

1st Peter: Reflecting His Reflection



I can't even begin to imagine what a privilege it must have been in the ancient world to be entrusted with the responsibility of being the goldsmith. Can you imagine the trust? You take your piece of gold, perhaps your life savings, and give it to a man who puts it in a crucible. With his eye on that solid bar, he puts foot on a bellow that regulates the air flow to the fire to heat that crucible. As he heats the crucible, right before his very eyes the solid pieces of gold begin to liquefy. He keeps his foot on that bellow and his eye on that gold, while in his other hand he has a long metal object, a probe. As he watches that gold liquefy, he begins to notice the alloy rise to the surface because this gold isn't pure. As that gold gets hotter, more and more particles rise to the top. Under his watchful eye and with a stroke as light as a painter would use to paint on a canvas, he skims those alloys to the side through a narrow opening where those alloys will flow outside that crucible, and he looks into that liquefied gold. According to historians, the standard of purity was when the goldsmith could see his reflection with no impurities, and he would know the gold was 99.9% pure.

1st Peter is exit 21 in the New Testament, or exit 60 from the Old Testament. It is a letter that Peter wrote to the elect exiles of the dispersion living in Asia Minor. As we study this letter, we will realize that the goal of our life is to reflect God's reflection. In my mind, 1st Peter is

about you and I knowing what God knows, and others seeing what God sees. God wants us to know what He knows about our faith; therefore, life for a Christian has been designed with trials that will bring grief to us. Peter will say there will be times when we wonder if it can get any hotter than it is at this point. But he wants us to remember that God has His eye on you, and He has His foot controlling the circumstances of our lives. God wants to see His reflection in our lives so He tries our faith, because there is a good chance none of us has a faith that is 99.9% pure yet; there are a lot of alloys mixed in. Therefore, He has designed our lives for those alloys to rise to the top so we can skim them off, so we can know what He knows; He wants to see His reflection in our lives. He is also doing this so others can see what He sees. When God tries your faith and it gets hot, He is not just doing it to let you know what He is doing and what He knows; He is doing it to let others see what He sees, and that is Him in you. Most people will never really see Christ in you as long as you live a life exempt from suffering. It is in your times of trials, in your time of testing, when life really gets hot, it is in those moments that God has designed you to reflect His glory, His reflection, to others. Therefore, I am going to call this lesson in 1st Peter, Reflecting His Reflection.

The letter divides into two parts, as many of the writings of the New Testament do when it comes to letters. The first part of the letter is about our identity. Peter was a fisherman, so he put a twist on it. In the first part of the book in chapter 1:1-2:10, it deals with our identity and His example, meaning God, the Father's example. The Father's identity, the Father's character is your example of your identity. When you look at the Father, you realize that is the character you are supposed to reflect in all your situations. How many times do we fail to do that? Then when we come to the second part of the letter in chapter 2:11-5:14, it is now going to deal with our behavior. Again, Peter puts another twist. Twice, when he talks about our behavior, he is going to give us an example, but the example will not be God, the Father; it will be Christ, the Son. In the first part of this letter, we will discover that God, the Father, is Holy. In the second part of

the letter, we will understand that in every situation Christ faced He was sinless. So our example of reflecting His reflection is we have to remember who we are, and our example of that is God, the Father; He is holy. When you remember who you are, it affects your behavior. We ought to be reflecting the reflection of Christ in our behavior, so that in those difficult situations when our faith gets tested, we do not sin, but we live sinless. How many times have we used the actions of others as an excuse for our actions of sinfulness? It is almost as if we believe that if we could control the actions of others, we could live the life we are supposed to live! It is not going to happen. As a matter of fact, Peter is going to teach it is actually our behavior in that testing of our faith that gives an example to others of how they should be living.

Let's read two passages that give us a snapshot of how Peter viewed God, the Father and God, the Son, and how those are example for us.

Scripture

"But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy for I am holy.'" (1st Peter 1:15-16)

This next Scripture is an example of the Son.

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1st Peter 2:21-25)

This is talking about suffering unjustly, not because you sinned. There is a suffering for sin; there are consequences for sin that you will suffer. But there are times we suffer, not for any sins that we have committed. We suffer because of other people's sin. Our suffering is a consequence of what someone else has done to us. Now some of us may not like this, but it says that Jesus committed no sin when others were sinning against Him, which means, you and I never have an excuse to let the actions of others to cause us to sin, never.

Our Identity in Christ

I could just campout in the first part of 1st Peter; it is absolutely mind boggling as Peter talks about our identity in Christ. He is going to use no less than six descriptions of us, as the people of God, and how each of these descriptions tell us a little bit more about our identity in Christ. Being a fisherman, Peter wasn't afraid to put the hook in the water. He wasn't afraid to fish in the deep water. He just starts this book right out telling us he is an apostle and he is writing to, not the exiles, but to the elect exiles, those exiles who have been chosen by God. And then he tells us that being chosen is based on three things:

1. The Choice of God, the Father
2. The Sanctification of the Holy Spirit

He came upon us, set us apart, and caused us to respond to the gospel of Christ when we heard it preached.

