

This Exiled Life – Part 5

Stand Firm | 1 Peter Review

1 Peter 5:12-14

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“By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.” (1 Peter 5:12–14, ESV)

One of the reasons why I love walking through entire books of the Bible is because of the way those particular books tend to mark our lives. Some of you, in fact, may identify the time that you started coming to College Park with the book of the Bible that we were studying at the time.

I’ve heard people say that they joined the church during Colossians or Job or Matthew or Exodus or Romans or Lamentations. There is something special about walking through and completing an entire book of the Bible. You can almost hear “Pomp and Circumstance” in the background because it feels a bit like a graduation.

Now expositional preaching is more than just walking through a particular book of the Bible. Even when we are not walking through a specific book, we still approach any issue through our core value of the “Authority of the Word.” This means that the point of the sermon is the point of the text. It means that the authority for life change comes our faithfulness to the Scriptures.

Next week we will start a seven-week summer series entitled ***Come to Jesus: Sharing the Gospel with Conviction and Compassion***. We are going to look at various encounters that Jesus had with people from all walks of life to see how He dealt with them with both conviction and compassion. The goal of this series is to help you move from an exile mindset to more actively talking about the gospel. The summer provides some unique opportunities for us to share the gospel, and we’d like to help you know how to do that more effectively.

Along with that sermon series, we’ll have some specific action steps for you to take. Think of them as a summer challenge to help you translate what you are hearing on Sunday with how you engage in the world. This is part of an effort to help us be more effective at the art of “neighboring” for the sake of the gospel.

Why 1 Peter?

Last September we started our journey through 1 Peter, and I’ve been greatly helped by this book. I trust that you have as well. My mind thinks differently about what it means to be a follower of Jesus in our culture because of our time in this book.

When we started this book, I gave you six reasons for studying 1 Peter. Let me remind you why we walked through this important letter:

1. That you would see the shifting cultural reality as an opportunity to be embraced, not a trend to be feared
2. To remind you who we really are and what our calling is all about, because it is easy to forget
3. So that you will not be surprised when you experience the weirdness of Christianity
4. To drive you back to the Bible to see how relevant it is for your life
5. So that you will see and appreciate the uniqueness of your church experience every Sunday
6. To help you be mobilized toward godliness

As I consider those six reasons for studying 1 Peter, I am rejoicing in how I've seen those play out in my life and the growth that I've observed in our church. 1 Peter is a unique book, and it has served us incredibly well.

Three Verses and a Summary

Verses 12-14 are the final three verses that we are going to study, and they serve as an excellent summary of the entire letter. Peter now draws his book to a close, and these verses are a fitting way for us to end this series and to look back at some things that we've learned.

What I'd like to do is to start in verses 12-14, give you an overall summary statement about 1 Peter, show you how certain themes emerge in the book, and remind us how this book applies to our lives.

Here is my summary statement that I'd like to unpack: The book of 1 Peter is a letter written to **an exile community standing firm in God's grace.**

Or you could think of it another way. What is this exiled life? It is being an exile community standing firm in God's grace. That is the message of 1 Peter. Let's see how this plays out in verses 12-14 and in the rest of the book.

Exiles

My guess is that you know more about this word than you did a year ago. In fact, I trust that you know that the word "exile" is deeply connected to the issue of identity for the follower of Jesus. This book has shown us over and over the importance of Christians understanding who we really are. We need to know our place in the world, first knowing who we are in Christ.

This thought appears at the very end of the letter, where Peter says "Peace to all of you who are in Christ" (v. 14). Now this could be an easy phrase to dismiss, thinking that it is merely a way to end a letter. But that would miss the enormous biblical significance of what it means to be "in Christ."

To be "in Christ" is a foundational aspect of what it means to be a Christian. It speaks to the very nature of what the gospel, or good news, is all about. If we were to look at the entire New Testament, we would find this idea at the center of Christianity. It means a) **Forgiveness** - God has applied the righteousness of Christ to those who believe in Him (Rom. 3:22-24); b) **Freedom** - a Christian is dead to

power of sin and death in Christ (Rom. 6:11); c) **Eternal life** – God promises eternal life to those who are in Christ (Rom. 6:23); d) **Assurance** – nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:39); e) **Unity** – the church is brought together because of its common relationship in Christ (Rom. 12:5); f) **New Identity** – The gospel creates a new identity in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)

The book of 1 Peter highlights this new identity as a prominent theme. It is how the book begins, and it is how the book ends.

- In 1:1 Peter calls these Gentile believers exiles, as they are spread over Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (modern day Turkey). They have an identity rooted in a rich biblical tradition.
- In 1:3-5 the readers are reminded about their inheritance in heaven and how God is going to keep them to the end.
- They are called living stones, a spiritual house, and a holy priesthood in 2:5. And all of this is “through Jesus Christ.”

