

Standing in the True Grace of God



Bro. Ricky Cunningham
1 Peter 5:12–14

I don't know about you, but I'm a person who genuinely likes water. Therefore, when I'm around water, like let's say a swimming pool, a river, a lake, or an ocean, I'm always watching how other people respond to water. I've noticed that a lot of people do not have the same fascination for water that I have. When I really see this is when I go to the Amazon River (love that river), but not everybody responds to the river like I do. Neither do people respond to swimming pools, lakes, or oceans like I do. Have you ever noticed there are some people who can be surrounded by water and they'll never get in? They're comfortable on it, they're comfortable beside it, they're comfortable around it, but they just don't get in it. Then, there are those people who might get in but before they actually get into it, they test it. You know what I'm talking about. Depending on what their toes say or feel, they decide to either stay out or to get in. Then, there are those people who seem like their only comfort level in water is about ankle deep. Then, you see the knee deep people. Then, there are the waist deep people. And then, there are those rare ones who are like up to their neck people. Finally, there are those who are way

in over their head. Now which one would you be, when it comes to water in a swimming pool? Are you just as comfortable in a river like the Amazon as you would be in a swimming pool? What about the ocean? Now, have you noticed how we have taken those measurements and those reactions to water, and we have expressions we use that talk about other things—like have any of you ever said, “I’m only going knee deep with you into this.” That expression is letting them know I am not all in. Have you ever said to somebody, “I’m up to my neck with you?” That’s an expression that basically means I’m just about done. Now, have any of you ever been in over your head? In our culture, that means I don’t know what I’m doing. We’re going to take those measurements and those thoughts and apply them, not to water but to the grace of God.

The sermon title this morning is Standing in the True Grace of God. As you know, I don’t send the tech team the title of the sermon until early Sunday morning. Well, to them it’s late Sunday morning, but to me it’s early Sunday morning. But this week, I had the title Monday so this was really, really neat for me. As we end this sermon series about elect exiles, let’s see how Peter concludes his letter and I think you’ll see where I got the title.

Scripture

“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. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love.”

With these last three verses, Peter concludes his letter with these words “By Silvanus, a faithful brother...I have written briefly...exhorting and declaring...the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.” With this word “By,” scholars are not exactly sure if Peter is saying Silvanus (also known as Silas in the book of Acts) is the one who has taken pen and paper and writing out this letter after listening to Peter. Is that what Peter means? Or, did Peter write the letter and then give it to Silas knowing Silas is going to take it to the elect exiles who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire? Or

did he do both? Now, most scholars are going to believe that Silas actually penned the letter, but the words were Peter's words, because it was very common in that day for the speaker to be speaking to someone who had better penmanship than they.

Here's why the scholars believe Silas wrote the letter not Peter, even though it's Peter's words—it's because Peter was a Galilean, he was a fisherman. Not to discredit anybody here who makes their living fishing, but fishermen just were not the most educated people in that society and did not have access to really great Greek skills. Therefore, most scholars who read this in the Greek say Peter could not have written this; Silas did. But here's what we know...it's still Peter's words. Some of you have gone to the Hardin website and looked up an old sermon I have preached, and you can hit the READ button and you'll never hear my grammar mistakes. The reason is because the people who transcribe our sermons and put them to paper take my broken English and they smooth that out. That's probably what Silas did. He was a faithful brother.

Now, you and I already knew that because we've read the book of Acts. In chapter 15, the church had been wrestling with whether or not to add Law to Gentiles who were coming into the church, which was primarily Jewish, so they had that council in Jerusalem. When they made their decision, they sent Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch and they sent Judas and Silas with them. Silas was actually commissioned to go and preach the Word; he was a prophet, so to speak. Then, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about one of their traveling companions, Mark. See, earlier Mark had gotten homesick and wanted to go back home and see mama, and so when they all got ready to leave on a mission trip and Mark wanted to go, Paul said no to Barnabas and they got into a fight. Do you remember who Paul took with him? He took Silas (Barnabas took Mark). Therefore, when we read chapters 15, 16, 17, 18 of the book of Acts, we see Silas a lot.