3. The Redemption in Christ Jesus

- **Exiles**

This word, exile, in the Greek New Testament, actually means to be a foreigner. Most of us have never been foreigners unless you have traveled overseas, but you may have had a foreigner move in your neighborhood, or you might work with one. Foreigners are different. That is the word

here; we are elect foreigners, and I think the word that really captures this is, we are strangers. That is what the word means in the Greek, to be a stranger. It meant to be somebody who had moved from one country to another country and take up residence in the new country. So you actually lived in the new country, but you were different. When we get to chapter 2:11 (which talks about our behavior), the first thing Peter does is to remind us who we are, and he calls us "*exiles*," and "*sojourners*." In other words, sojourner is a little different this word, stranger or exile. The word, sojourner, means you are a foreigner in another country, but you are just passing through that country. You never put down roots in that country. Now this is kind of odd. Why did Peter use two different words that mean two different things when he referred to who we are? One means you are a foreigner who is passing through a country but you never settle down in that country, never take up residence in that country. The other word means you are a foreigner who is living among the natives, taking up residence in that country. Doesn't that sound like a contradiction? Remember that Peter is a fisherman. You see, fisherman don't have to follow all the rules of syntax, grammar, and context. So this fisherman puts two words that are completely different together, trying to tell us that we are a part of the community in which we live, but we are not part of the culture in which we live. He is trying to tell us that as Christians living in this community, we should not be like the community even though we are a part of the community; we are different.

- **Born Again to a Living Hope and Inheritance**

You are different because God, by His mercy, caused you to be born again. I get tickled when people seem to believe they are the first cause in their salvation of being born again. Peter would take issue with you. Yes, you have a choice in your salvation, but you have a choice in your salvation because of His choice of you. Do you understand that? He caused us to be birthed again. You see, we live in a community, but we are not like the culture because we have experienced a spiritual birth, we have been born from above. We have been born of God.

Peter says that we have a living hope. We have an inheritance that is reserved for us in Heaven. It is undefiled, unfading, and incorruptible. It is reserved for you. Peter says that God is not guarding your inheritance, you can trust it is safe; no, God is guarding you. While you are in this community, the power of God is actually safe guarding you so that one day when this life is over for you, or Jesus comes back, you will be with Him forever. Peter believes knowing that God is guarding us ought to bring great joy to us. We don't guard ourselves, God is guarding us so that one day we will have and receive our full inheritance. We will have the salvation of our souls. Peter says to rejoice in that, but know why you are rejoicing because there will be times that life is going to be tough.

You see, God guards you by His power through faith, and the key is faith. Wouldn't it be terrible to believe you had a faith that caused you to be right with God, but you really weren't right with God? I really believe with all my heart that there are some people who just don't get it. They have not read enough of the Scripture to fully understand what saving faith really is and what it looks like. There are a whole lot of people who are under the impression that they are going to live with God forever and ever, and they are not. In all of my years of doing this, I have been in church many times where a lot of us believe there are people who are not right with God and are not going to live with God forever. But I have never been to a funeral where someone says the person who died wasn't right with God. I have never been to a funeral where somebody came up to me and said that their loved one is in Hell, or they didn't know Christ. We always talk about how they are not suffering anymore, how much better off they are. In the Church, we know people who are lost, but in the funeral homes, we don't know anyone who is lost. Listen, God wants you to know! How do you know? You will know because He is going to put the squeeze on you. He has designed life to get hot, and as life gets hot, you come to understand that God is testing your faith. He knows whether or not you have faith, He also knows the degree of faith you have. He knows the alloys that are in your faith. He knows the things that need to come out

that are in you that you don't know is in there, so He allows life to heat up. And when it heats up, Peter says you are going to grieve for a little while. This is a believer, we have joy, and yet we grieve. We grieve, yet we have joy, two polar opposites. You see, in the midst of our grieving, if we understand what the trial is about, it causes us to rejoice because God is trying to tell us that He is purifying our faith! As a matter of fact, is that not what Jesus told Peter was going to happen? Did he not say after you are converted, strengthen the brethren? I mean Peter made a big flop. Confessed loyalty to Christ, said he would die for Him, and then he panicked and fled, and Christ said when you get over it, I want you to strengthen others. That is why he is writing this letter, because he knows there will be times in the beginning of our faith where we are going to fall flat on our face, and yes, we are going to examine our faith. Peter wants us to know that this is normal for us as believers. As a matter of fact, if your faith is not being tested, or if in every situation you get in you blow it, you need to examine your faith.

