living stone," a sufficient sign that God had accepted him as the "capstone"? Peter constructs a word-play, using various terms for "stone."
- Lithos* commonly referred to a "block of stone" whether marble or another substance (including crystal), used in building. Peter uses it in 2:4, 5, 6, 7, 8; Acts 4:11. Paul uses it in Romans 9:32-33; 1 Corinthians 3:12; 2 Corinthians 3:7.
 - Akrogōniaios*, usually translated "cornerstone." It is, on first examination, an odd word choice, since it seems to point, not to a bottom-stone, but to a top-stone in the building structure, or as Jeremias puts it, a "high cornerstone." However, in Old Testament texts like Isaiah 8:14 and 28:18, as well as New Testament ones like 2:6, such a stone was considered part of the "foundation", even though it was placed high above the "arch". Similar language occurs in Zechariah 4:7-9 which describes the completion of the temple built after the exile. Some church fathers, such as Tertullian (160-220 C.E.) and Hilary of Poitiers (300-368 C.E.), spoke of Christ as the "cornerstone at the head which supports all". Perhaps it is Jerome (347-420 C.E.) who best clarifies this seemingly contradictory combination of images: Christ "is the foundation and the top because in him the church is founded and completed."² Obviously Christ was there at the beginning, as witnessed by apostles and explained by prophets. But he will also be there in the end when this "building" reaches its completion. He is, to be sure, the Alpha and the Omega of the new building of God, and as such, is both the foundation and the keystone (see also 1 Corinthians 3:10-11). The integrity of the whole building is both determined by the *akrogōniaios* and tested by it. The prefix of this word, *akro-*, points to a sharp, right-angled corner which functions as a building "square" in the present setting.
 - Kephalē gōnias*, "head of the cornerstone." This term is likely the counterpart to *akrogōniaios*, since it contains the same root idea: *gōnia*: a corner, an angle. In the form of the noun *gōniasmos*, it means "a squaring of the angles; finishing by square and rule." The position of Jesus in this New Temple is as the One who makes certain that everything fits together as it should, or, in this case, makes certain that *everyone* unites together as they should in the restored community of God. Faith, understood under this symbol, means accepting the "squaring up" work of Jesus, as he puts the world together as it should be. The Temple was supposed to be, after all, "my Father's house" (Luke 2:49; John 2:16; John 14:2), and Jesus came to "shape things up" so that it would be that kind of house once again.
 - Lithos proskommatos* and *petra skandalou*. Peter uses these two phrases to describe obstacles which lie in the path and which cause a person to stumble or fall. Again, using language from the Old Testament (Isaiah 8:14), Peter evolves the meaning from *lithos* (a block) to *petra* (as massive bedrock stone). Ordinarily, such building materials contributed to the construction of the Temple, as the master builders carefully selected them to serve as either foundation or super-structure blocks. We have some idea about these blocks of stone from the Gospels where the disciples stand admiring the physical Temple in Jerusalem built by Herod:

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones (*lithoi*) and what wonderful buildings!"² And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone (*lithos*) upon another that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:1-2).³

² Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*. The Anchor Bible Vol. 34 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), 319.

³ Josephus records the size of the stones: 25 x 12 x 8 cubits. Note: The cubit is the first recorded unit of measure and has roots in Egypt where the forearm (from elbow to wrist) is its symbol. Later societies utilized groups of fingers or palms to define the cubit which varied in length. At the time of Jesus, the Roman cubit was largely followed by the Jews and it was roughly 18 inches or 1 1/2 ft. Applying that to Josephus' dimensions, renders these stones large indeed! And if large, surely, thought the disciples, hard to move! But Jesus responds with a prophecy: not a single stone will remain on another. In other words, this place will be taken apart, stone by stone.

Under what circumstances would a building stone become a *skandalon* — that is, a stone which one would trip over or a stone which would fall on someone and crush him? If we follow the reasoning of Jesus in texts like Mark 13, the answer becomes evident: when the structure is torn apart, stone by stone and scattered about. Unbelief places the whole nation of Israel in peril, even to the point of transforming building stones into stumbling blocks. Jesus himself made clear that rejecting him and choosing the way of radical revolution against Rome would ultimately carry Israel down the broad road to destruction.

[Note: We discussed the meaning of 2:9-12 in our first study, April 17/18, 2010. Please refer to the *Background Notes* for that week].

The Will of God (1 Peter 2:13-17)

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:13-17).

As we noted in last week's study, the idea of submission (from the Greek *hupotassō*) has to do with *arranging* one's life *under* something or someone. Beyond sheer blind obedience, the emphasis falls instead on *engagement with* as opposed to *detachment from*. Additionally, the act of submission is “for the Lord's sake” (with reference to *kurios*), and not because an external authority demands this from us. Undoubtedly external authorities demanded a great deal from Peter's readers — loyalty, taxes, conformity to social rules, and obedience to the Empire. However, followers of Jesus could hardly submit to Jesus as Lord and then give Caesar the sort of obedience he required. That is, Christians placed a higher value on *the will of God* than they did on the *will of Empire*. Therefore, when Peter instructs his audience to submit, he *mediates* that submission through *the Lord* and not directly to human structures.

In fact, he calls each of those structures *anthrōpinē ktisei* — a human creature or creation. Such human creations remained subordinate to the Lord in the minds of the Christians. As such they were fallible, weak, and flawed. Even if, as Peter designates them, they are called “the king supreme” (*basilei hōs huperechonti*), they remain human creations. According to the translators, this phrase suggests the Emperor, Caesar himself.⁴ By using the weaker noun, *basileus*, Peter accommodates the sensibilities of his Asiatic audiences who were more likely to think of Rome's rulers in local terms. He further identifies the *hēgemōn*, the ruler administering local provinces or regions, whether on behalf of the Emperor (see other New Testament instances of this term: Matthew 10:18; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12; Matthew 27:2, 11, 14; Acts 23:24, etc.).

Since people in Peter's readership would more likely interface with the *hēgemōn* (local rulers) than with the Emperor himself, Peter elaborates this second layer of government by stressing its role: to punish wrongdoers and to commend doers of good. Applying justice (*ekdikēsin*) and lavishing praise (*epainon*) belong to the prerogatives of the ordered society to which the Asiatics belonged. As we have noted in our earlier studies, societies often looked for ways to honor its outstanding citizens. For Christians who lacked definite social identity, “doing good” was an opportunity for them to silence false claims that as resident aliens they were potential troublemakers or even criminals.

