

I PETER

The First Letter of Peter

Introduction

Martin Luther speaks for many of us when he describes this letter as ‘one of the noblest books of the New Testament’. The author continually focuses our attention on Jesus, suffering, crucified, raised to life and taken into glory, for he is writing to communities that are under constant harassment from their neighbours because of their avoidance of public festivities. Throughout Asia Minor, the region within which the communities addressed in the letter lived, the local civic authorities encouraged the cult of the emperor as a way of demonstrating their loyalty to Rome, and so of gaining favour. By not taking part in this cult, Christians were perceived as a threat to public order. Since public life was also interwoven with the cult of various local gods, their refusal to take part was seen as dishonouring the gods and so as incurring divine disfavour. They were an easy target for blame when things were not going well. The constant harassment spilled over into outright persecution, and the author is trying to encourage the Christian communities in the area, through the example of Jesus, to persevere in their faith, for their suffering, like that of Jesus, is a prelude to sharing in his glory.

As one would expect in regard to a minority group looked on with suspicion by their neighbours, they were the object of accusations not only of being atheistic (because they did not worship the gods), but also of being immoral. Again and again, the author urges them to live lives of transparent purity and goodness so as to give no grounds for such accusations. They were accused of disloyalty. Here the author’s appeal is more nuanced. They cannot compromise the key convictions of their faith which must necessarily challenge the society of which they were part. At the same time, they are not to withdraw into sectarian isolation, for they have a mission to their world. It is here that the stress on love finds its place. Their love is to be so transparent that outsiders will be drawn to them. As in the case of Jesus they will still suffer persecution, but they must not let that deter them from loving.

As regards the accusation of disloyalty, they must do all they can to live in the community a life that recognises, affirms and values all that is best in Hellenistic society. This will involve the ability to compromise on matters that are not essential. It will require tact and good judgment. Wherever possible, they must practice civic obedience and their domestic life should be so ordered as not to give rise to accusations of undermining values that were considered important by their neighbours. This letter is not a call to reform the social order. Rather, it is a call to live good and especially loving lives within it. Social reform will be an effect of this when the time is ripe. They are to avoid conflict on secondary matters in order to keep the lines of communication with society open for the mission of being instruments of Christ in bringing about radical conversion.

The reader may be surprised to learn that there is debate among scholars regarding the identity of the author. The letter opens with the words: ‘Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ’. Three possibilities are discussed. The first is that the author is Simon Peter the leader of the Twelve and that he composed the letter himself. This is the traditional view. If this is correct (and it may well be), the Galilean fisherman is among the better writers of Greek among the authors of the New Testament. He also uses the Greek version of the Bible. As noted in the Introduction to James, the Greek language was well and truly at home in first century Palestine and had been for some time. Peter could well have mastered it.

Those who find it unlikely that Simon Peter would have received such an education offer a second suggestion. At the close of the letter, the author writes: ‘Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter’ (5:12). Perhaps Silvanus did more than act as a scribe for Peter. He may have supplied the literary skill that Peter lacked in giving expression to Peter’s thoughts. Since there is no compelling reason against accepting Peter as the author, however much he relied on Silvanus, I will be working on this assumption in this commentary.

However, since the majority of scholars favour another point of view (and they may well be right) we should examine it here. The suggestion is that an anonymous author, writing after Peter’s death, wrote in Peter’s name. That such a suggestion is made may come as a surprise. After all we are dealing with a writing that has been accepted by the church into the canon of inspired scripture. How could this be if a letter’s claim to be written by Peter is false? If a writer set out to pass his work off as being written by Peter in order to deceive his readers into accepting his ideas, we can be confident that, in the providence of God, such a writing would not have been so successful as to become part of the canon of scripture. It is wisely said that God writes straight on crooked lines, but to imagine God using a forgery as a means of revelation stretches belief beyond breaking point. We rightly expect sacred scripture to have been born in prayer and to convey to us divine revelation. Could such a pure flower grow in such a polluted bed? One might also wonder why it has taken till modern times to discover the forgery when those much closer to the language and culture within which it was composed failed to pick up the clues. We can surely safely dismiss any notion that we are dealing with a forgery.

The suggestion is that a disciple of Peter, far from wanting to deceive, set out to present an authentic statement of Peter’s thought. After Peter’s death and in a way that was obvious to his contemporaries, a disciple chose this form in order to get people to reflect on Peter’s teaching and to see in this letter a statement of what Peter would have said in changed conditions were he still alive. If such a practice sounds rather strange to a modern reader, we should know that it was quite widespread and quite accepted in Jewish circles and had been for some time. Interpretations of the Torah were attributed to Moses. Psalms were attributed to David. Wisdom writings from a later time were attributed to Solomon. Disciples of the great prophetic figures of Israel’s history had no scruple in adding later insights to the prophetic scrolls.

The writings of all these groups were accepted by the community as authoritative interpretations of the mind of those to whom the writings were attributed. After all, they considered that they were dealing with the word of God, a word which was living and active and contained guidance for different generations living in different circumstances. When interpreters searched the sacred writings in prayer and discovered meanings there that applied to their own times, and when they added these to the scrolls, they were not claiming, as it might appear, that Moses or Isaiah, for example, actually composed the words which they were adding. Rather, they were claiming to give an authoritative interpretation of the implications of the revelation given to Moses or Isaiah by God. By placing later writings in the scroll of Isaiah, for example, the scribes were not trying to deceive by passing off their writings as having been written by Isaiah.

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They were making a claim to express Isaiah's inspired thought in an authoritative way. Their additions were accepted as a valid expression of revelation because of the value of their content.

Another example is the Book of Daniel. Composed during the persecutions under Antiochus IV and drawing on legends about a prophet called Daniel from the period of the Babylonian exile, this writing invites its readers to reflect back on their history and to see how God has always been faithful to those being persecuted. The Book of Daniel gave rise to a spate of spiritual writings that invited the reader to reflect on the revelations given to great figures of the past. In the Testaments we have advice especially from the patriarchs and Moses. In the Apocalypses we have speculations about the afterlife. Enoch is a favourite figure in these. As regards the fate of Jerusalem, Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, was chosen; as regards regulations of the law, they selected Ezra. Of these writings, only the Book of Daniel and some additions to the prophetic scrolls became part of the Jewish canon of scripture. The others were more or less popular depending on the judgment of those who considered them to be truly in accordance with tradition or not. Here, as in the additions to the Torah, to the prophetic writings, or to the Wisdom literature, the use of the name of a famous person of the past was not a claim to literary origin but to an authentic interpretation of his experience, a re-expression of the living word that had been confided to him by divine revelation and inspiration.

It is along these lines that some claim that Peter himself is not the author of this letter that bears his name. They are saying that a disciple of Peter, after Peter's death and in new circumstances, was offering to the Christian community what he claimed was an authoritative interpretation of what Peter would have said to them were he still alive. The acceptance of such a letter into the canon is not to be read as a guarantee that Peter is, indeed, the author of the written text. Rather, it is a guarantee that in the judgment of the church, the letter is an authentic statement of inspired truth and of Peter's thought. It is as though a Jesuit today were to compose a 'Letter from Ignatius of Loyola to his sons'. Everyone knows that it is not an actual letter from Ignatius, but it copies Ignatius's style and is received with gratitude and preserved as an inspired and truly 'Ignatian' writing. If this is what we are dealing with there is nothing inherently problematic in the claim that this letter, though using Peter's name, was not actually written by Peter. However, such an hypothesis does imply that what was transparent to the contemporaries of the anonymous author, since it was never declared in writing, had the result that within a few generations others failed to recognise the literary form being employed and accepted the letter as written by Peter himself, and it took till the nineteenth century for people to begin to suspect the mistake.

If we accept that there is nothing inherently contradictory about a letter written in this way being considered to be inspired and being accepted as part of the canon of scripture, we still have to examine the text to see if there are grounds for making such a claim. Unless the evidence is convincing, we should surely assume that what seems to be the case is the case, and that a letter which claims to be written by Peter was in fact composed by him. Since I find no convincing argument against accepting Peter as the actual author, I will be working from that assumption.

Whichever position one holds, what ultimately matters is what is said in the letter, and it is to this that we now turn.

The letter is addressed to the Christian communities of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) 'in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia'(1:1).



1Peter was widely known in the late second century. We find it mentioned and quoted by Irenaeus in Gaul in his *Against the Heresies* (4.9.2; 4.16.5), by Tertullian in Africa in his *Scorpiace* (12 and 14) and *De Oratione* (20), and by Clement of Alexandria in his *Paidagogus* (1.6.44; 3.11.74; 3.12.85) and *Stromata* (3.11.75; 3.18.110; 4.7.46,47; 4.20.129). It is probable also that Polycarp refers to it earlier in the second century in his *Letter to the Philippians* (1.3; 8.1; 2.1). The oldest manuscript which contains the whole of the text is Papyrus Bodmer VIII (P⁷²), from c.300AD, which came to light only in the 1950's. It is found also in the fourth century parchment codexes, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, and in the fifth century parchment codex Alexandrinus.

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The Structure of 1Peter

Peter's greeting	1:1-2
Introduction	
1. New life and its consequences	1:3-5
2. Present trials lead to future salvation	1:6-9
3. Salvation in Christ is revealed in the prophets	1:10-12
Part One. What it means to belong to God's household	
1. The tasks and nature of the Christian community I	1:13-25
2. The tasks and nature of the Christian community II	2:1-10
Part Two. Appeal to live as disciples in the world	
1. Thwarting false accusations by good behaviour	2:11-12
2. Appeal to live an ordered life	2:13 - 3:7
3. Appeal to live a moral life	3:8 - 4:11
Part Three.	
1. As disciples of Jesus we should expect to suffer	4:12-19
2. Appropriate conduct in the community	5:1-5
3. Appropriate conduct amid eschatological suffering	5:6-11
Closing of the letter	5:12-14

The liturgical readings

1:1-2	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries
1:3-9	2nd Sunday of Easter Year A
1:3-9	Monday of the 8th week of Ordinary Time Year II
1:8-12	vigil of the Birth of John the Baptist
1:10-16	Tuesday of the 8th week of Ordinary Time Year II
1:17-21	3rd Sunday of Easter Year A
1:18-25	Wednesday of the 8th week of Ordinary Time Year II
2:1	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries
2:2-5, 9-12	Thursday of the 8th week of Ordinary Time Year II
2:4-9	5th Sunday of Easter Year A
2:13-20a	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries
2:20b-25	4th Sunday of Easter Year A
3:1-14	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries
3:15-18	6th Sunday of Easter Year A
3:18-22	1st Sunday of Lent Year B
4:1-6	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries
4:7-13	Friday of the 8th week of Ordinary Time Year II
4:13-16	7th Sunday of Easter Year A
4:17-19	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries
5:1-14	not in Sunday or weekday lectionaries

**¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,
²who have been chosen and destined by God the Father,
and sanctified by the Spirit
to be obedient [NRSV 'to Jesus Christ] and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.**

In identifying himself as 'apostle of Jesus Christ', Peter is claiming to write with the authority given to him by the risen Christ who declared:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

– Matthew 28:18-20

Peter was the first of the disciples to recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah when, at Caesarea Philippi, in response to Jesus' question: 'Who do you say that I am?', Peter replied: 'You are the Messiah [the Christ]', the Son of the living God' (Matthew 16:16).

