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Encouragement for Exiled People, Part 3

On a Monday morning in December 1913, the automotive industry was changed forever. Prior to this day, Henry Ford's factory could make an automobile in a little over 12 hours. But then on this date, Ford implemented a change which resulted in his factory producing a car every 2 1/2 hours! This enabled Ford to make 10 million cars over the next 10 years!

The change he made was the creation of distinct building stations as a conveyor belt moved the car down an assembly line six feet every minute. Each station or phase had as its goal a distinct objective. For example, the first phase/station was devoted to building the car frame. The second would be the suspension/wheels. And then the engine phase. And so on and so forth.

The key was that each station/each phase had a unique objective when it came to the car.

When it comes to our time on this earth, God also has distinct, temporal phases with specific objectives in mind? For example, if we asked, “What is God ultimately after when it comes to the Christian?” Most likely all of us would say that God ultimately is equipping us and so enabling us to glorify and enjoy Him forever. Yet if we stop there, we miss the *intermediate* purposes that God has for our lives in this age. For example, what is God’s purpose/objective when it comes to trial? Why does He ordain it for the believer?

James 1:2, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

Interesting! While our chief end is to glorify and enjoy God forever, nevertheless when the Lord appoints trial in our lives, it is for a more foundational purpose: to produce in us a persevering faith, one that would endure over the long haul!

What is God’s purpose when it comes to marriage? Why does He ordain the union of a man and a woman? Speaking of marriage, Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Spirit of God these words:

Ephesians 5:32, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”

As you have heard me teach, God’s purpose in marriage is that the man and the woman proclaim and enjoy the Christ/church relationship! And so while we know and understand the overall objective of the Christian life (glorifying/enjoying God), nevertheless there are short-term objectives — temporal phases — when it comes to God’s work in our lives!¹

The Apostle Peter introduces us to a distinct phase/objective when it comes to our lives as aliens in this world. Recall the background of this text. 1 Peter was written around 63/64 BC on the cusp of the Neronian persecution. Soon Christians everywhere in the Roman Empire would be threatened just as were their brethren in Rome, many of whom would lose their lives (as did Peter and Paul at this time). And yet before Peter was executed, he penned the epistle before us to aid the body of Christ as it faced trial, persecution, loss, and, in some cases, death!

As we transition to the temporal objective that God has for us in this “phase” of our Christian development, notice that it is two-fold. The first objective is our obedience.

1 Peter 1:1b, “who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the

sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ.”

The word for “obey” is ὑπακοή (*hupakoē*) and is made up of two words: ἀκοή (*akoē*) which references “listening” or “hearing” and ὑπό (*hupo*) which translates here as “under,” serving to intensify the main word. See it is one thing to listen to the counsel of another individual. When this occurs, we have good hopes that the person will act in accord with the counsel. Yet they may not. Yet with ὑπακοή (*hupakoē*) — listening intensified — the expectation becomes a certainty. If a person ὑπακοή’s (*hupakoē*’s) another individual, they will obey!

That is the idea behind this word! God’s will is for the Christian to “listen under” God and so His word. This encompasses far more than external obedience; it encompasses our entire person from our will, motive, objective to what we do, say, and think. God’s working in our lives today is that our entire being be subject to the Lord!

Now in the church today, we don’t like this message. It has a legal twang to it that leads many to reject it. *You can’t say God wants us to obey Him! That would be legalism and we are under grace!* Yet we know that those who say such things don’t understand grace!

Titus 2:11-12, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.”

I love this! Did you know grace has a particular teaching? Once a person is saved, grace says, *“Now that you are saved, out of love for Christ ‘...deny ungodliness and worldly desires and... live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age’”!* Truly the overriding passion that comes from knowing the grace of God is a longing/zealously for good deeds (cf. v. 14)! To miss this is to misunderstand God’s grace!

Psalms 111:10a, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do *His commandments...*”

A quest for obedience is NOT in competition to grace; it in fact is the overriding passion that comes from grace! John Stott put it this way:

Christian liberty is not inconsistent with law any more than love is. True, Christians are not ‘under law’ in that our salvation does not depend on obedience to the law. Yet this does not relieve us of the obligation to keep the law (Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 8:4; 13:10). The freedom with which Christ has made us free is not freedom to break the law, but freedom to keep it. ‘I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought your precepts’ (Psalm 119:45). (Stott, 1998, p. 210)

Douglas Moo wrote:

God's gracious acceptance of us does not end our obligation to obey Him; it sets it on a

new footing. (Moo, 2015, p. 117)

What great insight! Grace and obedience are NOT antithetical; they are bed-fellows... the one (grace) will always lead to the other (a passion to obey). Consider the words of John.

1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

Today in Christianity if you preach obedience/duty, you very well could be accused of placing your listener under the burden of the law! And that would be true if we were talking about the basis for one's acceptance before God. Yet if a person already is saved (if their sins are forgiven on account of the cross-work of Christ), then obedience to them will NOT be a burden, BUT a delight! That is John's point here! Love for God is always expressed in obedience!

