

# The True Grace of God Applied

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[ 0 : 00 ] This evening's reading is from 1 Peter, chapter 1, which is on page 1217 in the Church Bibles. Page 1217, 1 Peter, chapter 1.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

Grace and peace to yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given his new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In all this, you greatly rejoice, though for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[ 1 : 55 ] Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told to you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, thank you very much for doing our reading.

First of all, to say it's a privilege for me to be back visiting you. My wife, Janice, and I were here, I think it was in August, when it was a lot more light than there is now.

[ 3 : 24 ] But the good news, of course, according to my weather app, is that the light is increasing almost every day. I'm thankful for that. Second, I want to pass on greetings from Rob and Fernanda Cadru, whom some of you will know.

They are with us at Edinburgh North Church. And I think later on in this series, Rob is coming back to preach. And before I pray, though, can I just endorse the 10 of those .com books?

Everything he said is absolutely right. But also, may I assure you, at our church where I was serving down in Kent, one evening, one of his colleagues came from 10 of those, and they did the same kind of thing, set up a book stall and commended the books.

And afterwards, I saw one dear, dear saint, and she was a bit upset. And so I asked her, I said, what's the problem? And she said, well, I would like to buy one book, but I have to buy 10 of them. I said, no, no, no, no, no. You don't have to buy 10 of them. And so anyway, if that even crossed your mind, what am I going to do with 10 books? No, that's just the name of the company, that you can ask them why it's called 10 of those.

[ 4 : 40 ] Well, let's pray together, and then we'll turn back to that passage in 1 Peter. Our gracious Father, for the honor of your name, for the glory of your Son, and by the power of your Spirit, help me please tonight to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Well, I think one of the fabulous features features of the epistles, otherwise known as the letters, in the New Testament, is how they ground, how they earth the gospel in very practical ways in a person's everyday life.

That's going to be apparent for you as you work your way over the coming Sunday evenings in 1 Peter. 1 Peter, like all the epistles, the letters, is the apostolic application of the gospel.

It is the application of the gospel into very practical situations that churches were facing. I mean, for example, when we look at 1 Peter, and it's a delight to spot that he actually tells us why he wrote this letter.

Turn with me, if you will, to 1 Peter chapter 5, and I think it's in verse 12. 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 12.

[ 6 : 14 ] With the help of Silas, that was one of his colleagues, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.

Stand fast in it. That little phrase, the true grace of God, is, I guess in some ways, a shorthand for the gospel, the good news that's about the Lord Jesus Christ.

You could describe the gospel as the true grace of God. And Peter says, that's why I'm writing to you. His application then is going to be running throughout the whole letter.

And it's to help the churches, to whom he's writing, to stand fast. Or in other words, not to wobble, to shake, to give up. At a time when it seems in this letter that it was at least possible for some of them to be very discouraged, disappointed, and disturbed.

So really, what I want to show you tonight is that actually right from the very beginning of this letter, the sense of encouragement or application of the gospel, Peter intends that to be right for them, right where they are.

[ 7 : 27 ] Now we're going to be focusing tonight principally on just the first 12 verses. But you're going to see that throughout the entire letter. We'll see first tonight how Peter encourages them to reframe, to see in a different way their identity.

And then secondly, we're going to see how Peter actually calls them and encourages them to reinterpret, to see the experiences that they're going through at the moment in a different way.

But we don't want to stop there because thirdly, we want to ask ourselves, well, how does this relate to us? And are we right to receive Peter's ministry in this letter?

So let's begin then with here is true Christian identity. Now as we look at the opening verses, there's a, how can I put it, on one hand and on the other hand kind of pattern.

On one hand, there are men and women scattered throughout some particular Roman provinces. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

[ 8 : 49 ] Now these were Roman provinces in part of what we now call modern Turkey. Provinces that were essentially administrative districts of the Roman Empire.

And each province was sort of a funnel for money, for trade, for people, and ideas, and even religions coming into Rome and coming out of Rome.

And these people to whom Peter is writing, these Christians are in various different churches throughout these regions. And on one hand, they were living lives when it came to work or trade in the marketplace, and everyday social interaction that looked like anyone else in those areas.

These Christians spoke the same languages, shared the same cultural framework, and experienced the same joys as well as problems. In short, on one hand, these Christians look no differently than their non-Christian friends and neighbors who did not believe in the gospel of Christ. But on the other hand, however, that's not their identity, their true identity. Their true identity, according to Peter, was something radically beyond simply living in a Roman province.