He is writing a general letter to the Christians of Asia Minor (see map page 49). He makes no claim to have personally proclaimed the gospel to them, referring later to 'those who brought you good news' (1:12). We know from Luke that there were Jews from 'Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia' (Acts 2:9) among the pilgrims present at the first Pentecost. These would have been the first missionaries in the area. Though the communities are largely Gentile, as will soon become clear, Peter addresses them from the beginning in terms that were traditionally used of themselves by the people of Israel: 'exiles' (see Hebrews 11:13), 'of the Dispersion' (Greek: diaspora), especially 'chosen' by God. He sees the Christians as in continuity with the chosen people of the first covenant.

You are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

– Deuteronomy 7:6

In a way which in later centuries would find expression in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, he speaks of God the Father, of the Spirit and of Jesus Christ. He speaks of God as 'Father', for that is how Jesus addressed God. They are living Jesus' own life, they share his intimate communion with God, and so they too can call God 'Father'. As God chose the people of Israel, so God has chosen them. Their life as Christians has set them apart from their contemporaries in many ways, especially in their religious and moral lives. This, as we shall see, has led to persecution.

Peter is assuring them from the outset that their being different is no accident. It is God's choice that has set them apart and that makes them relive the experience of being 'exiles of the Dispersion' (compare James 1:1). They should not feel abandoned. Rather, they have been especially chosen by God.

What is happening to them is according to the 'destiny' (Greek: *prognōsis*, 'foreknowledge') of God. The 'pro' here is not to be understood in temporal terms (God transcends time). Peter is claiming that whatever human reasons there are for the situation in which they find themselves, they should not forget that no situation is outside the providence of God. When they look beyond the categories of this world, they will see acting in their lives the presence and the grace of the God who has lovingly chosen them to share in the special communion of love experienced by his Son, Jesus.

God, who alone is holy, is calling them to holiness (Greek: *hagiasmos*) by the gift of his Spirit. The experience of being exiles among their compatriots flows from the fact that they are in communion with God and so are themselves 'sanctified' ('separated').

God's purpose in this is to bring them to 'obedience' (Greek: *hupakoē*), a profound and humble listening for God's word in whatever way God chooses to communicate himself and his will to us. This is what Paul calls 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5), for it is the obedience that results from our welcoming of grace and our trusting and loving commitment to follow God's inspiration and attracting grace. In linking obedience with the sprinkling (Greek: *rhantismos*) of blood, Peter seems to be alluding to the forming of the people of the first covenant. We read in the Book of Exodus:

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, 'All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.' And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'

– Exodus 24:3-8

It is by God's loving design that they have been drawn into the people of the covenant, through Jesus' gift to them of his own life (his 'blood'). It is because Jesus has embraced them in love, even to giving his life for them, that they now share in his communion of love with God his Father.

^{2b}May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy he has given us a new life.

[NRSV 'birth'].

Peter concludes his address with a prayer that they will experience in abundance 'grace and peace'.

The customary Greek greeting was *chairein* (see James 1:1). Peter, like Paul, uses a similar sounding word, *charis* ('grace') – a greeting that reminds the Christian assembly of God's action in their lives in drawing them to share the life of the risen Jesus – a life of communion in love with his Father through the shared bond of the Holy Spirit. Peter's prayer for the churches in Asia Minor is that they will continue to experience the graciousness of God pouring out his love upon them (see James 4:6).

The customary Jewish greeting was *shalôm* ('peace'). We might recall the traditional priestly blessing proclaimed in the assembly:

The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

– Numbers 6:24-26

Peter repeats this greeting here, for his prayer is that they will experience the peace that is the fruit of grace: the fullness of life that happens when each member of a community contributes his or her gifts to the others in harmonious communion.

The form of the opening prayer is decidedly Jewish. The content is Christian. Praise is directed to God, but precisely because of what God has revealed of himself and has done for us in Jesus who is called here not only 'Christ', but also 'our Lord (Greek: *kurios*)', thus identifying him with God's redeeming and saving action (see the commentary on James 1:1). The source of his being 'Christ' ('Messiah') and 'Lord' is his intimate communion of love with God, referred to here as his 'Father' (see the commentary on James 1:17).

God's saving action is seen by Peter as an expression of God's 'mercy' (Greek: *eleos*). This rich biblical expression speaks of God's faithful covenant love. *eleos* is used to translate three different Hebrew words. The first is *ḥanan*, which speaks of God's gracious care and all the ways in which God looks after us. In the following two examples, the Greek bible has *eleos*, and the Hebrew text uses *ḥanan*:

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous.

– Psalm 116:5

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be *gracious* to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

– Numbers 6:24-26

Now, some texts where the Greek is *eleos* and the Hebrew is אהבה, which speaks of the tenderness of God's love:

Our God is *merciful*.

– Psalm 116:5

In you the orphan finds *mercy*.

– Hosea 14:4

I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his *mercy*, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

– Isaiah 63:7

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his *mercies* never come to an end; they are new every morning.

– Lamentations 3:22-23

Finally, there are innumerable texts in which *eleos* translates *eleos* which places the focus on God's faithfulness to the commitment of love which he has made to us:

I will not take my *steadfast love* from David.

– 2Samuel 7:15

In the Lord your God show *steadfast love* to the thousandth generation.

– Exodus 20:6

With everlasting *love* I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer ... my *steadfast love* shall not depart from you.

– Isaiah 54:8,10

God's 'mercy' speaks also of the myriad ways in which God graciously pours out his abundant blessings upon us, and it picks up also the 'feeling' and the 'intimacy' of the communion into which God draws us. God has given us new life (literally 'begotten us again', Greek: *anagennaō*). The focus is not so much on 'birth', as on our being regenerated (reconceived) through the gift of God's own life.

**^{3b}[God has given us a new life]
into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,
kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

Peter goes on immediately to focus on the promise that is held out by this new life, and so he speaks of ‘hope’ – a hope for life (‘a living hope’). Our hope is to enjoy a full sharing in the life which God gave Jesus when he took him through death to the resurrected life. We are living now the life of God’s Son. It is God’s will that we share also his ‘inheritance’. Unlike anything which this passing world can promise, this inheritance, since it comes from God is ‘imperishable, undefiled, and unfading’. United to Jesus our promised land does not have any of the uncertainties of the land associated with Israel, for it is ‘kept in heaven’, and we will receive it when ‘the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed’ (1Corinthians 15:52).

They are suffering harassment and the insecurity of exiles, but their inheritance is secure for it is being ‘protected by the power of God’. No one can take it from God, and so no one can take it from them. They must, of course, welcome it, for it is offered to them in love by a God of love. It is not forced upon them, nor is it received automatically. Hence Peter adds ‘through faith’. It is through ‘believing’ that we experience ‘being in love’. There is no other way. We must welcome the fire of love from the heart of God. The salvation promised us is final and absolute. We are already experiencing its beginnings, for ‘the last time’ has been inaugurated by God in the life, death, resurrection and glorification of his Son, Jesus. For us, however, it is obviously still in process. But our hope is secure, our salvation assured, provided only we continue in our faith.

Peter was there when Jesus himself promised that his disciples would experience joy amid the sufferings that inevitably come our way in this imperfect world that is undermined by sin. This is especially the case when the suffering comes to us because of our adherence to Jesus:

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

– Matthew 5:11-12

The reasons for rejoicing have already been outlined by Peter in the preceding verses. The idea that suffering is like a fire which tests faith and reveals it in all its splendour is a theme repeated throughout the New Testament. The closest parallel is in James:

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

– James 1:2-3

Having passed the test, we will enjoy the ‘praise and glory and honour’ which only God can give and which will be ours ‘when Jesus Christ is revealed’. He is speaking of the final judgment when everything will be seen for what it really is in the light of truth. There will be no possibility of pretence then, nor of deception. We will not be able to look away and hope that things are other than they truly are. On that day, all is revealed and we will enjoy or suffer the consequences of our choices.

In verse eight Peter speak of our love which embraces Jesus and his Father. For a reflection on the nature of this love see the commentary on James 2:8. There are echoes here of Jesus’ words to Thomas: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe’ (John 20:29). Peter is writing to such people. They love Jesus. They have committed their lives to him. They are in communion with him in the Spirit. They are living in the love when he entrusts to them. Their experience now is one of faith, not of sight, but ‘in him’ they experience ‘an indescribable joy’ that is caught up in the wonder and the glory of his risen life, radiant with the beauty of God. They are already receiving the beginnings of the salvation promised them, a salvation of their very selves (compare James 1:21), for they are already experiencing the intimacy of Jesus’ own communion with God which is Jesus’ gift to them, and which they have welcomed in faith.

⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,

⁷so that the genuineness of your faith - being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see now, but believe, you rejoice in him [NRSV ‘even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice]

with an indescribable and glorious joy,

⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, your salvation [NRSV ‘the salvation of your souls’].

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry,

¹¹inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory.

¹²It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you,

in regard to the things that have now been announced to you, through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven

– things into which angels long to look!

Peter gives expression to an understanding which we find throughout the New Testament. In the light of his experience of Christ, he sees in the inspired words of the prophets of Israel meanings that find their full sense in Jesus the Messiah. In their search for the truth, in their sensitivity to the inspiration of God's 'Holy Spirit', things were revealed to them that neither they nor their contemporaries could understand; things that became clear only to those who were privileged to know Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is called here 'the Spirit of Christ', for it is God's Spirit that fills Jesus' being. It is the Spirit of God's love that binds him to his Father, and it is this Spirit that is his gift to his disciples. The risen Christ sends his 'Holy Spirit' to empower evangelists to proclaim the good news and to open the minds and hearts of people to believe.

