

# *HoliMess* Welcome to the Messy Life!

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**Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)**

*HoliMess: Welcome to the Messy Life!*

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## Background Notes

**Key Scripture Texts:** 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:9-12

## Introduction

Did you have any idea what you were getting yourself into by becoming a Christian?

“What have you gotten me into?” The question tumbled out of the new employee’s mouth six weeks after she was hired. Customer service sounded reasonable enough. She was good on the phone, had a friendly voice, didn’t mind taking the hard questions, and understood the company’s products. She’d been doing this for a long time — elsewhere. But here .. That was a whole different story. Everybody seemed to scramble to get their work done on time. The supervisor insisted on approving the tiniest detail. It wasn’t like her old job where people did their work uninterrupted and without the clutter. Such a mess.

Had we known the requirements of being a Christian, would we have made the choice? Maybe we feel like somebody sold us a bill of goods, painting a rosy picture or promising the world if we signed on the dotted line. A king of “bait and switch”? This sounds like lyrics from Anderson Lynn:

*I beg your pardon,  
I never promised you a rose garden.  
Along with the sunshine,  
There's gotta be a little rain sometimes.  
When you take, you gotta give, so live and let live,  
Or let go.  
I beg your pardon,  
I never promised you a rose garden.*

What has God promised us?

Two millennia ago, what looked like a knock-off sect of Judaism sprouted on the landscape of the eastern Mediterranean. Before long, thousands of people joined the movement rooted in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They signed on with their eyes wide open. After all, the Good News they heard, believed and now proclaimed for themselves started out with the words “Christ died for our sins...” Here was a movement founded on the death of its founder for the sins of his followers. Of course, there was more, “...he was buried...rose again the third day...” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Born up to its neck in controversy, the Jesus movement did not lack for criticism or opposition. Not only did the Jewish kinsmen of the first Christians put up a fuss, the Roman Empire eventually took notice of the wild claims that “Jesus is Lord,” meaning that Caesar was not.

Then there were the social pressures associated with any new movement which bucked the tide of cultural opinion. Trying to figure out these first Christians gave the local officials reason for pause. Take Pilate, for example, the procurator charged with hearing the *case against Christ* brought by his fellow Jews.<sup>1</sup> He really had no patience for such matters, hated Jewish life, and found the Jesus incident a huge annoyance during the busiest and most dangerous time of the Jewish calendar — Passover. His digs at Jesus, mocking the idea that

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<sup>1</sup> The most complete Pilate account in the Gospels appears in John 18:28-19:16.

such a peasant teacher could be a *king*, went further with the gruff remark, “Am I a Jew?” Yet something eerie about Jesus, something downright weird, made Pilate take a second look ending with the haunting question “Where are you from?” We can almost hear local townsfolk greeting some country bumpkin with those words. All this talk about Jesus being “the Son of God” simply aggravated Pilate’s distaste for Jewish beliefs. But calling Jesus a king was dangerous, revolutionary language, likely to find its way back to Rome where Pilate’s commanders would no doubt ask for his dismissal. Treason in the Roman Empire was a capital offence, and it didn’t take Rome long to make good on its threats.

Fast forward to the first one hundred years after the crucifixion when the Christian movement took shape, as dozens of communities sprang up throughout the whole Roman Empire, and got the notice of another important procurator, this time, of Pontus/Bithynia in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Pliny “the Younger,” as he was called, like most of his peers, sent regular reports to the Emperor of Rome, updating him on how well the *Pax Romana* was holding up under his leadership, seeking guidance on matters of state, and offering the typical deference to the Empire’s chief ruler. His *Letters* have survived, and I distinctly remember reading them in Latin as a young school boy. It was one passage which caught my attention and which scholars commonly offer as an insight into “Church-State” relations in the earliest years of Christianity. Here’s the main text from 10.97, written sometime between 111-113 C.E. to the Emperor Trajan:

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*. Ed. Henry Bettenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 3-4.

The Emperor's response has been preserved as well:

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Notice how Trajan refers to "the spirit of our age," in counseling his young procurator to use care in handling the Christians. Seeing the Christians as part of a superstition, Pliny reports their rapid spread and acceptance by "every age, every rank, of both sexes." He calls Christianity a "contagion" which must be checked and cured. Apparently people had been leaving the pagan temples, stopped practicing pagan rituals, and offering pagan sacrifices because of conversion to the faith of Jesus. Of course, he claims that trends had been reversed, no doubt to assuage the fears of the Emperor that sedition had not unsettled that section of the Empire under his control.

So much for pagan perceptions of deviant Christians messing up the Roman Empire. But how did Christians see themselves one hundred years into the movement? It appears that someone called Quadratus, writing in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., and addressing himself to the Emperor Hadrian, offered the following description of who Christians were within the fabric of Roman society.<sup>3</sup>

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through (Greek: *paroikoi*). They play their full role as citizens (*politai*), but labor under all the disabilities of aliens (*xenoi*). Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives.

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they, rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

To speak in general terms, we may say that the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so Christians are seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unseen. The body hates the soul and wars against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians, not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its enjoyments.

Christians love those who hate them just as the soul loves the body and all its members despite the body's hatred. It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together, and similarly, it is by the Christians, detained in the world as in a prison, that the world is held together. The soul, though immortal, has a mortal dwelling place; and Christians also live for a time amidst perishable things, while awaiting the freedom from change and decay that will be theirs in heaven. As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from *Early Christian Fathers*, edited by Cyril C. Richardson as Volume I in the *Library of Christian Classics*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953, pp. 205ff. Also available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.ix.i.html>. This letter is commonly called the *Epistle to Diognetus*.

The Christian is the soul of the world, the writer declares, while remaining distinct from it. The world hates the Christian and wars against him because, like the soul, it seeks restriction on unbridled pleasures. The world is messy and the Christian seeks to make order out of this mess — seeks to hold together the perishable things until finally freedom from change and decay appears. In essence that is what this ancient letter tells us about early Christian life lived in a world unfriendly to Christians.

What a perspective these letters give us! Life was equally challenging in the first one hundred years as it is today! That is why we titled this new series with a freshly invented moniker, “HoliMess,” which I have promptly added to my word processor’s dictionary. Our little graphic nails down the idea at a glance.<sup>4</sup>



The church symbol isn’t just a physical building where people isolate themselves from the world’s mess outside. Rather, it represents the presence of Christ’s body in the world, a true sanctuary for human lives and the place where God’s new creation has staked out a claim in the world. Yes, in the eyes of the surrounding culture, we seem like a foreign invader, aliens within Caesar’s world. We are, on the contrary, the salt of the earth and light of the world, God’s colony on earth, inviting humanity to join together with us in the grand journey and help sort out the “mess” which sin and death have produced in God’s good creation. Outside, the world is “out of sorts” and “out of joint,” requiring something we have come to call *holiness*, the application of God’s character — revealed in Jesus Christ — to the mess left by millennia of failed human projects. You can almost see the shuddering and trembling of the “mess” in the graphic as it comes into contact with this holiness. More importantly, this isn’t really a case of “us” vs. “them.” We have our own messes which we must daily bring to the suffering and risen Jesus for restoration and hope. *As Christians, we are a humble unity of holiness and messiness.* In one important biblical text, Paul once wrote:

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

The spire which points vertically upward and the roof which reaches slantingly outward both call us to this holiness, this character of the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ where “wasting away” messes can find “renewed inner natures, day by day.” You are invited to share with us in that experience.

### 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.

Green, Joel B.. *1 Peter*. The two horizons New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007.

Jobes, Karen H.. *1 Peter*. Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

Marshall, I. Howard. *1 Peter*. The IVP New Testament commentary series. Ed. Grant R. Osborne. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991.

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<sup>4</sup> Special appreciation to Dave Everson for his continuing creativity which captures the heart of each series.

- Martin, Troy W.. *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter*. SBL Dissertation Series 131. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992.
- Michaels, J. Ramsey. *1 Peter*. Word Biblical Commentary. Ed. David A. Hubbard, et al.. Dallas: Word Books, 1988.
- Rees, Paul S.. *Triumphant in Trouble: Studies in 1 Peter*. Westwood, New Jersey: F.H. Revell Co., 1962.
- Witherington III, Ben. *Letters and homilies for Hellenized Christians, II*. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007.
- Reicke, Bo. *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*. The Anchor Bible, Vol. 37. Ed. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1964.

