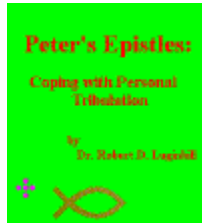


Peter's Epistles #33

Three Analogies for the Christian Life

1st Peter 2:1-10

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill



<http://ichthys.com>

Introduction: Having in the first chapter sufficiently explained and explored our status as believers who are reborn through faith in the gospel, the Word of God, and having established there the principle that this blessed status mandates that we advance spiritually in the same way as we have believed, and that we add to our positional sanctification a holy manner of life, Peter goes on in this first part of chapter two to teach us about the processes of spiritual growth, spiritual progress and spiritual service using three analogies. Having first reminded us of the need for sanctified behavior in order to make any progress in the Christian life (1Pet.2:1), Peter explains the process of spiritual growth through the analogy of a growing child (1Pet.2:2-3), the process of spiritual progress through the analogy of the construction of a building (1Pet.2:4-8), and the process of spiritual ministry by comparing it to that of the Levitical priesthood (1Pet.2:9-10). Careful attention to the details of what Peter says here will give us some very valuable insights into the essentials of how every Christian should live after salvation.

(1) Therefore (i.e., since the Word of God is the basis for all good thing), having put aside all badness and all deception and hypocritical behavior and envying and all bad-mouthing, (2) like newborn babes, desire the milk of the Word which is without deceit, that by it you may grow in regard to your salvation, (3) since, after all, you have tasted that the Lord is excellent. (4) [It is Jesus] to whom you have come, a Living Stone, rejected by men, but, in the eyes of God [the Father], elect and highly honored. (5) And you yourselves [too] are being built up (i.e., by the Holy Spirit) into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood for the offering of spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. (6) That is why it says in scripture, "Behold, I am placing a stone in Zion, a cornerstone which is select and costly, and the one who believes in Him will most definitely not be put

to shame". (7) This honor belongs to you who are believers, but to unbelievers [scripture says] "this [very] stone which the builders rejected has become the Chief Foundation", (8) and "a Stone for stumbling and a Rock for tripping", against which the disobedient collide as they have been appointed to do (i.e., because of their decision to reject Christ). (9) But you are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people to be preserved in order that you might proclaim the virtues of Him who called you out of the darkness into His marvelous light,

(10) who once were "not a people", but
who now are "[the] people of God",
who [once] were devoid of [God's] mercy, but
who now have been granted His mercy.
1st Peter 2:1-10

Experiential Sanctification: Chapter two begins with a reprise of the principle of experiential sanctification which Peter had covered extensively (and which we have studied) in chapter one. The summary is detailed, but, as in other such lists of bad behavior to be avoided by Christians (e.g., Gal.5:19-21), not meant to be understood as all-inclusive. In other words, while not content to remind us that we are by position in Christ "holy people", and that means that we certainly ought to do our best to live in a holy way more and more day by day, Peter feels the need – under the guidance of the Spirit – to include some specifics here, lest we assume that we have already achieved a perfect Christian walk. Peter does this not to discourage us (we know very well that we are forgiven for all our errors and sins whenever we confess them to the Lord [1Jn.1:9], and can be confident that if we are doing a good job of keeping sin – especially gross sin – under control we need not agonize overly about the issue), but to remind us of the deceptive nature of sin with its wide-ranging and all-pervasive influence (i.e., we are not perfect after salvation: 1Ki.8:46; Job 15:14; Ps.143:2; Rm.3:23; 5:12; 1Jn.1:8-10); Peter does this, in other words, to help us stay humble on the subject, even though we may be "doing well" in our personal efforts to lead a holy, sanctified life that is honoring to Jesus Christ.

Having Put Aside: It is also worth noting that this revisiting of the principle of sanctification, putting the matter in practical terms by giving us examples of what not to do, precedes Peter's discussion of what is necessary for proactive spiritual growth, demonstrating the principle we have often intoned that a good defense and a sustained offense go hand in hand, with deficiency in either area affecting the other in a negative way. To get the most out of the Christian life and to honor our Lord to the best of our ability, we need not only to behave in a holy way or only to grow, progress and produce in a positive way – we need to do both, because the approach of either one without the other will not take us very far and will turn out to be counterproductive in the end. This is all illustrated by Peter's use of the participle here, *apothemenoi*, which we are translating as "having put aside". It should be noted that this represents deliberate action on the believer's part. It is neither accidental nor automatic. Furthermore, "putting off" the unseemly activities Peter goes on to list here (along with all other inappropriate behavior) in itself requires a significant degree of spiritual growth. To be

effective at resisting sin of any kind, we need to know in some detail what sin is, for as this list shows, while most gross sins are very obvious, there is much in the area of what we think and say, for example, which is also sinful. To carry out Peter's command given in the Spirit, we also need to know something about how we are constructed, spirit and body, about the sin nature, about the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, about how to recover from sin when we do fail, and indeed about every other possible aspect of the truth of the Word of God because success in resisting sin cannot really be divorced from seeing things, all things, from God's perfect point of view. For it is when we get knocked off that high ground of correct "divine viewpoint" that we are more likely to fall back into worldly ways of thinking, speaking and acting.

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

Badness of Every Sort: Evil is a poor translation for the Greek word *kakia* in verse one because it is a somewhat loaded term in English. Wherever one finds the word "evil" in the Old Testament, for example, it is almost always rendering the Hebrew word "bad" (as opposed to good), and while there is a separate Greek word for evil (*poneria*), it too means "bad" at its core without necessarily embracing all the connotations of our English word (and as such is a virtual synonym for *kakia* here). Using "malice" to render *kakia* (KJV, NIV, ESV, etc.) is technically correct, but this word today in contemporary English is not well-understood and may seem to connote more of a negative mental disposition, whereas the Greek word we have here encompasses anything thought, said or done which is "bad" or sinful. "Wickedness" (ASV) is also potentially misleading because even the worst of sinners may not consider themselves "wicked" – which has become the stuff of fairytales or dark, satanic evil – and *kakia* is not so specialized a word. "Sinfulness" is possibly the closest English word other than "badness", but Peter does not use a Greek word related to the morpheme for sin (*hamart-*), which he easily could have done. He no doubt chose to avoid that because otherwise this mandate would seem to be – and would be – entirely impossible, since "we all stumble" from time to time so that not even the most advanced Christian will ever be without sin (Eccl.7:20; Rom.3:9; 3:23; 7:14; 7:23; Gal.3:22; Jas.3:2; 1Jn.1:6-10; cf. Ps.143:2). So while "badness" is not the most poetic of terms, it communicates what is meant here: any sort of thought, word or deed which is unbecoming for a Christian.