Along with the other New Testament writers, Peter finds in the prophets references to the suffering and glorification of Jesus, the Messiah. Perhaps the clearest example, certainly the one most alluded to, is that of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. All of this was in view of those who have the privilege now of living in communion with Jesus. As Jesus himself said:

I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

– Luke 10:24

The 'good news' that is 'proclaimed' (Greek: euaggelizō) is so wonderful that it has captured the attention even of the angelic world.

Peter turns now to draw out some of the implications of the wonderful truths that he has just expounded. God has given us a new life and the power and love to live it. It is for us to welcome this grace and to commit ourselves, as people of the covenant, to obey God's will and to live fully by God's inspiration. Since we are graced to be able to discipline our lives, we are to be alert and to keep our hearts and minds focused on the inheritance for which we hope, the 'grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed'.

This is the second time Peter has spoken of 'hope' (Greek: *elpis*, see 1:3). In non-Biblical Greek *elpis* means 'estimation' or 'expectation'. We should have a sound basis for our judgment of what the future might hold for us. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Psalms and prophetic writings, *elpis* translates word expressing 'trust' and 'taking refuge in'. The focus is not on some future good for which we hope, but on God as the one in whom we place our trust because of what God has done in the past and because of what God has promised to do in the future. This sentiment continues in the Wisdom literature, but there the influence of non-Biblical Greek can also be seen with the focus shifting from present trust to future expectation.

In the New Testament *elpis* retains the idea of trust, but with the focus on the future. We could define it as a trusting confidence now in regard to the future – a trust based on faith in God. Trusting that God is faithful we are sure that what God has promised will happen and we can leave the future peacefully in God's hands. A perfect expression of hope is found in Psalm 131:

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
 my eyes are not raised too high;
 I do not occupy myself with things too great
 and too marvellous for me.
 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
 like a weaned child with its mother;
 my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
 O Israel, *hope* in the Lord from this time on and forevermore.

We are obedient children, living the new life given to us by God our Father. Those whom Peter is addressing know how they used to live as Gentiles, ignorant of God's will, following their own confused and self-focused desires. Things must be different now. It is the Holy One who has called them. They are to separate themselves from their former habits and live the life which God has given them. They are to live in communion with God, showing by their actions that it is, indeed, the life of God that they are living.

**¹³Therefore
 prepare your
 minds for ac-
 tion; discipline
 yourselves;**

**set all your hope
 on the grace that
 Jesus Christ will
 bring you when
 he is revealed.**

**¹⁴Like obedient
 children, do not
 be conformed to
 the desires that
 you formerly
 had in igno-
 rance.**

**¹⁵Instead, as he
 who called you
 is holy, be holy
 yourselves in all
 your conduct;**

**¹⁶for it is writ-
 ten, 'You shall
 be holy, for I am
 holy.'**

(Leviticus 19:2)

¹⁷Since [NRSV
'If'] you invoke as
Father the one who
judges all people
impartially accord-
ing to their deeds,
live in reverent fear
during the time of
your exile.

¹⁸You know that
you were ransomed
from the futile
ways inherited
from your ances-
tors,

not with perishable
things like silver or
gold,

¹⁹but with the
precious blood of
Christ, like that
of a lamb without
defect or blemish.

²⁰He was destined
before the founda-
tion of the world,
but was revealed at
the end of the ages
for your sake.

²¹Through him you
have come to trust
in God,

who raised him
from the dead and
gave him glory so
that your faith and
hope are set on
God.

God sees things as they really are, and God's judgment is necessarily according to the truth. We therefore should live according to the truth. They are living in exile, in the sense that they are separated from their contemporaries in so many ways. They are no longer at home in the pagan environment from which they have been separated by grace. God, however, is their Father. Rather than fear the suffering consequent upon their being in exile, they should live in reverent fear of God whose judgment alone ultimately matters. The Book of Proverbs expresses well the meaning of this 'fear' in the following texts:

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance
... I hate.

– Proverbs 8:13

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the
knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

– Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.

– Proverbs 14:27

Isaiah speaks of the fear of the Lord as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:3), and writes: 'The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure' (Isaiah 33:6). The fear of the Lord is the opposite of 'pride and arrogance'. It is 'knowing the Holy One': knowing that God is the creator and sustainer of life, the redeemer and saviour. It results in a commitment to seek and to carry out God's will, knowing that all our hope is in God, the 'fountain of life'.

Jesus himself said that his mission was to 'give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). Their former life, inherited from their ancestors, was empty and meaningless. God rescued them from it through Jesus gift of himself to them in love, a love that led him to the cross and the pouring out of his 'precious blood' (see 1:2). The lambs offered in the Jewish cult had to be spotless. Jesus, innocent of sin, responded with pure love to the onslaught of evil. He showed us a new way and gave us his Spirit to enable us to live as he lives.

This love giving even unto death was itself no accident. Rather it is what God has designed for the world, and it is we who are privileged to experience it. The terrible actions of sinful human beings were able to crucify Jesus, but they were powerless to take away his life. God raised him to glory and he has the same design for us. Let us set our faith and hope on God.

The emphasis falls now on the community, and so on mutual love (Greek: ἀγαπή ἀλλήλων). The theme of mutual love within the Christian community permeates this letter (see 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). For a reflection on the nature of this love, see the commentary on James 2:8. It is God who purifies, and so it is by allowing the truth of the gospel to fill our minds, our hearts and our lives that we experience this purifying love of God. As Jesus himself said: 'the truth will set you free' (John 8:32). God's love is a fire that, having ignited our hearts, causes them to burn in love for our brothers and sisters within the Christian community. Peter is not restricting love to this, but it is this community love that he now stresses.

It is the word of the gospel sown in our hearts by God that has engendered in us a share in God's own life, a communion in the intimacy of love that binds the heart of Jesus to that of his Father. This word is a word of life and it endures through suffering and beyond physical death. It is expressed in love, and it is this love, the love of the heart of Jesus, that we are to offer each other 'from the heart'.

What the world has to offer, with all its glitter and pomp and apparent advantage, is all passing. They must not regret the fact that they are not among those who 'benefit' from it. Even when they find themselves persecuted because of their refusal to be part of it, they must consider themselves privileged, for they have been given the word of life, and they are already experiencing this new life, the full harvest of which awaits them in an eternity of love.

²²Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply, from the heart.

²³You have been begotten [NRSV 'born'] anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed,

through the living and enduring word of God

²⁴For 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, ²⁵but the word of the Lord endures forever.'

(Isaiah 40:6-8)

The word is the good news that was announced to you.

**¹Ridding [NRSV 'Rid']
yourselves, therefore,
of all malice,
and all guile,
insincerity,
envy
and all slander,
²like newborn infants,
long for the pure ['un-
diluted'] milk of the
word [NRSV 'spiritual
milk'],
so that by it you may
grow into salvation –
³if indeed you have
tasted that the Lord is
good (Psalm 32:8).**

Peter opens verse one with a participle. It can be translated as here by an imperative, but he may also be describing his readers as those who have been purified in the ways he describes by their 'obedience to the truth' (1:22). Living a life of 'mutual love', they have rid themselves (and of course are to continue to do so) of the vices here described, vices which are destructive of community. This life of communal love has been made possible by the gift of God's life-giving word, and so Peter urges them to long for this word the way a newborn infant's whole being is consumed by its desire for its mother's milk.

Peter qualifies 'milk' with two adjectives. It is to be 'pure' in the sense of undiluted, and it is to be 'logikos'. This can be translated 'logical', 'appropriate', and hence 'spiritual'; but it seems better to retain its connection with 'logos' (the 'word'). They are being nourished by 'the living and enduring word of God' (1:23), 'that word is the good news that was announced to you' (1:25). It is this word of love revealed to them in Christ and announced as good news that will nourish them on their journey to the fullness of 'salvation' of which Peter has been speaking.

Peter reinforces his message by quoting from Psalm 32:8. There may be eucharistic overtones, of course, but the reference is more general, alluding to all the many ways in which we experience the goodness of Christ. The word 'good' (Greek: *chrēstos*) was pronounced in the same way as Christ (Greek: *christos*), which helped make this text a favourite in early Christian writing when speaking of Christ.

The communities to whom Peter is addressing this letter are feeling the rejection of their neighbours. By adhering to Christ through belonging to the Christian community they have turned their backs on many of the meanings and values that inform the culture to which they once belonged. In doing so they have become the object of suspicion, rejection, harassment and even persecution.

Peter tells them to come to Jesus. He was ‘rejected’, but not by God. He was ‘chosen and precious in God’s sight’. They are living in intimate communion with God because they are sharing in the life of Christ. This means that they, too, though suffering a similar rejection, are not being rejected by God. On the contrary, they, too, are ‘chosen and precious in God’s sight’.

Christ is an especially dressed stone (Greek: lithos), selected by God for a special purpose. The rejection is part of the chiselling that prepared the stone for God’s purpose which is that he live the full life of resurrected glory. God is preparing them, as one dresses a stone, for the same fullness of life. Peter tells them to let God work on them as together they are being built by God into a ‘house’ which is ‘spiritual’, because it is being formed by the action of God’s Spirit. It is also a temple in which God has chosen to dwell.

The Christian community, God’s household, is present in the world as a temple. The whole community is to be a ‘holy priesthood’. They are to offer sacrifices which are acceptable to the only true, living, God. They are to mediate God’s grace to the world and draw all people into communion with God. The sacrifices are ‘acceptable’ because they, too, are ‘spiritual’, being inspired by the Spirit and expressive of the communion in the Spirit of love which is the very life of the community.

All of this – being ‘living stones’, welcoming God’s action which is dressing them so as to build a temple, and offering their lives, like Jesus, as a sacrifice to God – all of this is ‘through Jesus Christ’.

**⁴Come to him,
a living stone,
though rejected by
mortals
yet chosen and pre-
cious in God’s sight,**

and

**⁵like living stones,
let yourselves be built
into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priest-
hood,
to offer spiritual sacri-
fices acceptable
to God**

through Jesus Christ.

⁶For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame'(Isaiah 28:16).

⁷To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner',
(Psalm 118:22)

**⁸and 'A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall'.
(Isaiah 8:14)**

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

**⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts
(Isaiah 43:20-21;Exodus 19:6)**

of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

**¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people (Hosea 1:10);
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (Hosea 2:23).**

This is one of the longest chains of biblical references in the New Testament. The community at Qumran identified itself in a similar way (of course, without reference to Christ), seeing itself as the faithful of Israel, and we find Paul referring to some of the same texts in his letter to the Romans (Isaiah, Romans 9:32-33; Hosea, Romans 9:25-26). It is but another example of Peter's understanding the Christian community in the light of the experience of Israel.