## **Peter: The Man Who Knew about Messes**

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ ... (1 Peter 1:1a)

We have selected *1 Peter* to guide our thinking through this series. If we accept the traditional authorship of *1 Peter*, taking “apostle of Jesus Christ” as a direct reference to the apostle named “Peter,” then we may gather our information about the writer from what we find about Peter in the Gospels and the *Acts*.

The arguments for and against Petrine authorship nowadays tend to discount the real Peter in favor of *pseudonymity*. That term means the use of an important person’s name by someone else when writing a document. This does not necessarily mean deception, however, since the practice of doing so existed in the world of the New Testament, usually in honor of one’s mentor or other great figure through using their name rather than one’s own. On this theory, what we read in 1 Peter 1:1a is an attribution of authorship to Peter by someone who actually did the writing. Presumably the surrogate writer tried to faithfully reflect the thought of the honored person. Of course, it’s also possible that a writer might seek legitimacy for their own work by invoking the name of the famous person in the opening of the letter — a not so noble motive.

In opposition to Petrine authorship, a hand full of reasons is given, and we offer out rebuttals to each.<sup>5</sup>

1. The Greek of *1 Peter* is too refined for a Galilean fisherman. This is an overstated objection, since it assumes a great many things about what a person like Peter was capable of writing. Bilingualism was common in the days of Jesus, and there is no reason why Peter could not speak and write both Greek and Hebrew (or Aramaic). Scholars of Greek style (like Nigel Turner) have shown how native speech can influence writing in another language.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Hebrew and Greek, this appears as Semiticisms, Hebrew-like styles found within the writing of Greek. That sort of thing happens in *1 Peter* and must be factored into the discussion.
2. Peter had no known connections to Asia Minor, the identified destination of the letter as seen in the listing of geographical/political regions. In reply, it is a bit prejudiced to suppose that if anybody evangelized Asia Minor, it must have been Paul not Peter who seemed to be assigned to the Jews. However, the book of *Acts* tells the story of Peter’s evangelism of the house of Cornelius — a Gentile. We mustn’t assume a sharp division of labor in apostolic evangelism during the first century.
3. The widespread persecution alluded to in the letter didn’t happen until after Peter died, perhaps during the reign of the Emperor Trajan (98-117 C.E.). Also, calling Rome “Babylon” didn’t appear in Jewish literature until after 70 C.E. when Peter was gone from the scene. Answering this objection, we note that widespread persecution is not directly claimed in the letter, but dispersion is. Further, recent research uncovered the use of Babylon as a metaphor for Rome.
4. *1 Peter* fails to present the personality of the Peter found in the Gospels, nor does it make reference to first-hand accounts which we would expect from an apostle had he written the letter. But, this argument ignores

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> As it relates to the style of *1 Peter*: Nigel Turner, *Style. Vol. IV*. A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Ed. James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), pp. 121-131.

the more subtle references to things Jesus said and did. Moreover, not all eyewitness testimony by firsthand witnesses got reported in the New Testament in direct ways.

5. The letter is thoroughly Hellenized, revealing less of Palestine and more of Greek thought as it pertains to the Christian movement. In reply, Galilee was much more Hellenized than Judea, and Peter no doubt had plenty of contact with Hellenization there. The book of *Acts* depicts Peter traveling widely outside of Jerusalem at some point after Acts 12 and 15, no doubt affecting his outlook and the style of his writing or speaking. Peter is not as parochial as some scholars make him out to be. Don't people grow and change? Even simple fishermen?

Trying to argue on the basis of style, including grammar, syntax, and lexicography, fails to acknowledge that documents like *1 Peter* were designed more for oral presentation than for private reading. They were supposed to be read aloud, and the writer kept that in mind when he composed them, noting how certain words would *sound* when read in sequence or in parallel to other words. If the assessment of Witherington is correct,<sup>7</sup> the Greek of *1 Peter* is of the Asiatic variety, marked by a sing-song rhythm, parallelism, strong expressions of emotion, and colorful expressions — pushing the language of Greek to its limits. Wit, irony, wordplay and humor all conspire to shape this flavor of Asiatic Greek. Such Greek stands in contrast to the Attic style which tries to imitate the older, classical Greek of the literary masters. Was Peter capable of using the Asiatic style? Considering his Hebrew roots, it was more likely that he felt at home with it rather than the more formal, classical usages.

Peter's name appears slightly less than two hundred times in the New Testament. We know him initially from the Gospels as "Simon" who got a nickname from Jesus who called him Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek). This roughly parallels our use of names like "Rocky" — and in fact Peter means a "rock." Starting with Matthew 16:18 and throughout the New Testament (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 15:5; Galatians 2:7-9, 11, 14), Peter or Cephas is the name of choice for him.

The brother of Andrew, Peter was active in the family fishing business based in his Galilean hometown of Bethsaida (John 1:44). Archaeology has, in recent years, revealed that fishermen were not necessarily illiterate and in most cases ran respectable businesses.<sup>8</sup> Clearly Acts 4:13 calls Peter (and his associates) persons without formal academic education. But that does not mean Peter lacked the ability to read and write Greek, something useful in operating a fishing concern in Galilee. Jesus called him early in his mission (Mark 1:16-18; John 1:40-42), and he remained on the official rosters of apostles (e.g. Mark 3:16-19).

Peter's personality is famous, perhaps more so than is true of the other apostles. He was slow to understand, quick to speak, changed his mind impulsively, showed a cowardly side, though boastful about his loyalty. A leader, he stoutly announced faith in Jesus as the Christ, and later took charge of things after Jesus' ascension. Pentecost endued him with new spiritual power, and though resistant to the idea of Gentiles in the church, he yielded to the vision from God and preached to the house of the Roman Cornelius. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels and *Acts* will reveal these facts. His missionary activity followed the pattern of Acts 1:8, taking him to Judea, Samaria, back to Galilee, outward to Antioch, into Asia Minor, and finally to Rome where tradition placed him at the time of his martyrdom (see the non-biblical writings of 1 Clement 5:1-4; Ignatius to the Romans 4.3). The later church historian Eusebius confirms this picture based, he claims, on the earlier writings of Tertullian, Gaius, and Dionysius. Though Mark penned the Gospel bearing his name, we learn from the church fathers Papias, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria that what Mark actually put down in writing were actually the memoirs of Peter.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Witherington, pp. 39-45.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick M. Stickert, *Bethsaida: Home of the Apostles*, Liturgical Press, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels provides a good summary of the issues affecting the life of Peter and the authorship of the letter, 1988, pp. lv-lxvii.

Did Peter write *1 Peter*? The Prescript (1:1-2) says that he did, unless we accept the verdict of pseudonymity — which cannot be done conclusively. This does not mean Peter wrote alone, and, in fact, in the letter itself we have Peter’s own words:

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it (5:12).

If this Silvanus is the same person referenced alongside Paul (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1), we have a well-known figure acting as Peter’s scribe (called an *amanuensis*). Peter says that “*by Silvanus...I have written briefly...*” Once again, the letter appears as an oral composition which is reduced to writing by someone else known to Peter. Such a practice was common, and may well have been done in the case of Paul’s letters. The burden of proof lies with the claim of the text unless there is overwhelming evidence that this claim cannot stand the test of other facts. As we have noted already, a number of arguments to the contrary contain reasonable doubt.

The approach we will take throughout these *Notes* in this series is to be watchful listeners to the text, looking for echoes of the Peter we know from the Gospels and from the *Acts*. As those nuanced references appear, we will mention them and place them in evidence favoring Petrine authorship. Similarly, we will try to comment on potential snags in the argument for authenticity.

### Structure and Literary Form

Two schools of thought want our attention on the matter of what kind of literature *1 Peter* actually is. Some see it as purely a letter, following the classic letter style with Christian modifications. More recently, emphasis has fallen on finding rhetorical (speech-like) features. In some of our previous studies of New Testament books, we worked out the rhetorical outline within the outer shell of the letter. This is likely the case with the present work. Writers like Witherington press the argument for rhetorical form, while others, like Troy Martin lean toward the letter style, though discerning within it distinct literary forms, such as the controlling *metaphor* of the scattered people.<sup>10</sup> The more eclectic approach seems wise, acknowledging the letter outline but seeing embodied within it other literary forms, including rhetorical elements.

