



1 Peter Chapter Two

II 1 Peter 1:3-2:12 - Called to Salvation as Exiles continues/concludes

II.b 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 - Be Holy (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Two

The general exhortation to holiness is continued, and enforced with several reasons taken from the foundation on which Christians are built, namely our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and from their spiritual blessings and privileges they receive through him. The means of obtaining it, i.e. being thoroughly conversant with the Word of God, is highly recommended, and all contrary qualities are condemned.

Peter gives particular directions as to how believers ought to obey the civil authorities, and then servants with regard to their masters, patiently suffering but performing their duties well whilst doing so, in imitation of Christ. For it was Christ who suffered for us and we are called to suffer in a similar manner - with patient endurance.

¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

1 Peter 2:1-2

Therefore links Peter's instruction back to the changes a believer has experienced by being born again that we saw at the end of Chapter One.

Rid yourselves of all malice. Peter names five of the worst of human traits. What is in the flesh cannot be pure so those who live in the flesh as we all do are still subject to the desires of the flesh and the sinful nature: <<*wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong*>> (Isaiah 1:16). We are called to live our lives in honour to God and in love to our neighbour. To enable this we must always guard against the desire to sin that is

ever present in our bodies and our hearts.

Malice in a heart often leads a person to actively seek a way to do others harm but they will be discerned and dealt with: <<*His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly*>> (Proverbs 26:26), and if not in church then it will be by God when they are judged!

Deceit is opposite to all the qualities that a disciple of Christ is called to display: <<*Surely he recognises deceitful men; and when he sees evil, does he not take note?*>> (Job 11:11).

By accepting Christ as our saviour, we are called to act honourably in all our dealings for to do otherwise is to dishonour Christ. Believers are to avoid **hypocrisy** and act with honesty and integrity: <<*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body*>> (Ephesians 4:25).

Hypocrisy in the church is a sure way to turn people away from the faith and to encourage those against the church to speak out. Jesus warned his disciples about **hypocrisy**: <<*Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"*>> (Luke 12:1).

Envy is also something that is intolerable when we consider just how much God has so freely given to us. There is nothing that others outside of the faith have that could possibly match it. To **envy** others within the church, especially if it is toward their gifting or position, is a metaphorical slap in the face for God, who gives the gifts and raises people up through his Holy Spirit. Such **envy** can only mean dissatisfaction with what we have been given. Job noted: <<*Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple*>> (Job 5:2), and Solomon gives warning to envy as well: <<*A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones*>> (Proverbs 14:30).

David perhaps shows how we should deal with those who do **slander** us: <<*Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous. Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good. O Lord, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God*>> (Psalm 38:19-21), i.e. he continues to try to do what is right and he cries out to God to help in against those who would harm him. If this is what it is like when an enemy **slanders** someone, then it so clearly portrays how bad it would be coming from a fellow brother in church.

A believer should act in a way that will permit others to perceive what is truly in the heart. He should, in all his walk and conduct, be anxious to praise God and serve his neighbour, and to fear no one other than God. He must live openly and honestly, and not put on an act to make him appear to be something he is not, but to enable others to see God through him for what God truly is. Believers are called to do away with hatred and evil speaking. This also applies to our thoughts; for God sees and judges the heart, not the person.

In comparing believers to **newborn babies**, Peter is not necessarily saying that

they are immature in their faith, but that all Christians are to be like infants in their longing for pure spiritual milk, which likely refers to God's Word (vv.23-25). Paul speaks of his teaching to the church in Corinth in a similar manner: *<<I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready>>* (1 Corinthians 3:2), showing what a lengthy process it can be for some believers to become fully mature in Christ. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews seems to indicate that there are some who need to go back to the basics of the Gospel: *<<In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!>>* (Hebrews 5:12), and: *<<But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil>>* (Hebrews 5:14). It is an allusion to their regeneration through the Holy Spirit, and the way we grow is by meditating on God's Word: *<<But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen>>* (2 Peter 3:18). Just as a newborn baby needs to suck in the pure milk of its mother in order to obtain the nutrition it needs to live and grow, so too new Christians especially, but not solely, are required to suck in the Word of God, the pure doctrine of Christ, in order to understand God's revelation to them and then grow in his ways and not their own.

Just as true believers are born of the uncorrupted seed that was sown onto good soil, so too the uncorrupted milk of the Gospel will ensure the seed can grow into the person God intends them to be, although it can only be in tandem with the Holy Spirit, and according to God's will and purpose. The breasts from which we suck the milk are the church leaders who preach the pure Word of God, as the Beloved says to her Lover: *<<My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts>>* (Song 1:13). Or in Jesus' time on earth it was Mary sitting at the feet of her Lord instead of helping her sister Martha with domestic chores: *<<"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her">>* (Luke 10:41-42).

The cream of the Gospel is that Christ died for us and rescued us from sin, death and hell. For after the milk then the Cross must be preached so that we understand that we too must share in the suffering of his death, in order to share in his glory. The cream would symbolise what is really good in our lives, a gift of God, a time of blessing in Job's life: *<<Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil>>* (Job 29:46). This is more a strong draft of wine than pure milk: *<<Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory>>* (Romans 8:17).

We should consider the Word of God: *<<"Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk">>* (Exodus 23:19), *<<"Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk">>* (Exodus 34:26), and: *<<Do not eat anything you find already*

dead. You may give it to an alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk>> (Deuteronomy 14:21). Why would God want such a command written three times? Why should a suckling not be slaughtered until after it is weaned? It is probably as Peter writes here - teach the young and weak Christians gently; let them be carefully fed, and thrive in the knowledge of Christ; burden them not with strong doctrine, for they are yet too young, but after they have become strong, let them then be slaughtered and sacrificed on their own cross. It brings to mind the command of Moses that a newly-wed does not have to go to war for the first year of marriage to give him time to build the relationship with his new wife before going out to face death in battle: <<If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married>> (Deuteronomy 24:5). After this the command of Christ is clear: <<Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me">> (Luke 9:23).

Spiritual comes from Greek logikos, which echoes Word, Greek logos used in 1 Peter 1:23. Word is also a direct link to the Christ: <<In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God>> (John 1:1).

³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good

1 Peter 2:3

Taste. Some of the human senses such as sight, hearing and smell can be achieved from a distance, but taste, like touching, requires close contact and describes a way in which we truly experience Christ. To taste something that is good so often gives us the desire to crave for more! However, all the senses serve their purpose: <<That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life>> (1 John 1:1).