From Isaiah and Psalm 118, he borrows the image of the stone. The point being emphasised is that it is 'precious' (see 2:4). This they know from their experience as believers. It is our relationship to Christ that is decisive. Those who reject him (and in rejecting the Christian community they are rejecting him) will stumble and fall. They stumble because 'they disobey the word'. When he adds 'as they were destined to do', he is not denying free will or resorting to a pagan notion of fate. God's love is universal, and the gospel is offered to everyone for acceptance. He is claiming, rather, that our rejection comes within divine providence. Our rejection does not weaken God or limit God's power to save. God retains the initiative and the Christians need not be concerned. God will be faithful to his promises to us, and can ensure our inheritance.

Isaiah 43:20-21 speaks of 'my chosen people (genos), the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise'. This picks up the theme of 'chosen' with which Peter opened the letter (see 1:2), as well as the action of God who is the source of our new life (see 1:3,23, gennaō). Exodus 19:6 reads: 'you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation' (see 2:5). Before their conversion they lived as pagans, in 'darkness'. They were, in the terms of Hosea 'not a people'. Now, sharing the communion of love that binds the risen Christ to his Father, they are living in God's 'marvellous light'. They are 'God's people', thanks to 'his great mercy'(1:3). Now they suffer as exiles among their neighbours. But they are God's true people, and no one can take this away from them.

Their embracing of the faith has meant that they are living as ‘aliens and exiles’ among their own compatriots. In choosing to be disciples of Jesus they have committed themselves to a set of meanings and values that differ from those of their contemporaries. Peter urges them not to go back on their commitment.

The word translated ‘urge’ (Greek: *parakaleō*) is not the usual word used by Greek moralists. It is a word derived from the verb ‘call’, for Peter saw his exhortations as invitations, as mediating God’s call, inviting people to respond to love, while always respecting their freedom.. Peter is mediating the call that Christ himself is making to them.

Their refusal to conform to practices considered religiously important by their neighbours means that they are accused of being unfaithful to the gods (see, for example, Acts 19:24-27), and of being troublemakers (see, for example, Acts 16:20-21; 17:6-7). Their lives are to be so transparently good as to give no grounds for the accusations levelled against them. They are not, however, to withdraw from the world. Rather, they are to so love those among whom they live that, even though they are not judged properly now, when all is made clear at the ultimate judgment, people will be drawn to glorify God because of them.

We recall Jesus’ words:

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

– Matthew 5:16

¹¹Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.

¹²Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles

so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds

and glorify God when he comes to judge.

¹³For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.

¹⁵For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish.

¹⁶As slaves of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.

¹⁷Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

The main thrust of this exhortation is that the Christians do not provide grounds for accusations of disloyalty by neglecting their civic duties or by being insubordinate towards civil authority. At the same time it is important to observe that Peter locates the authority of the emperor and so of the administrators who are responsible to the emperor very decidedly as being 'human' authority. He says nothing about this authority being divinely instituted, and he exhorts them to be law-abiding citizens 'for the Lord's sake'. This already includes two important limitations on the kind of obedience which they are to give. Firstly, they are not to be engaged in emperor cult (he is human, not divine). Secondly, the context is obedience to the Lord. If the two areas of obedience conflict, then they must obey the Lord. When there is no conflict, however, nothing in Christianity supports insubordination. Peter's advice has two effects: it calms any revolutionary zeal that may be stirring, and it requires that Christians be engaged in the stream of civil society and not withdraw into a sectarian isolation. The assumption behind acceptance of authority is that it is in fact punishing crime and honouring good.

Verse sixteen reinforces where their ultimate obedience lies: they are 'slaves of God'. It is true therefore that, as Jesus himself said: 'No slave can serve two masters' (Luke 16:13). Being God's slave they are, at the most profound level, free of any other master. They must not use this freedom, however, as a pretext for evil, and to fail in their duty of obedience to civil authority is an evil. This is not unlike the exhortation given by Paul: 'you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another' (Galatians 5:13). They must 'honour everyone'. They must 'go on loving (present imperative) the family of believers' and not bring upon them unnecessary persecution by behaving as bad citizens. They must 'go on honouring the emperor' by playing their part in society. However, divine honour (called here by the traditional word 'fear') is due only to God. In everything they are to 'go on giving to God the honour and obedience that it due to God alone'.

Is Peter echoing Jesus' statement: 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22:21)?

Peter has just reminded the Christians that they are ‘slaves of God’(2:16) in God’s household (see 2:5). This leads him to address his words to those who are household slaves. Part of his reason for this, as we shall see, is that their condition of living without rights represents the situation of the Christian community itself, living without legal rights and as ‘aliens and exiles’(2:11) among their neighbours.

As in the previous passage, the motivation is ‘deference’ (Greek: *phobos*, ‘fear’), meaning ‘fear of the Lord’. The only effective result of insubordination on the part of a slave is crucifixion for the slave and for anyone else thought to be in collaboration with him. For a Christian slave to be insubordinate endangers the whole Christian community, whom they have just been asked to ‘love’(2:17). Nothing is to be gained by insubordination. By respecting the social order considered appropriate by their contemporaries, their suffering can be given a meaning. Once again, however, the phrase ‘with all fear’ places a limit on this acceptance. Their first obedience is to God. They cannot obey when it involves disobedience to God.

Peter reminds them that when they endure suffering God is looking upon them with love, as he looked upon his Son. Jesus himself said: ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven’(Luke 6:22-23).

Peter expresses one of the central themes of his letter when he writes: ‘if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval’. This is true for the household slaves. It is true for each and every member of God’s household. God’s call (see 1:15; 2:9) is to discipleship. We are to walk the way Jesus walked: the way of suffering. Christ had God’s ‘approval’(Greek: *charis*), yet he suffered. However, when he suffered he continued to love and to give himself in love ‘for you’. We are to walk in Jesus’ footsteps, and when doing so bring suffering, we, like him and with him, are to continue to give ourselves to God and to others in love. Peter would agree with Paul who wrote: ‘he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well’ (Philippians 1:29).

18Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all fear [NRSV ‘deference’], not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.

19For it is a credit to you if [‘when’], being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.

20If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that?

But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval.

21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

'Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps'(2:21). Because of the importance of the theme of suffering in Peter's letter, let us pause here to reflect on the place of suffering in the life of Jesus, and then on the place of suffering in the life of a disciple.

Suffering in the life of Jesus

Let us begin our reflection with words spoken by Jesus to Nicodemus. Referring to his coming crucifixion, Jesus says: 'the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life'(John 3:14-15). That Jesus saw his being 'lifted up' on the cross as part of God's providential design for our salvation is indicated when he says that 'the Son of Man *must* be lifted up'. We are reminded of a similar statement recorded by Mark: 'Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again'(Mark 8:31). In choosing to accept his death, Jesus saw himself as carrying out his Father's will:

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.

– John 8:28-29

This text and others like it must be read with care. If Jesus' death (his being 'lifted up') could be described without qualification as God's will, we would have to say that those who condemned Jesus to death and those who crucified him were carrying out God's will. This would make what they did an act of obedience, and therefore virtuous. Such a conclusion is obviously false. To imagine that it was God and not sinful human beings who willed the unjust death of Jesus can only lead to a gross misunderstanding of the place of God in Jesus' life – a misunderstanding that it is hardly short of blasphemy. It was not God who crucified Jesus; it was the Jewish leadership, the fickle crowd, the Roman prefect and the 'obedient' soldiers. To see God's part in Jesus' death, we will have to contemplate Jesus' dying more carefully. Before we do that, let us look beyond Jesus' death to his resurrection. It is clear that here we are watching the action of God. Sinful human beings 'lifted up' Jesus on the cross. God 'lifted up' Jesus into his eternal embrace in the resurrection. This is Peter's teaching as recorded by Luke:

This man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

– Acts 2:23-24 (see also Acts 3:13-15; 4:10)

A proper understanding of Jesus' death on the cross cannot be had if we neglect the fidelity of God to Jesus revealed in his taking him from the cross into his eternal embrace. However, it is important not to move too quickly to the resurrection, but to stay contemplating Jesus on the cross.

When Peter says that Jesus was ‘handed over according to the definite plan and fore-knowledge of God’, is not to be understood in a temporal sense, for God does not exist in time. Luke is telling us to look beyond sinful human activity to the design of God, for God can use even sin to bring about his will. Our question here is: what is the will of God that is achieved through the crucifixion? What does it mean to say on the one hand that the suffering inflicted upon Jesus was the sinful responsibility of those who refused to obey God’s will, and yet, on the other hand, that it comes within God’s providential design and grace?

Whatever we mean by God’s providential design, it cannot be such as to leave no room for human freedom. We are not automatons; we are not puppets of fate. We experience some freedom, however limited and conditioned. If so much human suffering results from our saying No to God’s loving design, it is also true that much that is good results from our saying Yes. Without freedom there would be no sin. Equally, without freedom there would be no compassion, no generosity, no heroism, no love. Freedom is at the very heart of what it means to be a person. God made us this way, and respects and loves what he has made. God is also constantly inspiring everyone to behave in loving ways. To the extent that we respond to God’s inspiration we behave responsibly and God’s will is done. To the extent that we reject God’s inspiration, we behave irresponsibly and God’s will is not done. Any particular decision we make is likely to be a mixture: we partly respond and partly hold back.

The crucifixion of Jesus would have to be defined as an unjust act. God does not will that innocent people be sentenced unjustly to death. Paul includes the murder of Jesus with the persecuting of the Christians as acts that ‘displease God’ (1Thessalonians 2:14-15). The Sanhedrin and Pilate condemned Jesus to death precisely because they refused to listen to God; they refused to face the truth. Their action was sinful, and so, by definition, contrary to God’s will. Jesus himself says as much: ‘You kill me because there is no place in you for my word’ (John 8:37). Stephen links the crucifying of Jesus with the persecution that was inflicted on the prophets. In behaving in this way, they were precisely ‘opposing the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 7:51). This point was made by Jesus himself:

You are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors . . . Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

– Matthew 23:31-32,37 (compare Acts 7:52)

God’s attitude to sending his Son is expressed beautifully by Jesus himself in a parable which directly refers to his passion. It is about a man who planted a vineyard and kept hoping to enjoy its fruits. Everyone he sent to deal with the tenants was murdered or badly treated:

He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

– Mark 12:6-8

God sent his Son to 'give his life', in the sense of making every moment a love-offering of himself to others. Jesus gave himself to the leper and to the paralysed man; he gave himself to the sinners, the prostitutes and the outsiders; he gave himself to carrying out the mission of love given him by the Father. This self-giving brought him up against the resistance of those who refused to listen. When, sinfully and resisting the Holy Spirit, they determined to effect their evil purpose, what was he to do? His mission looked like a failure. The religious authorities were not listening. There was division even among his chosen disciples, who did not appear to be strong enough to carry on without him. Death must have seemed to Jesus to make no sense. He needed more time to do what he knew his Father wanted him to do. There had to be another way.

