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## Prayers

### To God

*Weekly theme: Thankfulness*

Inspire us, Lord Jesus, by the simple beauty of your life, lived so long ago but so powerfully close to us now. Lift our spirits to fly higher than they have flown before, so that on eagle's wings we catch a vision of our world from Your eyes, and be thankful for all you have done for us. Then, may we be faithful to You in everything we do, and remain confident and strong in our witness to the Gospel by which we were saved. We pray this in Your name, Lord Jesus: AMEN

### For myself

*Pray in gratitude for the many gifts God has given you, and ask the Lord to bless you as you seek to use these gifts in the life of the church.*

### For others

*Pray in gratitude for the many gifts God has given the people in your church, and ask the Lord to bless and encourage your all us you use these together, and as a 'body', for the glory of God.*

## Meditation

*(a meditation using John 1:14-17; Acts 14:3; Rom 5:1; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 4:15, 12:9; 2 Peter 1:2, 3:18)*

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
And we have received grace upon grace:

Grace has come to us in love and abundance  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord;

Grace is the measure of His compassion for us,  
shown by signs and wonders of His love;

Grace gives us access to His glorious throne,  
Through faith, hope and peace he gives;

Grace is the Lord's attitude towards us always,  
for He has made us to be His children;

Grace continually extends from heaven to us,  
overflowing from His people to the world;

Grace is always sufficient for us, in our faith,  
His power is made perfect in our weakness;

When we grow in the knowledge and grace of God,  
His peace will be ours and our children's, forever.

## Bible Passage

### 1 Peter 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ:

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, chosen <sup>2</sup> by the prior intention of God the Father, by the consecration of the Spirit, by obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood:

May grace and peace increase amongst you.

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an imperishable, pure and unfading inheritance, which is kept in heaven for you <sup>5</sup> who through faith are protected by God's power, for a salvation waiting to be revealed in the End Time.

## Review

The beginning of Peter's first letter is typical of many letters in the New Testament, but it is characterised by a sense of joy and excitement. Peter is writing to a wide range of churches across the Roman provinces of Asia Minor, a region we now know as Turkey (1:1), and he affirms them as part of God's great salvation plan expanding out into the world (1:2). In the early days of the church, the Gospel had been preached throughout the world of the Roman Empire, and this was something entirely new. Peter wanted to make sure that all the Christians in these churches knew that although they were different congregations in different places, they were all a part of God's great work in the world. God's work was one thing, and all His people were united in Him!

Something remarkable happens in verse 2, because here, Peter speaks of God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (1:2) all in one sentence! You may ask what is remarkable about that? In truth, although these three are all mentioned throughout the Bible, there are only a few places where the three 'persons' of the Trinity are mentioned side by side, in one sentence! In Scripture, the idea of the 'Trinity' is not as fully formed as it became in the third and fourth centuries AD, when Christians worked hard to be accurate about their faith and beliefs. The word 'Trinity' is a Latin word that comes from that time.

Then, after a typical Christian greeting of '*grace and peace*' (1:2, see also Paul's letters, 1 Cor 1:3, Gal 1:3 etc.), Peter begins by encouraging his readers to look forward to the completion of God's promises and the wonderful future God has for them in this life and the

next. He offers praise to God for the 'new birth' found through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:3), and then looks forward to the glory of salvation that will be completed (1:4) when all things come to their timely end (1:5). It is an 'imperishable, pure and unfading inheritance' (1:4). This whole paragraph summarises the Gospel in a unique way, and there can be no doubt that Peter wanted to remind these churches to trust in God and remain faithful.

## Going Deeper

### Notes on the text and translation

#### V1 'To the exiles of the Dispersion ... chosen'

##### Other translations:

'to God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout ...' (NIV)

'To those who reside as aliens, scattered ... who are chosen' (NAS)

Our interest here is in the three Greek words 'exile', 'dispersion', and 'chosen'.

The first word 'exile' (parepidemois) is used in the Bible to speak of 'temporary residents' or to 'resident aliens' or 'sojourners' who lived in Israel, as well as Israelites themselves when they were exiled in the days of Jeremiah.

The second word 'Dispersion' (diasporas) is a technical word used to refer to Jews or Christians who had been 'dispersed' throughout the known world, either through war or through personal choice.

The third word 'chosen' (eclectois) means 'elect' or 'chosen', and it refers to God's chosen people of Israel in the Old Testament as well as the Church as the 'body of Christ'.

