

1 Peter 1:1-2 'God's Elect!'

We've been on a long journey with Peter, beginning with his first meeting with Jesus when he met the Lord, when Andrew his brother brought him to Jesus. In John 1:43 He said, "You will be called Cephas, which means Peter." In Matthew 14:29 Peter walked on water. In Matthew 16:16 Peter declared Jesus' Messiahship: "You are the Christ; the Son of the living God." Yet in v21-23, Jesus explains that the cross is coming, but Peter tries to dissuade Him. "Never Lord. This shall never happen to you." "Get behind me Satan," Jesus says. "You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men"!

Then Peter witnesses the transfiguration! Yes, that window into heaven of Matthew 17 where Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus in heavenly apparel. Peter pipes up with verse 4 "Lord, it's good that we are here. I'll build a shelter for each of you." But of course then a cloud envelops them with only Jesus left there standing before them, and God's voice saying, v5 "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." 'Yes Peter, the others are but men. Jesus is My Son. Listen to him!'

Also in chapter 17 Peter finds a coin in a fish's mouth. Matthew 26, The Lord's supper, where Jesus predicts His betrayal, and everyone's falling away. That's where Peter makes his bold boast, that even if everyone else runs, only death will separate him from Jesus! Verse 36 to 46 in the garden of Gethsemane. V48, Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. V51, Peter cuts off a servant's ear. Then he and all the disciples flee into the darkness! Peter's threefold denial in v60-75, while he warms his hands around the fires of the soldiers. And then the rooster crows! His running to the tomb in Luke 24:12.

Then a feed of fish on the beach with Jesus, where Peter is reinstated for service. John 21:15-17. "Peter do you truly love me more than these?" Remember that was his bold boast. Well Jesus says, "feed my lambs"; "take care of my sheep"; "feed my sheep." 'Yes, love for Me Peter is evidenced in love for My church!'

Acts 2, Peter preaches his first sermon at Pentecost laying the death of Jesus down at his hearers' feet. And 3000 are saved that day. Chapters 3-4, he and John heal a man crippled from birth and Peter preaches his second sermon in the temple courts and again he lays the blame for Jesus' death down at his hearers' feet. And 2000 more repent and are added to the number! He and John are then hauled before the Sanhedrin, but the message is the same! Chapter 5, they're arrested again and Peter's first angelic deliverance. His message doesn't change. You are responsible for the death of the Son of God. And there they get their first flogging! Chapter 8 he deals with Simon the sorcerer. Chapter 10, his heavenly vision and then the first non-Jewish church is born at Cornelius' house! Then finally, chapter 12 (as we have been seeing recently), his second angelic deliverance out of prison, as the believers were "stretched out in prayer" for him!

Yes it's been a long road as we have walked through Peter's life with Jesus, That ordinary man serving our extraordinary God. And now finally, we come to his first epistle, his first letter! Now this of course brothers and sisters was just a brief summary of what we've looked at over the past 18 months or so.

But now we finally come to this letter which has been our destination all along! 1 Peter 1:1-2. And I've simply called it God's Elect! And friends, as we do so we are going to be dealing with some words which have very specific and confronting meanings. Peter uses these words in the same way that Paul does in the book of Ephesians as he writes to the church at Ephesus. And for some of us these

things may be difficult to look at. They might make us feel uneasy, uncomfortable. We might disagree. You might disagree with me. That's fine. The Lord's people can have differences of opinion. My goal as always, (having done due diligence by consulting sound biblical commentators), is to just open up what the Holy Spirit is telling us through His "God-breathed" Word! If anyone has any comments or questions I'd love to talk to you about them. Because remember, "Iron sharpens iron"!