Christians will continue to long for the Word if they have tasted that the Lord is good, which they did in conversion: <<Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him>> (Psalm 34:8). In writing this letter, Peter likely meditated at length upon this psalm, which is about how the Lord delivers the righteous in their sufferings: <<For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil">> (1 Peter 3:10-12), and: <<Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies>> (Psalm 34:12-13).

Lord. Peter uses the Greek word Kyrios that is standard practice for NT writers when referring to Christ. In the LXX, i.e. the Greek OT, this same word is used to translate Yahweh, the Hebraic name of God the Father. Neither Peter nor other NT writers are saying that Christ and God the Father are one and the same, but they

recognise the deity of Jesus as the Christ.

For those who have not tasted that the Lord is good, the writings of Peter and others like him have no impact and their efforts are in vain: <<*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*>> (Galatians 3:1-5). All believers have tasted the goodness of the Lord as God the Father, for he sent his only Son to die for the sins of mankind. Equally, they have tasted the goodness of God the Son in his love and determination to fulfil his Father's will in his role. They can also taste the goodness of God the Holy Spirit who lives within them and will guide those who hand over control to him.

Once we have reached the stage to know just how gracious God is then we can eat all kinds of foods. Not in the sense that Paul speaks of in terms of freedom from the ceremonial law to eat all foods, such as we read in Romans Chapter 14 and 1 Corinthians Chapter 8, but in the way that we can come to understand the full revelation of Christ and what it means to be a true disciple of Christ in the way we should live our lives to, for and through him alone. As Mary sang in the Magnificat: <<*He has filled the hungry with good things*>> (Luke 1:53a).

II.c 1 Peter 2:4-12 - The Living Stone and a Chosen People

They are like living stones which together build up a spiritual house - the church, with Jesus as the cornerstone (vv.4-8). Believers are chosen by God to be his people (vv.9-12).

⁴ **As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him –**

1 Peter 2:4

As you come to him indicates a daily personal relationship with Christ, beginning at but not limited to the time of conversion. As believers continue in fellowship with Christ, they: <<*are being built into a spiritual house*>> (v.5). Just as his followers suffer persecution, Jesus also was rejected by men. Still, he is risen from the dead and hence is the living stone – the foundation of God's new temple. He is God's elect or chosen one, and as the exalted Lord he is honoured above all, i.e. precious to him.

The living stone would be a term readily recognisable by those readers who were familiar with Scripture, including those that Peter will shortly quote. It would clearly denote Christ's invincible strength and everlasting duration. It would also be a rock of offence to all enemies of these disciples, that is, enemies of God himself.

He is the living stone, having eternal life in himself, and being the prince of life to all his people. The reputation and respect he has with God and man are very

different. He is disallowed of men, reprobated or rejected by his own countrymen the Jews, and by the generality of mankind; but chosen of God, separated and fore-ordained to be the foundation of his church and ruler of God's eternal kingdom.

This is a particularly important passage of Scripture, for Christ is the precious stone which God has laid, on which we must all be built upon. For on him we can set our hopes with confidence and trust. He is the rock or cornerstone on which our lives and indeed his whole church is based. It is the truth that is found in Jesus' teaching: <<*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash”*>> (Matthew 7:24-27).

⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5

Believers are living stones in God's new temple, i.e. spiritual house. Since the components that make up the house are living, the house itself is also growing: you yourselves are being built up. Peter sees that the OT temple anticipated the new temple, where God truly dwells through his Spirit in his people. But believers are not only God's temple but are also a holy priesthood, which offers spiritual sacrifices by the power of the Holy Spirit: <<*I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God*>> (Philippians 4:18), and: <<*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased*>> (Hebrews 13:15-16).

A holy priesthood. Although it continued until the destruction of the Temple in AD70, the Levitical priesthood passed away with the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus. It has been replaced, not by biological descendants of Aaron but of spiritual descendants of Christ, all who believe in Jesus and would call on him as their personal Saviour. Jesus had served as the ultimate sacrifice once for all and had become the true and only High Priest: <<*Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever*>> (Hebrews 7:26-28). There still remains the need for sacrificial living and we are to offer

ourselves spiritually and physically: <<Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship>> (Romans 12:1). In Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren says: 'The problem with a living sacrifice is that it can crawl off the altar'.

Acceptable to God. As an apostle to the Gentiles it had been Paul's task as well, through the Holy Spirit, to make Gentiles **acceptable to God**: <<I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God>> (Romans 15:15-17)

Now that all are a holy priesthood there are two things to note:

1. All believers are to act accordingly. If we are called to be holy then we must do all within our power to be holy. We must sacrifice that which is of ourselves, putting off the old and putting on Christ Jesus as Lord.
2. We are all called to preach without distinction: <<There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus>> (Galatians 3:28), <<For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake>> (2 Corinthians 4:5). However, this does not negate the gifts or various church offices that we must respect. Paul clearly teaches this: <<Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts>> (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).

The debate over women priests is one that is causing a wide split in the church at a human level. Paul did not permit women to speak in church primarily for cultural reasons, as Jesus does not seem to impose this restriction. It is always sad when it is the arguments of men that impact so negatively on the image of the church and therefore on Christ, for we are called to live in peace, confirmed by Paul: <<God has called us to live in peace>> (1 Corinthians 7:15b), <<Live in peace with each other>> (1 Thessalonians 5:13b), and by the author to the Hebrews, who does so with a warning: <<Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord>> (Hebrews 12:14).

This is now the true priesthood, which consists of three points:

1. We are all to pray for the church.
2. We are all to offer ourselves in spiritual, as well as material sacrifice.
3. We are to preach Christ Jesus as Lord of our lives and everything else.

Martin Luther says there is more to being a priest than simply to wear the tonsure, having your head shaved and being anointed. He claims he can just as easily do that to an ass!

It does not matter whether the cross we bear is symbolic or real, nor does it matter how great the sacrifice is, if it is not offered through Christ Jesus as our Lord then it is not acceptable to God the Father.

As grand as Solomon's temple was, as was that built by Herod, which Jesus himself had worshipped in, the new temple was not made of dead material but was a living temple, made up of living parts that were no longer dead in trespasses and sins, but alive to God by regeneration and the working of the divine Holy Spirit.

Those who accept the Word of God are being built into a spiritual house, the church of Jesus Christ. We too are stones being laid to rest upon the foundation of Christ but as such we must understand we must also bear the marks and fashioning just as he had, and every believer that is laid alongside or above us. We are required to bear some of the load, although ultimately the load is upon the foundation: *<<Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls>> (Matthew 11:29)*. It is the fruit of faith and the mark of love that we are all fitted one to another, and thus become one building, as well as one body in Christ. In similar fashion Paul speaks of the building as being God's temple: *<<Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple>> (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)*.