#### V2 'the prior intention of God the Father'

##### Other translations:

'according to the foreknowledge of God' (NIV)

'destined by God the Father' (NRSV)

Everything here describes what it means to be 'chosen' (1:1). Many translations begin the verse 'according to the foreknowledge of God ...', but the Greek word here is 'prognosis' and it means 'known beforehand' and I prefer the translation 'prior intention' because this best describes the fact that God's plan of salvation is already prepared.

#### V2 'may grace and peace increase among you'

##### Other translations:

'grace and peace be yours in abundance' (NIV)

'grace and peace be yours in fullest measure' (NAS)

This is a fairly literal translation of the Greek. Many versions say, 'grace and peace be yours in abundance', but this leaves out the essential meaning of the Greek word 'plethuno' which is 'ever-increasing'. So, Peter wants the churches

to have more and more, not merely a large amount of these gifts, and this must be conveyed within the translation.

## **Further Comments**

### **Who wrote 1 Peter?**

To begin with, we must decide whether the Peter who wrote this letter was indeed the Apostle Peter. Certainly this letter was included in the Bible because those who first compiled the list of letters believed this to be the case. Scholars have long debated this, focussing on the possible dating of the letter and whether it was possible for Peter to have written it. The dating has been done by working out when the serious 'persecutions' referred to in the letter (1:6, 3:13, 4:12 etc) took place. No real conclusions can be drawn, however, because our knowledge of persecutions in the first century is very incomplete, and whilst one scholar will suggest these refer to the persecutions by Nero (64AD), another will suggest those under Trajan (97-117AD), for example. Knowing that from the earliest days of the church (as in Acts 17:1f., 18:12f. etc.), strong persecutions could arise anywhere, it seems to me this is the best background to assume for this letter, which assumes the authorship of Peter.

Some object to the idea that a poor fisherman from Galilee might one day write an accomplished letter in Greek. But why not? Why could Peter not grow through the astounding life-changing experience of being with Jesus throughout His ministry, and thence become more educated and eventually be capable of writing good quality Greek? To deny this shows an unworthy superior attitude on the part of those who deny Peter could have written this. Peter had a special commission to proclaim the Gospel from Jesus Himself (Matt 28:19), and this is why he began the letter; 'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ' (1:1).

### **The structure of 1 Peter**

The letter of 1 Peter has an interesting structure. Peter begins with an introduction (1:1,2), but then launches into a long sermon-like explanation of the Gospel together with advice for general Christian living. However, you will discover that the sermon-like part of the letter continues only to 4:11, where Peter concludes; 'may God be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ, To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.' (4:11). But after this, Peter adds further personal comments and advice, ending with this explanation; 'I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.' (5:12). This is an extremely helpful summary, because it tells us that Peter's intention was to encourage the churches to remain faithful to 'the true grace of God'; which for him meant the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. One interesting theory about the whole letter however, is that 1:3 to 4:11 is in fact a sermon by Peter preached on the occasion of conducting baptisms. When we get to the relevant passages, we will look at this theory further, including the possibility that the candidate was baptised after 1:21 and before 1:22, in the middle of the sermon!

### **The introduction (1:1,2)**

It is interesting that Peter called the people to whom he wrote '*the exiles of the Dispersion*'. Both these words have great significance. Behind the word 'exiles' is the Old Testament word for 'sojourners' used of Abraham, and by the prophets when speaking of God's people at the time of the exile in Babylon (Is 14:1; Ez 47:22 etc). In addition, the word 'Dispersion' was first used by Jewish people about those who were spread around the known world when it became impossible or them all to live in Israel or Jerusalem, and the word is still used in this way today. However, Peter was a Jew who had broken out of his exclusivity (with some help from the Apostle Paul – see Acts 15) and here is evidence that he applied these Jewish terms to the church of God.

Peter describes Christians as sojourners living in this world but not 'of' it (see also Phil 2:15, 1 Cor 7:31 etc), and as our text later explains, they have an eternal hope (1:4,5), and no trust in earthly things. They were also dispersed throughout the world not simply because of persecution, as with the Jewish people, but because the Gospel commission called on the Word to be spread or 'dispersed' throughout the world (Matt 28:19). The area of '*Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*' (1:2) was not the whole world, but it was a large region. Within decades of the death of Christ, it was remarkable that the Gospel had reached this far.