Yet, as sometimes happens, the sinful decisions of other people left Jesus no room to manoeuvre. Heroically, he determined to continue carrying out his Father's will. He determined to continue giving his life. He determined to continue preaching the good news of God's saving love, knowing that the religious authorities did not want the truth to be spoken. He determined to remain prayerful, forgiving and patient, and to continue taking the side of the poor who were crying to God for help. On the night before he died he shared with his disciples what his approaching death meant to him: he made his death, as he had made everything else, an offering of love. When it is said that his death redeemed us, we mean, rather, that it was the way he died (Mark 15:39). His death was brought about by others. The way he died, however, was determined by Jesus himself, and his manner of dying — in prayer, and faith and love and forgiveness and compassion — gave the final demonstration of the extent of his love (John 15:13).

It was this love-giving, this self-giving, this life-giving that God willed. Thanks to Jesus' fidelity to his Father's will, not even the injustice and disobedience of those who crucified Jesus could thwart God's eternal design. What we see when we contemplate Jesus' self-giving on Calvary is the power of God. It is important that we distinguish between power and control. The good news is precisely that real power, the power of God, is not a matter of control. It is a matter of love. Were it a matter of control, we would not be 'set free'. What we would claim as religious obedience would be a servile submission to a controlling God, not a free, creative response in love to love. We would bury the wonderful gift of freedom, lest we offend. We would spend our life being careful, failing to live lest we make mistakes. We would be victims of superstition, caught up in trying to control God, to manipulate God into being on our side. We would conform to whatever religious system offered security.

If, on the other hand, when we contemplate Jesus on the cross, we come to see that the power of God is not in the sphere of control but of love; if we see that God respects human freedom even when it behaves as atrociously as people behaved in crucifying Jesus; if we see that Jesus' faith in God was not destroyed by the pain, degradation and humiliation of the cross, we might dare to be free. Recognising God as love, we might allow God's graceful Spirit to create in us, as God did in Jesus, someone who dares all for love.

If we believe the gospel proclaimed by Peter, we will not fear God. Rather we will fear our own capacity to fail in love. We will dare the journey of freedom, knowing that we are constantly graced by love. We will not avoid life and its risks for fear of God's punishment. Rather, we will take seriously the gift of freedom given to us by God. Knowing our capacity to abuse freedom, we will humbly cry out to God in our need and in our poverty, knowing that God will grace us with his Spirit. Purified by love and sensitive to the presence and action of God's loving Spirit in our lives, we will dare to express love in the kind of creative self-giving that we see in Jesus on the cross.

When we focus on Jesus' relationship to us, another consideration emerges. What Jesus did stands as an example for us. He shows us how to listen to God no matter how terrible our circumstances may be. His resurrection holds out hope for us that God will vindicate us just as he vindicated his Son. Jesus shows us that when people behave badly towards us we do not have to respond in the same way. 'Love one another', he said, 'just as I have loved you' (John 15:12). However, his example would have had little power to persuade us had he not suffered. Suffering is part of the human condition, and Jesus' example is all the more powerful in that we see him loving even when everything was against him:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

– Hebrews 5:7-9

Jesus demonstrated his faith in God's love even when nothing supported such faith. He also showed us how to respond in love even in the worst situations. It is this which makes his message so convincing. It is this which draws us to follow him. When Jesus says that he '*must* be lifted up', he is saying that *we* needed something as shocking as a crucifixion to shake us out of our lethargy and to save us from the futility of being caught up in a meaningless way of life by reacting to sin with more sin, till we lost all hope of finding our way to the fullness of life and love for which we all yearn. We needed to see Jesus loving on the cross, not because God demanded a crucifixion, but because nothing less could convince us that in our suffering we, like Jesus, are surrounded by the unconditional and persistent love of God. Suffering, even when unjustly inflicted, does not prevent God loving us and does not have to stop our loving.

We needed to see Jesus believing and forgiving, despite being faced with ultimate rejection and the apparent meaninglessness of doing so. For now, no matter what happens to us, we are able to 'look on the one whom we have pierced' (John 19:37), and learn from him the secret of a love that alone can free us from becoming lost in a maze of sin. His example and the Spirit of love that he gives us from the cross make it possible for us to give meaning to our sufferings by making an act of faith in God, and allowing the Spirit of his love to transform our cross into a resurrection like his. If, in our human way, we are to imagine God responding to the crucifixion, we should imagine God weeping, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). God is almighty power – the 'might', however, is the might of love.

Jesus' suffering

When Jesus wept over the city, we see God's reaction to all the terrible injustices that we humans inflict on each other by our sinful rejection of his loving inspiration. God is all-powerful, all-powerful *love*, and from the broken heart of God enough love pours out over this world to transform it into a paradise, if only we would receive it.

In making us free, God takes our freedom seriously, permitting our decision to say No to love, and so permitting the consequences of such a decision. But God does not stand by as a passive observer of our folly. God is actively inspiring everyone to bring love to flower where it is absent. If we follow the example of those who crucified Jesus and refuse to listen, we must not blame God for the effects of this refusal. Through Jesus it is revealed to all who are willing to look and listen that God is love. Some rejected this love. Like the people in the desert who struck at the rock (symbol of God), so those who murdered Jesus struck at his heart with a lance. Just as Moses saw water flowing from the rock to slake the thirst even of those who were rejecting God (Numbers 20:11), so the Beloved Disciple saw blood and water flowing from the heart of Jesus on the cross (John 19:34) for the healing even of those who were crucifying him.

There in that darkest place, in that most meaningless event, in that symbol of humanity's rejection of God, love shines forth. God did not will the unjust murder, but he did will the love-response; for it is God's love that is revealed in the heart of Jesus. It is in this sense that one can say that the death of Jesus came within God's providential plan, so that 'by the grace of God, Jesus might taste death for everyone' (Hebrews 2:9).

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.

– John 8:28-29

When Jesus said in his agony 'Not my will but yours be done' (Mark 14:36), he was expressing his determination to continue, in the face of death, to carry out the mission of love given him by the Father, whatever the cost. He trusted that, in spite of the apparently meaningless death and the apparent failure it represented, his Father would see that the cause entrusted to him would succeed. When Jesus' early disciples searched the Old Testament, the ancient testament of Israel, in an effort to make some divine sense out of the crucifixion, they discovered there a constant pattern of God's love persisting through rejection. In this sense, Jesus' dying fulfilled the Scriptures, bringing to a stunning climax the revelation of divine love in the history of God's people. Jesus' way of dying, and God's taking him into his embrace in the resurrection, are at the centre of the Christian faith, revealing as they do God's love-response to human disobedience. Our disobedience matters. It matters that we sin, and that our sin has such terrible effects on ourselves and on other people. God cannot pretend that things are other than as they really are. Sin, however, cannot change the truth that God is love. This love, demonstrated in the way Jesus died, is the source of all our hope. If we believe it, we may dare the journey out of sin. If enough people believe it, there is still hope (a hope we renew each time we pray the 'Our Father') of realising Jesus' dream of God's will being done on earth as in heaven.

Suffering in the life of a disciple

The only way to discover the key to unlocking some of the mysteries of suffering in the Christian life is through contemplation of Jesus in his sufferings. To do this we need a special grace, for, as Paul says:

We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

– 1Corinthians 1:22-24

What revealed God to Peter as a God of love was not the crucifixion. It was not Jesus' sufferings in themselves or his atrocious death. Rather, it was the way in which Jesus responded to the injustice, the envy, the hatred, the fear and the political manoeuvring that brought about his death. Jesus continued to do his Father's will, even on the cross, as he continued to pray, to believe, to hope and to love. The sin of others was able to bring about his death, but it was unable to take away his life. It comes as no surprise that Christ crucified was a scandal to Jews and utter foolishness to Greeks. Only one who is sustained by grace and who dares to look beyond the suffering and to enter into the heart of Jesus as he offers forgiveness and hope and love from the cross can begin to find meaning there.

Without such contemplation what sense would it make to look for meaning in our lives, and for freedom from the burden of suffering, to be told that the one offering us salvation is a person who was crucified? To break through the scandal and apparent folly of such a suggestion, Peter had to make some sense of it himself. His message was not that God causes suffering and so we must submit to it. Besides the fact that such an idea lacks attraction, it is clearly wrong. A large part of suffering is the result of people's sinful refusal or inability to obey God. Salvation means salvation from such sin, not acceptance of it. Nor was it Peter's message that if we believe we will be freed from suffering. The facts speak for themselves. If anything, the suffering experienced by the disciples whom Peter is addressing in this letter increased as a result of their decision to believe. When they turned their backs on the false gods honoured by their fellow citizens, they found themselves cut off from a good deal of ordinary social interaction. This made them objects of suspicion, and when things were not going well, the superstitious populace blamed this on the Christians' neglect of the gods.

There is no suggestion that persecution is itself God's will. As in the case of Jesus, the suffering was largely the result of prejudice and unwillingness or inability to be open to the liberating message of the gospel. The question upon which we are reflecting here is: How can we learn to give ourselves in love when we are suffering? Let us begin our reflection by recalling that as we mature as persons we have to grow beyond the complete dependence on others that was appropriate for us as a child, and we have to discover our unique personality. This is not the place to examine the various stages through which we need to grow in the long journey of self-discovery. It is sufficient for our purposes to note that growth is not always easy or straightforward. Depending on circumstances that are largely outside our control, we can often experience considerable difficulty and pain in letting go the security which we experience at one stage in order to face the risks of growth.