It is not a building of brick or wood, not a tabernacle of canvas, for it is a spiritual house of true believers - one church, one faith, serving one living God: even if it now comes in many flavours. And those who are inside this building are locked together in love without any wickedness, deceit, hypocrisy, hatred and slander as Christ has commanded. The reality may be different, for there are those who meet in churches who are not really born again of the Spirit of Christ, but use it for other, ignoble purposes.

⁶ For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

1 Peter 2:6

This is an excellent proof text to share with those that have not yet heard the Gospel, for it sets Christ as the foundation on which to build upon. These few words express so great a matter that sums up the entire basis of our faith, and in such brief words comprises more than any mortal man can express, for both Isaiah and Peter were clearly operating as servants of the Holy Spirit. In support of the

idea that Jesus is the cornerstone of God's temple, Peter cites Isaiah 28:16 as does Paul in Romans 9:33 and 10:11. Jesus is the elect Messiah whom God has honoured by raising him from the dead. Those who put their trust in him will enjoy vindication on the Last Day.

It is clearly a spiritual stone since the prophet calls on us to believe in him as the foundational stone. It is also clearly God, otherwise the prophet would be calling believers to break the 1st and 2nd Commandments: *<<And God spoke all these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments">>* (Exodus 20:1-6). However, it cannot be God alone, as it is also called to be part of the building and not just the head, so it has to be God in human form and therefore is God the Son. For just as we are called to be like him, he was also called to be like us but greater than all, for he never succumbed to the temptations of sin as the rest of us have: *<<for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God>>* (Romans 3:23).

Peter also quotes from David in v.7 *<<The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes>>* (Psalm 118:22-23). Jesus quotes this in The Parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:42), and Peter also quotes it to the Sanhedrin, as recorded by Luke in Acts 4:11. The builders that rejected this most precious cornerstone were the religious leaders who were misleading the people through their erroneous interpretation of the Scriptures, which had become muddled with their traditions. It is not that they were not zealous for God but they had confused serving the law with that of serving the law-giver and law-maker. They were not only meant to be the builders of their nation but builders of the Kingdom of God for all nations: *<<Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him>>* (Genesis 18:18), *<<All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him>>* (Psalm 72:11), *<<And I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory>>* (Isaiah 66:18), and he will ultimately judge all nations: *<<The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head>>* (Obadiah 15).

It is interesting to note that Paul generally quotes OT Scripture word for word from the Septuagint translation, except occasions where he has deliberately made changes to support a particular argument, something so eminent a person can do but most should never attempt. However, Peter, who also uses the LXX, sometimes just offers the sense of a passage rather than the precise wording. This again is acceptable from a teacher who had spent three years being personally taught by Jesus and was so frequently drenched in the Holy Spirit.

The cornerstone is considered to be the critical stone in the corner of the foundation that ensures that a stone building is square and stable. Jesus Christ is

the very foundation stone of all our hopes, dreams and happiness. He communicates the true knowledge of God: <<*All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*>> (Matthew 11:27), by him we have access to the Father: <<*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*>> (John 14:6), and through him are made partakers of all spiritual blessings: <<*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ*>> (Ephesians 1:3).

Peter, in agreement with the prophet, states that, in God's eyes, the stone is elect, and an extremely precious stone, it is of great importance also that it takes away spiritual death, satisfies for sin, and rescues from hell. Besides that, it freely bestows the Kingdom of God on those who will build upon its foundation.

Never be put to shame. King David concurs with Isaiah: <<*No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse*>> (Psalm 25:3).

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,”

1 Peter 2:7

Eschatological, that is, end-times honour belongs to believers, i.e. you who believe, but unbelievers will find the prophecy from Psalm 118:22 fulfilled. The stone the builders rejected is the foundation of God's temple, his new spiritual people.

Disciples of Jesus as the Christ view him as precious simply by believing in him, and so they gain a blessing through their faith in him. Yet to those who choose not to believe the very same stone they reject has become the capstone, the very foundation of hope for all men who will accept it and believe.

The prophet calls it a foundation stone as it has to be laid first before any others can be built upon it. Also, the foundation stone requires nothing from the other stones that are added, but all the other stones depend upon the one that forms the basis of the foundation for everything else that follows. Jesus was also the cornerstone that was able to bring Jew and Gentile into one structure, who were before at enmity one with another. Before this the Jews gloried in the law of God and that they were God's chosen people, and because of this they had generally come to despise the heathen Gentile. But Christ has now come and taken away their boasting and called those of us who were Gentile sinners, and thus he has made both one, by one faith and has so dealt with us that we both must confess we have nothing of ourselves but are all sinners deserving of death: <<*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*>> (Romans 6:23).

⁸ and,

**“A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”**

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

1 Peter 2:8

In stumbling, unbelievers fulfil the prophecy in Isaiah 8:14, where the stone God has established becomes the means of their falling. Their stumbling, however, is their own fault, for they are tripped up because of their refusal to obey the word of the Gospel of Christ.

They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for. Some understand this to teach that God has predestined not who will disobey, but only what the result of disobedience will be for those who choose to disobey, i.e. that those who disobey will stumble. It is more likely that Peter teaches that God appoints all that will occur, for God had planned it from all eternity. By definition God is sovereign, directing all things freely according to his royal counsel. This is in sharp contrast with the pagan gods of the time, who were understood to be often fickle or bound by an inscrutable and arbitrary fate. God’s predestination gives his people tremendous comfort, for they know that all who come to Christ do so through God’s enabling grace and appointment. In teaching this, Peter does not deny human responsibility or free will with the boundaries God provides, for he emphasises that people are guilty if they fail to believe, for they stumble because they disobey. Their fall has dire consequences: *<<He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed>>* (Matthew 21:44). What they have disobeyed is at the heart of God’s grand purpose and design for all mankind since eternity past.

This quote from Isaiah also seems to imply that God has pre-judged the world so that, when the time comes, the majority will be dismayed or put to shame, but a small elect that choose to believe in Jesus as the Christ, a decision they have reached through the free grace of God, will not: *<<Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame>>* (Isaiah 50:7).

Through this one passage all the doctrines and free-will choices of man, except that to follow Jesus as Lord, fail and fall to the ground like dead leaves from a tree in an autumn storm. All that we have of any value rests on Christ’s righteousness, truth, grace, mercy, love, life and eternal blessings.