Christians shared the premise with their Asiatic neighbors that *order in society was a value*, especially when it removed evil and rewarded good. Peter presses the argument further by saying that “the will of God” (*to thelēma tou theou*) requires that his audience silence false criticism and correct misinformation by means of good conduct. The Greek expression for “doing good” is *agathopoiountas*, a present active participle, suggesting that such conduct *ought* to be a way of life for Christians. We also have the intimation of a benefactor's role, akin to our previous conversations about Jeremiah 29:7, in which Christ followers, like their

⁴ Jobes, p.176; Green, p. 73ff; Reicke, p. 95; Witherington, p. 141.

Jewish forebears, should “seek the welfare of the city” where they find themselves.⁵ God’s will has, in effect, created an opportunity for them to become outstanding citizens and thereby attract favor toward the way of life they espouse as Christians. The best defense, in this case, is a strong ethical offense: “do good.” The bad PR Christians suffered in the first century was often due to ignorance of who they were, especially if they chose to withdraw from society into defensive enclaves, acting more like a sect or cult than a way of life. To turn that around, Peter advocates an active way of life, intent on making real contributions to the well-being of the society around them.

The expression “Live as free men” (literally in Greek, *hos eleutherpoi*, as free ones) underscores another key value considered precious by the early Christians: *freedom* (Greek: *eleutheria*). In ancient societies, a whole class of persons who were not slaves and who had rights as citizens within their community were known as “freedmen.” Former slaves also fall into this category. The Stoic philosophy, Epictetus (55-135 C.E.) once said:

He is free who lives as we wills, who is subject neither to compulsion, nor hindrance, nor force, whose choices are unhampered, whose desires attain their end, whose aversions do not fall into what they would avoid.⁶

Might a slave be freer than his master? Perhaps he might if he followed the direction of Epictetus’ thought. Peter sharpens this argument further by telling his audience: “Live as servants of God” (*hos theou douloi*). Christian freedom did not depend on human government but on the will of God. Christ followers accepted the words of Jesus, “If the Son makes you free, you are truly free” (John 8:36). Paul challenged his churches, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13). We are “servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Ephesians 6:6). If we do the will of God, we live forever (1 John 2:17).

Doing the will of God liberates us from the slavery of serving false lords and false masters. Human creations might demand our allegiance or ostracize us if we fail to submit. That was certainly the case in the first century. But there is a better way of being human: serving God and then being free to serve each other. It also free us to observe Peter’s final instructions in this section (2:17). What does the will of God look like when it leaps into action? That’s a bit like asking more simply, “What does God *want*?”

Answering that question, Peter begins with a *unifying instruction*: “Show proper respect to everyone.” The Greek consists of two words: *pantas timēsate*, where the verb is an aorist imperative from *timaō* which means of “to pay honor to, hold in honor, revere, bestow honors. The noun form is *timē*: that which is paid in token of worth or value; a valuation, estimate for the purpose of assessment. For the Christian, every human being has worth or value in the eyes of God. Our judgment of another human being does not depend on external circumstance or status, but on the fact of the divine image which human beings reflect. The Christian ethic exceeded the requirements of the surrounding culture. Persons in power felt no particular obligation to honor a slave. Yet, as we noted in our last study, Jesus took on the role of a servant and through submission to God’s will received the honor of resurrection life.

Submission to others includes the notion of *honor* in the Christian value system. We are to regard others universally. Peter distinguishes the following people groups in 2:17:

1. Everyone.
2. Brotherhood (*adelphotēs*).
3. God
4. King (Emperor).

Honor belongs to *all* regardless of social class or political standing. One might argue that *love* (Greek: *agapaō*) is the supreme virtue which is reserved for the Christian community. Fear has to do with reverential respect for God. Peter uses the same word for honor as applied to the Emperor as he does when applied to *everyone*.

⁵ Again, read Winter’s helpful explanation.

⁶ *Discourses*, 4.1.1-2 (published by his pupil Arrian).

Though he would have been unlikely to broadcast this from the parapets, he seems to be saying that honor to the Emperor is really no different than honor for everyone. Such an admission alters the power structure significantly in the minds of his audience. What Peter rejects is the idea that only persons with social power deserve honor. Each in their own way, members of his readership are each worthy of honor. From Emperor to slave, God honors each creature with His image and His love — so must we.

On the one hand, Peter subtly maintains the terminology of respect for those who occupy places of authority in that culture. Yet, the value he places on all of God's creatures requires him to *distribute honor without regard to class, station or power*.

[Note: Refer to the *Background Notes* (May 8/9, 2010) for our discussion of 2:18-3:7].

Uncommon Virtue in the Face of Common Suffering (1 Peter 3:8-22)

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him (1 Peter 3:8-22).

Suffering requires uncommon virtue. Let's recall that the word "virtue" derives from the Latin and essentially means "strength." We would say it means "strength of character." *When human beings consistently apply deeply held values to the habits of life, the result is the building of character.* If we had to ponder every moral choice we made, figuring up the pros and cons, life would be a decisional traffic jam. From Hebrew thought we learn about the importance of *wisdom* directing our steps, and are encouraged not just to acquire wisdom but to *be wise*. To the scattered resident alien Christians of Asia Minor, Peter has words of wise counsel. We see his treatment of virtue and suffering in the present section which he views as a "summary" of sort, as indicated by the Greek phrase *to telos*, usually translated as "finally" but also has the meaning "the goal, aim, end."

Integrity (3:8-12)

The main emphasis of 3:8-12 is on Christian integrity. Quotations from Psalm 34:12-16 ground the passage in ancient Scripture and show the complete consistency of the Christian ethic with the teaching of the Old Testament. This applies not only to individual Christ followers but to the community as a whole. This material applies to "all of you," and this implies that none of the previous household divisions (husband, wife, slave, master) in any sense modify or temper what Peter writes here. What's in view is an ethic for the whole Christian community — indeed for all human beings who will follow it. Absent is an ethic of exceptions or accommodations to position or power where certain persons take a "pass" because of who they are. Integrity is about what happens to the "whole" person and the "whole" community.⁷

⁷ We might want to consider that the word "integrity" has at its root the familiar term "integer" which means something that is *whole*, as in "whole numbers" (1, 2, 3, etc.). Persons who have integrity are not "fractions" who lived divided and fragmented lives. Often the division is between who they really are, and what they want others to see about them. The true opposite of integrity is hypocrisy.

