

The First Letter From Peter

HOPE AND HOLINESS.

Notes & Thoughts

(The Unpreached Series)

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These notes have been produced from my personal study of Peter's first letter assisted by William Barclay's Daily Study Bible, Early Christian Letters by Tom Wright, various study Bibles and some of the multitude of resources available in e-Sword.

This is not intended to be an academic work, but it is hoped that the reader may gain a deeper and practical insight into God's Word.

Overview:

This letter is about Hope and Holiness. Hope, because there was persecution going on and those who were suffering under it needed encouragement to press on. It is also about Holiness. Peter devotes quite a bit space in this letter to describing how a follower of Jesus ought to behave or respond to specific situations. This is so that the Christian's life and lifestyle will expose the accusations against them as being false.

Peter covers what we enjoy, what we endure and what we are expected to do. Having received this priceless inheritance, he points out what we need to do with it. He reminds us that what is going on now in this life, in this world, is not the end point, but rather a waypoint.

Hope and Holiness.

1 Peter 1:1-5

1:1-2 Holiness

Peter identifies himself as the author of this letter and an apostle. Right up front, he says who he is and establishes his authority as one sent out by Christ; one who saw and heard all that Jesus said and did during His ministry years and one who witnessed both Christ's suffering and resurrection. The point here for us is that we need to take the contents of this letter seriously. For the most part the issues addressed by Peter cut across generations and cultures and remain relevant to us throughout the ages.

There are two points to note regarding the recipients of this letter. They were 'God's chosen people' and they were 'living as foreigners'. These people were scattered throughout the region we now know as Turkey, but their geographic position is less important than their spiritual position. The primary thing is that *God chose them*. We read in [2 Thessalonians 2:13](#) about being chosen before the foundation of the world and in [Psalm 139:13](#) about God knitting us together in the womb. God has a deep connectedness and interest in us, right from the word go – no, even before that. God knows our makeup, He knows our experiences, He sees the whole picture at once and knows who will choose to walk with Him and who will choose not to. In the same way, you also have been chosen, predestined, set apart for a special purpose tailor made to fit you perfectly.

As well as having been especially chosen, they were also living amongst a people that they were not a part of. They had been called out to be different from those with whom they dwelled. They had a purpose and a destiny outside and beyond anything their neighbours had, yet they remained living alongside them. They were citizens of another nation living in exile, looking towards their eventual return home, but expected to make the most of their time where they were.

This sense of dual citizenship or temporary residency needs to be my mindset as well. All that I engage in while living in this country needs to be with a view to how it will influence things in my true and final home. It's so easy to be caught up in the culture, to be "squeezed into mould" of those around me. Yet I have been called, my choice known even before it was given to me, not so that I could blend in, but so that I can stand out!

We are called to be holy and holiness is about being set apart, it's about being different, it's about being reserved for a special purpose. This purpose God had in mind when He foresaw my choice before He began to form the world. This holiness, this difference, this purpose we have is not something generated by our own desires or strength. The Holy Spirit, as He takes possession, sets us apart and empowers us for the tasks appointed, but it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His life poured out, that cleans the house of your life so that the Spirit can take up residence.

This process of cleaning and living in is what is known as *sanctification*. It is an ongoing process, not a one-off event. Certainly, there is an initial start point where

there is often dramatic transformation, but throughout this process we are 'changed from glory into glory'¹ so that 'We shall be like Him'².

It is at this point of transformation that the Grace part of the equation comes into effect. None of us deserve this kind of second chance restoration, yet it is made available to all. The farther along this road I go, the more I realise just how much of God's patience I have required and just how much more I still need to rely on. God's Grace is not just about His provision for my shortcomings, it is also about His provision for each day's need – whether that need be physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. Every resource I need to cope with every situation I find myself in is available in the Father through Christ. It is this certainty of provision, this confidence that I *can* cast all my cares on Him³ that brings about peace. The more I rely on His Grace to provide, the more I give to Him my worries, the more I experience His gracious provision, the more I will have confidence in His absolute faithfulness to provide, the more I will experience that Peace beyond comprehension⁴.

1:3 Regeneration

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, deserves our praise. He has earned it by, among other things, demonstrating His great mercy to us. This mercy restores us to what we were originally intended to be to such an extent that it is likened to being born again. That phrase has been used and abused so much over the years that it I think it has lost some of its meaning. We could perhaps more accurately render the Greek as 'regenerated', rather like Spock's rebirth in Start Trek 3. OK, you may not have seen it, or would rather not admit to having seen it, so it's probably not the best analogy. So what exactly did Christ do for us?

Php 2:8-9 NAS77 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (9) Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

It was Christ's willingness to submit to the Father, even to the most humiliating death, that brought about His promotion above all else and it is Christ's resurrection that proves that we will receive an eternal inheritance of life. His regeneration is also proof of our own – a welcome encouragement when I see just how much more work is required in my own life! Continuing on with Philipians 2 we see the purpose in Christ's promotion:

Php 2:10-11 NAS77 that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, (11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ's lordship is not debatable. He is Lord, even though my actions at times do not reflect that. Yet God displays His mercy even when I reject Christ's authority over how I live my life. Paul writes of this in Romans 5:

Rom 5:6-11 NLT When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. (7) Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. (8) But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (9) And since we have

¹ [2Co 3:18](#)

² [1Jo 3:2](#)

³ [1Pe 5:7](#)

⁴ [Phi 4:7](#)

been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation. (10) For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son. (11) So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

The logic here is that if the Father went out of His way to help us when we were still His enemies, what will He do for us now we are His friends? Again, from Romans:

Rom 8:32 CEV God did not keep back his own Son, but he gave him for us. If God did this, won't he freely give us everything else?

This raises a couple of questions in my mind. Firstly, how can I *not* pour out praise to such a God as this? And secondly, how can I reject His absolute claim over me when He has sacrificed so much to rescue me?

1:4 Inheritance.

Now rescued, we have something beyond ourselves to live for, something to look forward to no matter how bleak things get here. Christ's resurrection is proof of our regeneration and also of our eternal life. There can be no doubt of the reality of Christ's resurrection – Peter the author of this letter, was a witness of it himself.

An inheritance is promised when the will is made, the will is executed on the death of the testator – the one who made it. Yet the inheritance is not received unless the beneficiary has come of age, and is kept in trust until that time. The New Will, or as we're more used to calling it, the New Testament, was executed when Jesus was. The thing is, as Children of God, we have not 'grown up' yet, we are not 'of age'. So our inheritance is kept in trust until that time when we become fully mature. How long will that be exactly? Well, there are a couple of references that should help us with that:

2Co 3:18 NLT So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image.

1Jn 3:2 NLT Dear friends, we are already God's children, but He has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is.

You will be 'fully mature' or come of age when you have completed that process of becoming like Christ. Not a clone, but an individual who has completely the same priorities. In this life, in this sin-wracked world, the transformation is ongoing, and our inheritance is kept in trust. But we only have to ask in order to receive all that we need from it now.

1:5 The Power and the Imperishable

That precious Gift of God to you, your Faith, is the channel through which God's power flows. It doesn't always *feel* like it though, does it? Things go wrong, sickness and other difficulties of all kinds strike at the least convenient times it seems. So what kind of protection is Peter referring to here? I don't think that physical protection would be uppermost in his mind considering the persecution that the recipients of this letter were going through. Physical protection is not a given, even for those who follow Jesus. Many who follow Jesus have been and are being tortured and murdered for their faith. Natural disasters don't skirt around God's

people either. However, these things are not cause for alarm, Jesus knows what is ahead for each of us and has the power to get us through.

Joh 16:33 NLT I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

Paul had learnt the secret of being content in whatever situation he found himself in and the Peace that Jesus gives was fundamental to that:

Php 4:6-7 NLT Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. (7) Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

The battle we are in is not a physical battle therefore we do not necessarily need physical protection as a priority. This guarding of heart and mind is vital in keeping that which is on *God's* heart at the forefront of *our* thoughts. We can have great confidence that whatever situation we are confronted with here and now, God's power has secured our future. And our future is an inheritance that cannot be polluted, that cannot be invaded or stolen, it cannot break down or deteriorate – it cannot be shaken.

There are references to our inheritance throughout scripture, yet they give just a small glimpse of what the Father has prepared for us. It isn't clear exactly how it will look, yet in the end when we finally take possession of it, all will be clear and all will see what we have been anticipating for so long.

1Pe 1:6 NLT

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while.

Pure Gold, Pure Faith.

1 Peter 1:6-13

1:6-7 Pure Gold

Gold. What makes it valuable? It looks good, it doesn't corrode, it's easily shaped and it's highly conductive. They are attributes that make it desirable, but gold's desirability combined with its rarity is what makes it so valuable. Simply, there is not that much gold to go around. It comes down to the old supply and demand thing – the more people there are who want something and the less there is of it, the more valuable a commodity becomes. Peter states, "Your faith is far more valuable than mere gold." So from that we can figure out that genuine faith is likely to be both highly desirable and extremely rare.

Attractive, conductive Faith *is* a rare thing and it is only obtained at great cost. Peter refers to 'many trials' – not just a few. Perseverance through many difficulties demonstrates the kind of consistency that God requires in us. An occasional victory in a rare difficulty does not build up the kind of character that the Father is seeking to develop in you. What you need to hang on to when going through the difficult times, which will surely come, is that none of it is new. Have a look at Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians:

1Co 10:11-13 NLT These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age. **(12)** If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. **(13)** The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.

The Greek word translated as 'temptations' in this passage from Corinthians is the same word that Peter used in verse 6 where it is translated as 'trials'. It's about putting someone to the test, proving their abilities. This is the kind of process that Job went through. His experience was not punishment; it was to demonstrate and strengthen his character. In my trade, we test hydraulic pipes by putting more pressure into them than they will ever face when in service. We prove that any heat treatment process carried out has done its job before we use the part. As those who would follow Jesus' example, our testing and proving is an on-going thing and not a one off occurrence because it is integral to the on-going process of our spiritual growth.

You can take heart from Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians, because it shows that whatever test you face it is by no means unique to you. Others have faced the same test and passed, possibly after many attempts, but passed nonetheless. Christ Jesus has faced the same tests and not only passed, but *overcame*. There is *nothing* is too hard or too big that God's Grace can't bring you through.

