

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expositional Journey Through **1Peter** **1Peter 5:10-14**

54 What Spiritual Maturity Looks Like, Part 3, The True Grace of God

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1 Peter 5:10-14

10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

11 To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

12 Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does* my son, Mark.

14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

To the Glory of God

Now we have arrived at the final Sermon in our “journey” through the Epistle of **1 Peter**. And, as always, there is a sadness when I reach the conclusion of my effort at expositing a particular Book of the Bible for two reasons: 1) I probably could have done better. Even though I tried very hard to “treat the Scriptures fairly”, I probably *could* have said much more and gone into much more detail than I did. 2) But, also, I am sad because we probably won’t go over this Books again in my lifetime. Somebody else will have to go into **1 Peter** at another time.

But I want to zero in on what Peter himself said was the *Reason* he wrote this Epistle in the first place. And that Reason is found in verse 12, that says:

Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

Now, many Bible scholars think that "Silvanus" was probably "Silas", the man who traveled with the Apostle Paul and experienced many wondrous things while he was associated with him. And, evidently, Peter used Silas, or Silvanus, which was his Greek name, to physically write this inspired Letter. And that tells us that Peter was either too weak or too old to write this himself, or that he was illiterate at the time this Epistle was put on a scroll.

But Peter says that this entire Book, was really nothing more than him:

... briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God...

So, the Epistle of **1 Peter** is a "brief exhortation", a "short statement of encouragement", and a "small proclamation of Hope" for the scattered aliens of his day and ours. But then Peter went on to say, through Silas, that this Epistle *testified*, it *declared*, it *witnessed*, it loudly and proudly and authoritatively *heralded* something that Peter called:

The true Grace of God

Now I find that very odd. Primarily, because we have discovered that the *bulk* of this Book deals with the Issue of "Suffering", and *why* God allows "Suffering", even *horrific* and *ongoing* Suffering, to come to His Own people. So, if *I* were to put a "sub-heading" over this Book, it would be:

"An Inspired Book about Suffering and *why* Suffering comes to the most godly people on earth".

Yet, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the only human, whoever walked on water with Jesus, to say that the sub-heading of this Book is

"A brief Exhortation that testifies that this is the true Grace of God"

Okay. But what is "This"? Peter said, "this is the true Grace of God". So, what is the "this" he is talking about here? What exactly *is* the "true Grace of God?" I mean, it's *something*, because Peter then commands us to:

Stand firm in it!

So, *what* is the "true Grace of God"? And *what* exactly are we to "stand firm" *in*? Is it Suffering? Was Peter teaching that godly people being treated horribly *is* the "true Grace of God?" That would make *some* sense, but then *how* do we "stand firm" in Suffering? Would Peter be teaching that when we suffer, we're not supposed to even *want* to get out from it, but we are to simply *endure* it? I don't think so.

I think that what Peter is talking about here is the Hope, that *in*, *by*, and *through* our Suffering, God is very busy at work to accomplish two things:

1. His Own Glory
2. The fullness of our Joy

Four times already Peter has told us about this Hope:

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:13

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:20&21

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God,

who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 3:14-16

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. *AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED*, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

So, here, in this last section of **1 Peter**, the Apostle is telling us that the fact that wicked rebels have been “born again into this living Hope”, the fact that we are “fixing our Hope on the Grace of God”, the fact that “our Faith and Hope are in God”, and the fact that, even in the face of horrific Suffering, we can “give an account of the Hope that lies within us”, serves as *irrefutable* Proof of the great Work of Grace that God has obviously done in our lives. And now Peter instructs us to “stand firm” in this very same Hope.

So, in actuality, how we *handle* Suffering, how we continue to Hope *in* our Suffering, and how we *go through* Suffering, is the visible means by which God displays the magnificent Work of Grace that He has wrought in our lives.