If we outline the book as a letter, following Martin’s suggestion, it would look like this:<sup>11</sup>

1. The Prescript (1:1-2)
2. The Blessing (1:3-12)
3. The Letter-Body (1:13-5:12)
  - a. Opening (1:13)
  - b. Middle (1:14-5:11)
    - i. Cluster 1: (1:14-2:10)
    - ii. Cluster 2: (2:11-3:12)
    - iii. Cluster 3 (3:13-5:11)
  - c. Closing (5:12)
4. Greeting (5:13-14a)
5. Farewell (5:14b)

Notice the substantial “Middle” of the letter Body. It is here that Martin locates the embedded metaphors which flesh out the main themes of Christ’s scattered community in the world. These serve as the controlling images which drive the Christian journey from New Birth to Second Coming.

Following Witherington, if we adopt a socio-rhetorical model, taking our cues from the speech practices of Asiatic rhetoric, the following outline results:

1. Epistolary Prescript (1:1-2)
2. Exordium (1:3-12)

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<sup>10</sup> Martin, pp. 144-161.

<sup>11</sup> Martin, 271-273.

3. Propositio (1:13-16)
4. Probatio (1:17-5:5)
  - a. Argument 1: (1:17-2:10)
  - b. Argument 2: (2:11-3:12)
  - c. Argument 3: (3:13-4:11)
  - d. Argument 4: (4:12-19)
  - e. Argument 5: (5:1-5)
5. Peroratio (5:6-9)
6. Closing Doxology (5:10-11)
7. Epistolary Prescript (5:12-14)

As a matter of review, we need to define once more the rhetorical sections in this outline:

1. **Exordium**: appears at the beginning and seeks to make the listeners favorable to the message.
2. **Narratio**: an explanation of what the speaker intends to communicate.
3. **Propositio**: lays out the main points and "proposes" the thesis.
4. **Probatio**: contains the actual arguments in favor of what the speaker is contending.
5. **Refutatio**: arguments against the speaker's critics or against some viewpoint the speaker rejects.
6. **Peroratio**: a summation, often laced with feeling in an effort to strengthen acceptance by the audience of the speaker's words

In the case of *1 Peter*, #2 and #5 are absent as explicit divisions. It's possible to have a fully developed speech and leave out certain sections but still use those rhetorical strategies within the other sections, as we surmise is the case here.

Comparing the two structural approaches, we see plenty of similarity, while noting the consolidation or separation which makes them different. Martin follows the metaphors as controlling structural components, and finds three of them in the Body Middle. On the other hand, Witherington views this division as the argumentative section of the speech and sees five distinct arguments within it. Attempting to conflate or harmonize both approaches is unnecessary, as we may learn something about the letter from each. What Witherington seems to do is treat the letter as a "wrapper" for the speech, whereas Martin sees the work as a true letter with discernible parts, the Body Middle becoming the heart of the letter's main message. He pays closer attention to the three-fold Body analysis (Open, Middle, Close), while Witherington ignores it.

### Who Are the Readers?

To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ... (1 Peter 1:1b)

If we compare the geographical references in the prescript with a map of the ancient world, we discover that they appear within what is modern-day Turkey, north and west of the Taurus Mountains, as seen below:



The “Asia” as it appears on this map, refers the western region and not to what we commonly conceive of as the “Far East” or the “Middle East.” The familiar “Seven Churches” of the book of *Revelation* belong to this area. The Christian communities of Asia owed their existence largely to the work of Paul and the oversight of John. “Bithynia and Pontus” was the name of a province on the Black Sea coast to the north, formed by the union of the former kingdoms of Bithynia and Pontus. The Roman writer Pliny the Younger (whom we mentioned in the *Introduction*) was governor of the province in 110-3 AD. Peter separates them in his Prescript, suggesting that the older national distinctions still remained, even though Rome administered both regions as a single unit. “Cappadocia” was known for its underground cities as documented by Xenophon in his *Anabasis* (4 B.C.E.). Once serving as a protection from wild animals, these cities later became hiding places for the Christians who lived there escaping persecution. “Galatia” refers to two distinct regions, one north and one south. Southern Galatia includes the first cities evangelized by Paul in Acts 13-14. Migrations of Celts and Gauls contributed to the development of this area.

Another listing of geographical regions appears in Acts 2:9-11. Persons from these areas were present on the day of Pentecost and heard the preaching of Peter. Among the provinces mentioned were “Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia.” This has led to the suggestion that the core groups influencing the development of Christianity in this part of the Mediterranean came from the converts to Peter’s preaching. On this account, they would have returned to their homes and brought the Gospel with them, proclaiming it to their townsfolk. It might also explain why *1 Peter* might have taken interest in these followers of Jesus who lived far from Jerusalem. The original audience who heard Peter’s sermon would have included Jews belonging to what was known as the *Diaspora* — the scattered ones. Since the days of the Assyrian deportation (722 B.C.E.) and the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.), Jewish people found themselves scattered “among the nations” where they should “seek the welfare” of their pagan neighbors (see Jeremiah 29:7). The book of *Esther* reveals a continuing presence of Jewish people *outside of Israel and Jerusalem*, even after the return from exile (538 B.C.E. and later). As a matter of history, most Jews did not return. By remaining among the nations, they had an opportunity to bear witness to the one true God, and to create synagogue communities.

What significance did the Diaspora have for Jews generally? To some it was a sign that the people of God remained in exile, perhaps as a result of continuing disobedience or disfavor with God. To others, it served to connect them to their ancient forbears, the patriarchs who were “sojourners and strangers” in the promised land *before* they actually took it as an inheritance from Yahweh.

Peter addresses himself to a somewhat larger community, however, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. When, in his Prescript, he refers to “the dispersion” he is using the familiar *diaspora*. However, considering the Roman policy of *colonization*, other ethnic groups were no doubt included in the populations of the named regions. Once these areas had been annexed to the Roman Empire, displaced people groups would have been brought here to assist in the development of towns and cities and in the social infrastructure. Rome’s intention was to replicate its culture within these newly formed communities. We know that the Jews who were expelled from Rome during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (see also Acts 18:1-2) settled elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Gentiles figure in this mix, as evidenced within the letter itself (1 Peter 2:12; 4:3). The recipients are described as “once not a people” but are now the people of God (1 Peter 2:10). This compares with Paul’s remarks to Gentiles in his letters (Romans 9:25-26).

Further, the listing of the various regions in 1:1 provides the carrier of this letter with a distribution list for the delivery of this *circular letter*. Much like *Revelation* and the letters of the seven churches, *1 Peter* was just such a letter, carried by one or more couriers who presumably would read it to the various churches.

The string of descriptors translated here as “elect exiles of the dispersion” comes from the Greek: *eklektois parepidēmois diasporas*. We have already discussed the *Diaspora* as a migration phenomenon affecting the Jewish people. However, in relationship to the whole Christian community, Jew and Gentile, it also has significance. As noted in the extended quotations above, especially from Quadratus, the Christ followers did not claim any land for themselves. From the standpoint of Jesus’ teaching, they were “inheritors of the earth” (see Matthew 5:5), something attributed by the New Testament also to the patriarch Abraham who would “inherit the world” (Romans 4:13). Still, until the kingdom of God would come in its fullness, the condition of the Christian church would be that of a scattered people. This was experienced by the early church as a result of Jewish persecution (see Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19). In point of fact, the Christian *diaspora* was a beneficial reality. Like the word which they preached, the Christians were scattered as seed throughout the Roman Empire — in this case in Asia Minor — where they would take root and bear fruit through evangelism and church planting efforts. Had not Jesus told a parable about the word of God as seed, scattered in a variety of soils where it would face suffering and hostility but would, in time, produce a harvest (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8)?

Further, the word *parepidēmos* occurs in conjunction with the readers’ scattered condition. Analyzing the word into its constituent elements yields *para* (alongside, wide)+ *epi* (on)+ *dēmos* (home). The New Testament uses this term to describe the status of the readers as “foreigners, aliens, strangers, temporary residents” who live in a place from which they did not originally come. We use the phrase “resident alien” to designate persons without permanent, but yet legal status. In Acts 7:6, Stephen uses the term to describe the status of Israel while living in Egypt. The word appears in the LXX version of the Old Testament where Abraham applies it to himself when he lived in the land of Canaan (Genesis 23:4). Ironically, his Hittite neighbors call him “a prince of God among us” despite his alien status (23:6)! The New Testament consistently sees both the Old Testament believers and Christians as a *pilgrim people* in search of God’s new world (Hebrews 11:13). Though they have this standing in the world, they do not have this status in relationship to each other (Ephesians 2:12, 19), but as persons formed into the new people of God they have at last found *a home*.