By using the phrase "*all* badness", Peter also keeps things general enough for us to understand that sanctification should encompass every aspect of the believer's life. It would have been impossible for him to include every possible sinful behavior, and for that reason none of the biblical catalogues which list sinful activities are meant to be taken as completely comprehensive but rather as illustrative of the kind of things we ought to avoid (e.g., 1Cor.6:9-10; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:3-5).¹ Everything we think, say and

do. After all, what we do is usually predicated by what we say, and this in turn is directed by what we think.

(17) "Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? (18) But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. (19) For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. (20) These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Matthew 15:17-20 NKJV

Capturing the "high ground of the heart" is thus the key to sanctified behavior, which is protected by sanctified speech, and guarded by sanctified thinking. This is why the tongue is often emphasized in such discussions because it occupies the middle ground between the two, preceding action and revealing thinking:

(2) For we all make many [sinful] mistakes (lit., "stumble much", i.e., sin somewhat inadvertently). If anyone avoids [sinful] mistakes in what he says, this person is perfect [in behavior and thus] able to bridle his whole body. (3) Consider how we put bridles into the mouths of horses so that they will obey us, and [thus we are able to] maneuver their entire bodies around. (4) Consider also what large things ships are and how they are driven by strong winds, and yet they are maneuvered around by an extremely small tiller wherever the helmsman intends. (5) In this same way the tongue, though it is a small member, makes great boasts. See how small a fire it takes to start a great conflagration. (6) The tongue is [just such] a fire too, and as it dwells among our other members the tongue embraces the entire system of wickedness, polluting the entire body, setting aflame every aspect of human existence, and in turn being set aflame by hell. (7) For every species of bird and beast, of things that creep and of things that swim, can and has been tamed by humanity. (8) But no man is able to tame the tongue. It is an implacable evil, filled with deadly poison. (9) With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse our [fellow] man, born in the likeness of God. (10) From the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. It should not be that way, brothers.

James 3:2-10

All Guile: The Greek word *dolos* means ignoble subterfuge, trickery or deceit. As was the case with "badness" (and as will be the case at the end of this catalog with "slanders") Peter adds the adjective "all" here for emphasis in order to stress the complete unacceptability of Christians acting in any sort of deceitful manner. Such tactics can never be justified in our relationships with other believers or even with unbelievers. While it may be true for the world that "all's fair in love and war" – and trickery is certainly an essential part of the art of war – duplicity, fraud and pretense have no place in what ought to be the honorable conduct of a Christian towards the world of believers and unbelievers both. Inevitably, tactics of deception cloak unworthy motives – or at the very least are apt to lead a believer down that road even if they were acting with "good intentions". The exception to this has to do as mentioned with warfare

and also with criminality (i.e., we would be well-advised to use whatever stratagem was at hand if confronted by a robber, kidnapper, murderer or enemy agent). Absent unusual and somewhat unlikely situations of that sort, we would do well to remember our Lord's words of praise to Nathaniel: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (Jn.1:47 KJV).

Hypocrisies: The Greek word here, from which the English word hypocrite is derived, has as its essential meaning "actor". Hypocrisy, therefore, is pretense, as in the infamous hypocrisy of the Pharisees who pretended to be lovers of God and doers of the Law but who were in reality lovers of self and users of the trappings of the Law for their own profit and benefit. Peter's use of the plural here is partly for emphasis, but also partly to make this less of a concept for us and more of a set of concrete problematic behaviors we need to avoid. Any time we put on airs or engage in any sort of behavior which is really only "for show", we at least run the risk of being hypocritical, biblically speaking. So this negative behavior we are to avoid encompasses more than the obvious problem of holding others to a different standard than we do ourselves; it also includes putting on any kind of "show" for the benefit of others so that we may appear other than we truly are inside. Christians who are walking in genuine love will have no problem giving a good impression because it will be in that case genuinely "good", empowered by the Holy Spirit. Erecting a phony facade, on the other hand, does no one any true good, and can do us grave spiritual harm because it is essentially behavioral lying (which is what all acting is, after all).

Envies: The plural here as in the previous instance, is both emphatic and serves to set our minds on particular cases of envious or jealous behavior (whereas the singular might have us thinking in only conceptual terms, and it is easier to imagine that we are not guilty of the whole but harder to think that we are not guilty of "small" acts of envy and jealousy).

And [when] I regarded all toil and all profit gained from work, [I saw that this all stems] from a man's envying of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 4:4

Or do you assume that the Scripture says to no purpose "The Spirit" which dwells in you "sets its desire against" [such] envy (expressed in vv.1-4; Gal.5:17)?

James 4:5

As these passages make clear, envy/jealousy is in many respects *the* archetypical sin. In this regard it is akin to pride and arrogance, but it represents the objective application of that pride and arrogance in contrast to the subjective over-appreciation of oneself and one's prerogatives. Envy/jealousy is the direct opposite of peacefully accepting the lot which the Lord has assigned us when we foolishly compare ourselves and our situations with others whom we deem better off – usually in material terms (although we should know that spiritual wealth is what we are here to garner, and that all material wealth and blessings will soon turn to dust). Lack of contentment and lack of peace is the

natural result of giving in to envy and jealousy (Ps.37:1; Prov.14:30; 24:1; 24:19; Eccl.4:8; Matt.20:15; 1Cor.13:4; Phil.4:11-12; 1Tim.6:8; Heb.13:5; Jas.4:2).

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1st Thessalonians 5:18 NIV

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

All Slanders: The Greek word here, *katalalia*, means, literally, to "down-talk". While the verb from which it is derived sometimes means merely "to speak against", there is clearly an element of defamation meant as Peter uses the word here. Slander, defamation, speaking poorly of someone and/or spreading rumors about them (regardless of the supposed truth of what one may be saying) is clearly a most un-Christian activity (Lev.19:16; Ps.15:3; Prov.10:18; Mk.7:21-23; 2Cor.12:20; Eph.4:31):

Therefore, having put away falsehood, "let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor" (Zech.8:16), for we [believers] are members one of another.
Ephesians 4:25 ESV

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 4:29 NASB

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

Colossians 4:6 NASB

(1) Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, (2) to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

Titus 3:1-2 ESV

The plural here is, once again, employed for generalizing purposes. Peter uses it to help us see that many things we might not place into the category of "slander" might actually be so. For one thing, since we are not God, our facts about situations we take it upon ourselves to comment upon are sometimes inaccurate and almost always incomplete. So when in doubt about the issue, silence is a better policy than expressing any negative opinion or repeating a negative report about someone else, especially another believer.