Several prominent virtue-values contribute to five strands woven into a pattern in 3:8.⁸

1. “Of one mind” (*homophrōn*). This adjective takes its meaning from the verb *homonoeō* and emphasizes harmony, agreement, and unity. The first strand is *unity-mindedness*. What Peter has in mind is a disposition or habit to focus on common concerns, much as Paul stressed in Romans 8:5 when he wrote about how we “set our minds” either on the flesh or the Spirit. When a person faces discord or division, this value leads them to find a way of resolution where differences are settled and conflicts are resolved.
2. “Common feeling” (*sumpathēs*). The Greek word looks like our idea of “sympathy.” This is a capacity for “feeling alike, feeling together.” It involves using sanctified imagination which puts ourselves in another place where their feelings, fears, anxieties, and sorrows become ours.
3. “Familial love” (*philadelphos*). Having this virtue-value assumes that we see one another as belonging to the same family of God. Peter used similar language in 1:22 in discussing the implications of the new birth. If we are all “born again” then we have become part of a new family unit.
4. “Tender-hearted (kind)” (*eusplagchnos*). Present in this word is vivid imagery which connects deep feeling with human anatomy. As you may recall from previous studies, the ancient writers associated emotions with internal human organs: heart, liver, kidneys, etc. Surprisingly, the brain had little or no importance in the processes of thinking, feeling and willing. All of those functions resided in the mid-section where, subjectively, strong emotions seem to originate. Old translations of the Bible used the odd word “bowels,” a visceral term referring to strong emotion. Paul used similar language (Ephesians 4:30). Rees fittingly framed this by writing, “A civilization that is being stalked by tragedy needs to be newly stocked with tenderness.” Considering the circumstances of Peter’s audience, this instruction seems appropriate.
5. “Humble-minded” (*tapeinophrōn*). This Greek term referred to a quality greatly disdained by Peter’s contemporaries, namely, “baseness.” Weakness, degraded social status, dishonor, and shame radiate from this word.⁹ But Christians had the example of Jesus to encourage them, and they gladly accepted humility since Jesus despised the shame (see Hebrews 1; Philippians 2). Humility means accepting the servant’s role and acting from a servant’s attitude. Not false modesty, but fearless ministry undergirds the humble servant of Christ. Witherington reminds us that humility does not come “from a low opinion of self, but from a high opinion of God.”¹⁰

In all that Peter teaches here, he agrees with Paul’s estimation of virtue in Romans 12:10-17.¹¹ Professor Jobes thinks that these five virtues belonged to the shared value-system of early Christianity tracing its origin back to Jesus himself.¹² Central to Peter’s purpose in including them here is to reinforce the cohesion among the followers of Jesus as they brushed against a society with different values.

By listing these virtue-values, *1 Peter* plants its feet firmly within Christian integrity, and for good reason. Surrounding pressures from Asiatic culture threatened to rip apart Christian solidarity. But the integrity of character which Peter describes triumphs over this threat. Persons without principle continued to batter Christian reputations. Cruelty and spite mangled lives and fortunes. What did Christians do in response? Disarming their adversaries, they did not respond in kind, though it was evil or insulting, as 3:9 suggests. Lesser persons would collapse beneath the onslaught, but the followers of the Master had found a “more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31b, KJV). Peter prefers the present tense verb forms in saying this, emphasizing the consistent ethic of integrity which energizes Christian values. Such conduct is *our way of being*, and not just an occasional good deed or a kind word. Our opponents demand a stricter regimen than periodic charity. Virtue means persistent strength of character which draws its power from the wisdom of Jesus

⁸ See Rees, pp. 79ff.

⁹ John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*. Anchor Bible Vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 605.

¹⁰ Witherington, p. 170.

¹¹ Throughout our study of *1 Peter* we have often made reference to the similarities between Peter and Paul with regard to certain ideas. Scholars differ in their opinions of which man wrote down his material first, or if one man had the benefit of reading the works of the other. One clue may be found in Peter’s second letter where the writer shows a familiarity with the writings of Paul and considers them to be “Scripture” (see 2 Peter 3:15).

¹² Jobes, p. 214.

who taught us: "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:22,, 27-28).

We are called to bless the world. Peter affirms this ancient calling of Israel which was made first to Abraham who was to become a source of blessing to all nations of the earth (Genesis 12). Tempting though it might be to "curse" (*loidoria*), Christians live under a different covenant — one which mandates the blessing (*eulogeō*) of our enemies. Indeed, Peter calls the act of blessing others our *calling* — our vocation. Whatever blessing we hope to experience one day as our future inheritance is intrinsically bound up with our disposition to include others in that blessing. *We refuse to accept blessing without the pleasure of seeing others blessed also.* What good is *my blessing* if I cannot share it with others? And who needs my blessing more than the one who insults, shames and reviles me. Are these not the very words applied to Jesus in Isaiah 53 and emphasized by Peter in 2:21-25 in his discussion of the Suffering Servant? The inspiring words of a Christian hymn resonate with this teaching:

Out on the highways and byways of life,
 Many are the weary and sad;
 Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife,
 Making the sorrowing glad.

Tell the sweet story of Christ and His love,
 Tell of His pow'r to forgive;
 Others will trust Him if only you prove
 True every moment you live.

Give as 'twas given to you in your need,
 Love as the Master loved you;
 Be to the helpless a helper indeed,
 Unto your mission be true.

Chorus
 Make me a blessing, make me a blessing;
 Out of my life may Jesus shine.
 Make me a blessing, O Saviour I pray,
 Make me a blessing to someone today.
 Ira B. Wilson

So as to undergird this teaching with the inspired words of ancient Scripture, Peter cites a section of Psalm 34, focusing especially on 12-16. Scholars have long noted the importance of this Psalm to much of Peter's message in this letter. As we have noted previously, the composition of *1 Peter* seems to be inspired by a meditative reading of that psalm. At this juncture it might be helpful to examine briefly the clear correlations between *1 Peter* and Psalm 34:¹³

Ideas	Psalm 34	1 Peter
Both start with blessing God	34:1	1:3
The result of seeking the Lord was deliverance from sojournings.	34:4	1:17
The absence of shame.	34:5	2:6
The benefits to those who fear the Lord.	34:7, 9, 11	1:17; 2:17

¹³ Different versions of these parallels exist in the literature, including Jobes (221-223) and Witherington, (170).

Ideas	Psalm 34	1 Peter
God responds to the suffering of the righteous.	34:17	3:12
The righteous are delivered from many afflictions.	34:19	1:6
God redeems the servants of the Lord	34:22	1:18; 2:16

As Peter noted in 1:25, God’s word “abides forever,” and, in this case, that word is continuously applicable for new generations of God’s people. Psalm 34 proved true for David and now proves true for the followers of Jesus, scattered though they are throughout the world.