Joel Green remarks:

For persons thus branded as “not at home,” intimate with day-to-day cancerous slander and calamity, the temptations are several: to embrace the dispositions and practices conventional in the wider world (i.e. the threat of assimilation and defection) and to query one’s status before God chief among them. Crucial challenges therefore include negotiating and maintaining community boundaries, identity formation and coherence, and

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<sup>12</sup> In the “Introduction” to her commentary Karen H. Jobes summarizes the research on Roman colonization and its potential effect on Christian migrations during the first century (pp. 28-44).

finding positive, redemptive meaning from, diasporic life. Peter will address the issue of boundaries and behavior in his repeated calls to holy and honorable living...<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the word *eklektos* draws the greatest attention for the biblical scholar. Simply translated as “chosen,” the word has to do with God’s choice of His people, granting them favored status based, not on their social standing, wealth or ethnicity, but on the simple fact that God has loved them. This understanding of “chosen people” is as old as the Hebrew Scriptures. Consider:

And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power ... It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7; 10:15).

Paul, using similar language, speaks of God’s choice of His people “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The doctrine of *election* is rooted in God’s love for His fallen world and His desire to raise up in the midst of it a proto-type people — the model of what He wants to do for the whole world. Far from being *exclusive and arbitrary*, God’s election is truly unconditional, based on nothing in us and on everything found in His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Jesus repeatedly spoke of His disciples as the objects of his choice, destined for a purpose in the fruitful harvest field of the world (John 15:16, 19). God’s choice of us is wholly atypical and includes those whom the world would normally despise (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Paul describes this choice as the revelation of a great mystery — the selection of Gentiles alongside Jews — the true “wealth of nations”!

### Date of 1 Peter

When the manic Emperor Nero torched Rome and tried to pin the deed on the Christians, he prompted an assault on the Christians sometime in the spring of 65 C.E. The sort of “trial” described in *1 Peter* likely has something to do with the fallout of that event. J.A.T. Robinson offers a detailed analysis of many issues affecting the date of the letter, and thinks it was dispatched to Asia Minor in April of the same year.<sup>14</sup> We are inclined to agree with this early date, though others push the letter forward to the time of Trajan in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, ruling out a genuine Petrine authorship — a position with which we disagree.

### The Relevance of a Relational God

...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1 Peter 1:2).

From all outward appearances, this scattered people should lack social cohesion and group identity. Thrown together in an alien culture, the dangers facing such a community include either assimilation or isolation. Consistent with Jesus’ own teaching, however, they ought be “in the world” while not “of the world” (John 17:15). What makes possible their sense of “chosenness”? The answer lies within the character of God Himself.

From 1:2 we discover a clearly Trinitarian explanation of the church’s sense of “calling.” The following chart captures the key elements:

Person: God	Role
Father	According to <i>foreknowledge</i> of ...
Spirit	In the <i>sanctification</i> of ...
Jesus Christ	For <i>obedience</i> to ...; for <i>sprinkling</i> with his blood

The writer uses a series of prepositions to correlate each person of the Godhead with their special work in the life of the Christian community. Nothing is left to chance or fortune, as if the church’s scattered or homeless state within the world dooms it to irrelevance or scorn. Far from it. God acts in ways which bring together the

<sup>13</sup> Green, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1976), p. 169.

otherwise alienated followers of Jesus and gives to them their *eklektos*, or “vocation” in the world. Part of God’s work in remedying our “HoliMess” is to order our relationships according to His own internal relationships, and then to outfit us for service within His kingdom on earth. It is important, then, to see as the unifying idea this sense of calling, vocation, and chosenness. It is no accident that the Greek word translated “church” is actually *ekklēsia*: the community of the *called* ones, the *chosen ones*. We consider each of these unique roles.

### **Foreknowledge: The Father**

Greek word: *prognōsis* is used in the accusative case with the preposition *kata* commonly translated as “according to,” but has the sense of “consistent with.” *1 Peter* is telling the audience that God’s choice of His people, both Jew and Gentile, living as resident aliens in the provinces of Asia Minor, is consistent with His *prognōsis*. If we allow the English word “foreknowledge” to exhaust the meaning of this term, then the emphasis falls on what God knew “before-hand,” and this opens the door to a theological discussion of the doctrine of predestination. But is this what Peter intends? The classical usage suggests “perceiving beforehand” but also has the sense of *prognosis* — as in the medical *outcome* of certain diseases. How will all of this “turn out”? The noun has a corresponding verb form, *progignōskō* (or the simpler, *proginōskō*) which literally means “to know, perceive, learn, understand beforehand, judge beforehand.” What sort of “knowledge” is this? From a purely Hellenistic perspective it is *perceptual* or *cognitive* knowledge. However, the Hebrew framework shifts the emphasis toward an experiential knowledge which includes *love* and deep forms of intimacy. This is not “picture knowledge,” merely reflective of what happens (or will happen). God is not passively peering into the future and saying, “Ah, that’s how things will eventually work themselves out.” He is personally and actively involved in bringing about His purposes in the world, but He is doing it, not as the “puppet-master” pulling the strings, but as a “personal-Savior” bringing about the restoration of human beings.

As we noted in our discussion of chosenness above, God’s choice of Israel to be His people was rooted in His love for them and in His determination to bring about the best for them. The same applies to God’s purposes for the New People of His choice, scattered though they be in a strange land. When Peter speaks of *prognōsis*, he implies the *proactive* love of God which seeks the good of His creation. This is echoed in the writings of Paul, particularly in Romans 8:

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things ... <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:28-32, 35, 38-39)?

Paul’s discussion of God’s purpose for His people is bracketed entirely between “those who love God,” “the love of Christ,” and “the love of God.” For God to “foreknow” and “predestinate” has little to do with His playing favorites but has everything to do with seeking the “good for those who are called according to his purpose” — language consistent with Peter’s usage in 1:2. This is especially vivid in the direct rhetorical question of Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” May I suggest that any theological understanding of *prognōsis* must include the simple notion that “God is *for* us”! If the prefix *pro-* means anything at all, it embodies God’s commitment to be “for us,” carrying out His loving purpose to put things “right” and “sort things out,” as implied by the words “justify” and “glorify.”

God’s “foreknowledge” is His “pro” action in the whole plan of salvation for the world. In a messy world where hostile powers and painful realities threaten to destroy, God demonstrates His *proactive love* which resists evil and brings everlasting good. Because of this love, the prognosis is hopeful. Where once we were

strangers and “aliens,” God has made us *brothers*, conformed to the image of His Son, no longer separated from Him or each other.<sup>15</sup>

### **Sanctification: The Spirit**

Sanctification is the “holy” in HoliMess. The root word *hagios*, “holy,” is found within the various terms having to do with “being holy,” “making holy,” and “the state of being holy.” Thus, we have: 1) *hagiasmos*, “consecration, dedication, sanctification, holiness” (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 12:14); 2) *hagiazō*, “set apart as sacred to God, make holy, consecrate, regard as sacred, purify, cleanse” (Ephesians 5:26; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 2:11; 9:13; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12; John 17:17, 19; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; 1 Timothy 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:21; Revelation 22:11); 3) *hagios*, “set apart to or by God, consecrated, holy, morally pure, upright, most sacred, sanctuary” (Mark 6:20; 8:38; Luke 1:49, 67, 70, 72; Acts 7:33; 21:28; Romans 1:2; 12:1; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 7:34; Ephesians 1:4; 3:5; 5:27; Colossians 1:22; 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:21; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 3:1; Revelation 4:8; 15:4; 16:5; 20:6; 21:2, 10; 22:19).