The Growing Child (v.2): In verse two, Peter uses the analogy of a growing child to describe the proper process of Christian spiritual growth. Just as "new born babes" are

very desirous of the mother's milk which produces physical growth in them, so also new believers (and in fact all believers) ought to be similarly desirous of the "the milk of the Word", that is, the truth found in the Bible, so that by means of imbibing it they too may grow. Our growth, of course, is not physical (which may be directly seen) but rather spiritual (which may only be intuited from what we say and do). Another difference between the two points of comparison is that while babies have a natural and uncontrollable desire for literal milk, believers have to be solicited – as here – to stoke up the desire for spiritual milk. That is not to say that believers, especially new believers, are not by nature interested in the truth – of course we are. But it is also true that being human and possessing free will, we are also very easily distracted from anything that is at all difficult and from anything that is not physically and immediately pleasing. Beyond all argument there is great satisfaction in hearing the truth being taught, believing that truth, and applying that truth to our lives. It does take effort, however, and the joy and satisfaction are not necessarily instantaneous or automatic. What is most pleasing is the result, but the result – of spiritual maturity – will not come without prior, consistent effort exercised in a correct, righteous way. Just as there is no doubt joy in winning an athletic competition, it is very clear to all that much pain, sacrifice and effort went into the preparation for victory – and that even so it had to be done "the right way" in order to achieve the desired result. Unlike athletics, all believers can "win the prize" – and indeed that is what our Lord desires. But just as in athletics, we will not achieve our goal without a consistent, daily application of our will for a good long time to *proper* procedures.

Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

2nd Timothy 2:5 NASB

What this means is that while it no doubt takes much time, effort and application of resources to become a valued member of a church where the truth is not being taught, all such efforts and sacrifices are not going to bring a believer to the point of spiritual maturity, a necessary milestone which must be gained if he/she is going to be fit to endure the tests which will come in our spiritual progress with the Lord and which precede effective service for Him. It takes the truth to accomplish that, the truth contained in scripture, distilled and taught in an orthodox way, then *believed* and consistently applied to one's life. While other things are needful for advancing to spiritual maturity (e.g., prayer, Bible reading, sanctification), there is no substitute for the truth of the Word of God taught in a substantive and orthodox way. That is the mother's milk of all spiritual growth.

Peter very significantly adds that the "milk" or teaching of which we need to be desirous must be "without deceit" or "guile" (the word in question being from the same root as the "guile" we are told to put away in the previous verse). Throughout the Christian communities in Asia we know from the writings of both Paul and John that there were always threats to the truth being perpetrated by false teachers of various stripes (Gnostics and Judaizers being the two most prominent found in scripture). This qualification thus serves as an important reminder that "a little leaven" is sometimes sufficient to leaven the whole lump (1Cor.5:6; Gal.5:9). The introduction of heretical

teaching into what otherwise appears to be true can and often does have the effect of undermining the faith of all who hear it and heed it. Just as a little poison in otherwise perfectly fine milk makes it unfit for human consumption, so also we need to be alert and on watch against any and all teaching which is substantively false – especially as we approach ever closer to the end where such false teaching is prophesied to be a particularly deadly problem (cf. Matt.24:4-5; 24:11; 24:24-27; 2Tim.3:1-13).

(1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.
1st Timothy 4:1-2 NKJV

(1) But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.
(2) And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.
2nd Peter 2:1-2 NKJV

Finally in verse two, Peter tells us that it is precisely through taking in the milk of the Word, that is, seeking it out, hearing it, *and* believing it, that we "grow up in regard to salvation". This does not mean that we are not already saved as believers (we are), nor does it mean, should we live so long, that we will not be saved by being resurrected when the Lord returns at the second advent (we will be); this refers not to being positionally saved (which we all are as believers) nor to the ultimate safety of eternity when we will be safely with the Lord forever (which is the legacy of all who believe). Rather, as in the case of experiential sanctification (which likewise differs from the positional sanctification all believers possess now and the ultimate sanctification we shall all possess on the day of eternity), this "salvation" refers to the exploitation of our status as believers for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ by adding growth to the foundation of belief we already possess (Rom.5:9-10; 13:11; 1Cor.1:18; 3:15; 5:5; 15:2; 2Cor.1:6; 2:15; 1Thes.5:8-9; 1Tim.4:16; 2Tim.2:10; 3:15; 4:18; Heb.1:14; 9:28; Jas.1:21; 1Pet.4:18; Jude 1:23).

So then, my brothers, just as you have always been obedient [to the truth], not just when I was present [with you] but even more so now in my absence, go to work on your salvation with fear and trembling.
Philippians 2:12 (cf. 2Pet.1:10-11)

Tasting that the Lord is "Excellent" (v.3): Peter concludes his comparison of the growing believer to a growing child by means of an emphatic rhetorical flourish, using what in Greek grammar is called a "simple" condition – which in semantic terms is anything but. As translated above, this device is the equivalent of a causal clause but an ironic twist: "if you know . . . of course you know, don't you, really!?" Believers who have made any headway whatsoever in the Christian life certainly *ought* to know that the Lord is "excellent". The word *chrestos* used here is not the most common Greek word for goodness and often conveys the idea of usefulness, aptness, and utility. So while

"benevolent", "pleasant", "virtuous" and "good" are all acceptable translations for *chrestos* as Peter uses it here, "excellent" better brings out both the quality of our Lord's character as well as His perfect superintendence of our spiritual growth – which is Peter's main point here. We certainly ought to be desirous of the milk of the Word and we certainly ought to be dedicated to the task of spiritual growth. After all, we "tasted" its goodness and excellence when we were saved by believing in Jesus Christ, and everything we have experienced since as we have learned about Him and come to walk more closely with Him day by day have confirmed that goodness, that excellence, that usefulness toward our continued progress in all things spiritual: Peter is not telling us anything here we shouldn't already know and shouldn't already be acting on, given that, having now eaten from the true Tree of Life, we know quite well how good the truth "tastes", and how excellent it is for bringing us closer step by step to Jesus Christ so as to please Him better day by day the way we should be doing (Ps.119:103; Heb.6:4-5).