1:8-12 Pure Faith

Trusting in help for testing times is one aspect of faith, Peter goes on to commend his readers for another. There is an implied comparison between himself and his readers here – Peter had walked with Jesus, seen Him and knew Him while the recipients of this letter had not, though none of them could actually see Jesus now. Yet they still loved Jesus, they still trusted Him even without any physical presence. Peter is encouraging this confidence in what they hoped for, he is reassuring them of

what they did not yet see. This is exactly what faith is, as the writer to the Hebrews put so clearly:

Heb 11:1 NLT Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.

Far from being something irrational or imaginary, Faith gives substance to the things that have been promised that we do not yet hold. Faith in Jesus Christ gives a solid confidence on which we build our relationship with the Father. It gives us certainty of the reward that He has promised. This confidence and certainty grows as it is purified and strengthened by testing – we do not suffer in vain, there *is* a hope and a future.

Each time we approach Easter and are reminded again of the historical fact of Christ's crucifixion, it is well worth being reminded that there is also more to that event – there is also the Resurrection. The Apostle Paul took great pains to get that clear to the church in Corinth:

1Co 15:12-20 NLT But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? **(13)** For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. **(14)** And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. **(15)** And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. **(16)** And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. **(17)** And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. **(18)** In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! **(19)** *And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.* **(20)** But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

Clearly, there is much more to our existence than the Now. There is something far greater, infinitely more permanent than this shadow land we currently dwell in. Holding on to that perspective is not always easy; the day-to-day cares of this life at times threaten overwhelm and block our view of what is finally in store.

For those who originally forecast the Great Event of the coming, suffering and victory of Christ, it was their primary focus. Imagine having word of your favourite musician or band coming to perform one concert only – one that would surely be a sell-out. How much effort would you put in to finding out when it was and how to get tickets? What if after all of your searching and investigation you found that you would not be able to go, but you children or grandchildren could? OK, it's a pretty weak analogy, because there has been no other event in history that comes close to the Good News of the arrival and sacrifice of the Son of God, but perhaps it can give a small taste of what those prophets may have felt.

1:13 Pure Attitude

All of this must provoke some kind of response from us. Peter spends much of the rest of this letter detailing what is required from those of us who would follow Christ but in verse 13 he has distilled it down to its essence:

1Pe 1:13 GNB So then, have your minds ready for action. Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

A more direct translation here is 'bind up your thinking'. You would all have seen the long, flowing clothing that is traditionally middle-eastern? Even today, there are many who wear that kind of clothing – frankly, it is probably the most comfortable thing to wear in that environment. You would also have noticed that no athlete runs in a dress! I'm not sure if anyone has tried to, I know I haven't, but I'm pretty sure it would be less than ideal.

Peter is trying to give a mental image of preparing for action. Tucking up those things that get in the way so they do not impede our progress. The New Living Translation, which is one of my favourites, says, 'So think clearly and exercise self-control'. That's where we need to be. That's how to maintain that Eternal Perspective when the weeds of this world threaten to choke the life out of us. That's what the prophets of old would have needed to do as they searched for details of this Gracious Salvation that they longed for and we have received.

This is a precious thing indeed that we have been given. Purchased at great cost, far more durable than gold, yet only a few seek it out. We need to live to change that.

The Perfect Example and the Perfect Solution

1 Peter 1:14-25

The best way to learn something new is to be shown how to do it and then to have a go at it yourself. Sometimes you can nut it out from the instructions, but if you can see how it's done it is so much quicker to grasp. Not only has God told us how to live, He has shown us how to live and has provided the means to do so.

However, people have a tendency to slip back into what is comfortable and familiar, whether that is the comfort of a set of Rules or a familiar Lifestyle. There's plenty in Scripture that warns us against that, but this one is particularly relevant to today's passage:

Gal 5:1 NLT So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.

Compare that with what Peter has to say in verse 14:

1Pe 1:14 GNB Be obedient to God, and do not allow your lives to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant.

Now Paul is writing about slavishly following the Old Testament Law and Peter is specifically referring to a godless lifestyle. They are both about conforming to an old life, which is best left behind. It's one thing if that is all you know – how else can you live if you are ignorant of any other possibility? Yet once having come to know what is absolutely true, that which gives absolute freedom, there is no excuse to go back to a life based on ignorance.

Leaving the familiar and comfortable behind is not easy though. It can be a huge wrench. Remember this: God never requires us to do anything or maintain a particular standard of behaviour without His providing the resources to do so.

It is God Himself who sets the standard, and it is nothing less than the example He has given us in Christ Jesus. Some dads want their sons to follow in their footsteps for purely selfish reasons – living vicariously through their children, doing things through them they themselves could not. Yet the Father calls us to live to the highest standards for our own good and these standards are the ones He is the very embodiment of. Holiness isn't comfortable or easy – it costs:

Mat 10:24-25 NLT "Students are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master. (25) Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master. And since I, the master of the household, have been called the prince of demons, the members of My household will be called by even worse names!

Joh 15:20 NLT Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted Me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to Me, they would listen to you.

Following Jesus' example will cost, yet it's benefits will outlast anything that we have here and now. And we are not being asked to pay any more than He has already paid to secure our release from slavery. By the same token, we are not being asked to pay any less either.

Since the price of our freedom was so costly, we must treat both it and the One who

secured it with respect. Familiarity can breed contempt, and we need to be careful that our intimacy with the Father does not mean that we take Him for granted or neglect what He requires of us. Peter gives quite a strong warning in verse 17 that The Father has no favourites. He deals with all of His kids with the same standard consistently. We can't even do the 'play Mum off Dad' game that kids do with natural parents either! We are expected to follow the Father's example of Holiness even as The Son has.

Note also that the judgement or reward mentioned in verse 17 depends on what we do. [Matthew 25:31-46](#) and [1 Corinthians 3:11-15](#) both speak of reward and judgement based on what we have or have not done. This is quite separate from the issue of salvation as Paul clearly states in Corinthians:

1Co 3:11-15 NLT For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. (12) Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. (13) But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. (14) If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. (15) But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. ***The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.***

Once again I want to point out that God never requires us to do anything or maintain a particular standard of behaviour without His providing the resources to do so.

Here's the thing – God Himself has made provision for you to live the kind of life and to do the work here that He has made ready for you. We know this because he has given us His Word – His promises and His instructions are here in black and white and cannot be changed at our whim. It is because of the permanence of God's Word, it is because of its certainty, and it is because when God speaks His words *always* achieve their intention that we can be absolutely certain of our Salvation and Sanctification. Their source is from the very Word of God that 'remains forever'.

It should not seem odd that an all-knowing, all-loving God should have made preparation for these things to be available to us well before they were even needed. Even before the foundations of Creation were laid down, Love had planned our Rescue. This event that literally shook the world, that we remember every Easter, was not God's Plan B. Christ's torturous murder and subsequent resurrection stand at the very epicentre of history. They are indeed both the focal point and purpose of creation. God didn't suddenly have to figure out what to do next when our original ancestors committed the Mother of all Rebellions, it was already woven into the tapestry of His Purpose.

Eph 3:10-12 NLT God's purpose in all this was to use the church to ***display His wisdom*** in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (11) ***This was His eternal plan***, which He carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. (12) Because of Christ and our faith in Him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.

And again, from Romans 3:

Rom 3:25-26 NLT For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed His life, shedding His blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when He held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, (26) for He was looking ahead

and including them in what He would do in this present time. **God did this to demonstrate His righteousness**, for He Himself is fair and just, and He declares sinners to be right in His sight when they believe in Jesus.

There are two things here about this Plan that God has had since Eternity. The first is that God's plan was to display His Wisdom; the second is that it was to demonstrate His Righteousness, or Justice. *It's not about us at all.*

Given that, and given that the cost of buying us out of slavery was the precious sacrifice of Christ, there is an expected response from us. This response is one of both *Faith* in His ability to help us and *Hope* for eternity because of His own resurrection. These two things are the starting point, but our 'sojourn' does not end there.

What grows out of this new faith and hope is *Love*. These three things are the things that Paul tells us in [1 Corinthians 13:13](#) will last forever, or remain after everything else has gone. The more I study the Bible, the more these three things keep coming up, to the point that I believe the whole of our Scripture could be distilled down into these three words. Faith, Hope and Love will not fade away or be finished with, but will be consummated or made complete at the end of time. These then are the things that are worth pursuing. They are active words, not passive thoughts or emotions and when we are filled with them they produce action on our part. In verse 22:

1Pe 1:22 NLT You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must **show sincere love to each other** as brothers and sisters. **Love each other deeply with all your heart.**

Why Love? Because these people are going to be living with you for an eternity, so you'd better learn how to get along with them now. Seriously though, English lets us down here in the translation from the Greek. It's very easy to miss the distinction in this verse between a brotherly affection or *philadelphia* and *agapáo*, 'to esteem, love, indicating a direction of the will and finding one's joy in something or someone'. So we are expected to have a genuine affection for those who are our family in Christ. More than that, we are expected to direct our wills, that is, to make a determined and consistent choice, to find our joy in doing what is in their best interest. Even to those who are our enemies. Again I'll ask, "Why?" Simply and seriously, that is what Jesus did and it is *His* example we are to follow.

Rom 5:8-10 NLT But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were **still sinners**. (9) And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation. (10) For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son **while we were still His enemies**, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son.

Not only is it the example that Christ set for us, it is His *command*:

Joh 13:34 NLT So now I am giving you a new commandment: **Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.**

The thought, the logic, the reason behind all that God has said – the very embodiment of His Words, that is, Christ, has commanded us to follow His extreme example of intentional, sacrificial love. These words spoken by God's Word *cannot* be superseded or fade into irrelevancy. It is by the Power of this Word that we have been rescued; it is by the power of this Word that we must live.

We have been placed on this planet for just a short time, we have been chosen by the Father with a particular purpose in mind. Yet the command and the example that we have is to engage in something that will last beyond all that we can see and touch here. There is an expectation that we will have a genuine affection for those close to us, but there is more than that. We are called to purposefully and deliberately seek what is best for others, even those who hate us.

With all the stuff that we chase after that is temporary, decays, breaks, and is superseded even before we buy it we really ought to be seeking out the stuff that lasts. We need to grow in faith, to live in hope and to act in love.