Peter tells us the Old Testament prophets were writing about this salvation, and we are experiencing it. We are experiencing what they never experienced! Angels desire to look into this thing called salvation, and you and I wear it, we have experienced it; therefore, rejoice in the salvation of your soul!

- **Called to be Holy**

Peter says while you are rejoicing; understand that you are to be holy. You should be holy because He is holy, and he uses God as an example. If God showed up in our community, He would be a foreigner, a stranger. Jesus was a stranger, and the reason is because He is holy. I visited The Point (our youth building) Wednesday night for just a second, and one of our college students who disciple the youth was asking a group of girls the definition of holiness. Not one of those girls knew the definition. It broke my heart! The primary meaning in Scripture of holiness means 'to cut, for the purpose of making a separation.' It is like taking a piece of paper and

cutting it in half. You cut a piece of paper in half because you have a purpose for the half that you are cutting from the other half. Holiness means that God has made a cut, and the purpose of Him cutting you out of this world and separating you unto Himself is so that you would be apart, so that you would be different, or strange. You are a stranger, a part of the community but yet not like the culture of the community because you are holy as God is holy.

- **Built as a Spiritual House**

You have been birthed, you have been guarded, you have been called, and now Peter says you are being built up as a spiritual house. He talks about how we come to Jesus, a living stone who is the Cornerstone. I believe this is a play on when Jesus asked Peter, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said, "Blessed are you Simon Bar Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven." Then Jesus looked at Peter and said your name means stone, but "upon *this* rock, (meaning Himself) I will build My Church..."

When you come to Jesus you are a little pebble, a little stone, a brick, but you are coming to the Cornerstone. When you come to the cornerstone, when you come to Christ for salvation, He takes you, a brick, puts you with the other bricks, and builds us into a spiritual house, which is God's Temple.

You see, he is writing to the elect exiles, he is writing to a primarily Jewish congregation. He is reminding them, not the fact that they can physically trace your lineage to Abraham, but they can spiritually trace their lineage to Father Abraham. We are being built into a Temple to the Lord. The reason is because He wants sacrifices. He doesn't want someone to bring Him a bloody goat. No, He wants you to bring you. He wants you to bring Him a spiritual sacrifice.

- **A Royal Priesthood**

He wants us to realize that we are holy priests to God. Paul would tell us we were saints of God, and Peter would say we are priests of God. A priest ministers on behalf of God. Priests bring things to God on behalf of people. That is what you and I do. We are a nation of priests, we are strange, we are different, we are unique; we are in a class all by ourselves. We have been set apart from mundane existence to offer sacrifices that are spiritual in nature to Him. Peter says we are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people (KJV). The word, peculiar, literally means we are his possession, we belong to Him, therefore, we are different.

Why does Peter say all this? It is so that we may proclaim the excellences of Him who called us out of darkness into the light. This is who you are, this is who we are; we are elect exiles of God! We are a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a possession that belongs to God for the purpose of proclaiming the excellences of His name. How many times do we forget that? We think we are here to make a living, or take care of our kids, or play sports, or...but no, those are just platforms God gives you. Your home, your work place, where you recreate, where you vacation, that is just your stage, your platform to reveal to others what God knows about you, which is that you are His, you are a believer.

Our Behavior

- **Abstinence**

Now most people won't believe what we say, most people want to see something in action. This is what the second part of the letter is about; it is about action. It is about your behavior, living up to whom you know you are. I think this last part of the book is kind of tough. When it starts off, he says right off the bat, "*abstain*," not from sex, but from every fleshly passion that wars against your flesh. Peter is quite frank here. You know those fleshly urges you have that come from the unredeemed part of you which will not be redeemed until Christ comes back, Peter says that there

is a war going on, and to abstain from them. It is pure and simple, don't follow the urges of your flesh because they war against your soul. Your soul, here, is your mind, your emotions, your will. It is the real you. There is a battle within you between your unredeemed flesh and who you really are in Christ. Peter is telling us not to follow those urges, not even once, abstain from them. So in the Church, we practice abstinence from fleshly desires.

- **Submission to Authority**

Honestly, I struggle a little bit with the next thing Peter says. He tells us to be subject to human institutions. It is kind of tough to be subject a human institution of government that you do not believe is godly. If we think that we have it bad, can you imagine being a Christian during the day of Rome? Can you imagine what was going to happen when Nero began to sit on the throne? Peter says whether it be the emperor, the judges, or the magistrate, subject yourself to them.

Then Peter particularly talks about the servants. He tells servants to subject themselves to their masters. Then he tells wives to subject themselves to their husbands. Honestly, when covering home life, work life, and social life, there is not much left. He tells husbands to dwell with their wives with understanding. There should never be a man who says they can't live without her, but can't live with her. There should never be a man who says he doesn't understand his wife. The Bible says you *should* understand your wife. The Bible says that is the key to living with her.