### ***The Trinity***

Verse 2 is a highly condensed sentence is one of only a few places in the New Testament where God is described as '*Father, Son and Holy Spirit*' (along with Matthew 28:19 and possibly Galatians 4:6). As such, this is an important text which confirms that the 'Trinity' is a way of understanding God which goes back to the Apostles themselves. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. Without such clear scriptural support, the doctrine of the Trinity could be said to rest on shaky ground!

The understanding of God in this three fold manner is set out by Peter very clearly. The Father is described as having a pre-determined plan of salvation which involves a choice of people, the Spirit does God's work in the world by making things holy, and there is a powerful link made between Jesus, 'obedience' and the 'sprinkling of His blood' (1:2). All of this represents a clear theological stance. Peter says that God's purpose is the salvation of humanity; that Jesus achieves this through his death (the sprinkling of His blood) and that the Holy Spirit makes all this to happen.

### ***The beginning of a message - connections with other New testament writers***

Peter begins his message with a word of greeting; '*may grace and peace increase amongst you*' (1:2). As we saw in the notes, Peter has taken this greeting from Paul and added to it, emphasising that it was God's intention that such things were not a static featured of faith, but that grace and peace should increase and multiply amongst His people. This is an amazing picture which encourages God's people to seek improvement in faith's quality and quantity, and this reminds us that we should never stand still in faith.

Everything Peter says in the next few verses is 'Trinitarian' (just as in verse 2). God the Father and Jesus Christ both appear in verse 3, but in verse 5, which is still part of the same Greek sentence, Peter talks of God's 'power', which is a normal way of referring to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Verse 3 itself contains a wonderfully concise description of salvation which combines both the words of Jesus and also phrases from the best of Paul's writing. When Peter describes salvation as '*a new birth into a living hope*' (1:3) we are reminded of John's report of Jesus' great words to Nicodemus; '*truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again!*' (John 3:3). Then, Peter speaks about the living hope of the '*resurrection from the dead*', and although this is of course at the heart of Christian faith, most of what we learn about this in the New Testament is written by Paul (Rom 1:4, 1 Cor 15:12f.; Phil 3:11 etc.). The fact that Peter's words are consistent in this way with the rest of the New Testament evidence from Jesus and Paul is a very powerful testimony.

# Discipleship

## ***Application***

### ***Keeping the faith***

It is interesting that Peter describes the heritage of salvation as maintained through '*faith*' and '*protected by God's power*' at the end of this great introduction to his letter. We can justly conclude therefore that our role in this great divine drama is to '*maintain the faith*' and to do so conscious of God's protective power by the Holy Spirit.

Almost every part of this passage is one which reminds a Christian of one or other great aspect of faith, but the message that we are to maintain the faith and be dependent upon God's Spirit is not casual, it is powerful advice. There is a central core to our faith which is not negotiable; Jesus died to gain our salvation as God required, He rose again to prove to us that he both meant this and could deliver it, and He has given us His Spirit to be present with us and to help us. There may be many ways to express these truths but they cannot be compromised. They are written here in God's Word, and without this, the Christian Church has neither heart nor purpose.

### ***The importance of classical biblical teaching***

This heritage of evangelical and Trinitarian faith is far too precious to be lost to academia, the generalisations of philosophy or the plain sinfulness of people whether in the church or out of it. God guards His message of salvation and those who proclaim it (1:5), and whatever happens in this world, it will prevail together with those God has 'chosen'. Peter knew all this, and he asked the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia to ensure that they stood fast to this '*true grace of God* (5:12). In the same way, this duty falls on us.

## ***Ideas for what to do***

- Discuss with a close friend what you believe to be at the heart of your faith, and compare this with what Peter says here, or similar scriptures.
- Try to find a way of describing your faith which you could use at work or in a non-church environment. You may not know when this will be needed!

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. If you were to make a list of aspects of Christian belief, how would you describe the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?
2. What do you think of 'predestination'? Does this scripture in your opinion teach us that people are predestined to have faith?
3. How easy do you find it to talk of the 'blood of Christ' and what does it mean to you?

## **Final Prayer**

Come to us now, O God;  
Receive our praise,  
Hear our confessions,

Forgive us our sins,  
Raise us up in faith  
Strengthen us in hope  
Re-make us in holiness  
Set us on Your pathway  
So we will see You again in glory!  
**AMEN!**