"Three things will last forever – faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love.

Growth and Community 1 Peter 2:1-10

The last time we looked at this letter, we considered the perfect example provided by Christ and the perfect means for us to be able to follow His example. Moving into chapter two, we find the first few verses follow on from the end of chapter one, rather than forming the start of chapter two. Still, it will be helpful to consider them before looking at the bulk of this passage.

2:1-3 Nutrition and Growth.

There are a number of passages throughout the Word that use this kind of hunger picture. [Psalm 42:1](#) we have a very thirsty deer longing for a cool, refreshing drink and [34:8](#) urges us to 'taste and see that the Lord is Good'. There are passages from Paul ([1Cor 3:2](#)) and the Writer of Hebrews ([Heb 5:12](#); [6:1-3](#)) that admonish their readers for not maturing, for still needing only milk and not progressing to solid food. This is what Paul had to say:

1Co 3:1-3 NLT Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. (2) I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, (3) for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

There was a serious problem with the spiritual growth of the Corinthian church when Paul wrote this and it showed in their behaviour. I don't believe that maturity is the issue with Peter's readers, although they may have been relatively new believers. Rather, I'm convinced it's about having a persistent longing that can only be filled by one thing.

Those of you that have or have had babies know just how annoying and persistent a hungry baby is. (Hungry teenagers are not much better by the way). It's no coincidence that a baby's cry is one of the world's most annoying sounds – if it wasn't you wouldn't try so hard to make it stop! Young babies have only one need food wise and there is only one source for it. Mum is all-sufficient for their immediate need – there is no-one else that will do.

This is where Peter is coming from. Our hunger must be for the Spiritual Nutrition that God Himself provides. Sure there is other food out there, but it will not adequately meet our needs, it will not provide everything required for health and growth. Filling yourself junk food will in the long term damage your health – that's as true for the spiritual as it is for the physical.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied⁵'. God's Word alone satisfies this hunger for righteousness. In the passage from 1 Corinthians, their spiritual diet is directly linked to their behaviour. The same applies to us also. When we feed from the Bread of Life we grow and deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy and unkind speech die off.

⁵ [Matthew 5:6](#)

2:4-10 Community

If you could sum up the purpose of our existence in one word, what word would you choose? There are plenty of good answers, but it really boils down to this one thing: Relationship. We were created for relationship, both with God and with each other. There's another word that we can use that goes hand in hand with this concept of relationship and that is Community.

From the beginning in the Garden, to the end of the story in the Eternal City we see that God's intention is for us to exist in community.

Gen 2:18 NLT Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."

My mum used to say that God said after He made Adam, "That's good, but I can do better..." The point is that we were always intended to function at our best when working with others.

Ecc 4:9-12 NLT Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. (10) If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. (11) Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? (12) A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

There should be no doubt as to whom the third strand of the cord is! And also in Proverbs:

Pro 27:17 NLT As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.

Nothing has changed under the New Covenant. We still need each other; we still need to exist in community in order to function at our best.

Heb 10:20-23 NLT Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise. (24) Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. (25) And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near.

This spurring one another on, or provoking one another to love and good deeds is vital for each one of us if we really want to finish this pilgrimage and be part of the Eternal Community. In Genesis, God makes a bride for Adam, thus creating the very first community. In the Revelation ([Rev 21:9-11](#)), we have God providing the Bride for the Lamb, the Second Adam, bringing together the final community. There is such a beautiful symmetry in Scripture.

Peter uses some unusual imagery from verse four. The quotes he gives are from a number of Old Testament passages, some of which originally referred to Israel, but have subsequently been applied to Christ Jesus. The references to stone and buildings are very interesting; particularly in light of our need for community and the way buildings are built.

Now, I am by no means an expert on buildings, but I do know a bit about aircraft structures, and as much as I might want to give you a brief on monocoque and

semi-monocoque construction, I will spare you that. Physics works regardless of what it is that you are building so I reckon I can make up what I don't know from what I do know.

Peter refers to Christ as 'the living cornerstone of God's temple'. He also refers to us as 'living stones that God is building into His into His spiritual temple'. We are called 'God's Temple' because we are where God dwells ([1Co 3:16](#)).

So this especially chosen, Precious Corner Stone is the primary structure, or foundation, of the living building we call the Church. Without that secure foundation, there is not enough strength in the structure for it to endure the stresses that will be placed on it when pressed into service. There are many stones, each one a different shape, which nonetheless fits into the structure perfectly. Each one takes up some of the load that is placed on the whole building. If any stone (apart from the Corner Stone) is missing the structure as a whole will survive, but it will be weakened.

One stone on its own is not a wall. Each stone is needed to be in its place, to do its job and provide support to the stones around it and also strengthen the wall as whole. But we are Living Stones, not a cold collection of minerals. Therefore, as we grow, we grow into the wall as God shapes us and places us exactly where He needs us. Our lives are shaped to fit better, to give more support to others around us as we learn how to better help in strengthening the weaknesses of nearby stones.

Let's think about being a Temple. There are two things that are normally associated with a temple – sacrifice and priests. What is it that priests do? They act as an intermediary between the people and God. Their job is to show the way to God, to lead people in the required sacrifice and acts of service that are required to please God. That description is valid for whatever religion you consider. There is one very significant difference with us though. We are a 'kingdom of priests' ([Rev 5:10](#)), that means *all of us* have the task of pointing people to God and *all of us* are required to offer sacrifices. How we do that will be different for each one of us, but the generic job description is the same:

...Show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

As God's Holy Priests, what sacrifices are we required to make? I mean, it's not like we have to be slaughtering sheep and burning them on a regular basis – Christ's own sacrifice has done away with the need to do that. Two passages in particular come to mind:

Rom 12:1 NLT And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.

Heb 13:15-16 NLT Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to His name. **(16)** And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.

Both of these verses anticipate a change in behaviour, shifting our thinking from what suits us to what pleases God. It's about using all of the gifts and resources

that have been given – including finances, the physical body you have and your mental capacity.

The way we speak to others, looking to encourage and build each other up is one way. Using your voice in singing is another. Physical gifts including the ability to work, or dance, or scrapbook, can also be used to honour God. Sharing financially with those in need is certainly part of sacrifice, as seen in [Philippians 4:18](#). Here Paul describes the gift they sent to him as a 'sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God'. There are countless ways in which we can, and do offer sacrifices to God and often it is as part of our priestly duty of pointing out the way to God.

We are a distinct people group, especially chosen to represent God to the Nations around us. Each one of us has a unique and important part in this Living Structure that we are being built into that displays the goodness and mercy of God.

'Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy'.

Reputation and Respect 1 Peter 2:11-17

Previously in the first part of this chapter, we looked at our identity in Christ and this community that we exist in, where our primary source of strength is Christ. In this community we are also supported by one another as each of us is shaped and fitted into our unique place. This is the kind of community that we should expect to emerge as God's Kingdom continues to be revealed. As Peter goes on he adds more detail to how we can expect this community of believers to look like, how we are to function.

We have in this passage something of an overview, a synopsis, of the next section of this letter. Peter gives us a brief sketch of how we should act, of what our attitude to authority should be and why. Over the next chapter or two he fleshes out the details as they relate to specific groups of people, but here we have those details distilled to the essentials.

Honouring God involves doing so in every aspect of your life. Every word, every activity, every decision, every relationship needs to come under the influence of the Holy Spirit if we are to live in a way that pleases God. Paul's advice to Timothy applies to all of us, no matter what age we are:

1Ti 4:12 NLT Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

Speech, conduct, love, faith and purity – these five things are the indicators of what kind of person I am. These things, whether good or bad, stand out. Even if I try to cover them up, their truth *will* come out. Because of his responsibilities in the Church, Timothy was specifically required to model an example to believers, as Paul did, but the requirement to set an example to the world around us extends to every believer, as we shall see.

Verse 11-12 Reputation – The Battle.

In verse 11, Peter is not urging us to stay away from 'fleshly desires' because it would be a bad example, although that is also true. His concern is for the damage that giving in to them does to us. John gives us a bit more detail of what these desires are, without going into specifics:

1Jn 2:15-17 NASB Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

'The World' – is everything that is outside of 'The Kingdom'. The cravings that my body has, the longings I have for the things I can see and the arrogance that comes with possessing those things actually fight against the very core of my being. There's no doubt that we are at war, a war fought in the spiritual dimension, fought with spiritual weapons. This picture is throughout Scripture:

2Ti 2:3-4 NLT Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them.

Something that is particularly important when I've deployed overseas is how the locals see us. We had some quite strict rules as to how we were to behave, where we could go, what we could and couldn't do – things that civilian expatriates for the most part didn't have to worry about. We were foreign military in their country and even though we were not fighting them, we risked the whole task group's presence there if we did not do the right thing.

We are in a war, a battle for our souls. These desires that Peter refers to in verse 11 move us in the opposite direction from the one the Spirit would have us go. If we submit to them we cannot obey the Spirit and lose much of the effectiveness that we would otherwise have had. More importantly, we cannot please the One who commissioned us when we get involved in such things. Indeed, we risk the mission of the whole Task Group that we call the Church.

Know too that we are under constant observation by those around us. Everything we do will be weighed up to see if it aligns with what we say. This why actions count as much as attitude, why our behaviour must be more than just good – it needs to be excellent, fine, harmoniously balanced, even beautiful. How we live matters, because it is not just our reputation that is on the line, but Christ's as well.

Verse 13-17 Respect.

How we function as part of the broader society is vital. Whether we live in a democracy or a dictatorship we need to fulfil our obligations as citizens. Keeping in mind of course that we hold a dual citizenship and that our first Loyalty is to the King of all Kings.

There are rules in some countries that forbid saying negative things about the rulers. How much less political reporting would we have if that were the case here! There are many revolutions going on at the moment that all seem to involve a great deal of violence and suffering and seem to result in yet another corrupt government being put in place. The World sees injustice and reacts with physical violence. Christ calls us to a different approach.

In his letter to Titus, Paul links obedience to the State with doing what is good. That's not always as easy as it seems – especially when the posted speed limit is ridiculously low! The reason for this requirement to submit can be found in Romans 13:1-2

Rom 13:1-2 NLT Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. (2) So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished.