But beyond how the letter starts and how it ends, the signature text that speaks to this new identity as exiles is found in 2:9-10.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9–10, ESV)

And then in the next verse (v. 11), Peter calls them exiles and sojourners.

The point of all this is very important. To be “in Christ” does not simply mean that a person’s sins are forgiven and that they know where they are going when they die. To be a follower of Jesus means that your entire identity has been changed. It means that the followers of Jesus live with an entirely different value set. They love things that before they would have hated. They long for things that they would never have longed for before. A follower of Jesus has been “born again.” Everything has changed.

But this is not just an internal or motivational change. It also affects how they relate to the world, the flesh, and the devil (Eph. 2:2-3). This identity and union with Christ affects how they respond to authority, to persecution, to mistreatment, to slander, and to their own sinfulness. Their exile is “in Christ.”

I hope that this book has helped you to really understand the beauty of the gospel in your life. I hope that you see how sweeping and transformative being “in Christ” really is. And if you are not yet a follower of Jesus, I wonder if perhaps God is drawing you to consider that you need a fundamental change of heart that only faith in Jesus can bring.

And I hope that those of you who are followers of Jesus will understand how important it is to remind ourselves about this identity in Christ and to live it out as exiles in the world. To be an exile is to have an “in Christ” identity.

Community

1 Peter is all about an exile community standing firm in God’s grace, and we see the community nature of 1 Peter appear in verses 12-14 and throughout the rest of the book.

Peter mentions two brothers by name: Silvanus, whom he calls a “faithful brother,” and Mark, whom he calls “my son.” Both of these people were special to Peter, and you should not see them as just an “add-on” to the letter. Consistently throughout the New Testament, we find the importance of relationships and a connection to other people.

Silvanus was the one who delivered the letter to each of the churches. Part of his role, as he traveled to these churches, was to also function as its interpreter if people had particular questions.¹ Now Silvanus is the Latin name for Silas, who was a respected leader in the Jerusalem Church and who conveyed the decree of the Jerusalem council to the church in Antioch (Acts 15:22). He joined the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey, and he was imprisoned with Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:19-29). He was an important part of both Paul’s and Peter’s ministries.

Mark is elsewhere referred to as John Mark. The early church met in the home of Mark’s mother (Acts 12:12), and he is the one over whom Paul and Barnabas disagreed (Acts 15:35-39). Barnabas and Mark traveled to Cyprus, and it appears that he labored with Timothy in Asia Minor (2 Tim. 4:11).² He had a close relationship with Peter, and John Mark was likely the author of the Gospel of Mark.

Throughout the New Testament there is clearly a “band of brothers” who serve together and help one another through trials. Exiles need a community of brothers and sisters to help them persevere to end. There is nothing like a godly and faithful friend when you are feeling the weight of your exile.

This book has reminded me about the spiritual danger of trying to be a solo-Christian. If you are not connected to a group of friends, a Small Group, or some aspect of community, work to fix that quickly. You need community, not just so that you aren’t lonely, but you need community so that you can be a good exile.

Additionally, Peter says “she who is at Babylon sends you greetings.” Peter likely wrote this letter from Rome, and Babylon is a familiar metaphor for earthly kingdoms who are in opposition to God. Peter is referring to the church that is in the city of Rome, connecting these readers to the broader community of what God is doing in the world.

¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 249.

² Elwell, Walter A. and Barry J. Beitzel, “Mark, John,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1403.

This book has often reminded us that there is a broader community of those who are really experiencing exile in a way that is so much more serious than our own. I love how this book has served to awaken us to other believers, in other contexts, who are exiles in a deeper and more significant way.

And finally, he tells them to greet one another with the kiss of love. He mentions it here as a way to emphasize the love and fellowship that they should have among themselves. It is interesting how much we have seen in 1 Peter about the internal culture of the church. This book has not just been a manual for how to respond to the pressure on the outside. It is a book that highlights the importance of the internal community.

In other words, the church is to live out her exile by creating a counter-cultural community marked by the beauty of the gospel. Now what does that look like? A few examples:

- Loving one another earnestly from a pure heart – 1:22
- Putting away malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander – 2:1
- Unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, a humble mind – 3:8
- Keep loving one another, showing hospitality, using your gifts – 4:9
- Elders who shepherd the flock for the right reasons – 5:2
- Being clothed with humility – 5:5

The idea is that the church is a spiritual and relational sanctuary. It is a place where you are loved, and known, and cared for. The church is a place where you experience the best of what the gospel brings – a real oasis from the pressure of a broken and hostile world. The church in exile is a community marked by the beauty of what the gospel does.

