

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Peter: First Recipients Identified by Grace

PETER, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:1–2, KJV 1900)

Who were those believers to whom Peter wrote this letter? We find only indirect reference to them in Acts. They seem to have lived in a rather remote area; yet we see this letter from Peter to them in our New Testament. It seems that their personal identity was not significant to the Holy Spirit's intent in this letter; nor was their race or culture. One thing only claims our attention as we read the opening of this letter, their spiritual identity.

A study of the various steps in Peter's description of these people will outline for us much of Peter's inspired beliefs regarding God's method for saving sinners from their sins and keeping them safe in His grace for eternity with Him.

1. **Elect.** They didn't elect themselves. God elected them. However much man-centric Christians strive to make election God's reaction to man's action, Scripture repeatedly and emphatically affirms that election is an act of God, not of man. (1 Thessalonians 1:4; "...your election of God")
2. **...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.** This term sees the greatest emphasis by man-centric Christians. While they will typically, though reluctantly, acknowledge that election is an act of God, they will interpret this term to teach that God merely knew in advance who would hear, believe, obey—or whatever terms of human behaviors they believe to be necessary for humans to save themselves—so God's election of individuals to eternal salvation is merely His in-advance response to their obedience. A simple assessment of the language that Peter uses in this verse will refute this man-centric explanation. According to this view, we must obey before God saves us, and the view holds that God knew that obedience in advance. However, the next phrase in the verse states election's objective, "...unto obedience..." If this man-centric view is correct, advocates of the view are correct in holding that the obedience of which Peter writes is our obedience. God chose us to obedience.

How can this view logically defend that election's objective, something that is accomplished by election, occurred in us prior to our salvation? The illogical reasoning would then go; God elected us to obey, but we must obey before we are in fact elected. If God's election of us was intended to bring us to obedience, how could we obey logically prior to our election? The passage sets the sequence; election prior to obedience, foreseen or not, but this errant belief contradicts the sequence and requires obedience, albeit foreseen, as the cause of election.

While I acknowledge that the Greek manuscript that Peter first wrote in all likelihood was written in a common form that did not include punctuation of any kind (First century Greek language was far more capable of communicating its meaning without punctuation than our contemporary English, even with punctuation), I do observe that the King James translators did not insert a comma between "...obedience..." and "...sprinkling of the blood..." Thus, they "Communicate" by the absence of the comma here that they understood Peter to be referring to the same One whose blood was sprinkled as the One who also obeyed.

In our English language, the word "Foreknowledge" is a compound word, consisting of "Fore," in advance or before, and "Knowledge," what someone knows. However, the question that this passage raises must probe the Biblical use of "Knowledge." How does Scripture use the word? New Testament Greek manuscripts use several different words that all roughly relate to our English word, though each of the Greek words likely emphasizes various nuances of meaning that are somewhat different from our generic English word. For example, we read in Amos, "You only have I **known** of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2 KJVP) Here God speaks to His chosen Old Testament

nation. Are we then to conclude that God in eternity, prior to His creation of the material universe, had no awareness that any nations would exist other than His people? The idea is absurd; it wholly contradicts the Biblical principle of God's omniscience, His all-knowing essential attribute. In his commentary on this verse, John Gill explains his understanding of foreknowledge in the verse, "...the sovereign grace, good will, and pleasure of God, or the everlasting love of God the Father, which is the cause of, and has given birth to the act of election, is meant by foreknowledge, joined with affection, delight, and approbation; knowledge, and foreknowledge, as ascribed to the divine Being, often signify such things; see [Ps 1:6](#) [Ro 11:1](#) and such a knowledge God the Father had of the persons of the elect from all eternity; and which is the ground and foundation of his choosing them to grace and glory, and not anything in them, or done by them, or anything out of himself; no other reason can be given of it than his own grace, his pure love, and sovereign good will and pleasure...."¹

The New Testament also uses "Know" in a variety of ways. For example, Matthew 1:25 uses "...knew her not..." to refer to the fact that, after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary lived together as husband and wife in every sense of intimacy that marriage normally means. They had several other children who are mentioned and even named in the New Testament. (Matthew 13:55-56 as one clear example) Therefore, the idea that Mary lived after Jesus' birth as a perpetual virgin has no Biblical support whatever.