'Those in positions of authority have been placed there by God'. Yes, even the ones we don't like, even the one who do us harm. Keep in mind that Peter's readers were under the authority of none other than Nero and still he urges them to 'submit to all human authority'. Rebelling against God is very widespread and people will do just about anything to justify their behaviour. It's no wonder then that protests, civil disobedience and outright rebellion against established authority are also becoming more and more widespread as people reject God's authority. In fact, the more corrupt the government, the more it matters that we follow Christ's example. Jesus

spoke out against corruption, yet He still obeyed the Laws of the day. Remember too that He suffered for it and if we are to follow Him then we also will suffer.

Our mission in all of this is to see The Kingdom break out into The World. This does not mean an armed insurrection, but rather it involves us modelling the same beautiful behaviour that Christ did. This is after all why He set us free in the first place – not to do as we please but so that we can serve God. All that Christ did and all that we are required to do comes down to one fundamental command: Love. That is the standard by which we need to measure all of our behaviour and attitudes.

Verse 17 Respect, Love and Awe.

The final verse of this section summarises what our attitudes to others must be. Those with whom we interact on a daily basis, those to whom we are accountable under the law, those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and also the One to whom all are ultimately accountable to.

Respect, esteem or honour may also be translated as 'give value to'. We are to value all people and we are to value (respect, esteem, honour) those who govern us at every level. That is not always easy to do, especially when we observe foolish choices by people and poor leadership from our government. Yet the command is there, and it's very clear. We can gain some insight into why this is so important if we look at Titus 3:1-5.

Tit 3:1-5 NLT Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. (2) They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarrelling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone. (3) Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. (4) But—"When God our Saviour revealed His kindness and love, (5) He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

Here we see some practical application of respect and love for others and also why it matters. It is because they are no different from us, or to be more accurate, they are no different from what we were before Christ stepped into our lives and started His Restoration work. It's not that we deserved His mercy and love and they did not. It's not that we did anything that that made us better than them. It was *His* Mercy, it was *His* Power, and it is *His* Spirit that is still working that Regeneration in us, just as He longs to do in *all* people.

So we need to respect, esteem and honour all people – the current resident of the Lodge in Canberra, as well as that unwashed Bogan at the local shops – *all* of them have value.

For those who are citizens of The Kingdom, something more than value is expected – Love. Specifically, that unconditional, covenant love that goes beyond any feelings and is driven instead by a determined choice. "See how these Christians love one another!" should still be the amazed exclamation from those in The World who genuinely observe us. Beautiful behaviour is indeed what we need to model.

Finally, what is our attitude to the King of Kings? The Greek word here means 'fear'. Hang on; are we supposed to be afraid of God? I think we have lost the sense of Awe that we should have in His presence. 'Familiarity breeds contempt' and we need to be very careful that we don't fall into that trap with God.

Mat 10:28 NLT Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Yes, God loves us, wants the best for us and has through Christ provided us a way to come to Him with confidence, but He is still God – the King over every king, Creator, Father, the Beginning and End of all things. Awesome, terrifying even. No one can stand up before Him. We need to keep this in mind, even as we need to keep in mind His Love and compassion for us. It's a delicate balance and people usually swing between the extremes.

I think that if we can be more afraid of the consequences of displeasing God than we are of upsetting people around us, we will be able to live the kind of Kingdom life that Jesus did, and even have the kind of influence in The World that He wants us to. It's a tricky balance, but we have His Spirit to walk with us.

Suffering for Doing Good 1 Peter 2:18-25

The verses prior to this dealt generally with the attitudes that all Christians should have towards authority. It is by having these attitudes and behaviour that we can 'silence the ignorant talk of foolish men'. Peter now moves on to deal with what is expected of specific groups of believers. This passage is about Slaves and how they should behave towards their Masters. There is however a secondary thrust to these verses that have to do with how we deal with unjust treatment or persecution.

Respecting Authority

Verse 18-20

While there are still plenty of places on the planet where slavery exists in various forms, we do not see much in Australia, and I'm pretty sure that none of us are *actually* slaves. Mind you, there are plenty who feel as if they are treated more as slaves than people! However, New Testament teaching on slaves and masters is a good basis for employee – employer relationships. That said, the word used in this passage actually refers to domestic help rather than slaves as such, so the employer – employee relationship is appropriate.

There is a consistent requirement throughout scripture for us to respect those who are in authority over us – be they an employer or elected official. Yet those same people that have been put in authority over us may at times abuse that authority. When we are suffering unjust treatment, even to the extent of outright persecution, how are we expected to respond to it? Why do we even need to go through those kind of experiences?

Paul gives us the reasons in Philippians:

Phi 3:10-11 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, (11) so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

There is a progression here. For us to genuinely know Christ we need to have a genuine understanding of what He went through for us. For us to experience the kind of power that raised Christ from the dead and to somehow experience that same kind of resurrection, we must also face the same kind of suffering. The question then is what kind of suffering? We know that Christ was without sin, so any wrong that He endured was not a consequence of poor choices, mistakes, or deliberate wrongdoing, as it has frequently been in my own case.

Action-Reaction

Here in verse 21, Peter reminds us that our destiny in Christ is '...to do good, even if it means suffering'. Here is where the rubber hits the road. Called out of the old way of life for the specific purpose of doing good stuff. We know from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that these things were in God's mind for you right from the Word Go. I think it's reasonable to deduce therefore that the One who had these works in mind also knew what difficulties would be involved in doing them.

So we have been 'called for this purpose' – what purpose, to suffer? Well, at times yes, although we see in Ephesians 2:10 that we are called, rescued and restored in

order to do good works. Christ set the example and we have eyewitness accounts of Him not only doing good works, but also suffering for it. Will good works always produce suffering for the one who does them? I don't think so and I don't think that we should be looking for ways to suffer either. What we do need to be looking for is doing what is right, regardless of the consequences.

How do we make sure that what we are doing *is* right? 'In so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men⁶ – we are to go out of our way to do what's right, and if we are genuinely motivated by Love, then opportunities to genuinely annoy those same people will be minimised. However, you can sure that if you are doing what God has called you to do, then opposition is not only likely, it is inevitable.

You see if we live the kind of godly life required of us, our very lives condemn them. It will needle their conscience. This can have two possible outcomes – one is that they will seek this kind of life for themselves. That is what we would hope for. However, there is also the likelihood that the pricking of their conscience will anger them as they resist the call for a change in lifestyle and values – here is where the danger for Christ's followers lies.

In Acts 8 and 9 we see a pattern that is often typical of the cycle that we experience – persecution and dispersion, with a period of expansion followed by a time of peace. Whether caused by spiritual influences on political systems or as a consequence of my own choices, God will use difficult times to bring about good things. Remembering that His main purpose is always to produce in us a reflection of His character, a quality that we call Holiness.

At times things can become overwhelming. We can take comfort from God's promises to us in His Word:

1Cor 10:13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

While that passage is actually about temptation, I believe that the same principal applies to persecution – He will not allow it to become more than you can bear. This one from Isaiah puts it plainly:

Isa 42:3 He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.

When we are struggling God will not allow us to be completely destroyed, but will provide what we need to make it through. Not only that, but we can be confident that in *His* time, justice will prevail throughout the earth⁷.

Our Response to His Example

Peter has told us what is required and from the second part of verse 21 he explains why. Our behaviour and attitudes need to be compared to Christ's and not with others around us. While I may feel pretty good about how I'm tracking when I compare myself to you (or not), it is the standard that Christ has set that I need to measure myself against. When I do that, it becomes very clear just how much work

⁶ [Rom 12:18](#)

⁷ [Isa 42:4](#)

there is still to be done. In discussing how we should respond to unfair treatment, Peter gives us Christ Jesus as our ultimate example.

Christ's lack of response was not weak. We see at other times a very strong rebuttal of those who were not doing what was right. Yet in His own case, He left the application of justice to 'the One who judges fairly'. Our response needs to match His – a firm voice when standing up for those who cannot speak for themselves, but leaving our own case in the hands of the rightful Judge of the whole world. This is what is required of us. Our mission is to do good things in order to bring honour to the Father as Christ did and that involves reacting to persecution as He did.

Stop and examine your attitudes and actions. Do they bring honour to God, or reflect poorly on His character? To a world that is jaded and cynical, we must be blameless in order to point people to Him. Compare what Peter says here with what Paul urges us to do in Philippians 2: 'You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had'.

Paul of course is speaking to the Philippians about how believers ought to interact with each other. Peter on the other hand, is speaking about how an employee should relate to their boss. The same kind of humble service, even to the point of death, is held up to us in the person of Jesus in each case.

That same Christ-like attitude must be the foundation of *all* of our relationships. We cannot afford to hold to the idea that, 'The boss owes me, so I will do what I want.' Our loyalty is first to Christ; we are to consider Him to be our employer – and we owe Him *everything*! This is what Paul had to say to the church in Colossae:

Col 3:22-25 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. (23) Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. (24) Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. (25) But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favourites.

'As though you were working for the Lord...' The last verses of 1 Peter 2 show us very clearly why the Lord has such a claim on us. Our service is service to the Lord, out of gratitude for the love He demonstrated to us. Here's the thing that blows me away: There's no way I can ever pay back what Christ has done for me, yet when I serve God faithfully out of love, I can be sure that I will receive even more benefit from doing so! It is not in an effort to pay an unpayable debt that we serve God, but rather out of love. Even though our salvation is a great enough reward on its own, the Father still promises us an eternal inheritance! Such is the power and effect of Christ's love and sacrifice for us.

Dead and Alive

Isn't it true to say that our sins have passed away on the cross? Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ." Death is the only acceptable payment for our unbelief/disobedience, but in Christ this cost has been met. Remarkably we can be dead to sin and yet still be alive.

Paul also said, "The life I now live... I live by faith in the Son of God..." ([Gal 2:20](#)). Yes, my rebellion has been judged and the death penalty has been paid – and I am still alive, but I am not alive to benefit myself. There will be a genuinely grateful response to such a selfless act of love when there is a genuine acceptance of the gift of Grace and Forgiveness. We are dead to sin, unbelief, disobedience and selfishness – the old way of life. We have been made alive to do what is right, to do 'good works, prepared beforehand'. This is nothing less than what is reasonable.

