Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Does anyone else here enjoy a corned beef sandwich? I can’t say I have one often, and it can take a bit to get through if the corned beef is thick, but with a bit of mustard and between slices of fresh bread, Yummo! Well, we’ve got a spiritual version of a corned beef sandwich before us today!

We saw last time that the believers Peter originally wrote this letter to had been forced to flee their homeland because of persecution. And this is why he called them ‘exiles.’ But we also saw that every believer, in every age, including you and me, are *spiritual* exiles. And this is because our true home is heaven. But for now, we must live in a world that is infected with all of the awful consequences of sin and, as followers of Jesus, we will experience persecution.

So, with that reality in mind, Peter wrote to **encourage** and **instruct** believers who live in difficult circumstances. And the encouragement and instruction begin already in the introduction of the letter. So, we looked at encouragement last time in the words “*elect*” and “*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*.” We saw that believers need to understand that their eternal destiny, and all the circumstances of their lives, are under the sovereign control of God. And, through Christ, He is our Father in heaven. So, we have every reason to trust Him!

But as we turn our attention to the rest of **verse 2**, **Peter also begins to *instruct* believers about *how they are to live* in difficult circumstances**. And the instruction is the ‘slab of corned beef,’ if you like. But Peter wraps the instruction up in several slices of freshly baked, encouragement bread. And all together it will be a delicious and nutritious meal! So, we will begin with the instruction, which is where we will see that the **purpose** of our election is that we live a holy or Christian life. And then we will see the **power** for the Christian life, the **security** for the Christian life, and the **provisions** for the Christian life.

1. So, we begin with the **purpose** of our election, which is that we would live a Christian life. And we see this in the phrase: “*for obedience to Jesus Christ*.”
   1. Everything else around this phrase describes who we are and all the blessings that ours in Christ as God’s chosen ones. But the word “*for*” indicates **purpose**; it points out the result of our being chosen. So, we were chosen “*for obedience to Jesus Christ*.
      1. And this is not some complicated plot twist or an as yet undiscovered teaching; this is the very plain and consistent teaching of the gospel!
         1. Think of the **great Commission**: Jesus said, “*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*.”
         2. Think of **Ephesians 2:10**: “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*.”
         3. And Peter will return to this point from **verse 13** onwards. The headings in our Bibles are not part of inspired Scripture, but if your Bible has headings, you will see that verses 13-25 are summarized by a heading that says something like “called to be holy.” And in that section, it says that we are “*obedient children*” who are called to “*be holy in all [our] conduct*.” So, we were chosen to be holy.
      2. Now, those words, “*for obedience to Jesus Christ*” are vital. Our obedience has a person in view – the Lord Jesus. And Jesus spoke about this in **John 14:15**; He said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*.” So, our eagerness to learn the commandments and to obey them is because we know that our sins are *entirely* and *undeservedly* forgiven through Christ. So, our obedience is how we express our thanks to Him!
   2. And we will have opportunity to explore all of this in more detail as we progress through the letter, but we can be very clear about this already – We are saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, which we receive by faith alone. But faith is never ***lonely***. Where there is saving faith there will be obedience.
      1. And we have often talked about this in relation to **1 John**. One of the key messages of 1 John is that someone who lives in fellowship with the Triune God will not continue in unrepentant, ongoing sin; instead, they will “*practice righteousness*.” And John explains practicing righteousness as loving the commandments of Christ and striving to obey them.
      2. Now, can we obey the commands of Christ perfectly in this life? No. Perfect obedience will come only when we are with the Lord Jesus in heaven. And John also explains that when we sin, we must turn to the Lord and confess our sins. But there will be **a pattern of obedience** in the believer that grows and deepens as their lives progress.
2. So, that’s the ‘slab’ of corned beef’ in the middle of our sandwich – the **purpose** of our election is that we would live a holy or Christian life. But we see more about why this is so as we continue with our second point. And it is the **power** for the Christian life, which we in the phrase: “*in the sanctification of the Spirit*.” And this is one of the delicious slices of bread that makes up our ‘encouragement sandwich.’