Christian suffering

Central to this growth is the fact that discovering our unique 'ego' is not a self-focused journey. Rather, it is a matter of growing in our capacity to receive and to give love. Jesus expresses this well when he says: 'If you try to make your life secure you will lose it. It is when you lose your life that you keep it' (Luke 17:33). In other words, we discover ourselves as we learn to give ourselves to others in love, not as we insist on using things and people to bolster our individual sense of security.

Suffering has an irreplaceable role to play in bringing us to the realisation that we discover ourselves only in God's love, and that to enjoy God's love and to be instruments of bringing others to enjoy it we must transcend our own ego. We must let go of our natural tendency to focus on ourselves. We must learn to give ourselves as Jesus gave himself on the cross. It is suffering that forces us to recognise the basic flaw in our thinking that we are meant to be self-reliant. It forces us to face our dependence and it invites us to trust, for we cannot reach the goal of our human fulfilment, let alone do God's will, except in dependence upon and communion with God. Without suffering, there is a tendency to stay fixed in situations that work, that feel comfortable, and in which we feel affirmed. Suffering threatens this equilibrium, and psychic energy is engaged which drives us to face whatever it is that is causing the suffering and the effects it has upon us.

To manage suffering we have to learn to listen at every level to what is going on in our psyche as well as in our body. We may choose simply to hold on, to stay put, to defend our position. However, when we listen, we hear ourselves being asked to let go, and to allow to die something that has seemed good, and perhaps has in fact been good, and to entrust ourselves to the grace that is being offered to us in and through the suffering. We are free to choose to avoid the pain of letting go our self-centredness, or we can cry out in pleading prayer to God on whom we depend, entrust ourselves to God's grace, courageously endure whatever suffering is involved, and allow ourselves to undergo what feels like a kind of dying, believing that God will raise us up. Death is the ultimate situation in which this happens, but all along the road of life there are 'dyings' as we have to leave someone or something we value; as we come up against our own or other people's limitations which require us to let go our self-image or our image of others and our unrealistic hopes, dreams and expectations. The pain of 'dying' can sometimes be in proportion to the success and duration of the adaptation we have made to whatever it is that is being threatened.

To be human means to be finite, to be dependent, to receive all we are and have as a gift. As human beings, we are not immortal. Once life has been given to us as a gift, the only life we ever know comes through dying. The whole process of maturing is one of accepting the 'dyings' that the human condition and our own and other people's sinful decisions inflict upon us. This does not mean submitting inactively to injustice. But it does mean that even when a 'dying' is laid on us unjustly, as they laid the cross on Jesus, we must come to an acceptance of the reality of the dying if we are to find a deeper life through it. Each time we accept to 'die', we experience a deeper communion with God who loves us through our dying, and who raises us up to a fuller life of deeper intimacy. Our fidelity, generosity and courage enable God to keep offering us a fuller life, beyond our experienced horizons.

This will involve suffering until all roots of resistance to God's love have been purified away by God's Holy Spirit, the living flame of love. We learn this difficult lesson by contemplating Jesus in his suffering. He gives us an example, and by sharing his Spirit with us, he encourages and enables us to follow him along the path of letting go, the path of suffering. By keeping our eyes on Jesus, especially on his way of responding to suffering, it is possible for us to glimpse in suffering a meaning that would otherwise evade us. In our weakness and suffering, we experience a special strength that is not our own. Like Jesus in the agony, Paul prayed for the burden of suffering to be lifted from him. He shares with us Jesus' response:

The Lord said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

– 2Corinthians 12:9-10

Much pain in our world results from our reaction to unjust suffering inflicted on us by others. We tend to hurt back. Or, when we do not do that, we store up the hurt and pass it on to others. In either case, the pain goes on and on. Let us listen to Jesus:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

Matthew 5:10-12

It is true that our reward will be experienced in full 'in heaven', in the sense that beyond death we will be taken into the fullness of communion with God. Jesus, however, is not restricting his words to that. 'In heaven' means 'in God'. We will experience the reign of God now: 'the kingdom of heaven *is* theirs'. If, like Jesus, we learn to give ourselves now in love, even in the midst of suffering, we will experience now a special grace of communion. What is more, such loving exercises an extraordinary power for the conversion of those who cause us the suffering. It can also give courage also to those who suffer and who do not know how to bear it.

For the disciple of Jesus there is a profound sense in which suffering can unite us to him. Truly, love is the greatest gift. But if we love the way Jesus loved, it will not be long before suffering enters our lives as it entered his. If, like Jesus, we love outsiders, we, like Jesus, will become outsiders. If, like Jesus, we take the part of the oppressed, we, like Jesus, will be oppressed. Perhaps the most wonderful thing about suffering is that, through it, Jesus invites us to join with him in redeeming the world. It is this truth that caused Jesus' followers to find joy in their sufferings:

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and I am completing what is lacking in my flesh in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

– Colossians 1:24

Christian suffering

It seems true that to experience Christ as exalted we have to experience him as crucified. To know the power of God's redeeming love, we need to look upon the one we have pierced (John 19:37). We need to put our hand into his pierced side and our fingers into his wounds (John 20:27) — the wounds of his brothers and sisters with whom, as the Son of Man, he still identifies. Did not Jesus say to Paul on the road to Damascus: 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting' (Acts 9:5)?

The amount of good that is in our world, as a result of suffering borne in love, is immeasurable. Paul considers such suffering a privilege:

God has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well.

– Philippians 1:29

It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

– 2Corinthians 4:6-10

There is a mystery here that goes beyond our understanding. But our life-experience will not allow us to ignore it.

Christianity has no answers to the meaninglessness of suffering brought upon ourselves and others by our failure to listen to God. It does, however, show us a way to integrate suffering into our lives. At the same time, it is apparent that there is excessive suffering in our world. People are degraded by suffering, dragged down by it, and have their lives rendered inhuman by it. Christianity lays upon everyone the duty to work against suffering and its causes. Like Jesus, we are to act as instruments of God, bringing healing and liberation to the sufferer. Discernment is necessary, and the causes of suffering need to be named and opposed. But it is not for us to sit in judgment, to look for culprits or to apportion blame. We are to work for just institutions and just structures. But we cannot wait for this to happen. We are called upon to feed the hungry now. We are called, now, to give drink to the thirsty, to visit those in prison and to work to heal the sick.

Finally, we need to remember that death necessarily sets limits to any possibilities we have of alleviating suffering. There can be no solution short of the resurrection:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.

– Philippians 3:10

While we strive, in response to God's grace and call, to be God's faithful servants in bringing about the reign of God here on earth, we recognise that our ultimate homeland is in the love-communion with God which we call 'heaven':

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

– Philippians 3:20-21

In this life we will experience being transformed into Christ, but it is only in the eternal life that is beyond death that we are assured of being finally and totally drawn into God's own love-communion, the communion enjoyed by the risen Christ.

If we think that whatever suffering exists in this world is willed by God (either directly intended by God or permitted by God), we will see our task as one of accepting suffering in all its forms. We will see such submission as doing God's will, while trusting in God's wisdom and love. If, on the other hand, we recognise that, whatever the circumstances, God's will is that we love and be faithful to love; if we recognise that suffering is part of life and that its causes are complex and sometimes quite contrary to God's will, we will see our task as accepting the suffering which we are unable to prevent, without letting it deter us from loving faithfully. When we experience suffering ourselves or experience others suffering, we will not automatically assume that it is God's will. Rather, we will trust that God is present to all who are suffering and loving us to draw closer to God through our suffering, whatever its cause. We may even draw so close to Jesus through suffering that we embrace the opportunity to share with him in revealing God's love in this special way to those for whom Jesus gave his life.

Jesus was willing to lay down his life, not to die but to continue in the intimate life of love which he had with his Father. He laid down his life willingly 'in order to take it up again' (John 10:17), and he is encouraging his disciples to do the same, for he has come not that we might die but that we may 'have life and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). Sharing his life we 'will not die' (John 6:50). 'Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes' (John 5:21). The power that makes possible the victory of life over death is the power of love which, like everything else, he has from the Father (see John 5:26).

We are called to believe that suffering comes within the loving and wise providence of God. We are called to believe that God's will is to heal us and to liberate us from suffering. Ultimately this will happen when we share glory with God's Son in heaven; but we can experience liberation here on earth when love heals, and when to be healed leads to greater love.

If we continue to suffer, let us continue to believe in God's love. Let us keep hoping for God's redemption. Let us remain faithful to loving. Then suffering itself will be experienced as a grace, deepening our love and bringing about our purification and redemption. Suffering is part of every life. Let suffering be a cross for us who are disciples of Jesus, for then we can embrace him who died there, knowing that he is embracing us.

²² ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9).

²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse;
[see Isaiah 53:7]

**when he suffered, he did not threaten;
but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.**

²⁴ He himself bore our sins
[Isaiah 53:4-5,11,12]

**in his body on the cross,
so that, free from sins,
we might live for righteousness;**

by his wounds you have been healed [Isaiah 53:5].

²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep [Isaiah 53:6],

but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Peter finds in Isaiah’s description of the Suffering Servant (‘**□□□□□□**’, ‘slave’) of the Lord a description of Jesus, the faithful one who gave himself completely to carrying out the will of his Lord. Nothing, not even unjust suffering, could deflect him from his obedience. In response to abuse he did not retaliate, but entrusted himself to God and responded in love. To suffer does not mean that one is abandoned by God. Jesus’ trust was not in vain. We are to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, and live as he lived. He gave himself to us in love to free us from a life of sin and to make possible for us a life of ‘righteousness’: a life that is in accordance with God’s will.

We have been healed, says Peter. We were like straying sheep. Jesus, whom Peter will speak of later as ‘the chief shepherd’ (5:4) has drawn us to himself in love. He will hold us to himself in love, and, as Jesus himself promised: ‘No one will snatch them out of my hand’ (John 10:28).

In the Hellenistic world there is ample evidence of a prevailing male stereotype of women as lacking a male's capacity for reasoning. They were portrayed as being ruled rather by emotions, so that their judgment was considered less reliable. Public life was the male's domain, but even in the home important decisions were expected to be made by him, and his wife was expected to obey. During the Augustan period women were given certain rights, but a woman remained subordinate. When this passage is read within this context it will be seen to be radically counter-cultural. Peter is addressing the question of how a Christian wife is to behave in relation to a non-Christian husband, a situation that already ran counter to popular expectation which was that a wife followed the religion of her husband. Peter takes the example of a Christian wife in a non-Christian home, because she, like the slaves, exemplifies the position of Christians generally in a pagan environment.