Carefully reading Psalm 34, we note a few key ideas concerning Peter’s citation of 34:12-16:

1. The tone of this section parallels the wisdom literature tradition as illustrated in Proverbs 1-9. Peter is inviting his readers to seek the new wisdom of the Gospel as they work out their behaviors in a hostile world.
2. What did the psalmist *value* in 34:12? Notice his language: 1) love life; 2) see good days. Those are classic Hebrew life-goals. The underlying Hebrew word for “love” is “delight in, desire” (*hāphēyn*). Focusing on the present life, the psalmist asks his students whether or not they want delight and goodness. Little in this passage suggests an escape to another world. Quite the contrary, the writer offers sage advice for living *in this world*. Peter, by citing this text, makes the application to his audience. Do they want to live life fully here and now, even though the world is messy and hostile toward them? Let the world know that Christians “love life” and “desire good days.” They are not as their detractors depict them: “haters of mankind.”¹⁴
3. Emphasis falls on two aspects: 1) What must we do? 2) What does God do? The two dimensions complement each other. Our actions in refusing to speak destructively, turning away from evil, seeking and pursuing peace (*shalōm*) are reinforced by our belief in the Lord who sees and hears us and who takes His stand against injustice. We are not alone, ethically. In the words of St. Patrick’s “Breastplate Prayer,” we “bind” ourselves to the character of God, and we rest in the name of Christ. Two stanzas of that prayer remind us of the fresh meaning Christian faith breathes into the psalmist’s words, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteousness”:

...
I bind unto myself today ...
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

...
Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

*Version by C.F. Alexander (1889)*¹⁵

¹⁴ The Latin phrase *odio humani generis* (“hatred of human kind”) comes from Tacitus, the Roman historian (56-120 C.E.), in his account of Nero’s burning of Rome and pinning the deed on the Christians. According to the pagan understanding, Christians devalued human life since they were so willing to die for their faith. The full account: Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Tr. Michael Grant, Revised Edition (New York: Penguin Classics, 1956, Book XV.32-47).

¹⁵ The full version, with links to video performances, is found at http://www.prayerfoundation.org/st_patricks_breastplate_prayer.htm, as of April 10, 2010.

These, then, are the Christian value-virtues which attached themselves to the followers of Jesus who walk in integrity.

Sovereignty (3:13-17)

Peter utters a spiritual “dare” in 3:13 as he introduces this next section. “Who is going to harm you?” translates the Greek *tis ho kakōsōn humas*. The participial form of the verb *kakōō* is in the future tense, suggesting that the afflictions faced by the readers may have been as much focused on what *might happen* as on what *was happening*. Similar language appears in 3:14 in the clause “if you should suffer,” where the optative mood implies *likelihood* but not *necessity* or *reality*. Fear about the future was the ever-present enemy of the early Christians. This is no doubt why Jesus spent so much time tracing and re-tracing the importance of *not worrying about tomorrow* (Matthew 6:25, 27-28, 31, 34). Such anxiety calls into question the *sovereignty of God* which firmly underpins this section. If the previous material focused on our integrity, this block of text concentrates on God’s sovereignty — His firm and loving grip on history and on us. Banishing paralyzing fear dominates Peter’s comments, and he cites yet another Old Testament text in support of this aim: “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened” (Isaiah 8:12). What was the original setting of Isaiah’s words? Briefly, he tells how little Judah, the minority Hebrew kingdom which still protected the honor of Jerusalem, its Temple and its king — how this weak and fearful nation is told to lay aside its fear, starting with its famous prophet, Isaiah!

Fear, as we have noted in earlier discussions, has a range of meanings, with some of them appropriate under the circumstances, while the rest fill with doubt and cowardice. Fearing things which immediately threaten, such that we flee for safety is no bad thing. Fleeing before the enemy when we are sworn to protect others from his terror is fateful fear, flushed with a coward’s heart. If tyrants command our fear, we must turn away. If God commands our fear, we must face Him with trusting reverence. Isaiah tells his audience “don’t fear what unbelievers fear: fear the Lord instead and put your trust in Him. After all, He is the one in charge.”

To express these truths, Peter hints at what Isaiah wrote in 8:13: “But Yahweh of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” After careful reflection on this ancient text, Peter bursts forth with fresh understanding as he writes (3:15):

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

The imperative, “set apart,” comes from the Greek *hagiazō*, the familiar verb usually translated “make holy, consecrate, sanctify, purify, cleanse.” This corresponds to Isaiah’s “you shall regard him [Yahweh of hosts] as holy.” An interesting implication flows from Peter’s use of the Isaiah text in this new form. To say “Yahweh of hosts” in Christian terms is to say “Christ is Lord.” More significantly, followers of Christ as Lord have no reason to fear any other claimants to the title “Lord” — including local magistrates or Caesar himself! There is a proper “honor” (*timē*) due to other human beings, Peter has already told us (2:13ff), including “the king” (=Emperor). But remember how he told his readers in 2:17 “fear God” but “honor the king.” Much is to be lost by fearing the king (or others)!

Setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts means surrendering the control of our lives to Christ who is our only Lord. This speaks directly to the value of sovereignty as a key component in our ethics. What happens to us — how we are treated because of our faithfulness to Christ — rests solidly in the hands of Jesus Christ our Lord. As the Prayer of St. Patrick affirmed (see above), Christ occupies the supreme place in our lives, and we bind ourselves to him with supreme allegiance. What does this confidence in the Lord of our hearts achieve for us? We observe a few key points:

1. **The protection it provides.** “Who is there to harm you?” This sounds a bit like H.G. Spafford’s familiar hymn:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows, like sea-billows, roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

We will suffer for our commitment to Jesus Christ. But he will never abandon us to the whims of our adversaries nor to the whippings of our persecutors. At nightfall, when it seems we have been left alone, he appears in our cell to assure us, before the shackles fall from our hands and feet, and he calls us from the darkness into the care of his mighty love.

