

If you are a Christian, God will continually upset your personal agenda, and if you are devoted to your program, you will become that most obnoxious creature under heaven, an irritable saint. ... Let me repeat that... as I encourage you to let it soak into your understanding. ... If you are a Christian, God will continually upset your personal agenda, and if you are devoted to your program, you will become that most obnoxious creature under heaven, an irritable saint.

In the opening chapter of the book of Acts... Luke relates how Christ commissioned the believers... who had gathered just outside Jerusalem... to watch Him ascend to Heaven. ... Before He left... He made it clear what He wanted them to do with the Gospel.

Acts 1:8 (ESV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Luke goes on in the early chapters of Acts... and shows us that the believers received power... the did Holy Spirit come... but the church was **reluctant** to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The Book of Acts is the narrative of how God brought His Gospel to the nations of the earth. His first means of doing this... in light of the early church’s reluctance... (their wanting to stay put... in Jerusalem)... was through **persecution**. God allowed the early believers to be severely persecuted... which we read in Acts 8:1...

Acts 8:1 (ESV)

... And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

This **scattering** of believers... in order to survive persecution... has been called “the Diaspora.” Eventually they spread out... all over the Roman Empire. And as they went... they took the Gospel with them.

God said “Go!”... and they stayed put... They didn’t go. ... When they didn’t move out with the Gospel ... God motivated them another way... to take the Gospel beyond Jerusalem.

*If you are a Christian... if Jesus is your LORD... God will continually upset your personal agenda... But... of course... He doesn’t do this from some sort of wicked delight... He does it so that we will participate in His plan... which is always better than our own plan. ... But sometimes we become too devoted to **our** program... and when He tries to move us onto His agenda... we become irritable saints.*

This morning we will take up a new study through a New Testament book. It is **not** the Book of Acts... but is a book where the author tries to encourage the believers who have been scattered by the Diaspora. ... It is 1st Peter.

The little book of 1st Peter is a letter of hope and holiness. ... Peter instructs his readers on how to have a **holy walk** in a hostile world. He encourages those who are suffering for Christ to stay on course and forge ahead.

Peter’s first readers... are believers who have been spread into several regions of the Empire... They needed encouragement and Godly focus... rather than becoming irritable saints.

One of the biggest reasons I believe God has led me to preach through 1st Peter with you... is because persecution against Christianity... right here in America... is on the rise... and I don’t think anyone believes that it will be getting better any time soon. ... Most of us probably sense that it will get

much worse. You and I need to know how to have a **holy walk** in a hostile world... because persecution is on the rise... resulting in irritable saints... also being on the rise.

A 140-page report released this past summer by the Family Research Council and Liberty Institute reveals a pattern of hostility toward Christians and Christianity in the U.S. The report includes over 600 incidents over a 10-year period. The report's findings shocked even those who commissioned it.

"It's way beyond anything we had imagined. It's so much more prolific than it's ever been before."

The attacks range from rulings from the judiciary branch to an elementary school student who was physically lifted from his seat and reprimanded for praying before eating his lunch. Yet another example shows a Christian couple was fired as apartment complex managers and forced to move because a painting with a Christian reference was displayed in their office.

Other examples cited in the report include:

- Matthew Reynolds, valedictorian for HLV Junior-Senior High School in Victor, Iowa, was told he had to give a 'secular' speech after he wished to attribute his success to his faith in Jesus Christ during his graduation speech.
- Dr. Frank Turek, a Cisco employee, was fired for expressing his views on traditional marriage in his book, even though he never voiced his religious opinions at work.
- Samantha Schulz, 8, was barred from singing "Kum Ba Yah" at a Boys and Girls Club in Port Charlotte, Fla., because the song included the words "Oh, Lord."
- City officials prohibited senior citizens from praying over their meals, listening to religious messages or singing gospel songs at a senior activities center.
- Following U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' policies, a federal government official sought to censor a pastor's prayer, eliminating references to Jesus, during a Memorial Day ceremony honoring veterans at a national cemetery.