But now, zero in on the word “true” in verse 12. Peter said that this Hope is the “true” Grace of God. So, by saying that this Hope in Suffering is the “true” Grace of God, is Peter teaching here that there is a “false” Grace? Not exactly. But he *is* teaching that there is a false *understanding* or a false *comprehension* of Grace, and a false *application* of Grace. Now I want to show you something. Turn to **2 Corinthians 6:1-10**:

And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain — for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION" — giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in

imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

So, here in verse 1, Paul says that he and the other Apostles are “working together with Jesus”. And they are urging us to:

... not to receive the grace of God in vain ...

So, there is a way for people to receive the Grace of God for no purpose, for no lasting result, or to receive the Grace of God “in vain”. And then Paul goes about to teach us how to NOT receive the Grace of God in vain. In other words, Paul then tells us *how* we are to receive God’s Grace with purpose or for a lasting result. He said:

... in everything commending ourselves as servants of God ...

So, “in everything”. In *whatever* State or condition God allows us to be in, those who have NOT received the Grace of God in vain, or those who have been given the “true” Grace of God:

... commend ourselves.

Now the English word “**Commend**” that Paul uses here comes from a Greek word that means: *to prove; to show; to demonstrate; or to stand*. So, to “**commend ourselves**” is to *prove*, or to *demonstrate*, or to *show* that we have received the *true* Grace of God, or that we have NOT received the Grace of God in vain. And then Paul goes into listing horrific Sufferings that God allowed him to go through. And the point is this: God’s Grace is sufficient to carry us through whatever God has sovereignly allowed us to be in.

And that is *exactly* what the Apostle Peter has been teaching throughout this entire Epistle, and what he *summarizes* in verse 10:

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

... so, the fact that God has *perfected* and *confirmed* and *strengthened* and *established* us AFTER WE SUFFERED FOR A LITTLE WHILE *proves* beyond any doubt that the Grace that we received was NOT in vain, and that we have been given the *true* Grace of God.

But that also means that if Suffering causes us to turn back, if Suffering causes us to fall down, if Suffering results in less Love for God, and less delight in Jesus, if what we go through produces a renewed interest in the fallen world and in worldly endeavors rather than a strong and powerful unshakable passion for God and the things of God, then we know that we have received the Grace of God in vain and that we have not received the "true" understanding of the Grace of God.

Now before verse 12, Peter has talked to us about "Grace" seven different times:

1 Peter 1:1&2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

1 Peter 1:10&11

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come to you* made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

1 Peter 1:13

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation [return] of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:7

You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

1 Peter 4:10

As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold [various] grace of God.

1 Peter 5:5

You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

1 Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

And from those infallible Statements, we can glean certain Truths about Grace:

- Grace should be experienced by believers in the “fullest measure”.
- The Old Testament Prophets *foretold* of the Grace that would come to us (signifying that the Grace they had was somewhat different).
- There is another *kind* of Grace that Jesus will bring with Him when He returns.
- Woman can have the very *same* Grace as Men, and this Grace is a “Grace of [Eternal] Life”.
- There are *various kinds* of Grace.
- God gives Grace to those He has made Humble.
- *All* Grace comes from the *one* God.

So, no matter how *unfair* or *unjust* our Suffering might be, no matter how horrifically *painful*, no matter how *long-standing* our Suffering might be, the Grace of God will empower us to *know*, it will work in us to enable us to be convinced, it will override all confusion and will cause us to not waiver, this Grace will allow us to be assured,

and this Grace will overwhelm all doubt that our Hope in God will stand firm, that God is *absolutely* Sovereign, and that God is *absolutely* Good. And the Grace of God will produce this Hope in us so that we will trust and believe that God is *absolutely* committed to cause or allow, to raise up or throw down, to bring in or cast out, *anything* that will *accomplish* what God has determined to do (in Eternity Past), so that He alone will be glorified and that we will find ourselves in *everlasting* Delight! *That* is what Peter's brief Epistle exhorts and testifies to us, and *that* is what we are told to "stand firm" in! And this is just another way of saying what Peter wrote in verse 10:

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

Now I have never met the first person who does NOT want to be *perfected* in Christ, or *confirmed* in their Faith, or *strengthened* with all might in the inner man, or *established*. And yet, these same people rarely seem to understand that the pathway to arrive at these Qualities is the path of Suffering. Peter said:

After you have suffered for a little while...