Well so let's have at it. 1 Peter 1:1 "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ." So what he does at the outset, like Paul does in many places, he establishes his authority upon what he is about to say. The word 'Apostle', literally means 'sent one'. Or one who is sent. And here, sent with a message. That is why God's gospel messengers are in effect Angels to us. For so the word 'Angel' means 'Messenger'. They are inter-changeable. So Peter is simply and clearly stating that he is one who has been sent by Jesus Christ Himself. And with the Lord's Own Message and authority of the gospel! And who is he writing to? Well simply to "God's elect." And friends, this is one of those words which I mentioned earlier. "Elect" And of course with the word "God's" in front of it. So it is to a particular group of people.

But who are they? That's the question. Yes who are "God's elect"? And what does it mean? Well the word "elect" by the old Collins dictionary is defined as such: 'To choose by vote. To appoint to office. To select. To designate, to predestine. To select from a number. And finally, (and take note of this), those predestined to eternal life'. Now isn't that astounding. I doubt very much that such a definition is found in any modern dictionary today. The one I use was published in 1956!

Well it does seem clear then from all of these definitions that the one who is elected has nothing to do with the electing. And in the case before us they are of course "God's elect." So we must conclude then that it is indeed God who has done the electing, or choosing! We could paraphrase this verse then by saying: To those who have been chosen by God.

Now respectfully brethren, why am I labouring this point? Well it's because there is a sense to which we may believe that *we can choose* God. We've all heard of those who have made decisions to come to Christ. You may well be one of them, praise the Lord! During Billy Graham's decades of preaching, millions upon millions of people worldwide went forward as it were. But please don't misunderstand me here. I'm not disparaging Billy in anyway. I personally stand in awe of his preaching and what God has done, and continues to do through him even since he has been promoted to glory!

But to be able to choose God, we must first have been placed in a position where we have been made capable of doing so. And may I respectfully suggest that when we believe that we have chosen God, it is our response to having been chosen by him! Let me explain: Genesis 6:5 "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." Now, no, this doesn't mean that mankind's thoughts are always only to rape, pillage, plunder and murder. Or that man is incapable of kindness and goodness. We know that isn't true. But what it does mean is that man, of himself, apart from Jesus, has no desire and has not the ability, nor the wherewithal to choose that which is holy, upright and pure. It is a spiritual impossibility! That's what Genesis 6:5 tells us.

No, the natural man cannot choose God, and is in fact opposed to God. Jesus didn't say you're either for Me, (and although you are not actually with Me you do support Me), no. He said, "you're either for me or against me." Listen to how James so bluntly and brutally puts it. James 4:4: "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." Now brothers and sisters, we need to remember that when James talks about "adultery" here, he means spiritual adultery! Having

more than one love, in that they had embraced more than one God. And in so doing, they were in danger of having no part in God whatsoever!

Again, look at the words. They are brutal and powerful. "Adulterous," "hatred toward God," "An enemy of God." So if we put the Genesis text and the James text together, it shows us clearly that not only are we incapable of choosing God, (because all of our inclinations are opposed to Him), but apart from Jesus, we are actually His enemies. And we in effect hate Him! So if this is true, (and of course it is because the Bible says it is), it renders us eternally unable to come to Him of our own accord. As in the old hymn, goes Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling!

And Beloved, notice who "God's elect" are: they are "strangers in the world." But again, what does he mean? Does he mean that we will have no friends in this life apart from other believers? Does he mean that we will never know our place in this life? Or that we will never have our place in this life? No what he is saying is that the things of the world, (and we understand the world here to mean, all of those ways and desires and attractions which are opposed to God), yes the things of the world must be strange to us, in the sense that we keep ourselves separate from them! Leviticus 11:44-45: "I am the Lord your God, consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy." "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God, therefore be holy even as I the Lord your God am holy."

The word "holy" means to be separate. Set apart. Not for common purposes! And we need to remember that when God blesses, He pours out His goodness is to His people, and even His common mercies to mankind. But when He makes something "holy" He claims that for Himself! Jesus explained it this way "Be in the world but not of the world." Or in other words, yes we must live in these bodies and this life till Jesus takes us home, but we mustn't be so enamoured, so joined to, and so indistinguishable from the things and people of this world, that it claims us as its own!