* 1. One of the wonderful features of Peter’s letter is its **Trinitarian** nature. The doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one God who exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We will see it throughout the letter, but it is here already in the introduction. We see that Peter is “*an apostle of Jesus Christ*.” Believers are “*elect exiles … according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit*.” So, not even two, full verses into his letter, all three persons of the Trinity are in view!
  2. And our focus now is the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
     1. In terms of His **person**, He is introduced here as “*the Spirit*.” But in **verse 11** He is referred to as “*the* *Spirit of Christ*,” and in **verse 12** as “*the Holy Spirit*.” And if you look towards the end of **verse 11**, you will see that the Spirit is referred to as “*He*.” So, the Holy Spirit is a person, not an energy force. In **Ephesians 4:30** we are told, “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit*.” And you cannot grieve a force, only a person.
     2. And in terms of His **work**, it is described in our ESV Bibles as “*sanctification*.” But other English Bible versions have “*consecration*” or “*holiness*” or even “*to be made a holy people by the Spirit*.” And I think that last option is really helpful.
        1. If you have heard a few sermons and participated in Bible studies, you will have heard a distinction made between **justification and sanctification**. Justification is the one-off declaration of God that we are forgiven because of Christ, which begins the Christian life, and sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming more and more like Jesus. Have you heard that distinction before?
        2. Well, Peter does not have that narrow understanding of sanctification in view. He is using the word to describe the entirety of the Christian life; the whole package, if you like. If you look at **verse 3**, you will see the phrase “*born again*.” That refers to the moment that a sinner has his or her nature changed, by the Holy Spirit, from hostility to Christ to love for Christ; it is the moment that begins the Christian life. It leads to conversion, or repentance and faith. And in **verse 13,** believers are referred to as “*children*,” which has to do with our adoption into God’s family. And Peter also has lots to say about living the Christian life.
        3. And the power for all of this is the Holy Spirit – regeneration, repentance, faith, adoption, and holy living – it is all the work of the Spirit.
     3. And we will have plenty of time to explore all this in more detail as we progress through the letter, but the key point here is that **the power for the Christian life is not you; it is the Holy Spirit**! Must *you* repent and believe in Jesus? Yes. Must *you* strive to obey the commands of Christ? Yes. But the power for the Christian life is the Holy Spirit.
     4. The believers Peter wrote to would have had doubts about their salvation and feelings of guilt about their inability to live a holy life, especially in their very difficult circumstances. And we too can have the same doubts and the same feelings of guilt. So, Peter’s point here is that the Father’s eternal decree to save certain persons and make them holy, is put into effect *not by those persons* but by the Holy Spirit.
     5. So, yes, we are called to a life of obedience. And it is a solemn duty; it requires all we are and all we possess, and it needs to shape every aspect of our lives. But the power for the Christian life is not you, it is the Holy Spirit. And because it is the work of the Holy Spirit, it will happen, and it cannot fail! You will be made holy.

1. But there are even more slices of bread in this encouragement sandwich as we turn our attention next to the **Security** for the Christian life. And we see this in the phrase: “*And for sprinkling with His blood*.”
   1. Earlier in the service we read from **Exodus 24**. It is a description of that Old Testament ceremony where Moses took half of the blood of the sacrificed oxen and threw it against the side of the altar, and then read the law of God to the people, and they said, “*All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient*,” and then Moses sprinkled the rest of the blood on the people. Try and picture that for a moment. What an incredible scene! Think about the PETA protests and the OSH regulations if you tried to do that today! And just imagine being splattered with blood. But it would have been a very powerful symbol for the people. Moses called this “*the blood of the covenant*.” And so, because oxen had died in their place, the people had put themselves under obligation to obey the law of God. And that ceremony is what Peter had in view when he wrote, “*sprinkled with His blood*.”
      1. You see, the same sprinkling of blood ceremony is referred to in **Hebrews 9&10**. But it is stated there that it is impossible for the blood of bulls to take away sins. But that blood pointed forward to the blood of the Lord Jesus. And so, Hebrews 9:14 says, If the blood of bulls was able to influence the behaviour of God’s Old Testament people, “*How much more will the blood of Christ … [take away our sins and] purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*.”
   2. So, you have a **triple security** here!
      1. What is the basis of your salvation? The blood of Christ. And what did Jesus say about accomplishing the work of salvation when He was on the cross? “*It is finished*.” Your salvation is secure because of the person and work of Jesus Christ!
      2. But there is security in the blood of Christ, also, for your duty to obey His commands. If growing in holiness was about our ability or our power, we would have no security or confidence or hope. But as we just heard, “*the blood of Christ … purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God*.” In the blood of Christ, there is real power to transform our lives!
         1. If there was a power cut and you had a torch with a flat battery, and I offered you a battery but I said it might not work and if it does it will probably only last for a few minutes, you would not be very impressed with that battery and probably refuse it. But if I gave you a battery and I told you it was fully charged and super alkaline lithium cadmium nickel hydrate electron magnetron mega powered, you would grab that battery and slap it in the torch, confident that you would have light for hours or even days!
         2. Well, believer, you have been chosen to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. And that is real power!
         3. And this is the problem, you see, with the philosophy of addictions, that a person will always be an addict, or the idea that we are born this way; that we cannot help but do this or that because it is in our DNA. No, says the gospel; By the blood of Christ, that sin that torments you, again and again, can become a thing of the past. It might happen in a moment, or it may take some time, but the blood of Christ is powerful to purify us, to transform us. And that is a blessed security. I hope that that truth gives you a solid hope!
      3. And then thirdly, even we fail, when we fall into sin, we can turn to Christ and His blood. **1 John 1:7-9** says, “*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin … If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.”