2. **The peace it creates.** “Do not fear!” How often did Jesus speak those words to troubled disciples? “Peace be still” (Mark 4:39; Matthew 10:26, 28, 31; Luke 12:32; John 12:15)!
3. **The preparation it inspires.** God’s sovereignty in no way relieves us of human responsibility. But sovereignty inspires such responsibility! Peter writes, *hetoimos aei* — “prepared, ready always.” Ready for what? Prepared for what? The Greek word introduced into the text is *apologia*. In its original context, the word applies to courtroom activities or to scholarly debate forums. Literally it means “a defense” or “a reason” or “an argument.” Something is stated with rational or logical support behind it. By implication, this suggests that Peter’s audience faced challenges to their faith which would require the giving of the “reason” (*logos*) for their Christian commitment. That is, they would mount *apologia* by giving *logos*. What is the subject matter of their defense? Peter chooses a familiar and favorite term: *hope (elpis)*, something with which he began his letter (1:3, 13, 21) and which consistently referred to the hope brought by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Be prepared to talk about the resurrection! But this defense is no mere academic exercise calculated to gain debating points. The hope is quite personally located “in you” (*en humin*). That is, “Talk about the resurrection as something which gives you life.”
4. **The purity it maintains.** A sentence break occurs near the end of 3:15, and then picks up, continuing into 3:16. “Gentleness, respect, clear conscience...” are all values which ought to brand the Christian’s handling of his critics. Maintaining consistency in the face of unjust attacks is difficult. The temptations to strike out, set the record straight, vilify one’s accusers, and demand a retraction are real challenges to heart purity. How do we make the case for Christ and remain “Christianly” in the process? That is the challenge of value-virtues, but we have a companion in this ordeal: the sovereignty of God into whose hands we place the disposition of our case and the judgment of our accusers. How liberating is the surrender of our will to the Will of God in such straits.

The clear conscience (*suneidēsis agathē*) throws attention on consistency. Hateful replies to harmful charges undermine honest faith. “Walk the talk” and “talk the walk” share the same yoke of Christian discipleship. The world has every right to watch us, and we have an eternal responsibility to be seen. “Don’t put your light under a basket,” Jesus cautioned his followers (Matthew 5:15; Luke 8:16; 11:33). “Let them see consistency before the bar of human accusation!” Malicious speech and slander are charmed by good behavior, Peter tells his readers. Our goal is not to shame those who lose the argument with us. Human beings still under the reign of sin have a hearty resistance to losing — or admitting it. We may well win the argument and lose the soul in the process. Far better, the writer encourages, “to suffer for doing good than doing evil.” (3:17).

Our study up to this point has been concerned about those values which call for personal integrity and trust in God’s sovereignty. Christian virtues in the crucible of worldly suffering require both. God is in charge, and we are wholly responsible. Ethics emerges from this remarkable pairing of Christian affirmations. But a special circumstance faces Peter’s readers — one which “tries men’s souls.” Thomas Paine gets credit for that phrase, and for a bit more that is relevant to our study. He once wrote, “What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.”¹⁶ By the same token, the early Christians knew the high price paid for *their* freedom — that it was far from cheap, but that it was highly esteemed and dearly valued. Indeed, heaven knew, more than fickle humanity, the proper price of redemption and of the cross. And yes, the purchase of salvation was a celestial article rated far beyond what even angels could understand (1 Peter 1:12).

¹⁶ From Thomas Paine’s pamphlet “The Crisis,” December 23, 1776, written in the deadly cold of winter when America’s fight for independence had its own share of suffering.

The Cross (3:18-22)

Perhaps nowhere more clearly does Peter encapsulate the Gospel than in 3:18. The amount of rich theology found in a handful of words (21 words in Greek, to be exact) is remarkable. Carefully laid out, line by line, we also see the beauty of Peter’s literary tapestry. To what purpose does Peter elaborate so passionately on the achievements of the Cross at this point in his letter?

His concern is with setting in proper perspective *the problem of unjust suffering*. The foreground for his remarks is, of course, the daunting situation of his Asiatic Christian family whose *diaspora* (scattered and alien condition) has remained foremost in Peter’s letter. Like the faithful *shepherd* Christ commissioned him to be, Peter never lost sight of the perils of the flock: sheep among wolves in hostile pagan pastures (Matthew 10:16). Perhaps the writer still heard the echoes of Jesus’ words spoken to him after the resurrection (see John 21:15ff). They were hard and embarrassing words which stirred up the embers of his failed past and questionable future. “Do you love me more than these?” — spoken three times, to be followed by the thrice-spoken instruction: “Feed my sheep.” From that repentant moment, the now-aged apostle Peter drew proper guidance as he once more turned to harassed and scattered sheep (see Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34) and tells them that he knows about their suffering, but wants them to look even more intently on One who suffered *more than they*.

All things gain perspective in light of Calvary — including the tragedy of unjust suffering, of *undeserved* suffering. “Why do bad things happen to good people?” What sorts of value-virtues are able to sustain Christians when they suffer without cause at the hands of unrighteous people? Consider for a moment the deeper dilemma this question forces on us. As followers of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Christians are dedicated to a mission, and included in that mission is the announcement of Good News to a messy world of hurt. Yet, within that world, are hostile people. Still further, they are hostile people who vent their dislike for Christians by subjecting them to all forms of humiliation and distress. Now comes the irony. Was it not for hostile persons that Christ died at Calvary? Are not these evil-doers the ones for whom redemption was planned in the first place? We call this *redemptive suffering* because it sees the inflictor of suffering as the supreme object of salvation, and therefore the only consistent response is accepting suffering *with a view to the redemption of the one who causes suffering*.

Peter has such thoughts on his mind, no doubt, as he pens this section (3:18-22). And to the flow of his presentation we now turn.

Since 3:18 is the lead verse for this section, we are graphically representing it, clause by clause.

1 Peter 3:18 — Greek / English	Comments
<i>hoti kai Christos hapax peri hamartiōn epathen</i> because also Christ once for sin suffered	The combined conjunctions <i>hoti kai</i> introduce the verse and have the meaning “because/for also/even.” They connect the logic of the verse with what precedes it. Peter intentionally connects the adversity of his audience with the suffering of Christ.
<i>dikaios huper adikōn</i> just on behalf of unjust	Here the idea of a just person suffering unjustly is explicitly mentioned and related to Christ.
<i>hina humas prosagagē tō theō</i> in order that us he might bring to God	Suffering for Christ had a purpose and it was not pointless — it brought us to God. Peter is specific in his choice of personal pronouns: “Us” — not the world in general. He wants his readers to relate to the impact of Christ’s sufferings on <i>them</i> , and then consider how their own sufferings might positively influence <i>others</i> to come to God also.

<i>thanatōtheis men sarki</i> put to death on the one hand in flesh	Christ's suffering resulted in physical death.
<i>zōopoiētheis de pneumati</i> made alive on the other hand by spirit	Christ's death was followed by new life through the Spirit.