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.
Psalm 34:8 KJV

Christ the Living Stone (v.4): Jesus Christ is the Rock (Duet.32:4; 1Sam.2:2; 2Sam.22:47; 23:3; Ps.18:2; 18:46; 19:14; 61:2; 118:22; 144:1; Is.17:10; 28:16; 44:8; 51:1; Hab.1:12; Rom.9:33; 1Cor.10:4; cf. Ex.17:6; Num.20:8; Deut.32:4-37; Is.8:14-15), the Cornerstone of the Church (Matt.16:18; 1Pet.2:6), the "living Stone" to whom we "have come" (1Pet.2:4), and the One who is the foundation for our entire spiritual "building" (Matt.7:24-25; Lk.6:47-49; 1Cor.3:11). This wonderful picture of Christ shows us at once His absolute faithfulness and reliability, while at the same time demonstrating most vividly that we have an absolute need of relying on Him and putting our faith in Him: just as a building must stand on a solid foundation, so we can not be saved nor can we make any spiritual progress apart from being completely reliant on the One who is the absolute basis for our faith, both at salvation and ever afterwards in every forward step we take in following Him. So while "Rock" is a perfect title for our perfectly constant Savior, it also should bring to mind our intimate connection with the absolutely reliable One: Jesus Christ is the the bedrock of all things in our Christian lives so that we are safe and secure come what floods may come, just as long as we keep relying on Him.

Rejected by men, but, in the eyes of God [the Father], elect and highly honored (v.4): We are told at 1st Corinthians 2:8 that if the rulers of this world had appreciated who Christ was – elect and honored by God the Father – they would never have crucified Him. And just as He was and remains disdained by the world – but not by His Father and ours – so we who have cast our lot with Him who cast His lot with us are despised by the world. But just as He has been given the highest of all honors, the Name which above every Name at which Name all will bow (Phil.2:9-11; cf. Eph.1:21), so we who persevere in Him will be glorified with Him on that great and glorious day to come (Rom.8:17; 8:30; 2Tim.2:10). We also are elect now in the One who is elect, specially chosen to be part of Jesus' Bride as ordained in the Father's plan from eternity past (Rom.8:29-30; 8:33; 11:7; Col.3:12; 2Tim.2:10; Tit.1:1; 1Pet.1:2). The world has its priorities and hierarchy of values. But they are nothing to us. Our blessed hope is one of

resurrection and life eternal, and a good reward from the One whom we have chosen over the world.

(18) Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. (19) Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. (20) Remember this principle I taught you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. John 15:18-20 (cf. Matt.10:25; 1Jn.3:13)

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another **foundation** except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Living Stones being built into a Spiritual House (v.5): Just as at Matthew 16:18 our Lord had renamed Peter "rock" (*petros*) as one who would be an instrumental part of the great "mystery" expansion of the Church built upon the "Rock" (*petra*) – who is none other than Christ Himself, the Foundation, Cornerstone and Head of the Church – so here Peter addresses us as "stones", equal parts of the eternal building which Jesus is constructing, "*living* stones", because the Church is no cold, dead, physical edifice, but a living, breathing, spiritually alive assembly of believers, built up stone by stone and believer by believer from Adam and Eve to the present day and onward until it is complete at Christ's glorious return. This beautiful analogy given to Peter by the Holy Spirit at once captures our inherent oneness with Christ and with each other, and also the exciting undertaking of which we are all collectively a part. We are all stones in the building, living stones in a living building whose Cornerstone is the Lord of life who gave us life eternal and made us one with Himself and with each other. And the task is not yet complete, nor will it be until the day of His revelation and our transformation in resurrection at the second advent. But the successful completion of the living edifice in which we all share forever, composed of all our brothers and sisters in Christ and founded upon the Rock in whom we have trusted for life eternal, is absolutely assured. Individuals may fail (Lk.14:28-30), but together we as a Church, members of Christ one and all (Jn.17:11; 17:20-23; 1Cor.1:10; Eph.4:3-13), will push through all opposition by the evil one until we are complete in Christ in every way on that great day, "and the gates

of hell" themselves will not prevent us or prevail against us in this sacred task (Matt.16:18).

(19) So then, you are no longer strangers and hangers-on, but you are fellow citizens and fellow members of the household of God, (20) established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself the cornerstone, (21) in whom the entire structure is in the process of being joined together and is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) in whom you too are being built up into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His house – whose house we are, if indeed we hold fast to the hope [in which we] boast firm until the end.

Hebrews 3:6

A Holy Priesthood to offer Spiritual Sacrifices (v.5): Even though we may be gentiles, even though we are personally not descended from Levi most likely, and even though many of us are not men but women, all believers in Jesus Christ, as this verse assures us, are now priests of God. That certainly stands to reason since Jesus Christ is the ultimate High Priest (1Tim.2:5; Heb.7:24-25; cf. Job 16:20-21; Is.53:12b; Heb.6:19-20; 9:11-12; 9:24), and we are one with Him (Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 1Pet.5:14; cf. Matt.28:18-20; Eph.3:6; Heb.3:1; 3:14; 2Pet.1:4).

For this reason He had to be like His brothers in every way, in order to become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things relating to God in order to propitiate the sins of the people (i.e., through the sacrifice of Himself).

Hebrews 2:17

So, brothers, [being now] sanctified and partakers of the call [come] from heaven, set your hearts on Him we profess as the One sent [to save us] and the High Priest [of that salvation], [even] Jesus.

Hebrews 3:1

(14) Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (i.e., as through the temple's veil), [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him]. (15) For we do not have a High Priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He too was put to the test in all things just as [we are], [only] without sin.

Hebrews 4:14-15

And He has **made us** a kingdom, priests of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:6

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have **made them** into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the

earth!"

Revelation 5:9-10

Spiritual Sacrifices (v.5): It is important to emphasize that this new priesthood of which all believers in Christ are a part is significantly different from the Levitical priesthood – just as Christ's high priesthood is superior to that of the Levitical regime (Heb.7:1-28). Christ is both the ultimate King and the ultimate Priest, combining both offices in His glorified person (Ps.110:1-4; Zech.6:13b; Heb.7:1; cf. Jer.33:16-18). So as the last two passages quoted above demonstrate, not only is the priesthood we believers share different from the Levitical one in that we have been given it based on our relationship to Christ, the Great High Priest, but that priesthood is also inextricably linked to the rulership we share with Him, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21). As such, the sacrifices we are to make are likewise significantly different from the Levitical ones being now in nature completely spiritual and therefore *real* in place of the previous symbolic sacrifices of the Mosaic Law (1Cor.5:7; Phil.2:17; 4:18; Heb.13:15) – these are the "spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to God through Jesus Christ" to which Peter is referring in our context.

(1) Therefore I entreat you by God's mercy, brothers, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God – [this is] your "priestly-service" spiritually performed. (2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by this renewal of your thinking, so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do].

