

“Elect/Exiles”—1 Peter 1:1-2

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me at the beginning of 1 Peter...

This past week was special for our family, not just because we were able to spend time with friends and family during a Thanksgiving meal, but also because one of the many things we had the opportunity to give thanks for was how the Lord, in His mercy, has knit together our immediate family. Thanksgiving day this year was the eight year anniversary of when Allison and I met our daughters for the first time. I remember it like it was yesterday, though every time I look at my kids I remember it was not. And I remember how blessed I am to be their father.

November is Orphan Awareness Month in our setting, a chance for us as Christians to remember the call of God to care for children in need of homes. This, James says, is a mark of “true religion” (James 1:27). We are not all called to adopt. But we are all called to champion the cause of adoption and care for the fatherless. What is more, as Christians, adoption should be near and dear to us because every believer, according to Scripture, has been adopted by God the Father. We have Christ as our brother. And just as there is a choice that is involved when every parent decides to adopt a specific child as their own, so too every child in God’s household is there because of God’s choice to make it so for that individual.

While the details and mystery of this divine decision may not make much sense to us at first, and it may even feel like the choices were all made by our own initiative, the more we mature, the more we interact with our Father, the more we read His words to us in Scripture, the more we begin to realize that He chose us. And not just “us” corporately, but “us” individually. If you are a Christian, God chose you to be His child and to be adopted into His family. He chose *you*. Through no initiative of your own, He chose *you*. Apart from anything you could have offered, He chose *you*. Before you even understood what a choice is, He chose you. It’s difficult to articulate the flood of worship-inspiring emotions that you’ll experience, once that thought takes root in your soul. And chances are, you are going to want to know more about that divine choice. Maybe not at first. But as we mature in Christ, our curiosity into these things very often grows as well. At least that has been my experience.

The choice of God to save the Christian, in theology, is known as the doctrine of election. It’s a doctrine that many *choose* (excuse the pun) to avoid, and yet one that Scripture constantly puts before our eyes as a source of encouragement and security. We neglect it to our detriment. And while we will never understand the mystery of this doctrine fully in this life, there is much that God wants us to understand about election. One clear example of this is found in the opening words of 1 Peter.

Last week we began this sermon series by looking at those introductory comments, but focused almost exclusively on what they say about the author, after whom the book was named. We also spent some time considering what various other passages in the New Testament says about Peter’s background and transformation. Today (and the next couple Sunday), we will turn our attention to what this text says about the original recipients. So let’s look at how Peter describes them right out of the gate in this letter. This is God’s Word:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the

sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” (1 Peter 1:1-2; ESV)

So, what can we say about the original audience of this letter? There are lots of debates about their history and ethnicity, but I will spare you those discussions.¹ What is more important for our purposes is to notice how Peter describes them in the text. For reasons I’ll explain in a second, the New International Version translates it better (so I’ll use it as the basis for our discussion for the rest of today):

“To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood...” (1 Peter 1:1-2; NIV)

The grammar of this sentence in Greek is going to organize our discussion for the next couple of weeks. It’s hard to see in English, but in the original language, Peter describes the recipients in these verses with two terms and everything else that’s printed on the page is explaining those two terms. The terms are “*elect*” and “*exiles*.”² “To the elect...” and “To the exiles...” These English nouns refer to the same individuals.³ The first term captures the believer’s relationship to God (elect) and the second the believer’s relationship to the world (exiles). A case could be made that the entire letter involves an elaboration of these two ideas, so we would do well to spend some time on them. Today we will unpack the “elect” side of things and in the days ahead we will tie up some loose ends, cover the sense in which they were “exiles,” and explore how their exile may have been related to their election.

THREE TRANSLATIONAL CHALLENGES

There are several things that are debated in the translation of these verses, but three deserve mention this morning because they affect the way your English text reads and the way it may differ from other English texts of the same verses. The first matter has to do with...

The Relationship Between “Elect” and “Exiles”

In the original language, you technically have these two adjectives—“elect” (which means “chosen”) and “exiles”—but adjectives can at times be used for nouns in Greek (or English for that matter). The question is—should one of the terms be read as an adjective modifying the other (i.e., “elect exiles” of the ESV [the same sense is found in NASB, NRSV, and NET] or “exiled elect” [the sense of the NIV¹⁹⁸³ and NLT]) or should both be taken as nouns (i.e., “to the elect” and “to the exiles”). In other words...

[Images]

I think the latter is correct; we should take these as two nouns, as the recent edition of the NIV has taken them. And, as I said earlier, these English nouns refer to the same group (i.e., they are appositional). The “elect ones” are the “exiled ones.”