... the God of all Grace will sovereignly *cause* you to have these Qualities. So, Suffering is *not* what *hinders* us from having these godly Qualities, it is what God mercifully uses to grant them to us. So, as we have learned from our "journey", Suffering is never meant to destroy you. But it *is* meant to change you. And it is this Change, that only comes from Suffering, that will allow you to possess these godly Qualities. So, from *that* perspective, Suffering is a gracious Gift from a loving Father to His dear children to help us become Holy!

Now it is my honest opinion that the Grace of God is *less* understood today than at any point in the History of the Church. God's Grace is the Cornerstone Issue of the Christian Church. And even though we sing and preach and teach and talk more about Grace than almost any other subject, when you really begin to discuss Grace with people (who lay claim to be saved), you *rarely* get more than just a few words.

Most people would agree that Grace can be defined as:

God's *unmerited* Favor

... and I agree that this is a workable definition.

But one of the best ways to try to *understand* a particular definition is to use other words (that mean the same thing) than what is already used. So, instead of using the word "*unmerited*", we might use *another* word, a synonym, like "*unearned*", or even the word "*undeserved*". And when we use those two words to our definition, we see that this makes Grace to be "Favor" from God that we did *not* "earn" and that we do not "deserve".

And that addition to our definition is huge because by defining Grace using those two other words we see that there is *nothing* human beings can "do" to *earn* God's Favor, and there is no way we could ever "deserve" God's Favor. This has the ability to negate all human initiated actions and deeds that are designed to either make us attractive to God or which are designed to somehow bring about the Favor of God.

And these terms are "absolute" in that it really doesn't matter if these are *noble and kind* deeds that we conduct in our communities, or whether they are *religious* deeds or acts that we engage in, in church. The fact that God's Favor *cannot*, in any way, ever be "earned or deserved", means (by definition) that we *cannot* earn or deserve the Grace of God, even by noble and good deeds, or even if we engage in religious ceremonies and rituals or the Sacraments.

And to this the Scriptures agree. And so, the Bible states over and over that Salvation is:

not as a result of works... (Ephesians 2:9a)

... and then, the Bible goes on to tell us *why* Salvation cannot *ever* be a result of human works:

... so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:9)

Now whatever *we* may think of Human Boasting, the Bible is crystal clear, God doesn't like it. God *condemns* Human Boasting.

Completely. Constantly. And the Reason God doesn't like it is because Human Boasting *robs* God of the Glory that only He is entitled to receive. And that means that us boasting in what we have done (anything we have done) to earn or deserve Favor from God is us acting as a thief, *stealing* Glory from God.

Now most people would respond to this and say, "*But Brother Blair, I don't boast. I freely give God all the Glory!*" And yet, in more and more cases, what these people actually *do* contradicts what they *say*.

For example, it is common to hear people say that they "got saved" by virtue of them "making a decision". People are told nearly every day to "Make a Decision for Christ". One of the largest Evangelical Organizations in history uses that phrase as their calling card. Others teach that people being baptized brought about Salvation. One of the largest religious systems in history unapologetically teaches that Salvation is brought about by people partaking of the Sacraments.

So, even though these groups would also teach that Salvation is "by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone", they *betray* that slogan by also teaching that people have to "do something" in order to be saved. And the only difference between these various groups is in what they tell people to do.

But let's examine this closely. If I have to "do something" in order to be saved, and I go ahead and do that thing, then it is my "doing of that thing" that *enabled* me to be saved. My action *initiated* my own Salvation. My work, my deed, my action *earned* my Salvation. What I did made me *entitled* to be saved. And if other people did NOT do that thing, then the only difference between me and them is in the action, or the work, or the deed that I engaged in.