Paul, (when speaking of marriage, yet the principle is also applicable for Christians living in this world), he writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17: "Do not be yoked with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be there God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate", says the Lord."

Yes "come out from them and be separate." Be holy. Set apart by God! The hymn that we sing: 'Guide me O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak but thou art mighty, hold me with thy powerful hand.'

Yes that is the sense to which Peter begins this, his first letter. We are God's chosen people. Strangers to this world and its people because we are just passing through, on our way to heaven!

Beloved, the theology that Peter uses here is in some ways confronting. Because if God chooses some and only some, it means also of course, that He doesn't choose others. Yes if the "elect" are only of God's choosing, and because of sin apart from Jesus we are incapable of choosing Him, then God is unfair. Yes if God chooses His people even before the creation of the world, then why pray? Why preach? Why are we to blame? Why testify to Jesus at all? Because God is going to do it all anyway. And also, knowing that God chooses us will create in us a vanity and a pride, even a boasting arrogance!

Friends, these are indeed some of the questions which are raised concerning the doctrine of "the elect" and election. Perhaps you have others? Praise God if you do. Let's discuss them. Remember it

is “iron sharpening iron.” Hopefully, I can answer those questions and concerns as we open up the text. But again remember, differences of application are fine. Such things should not prevent us from fellowshiping together!

“To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered through Pontus Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.” V2: “Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the father, through the sanctifying work of the spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling of his blood.” Beloved, I need to draw your attention to the words “who have been chosen.” So in the first two verses of Peter’s first letter he draws our attention to the sovereign choice of God. Not only are they *the chosen*, but that they *have indeed been chosen*. Yes they are the chosen of God, and they have been chosen by God. This must be significant for him to do this.

It seems that it is very important to Peter to take the credit for our Salvation, (to any degree), out of our hands. So we are “the elect” of His mercy, and we have been chosen for His mercy.

And now I want you to notice that we have been “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God.” Brothers and sisters, if the word “foreknowledge” stood alone, we could indeed come to the conclusion that God only *knew* who it would be that would respond His gospel message of grace through His Son’s sacrifice. But when we place the word in the context of “God’s elect” and “chosen”, it means something entirely different! And I think it is best understood in the light of Psalm 139, which we have looked at so many times over the years Psalm 139:1-16: “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down, you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in, behind and before, you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Yes, V5: “You hem me in behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.” V9-10 “If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” V13: “For you created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb.” V15-16: “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Beloved, can you see that, though we are strangers in the world, we are not strangers to God. God has left no- thing to chance, in regard to your Salvation. Not even your choosing of Him! Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 1:4-5: “He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons, in accordance with His pleasure and will.” Yes, “for He chose us in Him before the creation of the world.”

Beloved, may I suggest, that the reason that God's choosing is so important to Peter is because there were times when he tried to do it on his own, and every time he was found wanting. He made his vain boast and yet when the cross came, like all the others, he ran. Yes even he had to be brought to Jesus through the cross and picked up by Him! "Peter, do you truly love me more than these?"

Dear friends, the Lord's choosing doesn't fill us with pride and vanity. If it does it is not the Lord's choosing. No, the Lord's choosing brings us to our knees, like that tax collector: "Father forgive me for I am the Sinner." Yes the Lord's choosing must bring us to our knees, because it brings us to Christ's Cross! "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." No Brethren, the choosing of God will fill us not with vanity, but with a humble awe and wonder in gratitude, that God would choose such an unworthy one as myself. Even from before the creation world. And even knowing what I would do and be! Knowing my years in the wilderness of the world. Knowing my rebellion and rejection of Him and His Rule. And yet still, for me, did He send His Son to die!

"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Father forgive me. For I am the Sinner.

Yes, "to God's elect, strangers in the world." Yes, to you and I dear friends, dear sinners, God's elect, strangers in the world!!!

Let's pray!