Now this stone is not subservient to itself, but suffers itself to be trodden on and buried in the earth so that it cannot be seen, and other stones lie upon it that can be seen. Therefore, we are called to reflect his glory by living in a way that is honourable and to live in the manner that Christ chose to live: *<<For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many>>* (Mark 10:45).

Those that have accepted Jesus as the Christ have now become dependent upon him for everything, not least their eternal salvation. However, there are still so many that reject him and for them the stone causes them to stumble and the Cross becomes an offence. This unbelief started with the Jews, the very people who had been entrusted with God's law and had been so frequently warned to expect their Messiah, but Paul acknowledges their failure to do so: <<*But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"*>> (Romans 10:16).

Peter had the privilege of being taught directly for three years by Christ during his ministry and before his ascension, which gave him all the schooling he needed: <<*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus*>> (Acts 4:13). He had then been filled with the Holy Spirit to guide him in his own ministry: <<*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed*>> (Acts 4:8-10), and: <<*While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you*>> (Acts 10:19), yet it is as always to the Word of God that he turns for his proof and supporting arguments: <<*The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare*>> (Isaiah 8:13-14).

Men like Peter and Paul had amazing personal testimonies that could blow people away. Yet they chose instead to speak of the Gospel and not of themselves. After all, they were not the Good News; they were simply a product of the Good News.

The fault lies not with Christ that he causes men to stumble and fall. Instead, it lies with them for their hard heartedness: <<*Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too"*>> (Luke 2:34-35). They may cry out: <<*How long will you torment me and crush me with words?*>> (Job 19:2), and: <<*O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent*>> (Jeremiah 5:3).

Of course, Jesus himself was crushed in order that he might become the propitiation for the sins of us all: <<*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed*>> (Isaiah 53:5), and: <<*Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days,*

and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand>> (Isaiah 53:10).

To see the Jews generally rejecting Christ, and multitudes in all ages slighting him, ought not to discourage us in our love and duty to him; for this had been foretold by the prophets long ago, and is a confirmation of our faith, both in the scriptures and in the Christ. However, we should continue to pray for those who choose not to believe, continue to witness to them through our daily way of living and to take each opportunity we have to share with them the truth of the Gospel message. We should never become discouraged or disheartened by their rejection, but we must equally never become content with the situation we find ourselves and our world in.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9

A chosen people. Here, Peter uses the Greek word *genos* or race, which is different from *genea*, used to denote generation: <<*As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah"*>> (Luke 11:29). Peter is referring to a spiritual and not a biological race. God's grace rather than human choice is the ultimate explanation for why some people come to faith and others do not, although those offered his grace have the free will to reject the offer and must accept the consequences. God has elected or chosen some to be his people, therefore no one can boast of being included. Peter views the church as a new Israel, for he picks up what is said of Israel: <<*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites">> (Exodus 19:5-6), and applies it to the church.

The church is a royal priesthood and God's holy nation. As God's chosen ones, Christians are to declare the praises of the one who summoned them from darkness and ushered them into his wonderful light: <<*because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise*>> (Isaiah 43:20b-21). What Peter is really talking of is true enlightenment: <<*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"*>> (John 8:12).

All of Christ's disciples, where ever they may be, compose one holy nation. It is not nations! They are one nation, collected under one head, agreeing in the same principles and truths, and governed by the same laws, which are not laws laid down by man or any particular church denomination, but by the laws of Christ; and they are a holy nation because they are consecrated and devoted to God, renewed and sanctified by his Holy Spirit, and serving the same High Priest and sovereign of the church.

The KJV translates a people belonging to God as ‘a peculiar people’, which seems to fit so many of us at times! However, Moses writes: <<*For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession*>> (Deuteronomy 7:6). Again, we must recognise that this selection is purely by God’s grace and not through any action, good work or ability of our own. Everything we have has been given to us by God for his own will and purpose: <<*For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*>> (1 Corinthians 4:7).

His wonderful light. One of the works of God that we must be forever thankful for is that he has brought us out of darkness into his wonderful light. As Paul lay on the Damascus Road, in darkness as he was temporarily blinded by the Shechinah, God’s glory that accompanied the appearance of the Risen Lord, he was instructed: <<*‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’*>> (Acts 26:16-18). He is not speaking of the darkness that God brought upon Egypt: <<*Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt – darkness that can be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived*>> (Exodus 10:21-23), or that Job speaks of in death: <<*Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment’s joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness*>> (Job 10:20-22). There are those that are in light but have been sent into darkness for opposing the work of Christ, as Paul did to Elymas the sorcerer on Cyprus: <<*Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord*>> (Acts 13:9-12). There are those who choose the darkness and those who would choose light: <<*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God*>> (John 3:19-21).

Although Elymas, the Egyptians and indeed Paul had experienced physical

darkness through their blindness, the darkness Peter is referring to here is spiritual; it is darkness in the very soul of man. We may believe that we are living in the light but in Kingdom terms we are not, thus Peter takes what the world would call light and turns it into complete darkness. The apostle John explains this: <<Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him>> (1 John 2:9-11). The Lord's brother alludes to such people: <<They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever>> (Jude 13).

Peter has once again brought together many proof texts and it is throughout this letter common to heap passage on passage, for all the prophets had spoken of this, that God's name and honour, and his mighty arm or power, should be honoured and extolled; that he would perform such a work that the whole world would sing and speak of it; of this, all the prophets are in full agreement with the psalmists of Israel. In comparison to God, all human reason is but darkness.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:10

Once you were not a people. To those whose background were Gentiles this would come as no surprise, but what would those who were Jewish Christians think to such a statement? They had always been part of the family of God, chosen in the calling of Abraham 2,000 years earlier. We should never forget just how difficult it must have been for the Jews to give up the close ties they had with their Jewish traditions and joining in with the Gentiles in seeing that this was an outworking of all that Scripture had already been telling them, but which they and their forefathers had so badly misinterpreted.

Peter alludes to texts in Hosea that refer to Israel: <<Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them – not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the Lord their God". After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the Lord said, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God. "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God'>> (Hosea 1:6-10), and: <<I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'>> (Hosea 2:23), and sees these Scriptures fulfilled in the church.

God had once said: <<*They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding*>> (Deuteronomy 32:21).

Now you have received mercy. Paul writes in similar fashion to the Roman church groups: <<*Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience*>> (Romans 11:30).

It would appear from this passage and its allusion to these texts that the Diaspora Jews and Gentiles are included as recipients of Peter's letter as already commented on.

Those who have been accepted into the holy nation of God by accepting Christ as their Lord still need to be exhorted to strengthen their faith and to resist the temptations of the world, in order to avoid slipping back to what they were when they were not a people in God's eyes.

1 Peter 2:11-12

In this upcoming passage Peter confirms that the true believer is not of this world but is still in the world and must be aware at all times of the dangers this poses to one's own soul. But if a believer lives by true and deep faith he will receive all that is good from God and through the love he receives he can then give out of his abundance to his neighbour. At all times the believer is to live in a way that will attract unbelievers towards Kingdom life for themselves.

Inwardly, the believer is holy, pure and true. However, most if not all are still drawn to the lusts of the flesh, our sinful nature, imputed throughout the Adamic era, thus Paul writes: <<*Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin*>> (Romans 7:20-25).

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

1 Peter 2:11

Dear friends signals a major new section in the letter is about to start, and does so after this brief introduction to it. Peter uses this technique again in 1 Peter 4:12. Believers are aliens and strangers awaiting their end-time inheritance, see also 1 Peter 1:1 and 1:17. The pleasures of the world are tempting and enticing nonetheless, hence there is a great struggle and warfare against such desires. Believers are to abstain from sinful desires, for they wage war against your soul. Holding on to sinful desires brings spiritual harm.

Believers are called to learn how to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them and to give themselves completely over to his leadership, for that is their future. There will come a time, although probably never completely in this life, when they will have finally overcome the desires of the sinful nature and the conflict within them will then end.

Consider the words of Jesus: <<*He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough”>> (Matthew 13:33). Here it shows that the leaven is at work in us, permeating through gradually until the dough is fully raised, such is the Kingdom seed that is within the believer. Although the believer has faith and has the Word of God, he must allow it to penetrate throughout his whole being where it must continually work, along with the Spirit, until the entire being is renewed. Therefore, when Scripture, either OT or NT, refers to the purity of the saints it must be understood that their faith may be entirely pure and without sin, but their flesh or sinful nature still remains. This tension means that they can never be fully holy while life remains in the body or until they are renewed at the Lord’s Second Coming.*

We see this portrayed during the Last Supper when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet: <<*“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you”>> (John 13:8-10).*

Contrary to what some commentators have said, the contention and strife against sin does not occur in unbelievers but only in believers, which actually gives us encouragement, for it shows that we recognise our weaknesses and also our resolve to guard against these weaknesses within ourselves. Once we accept that we can do nothing on our own, we are more likely to hand over complete control of our lives to Christ in faith, as it is the only solution we have to battle against the desires of the flesh. Our own puny works will never succeed for long. Giving over control of our lives to Christ is not a sign of weakness, it is not a crutch that some outside the faith may claim, but is actually a sign of strength in our faith and trust that we so readily recognise our dependence on God for all things and are accepting of him.

For as long as the flesh remains we will have the battle to resist sin and evil. Our chief weapons are prayer, fasting and offering up ourselves to God as our whole self in supplication to his grace and mercy upon us. Unlike the Jewish leaders in the 1st Century, and indeed their forefathers, we are not to resist the work of the Holy Spirit within us, as Stephen stated to the Sanhedrin at the end of his trial: <<*“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it”>> (Acts 7:51-53).*

It is said that baptism purifies us from our sins for it is a baptism of repentance, but we must never become complacent and think of repentance as a once for all offering to God. We must maintain a watchful guard on our hearts at all times or else the enemy will strike, as in the story of the evil spirit given as a warning to us by the Lord: <<“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first”>> (Luke 11:24-26).

¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

1 Peter 2:12

Peter refers to unbelievers as pagans, which is in keeping with his understanding of believers being a new Israel, see comments on 1 Peter 1:1. Believers are to live godly lives even though they will often be criticised by unbelievers. When believers do good deeds, some unbelievers will repent and believe, and thus glorify God. Peter clearly alludes to Jesus’ words here: <<*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*>> (Matthew 5:16).

On the day he visits us may refer to the initial conversion of the believer through the regenerating work or visitation of the Holy Spirit: <<*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people*>> (Luke 1:68), or it may refer to the way in which those who become believers will glorify God on the Last Day, the day of judgment. Jesus had forewarned the Israelites of the destruction of Jerusalem that would occur in AD70 because they had not recognised the day of God’s visitation through the coming to them of their Messiah: <<*They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God’s coming to you*>> (Luke 19:44).

To glorify God should probably be understood in the broad sense that the believer will glorify God in many ways, e.g. by believing: <<*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed*>> (Acts 13:48), and: <<*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name”*>> (Romans 15:7-9), or through the doing of good deeds: <<*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds*>> (Hebrews 10:24), and at the end of the age: <<*He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water”*>> (Revelation 14:7), and: <<*Let us rejoice and be*

glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready>> (Revelation 19:7).

Believers are to live the guarded life as recently discussed, not in order to be saved or to make ourselves pure and holy, but to be good witnesses for Christ in the world, in order that our lives may encourage others to seek the Kingdom life for themselves, turning to God for the salvation of their own souls. It is a true act of our love for Christ that we are prepared to do this, particularly for the benefit of those who appear to hate us and offer nothing but abuse toward us: <<“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also>> (John 15:18-20).

History records that when the Roman emperors reigned and persecuted Christians, starting with Nero (54-68AD), no fault could be found in the Christians except that they called on Christ and considered him as their king. So Pliny wrote in his letter to the Emperor Trajan (98-117AD) that he knew of no wrong that the Christians had done other than they met together early each morning to sing their praises in order to bring honour to Christ; besides this, no one could bring any charge against them.

III 1 Peter 2:13-4:11 - Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World

This section emphasises that those who have trusted in Christ bear witness to the Gospel by their conduct in their everyday lives. Peter provides believers with an essential framework for their lives that will help them to live at peace where they can and to endure the sufferings that so often accompany a life given over to the service of God through Christ. The sufferings may be different from generation to generation and dependent upon the part of the world where God chooses that his people should become witnesses for him, but for each believer their life becomes a trial and a testing of their faith in their God through Christ.

III.a 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 - Testifying to the gospel in the social order

Peter exhorts Christians to goodness as citizens (vv.13-17), as slaves (vv.18-25), as wives (1 Peter 3:1-6), and as husbands (1 Peter 3:7).

III.a.i 1 Peter 2:13-25 - Submission to Rulers and Masters

Peter instructs his readers for the need to submit to the Roman Emperor, his civil administration and its officials. He also instructs those who are slaves to honour their masters by being in full submission in their service to them and ensuring they perform their duties to the best of their abilities. The whole purpose of this is to bring honour and glory to God.