Alive Indeed

But we are more than just alive – 'By His wounds you were healed'. God is most certainly in the business of restoration. He loves to take which is broken or dysfunctional and restore it to what it should be. Having had a part in restoring a car or two, I get that. There is nothing quite like the satisfaction of starting with a broken piece of junk and ending up with something that is literally as good as new, just as the original manufacturer intended.

There is something that we need to remember though. It is God who heals and therefore it will be on His terms, in His way and in His timing. His ways are not our ways and His agenda is not ours. We can't see the whole picture and the bottom line is His glory, not ours.

A Shepherd, Not a Stockman

Unsurprisingly, the image Peter uses is not one of a craftsman restoring a car, but rather of wayward sheep returning to their shepherd.

We don't really get the concept of a shepherd here in Australia. We get sheep; we ought to, as there are millions of them here. But we don't have shepherds – we have stockmen. Shepherds look after a small flock, not a large mob and the sheep follow them – they are not kept in line with fences, horses, motorcycles and dogs. Shepherds have names for each of the sheep and the sheep know when their shepherd is calling them. Shepherds notice when even one out of a large flock is missing. It is not without reason that Christ Jesus is called 'The Good Shepherd'⁸ and that Elders are called to 'be shepherds of God's flock'⁹.

Are you beginning to see what a beautiful illustration this is of our relationship with Christ Jesus? But wait – there's still more. The word 'Guardian' is a barely adequate translation of the Greek word *episkopos*. I can't improve on William Barclay's summary of its meaning:

"Episkopos is, therefore, a many-sided but always a noble word. It means the protector of public safety; the guardian of honour and honesty; the overseer of right education and of public morals; the administrator of public law and order."

At one time we were outside of that protective authority. At one time we were roaming around doing as we pleased, unaware of the dangers that we were exposed to. As any good shepherd would do, Jesus searched for us, calling us by name. Then, having finally realised the significance of Christ's love, we came to Him.

⁸ [John 10:11-18](#)

⁹ [1Peter 5:2](#)

Now under His authority and protection, there is a debt of love to be paid by us through our obedience. Even so, we know that whatever it cost, we have an inheritance that none in this world can take from us.

Honour and Obey

1 Peter 3:1-7

This is one of the toughest passages that I've ever studied. I don't have the knowledge of the historical context to confidently say what Peter was getting at so I'm relying on others for that. There is also the fact that I'm uncomfortable telling women what they should and shouldn't do. What I want to say here has to be based on my own experience and cultural expectations, at least in part. If correction is needed, I'm more than happy to accept it.

Our focus needs to be on how this passage fits into 21st century Australian culture and much of what is in this passage relates to both men and women anyway. That may end up getting people off side, but once again, I am open to correction.

As we continue into the third chapter, Peter continues to bring into sharper focus just how those who follow Christ ought to live. One key phrase in this short passage is 'in the same way' and we need to look back into the previous section to gain a better understanding of the context and the meaning of what Peter is speaking to here.

The requirement to respect those in authority comes through very clearly in chapter two, where the issue of respecting and submitting to civil authority (that is the government) is emphasised. This same attitude is required in our employer-employee relationships also (as shown in the passage about slaves and masters). There is a logical shift in focus from the relationship between slaves and master to the relationship between husbands and wives. However, the very nature of this relationship is different, not just because of the kind of intimacy, but because the marriage relationship closely reflects the relationship between Christ and the Church. Regardless of whether or not your spouse is a believer or not, mutual respect and sacrificial love are vital for a healthy relationship. People must see the evidence of a changed life – it is proof that you are following the example of Christ. No matter what we say, people will see what we do.

Slaves in the first century had no legal standing – they were not even considered to be people, let alone have anything by way of human rights! Yet it wasn't just slaves that were in that position. Women also were considered to be little more than possessions, under the authority of her father until marriage and then under her husband's authority. Christianity brought something that at the time would have been considered to be a radical change in thinking – that of equality.

Galatians 3:26-29 NLT For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (27) And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. (28) There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

This is actually quite dangerous thinking in a culture that has not grasped hold of it. What Peter requires here and Paul in other places, is primarily for the woman's own protection. With no government welfare and no legal recourse for any financial settlement on divorce, it would have been a very delicate balance for the wife of an unbeliever. Keep in mind that in those days a man could divorce his wife for any or

no reason without anything to send her on her way. There was no chance of her gaining 50% of the family home, or the husband's superannuation.

'Don't be concerned about the outward beauty'

'Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised'¹⁰. There is nothing more attractive than a woman whose love for the Lord radiates out from the very core of her being. That is a beauty that is independent of jewellery or fashion and increases with age rather than fades. I have met godly women who although they may have lost their youth they have not lost their beauty – still radiant even though their body may be failing. I have seen some stunning beauties too, who though young and pleasant to look at are without that inner life and have little more than an empty shell.

It's probably a sign of our times that the issue of outward beauty is not just an issue for the ladies these days. The whole thing of 'man-scaping' is a growing industry that is built on a desire to have a pleasing appearance.

This contrast of outward appearances and inner beauty is brought up in verses three and four. The World wants everything to *look* good, with little or no regard for substance, or character. (Does anyone remember the movie 'Shallow Hal'?) This body that we have will get old, wear out and eventually pass away. It is the quality of the 'hidden man of the heart' that is our true and lasting adornment. And we know from what God said to Samuel when David was anointed king of Israel that 'man looks at outward appearance'¹¹, but the LORD looks at the heart'.

Why do we need to cut the obsession with appearances? That fundamental principal of God looking at the heart is key, yet there it is more than just that. We need to go back to the Sermon on the Mount and see what Jesus had to say about it:

Mat 6:24-34 NLT "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (25) That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life — whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? (26) Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? (27) Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? (28) And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, (29) yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. (30) And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? (31) "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' (32) These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. (33) Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. (34) So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

The point being made in Matthew is that we need to put our energy into that which will last and not that which is gone in an instant. Our 'duty statement' as followers of Jesus must be to do what He requires of us and not simply to please and impress people. Obsessing about how we appear to others takes our energy away from

¹⁰ [Proverbs 31:30](#)

¹¹ [1 Sam 16:7](#)

being effective in His Kingdom. Seeking righteousness, is simply diligently working to develop godly character

So ladies, while I would not counsel you to neglect your appearance, neither would I urge you to not make it the focus of your life. Rather as those matriarchs of the faith did, devote yourself to the Lord first and foremost. We all need to look at what we are expending our energy on and if it does not have some kind of lasting value, we need to rethink why we are doing it.

'Wives... accept the authority of your husbands'.

Most of us have at least some trouble when it comes to authority. What is not well understood is that being under authority actually puts you in a protected place. We are all under some kind of authority, be it the law, a manager, parent, teacher, or whatever. Submitting to the highest authority available protects you. Disobeying your boss if he tells you to do something illegal is one example. As a member of the Australian Defence Force, I am *required* to obey commands – *lawful* commands. Doing something illegal just because I am ordered to do it will not prevent *me* from being charged with fraud or worse. Authority is essential for the smooth running of society, submitting to that authority protects you. Knowing where the authority comes from is vital because submitting to a higher authority is more important than obeying a lower one.

A husband has God-given authority over his family, his wife included. Understanding that this authority is from God is very important because that puts it right at the top of the authority table. We can also gain an understanding of how that authority looks, how it behaves when exercised. So what does godly authority look like? Matthew records Jesus saying, 'All authority in heaven and earth is given to Me...'¹² Jesus has the authority and delegates it out, but it is still His authority. To understand how we exercise and respond to authority it will be helpful to look at how Jesus exercised His.

'You husbands must give honour to your wives'.

Paul, in [Ephesians 5](#) expands on the same ideas that Peter touches on here. Christ has God-given authority over His Church and so we must respect and submit to that authority. In the same way a husband has God-given authority over his household and his wife (and children) must respect and submit to that.

However, it doesn't end there – that is just the first half of the equation. The fundamental tenet of discipleship to Christ is... LOVE. In submitting to Christ's authority we can have complete confidence that He loves us. We have such promises as, 'God demonstrates His love for us...'¹³ and 'this is love that a man lays down his life for his friends...'¹⁴ Finally we know that 'perfect love casts out fear'¹⁵. Therefore, even as a wife lovingly submits to her husband, the husband is to love her 'as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her'¹⁶. Here is balance – she gives herself up to him in loving submission and he gives himself to her in loving sacrifice. We are *all* called to have the same attitude as Christ, in that we do not

¹² [Matthew 28:18](#)

¹³ [Romans 5:8](#)

¹⁴ [John 15:13](#)

¹⁵ [1 John 4:18](#)

¹⁶ [Ephesians 5:25](#)

seek to gain honour or glory for ourselves but set those aside in order to benefit others.

It's important to understand that neither submission nor sacrifice is conditional on a response. Christ demonstrated His love for all of us 'while we were still sinners'¹⁷. He did not wait until we submitted to Him before He sacrificed Himself. Coming back to the text, husbands are to honour and respect their wives, not because they submit to them, but rather because they are equal partners with them in the eternal inheritance that we have.

This mutual submission and self-sacrifice when motivated by genuine Love creates a balance, an equality in relationship, where both partners have different, but equally important responsibilities.

I mentioned [Proverbs 31](#) earlier. We see there, not some kind of super woman, but an amalgam or collage, of different roles women have – everything from a stay-at-home mum to a successful business woman is covered. There are as many variations to the theme as there are women. It is the husband's responsibility to empower his wife to do these things as her gifts determine.

To Sum Up...

I think that we have lost some of our sense of just how radical the Gospel is. We are so far removed from the first century culture and Christianity has had so many centuries to influence western society. We can forget just how much of the freedom we enjoy now is a direct result of the radical changes required when we follow Jesus.

The fundamental purpose of our existence has to do with relationships. Therefore, it makes sense that following Christ should result in radical changes to the way we relate to others. Radical – that is, fundamentally different from what we see in those outside of the Kingdom of God. Nowhere should this be more obvious than in the family. It is in the family that we draw the most precious parallels with our relationship to both the Father and the Son.

Outward appearances count for little, especially if there is nothing of substance in a person's character. Character endures in a way that appearance cannot and it forms the foundation for a life that brings honour to God. Countless hours spent in front of a mirror creating an external image bring the focus onto Self and that is the polar opposite of the kind of service we see modelled both in Christ and also His disciples.

Having authority over, or responsibility for someone is not an excuse to be inconsiderate or abusive. Consider the standard is held up to men: 'Husbands, love your wives'; not just in any ordinary way, but 'as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her'. We see in [Philippians 2](#) how Christ's love for the Church lead Him to set aside His own rights and empty Himself of all that He had, just so His Great Love could be put into action and make a way for the broken relationship with the Father to be made complete again.

¹⁷ [Romans 5:8](#)

What place is there for fear, when such a Great Love is so steadfastly looking out for what is best for us?

Defend Without Fear 1 Peter 3:8-22

I'm not convinced that this part of the letter is primarily about 'suffering for doing what is right'. The fact of persecution is woven throughout the whole letter and suffering is certainly something that Christ experienced, so we should expect to share in that. However, it is the 'doing right' part of the equation that I believe we need emphasise. Keeping your conscience clear and being able to rationally *and kindly* defend what you believe are two of the most important points that Peter raises in this section.

To Sum Up... Verses 8-12

Previously we've had a bit of a look at the kind of behaviour that is required from those who would follow Christ. Those standards of behaviour and lifestyle that Peter urges us to hold to are clearly laid out in chapter two and the first half of chapter three, so there is no need to go over that ground again. Just to be perfectly clear, by 'following Christ' I understand it to mean following His example in how He lived, caring about the things that He cared about and it also means following His path of suffering. The things Peter mentions in this passage – unity, compassion and love (in this case brotherly affection) – are themes woven throughout the New Testament, both in Jesus' own teachings and those of the Apostles (that is the letters we have here).

Taking care of each other, demonstrating love, blessing people instead of cursing them – who wouldn't want to be around someone like that? These are the kind of things that Christ did while He was on earth and we can know the kind of things that He would have us do because, as Paul wrote, 'We have the mind of Christ'.¹⁸

A youth pastor that I had as a teenager used the expression, 'hearing the heartbeat of God'. You need to be close to someone in order to hear their heartbeat. Think about a child hugging their parent – securely held in strong arms, head pressed against the parent's chest. That's where we need to be with The Father so that we can know the things that concern Him most deeply *and do them*. Exactly how that will look will be a bit different for each of us as we discover the way we need to go. Jesus called it 'abiding in the Vine'¹⁹, Paul called it 'walking by the Spirit'²⁰ and John used the term 'walking in the Light'²¹. Yet the end goal is the same – God's Glory and His Kingdom through Relationship.

Two key things regarding relationship are Brotherly Affection and Compassion. These are two distinct things, even if they may appear very similar. We are Family, and while family may not always get along, there needs to be the loyalty and affection that is part of any healthy family. Yet regardless of how well we actually get along with our family-in-Christ we also need to have that heart-felt compassion

¹⁸ [1Cor 2:16](#)

¹⁹ [John 15:5](#)

²⁰ [Galatians 5:16](#)

²¹ [1John 1:7](#)

for them in whatever circumstance they are in – weeping with those who weep, laughing with those who laugh and mourning with those who mourn.²²

Unfortunately, there is a natural tendency to want 'get our own back' when people give us a hard time, yet we are told to bless and not to curse. This is one way that we can reflect God's own character. We see the same kind of attitude in the way Jesus dealt with His accusers when He faced execution, and we see this in the way the Father has demonstrated His love to us, while we were still His enemies. Our lives are to echo that Extraordinary Grace.

When we hold to the lifestyle required of us, we will remove any justification of mistreatment. Ironically, it is that very lifestyle that sets people against us in the first place.

Who Will Harm You...? Verses 13-17

To be falsely accused when your life so obviously honours God is no bad thing and being able to defend your faith in such a trial is essential. We can find examples of this in Acts in the accounts of how Peter²³ and Paul²⁴ handled such situations. You may find that some are simply enraged at the righteousness of God that can be seen in you, but that is no less than happened to Christ Himself. Ensuring that you *are* doing what God requires is key here.

Of course having a clear conscience is an on-going thing. Just as you need to clean your house regularly to keep it clean, your conscience requires constant diligence in order to keep it clear. Having that clarity and being able to defend your faith go hand in hand. If your speech, conduct, faith, love and single-mindedness are not reflecting that of Christ, what will you have to explain?

So our Faith needs to be visible – a living, functioning thing that produces something useful. In the same way, being able to defend what we believe means more than just knowing. Why do we live the way we do? What is it about following Jesus that compels us to act as we do? What could possibly be our motivation? These are questions that unless you are living the life, you can have no possible idea. Furthermore, unless you are living in a way that genuinely echoes Jesus' life it is very unlikely that anyone will question your beliefs or motives. No one is going to make you suffer for falling in with their own ideas.

Doing what is right and suffering is pretty much what Jesus did, although there's much more to His life than that. We are expected to follow Christ's example in the way we live and interact with others, we can expect to receive the same treatment that Christ received:

John 15:18-25 NLT "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. (19) The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. (20) Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. (21) They will do all this to you because

²² [Rom 12:15](#)

²³ [Acts 4:1-20](#)

²⁴ [Acts 24:10-21](#)

of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me. (22) They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin. (23) Anyone who hates me also hates my Father. (24) If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father. (25) This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: 'They hated me without cause.'

We are not in any way greater than our Master, so we cannot expect to be treated any better than He was. He did what was right, all the time. He was without sin. There was nothing in His behaviour or attitude that kicked against what the Father wanted. Not ever. Not even a little bit.

The Just For The Unjust... Verse 18

It was this very fact that allowed Him to be the Final Sacrifice that dealt with sin completely and thus forever. The motivation behind all that Jesus did during His life on earth and in that ultimate sacrifice that He made was 'to bring us to God'. Not only into His presence, but adopted into His family!

1 John 3:1-3 NIV See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (2) Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (3) All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Here is something unique in any religion – God demonstrating such Love by setting Himself aside in order to benefit us! He made the first move. He made the way clear for us to come to Him. This Grace is offered to all and available to all. There is nothing to be done to add to it, there is nothing else required to make us acceptable other than to accept it. His suffering and death was vital for our rescue. It was absolutely essential to deal with our unbelief and rebellion. How much more stunning is His Resurrection that confirms His promise to us of life with Him always!

Spirits In Prison (Verses 19-20a)

He was 'raised to life in the Spirit' and preached to the 'spirits in prison' while still in the Spirit. This is a difficult passage to get my head around and it is tempting to simply ignore it completely, passing it off as irrelevant. Yet it has been recorded and preserved for our benefit, even as it was written to teach and encourage those original recipients.

Perhaps the first point to look at is that Christ descended to the place of the dead. Obviously, if He had not actually died, He could not have gone there. His death was no swoon; and professionals whose job was death confirmed it. Our forgiveness is dependent on a physical death, for 'without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness'²⁵.

The next point to consider is probably what did Christ proclaim? There are a number different ideas on what Peter is trying to communicate here and if scholars can't agree, then I'm confident that I can't be certain either. Some believe the message to one of salvation, a second chance for those who had already died. Could it have

²⁵ [Hebrews 9:22](#)

been a declaration of victory, confirming forever their condemnation? There is also the thought that it refers to the Spirit preaching through Noah – although that would remove the need for the 'descent into hell' as the creed puts it.

When trying to understand the author's intention, it is absolutely vital that we keep in mind the context of the writing. What was Peter's primary reason for writing this letter in the first place? From reading the whole letter we can see that it is to encourage these believers during a very difficult time of persecution. This was not a number of random individuals giving believers a hard time, it was state-endorsed persecution designed to eliminate the influence of Christ's Followers. What we see in this section is that there is no place in all creation that has not been touched by His victory over sin and death. Christ died, to be sure, but He just as surely was raised also. No matter what is going on, no matter how difficult things seem, there is One who has overcome all of it and who has the authority over all. Yes, persecution and difficulties will come, but the hard work of achieving victory over them has already been done.

Saved Through Water (Verses 20b-21)

It is Christ's death that does away with our sin and His resurrection that confirms the promise of ours. Can anything we do save us? Baptism does not. This ritual that we join in is not a ceremonial washing like Israel's priests of old. Their washing was required for ceremonial cleanliness, but it was also to wash off dirt and sweat. Peter describes baptism as 'an appeal to God for a clean conscience'. We know that baptism is a symbol of death and resurrection:

Col 2:11-15 NLT When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. **12** For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

13 You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. **14** He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. **15** In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

We know from what Peter wrote here that baptism also parallels the rescue of Noah's mob. Noah stepped out in faith, responding in obedience even though the coming condemnation was still unseen ([Heb 11:7](#)). So, we have the judgement of sin, the means of salvation and the faith that takes hold of it, resulting in life. You can see the parallel – Death is the judgement for sin and Christ's death the 'Ark' that saves us, baptism our symbolic death and resurrection through water. It is the gift of faith that takes hold of that promise and in doing so we gain life and an inheritance of Righteousness.

Once again I want to emphasise that baptism does not in and of itself impart righteousness any more than any other task that we do. Rather, it demonstrates to others that we choose to identify with Christ and to accept His sacrifice that restores our relationship to the Father. In doing so we do not point to our own good works to clear our conscience. On the contrary, we point to the work that Christ carried out through His execution and finalised by His resurrection in order to make us right and free us from our past.

The Final Victory (Verse 22)

Now, with the body that will never wear out, He is seated in the place of ultimate honour and power at the Father's right hand. There is nothing in all creation that is not subject to Him. None of principalities or powers that get behind authorities and seek to destroy Christ's Bride have free reign – even if it feels like it. Our Protector and Shepherd is at the Father's side, pleading our case and the worst that can be done is to bring us into His presence.

The Attitude of Service 1 Peter 4:1-11

Moving into chapter four, Peter continues to provide encouragement in the midst of persecution to "God's chosen people who are living as foreigners". He continues to spur them on to the kind of separated life that Christ had, one that is in amongst the world creating a life-influence but is not influenced by it.