But, if I earned my Salvation by what I did, then the Bible says I wasn't saved "by Grace". In this scenario, what brought about my Salvation wasn't "unmerited Favor", it was what I did, my work or my deed. But if I earned or made myself able to have Salvation by virtue of what I did, then why am I not entitled to boast? It is truly a schizophrenic way of looking at Salvation.

In *that* scenario, I was saved by what I did for myself. And that means that I brought about my own Salvation (I earned it) by virtue of carrying out the deeds or the actions or the works that I performed. But if that is true, that means that I am *entitled* to boast about what I

did. Because I actually did what the other people did *not* do, which makes me able to boast. And, in *that* scenario, God would be a thief to want all the Glory and rob me of what I am entitled to receive. But the Bible says that I have no right to boast, precisely because I didn't do anything to earn or deserve my Salvation. And it is my lack of ability to boast that allows for God to receive all the Glory.

So, God getting all the Glory for Salvation is NOT about whether I choose to "give" God that Glory, but it rests in Who actually did the Work. *Whoever* actually did the Work *gets* the Glory. *Whoever initiated* Salvation *deserves* the praise. *Whoever originated* Salvation is *entitled* to boast.

And the Bible says that Salvation was all God's idea. The Bible teaches that God did all the Work in Salvation by and through all three Persons of the one, true, and living God. And, therefore, only God deserves all the Glory, precisely because He did all the Work. Human beings did not *initiate* our own Salvation. We did not *originate* our own Redemption. And we did not do anything, therefore, we are not entitled to boast. No, Grace is unmerited Favor from God, and so, fallen and sinful people did not do anything to earn or deserve Grace.

So, I hope we have established that, by definition, human beings *cannot* "do" anything to *earn or deserve* the Grace of God. We *cannot* engage in any act that would make us *entitled* to receive Grace from God. Grace, God's favor, is truly "unmerited".

And yet most of the people in this room this morning have experienced the Grace of God. But if Grace is "unmerited" and cannot be "earned" or "deserved", then precisely *how* do we "obtain it"? *How* does Grace become *ours*?

Based on our definition, so far, we see that Grace must be "given". It isn't a "Wage" that is "paid", and it isn't a "Reward" that we can *work for* or *labor* to acquire. And that means that Grace is *unilateral*, it can only come to us by way of *distribution* from God. In other words, God must *give* us Grace, He must *grant* Grace to us.

Okay, we have established that Grace is solely in God's Control and Dominion. And those three words, "*unmerited*", "*unearned*", and "*undeserved*", have to do with *our* position concerning Grace. But now, we need to deal with Grace coming from God's Position. And when we do that, we might use another word, like "*unobligated*". And when we use *that* word, we see that Grace is *not* something that God *owes* to

anybody. He doesn't *have* to give us His Grace. Nothing, either *outside* or *inside* of God, has the capacity to put pressure on Him to *force* God to grant us His Grace.

And this means that, while Grace must be distributed *only* by God, it also must be distributed by God *freely*. God cannot be *coerced* to give us Grace; God cannot be *intimidated* or put into a position whereby He *has* to grant Grace to anybody. So, here is what we have learned so far:

- Grace is God's *unmerited* Favor.
- Grace *cannot* be *earned* or *deserved* by humans.
- Human beings aren't *entitled* to have Grace.
- Grace is *given*, it is *granted*, it is *distributed* solely by God.
- God *cannot* be *obligated* to give Grace.
- Grace is given *freely*, *unencumbered*, *never coerced*.

... so, my Question is this:

If I can't do anything to earn or deserve Grace, and if God is the only One Who gives Grace, and if God cannot be obligated to give me Grace, and if Grace must be given freely...

... on what *Basis* does God give me Grace?

... what *compels* God, what *motivates* God, what *logic* does God use to freely give an unworthy rebel His Own unmerited Favor?