Thus, we have Biblical examples where "Know" in one form or another refers to God's special care for His people or for a husband's intimate love for his wife. Without question, the Bible's use of "Know"

¹ Gill, John, *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, copied from the electronic version, SwordSearcher Bible software. 1 Peter 1:2. When reading Gill's commentary, readers often become frustrated because Gill will present several possible interpretations. Students of Gill's life and writings offer an explanation that will make his writings far more understandable. They suggest that the first interpretations that Gill offers are his acknowledgement of various ideas that existed in his day. He always reserves his personal beliefs for the last interpretation. This quote from Gill reflects his interpretation of the passage, not what others thought of it.

is far broader than our contemporary idea of the word.

Given the centrality of God's love, His loving actions, specifically directed to His chosen people, the idea that this term in our study passage refers to human reaction to God should be rejected in favor of the view presented by Gill and others, that God's foreknowledge refers to His eternal—in advance of our existence—love and loving care for those whom He chose in His Son to be made heirs of His eternal glory. (Jeremiah 31:3; Notice that God's drawing is based on His everlasting love for His people, not on their foreseen faith or obedience)

3. **...through sanctification of the Spirit.** The means by which God carries His eternal design from purpose, divine intent, to fulfillment, occurs by the work of the Holy Spirit, not with the sinner's decisions or actions. In the whole work of our eternal salvation, God in Trinity, Father, Son/Word, and Holy Spirit fully cooperate to bring His eternal purpose to complete fulfillment. It is for this reason alone that inspired Biblical writers repeatedly and without qualification affirm that God's eternal saving purpose shall succeed so that not even one of the individuals so loved and chosen in Christ shall be lost. (John 6:37-39; 44 contains Jesus' declaring His own work that He would accomplish during the Incarnation) The Holy Spirit finds every individual whom God chose in Christ, and, however steeped in their sins at the moment, changes their hearts to love God and to love righteousness. He "Sanctifies" them, sets them apart to God, by His work.

4. **...unto obedience.** The appearance of obedience in this logical sequence raises an obvious question. Whose obedience? One more quote from John Gill; ".....or else the obedience of Christ is intended; and so the Arabic version renders it, "unto the obedience of Jesus Christ"; which lay in his performing the precepts of the law, and bearing the penalty of it, death; and by which the chosen seed are justified, or made righteous in the sight of God, and have a title to eternal life and glory, and are safe from wrath to come; and to the enjoyment of this grace, they are chosen of God the Father; and between these two, predestination and justification, there is a close and inseparable connection; so that they that are interested in the one, are in the other...."²

² Gill, John, *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*; see above footnote. It was Gill's belief that the Arabic manuscript stated the passage correctly

The logical sequence, of events, and of the One who performs the actions in this verse, renders human obedience in the verse illogical. The emphasis in the whole verse is on what God does from our election to our eternal security through the work of our faithful Surety. (Hebrews 7:22) The verse outlines the cooperative work of God in Trinity for our eternal salvation.

Jesus' work in accomplishing our eternal salvation is described as "Obedience" in several passages; for example, Romans 5:19; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8.

The passage identifies the cooperative work of God in Trinity, accomplishing the eternal and secure salvation of all whom the Father chose in Christ before He created the material universe.

5. Also unto "**...sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.**" The same One who obeyed is the One whose blood is sprinkled. The sprinkling of blood echoes the image of the high priests of the Old Testament as they sprinkled the blood of the annual goat inside the holiest of holies. The priest didn't throw the blood across the room. He didn't pour it all in one place. He carefully sprinkled it; each drop was applied with precise motion and purpose. When our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life, symbolized in His blood, for our sins, He didn't merely make that blood available for those humans who might decide they wanted it. He applied it—He sprinkled it—with divine purpose and intention to cover the sins of those whom He loved and chose in Christ before He created the material universe.

While humans demonstrate their broken, depraved dispositions by a nearly endless array of bigotry against various people who happen to be different from themselves, God's Book in the New Testament acknowledges only two classes of humans, those who are embraced in God's everlasting love and covered by the sprinkled (Purposely and sacrificially applied) blood of His Son and those who are not. And God reserves His personal judgment regarding who falls into these two categories. If we try to judge the eternal status of every person whom we meet, as is so sadly common in our day, we shall utterly fail, and, in the process, damage tender children of God. (Matthew 13:28-30)

We know very little about the people or culture of those first recipients of Peter's letter, but we know what we need to know that is of value to us. These strangers were not strangers to the loving grace of God, so they were our brothers and sisters in Christ. May we sit beside them as we study

Peter's letter and learn with them of the Holy Spirit's words to them and to us.

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Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor

and clearly; God chose all of His elect to be the recipients of the benefits of Jesus' obedience.