In verses one and two, Peter reinforces the importance of her keeping her proper place in the social order of the day. In this way she may win her husband over from opposing the faith to embracing it. She will also avoid unnecessary and pointless conflict. At the same time, we should not overlook the word 'reverence' (Greek: *en phobō*). Her subordination is within the context of her ultimate subordination which is to God. Hence it is in no way absolute. Verses three to four express sentiments that are often expressed (see Isaiah 3:18-24; 1Timothy 2:9-11). The focus is on interior beauty rather than on exterior beautification. 'A gentle and quiet spirit' is intended as an expression of Christian virtue. Verse six also puts boundaries on her subordination. 'Doing what is good' means doing God's will (see 2:15). They should also not let their husbands intimidate them into acting against their Christian values.

We should assume that the wife and female slaves of a Christian man would, according to the customs of the day, also be Christians. Since they are valued less in the surrounding culture and are less able to defend themselves, the Christian husband must honour them by showing them special consideration. If he does not, how can his prayer be genuine (compare Matthew 5:23-24)?

¹Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, ²when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

³Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; ⁴rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.

⁵It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands.

⁶Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

⁷Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life – so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

**⁸Finally, all of you,
have unity of spirit,
sympathy,
love for one another,
a tender heart,
and a humble mind.**

Verse eight is surely one of the finest descriptions of the life of a disciple to be found in the New Testament. We are to be ‘of the same mind’ (Greek: *homophrōn*). When Paul urges the Christians of Philippi to ‘be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind’, he goes on to say: ‘let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 2:2,5). We are to be in tune with each other at the level of feeling (Greek: *sumpathēs*). We are to love one another as members of the one family (Greek: *philadelphos*, see 1:22). We are to be tenderhearted (Greek: *eusplanchnos*). We recall Paul’s words: ‘be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you’ (Ephesians 4:32). Finally we are to have that most Christian of qualities, thinking of ourselves as God’s children, entrusting ourselves to God’s care and looking up to others (Greek: *tapeinophrōn*). We are to heed Jesus’ invitation: ‘learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart’ (Matthew 11:29).

The Greek *tapeinophrosunē* denotes ‘thinking of oneself as being low [Greek: *tapeinos*]’. In ordinary Greek usage outside the Bible ‘being in a low state’ is considered undesirable. To be reduced to such a state by people or by the gods is to suffer an evil fate. At the same time, since in relation to the gods one is necessarily ‘low’, to refuse to accept our lowly condition is to fall into the vice of pride. To accept one’s low position in relation to the gods, and even in relation to other people when fate has so willed it, is considered sensible and virtuous.

The Greek Old Testament mirrors non-Biblical Greek, with one important qualification which reflects Israel’s understanding of itself as a religious people born out of the Exodus event. The exception is that God has redeemed them from their ‘low’ condition in Egypt. Being ‘low’ has no value in itself, but it does attract God’s compassionate love, and it does hold out hope for redemption. The following text from Isaiah is typical:

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones [tapeinos].

– Isaiah 49:13

Sirach recommends lowering oneself before God:

They who fear the Lord keep their hearts prepared and *bow down their souls in his presence*.

– Sirach 2:17 (see also 7:17; 18:21)

Greek moral philosophy, outside the Bible, has no place for ‘*thinking* of oneself as low’. The word translated ‘humility’ in our text does not occur prior to the Paul. Shortly after him we find it being used by Plutarch, Epictetus and Josephus, but always as a vice, never as a virtue. As they use *tapeinophrosunē*, it is best translated ‘small-minded’ or ‘mean-spirited’. It is the equivalent of having a low self-esteem.

In the Greek Old Testament the related adjective [*tapeinophronos*] occurs once:

A person’s pride will bring humiliation, but one who is *lowly in spirit* will obtain honour.

– Proverbs 29:23

The related verb [*tapeinophroneō*] also occurs only once in the Greek Old Testament, in a text which prepares us for its use in the New Testament:

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed [The Greek reads: ‘*I think of myself humbly*’] and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and for evermore.

– Psalm 131

The New Testament, like Sirach, calls upon people to ‘lower themselves’ before God. Recall the statement of Jesus:

All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble [*tapeinoō*] themselves will be exalted.

– Matthew 23:12 (compare James 4: 10; 1Peter 5:5-6)

The following scene from the Gospel recalls Psalm 131:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

– Matthew 18:1-4

The little child is offered as a symbol of humility for it beautifully captures Jesus’ own childlike trust in the God whom he calls ‘Abba! Father!’ He wants his disciples to have a heart that is humble like his (Matthew 11:29). Because Jesus looked up to God in loving trust, he was able to look up to everyone, delighting in people with the delight that belongs to the innocence of childhood and experiencing it as a privilege to serve them.

Humility

All this provides the background to the virtue which appears for the first time in Greek in the New Testament. 'Thinking of oneself as low' (or 'humility') is an attitude of mind and heart that recognises oneself as God's child, sharing the life of his Son, and therefore as living in total dependence on God. The humble person delights in this dependence, knowing that God is a Father and can be absolutely counted on as a source of life, love and hope.

In the Greek and Roman world it was considered a virtue to recognise one's low position in regard to the gods; it was right not to exaggerate one's own importance or to strive beyond one's fate. But the self held a central place in their ethics, for they thought of their individual nature as sharing in the divinity. The divine in each person was thought of as identified with the self. It was important, therefore, to recognise and respect one's self, and not to think of oneself in a servile way.

For the Christian the divine Spirit which sanctifies the self is not identical with it but is the Spirit of Christ: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). To know how to obey the divine will, Christians do not look to their own nature and strive to act accordingly. Rather, they listen attentively to the call of the Lord, and strive to be obedient to one in whose wisdom and love they trust.

The highest freedom experienced by disciples of Christ is to be his slave, to allow him to live in them and to find in the freedom given by Christ an opportunity to be 'through love, slaves of one another' (Galatians 5:13). Christians experience a radical and liberating change of perspective: 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In this new creature, humility is a basic virtue. Everything now is possible, not to the one who is most self-sufficient, but 'for one who believes' (Mark 9:24). The self is no less important, but perfection for the self is a flowering of the gifts of the Spirit, and the way to this perfection is in self-giving, after the example of Jesus, and by the power of his Spirit. 'Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it' (Luke 17:33). Humility as a Christian virtue is a sharing in the life of Jesus, the child of God, and in the intimacy of his trust in his Father. Peter believes that it is Christ's Spirit who gives life to the Christian community. He wants us to let this special trusting dependence of Christ on his Father find expression in our lives. Then we would have no difficulty in living as he exhorts us to live here.

Peter reminds his readers of Jesus' own words: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you' (Luke 6:27-28). God has called us to 'inherit a blessing'. We must not throw it away by letting ourselves be corrupted by the behaviour of those who abuse us and do evil to us. Rather than react to others on terms set by them, we are to respond from the life of Jesus within.

Peter illustrates his point by quoting from Psalm 34. If we remain faithful to grace, those who perpetrate evil against us will not be able to cause us harm in any ultimate sense, because the God who saves is gazing upon us with love.

⁹Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing.

It is for this that you were called - that you might inherit a blessing.

¹⁰For 'Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.

¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil' (Psalm 34:12-16a).

¹³Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed.

Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.

Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

Clearly they are not all suffering, and they are not suffering all the time, but their situation as Christians is precarious and persecution can break out at any time. Peter draws together two points that he has already made a number of times. The first is that though they suffer, if they continue to do the will of God no one can cause them harm. The second is that if they suffer because they are doing God's will then they are, indeed, blessed. They have Jesus' word for it: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:8).

Peter goes on to apply to his readers the words of Isaiah:

Do not fear what this people fears, or be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

– Isaiah 8:12-13

They have been liberated by grace from the fears that oppress their neighbours. Their only fear should be in relation to God: a profound sense of religious awe before God and the fear that they could lose the intimate relationship of love which they have with God in Christ, and with it the salvation that has been offered to them. They are to recognise the holiness of Christ as their Lord, and they are to treat him as such, not just in their external actions, but 'in your hearts'.

When they are challenged, they must be ready to defend their faith, but the manner in which they do so is important. Their faith is not an ideology to be aggressively argued. It is a way of loving that radiates gentleness and a reverence for what is sacred. Once again we have before our eyes him who was 'gentle and humble in heart' (Matthew 11:29). Their way of living is not only to be good, and recognisably so; it is to be 'in Christ'.

The kind of suffering which they are experiencing happens because of sin. In this sense it is not 'God's will'. But God is not a victim of human sin, nor does God sit by helpless while sinful human beings seek to destroy what is good. As with his Son, so with them, God's providence is caring for them and God will bring good out of their suffering if they continue to do 'God's will' and continue to love through it.

Peter focuses, once again on the suffering of Christ (see 2:21). Here, however, he is not presenting Christ as an example, so much as the one who, through his suffering, is the source of our hope. He, the sinless one who faithfully carried out his Father's will, continued to give himself in love through his suffering to draw us away from 'sins' and to 'bring you to God'. As Paul says: 'The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God' (Romans 6:10). It is this life that he shares with us. The words 'flesh' and 'spirit' in verse eighteen are both in the dative and in the Greek they are not preceded by any preposition. Peter may be making the same contrast which he made to the crowd on the first Pentecost: 'You crucified and killed him, but God raised him up' (Acts 2:23-24).

Genesis 6:5-14 tells the story of human corruption and of violence filling the earth. This would have led to the destruction of creation but for the righteousness of Noah, who, with his wife, three sons and their wives (Genesis 7:13), 'that is, eight persons', was saved 'through water', that is to say, by the flood which destroyed the corruption that surrounded them, and enabled creation to have a new start.

The spirits of those who continued to sin right up to the flood were imprisoned by God, awaiting the final judgment. In some accounts the prison is in the realm of the spirits, that is to say, in the heavens. Against this background, Peter seems to be referring to the risen Christ ascending and announcing to these spirits the ultimate defeat of their evil schemes. Through Jesus' gift of himself in love, sin and death have been conquered. God has raised Jesus to life and taken him into glory, and all those who adhere in faith to the risen Christ will, like Noah, be saved.

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

He was put to death in the flesh by human beings [NRSV 'in the flesh'] but made alive by the Spirit [NRSV 'in the spirit']

¹⁹in whom [NRSV 'in which'] also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you - not as a removal of the dirt of the flesh [NRSV 'from the body']

but as a pledge [NRSV 'appeal'] to God of a good conscience,

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

²²who has gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, with angels and authorities and powers made subject to him.