So, our salvation is secured by the blood of Christ, and the blood of Christ secures our hope for a transformed life, and we have the forgiveness of our sins, as often as we confess them, by the blood of Christ. This is the triple security for the Christian life!

1. And it does not end there, beloved. For there is one more slice of bread in the encouragement sandwich, which is the **Provisions** for the Christian life. And we see this in the phrase: “*May grace and peace be multiplied to you*.”
   1. And many of you will recognize these words or words very like them as the words of the **salutation** heard at the beginning of our worship services. And the saying goes that familiarity breeds contempt, right? And so, because we hear these words in every worship service, we so easily tune out or do not give them much thought. But, oh, congregation, these words should be like a roast meal or a fine wine for our souls. One of our hymns describes coming to worship like this:

*Father, again in Jesus’ name we meet*

*and bow in penitence before thy feet;*

*again to thee our feeble voices raise*

*to sue for mercy and to sing thy praise.*

*Alas, unworthy of thy boundless love,*

*too oft our feet from thee, our Father, rove;*

*but now, encouraged by thy voice, we come,*

*returning sinners to a Father’s home.*

So, we enter His presence as returning sinners. But if we come in penitence, which means humble sorrow for our sins, He does not receive us with the pointing finger of blame and words of accusation and condemnation, but with arms open wide, saying, “*May grace and peace be multiplied to you*.”

* 1. And you will have heard **grace** explained as God’s undeserved favour. So, even though our sins mean we do not deserve God’s favour or generosity, because of Christ, God gives it to His chosen ones. And **peace** is typically explained as the absence of hostility. So, because of Christ, we are not *at war* with God but *at one* with God; we are not His *enemies* but His *beloved children*. But it is probably not just these narrow definitions that are in view here; this became a standard way of Christians saying to each other, May every blessing of God be yours. And Peter will continue to explore and celebrate all our salvation blessings from verse 3 onwards.
  2. And let’s not ignore that word “*multiplied*” either! In **Ephesians 3:20**, Paul prays, “*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us*.”
     1. Is this your experience, believer? I am sure that it is. You think you have exhausted God’s supply of grace and peace. Surely, He must have no more grace for me, given my many sins. But you go to Him in confession and once again His Spirit gives you the assurance that your sins are forgiven in Christ. And when you think you must surely have exhausted His pantry of blessings, you bring your requests in prayer and your prayer is answered even beyond what you asked for.
     2. And this is not to suggest that real Christians always get what they ask for in prayer and always have a strong assurance of salvation. Not at all. Read the Psalms! There can be long periods of God seeming to be far away and deaf. But short or long, they always end with the presence and blessing of our Father in heaven, whether that be here on earth or in heaven.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? If you do not, then please turn to Him in repentance and faith today! But if you do, it is because you were chosen by the Father before the creation of the world! And the **purpose** of your being chosen was that you would live a holy or Christian life. And the **power** for Christian living is the Holy Spirit, the **security** for Christian living is the blood of Christ, and the **provisions** for Christian living are God’s grace and peace. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. And all God’s people said, Amen!

Let us pray: