

# Our Identity: What we need to know about why we are who we are!



**1 Peter 1:1-2**

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Let's open our Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 1. We are going to be looking at just two verses this morning. Listen to what God's Word says.

## **Scripture**

***"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,***

***To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 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."***

I just want to say right off that I like the way the ancients wrote letters better than the way we write letters. Have any of you ever gone to the mailbox, got a letter from someone, had your name on it but there was no

return address? Now, let's say you open that letter and it's a three-page letter, do any of you do what I do and not read the three pages of the letter, but you immediately turn to the last page, look at the bottom of the third page and see who it's from? Because now let's be honest—many times, who that letter is from is going to change the attitude we're going to have as we read this letter. There are letters I get, depending on who it's from, that I just can't wait to see what you have to say to me. But sometimes, it's like...oh no...I brace myself. I don't read it immediately because I'm thinking this is not going to be good. That is not how biblical letters work. If you received a biblical letter, in the beginning, it told you who it was from, then they put your name second, then they greeted you, and then told you what they wanted to tell you in the letter. In our letters, we write who it's to (a greeting) "Dear Chad, how you doing?" Then we have the body, and then at the end we put our name.

So, here's what we know—this letter is from Peter. Now, Peter is going to give us a short description of who he is and this is going to be the basis on why we should listen to him in what he's going to say. Peter is an apostle of Jesus Christ. You remember Jesus called disciples, and then from those disciples, He chose twelve and He spent a lot of time with the twelve. He personally trained them. He told them that when He went away it was actually going to be to their advantage because the Holy Spirit was going to come and would teach them and remind them of everything that Jesus said. And then, the disciples were with Jesus when He died on that cross. They visited the tomb, they saw Him ascend back to His Father's right hand side, and they waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit. So Peter is writing to a group of people, reminding them that he is Jesus's authorized representative to say what he's going to say. The only office of leadership that's identified as *of* Jesus Christ we see in Scripture is the apostle—not a pastor, not a teacher, not an evangelist, not a missionary—only an apostle. So if I could say this and not offend anyone, when Jesus went back to Heaven, He gave His apostles power of attorney so that they can act on His behalf in His absence. Whatever they said, whatever they did, they were representing Him, so getting this letter from Peter is just like receiving a letter from Jesus.

Now, when I read "Peter," before I even read "an apostle" I think of something else. I think of the guy who denied Jesus three times. How about you? I think of the guy who opened his mouth when he should have been quiet and Jesus had to say to him... *Get behind me, Satan! For what's coming out of your mouth is the thinking of man, it's not the thinking of God.* I also think of Peter on the mountain with Jesus in that holy moment when Moses and Elijah appeared. And all of a sudden, Jesus's earthly body can no longer hide His deity and His deity begins to shine through that earthly body. Instead of falling down and worshiping Jesus, what does Peter do? He wants to enter a building program and build a tabernacle for each one. So God the Father has to say shut up! Do you not know who this is? This is my Son—listen to Him! Wow.

Now, let's give Peter a little credit. He walked on the water. I know you're saying he took his eyes off Jesus, he started to sink, and he prayed save me and the Lord did, but he had enough faith to get out of the boat. Remember that one time when he got it right, they were at Caesarea Philippi and all of those pagan idols were in the background, and Jesus says, "But who do you say I am?" And this time he got it right. He said, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God." And Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven." Do you remember what He said to him? You are Peter (stone, pebble), but on *this* rock, I am going to build my ecclesia, my church, and the gates of Hades shall not stop it, shall not prevail against it. Then He looks to Peter and says I give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatever you bind down here is going to be bound up there, and whatever you loose down here is going to be loosed up there. With these keys, you're going to make an eternal difference in people's lives. Have you ever thought about this? Have you ever give your keys to your car or to your house to someone? Can you imagine Jesus given to Peter the keys of the Kingdom of God? That guy who denied Him three times, after the resurrection and in the presence of Jesus, he declared his love three times, and he was elected to be the keynote speaker on the day of Pentecost. And when the dust settled on that day, three thousand souls were saved, baptized, and added to the church. Wow! When the gospel went down to Samaria, who was it that went to

verify if this was really a work of God? John and Peter—and when Peter laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. Who was it that God showed the sheet from Heaven and chose him to be the messenger to go to the house of Cornelius and open the door of salvation to the Gentiles? It was Peter...and he is writing a letter.