John 14:15, "If you love Me [Jesus], you will keep My commandments."

Love for another person always translates to us doing what the other person desires! Accordingly, if you love God you will obey Him!

John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; JUST AS I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

In Christ's life, obedience and love were NOT opposites, BUT coordinate actions! Because Christ loves the Father, He obeyed all that the Father asked of Him in His first advent. And not surprisingly, when it comes to our relationship with Christ, our Lord passed this on to us! And yet, far from placing a burden upon us, notice how Christ ended His statement here.

John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."

if there is to be joy in your life, it will only come as you embody God's will for you in Christ! And that will, as stated here, is our complete/total submission to the Lord-otherwise known as "obedience." That is the path to joy in the Christian life. That was Peter's passion when it came to his persecuted brethren of Asia Minor! Only as they endeavored to obey the Lord in and through their upcoming trial would they enjoy their Lord and so glorify God in their bodies! Only then would their "joy be made full" (John 15:11)!

Yet this merits some clarification! How does obedience usher us into the freedom of joy? Elton Trueblood describes it this way:

We have not advanced very far in our spiritual lives if we have not encountered the basic paradox of freedom...that we are most free when we are bound. But not just any way of being bound will suffice; what matters is the character of our binding. The one who would be an athlete, but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise

and by abstinence, is not free to excel on the field or the track. His failure to train rigorously denies him the freedom to run with the desired speed and endurance. With one concerted voice, the giants of the devotional life apply the same principle to the whole of life: Discipline is the price of freedom. (Trueblood, 1970, p. 69)

And so Peter wanted the men and women of Asia Minor in their suffering to do it God's way. For herein he knew that was the way of victory.

1 Peter 4:15-16, "By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God."

Yet what happens, in our allusive passion to obey God, when we sin? What then? That brings us to the second major theme of our lives as aliens and strangers:

1 Peter 1:1, "that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood."

When you think of the "sprinkling of blood" in the Bible, for most it brings to mind the sacrificial system and so the "sprinkling of the blood" of the sin/guilt offering. When it came to the forgiveness of sin pictured in the Sacrificial system, we read this:

Leviticus 7:1-2, "Now this is the law of the guilt offering; it is most holy. In the place where they slay the burnt offering they are to slay the guilt offering, and he shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar."

Because of this, when we read of the "sprinkling of blood" we naturally think of the forgiveness of sin! As that is the case, the passage before us is confusing. Why would Peter place a reference to the forgiveness of sin AFTER the call to obedience? It makes it sound as if our obedience is the basis upon which God cleanses us from sin.

The confusion lies in our lack of familiarity with the Old Testament. Once again, the expression here has a rich, Old Testament connotation. Yes "sprinkling of blood" can have reference to the cleansing of a sinner from his sin. Yet that is but a very small emphasis in Scripture when it comes to this expression. For example:

- The "sprinkling of blood" is most prominent in both the Burnt offering (which is a dedicatory offering, Leviticus 1) and the Peace offering (which is a communal offering in which the community/family enjoyed rich fellowship with God, Leviticus 2-3)!
- In fact, when used of sprinkling people with blood, there are only three references:
 - The commissioning of a priest when it comes to his service in God's Kingdom (Leviticus 8).
 - The rededication of the cleansed leper (Leviticus 14).
 - Covenant Renewal, Exodus 24.

Of the three, it clearly is the latter that Peter had in mind here. We know this because Exodus 24 is the only repeatable ceremony in the life of the child of God. Furthermore, the two primary elements of covenant renewal: Obedience and the Sprinkling of Blood are repeated here.

In light of that, consider with me the Old Testament Ceremony of Covenant Renewal whereby the Christian who failed in his service to the Lord could, in the context of worship, renew their commitment to God by which the Lord assured them of His abiding love! In fact, Exodus 24 is the first reference in the Bible to the “sprinkling of blood”! As God’s people stood before the Mountain of God after being redeemed from their slavery and now made servants of the Lord, Moses officiated over this service of Covenant Renewal whereby God affirmed to His people their acceptance before Him,

Exodus 24:4b-8, “Then he [Moses] arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. [Here now is the affirmation...] Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

Interesting! The first and primary significance to the “sprinkling of blood” in the Bible is that of reaffirmation and so rededication! It is God telling his struggling people that they remain the apple of His eye regardless of their sin! And that is the focus of our passage this morning!^{2,3,4} Wane Grudem wrote this:

For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood thus 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... (Grudem, 2009, p. 58)

Accordingly, God’s objective when it comes to His exiled children, on whom He has placed His love before time began, is that:

1. The passion to obey the Lord be and remain a massive theme in their life.
2. But just as passionate must be the theme of restoration and healing when once the Christian fails in his service.