"...Arm Yourselves..." vv 1-3

"...with the same attitude that [Christ] had..." Peter echoes Paul's words from [Philippians 2:5](#) yet in most ways these two passages differ more than they are the same. Paul's call is for unity and looking out for each other whereas Peter is calling us to stop chasing our own way and to do what God wants. Now this may be a very tenuous link, but whether we are serving each other or serving God having Christ's attitude requires self-sacrifice from us. You cannot live for God while continuing to pursue your own thing! In the context of the letter to the Philippians, that means looking out for the interests of others and working together. Here in Peter's letter, the expectation is that we will set aside our interests for that which is on God's heart, even when the likely result is persecution.

[Hebrews 2:10](#) tells us that Jesus needed to be made "perfect...through sufferings". Does this mean that The Son of God was not perfect before He suffered? No. The Greek word used here means "to bring to an end, to complete, perfect" so it can also be understood to mean, "to bring to full maturity". We also see in [James 1:2-4](#) that suffering and trials help us to grow up, so also it would have been with Christ. He was required to go through all the same kind of stuff that we do so that He could carry out our Rescue completely. He is not ashamed of us, not ashamed to be identified with His Creation, not afraid to love us and become like us in order to save us.

It is with this in mind that we can look at the next key phrase – "...finished with sin..." How can suffering produce that kind of result? From experience I know that pain, whether physical or emotional, brings clarity. That is to say that it brings into sharp focus those things that genuinely matter and those that do not. Of course God's view of what matters is vastly different from what most of the world thinks matters, yet there is plenty in Scripture to show us what kind of things they are. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 6:

31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

His Kingdom is one that will never end, so it is logical that the things of that kingdom are things that will last, that won't wear out, or be lost. [1 Corinthians 13:13](#) tells us that three things alone will last – Faith, Hope and Love. Here is our measuring stick, our standard by which to test all our behaviour – Am I trusting God? Do I look forward to what He has ahead for me? Most of all, is what I am doing motivated by that same kind of unconditional, setting aside of myself for the benefit of others that He demonstrated to us in His life and death?

Done with sin? If I can live like that I will be! Yet as long as I remain in this temporary clay-pot body there will be something of a struggle. Thanks be to God, that because of all Christ Jesus did, that self-gratifying life style cannot hold on to me – the Spirit of God has taken hold of my life instead! ([Romans 7-8](#))

Dead or Alive vv4-6

Note the transformation that occurs in these middle verses – before they were united with Christ they were “chasing [their] own desires” but now after sharing in His suffering and having had sin effectively dealt with they are “anxious to please God”. This is such a radical change of life that it is no wonder that those who have not experienced it cannot understand it. From what I have observed, it is those things that we do not understand that provoke the most fear. This is what I believe to be one of the main causes for much of the slander and persecution that Christians face – they just don't get this Christianity thing, so they do their own thing instead.

We *can* do whatever we like, but we have to be prepared to deal with the consequences. Those who reject Christ are free to do so, but the consequence is dire. God is Judge of all and rightly so. He set the rules, through Christ He kept those same rules perfectly, so He alone is qualified to judge. *It is NOT up to us to judge the behaviour of those who do not follow Christ.* We have an obligation to show them Christ, but we have no right to condemn them for not following Him. Consider all that the Father has put in place to bring people to Himself – He doesn't want to see *anyone* separated from Him ([John 3:17](#), [2 Peter 3:9](#)).

It may not be particularly clear what Peter means regarding this “preaching to those now dead” and the more I try to get an understanding of it the more I struggle with it. Perhaps if I had the same background as those first readers of this letter then I would see the intent more clearly. Be that as it may, we know from 2 Peter 3:9 that God wants to give everyone a chance to come to Him and be part of His Family.

Even so, I do have a few thoughts on this passage, although they may not help to explain what was in Peter's thoughts when he wrote it.

All people must die – that is the judgement that was brought down in Eden when mankind first disobeyed God. It was the Good News, preached through Jesus Christ, which gave mankind the first real Hope of reconciliation that would turn that judgement around. Our bodies are still under that death sentence, because the restoration work must start with the spiritual part of us, which is at the heart of every decision of mind and action of body. Having secured this regeneration of spirit we allow God's Spirit to continue to transform our minds and actions so that whether alive in the body or not we live for Him rather than ourselves.

For those who have rejected the Good News that Christ brought, God has passed judgement on them based on their response to it. So even though they condemn you for what you do and don't do, you have an obligation to the Spirit to live for God.

Gifted to Serve vv7-11

How does all this get translated into relationships? What does this knowledge do to result in a change of behaviour? The previous verses bring into view how tenuous

our hold on life is. 'The end of all things' could just as easily mean the end of life, as it could mean the end of life as we know it. God's Grand Resto Job has really only started, but its completion is 'upon us' already. Peter, quoting the prophet Joel²⁶ in his sermon in Acts²⁷ points out that we are already in the Last Days and carries that same idea here.

Knowing this and knowing that his readers are likely to be struggling under their current persecution, Peter gives them sound advice to deal with their situation. Right at the very heart is prayer. There is such a sense of urgency and yet the first call is to prayer rather than direct action – 'Protect the steadiness of your mind that you may be best equipped to pray'. Nothing is more important than maintaining that connection with God. Jesus uses the metaphor of being grafted into a vine in [John 15](#) so that life and energy can flow from Him into us producing growth and fruit. That abiding, or connectedness is essential to us in reproducing the character of Christ.

If prayer is key to enduring tough times as an individual in Christ, then love must be the foundation of Community. Indeed, it must be the supporting structure of all that we do in Christ's name. Note that love in itself does not remove sins, rather it covers them in the same way clothes cover nakedness. 'See how these Christians love one another!' should still be the resounding cry from those outside looking in.

Those gifts mentioned in verses nine and ten – they are all community gifts. They are things given to benefit the whole body, not just to build the person who has them. This is the outworking of that fervent love for one another – hospitality and service by using God-given gifts to build each other up ([Eph 4:11-13](#)). We are to be good stewards of the gracious gifts that God has given us. We are not the owners of that which we have, but the managers. It is the owner of a business that profits from the enterprise, but the managers are to run the business in the best possible way. They are expected to run it in a way that honours the name of both the business and the owner and in a way that enables the company to grow.

A good boss will provide his team with everything they need to do their job – training, tools, people – but even though the workers will be rewarded for their efforts, it is all for the boss' benefit. In the same way, it is up to us to put the work in, but clearly it is God who gives the strength and it is God who gives the words, so it is God who receives the glory.

So what kind of attitude do you have? Things may be tough, but there are resources outside of your own that will get you through and still empower you to bless others. What are you living for? Are you living according to God's heart and intention or your own?

²⁶ [Joel 2:28-32](#)

²⁷ [Acts 2:16-21](#)

No Surprises **1Peter 4:12-19**

We know that Christ Jesus suffered for us, motivated by that Amazing Love. We know also that because of what He did, He has received glory above all others. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we share in His sufferings before we share His Glory. It is no surprise that justice will be done. It is no surprise that God is faithful whatever we face.

Expected Discipline.

To those who want to be partners with Christ in His Glory, who want to share that eternal inheritance, the promised Rest, it should come as no surprise that we must first share in His sufferings. After all, that is the path to honour and glory that Christ took, how can we expect to take a different route? ([Philippians 3:10-11](#))

Furthermore, we are His children, adopted into His family and we are fellow heirs with Christ. Yet sharing in Christ's inheritance comes at a price:

Rom 8:16-17 NLT For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. (17) And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Christ was 'made perfect through suffering' – that is to say, it was only through suffering that He was fully able to do all that was required of Him to rescue us ([Heb 2:10](#)). We see the same kind of thinking in relation to us in [James 1:2-4](#). This process of maturity through difficulty is, in one sense, simply the normal process of discipline that must be applied to anyone who wants to reach their full potential in any field – be that a specific skill or the whole of life. Yet in another way, it is so much more.

Disciplining by our Heavenly Father is for our good ([Heb 12:5-10](#)), but it comes out of Christ's suffering for our good. Christ endured 'such hostility' without ever having done a thing to deserve it. His suffering and temptation means that He knows what it is like and is able to intercede for us and give us help and comfort through whatever we face²⁸.

Of course, it isn't just about you. Throughout the Bible is the recurring theme of being 'blessed to be a blessing'. There's not much sense in receiving comfort if you're not going to also give it in turn:

2 Cor 1:3-7 NLT All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. (4) He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. (5) For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. (6) Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. (7) We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us

²⁸ [Heb 2:18](#)

Even in the midst of persecution there can be comfort and blessing. As we go through fiery trials, we tap into the Source of comfort and strength and in doing so become a channel to others. This is exactly what Christ did for us; it is His example we follow here as elsewhere.

12-13 In Pursuit of Purity

Fiery Trials are by their very nature unpleasant and difficult. Yet we can be sure that they will not be more than we can bear. There is this beautiful image in [Isa 42:3](#) of the Messiah's compassion for those who are suffering injustice. He will not allow us to be broken or snuffed out by these trials. They are for our benefit, to make our character more like that of Christ so that we may share in His glory. They do still lead us to wonder why at times. Why do bad things happen to good people? Does God cause evil things? No, but rather He weaves the inevitable into something good, if we let Him.

As heat is used to refine precious metals, trials are used to refine our character. Gold when pure has an enduring lustre that does not tarnish. As we become more like Christ our character will begin to share the same lustre that His does. This is what I understand 'sharing in His Glory' is about. Perhaps the whole reason for being reproached or persecuted in the first place is because 'the presence of the Glory and Spirit rest upon you'. Without His presence, without the 'lustre' that godly character gives, it is very unlikely that you would draw attention, or that you would even be living in a way that reflects Christ. Your behaviour, your attitude will bring honour to God when His Spirit radiates out of you.

I would propose that the main reason I do not face opposition, reproach or persecution is because Christ's presence in my life is not as obvious as it should be.

A murderer, a thief, trouble maker or busy body will not have Christ's best interests at heart. These behaviours do not come from the Spirit and they bring no honour either to you or to Christ. Now I'd be pretty confident that there aren't many (if any) murderers or thieves here, but I also know how easy it is to want to stick your nose into things that are not your concern. Your life, your behaviour and your attitude to all that you experience will either commend or condemn. People will see that, whatever you are accused of, and know the justice or otherwise of those accusations.