Romans 12:1-2

And being one with Christ and priests together with Him, rather than needing an intermediary to approach the throne of grace in prayer, we now enjoy direct and immediate access to the Father (Eph.2:18; 3:12; cf. Jn.14:13-14; Rom.5:1-2).

So let us approach with confident free speech to the throne of grace [of the Father] that we might receive [His] mercy and gain [His] favor for timely help.

Hebrews 4:16

As to the "spiritual sacrifices" themselves, just as the Levitical priests were to conduct the rituals prescribed by the Mosaic Law according to the biblical requirements, so every believer today has been given at least one spiritual gift by the Spirit, and has been assigned a ministry by Jesus Christ, with effects preordained by the Father (1Cor.12:4-7). We should resist seeing these ministries in terms of how the church-visible has traditionally employed that word. All personal ministries truly ordained by Christ will contribute to the spiritual growth of other Christians either directly or indirectly. So whether a believer is personally teaching the Word or God or supporting a teaching ministry, whether personally engaging in a ministry of evangelism, or supporting those who are, personally encouraging and helping others to seek and follow Christ or doing so indirectly, all true ministry always comes down to the furtherance of the truth of the Word of God, because it is only through the truth empowered by the Holy Spirit that we can even hope to know what it is that our Lord would have us to do:

(1) Therefore I entreat you by God's mercy, brothers, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God – [this is] your "priestly-service" spiritually performed. (2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by this renewal of your thinking, so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do].
Romans 12:1-2

That is why it says in scripture (v.6): Peter's introductory phrase to the quotation which follows (from Isaiah 28:16) demonstrates that Isaiah's reference to the Rock of Zion was clearly Messianic, looking forward to Christ who is the Rock on which our individual faith is founded and rests secure. He is the Cornerstone for the edifice of which we are all a part. He is the foundation stone which has been specially chosen in whom we are also elect. He is the tested, precious, priceless stone highly valued in the eyes of the Father through whom we are also considered dear. And we have this relationship with Him, the basis of everything in the Church, through our faith in Him. Through that faith in Him, we will "never be put to shame", which is Peter's adaptation, guided by the Holy Spirit, of Isaiah's rendering, where we are told that we will "never be shaken".² Viewed from the standpoint of human beings who are believers in Christ, by placing our trust and confidence in Him we have nothing to worry about concerning our eternal future; viewed from the standpoint of the building analogy, we, living stones that we are, shall never be jarred lose from our place in this perfect building, the Church, in which we have been perfectly placed by the perfect Architect, our heavenly Father, the entire structure resting securely on the one foundation, Jesus Christ our Lord. So by prophesying the coming of the Rock and our intimate union with Him, Isaiah also indirectly predicted our sharing of all that the Messiah is and has, including His kingship and His priesthood – "that is why it says [this quote] in scripture".

This honor (v.7): The direct access to the Father we enjoy through our union with our Savior Jesus Christ is unprecedented in world history and an exceptional honor indeed. Given that we cannot see, feel or experience it, however, it is perhaps understandable but for all that regrettable that we perhaps do not appreciate as deeply as we should this exalted status we possess in Jesus Christ of being royal priests of God as those who share everything our Lord has won at the cross. It certainly behooves us as believers to call to mind at least from time to time the many wonderful blessings we enjoy as members of the Bride and Body of Christ, especially when we may find ourselves falling short of the full measure of joy in the Lord which ought always to be ours and which is our true source of strength (Neh.8:10).³ The world cannot see and most definitely does not appreciate the fact that Christians in the most humble circumstances in this life have been honored by God with a position that exceeds the power and status of its most select elites. The wicked of the world may scoff at us, but God scoffs at them (Ps.37:13), and we have every right to rejoice in this truly magnificent position of priesthood and the direct access to the throne of grace which it entails. For we know that it is real and wonderful beyond expression – by faith.

[Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which

cannot be seen are eternal.
2nd Corinthians 4:18

For we walk by faith, not by sight.
2nd Corinthians 5:7 NKJV

(1) It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen.
Hebrews 11:1

But to those who are disobedient: (v.7-8): Being a royal priest of God the Father on the basis of sharing in our Lord Jesus Christ's High Priest's priesthood is a great honor indeed, and the contrast between our positional status in Christ and that of the unbeliever could not be more stark. For even if like the poor Lazarus, whose earthly situation was so pathetic as compared to the rich man at whose gate he lay, we find ourselves amidst tribulations and fiery trials in this world (and that is a common thing for serious believers in Christ: 2Tim.3:12), we are well aware that the temporary blessings of those who refuse to accept Christ are just that. For them, Christ is a stone of stumbling. Meaning that Jesus is the issue in this life, and that all who refuse to accept Him merely demonstrate by that refusal, whether active or passive, that they have no desire to live forever with God. Thus Jesus Christ and what a person thinks about Him is **the** issue in this short life on earth. The builders (i.e., the Jewish leaders of His day) rejected Him who is in fact the Corner Stone, the foundation upon which all of creation is built – for the cross was always at the heart of the plan of God. But on that great day to come the fact that our Lord is the Alpha and the Omega will be irrefutable so that before Him "every knee will bow" (Phil.3:10; cf. Is.45:23; Rom.14:11) and acknowledge that He is Lord of all. To this fate "they were appointed" in the plan of God, but that does not in any way imply a lack of genuine choice on their part. For it is by "being [willfully] disobedient to the Word" (1Pet.2:8), that is, to the gospel which reveals salvation as coming only through faith in Christ, that unbelievers stumble, by their own fault, by their own rejection of the truth. In His great justice, God the Father gives unbelievers the right to make this choice, and that choice has been duly entered in the divine decrees.

An Elect Race (v.9): Having just described the self-imposed plight of the unbeliever, and having reminded us of our obligations as Christians in regard to sanctification and spiritual growth just prior to that, Peter pauses here to give us some encouragement based upon the indescribably wonderful status we occupy as believers in Jesus Christ. This is a good lesson for anyone who teaches or even shares the Word of God with others. The alternative to belief is horrific, it is true, and the responsibilities of believers are significant and challenging, it is true, but the blessings of belonging to Jesus Christ and of becoming a true child of God are glorious in contrast to the former and incontrovertibly worth the "trouble" in regard to the latter. Presenting a balanced picture of the truth is very important. Every gospel appeal should present both realities – the good resulting from salvation and the bad resulting from rejection of Christ. And every presentation of the truth of scripture should likewise judiciously mix the blessings and rewards we are promised as believers in Christ who commit ourselves to following

Him with the challenges, duties and responsibilities we have in following Him. That is what Peter does here on both counts, taking a moment to encourage his readers by reminding them of their exalted status as Christians before going on to continue his exhortations about the proper application of the truth in this world (in verse eleven and following).