With this, notice Peter’s final point or the consequence of embodying biblical instruction.

1 Peter 1:2c, “may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure,”

A wooden translation of the Greek would be, “*Grace to you and peace be multiplied [or] be*

yours in the fullest measure.” In the secular culture of Peter’s day, the typical form used to begin a written correspondence was this:

- If you were Greek, “Rejoice”/χαίρειν, or...
- If you were Hebrew, “Peace”/שלום.

The Christian greeting combined the two and so became, “Grace to you and peace”- “grace” being that which gives life and “peace” being the existential result that comes as a consequence of life given in Christ. From this it is important that we see that the Apostolic writers were deliberate when it came to their greeting. It was NOT something that they mindlessly wrote, BUT that which they truly wished for when it came to those who might read their epistle.

Peter utilized this greeting in which he genuinely wanted his persecuted brethren in Asia Minor to live in light of the grace of God that they, in all their suffering, turmoil, and trial, might have peace!

Yet would you notice that he went one step further saying NOT “Grace to you...” BUT “May grace and peace be multiplied” or “be yours in fullest measure.” The word for “fullest measure” here is the passive form of πληθύνω (*plēthunō*) which has reference to multiplication.⁵ Because he used the passive form, Peter viewed this as something that would come to the believers of Asia Minor NOT as they sought after it; RATHER it would come as a consequence of something that they did. Now get this: that *something* was/is nothing less than the embodying of the message Peter gave in vv. 1-2! So

- As God’s people recognized that where they were was according to the will of their Messiah/Savior who reigns supreme over creation...
- As they came to realize and understand that in coming to Christ they became strangers and aliens per Christ’s choice on account of His great love for them!...
- As they understood that in every moment of their life the Holy Spirit was molding and shaping them according to His sanctifying will...
- As they then endeavored to serve Him perfectly... and then as they failed they were assured of the cleansing love of Christ...

The believers in Asia Minor would come to know God’s “grace” in a way they never would otherwise, and the result would be an ever growing “peace” that would “guard their heart and mind in Christ Jesus”!

Years ago, a man who in God’s providence bore testimony to this truth in his life related that at his work he was given an undesirable assignment which seemed to indicate the company’s assessment of his value (which from the task could not have been good). At first he was in turmoil — wondering what had he done? Was this the beginning of the end? Would he soon be terminated from his job? What would he do if that occurred?

It went on like this for some time until he realized that a good God was on the throne of the universe directing everything that was going on in his life. As such he was filled with joy and peace as he realized he was right where God wanted him to be. If he got fired, God would take care of him. Regardless of his company's assessment of his value, his call was to be faithful and God would provide the advance in His time if it pleased Him.

As he meditated upon this, he said the peace of God descended upon Him like a waterfall. While he did not know the future, this he did know: A good God would be their supplying all his needs!

By way of note, just as we saw last week, this man was chosen for the undesirable task NOT because he was not valued, BUT because he was most valued! The owner knew if anyone would do a good job, it would be him!

What an important truth which Peter exhorted here. While a dark cloud loomed on the horizon of the Christian's in Asia Minor, nevertheless as they:

- Released their feeble grip on this world as the immigrants they were.
- Trusted God to work according to His sovereign plan in doing what was right.
- Embraced the glorious place they held in the heart of God by which they were His beloved way before they were born.
- Strove simply to be faithful to the Lord in the calling He placed upon their life out of love.
- And when they failed, clung to the cross of Christ.

They could face the coming storm with boldness, strength, and peace!

And family of God, listen! Insofar as we embody the glorious truths presented here, the "grace" and "peace" of God will most certainly be multiplied in our lives as well!

References

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End Note(s)

¹ This gives a deeper perspective on Romans 8:28 which says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” Just like in an assembly line, every phase or building station in the life of the Christian has one over-all objective: equipping us for glory! That is the “good” that is in mind in this verse!

² Surely acquaintance with the OT would remind these readers of the blood sprinkled on the people after their acceptance of the old covenant at Sinai, which blood sealed the covenant (Exod. 24:7–8). And the fact that in Exodus this sprinkling follows the acceptance of the covenant by the people with their pledge of obedience (Exod. 24:3), as well as the fact that in some of the passion traditions Jesus’ blood is specifically connected with this covenant initiation (Mark 14:24), probably explains the sprinkling’s following the obedience of the people. (Davids, 1990, p. 49)

³ Cf. also Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, pp. 56ff and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, NTC, p. 37.

⁴ In fact, in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the only time people are sprinkled with blood (normally it is the altar that is sprinkled) is when they are being set apart for service/dedication, as in (1) the ordination of a priest, (2) the dedication of a cleansed leper, and (3) the ceremony of covenant renewal!

⁵ Think of Christ multiplying the loaves and fish, Mark 6:33-44.