The Old Testament is the foundation for our earliest understanding of “holy” and its derivatives. These are based on the Hebrew word family of *qadosh*, “holy,” which includes the meanings “separate, sacred.” The root *qad-* implies an utter uniqueness, first applied to Yahweh, the God of Israel “whose name is holy” (Isaiah 57:15). This God seeks a “holy people” who will bear His name in the world and become His prototype people through whom He seeks the restoration of humanity (Exodus 19:6). To this people He issues the command, “Be holy, as I am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Israel is set apart from the nations, not because God wants to isolate them and thereby abandon the rest of the world, but because He wants to make them the instruments for the eventual sanctification of the whole world. They are His holy “firstfruits” (Jeremiah 2:3; Romans 11:16), and He expects *more to follow*. Holiness is both a *personal* and a *corporate* reality: God wants holy *persons*, but He also seeks a holy *people*, as evidenced by the phrase “holy nation” found in Exodus 19:6.

In the Old and New Testament, the adjective “holy” appears in conjunction with “Spirit” (Hebrew: *ruah* (Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10-11); Greek: *pneuma*) some 92 times. When we refer to the “Holy Spirit,” the emphasis falls on the one who is himself “Holy,” because he too belongs to the Trinity and is fully divine. He is holy in his *character*. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the author of holiness in the character of human beings. He is holy in his *creation*. Psalm 104:30 reminds us that when God sends forth His Spirit, things “are created...” and “renewed.” This recalls Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit “hovers over” the unformed and empty deep, preparing to transform it into its function as the creation of God.

A distinctively New Testament meaning takes shape as we begin to see the role of the Holy Spirit in the New Creation: “...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Once more, we hear echoes of the Old Testament:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26).

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, calls for a state of blessedness which comes from a “pure heart” (Matthew 5:8; compare Psalm 24:4; 73:1; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 1:22). The role of the Holy Spirit in all of this is seen in texts like this one:

...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:5).

Throughout *1 Peter* these themes of “holy” and “holiness,” along with their expression in the experience of “sanctification,” are frequent (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:5, 9; 3:5, 15). This fits beautifully into the wider metaphor of

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<sup>15</sup> Marshall, “God took the initiative and chose them before they had done anything to deserve it” (p. 31). In his Note on 1:2 he also references Numbers 16:5 and Amos 3:2 which focus *prognosis* on choice and love rather than knowledge.

“resident aliens” placed in a hostile world but called upon to bear the holy image of Christ. As we shall see shortly in 1 Peter 2:9-12, being holy persons in an unholy world is our vocation and the reason for our own sanctification. We are not holy *for our own sakes*, but for God and His purposes in creation. This is a *transformational holiness* not merely a *positional* one. The Holy Spirit is God’s agent who lives within His people making them the agents of genuine change and renewal in a messy world. Much like the imagery of Isaiah’s words:

... and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor (Isaiah 61:3).

Sanctification is God’s great “instead of” — replacing the human mess with His splendid beauty: beauty for ashes; gladness for mourning; praise instead of despair — the displayers of God’s splendor in a messy and desolate world. And that is role of the Holy Spirit: We are a holy people because we have the Holy Spirit.

For the early Christians, the Holy Spirit was God's gift to His people on the very first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection. Ordinarily, Jewish people celebrated God's gift of Torah to Israel through Moses on that day, but Jesus altered the content of the gift, offering the promise of the Holy Spirit (read the various passages in John 14-17 which speak about the "gift of the Spirit"). Peter, in his Acts 2 sermon, elaborates on the prophetic significance of the Holy Spirit's coming, especially that the Spirit's arrival marked the beginning of the "Last Days". Peter offers the promise of this gift to all who would believe that Jesus was God's Messiah, Lord and Savior. In so doing, he reminds them, they would "save themselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40).

Peter no doubt recalled the words of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would "teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). The role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the truth to the hearts of Jesus' followers was well-established in Christian thinking within the early days of the newly restored community of God:

1. Through the "filling of the Holy Spirit", the apostles speak God's word boldly (Acts 4:31).
2. National Israel is warned by Stephen about not "resisting the Holy Spirit" by ignoring or rejecting the message of Jesus (Acts 7:51).
3. Paul's own ministry is begun through the "filling of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17).
4. The strength, peace and encouragement of the church, even after persecution, is brought by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). Its numeric growth and reverence for the Lord is similarly grounded.
5. When Peter speaks the message of the gospel to his first Gentile audience, "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message" (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-16).
6. The commissioning of workers takes place by the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2, 4; 20:23).

In summary, the life of the early church was shaped, led, and instructed by the Holy Spirit. It would be hard to imagine this community of Jesus seeing itself as a holiness community without making direct reference to the work of the Holy Spirit among them.

Once we enter the theological real estate of the New Testament letters, we discover the intimate connection between the idea of the "holy" and the "Holy Spirit":

1. God pours His love into our hearts "by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5).
2. The essence of God's kingdom is "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).
3. God fills His people with "all joy and peace" and makes them "overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).
4. Paul sees his own mission in preaching to the Gentiles so that they might be "sanctified [i.e. made holy] by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16).
5. The entire community of Jesus' followers, the church., Christ's body, is called "a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you received from God...You are not your own..." (1 Corinthians 6:19). The idea of the "Temple of the Holy Spirit" also appears in Ephesians 2:21.

6. Such Christian virtues as "purity, understanding, patience, kindness" are directly connected to people being "in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love" (2 Corinthians 6:6).
7. The source of "fellowship" is the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14).

In addition to these passages, we have other, lengthier passages which speak about the role of the Spirit in the transformation of our lives. One text, in particular, stands out:

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

1. Though the full title "Holy Spirit" is not used here, the word "Spirit" is connected to Jesus through the phrase, "Spirit of the Lord." It is also clear that the Spirit in some real sense represents and implements the will of the Lord Jesus in what he does for us.
2. And what is that ministry of the Spirit? It is our transformation into the Lord's likeness "with ever-increasing glory". What does this mean? Given all that we have discovered about the holiness of God, and how Jesus embodied it when he came to earth as a man, the role of the Spirit is to make happen in our lives what God accomplished in Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings the holy likeness of Jesus into our lives. That is his "sanctifying work," from the moment of the new birth until Jesus comes again.

Paul writes in similar ways in Romans 8:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26-27).

The role of the Spirit is to intercede for us in such a way so as to guide our lives into the will of God. And what is the will of God? Paul, in a rich passage, connects God's will, the holy life and the Holy Spirit in this way:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

It is the Holy Spirit, then, who energizes the sanctified, holy life. From him the love of God is poured out into our hearts, and by his enriching power the fruit of the Spirit is born in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).

*The Holy Spirit is the Lord's agent for change in our lives. His residence is our hearts, his domain is our bodies, and his Temple is the Lord's people. Is it any wonder his name is "Holy"?*

### **Obedience and Cleansing: Jesus Christ**

The third and climactic role in this series of prepositional phrases has to do with Jesus Christ. It is introduced by the preposition *eis* ("into, in, among, concerning, for, as, by") which, in this case, points to goal, purpose, result and outcome. Two distinct nouns follow *eis*: "obedience," from *hupokoē*; "sprinkling," from *hrantismos*. The two nouns belong together and describe the finished work of Jesus on the cross. While the goal is *our* obedience and *our* cleansing, the agent for these is Jesus Christ who himself *obeyed His Father* and *shed his blood on the cross for our sins*.

**Jesus is called the obedient Son of God.** 1) "one man's (=Jesus) obedience" leads to the righteousness of others (Romans 5:19); 2) The Son learned obedience through his suffering (Hebrews 5:8); 3) Jesus wanted God's will more than his own human will (Matthew 26:39, 42; John 6:38; Hebrews 10:7-9); 4) Jesus wanted God's will done on earth (Matthew 6:10).

**Jesus came to bring about the obedience of the world to the will of God.** This idea lies at the heart of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God — God's active rule of His world; God becoming king once again among His people. The apostles see this as their goal: the "obedience of faith among the nations" (Romans 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; 2 Corinthians 10:5).

**We are called to be the obedient children of God.** Peter especially emphasizes this when he refers to his audience as "obedient children" who no longer live like Gentiles but like Christians (1 Peter 1:14). A strong connection exists between "purification of the heart" and "obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22a). The sanctification by the Holy Spirit, accomplished in human hearts (see above), has its basis in the work of Jesus Christ whose blood cleanses "the heart." The result is "sincere brotherly love ... from a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22b). Our hearts obey God instead of obeying sin (Romans 6:16). This obedience "is known to all," and therefore has an influential role in the surrounding culture (Romans 16:19).