- A public university's law school banned a Christian organization because it required its officers to adhere to a statement of faith that the university disagreed with.
- The U.S. Department of Justice argued before the Supreme Court that the federal government can tell churches and synagogues which pastors and rabbis it can hire and fire.
- Through the Affordable Care Act ("ObamaCare"), the federal government is forcing religious organizations to provide insurance for birth control and abortion inducing drugs in direct violation of their religious beliefs.
- A federal judge held that prayers before a state House of Representatives could be to Allah but not to Jesus.

"America today would be unrecognizable to our Founders. Our First Liberty is facing a relentless onslaught from well-funded and aggressive groups and individuals who are using the courts, Congress, and the vast federal bureaucracy to suppress and limit religious freedom," said Kelly Shackelford, president of Liberty Institute. *"This radicalized minority is driven by an anti-religious ideology that is turning the First Amendment upside down."*

The whole idea of “hate speech” laws... anti-bullying... and so called diversity programs... while sounding good... are being used as a club to beat over the head of anyone or any group that claims the Bible as it’s authority.

The hostility can (and *has*) led to violence... as in the case of this past Aug.15th shooting at the Family Research Council headquarters... in which a gunman barged in... saying he disagreed with the group's beliefs... and then pulled his gun on an employee and shot him.

How should a Christian react to all of this? ... How do you react to the courts trying to tell churches that they must not discriminate... with regard

to the hiring of homosexuals? ... How do you react when political correctness says it's OK to talk about Buddha... or Allah... but you cannot mention the name of Jesus... ?" How should a Christian respond to this ever increasing season of testing... that will no doubt be getting worse...?

And as things heat up... believers are being divided into different camps. We cannot agree on what our response should be. ... There are some Christian leaders who suggest that we must protest... demonstrate and demand our rights from the government. ... They also say that Christians must arm themselves with powerful political weapons... and exert pressure on the state... and thereby let it be known that the Christian community will not take these things lying down.

I have nothing against fellow believers who want to get involved in the political process – **UNTIL** they start to insinuate that I am not fulfilling my Christian responsibility because I don't share the same Christian political zeal as they have. I want to say to the zealots who believe **every** Christian's calling is to be a political focus... that they must think Jesus and every one of His Apostles shirked their responsibility... of being salt and light to our culture. ... Jesus and His Apostles emphasized changing human hearts with the Gospel... and to **expect** religious persecution.

Rather than reacting as any non-believer can (and frequently does)... I want us to go to the Scripture... and see what it says... particularly the first letter of Peter. The question facing Peter's original readers... and **us**... is the same: *How can Christians find peace in the midst of suffering...* whether political... social or personal suffering? ... How do we find and maintain that peace within our hearts?

Peter will suggest to us two things: first, we should remember that we are “exiles”... and secondly... we need to remember that we are “chosen ones.” These are the two principles we find in our opening verses this morning. But as we go on... all through 1st Peter... we will also see this: *If you are a Christian, God will continually upset your personal agenda, and if you are devoted to your program, you will become that most obnoxious creature under heaven, an irritable saint.*

We will be studying the first two verses of 1st Peter chapter one... this morning. But before we can do that... I think it is necessary that we get a little more acquainted with: **1)** the man who wrote it... **2)** the people to whom he sent it... and **3)** the particular situation that prompted him to write.

Peter had been restored after falling apart... because he had denied Christ three times during Christ’s trial... leading to His crucifixion... We are about to begin a wonderful journey through one of the finest books of the New Testament... the first epistle of Peter. ... Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... it was penned by a man that had *flopped... failed... was frozen in fear...* at a crucial time in the life of Christ. ...Yet, our Lord restored Peter to fellowship... and he went forward to do a great job for the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was Peter who preached the first Christian sermon... on the Day of Pentecost... and thousands repented... believed... and became some of the first members of that Church... which later was scattered... ... And you will find Peter’s name is always **first** when the apostles are listed in Scripture.

Peter wrote this epistle just before the terrible persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero... which took place from 65 to 67 A.D. ... Nero authorized capturing... torturing... and killing Christians. ... In 64 A.D. ... a large part of Rome was destroyed by fire... which many historians believe was started from a command of Nero... The emperor publicly blamed the Christians though... giving him an excuse for terrible atrocities... which included throwing believers to wild dogs in the Coliseum as a spectator sport. ... They were also burned alive and cut in half... to name a few other atrocities. ... During these terrible persecutions... believers were forced to choose between the emperor and Christ. ... Those who chose Christ often died for their faith in the Lord.