So we now understand that Silas has been with Peter in the location he's at and he's the one who's written this brief letter down, and now he's getting ready to take it to these elect exiles scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Now this is a brief letter. There are just five chapters in this brief writing, but I want you to hear what Peter says he's been doing—he's

been exhorting and he's been declaring the Word. Exhort literally means to encourage and it comes from a Greek word that means to come alongside in order to aid, to help, to give counsel, or to give advice. The word, declare, means to make known. So in this letter that he's writing, he's coming alongside the church to make known something to them, and he says it's brief. It's taken the preaching pastors of this church 21 Sundays to preach through this brief letter, preaching on average 35 to 40 minutes per Sunday. We have spent almost 14 hours encouraging and making known this brief letter to you. I like to think that when Silas delivered this letter to these elect exiles and he read it to them, I have to believe somebody in the back said... *Whoa, whoa, whoa. What? What does that mean?* So it's possible that Silas did what Kory, Chris, and I have been doing over the last 21 Sundays—that is taking this brief letter and expounding it—and I like to believe it took hours and hours for Silas to actually deliver the brief writing.

What's the writing about...what has Peter been making known to the church? He's been making known to the church the true grace of God, and then he gives us this command stand firm in it—not by it, not near it, not around it—in it. For Peter to have to put that adjective in front of grace, “true” grace of God, I have to believe he knew that there were some churches that were not adequately declaring the true grace of God and that the grace of God was being misunderstood, so Peter's writing to declare the true grace. Peter mentions the word, “grace,” nine times in this letter. Let me ask you this question. While we were preaching these previous 20 sermons on 1st Peter, if someone had asked you what Peter was trying to do in this letter to the elect exiles, how many of you would've said he's trying to encourage them and make known to them the true grace of God? Would you have picked another subject? Would you have said it's about suffering? Would you have said it's about being chosen? This book has been about the true grace of God. So can I just say this to us as a church? If we disagree or struggle with this book, it means we don't fully understand the true grace of God. If you teach or believe, or practice something contrary to this book, you are not standing in the true grace of God. When we talk about grace with someone, many of us like to go to the book of Ephesians, or the book of Romans, and we like to appeal to Paul.

Yet this Galilean fisherman tells us he has come alongside us to give us help so that we'll know what's the true grace of God. Then, once we know what that true grace is, he wants us to stand in it.

Now, look what Peter says in the next verse, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen [elect], sends you greetings..." Some scholars believe that Peter here is referring to his wife. We know from the gospels that Peter was married and had a wife, and we also know from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth that she traveled with Peter. That's why some scholars believe the reference is Peter saying... *Hey, my wife's saying hi to you as well*. We don't talk much about Peter's wife. This is a book about the grace of God. It is possible that this is Peter's wife or another female in Babylon—but I, like most scholars, believe he's referring to the church. The church is referred to in the Bible as the *bride* of Christ, a *she*—it's referred to as a lady. So no doubt Peter here is identifying where he's writing from, which is Babylon, and he's not the only one worried about the elect exiles who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire; he wants them to know that the *church* in Babylon is also concerned about them and sends their greetings. Now here, Babylon is probably being used by Peter as a metaphor for the city of Rome. Peter is writing to these elect exiles who are facing some tremendous persecution, but Peter and the church in Rome are at the seat of power of where the persecution comes from—the Roman Empire. He just wants them to know that he and the church there identify with what they're suffering, and the church sends their greetings. And notice, Peter reminds them that the church in Rome has been chosen too; they've been elected just like they have.

So Peter begins his introduction by reminding us who we are—we are elect exiles—and now in concluding, he again lets us know that being part of the church we are elect. God made a choice of us before we made our choice of Him. And then, Peter identifies someone else with him, Mark, and he calls him his son. Now you remember Mark. That's John Mark, the guy I referred to earlier who went on a mission trip with Paul and Barnabas and he got homesick and wanted to go home. Paul thought he was a mama's boy. After he went home and they got ready to go again, Paul would not let him go with him and Barnabas wanted to take him. They came to