[ 10 : 13 ] Peter identifies them, look back with me again at verse 1, God's elect. Yes, your exile scattered throughout the provinces, but do you notice in verse 2 who you are?

You are those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood.

They've been chosen. They've been chosen. And God's election or choice had absolutely nothing to do with them. Something special about them?

No, it wasn't. God saw them and knew them from eternity and He sovereignly called them to Himself in kindness. It wasn't that they were more religious or more moral than their neighbors.

Far from it. Instead, God the Father sent into their hearts and minds the ministry of His Spirit to call them to Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ, through Jesus' death and shed blood for them.

[ 11 : 24 ] In other words, as He goes on to explain it in verse 3, it's through God's great mercy and it's this mercy in Christ by the Spirit that now defines who they are.

These Christians came alive through the gospel preached to them. We'll see that in verse 12. The preached gospel that came to them was sent to them by the Spirit.

So it's God's triune ministry to them which now defines who they are because they have received, you'll see it later on in chapter 1, verse 23. They received the imperishable, a word that will be repeated throughout this letter.

They received the imperishable word of God, not that which was handed down by their ancestors. They are those in chapter 2, verse 3, who have tasted that the Lord is good.

They are those in chapter 2 who are coming to the living stone. Yes, it might be rejected by men and women, but is precious to God the Father, namely Jesus himself.

[ 12 : 32 ] Chapter 2, verses 4 and 5. And you'll see it again in chapter 2 that when it comes to who are they, what is their identity? Chapter 2, verses 9 to 10.

You are, says Peter, echoing Old Testament descriptions of Israel, but now applied to non-Jews as well. You are a chosen people or 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.

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. This is who they really are, says Peter.

Yes, you are living in Roman provinces and you speak all sorts of different languages and you look like your neighbor, but that's not defining ultimately your identity.

Yes, you feel like you are scattered throughout the world. In chapter 2, verse 11, you feel like you are aliens and strangers in the world. You are scattered. You are part of a diaspora.

[ 13 : 43 ] Of course you are. And you may well be feeling in this letter, we're going to see, they may have been feeling completely marginalized or pushed to the sidelines within the workplace or amongst their former friends and colleagues and some of them may actually be feeling marginalized, sidelined in their marriages.

But Peter says, I'm not going to deny those tensions that you're experiencing, but your true identity is from the God who knows you and loves you.

You need to reframe your self-identity as God sees you. Your true citizenship, your true rights and privileges do not come from Rome.

Of course you will, however, says Peter, feel that you are pilgrimage people, that you are never quite at home, and there will be a kind of unsettled feeling in your experience, he writes to these believers, but their true identity is certain because of their union with Christ.

But it's precisely at this point where we might almost hear some in those churches say to Peter, Peter, listen, you tell us that this is our identity, this is who we are, but what we're experiencing right now calls into question our certainty of our identity.

[ 15 : 17 ] Because, Peter, what we're going through is actually beginning to make us wonder, have we displeased God? Because we're going through hard times.

Have we done something wrong that we're now being punished for? As well, Peter, there are actually some in our churches who almost are saying, I didn't sign up for this, this suffering bit.

And I wonder if I maybe need to quietly leave the church and go back to my old mates and the way that I used to live and even my old religions, even old gods.

And that's why Peter's second point now about their experience is so vital for us to see. Because identity is one thing, but what if your experience is calling your identity who God says that you are, what if that's calling into question?

So look with me now at how Peter wants them to reinterpret, see in a different way, or actually, in this case, understand fully what they're actually going through.

[ 16 : 29 ] And again, there's kind of a pattern of on one hand and on the other hand, when it comes not only to their identity, but also now to their experience, because on one hand, as we've noted, verse 1, they feel like they are exiles.

They're part of a diaspora. And that means that they are probably experiencing a kind of out-of-sync feeling when it comes to their immediate social context.

And you're going to see throughout this letter there are references to social conflicts that these churches are experiencing. Some are possibly rather mild, but still serious. And other conflicts are quite harsh and threatening. Some Christians are being slandered, wrongly that is, by their non-Christian neighbors. Other Christians are actually threatened quite seriously. Some face suffering. And of course, it's those experiences that are real. And those experiences may well have led the churches to feel a tension, as I said.