Although the readers to whom Peter had originally written had not experienced all of this yet... they were beginning to feel the birth pains of its beginning. ... I believe that is just like **us**. We are starting to experience what may soon intensify. We need these words that the Holy Spirit gave to Peter.

Warren Wiersbe... in the introduction of his commentary on 1st Peter writes:

As you read this wonderful epistle, like the sunbeams that break forth at the dawn of a summer morning, you will be warmed by the tenderness, compassion, love, and encouragement of this letter. Like cool sips of spring water to a parched traveler in a scorching desert, Peter's words offer refreshment to Christians that were being slammed by the sledge hammer of suffering on the anvil of satanic adversity. Sixteen times he mentions the issue of suffering. Peter provides a powerful example of an encourager. He was not writing from a secure location, removed from the hardships of Roman life. No, Peter lived smack-dab-in-the-middle of the persecution.

Of the final days of the apostle Peter in Rome... Jowett wrote that Peter was cast into a horrible prison called the Mamertine... and for nine months was in absolute darkness. ... He endured monstrous torture when manacled to a post. ... In spite of all the suffering Peter was subjected to... he converted his jailers... Processus... Martinianus... and forty-seven others.

Peter's love for Christ was so great... that according to historical tradition... he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus... and begged to be crucified upside down... which tradition says he was... around 68 A.D.

Interestingly... tradition also states that Peter's wife served with him in the ministry. ... William Barclay quotes a touching picture by Clement of Alexandria... who said that she was martyred with Peter: "On seeing his wife led to death... Peter rejoiced on account of her call and her conveyance home... and called very encouragingly and comfortingly... addressing her by name... 'Remember thou the Lord'"

The apostle Peter wrote this letter to encourage believers who were about to face trials and persecution under Emperor Nero. It hadn't happen yet... at this time... Christians were not routinely hunted down and killed throughout the Roman Empire. ... The persecution they were going through that would intensify under Nero... was more of a social and economic persecution... from three main sources: the Romans, the Jews, and their own families.

These believers were very likely misunderstood... some would be harassed... and a few would be tortured and even put to death.

The legal status of Christians in the Roman Empire was unclear. Many Romans still thought of Christians as members of a Jewish sect... and because the Jewish religion was legal... they considered Christianity legal also — as long as Christians complied with the empire's laws. ... However, they became the target of persecution when they refused to worship the emperor as a god... refused to worship at pagan temples (so business for these moneymaking enterprises dropped wherever Christianity took hold)... or exposed and rejected the horrible immorality of pagan culture.

Many Jews did not appreciate being legally associated with Christians. As the book of Acts frequently records... Jews (like Saul... before he became the Apostle Paul) occasionally harmed Christians physically... drove them out of town... or attempted to turn Roman officials against them.

Another source of persecution was the Christian's own family. Under Roman law... the head of the household had absolute authority over all its members. ... Unless the ruling male became a Christian... the wife... children... and servants who were believers... might well face extreme hardship. ... If they were sent away... they would have no place to turn but the church... if they were beaten... no court of law would uphold their interests.

Peter may have been writing especially for new Christians and those planning to be baptized. Peter wanted to warn them about what lay

ahead... and they needed his encouraging words to help them face opposition.

This letter is still helpful for any Christians facing trials. Many Christians around the world are living under governments more repressive than the Roman Empire of the first century. Christians everywhere (and increasingly more in America) are subject to misunderstanding... ridicule... and even harassment by unbelieving friends... employers... and family members. None of us is exempt from catastrophe... pain... illness... and death — trials that... like persecution... make us lean heavily on God's grace. For today's readers... as well as for Peter's original audience... the theme of this letter is *hope*.

Let me say again... that 1st Peter is a letter of hope and holiness. Peter instructs his reader on how to have a holy walk in a hostile world. ... So let's begin our study now... of 1st Peter.