His Own Divine Prerogative

With all the talk about "Human Free-Will", I would like to suggest that the only truly "free" Being in the Universe is God. The Bible teaches that God acts according to His Own Divine Counsel. The Bible teaches that God doesn't consult with any Man. The Bible teaches that God always acts in accord with His Will, and that means that God is the *happiest* and the *freest* Being in the Universe, precisely because God only does what He *wants* to do, and His Will *always* comes to pass.

And what God wants to do is to give you *true* Grace so that you may Hope in Him. And so, God desires to change you in the Fires of this Purification so that your Faith and Hope might be only in God.

But we still aren't finished. I mean, we have established that Grace is unmerited and unobligated Favor, but what does it mean for us to say that Grace is God's "Favor"? What other words could we use instead of "Favor" that would help us understand Grace better?

Well, one synonym would be "Love". So, Grace is:

"God's unmerited and undeserved and unearned and unobligated Love".

... another word for Favor would be "Special Treatment". So, Grace is:

"God's unmerited and undeserved and unearned and unobligated Special Treatment".

But if Grace is God's Love and Special Treatment, and if that Grace has been given to us based solely on God's Prerogative, then that means that the normal rules that govern people don't apply to us. That means that Fire will not destroy us, and the Flood will not overwhelm us. It means that what should normally cast us aside won't. It means that no matter how difficult things may get, God will act on our behalf precisely because God voluntarily chose to "set His Love" upon us! And since God is Sovereign, He will never forget that. So, He will *move* for us, He will answer Prayers, and God will "See to it" (Provide) that we are brought safely Home. So, we are to *hope* in this Grace, *believe* this Grace, and *trust* this Grace.

And that is why the Apostle Paul treated the Grace of God as a *summary* of the entire Christian Message. For example:

- **The Acts 14:3:** "the word of his grace"
- **The Acts 20:24:** "gospel of grace of God"
- **Titus 2:11:** "when the grace of God appeared bringing salvation for all people"

... and when the Apostle John described the Incarnation, in **John 1:14**, here is what he said:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This tells me that the “**Glory**” of the “**one and only**” (only begotten) of the Father is a Glory that is “**Full of Grace and Truth**”. So, as Peter says that a Grace manifested through Suffering is the “**true**” Grace of God, John says the Glory of the Incarnate God is a Glory that is filled with “**Grace and Truth**”. So, here is what I’ve gleaned so far:

- “**Grace**” is a Favor with God that is *unmerited*. And that means that Grace is God’s sovereign and determined and relentless Pursuit of our undeserved and ultimate Good.
- “**Truth**” is what is *best* for us: the Truth about God, the Truth about ourselves, the Truth about the world, the Truth about Sin, and the Truth about Heaven. And knowing and loving this Truth will lead us into eternal Joy in Jesus Christ, which is the very *best* thing God could give to us.

But the phrase, the “**True Grace of God**”, implies that there is a “false” Grace. And that’s true, because in **Jude 4**, the half-brother of Jesus, said:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now, no human being has the Power to actually “turn” the Grace of God into anything other than what it already is. So, what Jude meant is that these “ungodly persons” turn the *understanding* of Grace, the *application* of Grace, into a false *understanding*, a wrong *application*, and a sinful and destructive *understanding* of the Grace of God.

And that means that what Peter meant was that “true” Grace *never* leads anyone into *lawlessness* or *licentiousness*. The true Grace of God is both a Divine Pardon and Power. It is a Pardon from the consequences of Sin, so that we can then be free to pursue Holiness. So, the “true” Grace of God always leads us to “stand firm in it.” In other

words, Grace does not save us *from* godly works, but it saves us *for* godly works.

And this is *exactly* what the Apostle Paul said in **Ephesians 2:8-10**:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

But *how* can God do this? *How* does God have the Power to accomplish this in us? *How* can God so intricately organize and use Suffering so that it will NOT destroy us, but only help us? Peter answers in verse 11:

To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

God having all "Dominion" means that God is absolutely Sovereign over everything, all the time. Now that is easy to see when it comes to sweet and wonderful and "Good" things like Salvation and physical healing or material Blessings. Everybody understands God's absolute Dominion when it is easy to see. But, what about Evil? What about the evil decisions of wicked people? What about satan? What about the Fires of Suffering? Is God still Sovereign then? Yes!