Several main points stand out:

1. Christ himself was not isolated from suffering, but underwent such suffering *for sin*. When Christians experienced suffering at the hands of other human beings who oppose their message and way of life, they must realize that it is “sin” which creates this state of affairs, and it is sin which must be dealt with. This redirects any resentment away from their persecutors and onto the power of evil which is the true offender.
2. When the text tells us that Christ suffered *once* (*hapax*), it is saying that the suffering of Christ was so effective that it did not require repeating. Because the sufferings of Jesus were purposeful and not random or gratuitous, they achieved their goal of dealing with sin. The writer chooses the aorist tense of the verb *paschō*, implying the decisive nature of the action — a thought reinforced by the use of “once.” Similarly, fellow-sufferers can expect that suffering for the Gospel is also not without meaning, and though it may appear prolonged or reoccurring, they can anticipate the time when its purpose has been reached, and suffering will end.
3. To say that Christ's suffering was “the just” *huper* (in place of) “the unjust” underscores the inequity involved in the act of suffering. However, this is necessary for the event of the cross to reach its goal: the atonement for sin and the redemption of the sinner. By himself being just, Christ did not suffer for his own sin, but he did suffer because of sin. The just/unjust pairing of ideas discloses the sort of justice we are dealing with, namely, the restorative justice of God — a suffering which brings about the remediation of sin — the solution for sin. For Christ to be *just* doesn't merely mean he was innocent or blameless, though he truly was both of those things. When we say Christ is *just*, we mean that *he brings about the justice of the unjust* — he changes the status and condition of the unjust person. Persons who benefit from the just work of Christ are thereby *justified*, to borrow language from Paul (Romans 5:1, 9; 8:30, and elsewhere).
4. Peter explains what this changed status and condition means by introducing a purpose clause: “*in order that* (*hina*) he might bring us to God.” The verb “to bring” is *prostagō*, a word which means “to bring before, furnish, supply.” Again, the aorist tense emphasizes the definitive action of the verb — a clear achievement of Christ in bringing human beings before God, thereby including them among the people of God. Consistent with the language of the Jewish Temple system, this term suggests entrance into the holy sanctuary of God (see also Hebrews 4:14-16).¹⁷ In Johannine terms, Jesus is “the way” so that we might “come to the Father” (John 14:6). At the same time, there is also the notion of reconciliation with God and the end to hostility between God and human beings. By comparison, Christians in the mission of the Church become agents of reconciliation when they suffer unjustly, embodying in their own sufferings the redemptive suffering of Christ. This corresponds to Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 where, as representatives of Christ, we “become the righteousness [read, “justice”] of God in him [Christ].” That is to say, our own suffering as *just ones* on behalf of *unjust ones* in turn *embodies* God's righteousness so that the world might see what it looks like.
5. Although Jesus was “put to death in the flesh (*en sarki*)” — the supreme outcome of suffering — God did not abandon him to death but raised him to life “by the Spirit.” We adopt the translation “by the Spirit” for *en pneumati* because of its consistency with texts like Romans 8:11 which give to the Holy Spirit the agency for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to the same Spirit attribute our future resurrection as well (see also Roman 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:44-49).

In 3:18, Peter teaches the *faithfulness* of God to Jesus. He infers from this that those who suffer and possibly die as Jesus did will experience the same future vindication by resurrection as Jesus experienced. But now he

¹⁷ The Old Testament LXX usage of this Greek word clearly involves the role of the priests who “stand before” God with offerings in hand (Ezekiel 42:14; 44:13, 15). The verb can also refer to bringing the actual offering to God (Malachi 2:12; 3:3, 5). In one sense, Christ brings us to God as an offering.

proceeds to reinforce this teaching with a reminder of how the Holy Spirit operated in the Old Testament by vindicating his righteous servant Noah.¹⁸ The second letter of Peter clarifies the special role Noah had when it says:

... if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly ... (2 Peter 2:5).

The phrase “herald of righteousness” is from the Greek *dikaïosunēs kēruka* and corresponds to the idea in 3:19 that Christ through the Spirit “preached” (*ekēruxen*). The shared root of both *kēruka* and *ekēruxen* means “to proclaim, act as a herald. In the New Testament it usually means “to herald the Good News” (Acts 8:5; 9:20; 12:13; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 15:12; Philippians 1:15; Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13; Galatians 2:2; Colossians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; Mark 1:14; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15), but can also refer other forms of proclamation (Luke 12:3; Revelation 5:2). Earlier in Peter’s letter he told his readers that the Spirit of Christ operated in the Old Testament prophets (1:11), and his second letter confirms the role of Noah as a prophet-herald. By using the word “righteousness” in conjunction with Noah’s prophetic role, Peter links Noah to the role of Christ as “the just one” in contrast to the “unjust ones.” He does this so that he can develop the metaphor further and apply the situation of Noah to that of his readers.

In the famous “hall of faith” text from the book of *Hebrews*, we find additional statements about Noah:

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith (11:7).

Several important elements of the Noah story correlate with 1 Peter 3:

1. Noah received a *revelation* from God in a prophetic-like fashion: “warned about things not yet seen.”
2. He acted from *holy fear* — an attitude Peter encouraged in his readers (1 Peter 3:15), namely respect and awe for the source of this message from God.
3. He acted so that others might be saved — consistent with the sufferings and death of Jesus.
4. He condemned (*katakrinō*) the world — an action one would expect from a judge who had jurisdiction to pass judgment, or a prophet who acted as the prosecutor of God’s covenant lawsuit in the case of *God v. World!*
5. He became an “heir of righteousness” — both inheritance (1 Peter 1:4; 3:7) and righteousness (1 Peter 2:24) are key themes in Peter’s letter, and refer to the future fulfillment of God’s promise to restore His broken creation.
6. God waited patiently, allowing for the possibility that others might accept Noah’s message. Those in Peter’s audience might well become *impatient* with the seeming tardiness of God’s intervention on their behalf.
7. Only eight persons were saved by Noah’s ark, suggesting that God is faithful to save though the number of respondents is in the minority. Though the Asiatic Christians might be a *minority* in a dominant culture, God is still committed to their salvation.

Like Noah, Peter’s readers face a hostile world as they maintain a strong witness for the Gospel. Just as Noah was “saved by God” through the ark-flood ordeal, so also the suffering Christians in Peter’s audience receive assurances from God — symbolized by their baptism — that they will be saved as well. While we might find Peter’s argument a bit circuitous and complicated, he succeeds in making his key point that the values which sustain the Christian’s life will preserve through the deluge of trials. The choice of Noah as an example of a righteous witness and a vindicated prophet was not an arbitrary one on Peter’s part. Literary evidence from the first century confirms that the people of Asia Minor had a fascination about Noah and the Flood,¹⁹ based on

¹⁸ A number of theories seek to explain the preaching of Christ to “the spirits in prison.” John S. Feinberg has written a coherent evaluation of the various views, and then provides substantial support for his own. In the main, his views are endorsed in our *Notes*. See John S. Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 303-336.