Now I know what you are thinking: “Why does this even matter?” Here’s why: if I am correct (that both should be read as nouns referring to the same group), then that means Peter is saying that all of the “elect” (i.e., those who have been chosen by God for salvation, the Christians) are, in some sense, “exiles.” We’ll talk more about that in a few weeks, but, since we were talking about grammar, I thought I’d go ahead and mention it now. To be continued...

I’ll tackle the second and third translational challenges together, because usually to clarify one in English you have to obscure the other. But before we get to that, here they are:

*Sorting Out the Modifiers
Preserving the Word Order*

It's pretty clear that "*scattered throughout* [or "of the diaspora/Dispersion of..."] *the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*" modifies "*exiles*." No one really debates this. All the English translations that I've seen reflect this relationship. He originally sent the letter to particular Christians (i.e., particular "exiles"), who are scattered through various territories of Asia Minor (which is modern day Turkey).

But then we find a series of prepositional phrases that could modify several things—"according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood..." What are those three phrases referring to? I'll spare you all the possibilities that have been suggested by commentators. Suffice it to say that virtually everyone believes that they modify, at the very least, the "*elect*"⁴ and the majority of interpreters that I have read see the phrases as modifying *only* that word. It seems to me, they all are describing the "elect." So the sense is "to those who are elect, according to the foreknowledge of God, through the sanctifying work..." and so on.

Here's the problem: Most English translations that try to clarify what those phrases modify usually do so by shifting the word order a bit. In other words, they move the word "elect" to the end of verse 1 so that it is clearer to the reader that all the prepositional phrases in verse 2 define God's election. On one level, that's helpful. On another, it obscures something that I happen to think is significant.

When you read some of those translations that do this (e.g., HCSB, NASB, NET, NKJV, NRSV), you can't tell that the very first thing that Peter says about his recipients is that they are "elect," they are "chosen." Sometimes in Greek, word order is used for emphasis. "When you put something first, you are not trying to hide it."⁵ I believe this is one of those times. We should ask, "I wonder why, in a book written to suffering Christians, do we find that the very first thing Peter says about their identity is that that they are 'chosen' by God?" I'll come back to that point later.

For now, we should simply acknowledge how difficult the work of translation can be (and thank God we have so many great translators in the English world!). Sometimes when you translate from one language to another, since the rules of grammar and syntax vary, in order to clarify one point you may slightly obscure another. This is one of those times. These are such difficult choices. But notice I think the NIV preserves both of these ideas in their translation, but to do so they add a word (or, more accurately, they repeat a word).

Look again at the text in the NIV—"To God's *elect* [notice, the word order and emphasis is preserved],⁶ *exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen* [notice, with this word they have essentially repeated the word "elect" and thereby clarified that what follows is describing the elect; they are elect,] *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*" If the NIV were a person, I would give that person a high five right now. What we just read was a great and clear way to translate this (even if my explanation of it was not).

And now, since I believe I have maxed out my grammar quota for one sermon (maybe even for the entire sermon series), let's move on. As I said earlier, today I want us to focus on what Peter says about his audience's election (and, by extension, the election of all Christians). That word, "elect," simply means chosen. To be "elect," means to be "chosen." The word Peter uses for "chosen" is *eklektos* and it's from the sound of that word that the English word "elect" is derived. What we find in the text is that Peter makes three statements that define the sense in which Christians are "elect."

THREE ASSERTIONS ABOUT ELECTION

Now, there is a lot that could be said about each of these assertions, and many questions that could be raised by them. Unfortunately, we don't have time to explore all those caveats today. But, take heart, these three ideas serve as an outline for chapter one,⁷ so we will be coming to each of them again in due course and may address some of your curiosities as we reencounter these subjects. For now, let's get the major idea of what Peter is saying. Since we are sharing the Lord's Supper together this morning, I would like to start and limit our discussion to the last assertion...

Christians are elect for obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ

We were set apart for a purpose. That purpose includes "*obedience*." I think he is referring to our obedience to God or to the teachings of Jesus. Peter is making the same point that Paul makes elsewhere. For instance in Ephesians 2:10, immediately after Paul states that your salvation is a gift from God and that even the faith through which you received salvation was itself a gift from God, he wrote: "*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" The key phrase is "*to do good works.*" So in that context, Paul says you were not saved by your good works, but you were saved to do good works which God prepared for you to do. The Christian life is a life lived under a new Lord and, therefore, the Christian life is a life lived in obedience to Jesus Christ.

But what is the sprinkling of blood a reference to? Well, clearly it is referring to Jesus' blood shed on the cross. We could stop there. He offered Himself so that we could live a life of following God and have our sins atoned for by the sprinkling of His blood. That's true enough. But I think Peter has combined these notions together to call to mind an additional point from the Old Testament. The question is—which part of the Old Testament is Peter alluding to?

Wayne Grudem explains,

"Sprinkled blood in the OT was a visual reminder to God and to his people that a life had been given, a sacrifice had been paid. But in most Old Testament sacrifices the blood was sprinkled on the altar or on the mercy seat (Lev. 4:17; 5:9; 16:14, 15, 19; Num. 19:4). In only three cases was the blood ceremonially sprinkled on the people themselves: (1) in the covenant initiation ceremony at Mt. Sinai when Moses sprinkled half the blood from the sacrificial oxen on all the people (Ex. 24:5-8; Heb. 9:19; and perhaps Is. 52:15); (2) in the ceremony of ordination for Aaron and his sons as priests (Ex. 29:21; probably also Heb. 10:22); and (3) in the purification ceremony for a leper who had been healed from leprosy (Lv. 14:6-7)."

Which one does Peter have in mind? That is difficult to say, because an argument for each could fit well in the context of the letter. Grudem himself (and only him, to my knowledge) makes an interesting case for option three (i.e., the purification ceremony for healed lepers),⁸ but I don't think it's very likely what Peter was alluding to. It seems to me the reference is simply too obscure. Certainly more obscure than the other two possibilities.

The second option (concerning the ordination service of Aaron and his sons as priests) could fit the context because Peter will say later that Christians are part of a "*royal priesthood*" (2:9). That's possible, but here again it doesn't seem like the most obvious referent when the first option we mentioned was the covenant initiation ceremony at Mt. Sinai that all the people of God at the time participated in. (That was kind of a big deal! The rest of the Old Testament plays out the way it does because of aspects of that covenant.) It would be like me mentioning the "Big Game" on Super Bowl Sunday and you saying, "Yeah, I love watching football!" But then I correct you, saying, "Oh no. You misunderstand. I wasn't talking about the football. I was talking about the

board game, playing Monopoly.” That would be weird. Monopoly is great, but no one is thinking of that as “the Big Game” on Super Bowl Sunday.

You see the point? If Peter references God’s people being sprinkled with blood and he means to allude to the Old Testament, then he, in all likelihood, has the most obvious referent in mind. In my opinion, and the opinion of most commentators, the most obvious referent is Exodus 24, the passage that describes the inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant, the Old Covenant.

One such commentator is Karen Jobes and here is how she describes the significance of the reference:

“In Exod. 24, animal blood was sprinkled on the people to establish that first covenant. Just before the sprinkling with blood, Moses told the people all that the Lord had said. In light of the subsequent history of Israel, the people’s twice-repeated response, ‘Everything the Lord has said we will do’ (24:3, 7; cf. 19:8), seems naive at best, if not even farcical. However, their response to God’s word is telling. Even though the human heart is undeniably depraved, there is nevertheless at the same time a deep urge within people to obey God. The inability to do so is frustrating to the point of despair, but because human beings bear the image of God, there is an impulse to be what he created us to be. The old covenant was powerless to bring that innate desire to complete realization. But through Jesus ‘everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses’ (Acts 13:39 TNIV). The new covenant in view in 1 Pet. 1:2 is the one that has been established by the blood of Jesus Christ. What the law was powerless to do—transform the hearts of people so they can obey the word of the Lord—has now been made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ brings to realization that innate desire to obey God. It is for this new covenant that Peter’s readers have been chosen and called.”⁹

So, in other words, both the reference to “obedience” and “sprinkling” should call to mind the establishment of a covenant, since both were involved in the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant. She argues that “both sides of the essential nature of the covenant are represented: the people pledge their obedience to God, and the blood of the covenant is applied to them.”¹⁰ Consequently, the words “obedience” and “sprinkling” express a single idea through two words, namely the idea of God’s covenant relationship with His people. This also, by the way, explains the order of “obedience” first and then “sprinkling” second in the text. I admit, when I first read that I thought, “Why would our obedience be described before our being sprinkled with Christ’s blood? Doesn’t our obedience result from that?” Yes, it does. But Peter probably opts for that order to make even more obvious the allusion to Exodus 24, where the people first pledge their obedience and then are sprinkled.

So what is Peter’s point when He says that his readers are “elect...for obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”? His point, it seems to me, is that the goal of your election, its purpose, or we might even say its result, is that you would be brought into covenant relationship with God. How does that happen? Through the blood of Christ!

As we close our time in God’s Word, let me invite those of you who are believers in Christ Jesus to peel back the tops of that Lord’s Supper unit you grabbed when you came in as we prepare to share this meal together. As we saw last week, Jesus picked up the cup at the Last Supper and declared “this cup is the New Covenant in my blood.” This text reminds us that we have a relationship with God because of the sacrificial death of Christ. If you are a Christian you have been sprinkled with His blood and you were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Ephesians 2:10), in obedience to your new Lord. Those works don’t save you, but they are an extension of your salvation. They evidence your covenant relationship with God.