Based upon the Septuagint's rendering of Isaiah 43:20 (where the exact same Greek wording is used), we can say that the phrase "an elect race" is an allusion by Peter to the Hebrew title "chosen people" which occurs in this verse (and see the similar usage at Deut.7:6; 10:15; 1Chron.16:13; Ps.105:6; Is.45:4; 65:9; 65:15; 65:22; cf. Rom.9:11; 11:5; 11:7; 11:28). When we consider the others who are similarly "chosen" by the Lord, namely, the Messiah (Is.42:1; Jn.1:34; 1Pet.2:4; 2:6; cf. Lk.23:35), David (Ps.89:3) and Moses (Ps.106:23), we may say that there is no better company to be in. We may also say that this "election" or "choosing" in Isaiah 45:3 (and its companion passages) refers therefore to the **believers** in Israel as can be deduced from the fact that Moses and David – and most certainly the Messiah – are not "chosen" merely on the basis of biology but first and foremost for spiritual reasons. So while initially it may seem strange for Peter to attribute to his gentile audience a blessing originally understood to belong to Israel alone, he is telling us directly here that through our faith in Christ by the grace of God we are beneficiaries of that same election, made part of the people and family of God, as those of Israel in the past and present – those who believe, that is, because without faith it is impossible to please God or accrue any lasting favor from Him (Heb.11:6). We gentiles are like a wild olive branch, but we have grafted into the stem of Israel, so to speak, and enjoy by our new position in Christ those same benefits: we are all part of God's "chosen people" in Christ.⁴ So while we are "elect" in that God has chosen us for salvation individually in His plan before time began (as Peter explains at the beginning of this epistle: 1Pet.1:1-2; cf. 1Thes.1:4), we have also become part of His "chosen people", namely, the Body and Bride of Christ, the Church, which is built upon the foundation of Israel (Eph.2:20).

Election: In Christian doctrine, "election" is generally seen as an individual thing, a Christian thing. As the foregoing discussion makes clear, however, the "choice" (which is what is behind the idea of election or selection) is **God's** choice, and that choice in the Old Testament focused upon one particular people, the seed of Abraham, the Jewish people of Israel. We certainly know from an abundance of revelation in the New Testament (as well as from the Old) that in fact only believers are saved regardless of their physical origin (so that in this sense "not all Israel is Israel": Rom.9:6). And we can also so with confidence that all believers of all time are saved, even if the believer in question was not blessed to be of Jewish stock (e.g., Eph.2:8-9). Both parts of this proposition, therefore, are important to keep in mind. God chose a race of people to be His unique possession, and we gentiles have been given the blessing of being entered into that fellowship by Jesus' sacrifice and our faith in Him and what He has done for us:

(11) So remember that you were once gentiles in the flesh, called "uncircumcised" by those of the so-called circumcision which is fleshly and man-made. (12) Remember that you were without Christ, alienated from the polity of

Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. (13) But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For He Himself is our peace, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity between us, (15) by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements with His [own] body, so that He might recreate the two into one new Man by making [this] peace, (16) and might reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind]. (17) For when He had come [1st advent], He proclaimed the gospel of peace to you who were far away [from God], and peace to those who were near (Is.57:19). (18) For it is through Him that we both have our access to the Father by means of one Spirit. (19) So then, you are no longer strangers and hangers-on, but you are fellow citizens and fellow members of the household of God, (20) established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself the cornerstone, (21) in whom the entire structure is in the process of being joined together and is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) in whom you too are being built up into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11-22

The basis of God's choice of us is our faith; the result of God's choice of us is our oneness in one Body, the Church, which is "the Israel of God" (Gal.6:16); and the means of effecting this choice is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, without which there is no plan of God. These are the important considerations to keep in mind when contemplating the doctrine of election. Some schools of theology emphasize God's choice of us as individuals to the exclusion of 1) our free will as a necessary part of the equation, 2) the purpose and result of this election being our inclusion in the corporate whole of true Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ, and 3) the cross which makes our election possible.

"Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of **the elect** those days will be cut short."

Matthew 24:22 NASB

"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even **the elect**."

Matthew 24:24 NASB

"And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

Matthew 24:31 NASB

"Now, will not God bring about justice for **His elect** who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?"

Luke 18:7 NASB

Who will bring a charge against God's **elect**? God is the one who justifies.

Romans 8:33 NASB

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing heaven has [to offer], (4) seeing that even before the world was founded **He elected** us in Him to be sanctified and blameless before Him.

Ephesians 1:3-4

Therefore, as **the elect** of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.

Colossians 3:12 NKJV

Knowing, beloved brethren, your **election** by God.

1st Thessalonians 1:4 NKJV

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and **election** sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.

2nd Peter 1:10 NKJV

"These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those who are with Him are called, **and elect** – and [have remained] faithful."

Revelation 17:14

Perusing various English translations will reveal that most versions are inconsistent in their rendering of the Greek word group whence "elect" and "election" derive. For example, "chose" and "chosen" are often preferred even by versions which elsewhere have "elect". That is fine as long as the reader understands that election is God's choice of us in Jesus Christ, and that we are chosen because of our faith in Him, with this only being possible because He bought us with His blood, His spiritual death on the cross whereby He died for all of our sins. All who respond through faith to the call of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ are elected (Matt.20:16; 22:14; 2Pet.1:10; Rev.17:14; cf. Rom.8:29-30). Election confirms this status of ours as those who belong to God's family forever in Jesus Christ, and the doctrine speaks to our eternal share in the kingdom toward which we so eagerly look. What matters in this life is not what the world prefers – since this world is passing away and lies in the lap of the evil one – but **whom** God prefers, namely, the elect of God, the chosen of God, believers in Jesus Christ who form His Church which is founded on the core of the "chosen people", true Israel, in company with whom we are all part of the "elect race" (Mk.13:20; 13:22; 13:27; Jn.15:16; 15:19; 1Cor.1:27-28; 2Tim.2:10; Tit.1:1; Jas.2:5).

A Royal Priesthood (v.9): In our treatment of verse five above, we have already discussed at length the blessing we believers have as part of the Bride of Christ to share in our Lord's High Priesthood; and as we share in all that He has, being one with Him forever, we also share in His Kingship and will reign with Him after His return for a thousand years – and forevermore thereafter. In the Millennium, under the rule of Jesus Christ who has won both of these two offices, namely, that of King of Kings and that of High Priest, there will no longer be any division between secular authority and heavenly authority because the Kingdom of God will be present on earth from that time forth until the end of time – and we shall share in both aspects of our Lord's primacy, being

rulers and priests, royal priests, a kingdom of priests, "a royal priesthood" which represents God to mankind and also rules over mankind as officers of our victorious Savior (thus fulfilling in their entirety the previous promise to Israel of which we have become a part: Ex.19:6; cf. Is.61:6).