Now, I'm going to be totally honest with you, I'm going to enjoy this, you're going to enjoy this, because Peter's more like us, amen? Sometimes we can't identify with Paul. He was that Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was that Pharisee. He was that scholar. He used words that we don't sometimes understand—but not Peter. He's just an old fisherman...and he was called to be a fisher of men. I love this! Can you imagine the nature of Peter to be a fisherman? You know, he would go home and his wife would ask how big the fish was. He would probably say it was |———| big, and it was really only |—| big. You know how fishermen are, right? They exaggerate a lot. Yet now, under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, Peter, no exaggeration, is going to speak on behalf of Jesus. And you can trust what he tells us because he's being superseded by the Holy Spirit of God as he writes this letter. So, you aren't going to be listening to me and Kory, you aren't even going to be listening to Peter—you're going to be listening to the very words of Jesus!

Who is this letter written to? Elect exiles of the dispersion and Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and Asia. Now, I want to make sure you know where this is on the map so we're going to show you a modern map.



Everything north of the Mediterranean Sea is Europe, and then south of the Mediterranean Sea is Africa. Now, if you look over here to the very eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, you see Israel down in the southeast corner and then above Israel, you see Lebanon, and you see Syria. Now, you see this region right above called Turkey below the black sea. Modern-day Turkey is this region Peter is talking about. Now, you know Turkey and the Black Sea are in the news a lot now because if you go north of the Black Sea, you see that Peninsula and above that is the Ukraine. If you go the east, that's Russia. If you come back to the west, that's Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. There's a lot of attention because of what's going on in this part of the world right now. So, please understand Peter's writing to exiles who are scattered throughout this part of the Roman Empire. This would have been the Southeast corner of the Roman Empire at this time.

Now, notice how Peter identifies the group he's writing to. He identifies them with the word, exile. Exile is an interesting word. It's a word that's literally a compound word and it means to be alongside a people who are not your people. That's what it means to be an exile, to be living alongside a group of people, but the group of people you're living alongside aren't your people. They're not native to you. Their cultures are different. Their ways are different. They're not your people. Now, this word for dispersion talks about the scattering of these exiles. Now, being raised in the church and being people of the Old Testament, we understand that because of their sin against God there was a time when He dispersed Israel throughout the known world at that time, under the exile plan of the Assyrians. Because of that, there are a lot of scholars who believe Peter, being apostle to the Jews, is actually writing to Jewish people who are scattered in this part of the world that are a remnant of the Old Testament people. Other scholars believe that this book doesn't just have a Jewish identity it has a Gentile identity, and therefore there are Gentiles who are living this part of the Roman Empire and Peter is identifying them now as exiles. They're not there because of sin, necessarily, they could be there because of the persecution that arose in Acts chapter 8, or they could be living there by choice. But Peter wants this group of believers, most likely

Jewish and Gentile believers but primarily Gentile believers, to know—you are not at home. You're an exile.

Now, I don't know what you believe, but I believe the Holy Spirit led Peter to write this letter to this group of people, but the Holy Spirit didn't just intend for it to be to this group of people, He also intended it to be for you and me as well. So now we're going to see the modern picture, a bigger picture—God has believers who aren't just scattered in modern day Turkey; He has believers who are scattered all over the world, Jewish believers and Gentile believers, and we are the church because God fulfilled His purpose to Abraham and sent them a Messiah. And when the Messiah came, He didn't come just to save Jews He came to save Gentiles. And not just to save Gentiles to make us the servants of the Jews and them sit at the table and us serve them...no. He broke down that racial distinction, He broke down that hostility between Jews and Gentiles, because the intention of putting Jesus on the cross was to redeem a people from Jews and the Gentiles and create a new body, and the new body is not a nation called Israel, it's a body called the church.

So now, the church is scattered all over the world, and you and I just have to happen to live in this region of the world. But God wants us to understand that we are not at home here. We are exiles. Now, I want to be totally honest with you...this is very hard for us because we live in the United States of America. We believe we live in what used to be called the Bible Belt of America. We believe our nation was founded by people who sought God and therefore God has blessed this nation, and so we have a home worth fighting for. This is *our* home and we are the protectors of this land, we are the protectors of this nation, so we are going to struggle with this letter because this letter's going to remind this isn't home. When you travel somewhere and your heart turns back home, it shouldn't turn back to Dexter, Hardin, Murray, Benton, or to Southern Illinois or down in Tennessee—when our heart turns to home, it should turn to Heaven. We are citizens of Heaven. Yes, we have dual citizenship as we have an earthly citizenship here, but this isn't home. If we would just stop and look around (if we're living out faith in Christ), we are not living among people like us. The majority is not like us. You see that at work, you see that at family

events, you see that at ball games, you see that at school events. So, Peter is writing on behalf of Jesus to remind us of who we really are in our very nature, which is we are exiles. We need to see ourselves as scattered throughout this world we live in, and we are scattered for a purpose. The overall message of this book is going to be that as an exile we need to stand firm in the fallen world in which we live.