Just as through the waters of the flood God destroyed corruption, leaving only the righteous Noah through whom he could give a new beginning to the human race, so, says Peter, through the waters of baptism, God has destroyed sin and 'now saved you'. This is said in the context of the death and resurrection of Christ, for it is he who 'brings us to God'(3:18).

The salvation given to us through the waters of baptism is described negatively and then positively. One way of understanding the negative description is to see it as contrasting Christian baptism with Jewish circumcision. We are encouraged to interpret it in this way by the constant use of Jewish imagery to describe the Christian community. If this is what Peter has in mind, he is saying that baptism is not a merely external act of removing flesh in the hope of being cleansed.

The positive description depends on the translation of *eperōtēma* which can mean 'appeal' or 'promise/pledge'. The latter fits well with the constant teaching of this letter that being a Christian means being aware of what it is that God wants of us (having a 'good conscience') and being committed to doing it, whatever the cost and in a hostile world. By accepting baptism we pledge to live a life that is in accordance with God's will.

Peter concludes in a traditional description of the glorification of the risen Christ. All authority has been given to him. The angelic world is subject to him. All evil powers, however super-terrestrial they may be, have been conquered. Peter is assuring his readers, that their triumph, too, is assured, if they continue to adhere to Christ.

Peter speaks in military terms of the sufferings which they are having to endure. What they need as they face the battle is to have the same attitude and determination as Jesus. This involves a determination to continue, despite everything, to do ‘the will of God’ and, as he has already stated, to be faithful to love. When, like Jesus, they continue to follow God’s will even when suffering in the flesh they demonstrate that sin has been conquered.

Peter offers a general description of the kind of life lived by their pagan neighbours, the kind of life they themselves knew all too well before their conversion. They do not want to live the rest of their lives driven by their human desires. On the contrary, they have the example of Christ to show them that even in suffering it is possible to live ‘by the will of God’. We are reminded of Paul’s words;

Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

– Romans 6:12-13

Verse four explains the reason for persecution. It is the refusal of the Christians to go along with the behaviour of their pagan neighbours. It is their nonconformity that sets them apart and that is perceived as a threat. Peter assures them that though they suffer now they will be vindicated by God who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.

Mentioning ‘the dead’ brings to mind the Christians who have died. This, at least, is one way of understanding the difficult verse six. They went through persecution. They were judged by their contemporaries and condemned (perhaps even killed) because of their faith. Peter assures his readers that they should not be anxious over them. The gospel was not proclaimed to them (during their life) in vain, but that ‘they might live in the spirit as God lives’. Their having died does not undermine this (compare 1Thessalonians 4:13-18).

¹Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention

(for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin),

²so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God.

³You have already spent enough time doing what the Gentiles like to do,

living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, rev-els, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

⁴They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme.

⁵But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.

⁶For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead,

so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged,

they might live in the spirit as God does.

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.

⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.

⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining.

¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God;

whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies,

so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

**To him belongs the glory and the power forever and ever.
Amen.**

It would appear that Peter shared the expectations of his contemporaries that not only were they living in the last age, inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus, but that only a short time remained before the coming of Christ, that is to say, before the final realisation of the new heaven and the new earth promised by God, when God's reign would be definitively established. We are to be 'serious' (Greek: *sōphroneō*); better, we are to have the mind (*phroneō*) of those who have been saved (*sōzō*; we are to have the mind of Christ. We are also to have our wits about us and not behave like people living in a drunken haze. We are to live in prayer-communion with God and with each other.

Within the community it is our constant, mutual love that should characterise our lives. Such love, according to the proverb, 'covers all offences' (Proverbs 10:12). None of us is innocent. If we are going to be loved, the person loving us will necessarily have to be forgiving. An excellent reflection on this truth can be found in Paul's hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Hospitality was especially important not only in the welcoming of travelling Christians, but because of the custom of gathering in homes for the Eucharist. In words that recall Paul's words to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:4-7), Peter reminds them that each one of them has his or her own special gift given by grace. In word and deed they are to use their gifts so as to be instruments of God's grace to each other. By using the word *diaknoeō*, Peter highlights the fact that it is the Lord whom they are serving, thus accenting, once again, the central importance of doing the will of God.

Their aim in all this is to radiate to the world in which they live the wonder of God, and thus evoke praise. They are to do this 'through Jesus Christ', for it is his life of intimate love-communion with God that they are sharing, and it is his Spirit who is gracing them with the gifts which they enjoy.

Jesus himself prepared his disciples for the suffering that would come to them just for being his disciples:

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master ... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

– Matthew 10:24-25

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you

– John 15:18-20

Peter returns to an image which he used at the beginning of the letter. Their faith is being ‘tested by fire’(1:7). There he wrote: ‘in this you rejoice’(1:6). Here he assures them that this is their way of sharing in Christ’s suffering. If they do so they will certainly share his glory. They are not abandoned in their suffering. They are blessed with God’s own Spirit, the Spirit of glory, who is resting upon them.

Peter makes it clear that he is not talking about any suffering; certainly not suffering deserved for criminal activity (see 2:20). He is speaking of the suffering that they experience precisely as Christians (see 2:21). They should not consider such suffering a disgrace but by their radiant love witness to God and bring others to praise him (see 3:14-16).

They are living in the last age. The time of God’s final judgment has begun. If they are finding the testing hard, imagine what suffering will be experienced by those who reject God’s word! When they experience suffering because they are doing ‘God’s will’, they are to do what Jesus did (see 2:23). They are to entrust their spirit into God’s hands (see Luke 23:46), knowing that God is faithful, and continue to do God’s will.

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

¹³But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.

¹⁶Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear his name.

¹⁷For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

¹⁸And ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?’

(Proverbs 11:31)

¹⁹Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

¹Now as one who is an old man like yourselves [NRSV 'an elder myself'] and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed,

I exhort the elders among you ²to tend the flock of God that is in your charge,

exercising the oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you do it -

not for sordid gain but eagerly.

³Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.

⁴And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

⁵In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders.

And all of you must clothe yourselves in humility in your dealings with one another, for

'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'.

(Proverbs 3:34)

The problems which the community faces from the surrounding culture highlight the importance of good organisational leadership. As one would expect, this is the responsibility of the older men. Peter is writing as an old man himself [Greek: *sumpresbuteros*], and as one who has also had his share of suffering because of his attachment to Christ. He may also be referring to the fact that he witnessed Jesus' sufferings at the time of his passion. It is not only the suffering that he shares. He shares in the glory of which he has been speaking.

In exhorting (Greek: *parakaleō*, see 2:11) the elders, Peter is conscious of mediating Christ's own call to them. His words remind us of Paul's words to the elders of Ephesus, even to the image of tending the flock (Greek: *poimainō*) and to the terminology of overseeing (Greek: *episkopeō*): 'Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God' (Acts 20:28).

They are to carry out their responsibilities as God would have them do. As responsible for the community's finances (and perhaps as being themselves supported by the community, see Matthew 10:10), they must be careful that it is not money or financial security that motivates them. They are to heed Jesus' words and example at the last supper:

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

– Luke 22:25-27

The garland of leaves that adorned the heads of those who gained victory at the games faded. Not so the victory crown that Christ, 'the chief shepherd' would give those who were faithful to the end in the struggle that the Christians are facing. Having addressed the older men to whom governance of the community fell, Peter addresses the rest of the community. They must accept the authority of the elders.

Finally, he repeats his earlier exhortation (see 3:8). In their dealings with one another they are to have the humility of the heart of Jesus (Matthew 11:29).

As ‘aliens and exiles’(2:11) they know what it is to suffer humiliation. Humility is something other (see 3:8). It is the joyful acceptance of the truth that we are utterly dependent, like children, upon God. Joyful, because God is our Father, and we share in the life of his Son. Peter stresses here the power of God to save, and assures them that their present humiliation will give way to glory, if they remain humble before God. He is thinking of Jesus who ‘humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him’(Philippians 2:8-9).

Peter draws inspiration from the psalms: ‘Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you’(Psalm 55:22). Did not Jesus promise as much: ‘Your heavenly Father knows your need ... strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well’(Matthew 6:32-33).

For the third time Peter calls for them to be disciplined (Greek: *nēphō*; see 1:13; 4:7). They cannot afford to live as though it a drunken haze. This is reinforced here with the call to be watchful (Greek: *grēgoreō*). Their real enemy are not their confused neighbours. In rejecting the gospel and bringing suffering upon the Christian community they are but instruments of the devil whom they are to resist by being determined and committed to ‘faith’(see 1:5,7,9,21). No one can harm them if they are secure ‘under the mighty hand of God’. We hear the same advice from James and Paul:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

– James 4:7

Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

– Ephesians 6:11-13

They are not alone in their suffering. It is part of being a Christian, as the experience of other Christian communities demonstrates. It will not be for long. They will soon be sharing in the glory of Christ, promised them by their faithful God.

⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.

⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert.

Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.

⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

¹¹To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

¹²Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God.

Stand fast in it.

¹³Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son, Mark.

¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

As noted in the Introduction, Silvanus may have played a role beyond that of a scribe writing what Peter dictated. Peter may have asked him to help formulate his thoughts in better Greek than Peter was capable of. Is this, perhaps, the same Silvanus who accompanied Paul on his journey through Asia Minor to Macedonia, the “Silas” who, together with Barsabbas conveyed the decisions of the Jerusalem Assembly to Antioch (see Acts 15:22)?

‘Babylon’ is generally understood to be a cryptic way of speaking of Rome. It implies that Peter is writing from Rome. He is reminding his readers that the Christians there are also ‘aliens and exiles’ (2:11). It is part of the experience of being a Christian in the pagan Hellenist world.

We are given no indication of the identity of the ‘Mark’ mentioned here by Peter. When Peter speaks of him as his ‘son’, he is presumably using the word in relation to the life of faith. In which case it resembles Paul’s words concerning Timothy (see 1Corinthians 4:17). Tradition has identified this Mark as the author of the gospel. Eusebius, writing in the first half of the fourth century quotes a second century presbyter called Papias who speaks of Mark as ‘Peter’s interpreter’(see *History of the Church* 3.39.15). Later in his *History* he quotes our present text:

The second gospel is by Mark, who composed it according to the instructions of Peter, who in his Catholic epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying, ‘The church that is at Babylon chosen together with you sends you greetings; and so does my son, Mark.

– *History of the Church* 6.25.5

Urging them, once again, to express their love for each other, Peter closes his letter with a prayer that they will enjoy ‘peace’(see 1:2), ‘in Christ’.