The sort of obedience Peter identifies is *complete obedience*, to borrow a phrase from Paul (2 Corinthians 10:6): *plērōthē humōn hē hupakoē*, "your obedience is complete." That is the goal: "bringing every thought into the obedience to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Or, as we sometimes describe it: "full surrender." But this would not be possible without the work of the cross as embodied in the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Cleansing by the blood has more than one aspect: 1) washes away sin so that God might forgive us; 2) makes the heart pure in its motive and intention, removing the bondage of original sin; 3) cleanses daily from personal and corporate sins.

Once again, the Old Testament helps us understand the meaning of "sprinkling blood" for the purpose of cleansing.

1. The priesthood, founded by Aaron, required a consecration through the sprinkling of blood (Exodus 29:21).
2. Within the holy place (tabernacle, temple) and on holy things, blood was sprinkled (Leviticus 4:6, 17; 5:9; 8:11, 30; 16:14; 19:18).
3. Persons who were unclean because of disease had their healing confirmed through the sprinkling of blood (Leviticus 14:7).
4. A person already cleansed is commissioned to bring cleansing to others (Numbers 19:19).
5. The prophets announced a time in the future when the nations (Gentiles) would experience a sprinkling (Isaiah 52:15), and Israel would experience a fresh sprinkling (Ezekiel 36:25). The prophet Zechariah especially brought this to light when we proclaimed: "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity" (13:1).

Jesus taught that cleansing was something for the "inside" (i.e. the heart) and not just for the "outside" (Matthew 23:25-26; Luke 11:39). When the Jerusalem Council met to certify the mission to the Gentiles, they heard Peter tell the church that God "...cleansed their [the Gentiles] hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Paul appealed to the Christ followers in his care to "cleanse" themselves from the "yeast" of sin in their midst (1 Corinthians 5:7), suggesting the corporate nature of this process. He further explains:

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2 Timothy 2:21).

Christ "cleanses" the church (Ephesians 5:26), and, according to James, we must implement his achievement by appropriating his cleansing in our lives (James 4:8).

In order to keep "short accounts with God," John reminds us of these important truths about daily cleansing:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

To summarize: Jesus Christ provided for our cleansing through his work on the cross. We are called upon, as his distinctive people, to exhibit cleansed lives so that the surrounding world may see what God has accomplished and come to the fountain as well.

### **Salutation: Grace and Peace**

May grace and peace be multiplied to you (1:2b)

Peter uses the familiar salutation found throughout the New Testament letters. He addresses a *plural* audience (“to you,” Greek: *humin*). Those among the Christian *diaspora* who read the words “grace and peace” would no doubt find special meaning. The grace of God points to “all that the Christian community receives from God.”<sup>16</sup> Nor is this gift limited to the present, since Peter also writes about the “grace to be given” (1:10) and “grace to be brought when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1:13) — plain references to the Second Coming. Considering the daily needs of Peter’s readers, living as resident aliens in a hostile environment, grace is a constant supply for them and not just a one-time experience. Through His grace, God saved them at the beginning, and He saves them *now*. The text applies the verb *plēthunō* to “grace and peace,” using the aorist optative form which expresses a strong wish or prayer applied to Peter’s audience in a decisive way.

“Peace” naturally originates in the Hebrew idea of *shalom* which has to do with more than cessation of war. Greeting someone with the familiar “Shalom” means wishing for them health, well-being, as well as rich personal relationships. If we factor in the Roman significance (*Pax Romana*), we might also suggest that as citizens of God’s kingdom, theirs is more than a peace maintained by force, but by the gracious gift of God’s reconciling love through Jesus Christ. Peter may also be following the language of Rabbi Gamaliel who addressed himself to the Jews in their own *diaspora*.<sup>17</sup>

### **Being the People of God**

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:9-12).

This week’s reading leaps forward to 2:9-12 at this point — and for good reason. Peter continues at this point to explain once again the sort of *identity* which the Christian *diaspora* has in spite of their alienated circumstances within the society of Asia Minor. The material in this section naturally falls into two sections:

- 1. What is Means to be the People of God (2:9-10).**
- 2. Living like the People of God (2:11-12)**

### **What It Means to Be the People of God (2:9-10)**

The writer begins with an emphatic pronoun “You” in the plural form (*humeis*), placing it first in the sentence. He uses the particle *de* to set this material in contrast to what has preceded in 2:7b-8. There he has reminded them how the “builders” of Israel — the leadership — had rejected God’s chosen cornerstone, Jesus, and as a result they have stumbled and fallen for failing to hear and heed the word of God. They too have a destiny but it is one of rejection by God.

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<sup>16</sup> Michaels, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> See *Sanhedrin* 11b as cited by Witherington, “May your peace be multiplied,” p. 73.

Peter sees something quite different happening to his audience. Thus he begins with *de ... humeis* — “but on the contrary, you...” What follows are five distinct and powerful affirmations about the community of Jesus. Each one is intended to undergird and strengthen the resolve of member Christians who struggle daily with the messy world of pagan influences and religious hostility.

**1. Chosen race.** Starting with this distinctive quality, much of the material in this section finds a basis in Isaiah 43:20 where the prophet foreshadows a time when the people of God, now in Babylonian exile, will be given water to quench their thirst, they who are “my chosen people.” The same Greek phrase appears in the LXX as is used here: *to genos mou to eklekton*. The term *genos* refers to persons who share a common family tree. In this case, as Isaiah 43:21 goes on to say, those “whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.” That is precisely how Peter ends 2:9: “that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the one who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” *God chooses His people, not for their own sake, but for His and for the world’s*. The early Christians saw themselves as descendents of the new birth, part of a new family, and, most importantly, the foundation for a new humanity. This led to hostility from those who felt threatened by this new way of life since it challenged pagan values. Among the charges brought against the Christians in Peter’s audience was that they were “haters of mankind.”<sup>18</sup> Followers of Jesus repudiated those practices which cheapened human life and failed to honor the holiness of God. Worshipping false gods, cheering the brutal gladiatorial combats, attending the risqué theater were not compatible with the character of the Christian. Yet, this new “race,” not founded on ethnicity but on spirituality, offered humanity a fresh start. To be “chosen” did not mean to be part of the elite club from which all others were excluded. Rather, it meant to hear the call of God and then respond to His summons to become part of the new humanity, founded on Jesus Christ.

**2. Royal priesthood.** From Exodus 19:5-6 we learn that ancient Israel was originally called to be God’s special people:

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.

In ancient Israel, the concept of priesthood had a two-fold form. As indicated here, the whole nation was suppose to be a “kingdom of priests” — equivalent to Peter’s “royal priesthood.” What did this suggest? They were to mediate between God and the whole world. They were to help implement the kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.” God set Israel apart from the nations so that she might serve Him in covenant obedience, and serve as an example of what holy living looked like. By following Yahweh’s distinctive standards of conduct, they mediated, as priests, His holy values in the world before the nations. Through Israel, the nations might one day find their way into relationship with the one true God. More recently, Jesus himself became the new High Priest who would make a way into the holy presence of God (Hebrews 4:14-15; see also, Hebrews 7-9 for an extended discussion). Therefore, the newly formed Christian community, as the New Israel, comprised of Jew and Gentile, mediates for the world through the Gospel, the message of forgiveness and relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

**3. Holy nation.** “Be holy, as I am holy,” was the Lord’s original instruction to His ancient people (Leviticus 19:2). As we have already commented in our discussion of sanctification (see above), holiness has to do with having the character of God in our hearts. Peter wants his audience to see themselves as having that role within their pagan environments. As “lights” in the darkness, they show the way to God to those who still live in the darkness. But they do this not only as individuals but also as a united people — a nation. Yet this nation has no geographical boundaries or ethnic basis. They do not comprise an Empire, ruled by the force of iron will as is the case with Rome. Rather, they live under the blessing and promise which began with Abraham:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-2).

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<sup>18</sup> Jobs, p. 159.

How ironic that the founding father of the Israelite nation began as someone who *left his country and his home and became a resident alien in the land God promised as his future possession*. God promised to make of Abraham “a great nation.” Through the special blessing of God, this nation would bring blessing to “all the families of the earth.”

To be a holy nation means to be that people who bring the holy life of God to the whole world, so that the whole world might live under the blessing of God.