This book has served as a very helpful reminder that church is not just a place that you come to. Church is a community to which you belong. It is a body that walks together through the time of our exile.

Standing Firm

The theme of this book is an exile community standing firm in God's grace. The third phrase that we need to focus on is this notion of "standing firm." The idea, as we have seen before, is to be who we really are. You could think of this as "live out your calling." It is similar to what you've heard me say before: keep trusting the One who keeps you trusting.

1 Peter is a book that calls exiles to be faithful until the end. It cautions against falling into unbelief or shirking back from what it means to be a follower of Jesus. This book consistently commands believers to live out their Christian lives when it proves to be costly.

Let me give you some examples:

- In 1:6-9 Peter tells us that trials serve to test our faith for the praise and glory of Jesus
- Believers are called to be holy, to be sober-minded, and to set our hope on what is yet to come in 1:13-18

- The theme of submission to man-made institutions, to employers, and wives to ungodly husbands emerges as central to being an exile in 2:13-3:6
- Suffering should not create fear, but exiles should always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is them, according to 3:13-18
- Believers are to be armed with thinking that resembles the way that Jesus Himself thought as it relates to suffering (4:1-6)
- In fact, they should not be surprised by trials, but instead rejoice in them (4:12-19)
- And they should maintain a posture of prayerful watchfulness, always aware that the devil is lurking about (5:6-11)

1 Peter is a strong book with numerous and unique exhortations for what it looks like to be an exile in the world. They are not to be some group that cowers in the corner of society. Nor are they to retreat and cut themselves off from the world and its problems.

On the contrary, they are to be the kind of gospel-shaped people who know what they believe, who respectfully and gently endure persecution, and who overcome evil with good. They are to stand firm in the grace of God – something we'll look more at in a moment.

But their standing firm does not look or sound like arrogance, anarchy, acrimony, or apathy. No, the exiles of Jesus are marked by standing firm in their godliness, their humility, and their respectful behavior. They are deeply convictional about who they are and what they believe, and this leads them to be hospitable, to have good behavior, to pray, to think like Jesus, and to share in His sufferings.

They don't revile when reviled. They don't threaten when being mistreated. Instead, they entrust themselves to the One who judges justly.

We need this book because 1) we need to be reminded that standing firm is part of the calling of the followers of Jesus. We are called to persevere. And 2) we need to be reminded what standing firm looks like. We need to see the beautiful Christlikeness that should be the aroma of our lives.

In God's Grace

The final phrase that we have in verse 13 is the foundation of the entire book. Peter says "exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God . . ." Notice that there are two kinds of instruction about God's grace: 1) exhorting – to come alongside and encourage, and 2) declaring – a definitive witnessing of the facts.

Sometimes we need this truth about God's grace to come along-side us. Sometimes we need this truth celebrated, and sometimes we need to hear the gospel boldly declared over us. Regardless, we need to be reminded about the true grace of God.

Now what is the true grace of God that Peter is talking about? He's referring to the gospel, the good news about the work of Jesus, and its sweeping implications. Underneath our identity, our community, and our endurance is the hope that comes from the gospel.

Let me give you a few examples:

- 1:3 – Peter starts his letter talking about the great mercy of God and how we have been born again to a living hope. There it is!
- 2:10 – He describes exiles as “once not a people, but now you are God’s people . . . once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy”
- 2:22-25 – the model for endurance is to follow the example of Christ which involved His suffering on the cross. “He bore our sins in his body on the tree . . . that we might die to sin and live to righteousness
- 3:18-22 – Christ suffered . . . that He might bring us to God
- 4:1-2 – This is very important text: “Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking . . . so as to live for the will of God.”

All of these texts keep pointing back to the foundation of our exile – to something that we should never forget or leave behind, namely, that the exiles are exiles because of Jesus and what He did for them.

A Christian exile doesn’t just have God’s grace applied to his life when he became a follower of Jesus. No, the beauty of the gospel and the work of Jesus goes far beyond that! To be an exile means that you have been captured by the grace of God in your life. You are so fundamentally changed because of Jesus that you see the world, suffering, and your future through a gospel-shaped lens.

It means that you’ve concluded that there is nothing more important than Jesus and nothing more transformative than His grace. Exiles have tasted and seen the goodness and grace of Jesus. So as the culture changes, as opposition grows, and as they are invited to suffer, the choice – while painful – is understandable. God’s grace is so amazing and so transforming that the exiles are compelled to be faithful to the end.

And in the midst of their suffering, God continues to supply His grace to help them to complete their journey faithfully.

This book calls us to receive the grace of God, to celebrate the grace of God, and to anchor our lives in the grace of God. And with this rich treasure of His grace, along with the inexhaustible supply of His grace, Christian exiles can persevere all the way to the end.

The church is an exile community standing firm in God’s grace.

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