Now there are two more assertions Peter makes here about the believer’s election. I’ll tell you what they are and then, Lord willing, we’ll address them next week...

Christians are elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father

Christians are elect through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit

But the focus today is the sprinkling of Christ's blood that brought us into fellowship with God. More than that, His blood brought us into the family of God, into covenant relationship. This bread and wine are meant to remind us that God has covenanted with us. Because we have partaken, by faith, in Christ. His blood has cleansed us of sin. His brokenness means an end to our guilt and shame. His suffering and rejection, ensures our acceptance. His work on the cross alone, not ours, is the basis of salvation and the New Covenant. His blood.

When we partake of these elements, we remember Christ's broken body and shed blood. We remember that God's wrath toward us has been exhausted in Christ's suffering. We are reminded that God so loved us that He gave His Son. We are reminded that the Father is for us. We are loved. We are accepted. Chosen. His. And nothing can separate us from that love.

Take, eat, drink, remember...

Let's pray...

¹ For some of the alternatives, see Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 60-63; Terrance D. Callan and Duane F. Watson, *First and Second Peter* (PCNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 19; Grant Osborne, "1 Peter" in *James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation* (CBC; Ed. Philip W. Comfort; Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 135.

² "The two designations inform the very substructure of the epistle, from which the major themes derive and in which 1 Peter coheres." J. Daryl Charles, "1, 2 Peter, Jude" in *Hebrews-Revelation* (EBC 13; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 297.

³ Technically in Greek they are adjectives, but I read them as substantival adjectives in apposition. I do not take "elect" as a modifier of "exiles," or vice versa.

⁴ There are a few who have tried to argue that these prepositional phrases modify only "apostle," but this is very unlikely and would have been the most confusing way for Peter to have conveyed this. Others, like Wayne Grudem (*1 Peter* [TNTC; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988], 50), have argued that the phrases modify the entire thought of verse 1. At least, this position sees them as modifying the "elect ones," however, as Karen Jobes concludes, "the later thrust of the letter suggests that it is the chosen-ness of the recipients with its alienating consequences that is the focus, not Peter's apostleship or the geographical setting of the recipients" (Jobes, 75).

⁵ From a sermon preached by John Piper on September 26, 1993, at Bethlehem Baptist Church, titled "Divine Election: The Role of the Father and the Spirit. This sermon could be found online on February 9, 2014, at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/divine-election-the-role-of-the-father-and-the-spirit>.

⁶ Technically "God's" is not in the Greek text, but it is implied in the text through the Trinitarian formula of verse 2.

⁷ "The prescript also introduces topics that will be developed in the body of the letter, including being chosen in the foreknowledge of God, as developed in 1:3-12; the sanctification of the Spirit, as elaborated in 1:13-17; and Christ's redemptive work and the need for obedience, as expanded in 1:18-25." Watson, 19.

⁸ He writes, "The third possibility, the sprinkling with blood for purification from leprosy, seems more appropriate. This passage (Lev. 14:6-7) is less obscure than we may think, for the ceremony was less obscure than we may think for the ceremony was used for any kind of skin disease (Lev. 14:54-57) serious enough to exclude the sick person from the community: that person was to live alone and shout, 'unclean, unclean' (Lev. 13:45-46). This Leviticus 14:6-7 is an excellent passage to represent cleansing from any defilement that would disrupt fellowship with God and his people. David apparently alludes to it in Psalm 51:7: 'purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean' (the LXX says, 'sprinkle me with hyssop' using *rhantizo*, related to Peter's noun *rhantismos*, sprinkling) here referring not to the physical defilement of leprosy but to the spiritual defilement of sin. In both cases, fellowship was disrupted but membership among the covenant people was maintained. This 'sprinkling with blood' fits 1 Peter 1:2. Although God intended these chosen sojourners to live 'for obedience to Jesus Christ', they were frequently 'defiled' by sin. Peter reminds them that their future includes continual sprinkling with the blood of Christ, that is, continual restoration of fellowship with God and his people through the sacrificial blood of Christ figuratively sprinkled over them [me...not because they lost salvation!], a continual reminder to God that their sins are forgiven and that they are welcome in God's [54] presence and among God's people (cf. 1 John 1:7 for the idea of continual application of the blood of Christ in Christian life). For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood this means that God's plan for them is not obedience marred by unforgiven sin but obedience whose failings are cleansed by the blood of Christ; it means 'for continual daily obedience and forgiveness.' F. H. Chase says Peter describes here 'a life lived in accordance with the Divine will and pattern...and continually quickening blood of Christ.' [HDB, vol 3, 796]. Here is simultaneous exhortation and comfort to bear in mind continually." Grudem, 53-54.

⁹ Jobes, 72.

¹⁰ Ibid.