We need to clear that what is referred to in this passage is *persecution*. It is not a consequence of bad behaviour, although that is mentioned. Neither is it about the kind of suffering that occurs merely from living in this fallen, sin-wracked world – such as comes from sickness, accident or our own poor choices. These things do indeed involve suffering of one kind or another and our response to them must bring honour to Christ. Living a godly life won't stop you from getting sick or having an accident, although it may mitigate some of your poor choices. In terms of suffering from persecution though it is godly living that draws the fire in the first place.

14-16 Insult and Injury

'It is no shame to suffer as a Christian'. Indeed, persecution is intended to humiliate and shame. It is carried out to coerce or force dissidents into conforming to the expected norms by use of physical and emotional pain. We are counselled by Peter to rejoice and not be ashamed. Suffering persecution because you refuse to let the

world squeeze you into its mould shows that you are being transformed into becoming a 'Little Christ'.

This term 'Christian' was originally supposed to be an insult, a derogatory term for those who followed the teachings of Christ Jesus. We are told here that we are to consider it a privilege to be called by His name. Is a privilege earned? No, it is given as an act of grace. Is a privilege a right? No, not everyone will necessarily share in it, but with every privilege comes responsibility. What is our responsibility when we are called by His name? It is to live in a way that brings honour to that Name. That is to say, we are to live in accordance with the Godly Principles that Peter outlined earlier in this letter.

17-18 Accountability

It is because of the very high standards required of us that we are held to account. 'The time has come for judgement and it must start with God's own household'. Why does judgement start with us? 'To whom much is given, much is required'²⁹. Consider exactly what Christ has done for us, how much we have been given in this life, let alone what is set aside for us in the next! We have this treasure in earthen vessels and we accountable for what we do, or don't do, with it.

Judgement, calling to account will start with the Body of Christ, His Church. That's one reason why fiery trials come to refine us – to purge the impurities so that we can better reflect Christ's Character. This is preparing us for our inheritance, that hope of something far better and eternally permanent that can never be taken away by anyone. So we are tested and judged and through that process made pure and prove the value of our actions.

Now if God does not spare from judgement those who believe and obey, how much worse will be the fate of those who do not believe and wilfully disobey? For those outside of God's household, it is a terrifying prospect. There is nothing but separation and darkness to look forward to, and the anguish that goes along with them.

V19 A Safe Deposit

'If you are suffering in a way that pleases God, keep doing what is right'. The pressure to what does not please God, to conform to what those around you may want, will most likely get to you eventually. Is what you are doing something that will please God? You need to be able to self-analyse under the direction of the Holy Spirit to examine your actions and motives. 'Search me... test me... lead me...' David cried in [Psalm 139](#). Once you are sure that you *are* where God wants you to be and doing what He requires then keep doing that, trusting the consequences to Him.

The Greek term used here in verse 19 that has been rendered 'entrust' means to 'set before'. It is a term that was used when depositing money with a trusted friend. What do you with your cash when you can't put it in a bank? You set it before someone you can trust completely. This is the same word was used by Paul to his young friend Timothy when urging him to ensure that his teaching was passed on faithfully. This is a most sacred trust. We see in the parable of the talents what was

²⁹ [Luke 12:48](#)

expected from servants, but here it is not a servant but a friend that is given that trust.

What we see in these examples is that there must absolute confidence in the one that we set this trust before. We can have that confidence in God. We can continue to do what is Right, knowing that whatever the consequence, our future is secure with Him. We can have the kind of confidence to say as Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."³⁰

³⁰ [Rom 8:18](#)

True Leadership

(Is Service)

1 Peter 5:1-14

Looking at the final chapter in this letter, it is obvious that the first few verses have to do with leadership. What may not be obvious is that most of this chapter also has to do with leadership. Understanding the fundamental principal of Christ-inspired leadership is a necessary first step to seeing that connection.

No matter what the context, leaders are examples. It doesn't matter whether it is in the church or the home, the sports field, or the battlefield, there are those who by nature of their experience set the tone for those who follow after. Leaders model behaviour and attitudes³¹ to those around them, setting an example, good or bad, regardless of meaning to or not.

Elders.

In the first instance, Peter establishes his credentials as an Elder. This isn't so he can big-note himself, but rather to show the reader that he knows what is involved in having that responsibility. By the time this letter was written he would have had plenty of experience to know what works and what difficulties and blessings go with the job, so he gently reminds them of this fact. More than this, he reminds them that he has been with Jesus. Peter experienced *His* leadership first-hand and witnessed His suffering and death – a reminder perhaps that being a shepherd means dealing with wolves³².

This concept of Elders as leaders goes back at least as far as Moses delegating responsibility³³ ([Numbers 11:16-30](#), [Exodus 18:13-26](#)) where we see men appointed to help bear the great burden of leadership that Moses had. It is likely that from the earliest times it was the older men of the community who shouldered the responsibility of leadership³⁴. The Hebrew word we translate to 'elder' comes from a word meaning 'beard' – not that being clean-shaven disqualifies one from the position for the word itself means 'old'. These older men had life experience, wisdom, which was used in decision-making and passed on to the younger men.

While speaking specifically to Elders in these verses, the principals brought forward by Peter apply to *all* areas service. Whether cleaning toilets, setting up chairs, leading singing, teaching Sunday School or pastoring a church community the work you do ought to be as God would want, because you want to and not for what you can gain. This really is what true leadership is about, when it is modelled on Christ's example – it is at its very root about service.

We tend to find it easier to boss people around than to set the standard of behaviour because we forget the principal of service, we forget that 'even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many'³⁵. Jesus *modelled* genuine leadership. He *did* it rather than talking about it. He spent time with His inner circle. He was more concerned with what His followers were

³¹ From sermon by Darryl Spicer at Windsor Districts Baptist Church, 21 Jul 2013

³² I'm sure I didn't come up with that line, but I can't find the source.

³³ William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition* (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) p. 262

³⁴ Consider Moses being sent to the elders in Exodus 3:16.

³⁵ Mark 10:45 NASB

becoming, than with what they were doing. That is to say, His leadership was relationship based, not result based³⁶. Tom Wright in his commentary on this passage writes:

What Peter is describing is not 'leaders' but shepherds. And the point about 'shepherds' is that the best of them aren't thinking, 'How can I be a shepherd?', but, 'How can I best look after these sheep?'³⁷

So the focus is not on how to lead as much as it is on how to serve in such a way as to empower others. What needs do they have? How can I teach them reliance on the Father's provision? What dangers do they need to be aware of? How can I help them through those dangers if they cannot be avoided? These questions can only really be answered if you know those whom you serve. Service and relationship are two recurring themes throughout the Bible that cannot really be separated.

Humility

Peter now turns his attention to the younger men, those who will follow in the footsteps of the elders in due course. Submission to authority is required from everyone, at every level, but ultimately it is required to each other and God. Clearly this was an issue with the youth of Peter's time even as it is today. Leaders can't lead unless people submit in humility.

What does Peter mean when he says, 'In the same way...'? From what I can tell of the context, it means that your submission to your elders should be with the same attitude that elders ought to have – that is gladly, eagerly, not for what you can get out of it, and as though you were in God's presence.

Regarding 'Clothe yourself with humility' Barclay makes the point that the word used here has to do with tying up an apron, such as Jesus did when washing the disciples' feet³⁸. We see in this, as we do in the exhortation to the Elders, the call to serve. Humility as demonstrated in throughout the Bible is about setting aside your own self-interest and looking out for the interests of others; it has to do with recognising the Father's authority over you and responding in obedience. It is in this way that service and humility are an inseparable component of Love.

'Humble yourself under God' – willing submission to authority requires genuine humility. Ultimately both youth and elders are answerable to God and therefore must submit to His authority, not for what can be gained, but out of love for Him and a genuine desire to serve.

It is this same kind of humility that recognises that a strength beyond oneself is needed and can then cast all cares on God. His shoulders are broad enough and strong enough to handle whatever we give Him. While we value our independence, from others as well as God, the call to serve must also mean that we allow others to serve us at times. It requires humility to acknowledge that you can't do it on your own. It requires humility to allow others to work with you to fulfil the Father's plan for you. Most of all, it requires humility to allow the One with more resources than you could ever need shoulder the weight of your day-to-day struggles.

³⁶ From sermon by Darryl Spicer at Windsor Districts Baptist Church, 21 Jul 2013

³⁷ Tom Wright *Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011) p.92

³⁸ William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible The letters of James and Peter Revised Edition* (The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh 1976) p. 270

For a Little While

The final encouragement to stand firm in the midst of difficulties begins at verse eight. Having cast off the weight of our concerns we have a lighter load to carry, but there is still a danger of being ambushed by the Deceiver. There is no room for complacency. A lion is still a lion. Even if you've had since it was a cub, it can and will destroy you if you are not careful.

As a cyclist, there is one thing more than any other that will keep you alive – that is being aware of the potential dangers. Riding with the mindset that everyone is either blind or trying to kill you helps to keep a level of situational awareness that keeps you out of trouble and brings you home at the end of the ride. Now I'm not saying that we need to be so paranoid as to see Satan under every rock, but we do need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and be alert to situations where we will be in danger.

James urges us to submit to God and resist the devil³⁹; Peter's warning here is identical in substance. Whatever struggle you are having with sin, whatever persecution you may be facing, whatever personal crisis you are experiencing, you are not alone. There are Christian brothers and sisters all around the world experiencing the same kind of trials – most likely some even nearby that can offer support, if you'll accept it. More to the point, one of God's defining characteristics is Grace and He longs to pour it into your life until it overflows.

Just Reward

There is hope. Hope remains, hope does not disappoint, when it is grounded in the promises of God. Though we may suffer for a little while, it is not a permanent state. Paul makes the point in [2 Corinthians 4:13-18](#) that the hope we have is not based on anything that we have done, but on the power of Christ's indestructible life. His resurrection assures us of our own, His glorified body confirms that we too shall share in that glory.

These two things contrast each other, for the sufferings and difficulties that we face here and now are for a little while when we consider them in the light of Eternity. Peter reminds us here of the value of such difficulties – God, Who is the source of all Grace uses them to perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish us for that eternal glory that we have access to through Christ. Our minds need to be set on those things that are eternal – as Paul put it, the things unseen.

When we set aside our own priorities and work on achieving Christ's, when we serve others out of love instead of what we can gain, when we look to the eternal for our security, there is a certain Hope that can never be shaken which ends in our Holiness.

³⁹ James 4:7