1st Peter 1:1-2

“Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ.” Have you ever thought much about Apostleship...? ... Peter establishes strong authority through his rightful claim of being an Apostle. I have met people in recent years... who audaciously claim they are an Apostle. I used to have a guy come around every so often... when I ministered in California... He had long... white... unkempt... hair... flowing beard... and crazy eyes. He came one day to “instruct me” from his apostolic authority... Before he got too far... I had him read Ephesians 2:20... which says that the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets... Jesus Christ being the

cornerstone. And then I asked him... are you still laying the foundation...? Are we still waiting for it to be finished... so we can finally start building the church...? He did not understand what I was trying to say... so I said it more clearly... "Scripture tells me not to believe you... when you say that you are an Apostle. You are not an Apostle. The Apostle's job was to lay the foundation for the church... which has already been laid – we have this foundation through their writings and recorded actions... in Holy Scripture... on which I... and many others have been building Christ's church through the ages... and now I need you to leave my office..." He left... but came back a few years later... and we went through the same thing all over...

Listen... don't let anyone try to fool you... by claiming that they hold the authoritative office of an Apostle. The Apostles laid the foundation... and they have all died... two millennia ago... ... But Peter cites such authority here... so we can stand confidently... on what we are about to read... and know that it is our proper foundation.

Verse 1 again... *"To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."*

I am going to come back to this concept raised here of "election," but first let me talk about being "exiles."

How can Christians find peace in the midst of suffering... whether political... social or personal suffering? ... How do we find and maintain that peace within our hearts in the midst of growing hostility against us...? First... we must remember that we are aliens... sojourners... or what the English Standard Version has Peter calling them – "exiles."

The word “**dispersion**” in verse one here... comes from the word Greek word I have been using – “diaspora” ... and it carries the idea of *that which is sown*. ... It was a word used of the farmer sowing seed in the field. Diaspora was a term... that would have been understood by these believers to mean... that Peter sees them as being scattered abroad as seeds of the Gospel. Seed had been scattered throughout **Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia**. These were all provinces of Asia Minor... which is Modern-day Turkey. ... But it doesn't matter whether it is Pontus or Pennsylvania... Galatia or Oregon... Cappadocia or California... Asia or Arizona... Bithynia or Washington... like a farmer sows seed in his field... the Lord sows Christians throughout the fields of this world. ... And sometimes it is through persecution... that He scatters His people... for purpose of spreading the good news of the gospel. ... “*God... why did You allow me to get laid off from my job...?*” ... “*Lord... why are we about to lose our house...?*” “*Why am I stranded here... in this place...?*”

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Think about it! You are where you are because God has put you there to spread the gospel.

This word "**exile**" is the word **parepidemos**. This word means "a **stranger**, foreigner, or an alien from a foreign country who temporarily resides with people of their country." This same word is translated "pilgrim." ... As Christians... you and I are pilgrims... we are strangers... or foreigners on this earth. ... We are temporary residents in this world.

So... Peter is writing a travelers' guide for Christian pilgrims. ... He reminds us that our hope is anchored in our homeland. God calls us to endure alienation as strangers... but we have a heavenly citizenship and destiny.

Whenever Patti and I face a particular challenge or a perceived unfairness... we often break out in song:

*This world is not my home, I'm just passing through.
My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me, from Heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home, in this world anymore.*

That song always seems to encourage us. ... It serves as our reminder that we are not supposed to feel at home in this world. When we **do** get to our home... then we will experience a true sense of justice... but until then... our job is to scatter Gospel seed.

Now let me tell you what living as an exile **also** involves...

1. Exiles (living in a foreign land) must deal with a different language than those they have been scattered among.

As Christians, our speech is to be different than that of unsaved people. Our language is not to be filthy, sensual, suggestive, deceitful, or blasphemous. What comes out of our mouths reveals what is going on in our hearts. Our speech should reflect the Holy Spirit that lives within us and reveal to people that there is something different about us in a good way.

2. Exiles (living in a foreign land) often are not accepted by the People. They are considered as “intruders” or “outcasts.”

Why do we act so surprised that our American culture more and more treats us as intruders and outcasts. – WE ARE !!! We too, as believers, are not accepted by a wicked world. We are strangers here and considered "strange" by this world. ... But so many believers today... reject the notion of being an exile... and are quick to fight back... trying to bring back the good 'ol days before the current flood of anti-Christian sentiments...