- 4. Special possession.** This phrase is likely based on Exodus 19:5, “treasured possession.” Michaels thinks we can translate this as “a people destined for vindication.”<sup>19</sup> The underlying Greek is *laos eis peripoiēsin*. From the Greek noun, *peripoiēsis*, we get the simple idea of “attainment, acquisition.” The emphasis falls on the *future prospect* of Peter’s audience. He encourages them by saying that, in God’s eyes, *they have a future*, and God guards them much like someone might take care of an extremely valuable possession. Wanting his precious investment to arrive safely at its destination, a man of means will carry it under armed guard to insure its safety and preservation. How much more so does God view His people! Elsewhere, we find the idea of God’s special people:

<sup>16</sup> Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. <sup>17</sup> “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. <sup>18</sup> Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him (Malachi 3:16-18).

<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28)

<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).

- 5. Mercy bearers.** When Israel lost faith and failed in their loyalty to God, He sent them into exile. They had broken his covenant which was paramount to walking out on their marriage with Yahweh. In effect, God issued them a bill of divorce (see Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8). As a result of their spiritual divorce, the nation was no longer considered God’s people. True, individual Israelites still had opportunity to maintain a faithful covenant relationship with God. Many did — Ezekiel, Daniel, and many others in exile communities. But as a nation they were “no longer a people.” This theme is taken up by Hosea:

Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all (Hosea 1:6).

<sup>9</sup> And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hosea 1:9).

The Hebrew names which Hosea gives his children symbolize the condition of the whole nation: 1) *lo-ruḥamah* means “No mercy!”; 2) *lo-ammi* means “Not a people!”

In New Testament terms, the whole world, Jew and Gentile is pronounced “under sin” and separated from God (see Romans 3:9). Yet God committed himself to restore Israel from exile, and along with Israel, the Gentiles as well — declaring that He will have “mercy on all” (Romans 11:32). God’s mercy reaches beyond the alienation of human beings and restores relationship once again. Covenant failure meets covenant love (*hesed*), and mercy trumps misery. The followers of Jesus are the living evidence that God is merciful, chooses to forgive, atones for sin by giving His only Son, and makes those who were not His people to become “children of the living God” (see Romans 9:26).

### **Living Like the People of God (2:11-12)**

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<sup>19</sup> Michaels, p. 109.

One of the common reasons for letter writing in the days of Peter was to encourage a change in behavior. Scholars use the technical term *paranesis* which means the *persuasion* to good conduct and the *dissuasion* from bad conduct. A writer might alternate sections of his letter between statements of fact or truth and persuasion to follow a certain course of conduct. Some commentators talk about *doctrinal* sections, followed by *ethical* sections. However, we need to use caution in blocking out large sections, calling them by these designations. More than likely, we are dealing with multiple sections, woven from both *doctrinal* and *ethical* strands. Furthermore, since letters often contained rhetorical features (see Witherington), the *paranesis* also figures into the persuasive case made by the writer. Martin writes:

1 Peter certainly exhibits this feature of paraenetic prescriptive speech ... It does indeed attempt to establish by precepts and examples the model of the good person. The good person who is described by 1 Peter is a person in a certain life role. He/she is a Christian, and 1 Peter exhorts him/her to play this role well. The letter describes the noble origin of Christians and the glorious goal awaiting Christians as well as the present conduct expected of them. Specific examples such as Christ (2:18f; 3:18f; and 4:1f), Sarah (3:6), and the author himself (5:1f) provide models for imitation. This description of the Christian life is not theoretical but prescriptive. The readers are being exhorted to emulate the model of the Christian life that the letter describes. We can conclude that not only in its use of imperatival statements and motivations for conduct but also in its use of moral example, 1 Peter reflects the literary form of the paraenetic genre.<sup>20</sup>

In order to show in *practice* what is true of their *identity* (2:9-10), Peter's audience is encouraged to live exemplary lives among their pagan neighbors. Jobe, in her commentary, refers to 2:11-12 as "Lifestyle Evangelism."<sup>21</sup> The Christians in Asia Minor are virtual visitors in their status as resident aliens. They cannot fall back on social, political or ethnic identity to answer the question, "Who are you?" God has formed a fresh identity for them and placed them in strange places so that they might, in turn, maintain a way of living seen as commendable by the Gentiles around them. The natural tendency is to suspect the worse of persons we do not know very well. How much prejudice and racism has grown up on the soil of ignorance! Peter doesn't want Christians to be an unknown within Asiatic society, susceptible to slander and attack by uninformed magistrates or subject to social ostracism by their hosts. The goal is to dissuade negative stereotypes and adorn the Gospel of Christ — bringing glory to God.

Peter builds a quick bridge to his audience with warm words: "Dear friends" (literally, *agapētoi* — "beloved ones"). Although those around them might be hostile, Peter is their dear friend and before he instructs them in how they should live he wants to affirm the close bonds that connect himself with them.

"I exhort" (or, "urge") comes from the Greek *parakalō*. This term frequently introduces the *paraenetic* sections of the New Testament letters. As Michaels points out, Peter sees the overall function of his letter as an "appeal" on his part to his audience.<sup>22</sup> On what basis does the writer make his appeal? While he begins his letter by introducing himself as an "apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), here he does not pull rank on the readers. Instead he grounds his moral appeal on their standing in Roman society as "aliens and strangers" (Greek: *paroikous kai parepidēmous*). As we have already noted, this combination of terms functions as a metaphor for the Christians in Peter's audience. Although ethnic Jews literally have this situation, the Christians — both Jew and Gentile — have an analogous situation because they are a unique people, formed by the grace of God as His chosen people to shine as lights in the world.

The problem is that the outside world doesn't know any of these things about the Christians. All they know comes from hearsay, innuendo and stereotype. Who really sees them as "chosen people," other than their own brothers and sisters in the faith? If misunderstood by the outsiders, the Christians might become fair game for ridicule and the politics of personal destruction. While it is true that God has given them their status, they will

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<sup>20</sup> Martin, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Jobe, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Michaels, p. 115.

need to define themselves clearly by their good conduct so that the watching world can make sense out of their identity. Peter believes that a godly life will become the best PR for them.

Who are the real enemies of the resident alien Christians? Surprisingly, they are not the pagans themselves. Rather, the enemy is *within* not *without*. Peter warns about “evil desires which fight against your souls.” The Greek refers to *tōn sarkikōn epithumiōn*, literally, “fleshly desires.” In previous studies, we have explained the way “flesh” operates within the biblical understanding of human nature. The word *sarx* refers to human weakness which is the result of the damage done by sin to human beings. Ordinary human needs, appetites, and wishes are high-jacked by strong emotion and turned into powerful forces driving human conduct. Allowing these desires (*epithumia*) to take charge, results in an assault on human well-being. Peter uses military language when he chooses the word *strateuō* to describe the attack of desire on human beings. “We have met the enemy and he is us,” remarked the Pogo character long ago. Christians who do not take seriously the weakness of human nature or who do not deal with human nature in godly ways are susceptible to self-destructive behaviors.

Jesus taught his followers about such things when he said:

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap (Luke 21:34).

When Peter writes about the strategy “against the soul,” he uses the singular form of the word *psuchē*, a term which has to do with human life in its essential form. He may have both the life of individuals and of the community in mind when uses the singular here. Whole communities have a soul — that which defines and shapes their identity, and what the outside world sees as their true character.

The term *apechō*, meaning “to abstain” also includes these nuances: “keep off, away from, keep apart, hold one’s hand off, desist from, be far from.” In other passages (Acts 15:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Timothy 4:3) the verb refers to abstinence from pagan practices of the surrounding culture which fuel conduct that is opposed to the Christian way of life. Living as they do in a spiritually antithetical culture, the Christian community is vulnerable to cultural compromise and influences which stimulate excessive desires. Constant exposure to the same temptations without a counter-balancing attraction to the holy life, results in losing the battle for the soul. Jesus put it concisely when he asked,

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36).

The soul is for the good of God and the world around. Within the soul lies the essential life of the person and their lived values. Uncontrolled human desire fuels the black hole of selfishness, sucking in whatever it can lay its hands on. That is not the Christian way. Christians should not want to gain the world but, instead, become the world’s greatest benefactors. In this they follow their Lord: “For the Son of Man did not come to be ministered to, but to minister and give his life a ransom for all” (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). Christ followers should not make demands of the world to accommodate their values. Instead they should live those values before the world, becoming for the world what the soul is to the body — to quote the *Epistle of Diognetus*. That is why keeping the soul in tact is so very important: how else can it be a healthy soul for the world? The life of the world depends on the integrity of the Christian soul.