¹⁹ Jobes, pp. 245-247. Jewish immigrants who arrived in 205 B.C.E. discovered a town in Asia Minor called Apamea Kibtos. The Greek word *kibotos* means “ark,” and that term translates the Hebrew idea in the Genesis account of the Flood. So important did the Asiatics regard Noah that there were several coins minted during the rule of five Roman Emperors from Septimus Severus through Trebonianus Gallus. On one side of the coins they placed Noah and his wife; on the other the Emperor at the time. Also, the famous

alleged identifications of specific places in the region with the landing-place of the ark. Knowing this reverent regard the Asiatics had for Noah, Peter skillfully weaves his story into words of encouragement to his audience.

Baptism in the first century carried the twin message of *judgment* and *salvation* (see the *Background Notes*, April 10/11, 2010, "Baptism and Eucharist"). Already the Christians of Asia Minor had gone on record declaring the judgment of sin and death — that is of the *old world* — and the promise of forgiveness and life — the arrival of the *new creation*. The Flood came to symbolize the judgment of God on those who rejected the righteous preaching of Noah. At the same time, the water also buoyed up the ark and carried the eight persons onboard to safety — somewhere in the mountains of Asia Minor! Peter's readers are also in *Asia Minor*, and he tells them how fittingly God has delivered them from defeat at the hands of a fallen world no less dangerous than the violent culture of Noah's day. Through baptism, the Asiatic Christians boldly and courageously took their stand, publicly confessing their allegiance, on oath, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The value upheld in this case is "the appeal of a good conscience toward God." What does this mean? The word behind the word "appeal" is *eperōtēma* actually which has several related meanings:²⁰ "declaration," "decision," or "agreement/contract." The *Vulgate* uses the Latin word *interrogatio* which corresponds to the Greek idea of a *rhetorical question*, one in which the answer is implied in the question. Translators are divided on the proper handling of the underlying Greek in this phrase. Perhaps the clearest meaning is that persons undergoing baptism make their positive *declaration* with respect to God. This declaration has as its *content* the *suneidēseōs agathēs*—an "appropriate awareness." As noted in our previous study of 2:19, the Greek word *suneidēseōs*, which is often translated "conscience," actually has a different meaning in Peter's letter. It literally means "a knowledge shared with another" or "a co-knowledge." The ancient Greeks used this term when they wanted to communicate their *conscious awareness* of a situation, circumstance, attitude, or factor germane to them. Applied to baptism, it has to do with God's immediate presence in the person's life, and the baptismal candidate's declaration that it is so.

What matters to baptized Christians is that God approves them, justifies them, affirms them, and honors them. When they are baptized, they are pledging their loyalty to Him and look to Him for their status and their standing. Tempting though it might be for them to make their "peace with the world," and thereby the harassment they receive from it, they have chosen instead the way of Noah and like him find "favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8-9). Peter makes clear that baptism *saves* but not as the primary *agent* of salvation. Water cannot wash away sin or the sin nature. Those actions must be the works of God's grace. What baptism achieves is the public declaration of the Christian's appropriate consciousness of God — that is, knowledge of the True God who has revealed His favor and acceptance in Jesus Christ.

How does God communicate His favor and acceptance of the Asiatic Christians? Peter tells them that God has already done provided these things by the "resurrection of Jesus Christ." After suffering and death, they have the promise of new life. He goes on to tell them what has happened to Jesus *since his resurrection* (1 Peter 3:22):

1. **Christ has gone into heaven.** This is the classic language of royal ascent, announcing that the King has ascended to his royal realm — the center of his kingdom, usually after a decisive victory over his enemies or a tumultuous welcome from his citizens.²¹ The King has come into his kingdom through royal Advent —

Sibylline Oracles were likely written in Asia Minor, and they discuss Noah and his family, along with alleged sermons preached by Noah in which he encouraged people to live righteously — an idea consistent with the New Testament image of this famous man.

²⁰ Oscar S. Brooks, "1 Peter 3:21 -- The Clue to the Literary Structure of the Epistle," *Novum Testamentum* 16 No. 4 October (1974): 290-305. This journal article offers a detailed analysis of the key terms in the passage, including the meaning of the Greek words for "appeal," "good conscience," etc.

²¹ The literature on royal ascent is rich and diverse. A few good journal articles include: W. Hall Harris III, "The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9-10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 No. 602 April-June (1994): 198-214; John W. Pryor, "The Johannine Son of Man and the Descent-Ascent Motif," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 No. 3 S (1991): 341-351; Delmar L. Jacobson, "The Royal Psalms and Jesus Messiah: Preparing to Preach on a Royal Psalm," *Word & World* 5 No. 2 Spring (1985): 192-198.

his first *parousia* — and now he joyously enters into his heavenly reign. Before his ascent, Jesus Christ “descended into the lower regions—to earth itself” where he experienced his suffering and death. But all of that has changed, having “gone into heaven” (compare Ephesians 4:7-16, where Paul writes that Jesus’ ascent begins his kingdom project to “fill all things” by equipping his people for service in the world). The Asiatic Christians ought to be encouraged by this new development, knowing that they will benefit from Jesus’ royal ascent.

2. **He is seated in the place of honor at God’s right hand.** The place of Jesus’ heavenly enthronement is, Peter tells his audience, “the place of honor at God’s right hand.” Whereas suffering and death were commonly interpreted as signs of divine disfavor, resurrection and ascension are God’s signs that Jesus is the honored vice-regent of God’s kingdom. Being “at [the] right hand” of someone symbolizes this honor and is used throughout the New Testament. One special text from the Old Testament inspired the frequent use of this image in the New Testament (Psalm 110:1):