I would like to propose to you... that instead of reminiscing about those "Good 'Ol Days of yester-year... that we should instead take a careful look in the Bible... at how an exile is supposed to behave. We are exiles living in a foreign land that is post-Christian. Immediately two examples come to mind. ... Joseph... the son of Jacob was an exile in Egypt. How did he behave...? He sought to honor God in all that he did... endured horrible injustice against him... did not seek revenge... and waited for God to supply a window of opportunity.

How about another example... Well... there is Daniel... Shadrach... Meshach... and Abednego. They were exiles to Babylon. Once again... they sought God's honor above all else. Even when told not to do what God asked them to do... they obeyed God and faced a fiery furnace for doing so... and a lion's den. They didn't fight the system – they did everything they knew that God asked them to do in their personal life – even the officials of their foreign land told them not to. ... We can also look at Esther... who once again under the threat of her own life... obeyed what she knew God wanted her to do.

Exile! Obey God... and be willing to suffer any consequences from our surrounding culture for doing so!

3. Exiles (living in a foreign land) face different customs and normal behavior patterns.

We are not only to speak differently... but we also should behave differently than unbelievers. ... We really don't need to feel as though we have to fit in.

How can Christians find peace in the midst of suffering... whether political... social or personal suffering? ... How do we find and maintain that peace within our hearts in the midst of growing hostility against us...? First... we must remember that we are "exiles." Second... we must remember that we are "chosen."

1st Peter 1:2

We were chosen by the Father. ... This took place in the deep counsels of eternity... and we knew nothing about it until it was revealed to us in the Word of God. ... This election was not based on anything we had done... because we were not even on the scene. ... Nor was it based on anything God saw that we would be or do. ... God's election was based wholly on His grace and love. ... We cannot explain it... but we can rejoice in it.

"Foreknowledge" does not suggest that God merely knew ahead of time that we would believe... and therefore He chose us. ... This would raise the question, "*Who or what made us decide for Christ?*" ...and would take our

salvation completely out of God's hands. ... In the Bible, *to foreknow* means "*to set one's love on a person or persons in a personal way.*" We are His elect according to God setting His love on us in a personal way. God elects individual believers... the same way He elected Israel. He set His love on them... and chose them to be His people. Why? Because He foresaw that they would always obey Him... Never go astray... Never commit spiritual adultery by following all the detestable god's of their neighboring nations...? Of course not. He chose Israel... and He chose you and I... not because He saw how good we would be. He chose us for His Own reason. We cannot explain it... but we can rejoice in it.

Peter lays out some heavy theology in this single verse. He says that we are elect... and then he goes on to describe the process by which we are saved. And notice how the entire Trinity is involved. God, the Father elects... The Holy Spirit sets us apart from the rest of the world... He makes us exiles... (here the term that is used is "sanctification")... and Jesus provides the means through His blood on the cross. ... And there is a design for which we have been chosen by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit... and effected by Christ's blood. It is so that we would be obedient to Christ. Obedience to God will be the evidence of the work of the Spirit, and the proof that we are **God's elect** and **chosen**. Henry Ward Beecher divided people into two categories: the 'whosoever wills' and the 'whosoever won'ts'. We can tell which we are by a simple test. Have we become obedient to him?

There is an old Greek story of a soldier under Commander Antigonus, who had an extremely painful disease that was likely to bring him soon to the grave. This soldier was always first in the charge, rushing into the hottest

part of the fray, as the bravest of the brave. His pain prompted him to fight, that he might forget it; and he was not afraid of death, because he knew that in any case he had not long to live.

Antigonus greatly admired the valor of his soldier, and discovered his malady and had him cured by one of the most eminent physicians of the day. From that moment, however, the warrior was absent from the front of the battle. Now he sought his ease; for, as he remarked to his companions, he had something worth living for—health, home, family, and other comforts, and he would not risk his life now as he had before in previous battles.

In the same manner, when our troubles are many, we are often made courageous in serving our God by His grace. We feel that we have nothing to live for in this world, and we are driven, by hope of the world to come. We are inspired to exhibit zeal, self-denial, and courage for Christ!

Christian!... you are not an "accident," but a divine choice.

You are an exile... and you are chosen! Knowing this is key for our responding right... in an ever growing hostile world.