Peter tells us that God reigns supreme over everything, all the time. And so, satan cannot do *anything* unless and until he gets Permission from God. And God will only give satan Permission so that by allowing that Evil, a greater Good will come forth (that would *not* have come forth had God not allowed the Evil). Now that is a "harder sell" to be sure, but that is what the Bible teaches. Evil people make decisions all day long, yes. And yet, *somehow*, God works those evil decisions in such a way that God's Will and Purpose always comes to pass! That is what Peter means when he says that God has all Dominion! Now look again at verse 13:

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does* my son, Mark.

Now, many times, the term "Babylon" refers to a real nation or a real Empire. But Babylon also has a *spiritual* connotation to it. And from that perspective, "Babylon" has to do with an ungodly *system*, or an ungodly *region*, or even an ungodly *religion*. And so, this term is referring to the city of Rome where Peter was imprisoned and where he eventually was martyred. And the "she" here is the Christian Church, that was in Rome, that was under such intense Persecution.

But notice that Peter also mentions "Mark" in this verse. And this is John Mark, the man, that Peter *dictated* his Gospel Account to, and that now bears Mark's name. So, the **Gospel of Mark** is actually the Gospel of Peter, as it reflects Peter's experience with Jesus. And, evidently, Mark was very close to Peter as Peter refers to him as his "son".

And finally, look again at verse 14:

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ

The Hallmark of Christianity is NOT Preaching or Teaching or understanding Divine Revelation. It isn't Spiritual Power or the ability to cast out demons or how much Authority we supposedly have. No, the Hallmark of Christianity is Love. And not just *any kind* of Love, but a genuine Love for God and a Love for other people.

Yet loving God is entirely *unnatural* and *not normal* to fallen people. Lost people can put on a façade and appear to be very spiritual about a lot of things. Lost people can go to Church, they can enjoy reading the Bible, they can delight in singing Hymns, and they can even enjoy listening to great Sermons. Lost people ask God to give them a better life all the time, they ask God to heal them, and help them, and bless them, and provide for them. And lost people even give God "thanks" when He does things for them.

But lost people CANNOT *love* God. Lost people CANNOT *enjoy* Jesus. That which makes people to be lost also *prohibits* them from truly *delighting* themselves in the Lord. And, normally, lost and fallen people only "love" others to the degree that they love us back, or to the degree they have to give us something we don't already have.

And that means that when you see somebody who was a wicked rebel truly loving God, genuinely enjoying Jesus, or totally delighting themselves in the Lord, then you are looking at a Miracle. So, this Love

is not something that we can “work-up”; it isn’t already inherent within the human vessel. This kind of Love is not a choice to be made or a decision. It is NOT an act of our will. This kind of Love is external to us, and it must be *given*, it must be *granted*. The Apostle John teaches that our Love *for* God is a Gift *from* God (**1 John 4:19**).

And so, the *most important* Aspect of Christianity, the *single best example* of the supernatural Work of the Holy Spirit, the *very epitome of the Power of God*, is people loving God and loving each other.

And this is so important that Paul says, in **1 Corinthians 13**, that without this amazing, miraculous Love, nothing else matters. Nothing. Theology and Doctrine and biblical comprehension isn’t worth a dime if you don’t have this Love.

But, the Bible is clear, if you have been gifted with this Love or God, then you WILL love one another. Those who do not love their brother or sister in Christ are only deceived about loving God.

And the “Peace” that Peter ends this Epistle with is NOT referring to the absence of war, it isn’t that all is well with us on this earth, it isn’t that we have no troubles or trials. No, this is “Peace with God”. This Peace is the Comfort that we get by knowing that the Wrath of God has been forever removed from us by this amazing Grace, and through the Gift of Saving Faith. And Peter says that all who are “in Christ” have this wondrous Peace.

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.