The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

For Jesus to ascend meant he took his place "at God's right hand," a *majestic* place and a *royal* place (see Luke 22:69 where Jesus predicted his future ascension; also, see Luke's additional testimonies about Jesus in this new exalted role: Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55-56 — Stephen actually sees Jesus "standing at God's right hand" ready to receive him!). Paul speaks about Jesus as "interceding for us" (Romans 8:34), seated at God's right hand (Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 1:20). The writer to the *Hebrews* notes Jesus' exalted role after his death and resurrection (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Peter tells us that all authority is subject to Jesus "at the right hand of God" (1 Peter 3:22). The Psalmist, in 48:10, tells us "Your right hand is filled with righteousness," implying that the right hand of God symbolizes his righteous rule over the world. In one of the grand "enthronement psalms" which celebrated the annual renewal of the kings' rule in ancient Israel, we read how Yahweh speaks to "my Lord" and invites him to sit "at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet..." (Psalm 110:1). This psalm is quoted by Peter in his sermon (Acts 2:35) in a passage we will soon examine. Paul picks up this "under your feet" language in 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 when he writes about Jesus' *present role*: "He must rule until he puts all his enemies under his feet...the last enemy is death..." The writer to the *Hebrews* uses similar descriptions of Jesus' present role (1:13). In the *Revelation*, Jesus, pictured as the Lion-Lamb, takes the title deed of planet earth from the "right hand" of God (5: 7). Theologians refer to Jesus' ascended state as his "present session" — his status at God's right hand *before he comes* "to judge the living and the dead" [*Background Notes*, April 18/19, 2009, "What If We Had That Power?"].

3. **All angels, authorities and powers are subject to him.** The world of the Asiatics was filled with a variety of “forces” which shaped and often bedeviled their lives. Among Jewish people a “theology of angels” emerged during the period between the Old and New Testament, roughly two hundred years of uncertainty about Israel’s future. Hints of angelic roles in protecting God’s people, as well as fighting against evil angels who were behind the pagan empires, appear in books like *Daniel* in the Old Testament and in non-biblical documents which form the Jewish *Pseudepigraphica*. The world in which Christians lived was filled with demons, angels, spirits, and other mysterious powers. Even the planets were thought by some to be angelic or demonic forces.²² Many Jewish scholars read Genesis 6 which described conditions before the Flood and interpreted it to mean that fallen angels had intercourse with human beings resulting in monstrous creatures which filled the world with violence.²³ The *Book of Enoch* (non-biblical) is perhaps the commonest source for the role of angels, good and evil, in influencing the affairs of human beings. Peter rejects the notion that such beings have continuing power over the people of God by declaring that they are “subject” to Jesus Christ. The Greek word *hupotassō* means simply to “place or arrange *under*,” in this instance. Paul likewise affirms the defeat of such powers and their public humiliation as a result of Christ’s triumphant victory at the cross and in his resurrection (see Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:16; 2:15).

These “powers and authorities” (Greek: *archai* and *exousiai*) were not limited to the supernatural realm but also included human power structures which opposed the followers of Jesus. Rather than cower in fear

²² Alexander Toepel, "Planetary Demons in Early Jewish Literature," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 14, No. 3 (2005): 231-238.

²³ Refer to the article by John Feinberg referenced above for a summary of evidence concerning this view and why he rejects it.

because of these earthly rulers, the Asiatic Christians were to trust confidently in the defeat of all such powers by the risen and ascended Christ. Peter wants his readers to factor in *the value of Christ's victory* as they negotiate their new life as Christians. Tempted to become discouraged or to overreact to such adversaries, they should trust instead in the assured triumph of D-Day as they wait the final victory at V-Day.

An especially encouraging text tells how none of these “powers” can defeat God’s love for us:

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, {38 Or nor heavenly rulers} neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

Glory to God! Amen.

Resources: Brief Bibliography

A number of fine commentaries provide more in-depth discussions of the topics we will discuss in these studies of *1 Peter*. The following list is selective. When referenced throughout these *Notes*, the author’s name will appear in the footnotes. Consult this bibliography for full information on the sources.

- Elliott, John Hall. *A Home for the Homeless*. A social-scientific criticism of 1 Peter. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
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Digger Deeper: *HoliMess: Value-Added Living in a Very Messy World!*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *HoliMess: Value-Added Living in a Very Messy World!* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. The emphasis this week is on the “values” which support the Christian life, especially in the midst of adversity. Offer a definition of the word “value,” and then list some important values in your life. What relationship do they have to your Christian faith?
2. Read 1 Peter 2:4-8 and then identify the main value on which everything in the Christian life rests? What image does Peter use to express this idea? Compare the Old Testament teaching based on the same metaphor: Isaiah 8:14; 28:16-17; 51:1ff; Psalm 118:22; Daniel 2:34; Zechariah 12:3; Deuteronomy 32:31, 37.
3. Why is Jesus called “the living stone”? Under what circumstances might a “building stone” become a “stumbling block”? Who are the “builders” mentioned in this text? What different kinds of “stones” seem to be in view, and what do they mean?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:13-17 which emphasizes living by the “will of God.” According to Peter what is the will of God, and how do we best follow it? Note the specific instructions he gives for doing so.
5. Values lead to the formation of virtues in our lives. Define the word “virtue.” Then read 1 Peter 3:8-22 which deals with this topic.
6. The main sections of this reading are: 1) Integrity (3:8-12); 2) Sovereignty (3:13-17); and 3) The Cross (3:18-22). Comment on the content of each passage.
7. What is integrity? What might be its opposite? What contributes to the building of integrity? To its loss? Based on the reading, list the virtues which come from a life of integrity, and then explain how they apply in our lives.
8. In 3:13-17 explain the question Peter raises: “Who is going to harm you?” What kind of question is it, and how does it point to God’s sovereignty? What does it mean for God to be sovereign? When we are in distress, how does God’s sovereignty help us?
9. How is God’s sovereignty expressed in the following ideas found in this section: protection, peace, preparation, and purity?
10. In what ways is 1 Peter 3:18 a key verse? What does it tell us about Christ’s work on the cross? How does Christ’s suffering relate to our suffering, and how is this relationship a source of encouragement to us?
11. What sort of suffering, experienced by his readers, does Peter describe in this passage? How is their suffering like Christ’s suffering? How does God honor the suffering of Christ, and in what ways is this applicable to Peter’s audience and to us?
12. Explain Peter’s use of the Noah story from the Old Testament. Read Genesis 6-9 for background on Noah and the Flood. Also read the following New Testament passages about Noah, and then summarize the key themes from the Noah story which are relevant to Jesus and the Gospel: 2 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 11:7.
13. Research question: why might Noah have been a fitting ancient personage to Peter’s readers in Asia Minor?
14. In what way is Noah, the ark and the Flood fitting pictures of Christian baptism? What is symbolized in Christian baptism which parallels the Noah story? How does water function in both cases?
15. According to Peter, why are Christians baptized? How might Peter’s readers have benefitted from this teaching, considering their situation?
16. What declarations does Peter make about Jesus after he rose from the dead (3:22)? In what ways would knowing this help the suffering Christians of Asia Minor?