And He has made us a **kingdom, priests** of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:6

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a **kingdom and priests** to our God, and they will **rule** upon the earth!" Revelation 5:9-10

Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in this first resurrection! Over these the second death has no power, but they will be **priests** of God and of Christ, and will **reign** with Him for the thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6

A Holy Nation (v.9): This description of the Church is likewise original to Israel as a nation (Ex.19:6). Israel, of course, was founded upon faith, with Abraham being the first and with only his son Isaac continuing the line of faith (Ishmael not being included in Israel), and with only Isaac's believing son Jacob, renamed by the Lord "Israel", being the recipient of the blessing (Esau being shut out by God's choice and not without that choice being ratified by Esau's own selling of the birthright of faith he despised). In the course of time, it is true, many in Israel proved themselves not to be of the faith of Abraham (Rom.9:6), and therefore not part of the "seed of promise" (Rom.4:16). With the coming in of the Kingdom at our Lord's return, there will no longer be any distinction between race and faith. The entire Church, resurrected and redistributed into the tribal organization of Israel, will be at that point a "**holy** nation" in every way, completely sanctified, not only positionally and experientially, but ultimately, with each member of the Church being sinlessly perfect forevermore, living out in reality what for historical Israel never became more than aspirational (because of human sinfulness) and theoretical (because of the fact of free will resulting in many of Abraham's physical descendants never becoming believers: Rom.11:7; 11:28).

A People to be Preserved (v.9): Along with "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation", this phrase also originates in Exodus 19:5-6 (specifically, in verse five), but Peter saves this blessing for last. The root of the Greek word translated "preserved" here (*peripoie-* / περιποιή-), has to do with acquisition, preservation, and possession, and all aspects of these related ideas are present in Peter's usage here. In the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 19:5, the word *segullah* (שְׁגֻלָּה) means "possession", as in Israel (and all believers in the Church by extension) belonging to the Lord in a special way. But we know from usage of this root in the New Testament that not only His possession of us is in view – and His acquiring of us and our having acquired salvation which makes us His – but also and most particularly here in this specific word (*peripoiesis* / περιποίησις)

the meaning of preservation: we, the Church built upon Israel, are "a people to be preserved" unto salvation and resurrection – at which point we will glorify the Lord forever as we worship Him in eternity (Lk.17:33; Acts 20:28; cf. 1Tim.3:13).

"They will be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "on the day that I prepare My own **possession** (*segullah* / סְגֻלָּה / LXX: *peripoiesis* / περιποίησις), and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."
Malachi 3:17 NASB

Being part of the Lord's eternal "possession" is not possible, of course, without being saved **and** without being given a new, eternal body, a "resurrection body" wherein we can and shall live with Him forevermore. For this reason, this word and word group in the New Testament almost always references the resurrection body and the rewards associated with it (though this very important point is invariably missed in commentary and translations, despite the fact of the unique, common root). Being preserved by the Lord for the Lord to be the Lord's special possession and to enjoy the benefits related thereto is all about our eternal inheritance:

(13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a pledge of our **inheritance** (based on our resurrection body) for redeeming its **preservation** (*peripoiesis* / περιποίησις; i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), to the praise of His glory.
Ephesians 1:13-14

(9) Because God has not appointed us for wrath, but for [taking] **possession** (*peripoiesis* / περιποίησις) of [our] salvation (i.e., full gained at the resurrection) through our Lord Jesus Christ, (10) the One who died on our behalf, that, whether we stay awake or sleep (i.e., pass on to heaven), we will be alive together with Him [on that day of resurrection].
1st Thessalonians 5:9-10

For it is precisely for this purpose (i.e., salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth; v.13) that He called you through our gospel in order that you might gain lasting **possession** (*peripoiesis* / περιποίησις) of the glory (i.e., the resurrection) of (i.e., coming from) our Lord Jesus Christ.
2nd Thessalonians 2:14

(39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to **the preservation** (*peripoiesis* / περιποίησις) of [our eternal] life (i.e., in resurrection).
Hebrews 10:39

To Proclaim the Virtues of Him (v.9): As the title "elect race" came from Isaiah, this phrase too comes from that same passage, occurring specifically in Isaiah 43:21. Peter, however, is given by the Spirit to directly connect our proclaiming of the glories of God to the prior string of benefits we have received from Him, and to do so in what grammatically is a purpose clause. In other words, **God's purpose** behind making us

into an "elect race", a "royal priesthood", a "holy nation" and a "people to be preserved" is precisely this: witnessing to the goodness, the virtue, and the glory of God.

I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a light for the gentiles.

Isaiah 42:6

This verse, which is prophetic of our Lord's first advent and the expansion of salvation dramatically beyond Israel unto all the nations of the world (Is.49:6; Acts 13:47; 26:23), is also applicable to Israel herself. Just as the world was supposed to see the Lord reflected in the witness of His people Israel, so the world now should see Him reflected in the words and deeds of all members of His Church. However, just as Israel fell short on this score collectively, so we Christians need to take care not to fall short individually. Spiritual growth is essential in order to carry out this mandate. Proclaiming God's "virtues" or "excellencies" (Greek *arete*) – the wonders of His perfect character and gracious actions towards us and towards the world (first and foremost in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross) – requires more than giving Him and them lip-service. For it is not only if we speak but precisely what we say and how we say it that matters – and also "who we are" as we say it. A Christian who is only a hop, skip and a jump away from the sin unto death and behaving in all manner of immoral ways is hardly a decent witness to proclaim the glories of God – even if he or she says things in just the right way. Furthermore, it is not only our words that matter but also very importantly our deeds. As James emphasizes, it is not much use to spout words which are immediately proved empty by our inconsistent actions (Jas.2:14-17). So not speaking up for the Lord is a problem just as speaking up for Him in the wrong way is a problem – and failure to provide all who watch, men and angels both, with a witness of the life which by itself demonstrates the goodness, mercy, love and glory of God is perhaps the biggest problem of all, because it is indicative of a lack of spiritual growth, progress and production which constitute the very purpose of our lives on earth after salvation.

(17) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom.

(18) And everyone of us, if we reflect the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image [of God] (i.e., become more Christ-like as we use our will to respond to Him) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of [God's] glory [as we do so] (lit., "from glory to glory") – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent [of our transformation].