Notice that Peter didn't just call us exiles, he calls us elect exiles. I just want you to let those two words register for just moment, elect exile. It's almost a contradiction because to be an exile means you live with a group of people who are not your people, and as you live a distinct life from them, pretty soon you're going to realize you're going to be rejected, most likely. On one hand, we're in a group of people but we're not like them. On the other hand, he's not using the word that conveys rejection he uses a word that means to be chosen, to be selected. This word basically means you have a group of things or a group of people and the chooser makes a selection. The ones that he or she selects now take the name chosen, elected, selected. Peter is writing to the chosen exiles, the selected exiles, the elect exiles, not just exiles. There have already been a lot of people in modern Turkey who had identified as an exile but that's not who he's writing to—among those exiles, he's writing to a group who is *elect*. They are chosen.

I left home this morning and did not have a title to this sermon. Scott tries to text me before I leave for church on Sunday mornings so that he doesn't cause me to text and drive. This morning, he sent me the text: "Title?" I texted back: "Don't have one." I wrestled all the way to church trying to come up with one. I want titles to my messages to convey the very essence of the message in as few words as possible so that if you can just remember the title you remember the essence of the message. Now, I'm not going to tell you what I really wanted to call this, but my second choice is - Our identity: What we need to know about why we are who we are. Peter doesn't just say, '*Hey, you elect exiles,*' and then give them a greeting and go into the body of the message. No...identity is so important to Peter that he's now going to tell them what they need to know about

why they are who they are. So what we're going to do now is give you the foundation, the very basis of your identity as an elect exile.

Now, I'm going to be as careful as I can to stick to the text, but I want to say this—to be a Christian you don't have to interpret this the way I interpret this. If you want to be wrong, you can be wrong 😊 it will not affect your salvation. I surfed the internet a lot last night and I would read a sermon that would talk about verse 1, and then it would go to verse 3 and completely leave out verse 2, with the exception of “grace and peace be multiplied to you.” I can't do that. For the last forty years, this church has decided we were going to preach through books of the Bible chapter by chapter, paragraph by paragraph, verse by verse, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, word for word. We are not going to be a church where you come to hear what your pastor thinks. To the best of our ability, we're going to labor the teaching side of this church to base everything we say and believe on God's Word. And because of that, I can't lighten this at all. I can't serve you a grapefruit this morning. I can't serve you frosted flakes or Cheerios with little banana slices. It's going to be ham, country ham, bacon, eggs, sausage, hash browns, and hopefully a grapefruit and bananas.

Listen to what Peter believes. He believes you know that the basis of your identity is important. And you know my heart—I believe in identity. For so many years, I was deceived into believing that I was just an old sinner, saved by the grace of God, and ultimately when I sinned it was okay for me to sin because that's just the way I am. I was a whole lot like Bobby Cunningham, who was a whole lot like Garnet Cunningham, who was a whole lot like Albert Cunningham! There were just some traits in our family that wasn't all good, and praise God there's no condemnation for those who believe in Jesus Christ! It's not the Bible. The Bible talks about a transformation that takes place when you turn from sin and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and the best way to describe you now is you are a saint of God. It is not your nature to want to sin. It's your nature to want to do right. You do not want to live according to your unredeemed flesh; you want to live according to the Spirit God. The reason you want to is because in your nature you're alive to God and dead to sin. You're not



dead to God and alive to sin anymore! Yes, we will still sin from time to time, occasionally, but when we do, it will break our heart. It will drive us to the cross. We will confess, be clean, pick ourselves up, and have grace and mercy to continue on to become who God wants us to be! So Peter is not going to just call us elect exiles, he's not even going to just call us the church, he's not going to just call us saints, he's going to tell us why this is true of us, why we are who we are.

Now Peter, the guy who has power of attorney from Jesus to represent Him, says this in verse 2, "...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood..." Mrs. Linda, my grammar teacher at Calloway, was one of the people who taught me how to diagram sentences. You can't make these phrases modify "Peter" or "an apostle." It can only identify one source, and that's the "elect exiles" who are scattered throughout what we call modern Turkey. I think it refers to us as well who are scattered throughout the world. Here's what you need to know about why you are who you are, an elect exile—it's according to the foreknowledge of God. Peter does not trace this back to a moment in your life where you did something for God; he traces this back to God and His foreknowledge. I just want you to let that register. You are who you are, not because of what you did for God but because of what God did for you. Most of the time in our churches, we go back to the cross but Peter goes further than the cross; he goes back to the foreknowledge of God.