Peter is telling us as Christians that the first thing that is going to happen to us as we live out our identity is there will be an understanding about authority and order in society, whether at work or at home. He says someone has got to be 'under,' in order for there to be order. Who is under? All of us are under the government, all of us are under our employers, and at home, all wives are under our husbands. But husbands, you are to dwell with her with understanding.

Then Peter gives us the example of Christ. He says there are going to be times at work that you are going to suffer unjustly. What is going to happen to you will not be your fault, but you will take the brunt of someone else's actions. When your boss or your co-worker gets in your face, you are going to want to get back into their face. If you have ever done that, shame on you. The Bible says that Christ is our example that we should follow in His steps. Peter says when Christ was reviled, He didn't revile back, and when they harmed Him, He didn't threaten back. Jesus continued to entrust Himself to God who judges justly.

Again, my premise is that most of us blame our sin on somebody else. I am saying that according to Peter, there is a two-fold purpose for someone else's sin in your life. First, it reveals your level of faith and trust in God. Secondly, it is an opportunity for you and you're suffering in that situation to be used, redemptively, in their life by God, because the example Peter gives is that Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. Christ suffered, not for His sin, but for our sin.

Now when you suffer for your sin, you deserve it. But when you suffer for someone else's sins, you don't deserve it. You have to remain under other people's sins, realizing it is an opportunity God is going to use to strengthen and refine your faith, but you also make yourself available for Him to use you to bring redemption to them. When you get in someone else's face because they were in your face first, they forget they were in your face and they think you are wrong for being in their face. There is no conviction on their behalf of what they just did because of the way you just acted. You just sinned and relieved them of their sin! Now, they actually think it was ok to do what they did because of you! And you did it; you brought it on yourself because you were sinful in that situation, not sinless like Christ is. Wives quit blaming your husbands. Employees quit blaming you work conditions. Understand that God has ordained the circumstances of your life to a degree for Him to know what He knows about you, and for others to see what He sees in you, and that is His reflection.

- **Suffer for Righteousness Sake**

Peter talks suffering for the rest of the letter, suffering for righteousness sake, and suffering as a Christian. Again, he uses Christ as an example of how the righteous suffer for the unrighteous, and how He suffered once so that He might bring us to God. In your time of suffering, you are not supposed to revile. The word, "*revile*," means 'insulted, slandered, or blamed.' 1st Peter 3:9 says when you are reviled, you are supposed to bless. Then Peter says, "*...to this you were called.*" You have not been called to repay evil for evil, or an insult with an insult; sin for sin. You and I have been called to a higher standard. It is a standard that when other people are sinning against us, we are supposed to be a blessing to them. The word, bless, in the Greek New Testament means 'to speak well of.' How many times do you speak well of those who cause you suffering? There is probably not a one of us. The Bible says that in those moments, we are supposed to guard the way we talk. What should come out of our mouth should be a blessing to the person who just caused us to suffer because they have sinned against us. When we do this, as our faith becomes more pure before our co-workers, our wife, our husband, and our children, they begin to look at our life, and in that moment when it gets the hottest, they see the reflection of God in us. Wow!

Peter closes by telling us to clothe ourselves with humility, and to bring ourselves under our spiritual elders. Listen to what they are saying! It isn't just about when we gather together as a church. When it really counts is when we scatter and we go back home, or back to work, or back to school and live this thing out. Where are you at in your walk? Do you fully understand who you are in Christ? Do you fully understand the great salvation He has given you? 1st Peter 4 says we can actually arm ourselves with the thinking of Christ. When we get to that place when we don't revile back, when we don't sin when we are suffering, that is when we come to the point where we have ceased from sin and are no longer following the desires of our flesh, we are no longer protecting or defending ourselves, and we are exercising the will of God.

Finally, Peter says I have revealed to you the true grace of God. The true grace of God does not exempt you from suffering. The true grace of God gives you the power in suffering to reflect His reflection. That is God's grace. Then Peter says to stand firm in grace. I want you to see yourself standing in a lake, and it is a lake of grace. How deep are you in God's grace? How deep are you in God's enabling power? Are you in ankle deep, knee deep, waist high, up to your shoulders, up to their neck in grace? God's grace enables you to reflect His reflection in all your circumstances. It can get so hot that you can destroy gold, but it can never get so hot that if your faith is real, your faith will be destroyed. There are some impurities in us and it has to get really hot before we ever know they are there. If we don't know they are there, we will never deal with them. Deal with what God has brought to the surface. Claim the grace of God and life out what you know is truly about you. You are holy and you can be victorious.