2nd Corinthians 3:17-18

Seeing that we have the Holy Spirit to help us in all this, and seeing that we have been given an abundance of blessings for the purpose of doing so – being chosen of God for life eternal, made royal priests of God Almighty, brought near to be part of the holy nation and included in His people to be preserved unto resurrection and reward – let us not be slack in demonstrating God's wondrous excellencies in everything we think and say and do, but let us instead make a point of responding to these incomparable blessings in the way in which our dear Lord and Savior would have us to do. Just as He

is "the Light of the world" (Jn.8:12; 9:5), so we ought to "reflect" positively on Him who **is** the message, the Word of salvation, as we praise Him and thankfully respond to Him and His grace towards us in all we think, say and do – so as to bring to Him and to our heavenly Father all appropriate praise.

(14) "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may **see your good deeds** and **glorify your Father** in heaven."

Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

For in any case, we will certainly be carrying out this mandate of praise for all eternity.

Blessed are those [destined to] dwell in Your house.

They will praise you forever.

Psalms 84:4

. . . of the One who Called You out of the Darkness into Light (v.9): This world is a world of darkness, filled with fear and hopelessness. But God made His Light to shine and illuminate it in the Person of Jesus Christ, He who is the "Light of the world" (Is.42:6; 49:6; Jn.8:12; 9:5; 12:46; cf. Is.9:2; 10:17; Jn.1:4-5; 1:9).

(12) Giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the saints in the **light** [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us from the power of **darkness** and delivered us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son. Colossians 1:12-13

Having eternal life in place of death, the hope of resurrection in place of the fear of condemnation, and the light of the truth in place of the dark lies of this world, it is entirely appropriate for us to praise "the One" who called us from darkness into the glorious light of Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior. The Father called us, and so it was recorded in His plan that He should do so (Rom.8:28-30), based upon the positive response He foresaw that we would give. This calling into the light of the truth and into the eternal life we now enjoy only in terms of our position in Christ also anticipates our glorification when we will be in every way "light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8; cf. Ps.73:24). On that glorious day to come we shall all know the truth "even as we are known" by Him (1Cor.13:12). Until that day, then, let us continue to embrace the light of the truth whereby we have been saved so as to continue our walk with the Lord in the light, refuting every lie and reflecting the glorious light of Him who bought us with His life.

(8) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (9) Now the fruit light produces accords with all goodness, righteousness and truth. (10) So [in all things] you should [always] be calculating what it is that pleases the Lord. (11) And do not participate in dark deeds which bear no fruit. But rather expose them as such. (12) For the things done in darkness by those [who reject the truth] are shameful even to mention. (13) But all things become visible [for what they really are] when they are illuminated by

the light, (14) because everything which has been made visible [through such illumination] is light. That is why it says, "Arise, sleeper! Awake from the dead, and Christ will shine [His light of truth] upon you!"

Ephesians 5:8-14

Now a People (v.10): As Peter has told his recipients at the very beginning of this epistle, though once "outcasts", they and we have now been "selected" to belong to Jesus Christ through His sacrifice on our behalf. This verse is constructed in poetic form with two stanzas (according to Hebrew rather than Greek and Roman poetic conventions), so that this is not a mere reemphasizing of the point Peter has already made in the prior verse; rather it is a rhapsodizing of the glorious work of God in calling out a people for Himself from gentiles as well Jews. It is a blessing indeed to see Peter here, the apostle to "the circumcision" (Gal.2:7-8), and a man who required very detailed instructions and encouragement from the Spirit even to meet with gentiles (Acts 10:10-16), and who even so was not perfect in his application on this point later on (Gal.2:11-14), now rejoicing wholeheartedly in the salvation of the gentiles to whom he has become an apostle in every sense. By this time, Paul had been martyred, but Peter has entered into his work in Asia minor so as to reap an abundant harvest among the gentiles as well:

(11) So remember that you were once gentiles in the flesh, called "uncircumcised" by those of the so-called circumcision which is fleshly and man-made. (12) Remember that you were without Christ, alienated from the polity of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. (13) But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:11-13

Now Granted Mercy (v.10): As in Hebrew poetry (most easily seen in the book of Proverbs), the second stanza explains and is parallel to the first. In both stanzas, the second part demonstrates by contrast to the first the glorious transformation that has taken place for Peter's audience (and for us). Once they were "not [even] a people" for any good purpose, but now have become "God's people". Similarly here, once they and we and all believers were previously under the wrath of God (Eph.2:3; cf. Rom.1:18), but now we have been forgiven and glory in the mercy of God we have received unto salvation (Eph.2:4-7; 1Thes.5:19). Mercy, it should be noted, is Greek word *eleos* (corresponding to the Hebrew word *chesedh*), and is the "bridge blessing" which connects God's grace to the peace/wholeness/blessing we have in Him as a result of salvation (1Tim.1:2; 2Tim.1:2; Tit.1:4; 2Jn.1:3): in His grace, God provides an answer to the problem of sin which otherwise would condemn us – and does so at the highest possible cost to Himself; as a result of salvation we have God's peace – the elimination of wrath and judgment and restoration of a relationship of blessing which is wonderful now and beyond imaginable in eternity; in between, where God's grace meets our non-meritorious reception of His offer of salvation through faith we experience the mercy of God. We had nothing to bring to Him to restore peace between us and effect reconciliation so He had to provide everything: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross in dying for all of our sins. All we do is to accept that gracious gift by trusting in Him, our Savior, and what He did for us in paying the price of redemption that we could not

pay.⁵ That is how we receive God's mercy which is produced by His grace and, as a result, enjoy the peace of a restored relationship with Him in Jesus Christ as sons and daughters of God most high.⁶ Nothing on this earth could be more wonderful than being delivered from sin and death . . . and being made part of the family of God Himself instead. It is no wonder that Peter saw fit to memorialize this truth in this special way.

[You] who once were "not a people", but
who now are "[the] people of God",
who [once] were devoid of [God's] mercy, but
who now have been granted His mercy.
1st Peter 2:10

This offer of mercy in redemption from sin and reconciliation with God is available to all mankind through Jesus' spiritual death on behalf of us all. Praise be to God that we who believe have been blessed to actually receive that greatest of all gifts through simple faith in Jesus Christ, the One who gave up everything to come into this world and save us from death! Let us therefore make every effort to exploit this greatest of all blessings – and all the other wonderful blessings derived therefrom and described in the verses treated above – by continued spiritual growth, progress and production, to the glory of the One whom we love more than life itself, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

<http://ichthys.com>