Paul does the same thing. I'm amazed that if you read Ephesians 1:3, Paul is going to say blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and next week when we get to verse 3 in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, Peter is going to say blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in Ephesians 1 starting in verse 4, Paul's going to talk about our salvation and the work of God the Father, the work of God the Son, and the work of God the Holy Spirit, and how God's work for our salvation is to the praise of the glory of His grace and He is to be blessed. Peter talks about our identity being based on the work of the Father, the work of the Spirit, and the work of the Son and then he says blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't miss what Peter is saying here, and don't leave here today

mad or angry at God or questioning God because the person representing Jesus who is writing this says next, after what he just says, "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" I pray that after we hear what we're going to hear today it's going to cause us to bless God. Why am I an elect exile? Why are you an elect exile? It's according to the foreknowledge of God.

Now, I want to be as clear as I can be and as brief as I can be so no one misunderstands. There is a side of the church, and you may be in this side, that wants to identify foreknowledge as God having the ability with His knowledge to look down into the corridor of time and see everyone who is going to hear the gospel and believe the gospel, and then He made a choice of those people to elect them based on their faith in Jesus Christ. That's not true, and that's not what this means. Now, I want to be clear...does God have the ability? Yes, He has ability to look down in the corridor of time. God being God sees all things from His perspective, past, present, and future, amen? But let me just tell you what would happen, based on Scripture, if God looked down into time and saw people, sinners, He would see they are spiritually dead in sin. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2 teaches that natural man can't receive the things of the Spirit of God. He doesn't have the ability. Paul said how many righteous are there? None. How many understand? None. How many of them seek God? None. How many fall short? All. So I want to be crystal clear here—if you make this God looking down the corridor of time, here's what God sees—nobody comes to faith in Jesus! Nobody.

And yes, God knew that...but that's not what this is talking about. In the Bible, "know" is used not just to express facts about things or facts about people, but it is used to express intimate knowledge of, a covenant relationship with. For example, in Amos 3:2, God says to the nation of Israel, "You only have I known of all the families on the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." How many of you believe this means of all the nations? The only nation God knew anything about and what they were doing was the nation of Israel. Do any of you believe God did not know what the Gentiles were doing? No. It's not what that means. What does it mean? You had all these nations on the Earth and there was only

one nation that God had an intimate relationship with, and that was the nation of Israel. Because He was their Father, and because of His covenant with them, He saw their sin and He decided He was going to punish them for all their iniquities. Why? Because He had an intimate relationship with them. Does everybody agreed that's what this is talking about? Why was God not punishing the Gentile nation? He didn't have a covenant relationship with them, just Israel. They were the only family (in Old Testament times) He had a relationship with.

Now, let's take it back to Genesis 4:1. I love this..."Now Adam knew Eve his wife..." She had red hair, freckles, she weighed ninety-eight pounds, and she was four foot, ten inches tall. No, no, no...Adam knew his wife and what? "...she conceived..." This word, "know," is being used to talk about intimacy, a relationship, a personal relationship with. Now, you can disagree with this but I believe the New Testament teaches our identity is based on God, before the foundation of the world, having an intimate relationship with you and I, and He set his covenant love upon us. He knew when He created us that we would sin, He knew the state of depravity that would come upon us, and yet when He looked at us as sinners, He made a choice of us. And that's why we are who we are.

Peter is writing to a group of people are going to suffer; therefore our theme is going to be stand firm in a fallen world. Paul was also writing to a group of people who were suffering and he says it this way, "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." How many of you love that verse? How many of you just love to camp out, start a fire, and think about that verse from time to time? Wow...all things work together for good. I love God, amen! That promise is not to the whole world; it's just the one group of people—those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. If you love God, it's because you are called according to His purpose. Paul did not let you think you love God because of anything rooted in you; Paul make sure you understand the reason you love God is because you've been called according to God's purpose! Now, why do all things work together for good? The next verse tells us. Paul said "for those whom He foreknew." Those whom He had set His covenant relationship on before the foundation

of the world, those whom He had chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (the Book of Revelation says) before the foundation of the world, He also predestined. So those He set His covenant love upon, He predestined that we would be conformed to the image of His Son so that He, Jesus, might be the firstborn among many brothers! I love this! Now, I know this is an old illustration I have used before, but it's the picture of Granny Bogard's table and all of the family trying to get around that table and Granddaddy Bogard sitting at the head of the table. Nobody sat at the head of the table except Granddaddy Bogard. There's a big family in Heaven, and do you know who's going to sit at the head of the table? Jesus! And the table is going to be full of brothers who are just like Jesus because God set His covenant love upon a group of sinners and determined they were going to be like Christ before He ever created the world! Those people that He blueprinted to be like Christ, He also called. And those whom He called, He also justified. Those whom He justified, He also glorified.