blows, not physically, but emotionally they got in a heated discussion, a sharp disagreement. They cut each other in their remarks and Paul held his ground. He took Silas and Barnabas (praise God for the Barnabas's of the world) took John Mark. Yes, Mark had made a mistake but Barnabas believed God had redeemed him and took him with him. This same Mark, who Paul will make up with later in his ministry, is now with Peter and Peter looks at him as a son, not a physical son, but a spiritual son. This Mark is the one who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Most scholars believe that while Mark was hanging out with Peter, Peter told Mark all of his stories about Jesus. Then Mark took the initiative, under the Holy Spirit, to write those stories down so we have the gospel of Jesus according to Mark...but it's actually Peter's version of who Jesus is. Mark just wrote the story for him.

Then in verse 14, Peter said, "Greet one another with the kiss of love." I have to be honest with you; I was a little disappointed coming to church this morning. None of you kissed me. Did you know in the early days of the church in the days of the Roman Empire, when the church met together they kissed—not a romantic kiss but a holy kiss, a kiss on the cheek. That kiss on the cheek was not just when the church got together, but when you saw someone in the community you knew was a believer, you knew they were a family, you just gave them a holy kiss, a kiss on the cheek. That acknowledged you as my family member. Pretty soon, in the perverted Roman Empire, that came to be misunderstood, because you had a man kissing a girl or a woman kissing a man, and so the church stopped the holy kiss on the cheek. But when they stopped it, they replaced it with this—the Christian ladies still kissed Christian sisters and the Christian men still kissed Christian men.

Now, if we were still doing this practice, when I saw Mickey this morning, instead of me and Mickey shaking hands, Mickey would kiss me on the cheek and I would kiss Mickey on the cheek, but I would not kiss Yvette. Again, this didn't just happen in church assembly this happened in the community too; this is how you recognize each other. So get this picture...say we were out in the community at a place of business, I kiss Mickey, and Mickey kisses me. Somebody would say... *Whoa, why are those*

two guys kissing each other? I would say, "Hey, that's my brother."
...Whoa, whoa, that ain't your brother! I know who your momma and your daddy are, I know his momma and daddy, and you guys are not brothers!
"Oh yeah, we are. We're related. We got the same Father; that's God." But the culture frowned on that kind of kissing so we quit. In the church today, I see Tommy and I shake his hand or give him a hug and say, "Good to see you brother." I do a holy handshake or I do a holy hug, and that acknowledges I've got affection to you. I've got affection to you not because you're a stranger, not because I hadn't seen you all week; I've got affection toward you because you're my real brother, or you're my real sister!

I got so tickled on Friday. I was at the mall with Celisa and she was doing her thing...she was shopping. Now I was being a supportive husband being with her shopping, but I was studying while she was shopping. All of a sudden, from behind, I got a big old hug and it was a bear hug! I heard someone say, "Bro, Ricky!" I turned around but I didn't see anybody so I had to look down, and there was this little bitty beautiful girl named Ellie who comes to Hardin. She was with her grandmother and she had seen me while they were walking through the aisles—and when she saw me she just couldn't **not** hug Bro. Ricky! Oh yeah, that's the affection we should have for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the affection we have of being part of a spiritual family.

Then Covid hit...and we quit shaking hands. There's a lot of weird stuff going on in the world and we quit hugging. Now we've got a whole group of young people who don't want to hug and they don't want to shake hands. I'm not criticizing anybody here at all this morning, but if I'm being totally honest with you, the only way they want to connect is on the internet. In their little world, they've got a thousand friends, but they really have no friends. We adults are the same way. It's amazing how we want to connect on the internet, but then we come to church and don't connect with anybody. I checked with my doctors last week. I really did. In our area, Covid is almost non-existent. Are you listening to me online? It's basically non-existent. It's time to reconnect. Now, you can still catch Covid but my doctors tell me it's going to be more like the flu. It's going to be

more like a cold for the majority of us. Now, if you're high risk, I understand you don't want to hug, you don't want to shake hands; we respect that. But the majority of us in the church ought to have a way of saying I recognize you're my brother, I recognize you're my sister—we don't keep separated, we don't isolate, we don't keep a distance; we engage. We had a family meal last night in a restaurant in Murray and when we got ready to leave, Kiki and Chad just give us big hugs; Kory and Katie and the grandkids did too. That's what we ought to be doing with each other. Got it? We're family.