When 2:12 speaks about “honorable conduct among the Gentiles,” Peter uses the Greek idea of *anastrophē* — “manner, way of life.” Literally, the word means “turning about” but then acquires the connotation, “manner of life in a certain place.” That is, the place around which a person’s life *revolves*. Though a scattered displaced people, the Christians settled down in a certain place and made a life in that place. What sort of life? Peter is urging them to make a “good” life (Greek: *kalos*) in the sense of becoming “good for the benefit of others.” Picking up on the turning wheel imagery, Christians ought to “roll” among the Gentiles in ways which silences the rumors that floated around about them. By urging public participation of the Christians in “doing good,” Peter nudges them out of the shadows and corners of society in the mainstream. By remaining aloof, Christians might be accused of all sorts of secret crimes; by “going public,” they help correct the false impressions about their identity in Graeco-Roman society.

Peter wanted the “good works” of the *diaspora* Christians to be “seen.” The Greek verb used here is *epopteuō* and appears in contexts where a watchmen or overseer is carefully paying attention to what is happening and who is involved. The text uses a present active participle, suggesting that within the cities and towns where Christians were scattered there was always someone watching what they were doing. In that society, if someone did an especially noble act or gave a generous contribution toward the public good, someone took note of it and would likely make a public inscription of the deed. Many of these inscriptions have survived and have been collected by scholars.<sup>23</sup> Such persons were not seeking the praise of men, but, as Peter phrases it, they wanted the “glory of God.” The Greek word for “glory” is *doxa* and has to do with *the estimation of value* placed on something or someone. The verb form “glorify,” from *doxazō*, is used here in the aorist subjunctive form, implying that *eventually* this estimation of God’s value would come *decisively*.

The occasion for this public recognition was something Peter calls the “day of visitation.” The Greek phrase is *en hēmera episkopēs*. To what does this refer? We’ve noted that official “watchers” looked for ways to honor esteemed citizens for their benefactions within the community. Certain “days” were proclaimed for this purpose, and the whole town would gather for the festivities. The Greek word *episkopēs* refers to the “watcher” or official “overseer” present on such occasions, ready to make his report public and honor the citizens in question. Peter may have hoped that the distinguished actions of persons within the Christian community would get public recognition during such “visitations,” not for the merit of the individual, but for the *doxa* of God. Further, the writer wanted to assure the Christians of God’s future “visitation” when, at the Second Coming, He would bestow the highest honor of all to those who faithfully lived their lives before Him and the watching world. In that case, we have both an ethical/civic, as well as an eschatological dimension to this “day of visitation.”

## Concluding Thoughts

During the days of Jewish exile in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah wrote the following instructions to his fellow Jews (29:1-7):

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon ... It said: <sup>4</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> **But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**

The main idea is in 29:7. After telling the exiles that they needed to settle in for the long-haul in a foreign place, he admonishes them about their “civic responsibility,” summarizing it with the words “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile...” He then underscores how closely connected their own welfare is with that of the city. The early Christians saw themselves in much the same way within the Graeco-Roman world. Theirs was a dual citizenship. Though living in what seemed like a foreign land, due to their distinctive values as Christians, the followers of Jesus did not assume a passive role in society. Like their Jewish forefathers, they shared in what their culture called *politeia*, a word which has to do with an *active civic role*. That’s what politics was in those times — contributing to the welfare of the *city*, the *polis*.

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<sup>23</sup> See A.S. Henry, *Honours and Privileges in Athenian Decrees: The Principal Formulae of Athenian Honorary Decrees*, Hildesheim and New York: G.Olms, 1983.

The early Christians stood apart in their beliefs and practice, but they did not stand aloof. They remained involved. Scholars like Bruce Winter<sup>24</sup> have researched the early church under its actual social conditions in the first century. Consistent with Jeremiah 29:7 and the *Epistle to Diognetus* (quote earlier), he shows how the Christians functioned in special roles as benefactors to their fellow residents. Rather than seeing their scattered condition in the *diaspora* as a tragedy, they affirmed it as God's foreknowledge, lovingly planting them in the world, though on foreign soil, so that they might contribute to the well-being of people within their sphere of influence. By doing "good works" and living a "holy life," they drew favorable attention to the Gospel. By not living a life of self-indulgence but self-sacrifice instead, Christians proved to be "salt and light."

Social ethics and eschatology converge in the letter of *1 Peter*. That is, concern for how things turn out for Christians *in the future when God sorts out the messiness of the world* in no way puts a damper on what can be achieved now in the midst of the messy world. Our problems are not so grave that they excuse us from doing anything about the world *now*, under cover of the Second Coming *then*. There is wisdom in the old poetic couplet: "Only one life 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." The important thing about that bit of rhyme is that it teaches us to be involved in doing things for Christ, living in the knowledge that what we do for him will survive into God new world. Are we building better schools, reforming health care, teaching the values of life, working as good citizens in our communities? Rest assured that those achievements will benefit from the resurrection life of Jesus when he comes, being taken up and transformed in the New Creation which God will implement in the future. They will not be lost nor destroyed but incorporated in mysteriously wonderful ways into the everlasting city which comes down from God out of heaven (see Revelation 21-22).

And so the audience of *1 Peter* could understand what Peter was telling them when he wrote about living as good citizens, while at the same time promising them that God would eventually bring them all to glory.

Glory to God! Amen.

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce W. Winter. *Seek the Welfare of the City*. Christians as Benefactors and Citizens. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.

**Digger Deeper:** *HoliMess: Welcome to the Messy Life!*  
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *HoliMess: Welcome to the Messy Life!*, 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. How does becoming a Christian complicate our lives? How does living the Christian life help overcome the difficulties? Discuss the Christian life as the place where holiness and “messiness” meet each other. In what ways has that interaction affected your life?
2. The letter of *1 Peter* speaks to the question of *living a holy life in a messy world*. Read through the whole letter at one sitting, noting the main sections and writing down a simple outline. What large themes appear throughout the book? Explain its relevance to our series theme: “HoliMess.”
3. What do we know about Peter from 1:1? Based on your memory of incidents in the Gospels, what do you know about Peter? List several facts about him. How was he acquainted with the “messy life”? Give some examples. For help, consult these passages: Matthew 4:18; Matthew 14:23-33; 16:16-23; 18:21; John 13; Luke 22:31; Mark 14:37; John 18:10; Matthew 26:58, 69-75; John 21; Acts 12.
4. In 1 Peter 1:1 what words does the writer use to describe his readers? Define each word, and explain why Peter chose to use them (see also Genesis 23:4; Hebrews 11:13; Ephesians 2:12, 19). Using the *Background Notes*, locate the place names mentioned in 1:1. Why are they significant? Compare these names with the list found in Acts 2:9-11, and then suggest a possible connection between the events of Acts 2 and Peter’s audience in this letter.
5. According to 1:2, what relationship does God have with the people in Peter’s audience? What is the basis for the three-fold structure of that relationship? Define the terms foreknowledge, sanctification, and obedience as they appear in this passage. Compare the following additional Scriptures: Romans 8:28-32, 35, 38-39; Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 7; Ephesians 5:26; Romans 5:19; Hebrews 5:8; 1 Peter 1:14, 22a; Romans 6:16, 19). How might this teaching have been helpful to Peter’s chosen but scattered readers?
6. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12 which continues the theme of God’s chosen but scattered people. Label the following divisions within this passage: 2:9-10 and 2:11-12.
7. In 2:9-10, Peter gives five descriptions of his readers. List them and suggest ways that each one might have encouraged the scattered people of God who lived in a messy world.
8. What does it mean for Christians to be a “royal priesthood”? Compare Exodus 19:5-6 as you think about your answer.
9. Explain the phrase “special (or treasured) possession.” Refer to Malachi 3:16-18, Acts 20:28, and Ephesians 1:13-14 for background.
10. According to 2:11-12, the scattered people of God have an obligation to the world around them. What is that obligation, and how does Peter counsel them to discharge it? How does this apply to us?
11. In thinking about your answer to #10, read Jeremiah 29:1-7, paying special attention to 29:7. How should we “seek the welfare of the city” today?