In Romans chapter 9, there were two boys in the belly of their mama and they had done nothing good or evil, Paul said, and God made a sovereign choice to love one and reject the other. Why? For purpose of God according to election, not human will, or human exertion, but God's purpose of election, God's purpose of choosing, God's love, and choice of saving His covenant love upon people. Then we fast forward to two men, one Moses, and one pharaoh. God chose to be merciful to Moses and He chose to harden Pharaoh's heart because of His will.

Now, I shouldn't say this but I'm going to because there are just some things you can say when you have been here a long time and you're sixty-two years of age—I would love to change the name of Hardin Baptist Church. The name I would like for it to be that I think really captures what we really believe, according to the Bible, is Hardin Baptist Church: A freewill Baptist church. I would like to put that on our two vans. I would love to put that on a big old sign out on the four lane! I can't do that because it would be misunderstood but you would know what I'm talking about, right? We believe salvation is rooted in the free will of God. Now, let me ask you a question. Do you want it anywhere else? Those of you who

have free choice, how many of you make the right choice every time? How many of you do it most of the time? Are you raising any kids? How are they doing? Why are we fighting against God's Word and wanting to root salvation in the free choice of man rather than being where it is in the free will of God? Can God who is holy, holy, holy, ever make a wrong decision? Can He ever make a wrong choice? No. His choice of you isn't rooted in you and you being better than somebody else; His choice is rooted in Him. This ought to humble you and it ought to make you bless Him who is the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"...in sanctification of the Spirit." This isn't talk about sanctification to where we become a believer and then God moves us further and further away from the image of Adam, and more and more into the image of Jesus. That is a work of the Holy Spirit in your life as a believer. This refers to the initial act of salvation. God the Father made a choice of you, and in making a choice of you, He sent His Holy Spirit into your life as a dead sinner, separated from Him, selfish. He convicted you of being a sinner. He made you aware of the only way to be made right is by putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Then He told you about the judgment that He had already judged Satan in this world. Judgment has already taken place and now you can be free from His judgement and you can be righteous with God by putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Because of the Holy Spirit setting you apart, making you holy, you are who you are. Praise God, He didn't leave us in sin! Praise God, He didn't give us what we deserve, and that's justice! Praise God, He loved us enough to step into our life, not with the general call of the gospel but with an effectual call that accomplished God's purpose in your life! He brought you to faith in Jesus. For me, it was March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1974, and you know when it happened to you.

Why? "...for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood." This isn't works-based salvation. The reason God chose you, the reason God unleashed the Holy Spirit on you is so that you come to faith in Jesus. In Romans 1:5, Paul says the very reason God called me to be apostle is to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations. Then when he closes his letter, he talks again about what God did in sending Jesus to

bring the nations to the obedience of faith. Listen to me...a group of people asked Jesus what must we do to work the works of God? And Jesus said, "This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent." Do you remember the message of Jesus? Repent. Repent. You can't turn without trusting, so do you know what it means to obey Jesus? It means to turn from self and trust Jesus. When you do that, you've done what He wants you to do. Quit trusting in you and totally trust in what He did on the cross to make you who you are in your identity.

And so you will be sprinkled with the blood...this is not referring to baptism. We're not going to debate Methodist with sprinkling or immersion. This is a reference back to the first covenant. In the first covenant, Moses went up on the mountain, got the law, came back down, and gave it to the people. They had a blood sacrifice, they had a bowl full of blood, and all the people said we will do what God said. That meant they were accepting being part of God's covenant people. Moses took that blood in those bowls and he just poured it, sprinkled it, all over the people, and when those people received that blood they knew they were part of God's covenant people.

Listen to this...God chose you before the foundation of the world. He sent the Holy Spirit into your life personally to call you out of sin to faith in Jesus. When you put your faith in Jesus, God sprinkled you with the blood of the new covenant. You are a covenant person! You're part of the covenant people of God, and therefore as we live in this world, we suddenly realize we are not like these people. We don't do holy huddles. We don't retreat. We recognize this is who we are. We are exiles. We live in this group of people but we never become like this group of people because we're part of the covenant people of God. When you know that, you will stand firm as the world continues to fall all around us. It's not going to get any better, it's only going to get worse, and this is going to be the moment. God's got us here for a reason, and that's to demonstrate we are an exile, and to bring honor glory to Him.