And then, Peter wants peace to all of us who are in Christ. He's writing to a group of people whose is being turned upside down because of their faith. He knows while there's literally war in their outside being, there can be peace, the peace of Christ on the inside. That's the end of this letter, but we would really mess everything up if we quit right now, so can we talk about the true grace of God just for a moment? That's what this whole letter's been about, the true grace of God. At Hardin, we like to say grace is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can now do what He did—live an obedient life. Yes, we believe grace is God's provision, but we believe it's more than that. We also believe it's God's enabling power. If I had time, I would take us to Romans 5 right now because verse 1 begins with our favorite word here at Hardin, “Therefore.” You know what we do at Hardin; we stop and see what it's there for. Basically, it's going to tell us we have been introduced to grace, the grace we now stand in, because we've been introduced to grace by Jesus Christ.

See, Jesus made an introduction of you to grace, and He now want you to stand in it. He doesn't want you to ever turn away from it; He wants you to stand in it. So my question to you is, how deep are you into God's grace, and are you in the true grace of God? Peter introduces us to grace in the first few verses of his letter. He's writing to people whose identity is based on them being chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus being applied to their life, which transformed them from a sinner into a saint of God. Wow, did you hear that? That's grace! Then he begins to talk about how we ought to be blessing our Father, and he says we're blessing

God because "According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." The picture here is we were dead in sin and we need to be made alive, and God reached down by His mercy. He withheld from us what we deserved, and that was to stay condemned, to stay separated from Him, and to spend eternity separated from Him forever and ever and ever. But God, by His grace, gave us mercy and He brought new life to us! He birthed us. We were born from above and we have a new life, we have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ! And through faith, we're being guarded; we're being kept for this salvation that will be revealed to us **fully** at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Then Peter tells us this, this is true grace—you can't just profess it; you have to possess it. To make sure you really possess it and you're not just professing it, He's going to try your faith. He's going to give you a trial. He's going to test you. Do you know why He's testing you? It's to see if you've really got faith. If your faith does not get you through an earthly trial, you had better not trust it to get you to Heaven. Most of us have quit doing this, but if you're newer to Hardin, if you're going to be Hardin, hear us. Quit arguing for the salvation of those people who are still living like sinners in the community and don't darken the doors of a church—don't take them back to a profession they made when they was little—because it's not a *profession* of faith but the *possession* of faith that brings salvation to you and brings you into a right relationship with God. The Bible says God tests us, so that when Jesus Christ comes we are fully confident our faith is in God.

Then, Peter says we're going to set our hope on the grace that's going to be revealed at the revelation of Jesus. Wow! Therefore, he says, we're going to be holy. Do you know why we're going to be holy? We're going to be holy because our Father is holy. Then he talks about how because of God's grace we have this desire to grow because we want the pure spiritual milk of God's Word. We're going to grow up into this salvation that God has given us by grace, this salvation that the prophets by grace prophesied about.

Then Peter tells us who we are. We're not just individually someone who's been born again; we're someone who, alongside others, is being put into this marvelous building called the spiritual house of God. We are a holy priesthood, and our whole nature is to offer sacrifices to God. We are a chosen race, we are a holy nation, we are a royal priesthood; we are peculiar people. Why has God done this? It's so that we would "proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

And then, Peter tells us it's going to affect your political life, it's going to affect your work life, and it's going to affect your married life. Did you hear that? Your political views ought to be based on God's grace. A few of you are outside of Scripture, politically. You do not understand the true grace of God. And then your work condition—every day as you go to work you get to reflect that you understand the true grace of God. At home? Some of you ladies who are married to men who are not completely under God's Word and they're disobedient to God's Word—you reveal the grace of God. Peter tells us husbands that we're living with somebody who's not like us. They're female, we're male, and we're supposed to live with them in an understanding way. We're supposed to give honor to them because we are heirs together of the grace of life.

