

The Elect

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Peter addressed his first epistle to "the elect." The term means "chosen." It had been applied to Israel, but now is applied to Christians (Deut. 7:6; Col. 3:12; Titus 1:1). God's choice is not arbitrary, but is contingent upon man's faith and obedience. When one obeys the gospel, he stands before God as one of His chosen ones. If men are not chosen, it is not because of God's unwillingness, but because of man's (Mt. 11:28-30; Jn. 5:40). Chosen is both a dangerous and comforting idea. It is dangerous when it leads to a sense of pride. But chosen is comforting because we know that regardless of what happens, God has a purpose for us. We will not be abandoned. It was one of the great mistakes of the chosen people of the Old Testament that they often thought more of their privileges than of their responsibilities. Let us avoid this mistake.

"ACCORDING TO THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD"

God planned the redemptive work of Christ and the establishment of the church before the events transpired (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-6, 11). Without such foreknowledge, the prophecies of the Old Testament would have been impossible. Peter's assuring these Christians that they have been chosen according to and in keeping with the plan and original purpose of God is to be part of the comfort which leads to hope in the midst of their persecution and trial (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29, 30). God has made known to us in these last days how we may become His elect. The how was known to Him ages before. This was His foreknowledge, or His predetermined purpose (Titus 1:2).

"IN SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT"

This is connected with "the elect." The chosen people of God are those who are sanctified. This is how they were chosen. "Sanctification" means "set apart." This is done by the Spirit of God through the instrumentality of the word of God (Jn. 17:17; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14). While one is set apart at the moment of conversion, there is also a sense in which the process continues as we become more holy (1 Thess. 5:23). God calls us for a separate life (1 Thess. 4:4-7). We need to keep up a sense of separation from the world. If we don't, we will be overwhelmed and destroyed by worldliness (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

"UNTO OBEDIENCE AND SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST"

God chose these people, and us, with the purpose in mind of their being obedient. Obedience is the goal of His choice (1 Pet. 1:14; Jn. 14:21). The suffering these saints are to experience will not relieve them of their responsibility to obey God (1 Pet. 4:12). In fact, it may increase responsibility for added precaution and care. We cannot use our problems as an excuse for not obeying God. God also chose them that in being obedient, the blood may be applied to take away sins (1 Jn. 1:7; Mt. 26:28). Obedience is our part; sprinkling the blood is God's part. Sprinkling is figuratively used to refer to the appropriation of the merits of Christ's blood (Rom. 3:25; 5:9). The figure is borrowed from the Old Testament where the blood was literally sprinkled (Exod. 24:8, 3). Thus the new Israel is brought into relationship with God in a way similar to the old Israel. The Israelites promised to obey, and we promise to obey.

The date of this epistle is about 64 A.D. This was the time in which the persecution under Nero was just beginning. Peter opens with words that would be of real value to Christians either being persecuted, or facing persecution. He seeks to prepare as well as encourage and comfort. They are God's elect even if scattered; set apart for Him according to a plan He knew before the world began; cleansed by the blood of His Son to live obediently to Him. Thus grace and peace are theirs.