[ 17 : 39 ] You know, what they learned from the gospel now is in tension from what they are experiencing because of the gospel. So chapter 4, verse 12, it looks like some of them were very surprised that the suffering for Christ is theirs.

And Peter says, well, you shouldn't be surprised by this. Don't be surprised. But the thing is, they were surprised. And here's what's fascinating you will see over the coming Sundays. In this letter, in this letter, Peter does not minimize their suffering or their confusion. He doesn't airbrush away their tears.

And likewise, Peter's practical theology, his applying the true grace of God, exhorting and encouraging, doesn't simply say, well, it's your fault. That's why you're going through a hard time right now.

He doesn't say that God is angry with them. Instead, Peter looks at suffering right in the eye and puts things in a gospel-formed reinterpretation of their experience.

[ 18 : 52 ] And here's the other hand. Because let's pick it up at verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God's power into the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Notice what Peter is saying. Peter praises or blesses a Hebrew way of extolling who God is. But He's the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, says Peter.

He is, if you will, not starting necessarily with their experience, but is pointing to their identity to help them see their experience in the right light.

In other words, He's bringing the gospel to explain and to reframe not only their identity, but to help them say, okay, this is what's happened in my life.

[ 20 : 05 ] See, He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, about whom you'll see in the rest of this letter. Jesus Himself suffered. But Jesus has been raised from the dead, says Peter.

Death, therefore, has been defanged through Jesus' victorious resurrection. And did you spot in these verses three to five, Peter is saying to the believers, you share already in that resurrection. In the gospel, says Peter, that you are united with Jesus, not just one day in the future, but right here and now. And that comes by God's mercy. And all Christians have been rescued from their past inasmuch as they have been given a new birth.

And with that new birth, that new life, there's a promised inheritance. Now, maybe Peter is echoing and remembering in his writing Israel's promised inheritance of a promised land, a land of security and provision and safety, a home.

Whatever Peter is doing, his point is very clear. They may be exiles and strangers wandering like ancient Israel did, but their inheritance is imperishable.

[ 21 : 25 ] A word, as I said, that you'll see over and over again in this letter. Unlike gold or any other priceless commodity, all of which eventually perishes or has a limited shelf life, their inheritance is protected, guarded, or defended by God's power.

verse 5. God's imperishable inheritance for his people in Christ is absolutely assured and guaranteed. His promise of a coming eternal home and eternal security is absolute.

Until then, of course, says Peter, until then, they are passing through life by faith, but they are shielded, protected by God's power. nothing, nothing can destroy them, even if, as Peter says, just for a little while, they're suffering all sorts of different trials.

That's because their salvation is ready to be revealed, and you'll see that theme over and over again in this letter. And verses 6 to 9, let's continue to read this together.

in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold

which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[ 22 : 54 ] Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Even in grief of all kinds of trials, they experience a great joy. It's not a happiness. Peter will want to show us that we mustn't confuse joy with happiness.

Happiness is usually trumped or thwarted by circumstances. Not joy. Joy carries the Christian because he or she is linked with Christ who himself experienced suffering.

This is crucial to get this. You are in union with Christ who himself suffered first and then entered glory. And because of that, you are united with a suffering savior who will carry you personally even if we don't believe it.

Carry you personally, says Peter, bringing about a joy that even the trials are not ultimately accidental or outside of God's sovereign care.

[ 24 : 20 ] They are used by God not to punish, not to teach some great spiritual truth. We hurt people when we say that.

Instead, this refinement proves the genuineness of the Christian's faith. They are right to trust me. See?

Even in these trials, the reality of their trust in me is vindicated. But it's more than that. Painful trials prove not only the genuine character, of the person's faith.

But if you spotted this to bring praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. And here's the staggering point.

When Christ is revealed at the end of history, of course, he will receive, indeed, praise and honor. But so too, so too will every Christian woman and man receive praise and honor and glory from Christ himself.

[ 25 : 34 ] You'll see that again in chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, when Peter says, you too will receive the crown of glory from the king himself.

So spot how Peter's reinterpretation of their experience isn't simply a hang in there, it will all work out, keep going. If he only offered that, I personally don't think Christians would keep going. Rather, he explains that even in trials when, of course, they don't physically see Jesus, but they do love him. Of course, they don't see Jesus now.