Then Peter launches into suffering. He says in that moment of suffering, suffering for righteousness' sake (not suffering because of our own sin and facing the consequence), we are supposed to be ready to give an answer for the reason of hope that's within us. And there will be conflict...this health, wealth, wisdom, follow God and you'll have no problems...no, no, no! That's not biblical. What we've learned in Peter is about the true grace of God, and what the true grace of God teaches us is God has ordained you and me to suffer. He's actually ordained for us to suffer politically, He has ordained for us to suffer at work, and at times He has ordained for us to suffer at home, because in those moments we have a reason to give an answer for hope, the hope that's within us. How are you doing? This is the true grace of God. Peter wants us to understand we have an enemy and he's out to devour us, he's out to eat our lunch! Peter wants us to reveal the true grace of God, God's enabling power in you at that very moment

someone is looking at you, not understanding how you handle the situation the way you do, and here's what you know—it's not you doing it but Him doing it through you. It's God's enabling power. It's God doing for you what you cannot do for yourself so you now do what He did; live an obedient life.

Peter tells us that we've been *called* to suffer. Do you know why? We've been called to suffer because Jesus suffered. How dare you want to follow Jesus but not suffer like He suffered! It's wrong. This sovereign God we love has ordained suffering in the life of His children to reveal the faith that we have, so that in that moment of suffering others around us might be drawn to our life, and now we get to give and answer. Please hear me say this...the true grace of God turns you away from life being about you to life being about Jesus. Everything in our culture makes us want life to be about ourselves, and it's wrong.

I had three things I wanted to share with you, quickly. John Kyle was going to be leading worship this morning, and he called me on Monday and said, "Bro. Ricky, are you finishing 1st Peter?" I said, "Yes." He wanted to know what the sermon was going to be about and I already had the sermon title. So I said, "John Kyle, it's going to be Standing in Grace." John Kyle and I did not discuss what he was going to sing but I knew what John Kyle was going to do. His heart, like Matt's, was going to try to choose songs that got us ready to think about grace and what God's done for us. This morning, he introduces this powerful song I've never heard, and there was a line in there that said something like this, "I don't know what He's doing, but I know what He's done." That resonated with me. Can I tell you what my three thoughts were? My first thought was *I know what He's done for me*. Do you know what He's done for me? He put His Son on a cross in my place! He took all of my sin and His Son paid my sin debt, and God's wrath was turned from me. God took me, a sinner, transformed me into a saint, and by His grace brought me into right relationship with Him, and He remembers my sin no more!

My second thought was not only do I know what God has done for me; I know what He's doing *in* me. He's moving me further and further away from an Adam-like response to all of my circumstances, to a Christlike

response. He's moving me away from Adam, who I used to be, and He's moving me more and more into the image of Jesus because He tells me that God predestined me to be conformed to the image of His Son so that He might be the firstborn among many family members. God blueprinted my life. This is why I can say all things are working together for good in my life is because God has an ultimate plan, and His ultimate plan is to make me like Christ, and making you like Christ. Nothing can defeat that plan if you're a believer in Jesus. Amen!

So, not only do I know what God's done for me and I know what He's doing in me, but my last thought was I have no idea what He's going to do through me...and you don't either. That's kind of scary. So here's what we have to do—we have to stand in grace. We have to stand in God's enabling power. We have to stand in God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can now do what He did, and that's to live obediently to Him!

I just want to ask you...God's grace—are you in, or are you still out? Are you checking it out? Did you get in when you checked it out? See, if some of you would be honest, you're just about ankle deep into grace, and you're still trying to do this on your own. Some of you got in up to your knees, and some of you are in up to your waist, but some of you have no desire to be up to your neck because when you get there, there's only one next place to be, and that's in over your head. Do you know what in over our head means? You have no idea how to handle life. You have no idea what's next. So do you know what I'm going to do? I'm in grace, so I'm going to depend on God's enabling power. I'm going to truly depend on God doing for me what I cannot do for myself. I'm going depend...then I can do what He did. Then, I'm just going to see what I have no idea about and that's what God wants to do through me. Where are you at in the pool, the river, the lake, the ocean of God's grace? Yes there's a devil and yes there's some suffering, but it's all covered by grace. It's time this community and it's time this nation saw the true grace of God.