1 Peter 2:13-17

Here, Peter proceeds with beautiful phraseology to teach us how we should conduct ourselves in all things. Until now he has spoken in general terms of the conduct that belongs to every situation. Now he begins to teach how we should act towards the civil authorities. For since he had said enough as to the first matter, of our duty to God and ourselves, he now adds how we are to conduct ourselves towards men.

¹³ **Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,** ¹⁴ **or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.**

1 Peter 2:13-14

Christians are to submit to every civil authority, as the Christian faith is not about rebellion against law and order: <<*Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God*>> (Ecclesiastes 8:2). Paul had spoken to the Roman church on this issue: <<*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour*>> (Romans 13:1-7).

God has ordained civil authorities, for it is right that the evil doers are punished and the honest people are protected. Without civil authority, given the level of wickedness that man is capable of, there would soon be chaos and anarchy in the world, which God would not tolerate: <<*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace*>> (1 Corinthians 14:33). God has also ordained those authorities that do not rule well and even those that are evil. This is partly for the testing of faith of those who live under them and should be viewed from the perspective that these people will ultimately be judged by God.

Jesus also advocates giving civil authorities what is due to them, whether it is just or not, providing that God is not neglected and receives what he is due: <<*Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it*

right to pay taxes to Cæsar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Cæsar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Cæsar what is Cæsar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him>> (Mark 12:13-17).

Peter clearly states that we do so for the Lord's sake. We are not bound to obedience to the sovereign power for its own sake but for God's sake, whose children we are. We should be drawn to this, not that we may thereby acquire any merit, for what we do for God's sake we must freely do as an act of service.

It is God's will that we obey the authorities and the laws they make. This includes what some of us may consider being lower grade laws, such as traffic offences. Those who wilfully fail to observe such laws are not only providing a poor witness to the world (see v.12), but they are also dishonouring the God they have chosen to serve.

To punish, the Greek word *ekdikēsis*, which can mean justice, punishment, or retribution, includes not just deterring evil but carrying out retribution against those who do wrong. Disciples of Christ are commanded not to seek revenge but should leave those who cause them harm to be tried by the due process of law, if appropriate, and to live in the knowledge that all will face trial by Christ on the Last Day. By contrast, governments are to commend or reward those who do right, thus encouraging more good behaviour.

The Jewish Christians would have grown up under the contention that they had, by right of God, authority only to submit to a king of their own nation and not to one from foreign nations. This had always been a cause of strife even before their first exile by the Assyrian's, when foreign kings would frequently raid their nation to take taxation in the form of treasure, crops and cattle. God had clearly instructed them through Moses: <<*be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite*>> (Deuteronomy 17:15). Their king now was of course Jesus, who had ultimate authority over them and indeed everyone else. But God is clearly commanding that, since he sets up all civil authorities, good and bad, then citizens of any country are to submit harmoniously to those authorities unless it brings them into direct conflict with their service to God. Their subjection to the civil authorities in no way impacts on their freedom in Christ: <<*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*>> (John 8:36). That is, they are free from Satan's dominion, the law's condemnation, the wrath of God, the difficulties of duty, and the fear of death

¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

1 Peter 2:15

The godly lives of believers will put to silence any false charges raised against them. By showing true forgiveness and love for enemies, the believer will be

demonstrating the true heart of God that will either convict people within themselves to change or condemn them.

If we live our lives in obedience to the civil authorities in a way that is pleasing to God and does not in any way conflict with what God requires of us, then we will be seen to be good citizens and will silence the critics of God who try to make believers out to be something that is contrary to the interests of the general population. By being good citizens in the world, without being drawn into the traps set by the world, we will live lives that are pleasing in God's sight, the only opinion that matters.

Jesus had confirmed to Pilate that he and his followers were no threat to the Roman authorities: *<<Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place">>* (John 18:36).

¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

1 Peter 2:16

Freedom in Scripture is not a license to sin, but expresses itself in devotion to what is good: *<<You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself">>* (Galatians 5:13-14).

This verse is for those of us who have embraced the freedom in Christ, that we may not go on and abuse this freedom; that is to say, under the name of Christian freedom do all that we lust after, so that from this freedom shall spring up a shamelessness and carnal recklessness, as we see even now taking place and has existed throughout the history of the church from Peter's time. This is seen in the epistles of Peter, John and Paul, when men did what the great multitude does now, e.g. *<<It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?>>* (1 Corinthians 5:1-2), *<<For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder>>* (2 Corinthians 12:20), *<<In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us>>* (2 Thessalonians 3:6), *<<Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenæus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme>>* (1 Timothy 1:18-20), and: *<<I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied*

with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church>> (3 John 9-10). We have now, once again, through the grace of God, come to the knowledge of the truth and we know that it is mere deception which has been taught by some church leaders who try to sanitise or provide political correctness to the Gospel truth. We cannot change the message by saying that times have changed. Everyone is now living with their partner, gay marriages are OK, all faiths lead to the same God, unbelievers will get to heaven anyway, etc. To live in the freedom of Christ is to live under grace and truth, but not under law!

We must hold onto the truth that Jesus brought into the world. While speaking in the temple courts: <<To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed>> (John 8:31-36), and shortly before his crucifixion: <<“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate asked>> (John 18:37-38a).

There is no law in Christ for true believers, for they should be motivated to live their lives to God and to do what is good for their neighbour. Paul talks of the law: <<We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me>> (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

Freedom from the law is a freedom to wholeheartedly serve God and his true church. It is not done out of obligation, although we owe him everything, nor is it done through compulsion. It is not about serving officers or leaders of the church, although we should show them honour if they are themselves acting honourably in the office they hold. If they do not then they are answerable to God for their inappropriate actions and false teaching, and their punishment will be severe: <<If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain>> (1 Timothy 6:3-6).

Jesus demonstrated his freedom to comply with the religious authorities when he didn’t need to but did so to bring honour to God as well as to avoid giving unnecessary offence: <<After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your

teacher pay the temple tax?” “Yes, he does,” he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes – from their own sons or from others?” “From others,” Peter answered. “Then the sons are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours”>> (Matthew 17:24-27).

Likewise, he permitted himself to be judged when he did not have to, in order to please his heavenly Father: <<“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin”>> (John 19:10-11).

This freedom allows us to do God’s will, which includes that we love one another especially the weaker Christians since to do so is a work of love and a debt to God that cannot be repaid: <<Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law>> (Romans 13:8).

We are servants of God and not servants of man, which gives us the freedom to serve all men in brotherly love and not out of obligation or by law, but under the free grace with which we abide.

¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.

1 Peter 2:17

Show proper respect to everyone is not so much a command from Peter but a faithful admonition for our freedom does not extend to being disrespectful and especially not evil towards others. This does not just apply to our outward behaviour or in our communication with people, but is in respect to our innermost thoughts about people, for it is the heart that is judged by God, not our actions and words. Paul too writes of this: <<Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves>> (Romans 12:9-10). By honouring others above ourselves, we are honouring God, for who are we to think we are better in the sight of God than anyone else?

Everyone. All people deserve the same honour and respect as the king or emperor. Only God is to be feared. Believers should have a tender love for each other as members of the same family: <<A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another>> (John 13:34). The reason for doing so is of most importance: <<By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another>> (John 13:35).

Love the brotherhood. For thirty pieces of silver Judas betrayed his Messiah: <<Then one of the Twelve – the one called Judas Iscariot – went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to

you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over>> (Matthew 26:14-16), thus dispersing, temporarily at least, the brotherhood of believers: <<“Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” Then everyone deserted him and fled>> (Mark 14:48-50). This was the same price for God to break the brotherhood of Israel: <<And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter” – the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter. Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel>> (Zechariah 11:13-14).

To honour the king is in regard to earthly kings and rulers. Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon showed such honour to the former King of Judah: <<He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honour higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon>> (2 Kings 25:28), Solomon did not ask for it: <<God said to Solomon, “Since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honour, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king>> (2 Chronicles 1:11), kings in turn should show honour to God: <<Praise be to the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put it into the king’s heart to bring honour to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way>> (Ezra 7:27). However, we are not called to honour men who directly oppose the will of God, such as Haman: <<All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honour to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour>> (Esther 3:2). By doing this Mordecai also failed to honour the king and risked his life in doing so, but he did so for appropriate reasons.

We are called to honour the king in all things that does not prevent us from bringing honour and glory to God. If we find ourselves instructed to do the latter, we are required to resist, even on pain of imprisonment or death. This was demonstrated when King Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden idol and required even the Jewish exiles to worship it: <<At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.” Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be

able to rescue you from my hand?” Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up”>> (Daniel 3:8-18).

We should always remember that ultimately we have but one king. It is proper to respect and serve an earthly monarch as we have in the UK but we must avoid the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ time: <<But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” “Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Cæsar,” the chief priests answered>> (John 19:15).

¹⁸ Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

1 Peter 2:18

The terms ‘ebed (Hebrew) and doulos (Greek) are often translated as slave. These terms, however, actually cover a range of relationships that require different renderings – either slave, bondservant, or servant – depending on the context. Further, the word slave currently carries associations with the often brutal and dehumanising institution of slavery in 18th and 19th Century Europe and America. Thus in OT times, one might enter slavery either voluntarily, e.g. to escape poverty or to pay off a debt, or involuntarily, e.g. by birth, by being captured in battle, or by judicial sentence. Protection for all in servitude in ancient Israel was provided by the Mosaic Law. In NT times, doulos is often best described as a bondservant, that is, as someone bound to serve his master for a specific, usually lengthy period of time, but also as someone who might nevertheless own property, run a business on behalf of his master, achieve social advancement, and even be released or purchase his freedom. Where absolute ownership by a master is in view, as in Romans Chapter 6, slave is used; where a more limited form of servitude is in view, bondservant is used, as in 1 Corinthians 7:21-24; where the context indicates a wide range of freedom, as in John 4:51, servant is preferred.

Masters had extensive authority over slaves, and slaves were often mistreated by their masters. Still, Peter calls on slaves to submit even to evil masters, with all respect. This will maintain their personal dignity, be seen as a good witness to Christ, and be pleasing to God.

Slaves may hold a lower station in society but are equal to all other Christian believers. They are called to show honour to their masters for the sake of Christ, as David acknowledges:
<<I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy>> (Psalm 123:1-2).

Paul agrees with Peter on the issue of how Christian slaves and masters should live with one another: <<Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord>> (Colossians 3:22), and: <<Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them>> (Titus 2:9). Equally, Christian masters are called to respect their servants and slaves: <<And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him>> (Ephesians 6:9), and: <<Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven>> (Colossians 4:1).

Paul also writes to Philemon, a believer whose slave Onesimus had absconded and could face a death sentence and certainly a severe beating for his actions, but Paul indicates what the Christian reaction should be: <<Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus – I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him – who is my very heart – back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord>> (Philemon 8-16).

What the account also shows us is that Onesimus showed great faith in the Gospel, in Paul as his mentor and in Christ especially, to return to his master, knowing that he could face punishment or death, but trusting that his master will show the compassion and love that he should as a brother and not as a master. Servants in particular seem to be called to endure their suffering with all humility and still to offer good service to their master for the sole purpose of honouring God. In part, scripture elsewhere supports such regular suffering: <<Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me>> (Luke 9:23). The apostles too gladly accepted their suffering for the name of the Lord, although they were innocent of any crime other than to proclaim Jesus as Lord when instructed not to do so by the authorities: <<The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name>> (Acts 5:41).

Considerate. Paul reminds Titus to teach consideration: <<Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone>> (Titus 3:1-2), as does James: <<But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving,

considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere>> (James 3:17).

¹⁹ For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

1 Peter 2:19-20

Commendable is often translated as gracious thing, which comes from grace, the Greek word charis, and in this context seems to be synonymous with credit. Both words indicate that God's people will receive a reward from him if they endure suffering righteously. <<*And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked*>> (Luke 6:34-35), where charis is translated credit, used here in the NIV too, and is parallel with reward, Greek misthos.

Commendable could also mean that patient endurance of suffering is evidence of God's grace at work. The two interpretations are compatible, for along with God's enabling grace comes his favour and blessing.

We are called to note that we must accept due punishment for the things we have done wrong: how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? We should not expect commendation or even sympathy in such circumstances. We should simply and earnestly repent of our wrongdoing and thank God for his grace and mercy that we have not been punished by him in a way our sins truly deserve.

Unjust suffering. We should take care not to be too dogmatic about our own suffering being unwarranted for it is only through the grace and mercy of God that we are not condemned to hell from birth. It is Christ alone who suffered unjustly, as he did for us all, without a trace of sin in his fibre and he still continues to suffer with us today. Not only did he suffer in his body but he suffered in his soul as well, when he became our scapegoat: <<*He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert*>> (Leviticus 16:21-22), for he was truly: <<*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*>> (John 1:29b).

God is calling those that serve him to be conscientious in all they do, whether it is their service to the church or as a servant to his master. It is often the conscientious that suffer most but God will commend those who persevere before him.