And the New Testament is always very clear on us. One day we will see him, but right now we don't, and that is hard. But you still love him, and you still believe in him because he's believable, he's trustworthy, he's reliable.

They love him because Jesus loves them. And they believe in him because he is faithful and trustworthy in every circumstance. And that Peter uses a delicious expression.

[ 26 : 52 ] He says, this joy is so inexpressible. In other words, I can't even find the right words to express how glorious this joy is that's theirs. But look, finally, let's see if we can bring this home to ourselves this evening.

Because I think it is utterly impossible. I could be wrong on this. But I think it's utterly impossible to hear these opening verses or to read these opening verses and not ask, well, what about me? What about us? Does Peter's practical application of the gospel, the true grace of God, does it fit our circumstances?

promises? And instinctively, we say, well, yes, of course it does. But I want to just conclude by gently pressing this and saying, it's more wonderful than even your instincts.

Because on one hand, I suppose, we could look at today's church, I don't mean St. Silas, but you're part of a worldwide church, and you could look at the church, and you could say, well, yeah, in many ways, I guess we're sort of like these churches.

[ 28 : 15 ] Perhaps at home or at work or at university, you personally increasingly feel like an alien or stranger.

You might personally feel in some ways increasingly you are in exile. And to be sure, in Scotland, we're not experiencing the trials that churches in other parts of the world are facing, but some of you may well be receiving the kinds of criticisms or even the slander that you'll read about later on in this letter.

But I think there's another way that you and I can be more assured than simply saying, how do I connect the dots of my experience with these people? I don't even know where these places are on the map.

I think there's a better way. Not that the first way is wrong, but there's a better way of saying, this is God's ministry to me tonight. Look more closely at verses 10 to 12.

Concerning the salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

[ 29 : 37 ] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Peter explains that the gospel is first and foremost about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament prophets prophesied though they didn't know exactly what they were prophesying but they knew that they were prophesying ultimately about someone that would come who would first suffer and then enter glory.

They were inspired, do you notice it, by the Spirit of Christ which is a fascinating other name for the Holy Spirit and it was revealed to them, says Peter, that they weren't just ministering to themselves or to their own contemporaries but somehow or other they were ministering to others whom Peter will say is you.

In other words, whoever has received the gospel sent from heaven by the Spirit by the ordinary preaching of the gospel you can be included.

[ 30 : 52 ] And hasn't that been your experience? Has not the gospel come to you not because you've been living in a Roman province but rather because God in his electing, choosing, mercy to you sent the gospel into your life in the ordinary means by which it was preached to you.

You, therefore, are just like the recipients of this letter. You are sharing now because of the gospel in Peter's apostolic application of the gospel.

And that means that Peter's counsel about your identity is just as powerful and real as it is for his first recipients. Because in the gospel now, all that Peter described about their identity, that's your true identity.

When he speaks about their experience, it may not be exactly what you're going through right now, but others are. And in some degree, you may well in the future go through similar situations.

But whatever it is, your identity and how to interpret your experience as a follower of Christ is just as real because it's a universal gospel. Later on in this letter, Peter will remind them that there are others around the world that are suffering.

[ 32 : 11 ] He'll even describe, we think he's writing from Rome, which he calls Babylon. And they too are elect with his readers. So this is a universal gospel, which means it's a universal identity and a universal way of understanding our experiences.

But let me be honest and say that do I always see my identity as Peter explains it?

Not always, to be very, very honest with you. But here's the wonderful thing. Isn't it more important that God always sees me as Peter defines me?

If it were up to me to appropriate this identity, I wouldn't last long. How marvelous it is that God sees you and defines you and gives you an identity that's not dependent upon you believing it strongly enough.

It's his kindness and mercy. Do I always understand and say to myself or to my wife, this is how to best understand our experiences?

[ 33 : 27 ] No, I wobble. I honestly wobble more often than not. But isn't it marvelous that God holds me as he holds you?

That we follow a suffering as well as risen king who will never let you or me go. That's why you can take to heart Peter's words about the true Christian identity and the true Christian experience.

He's encouraging and testifying as an apostle to the true grace of God. This letter will have a lot of gems for you over the coming weeks.

It will also have a lot of challenging passages and I'm glad I'm not having to explain them to you.

And I will pray for you. I will pray that God by his spirit will take this wonderful apostolic application

of the gospel and strengthen you to help you stand fast.  
Amen. Amen. Thank You. Thank you.