²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:21

Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, in which he gave his life for sinners is unique, and yet those he has saved may follow Christ's example when they suffer unjustly, even though their sufferings do not atone for sin, theirs or anyone else's. After washing his disciples' feet, Jesus himself said: <<*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*>> (John 13:15).

The Lord humbled himself to become a servant and although innocent, not just of any crime, but indeed of any sin or wrong thought, he then suffered most severely in substitution for those who should have so willingly died for him. How can we not wish to suffer for him when called to do so? No one would wish to suffer unnecessarily but if required to for the sake of our beloved Lord it should be done with equal humility and love as was demonstrated on the Cross.

²² “He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

1 Peter 2:22

Peter now addresses a specific example of Christ, who committed no crime deserving death: <<*“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”*>> (Matthew 27:23). Nor was he a man of deception. Therefore, Peter uses the words of Isaiah 53:9, a well-known messianic script that would have been much used in the early church by the apostles and other teachers to explain why the Christ had to suffer in the way that he did, in order for the reconciliation of mankind with God to be fully and finally achieved. One of the most amazing things is that, not only did Christ accept his punishment without complaint, he did not call out against those who were perpetrating this most horrible of crimes, but instead he prayed *for them*: <<*Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”*>> (Luke 23:34a).

This crucial verse underscores the sinless nature of Christ, i.e. committed no sin at all, and his substitutionary death for all sinners: <<*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit*>> (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus' freedom from deceit alludes to Isaiah 53:9 <<*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth*>>. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 especially emphasises that the servant of the Lord died as a substitute to remove the sins of his people. There is an explanation given on Isaiah Chapter 53 as an appendix to the material on Romans Chapter 4 of this series.

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

1 Peter 2:23

When he suffered, he made no threats. It is common to long for retaliation in the face of unjust criticism or suffering, but Jesus behaved like the meek lamb of Isaiah 53:7 <<*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*>>. He could do so because he continued entrusting both himself and those who mistreated him entirely to God, knowing that God is a just judge, and will make all things right in the end.

Jesus withstood some appalling treatment as Scripture describes: <<*Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace*>> (Lamentations 3:30), <<*I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting*>> (Isaiah 50:6), and: <<*Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"*>> (Matthew 26:67-68). Likewise believers, knowing that God judges justly, are able to forgive others, and to entrust all judgment and vengeance to God: <<*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord*>> (Romans 12:19). Every wrong deed in the universe will be either covered by the blood of Christ or repaid justly by God at the final judgment.

Peter calls us to follow in Jesus' example, which Stephen did when he prayed for his persecutors: <<*Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep*>> (Acts 7:60). This is an extreme case that thousands may have endured over the centuries that few of us in the western world today will have to follow. But we should remember that if we are tormented by such people that Christ died for them as much as he did for those who have believed and that we were once in the same Christ-less state they are in. It was only grace that had brought us out, and is through no effort or ability on our part.

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:24-25

Again, Peter uses the words from Isaiah Chapter 53 to describe how we are all like sheep that have drifted away from the shepherd but thanks to his grace and mercy we have been called back to the care of the Good Shepherd: <<*Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf*

coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father”>> (John 10:7-18).

He is not just the shepherd who cares for our bodies by feeding us and keeping us safe in a sheep pen, but he feeds our souls with his Word and gives us his Spirit that we might venture out of the pen, in order to be doers of the Word and shepherds to other lost sheep and bring them into his fold.

He himself bore our sins in his body: <<And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!>> (Philippians 2:8). This is remarkable and almost unbelievable in and of itself. The burden, guilt and shame of the sins of all mankind, past, present and future must have been tremendous. What is not mentioned in this passage is that he bore also the full wrath of God against mankind for their sinful wickedness and at the point of death experienced spiritual separation from the Father for the only time in all eternity: <<And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” – which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”>> (Mark 15:34).

Tree was often used as a synonym for cross in 1st Century Judaism, possibly due to association with Deuteronomy 21:22-23 <<If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance>>. This is alluded to elsewhere in the NT: <<Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”>> (Galatians 3:13), <<The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree>> (Acts 5:30), <<We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree>> (Acts 10:39), and: <<When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb>> (Acts 13:29). The unique, substitutionary, sin-bearing death of Jesus is described here, with allusions to Isaiah 53:4-5 <<Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed>>, and: <<After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities>> (Isaiah 53:11).

Crucifixion was widely practiced by the Romans, and the early Jewish historian Josephus mentions thousands of people being crucified in 1st Century Palestine,

mostly during rebellions against Rome. There are stories of Roman soldiers cruelly playing with different postures for crucified victims, e.g. Josephus, Jewish War 5.449-551, although the use of nails and a crossbar appear to have been common. Modern medical explanations for the cause of death on a cross have focused on either asphyxiation or shock. Crucifixion was widely believed to be the worst form of execution, due to the excruciating pain and public shame. Hanging suspended by one's arms eventually caused great difficulty in breathing, which could be alleviated only by pushing up with one's feet to take the weight off the arms. But that motion itself would cause severe pain in the feet, arms, legs, and back, causing the exhausted victim to slump down again, only to be nearly unable to breathe once more. Eventually, the victim would succumb to suffocation, if he had not already died as a result of the cumulative effect of the physical trauma inflicted on him. If they required a victim to die more quickly they would break his legs so they could no longer push themselves up to alleviate their breathing difficulties.

For you were like sheep going astray. Before Christ came, those to whom Peter writes, and indeed many of us before we came to know him as our Lord and Saviour, were like sheep going astray, each in their own different way, but now we have been gathered into a sheep pen, and our loving shepherd is watching over our souls, shepherding us, guiding us all to everlasting life in his eternal presence: <<*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd*>> (John 10:14-16).

Healed. The healing in the atonement does not refer to physical healing in this context though: <<*This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases”*>> (Matthew 8:17), but to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' death should lead to a profound change in the lives of believers, so that they now sever all ties with evil, that is, die to sin, and devote themselves to living in a holy manner, i.e. live to righteousness.

Returned to the Shepherd. Jesus explained what happens when a lost sheep returns: <<*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent*>> (Luke 15:7).

So Peter has taught us in this chapter how to put our faith into action to produce works of love for others. He has shown us how to fulfil that work with regard to the civil authorities and also how those who are in service to others should perform their tasks fully and cheerfully, not just for the sake of their masters, but more importantly that it brings glory to God.

In Chapter Three he will go on to show how husband and wife should treat each other through their Christian life and love.