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## A BETTER RESISTANCE | WHEN ALL THE MAPS ARE WRONG

January 10, 2021

1 Peter 1:2

*<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,*

*To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

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### BACKGROUND

Peter who identifies himself as the author of this letter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. He writes this letter to comfort and to encourage fellow Christians to stand firm in their faith as they experience suffering and persecution as followers of Jesus. He points them towards the certainty of the hope that they find in Jesus Christ, and specifically, to the ways that they are already receiving the promises of God here and now through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Peter encourages his readers to endure suffering and persecution by giving themselves entirely to God because they can know that God will vindicate them and that they will certainly enjoy the salvation that God has promised. The death and resurrection of Jesus stands as the paradigm for all Christians. Just as Jesus suffered and entered into glory, so too his followers will suffer before being exalted.

In many ways, this letter helped prepare Christians for what was to come. This letter was likely written from Rome during the reign of Nero right before the Great Fire of Rome, which happened in AD 64. The fire burned for over a week and resulted in severe damage and loss to the city. We read from the Roman historian, Tacitus, that Nero accused Christians of starting the fire and many Christians were arrested and brutally executed.

This letter is helpful for Christians today as it provides a foundation for living in a world that is opposed to the hope of the Christian faith. Peter reminds his readers that they are visiting foreigners and resident aliens in the places that they live. Because of the extraordinarily uniqueness of what they believe (namely, the resurrection of Jesus Christ), they will stand out and experience opposition for living according to their convictions. But Peter contends that the grace of God gives Christian the courage and strength to live with the power of God no matter what they face. He reminds them that they are called to holiness—to be set apart for God and for his purposes in the world. And because of this, they will experience suffering and hardship as they faithful follow Jesus. Christians will be rejected for the same reasons that Christ was rejected.

As we think about our own context, and the values of our culture today, 1 Peter is a helpful guide on how Christians can live with courage and joy as faithful witnesses to the hope of the gospel in spite of the increasing opposition to the Christian faith.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

To think about how Christians can navigate opposition and suffering in life through the grace that comes through God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Peter begins his letter with a greeting: “to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion...” Peter’s readers are not literal exiles as they were most likely living in the place where they were born. Why might he describe his readers as “exiles?” Why might the idea of being an “elect exile” give comfort and encouragement to his readers? (see 1 Peter 2:9-12 for help)
2. Peter opens his letter with a rich Trinitarian formulation (1:2). What role does each member of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) play in this verse? How does their work convey grace and peace? How does it give hope?
3. Have you ever felt like “an outsider” at work or with your family and friends because of your Christian faith? How can a Christian embrace their identity as an outsider in a positive way?

**LEADER’S NOTES**

**Question 1:** *The purpose of this question is to help Christians consider how living out their extraordinary beliefs sets them apart from all others and often cause opposition or rejection. The people receiving Peter’s letter were not literal exiles, rather they were exiles in a sense that this present world is not their true home. Through Jesus Christ, Christians are given an inheritance that they fully receive at the end of this present age (i.e. when Jesus returns in power and glory as the world’s true King). Therefore, as present members of God’s kingdom, they do not conform to the values and beliefs of this present age. As they live in obedience to Jesus and his kingdom, their values and practices will rub up against the values and practices of those around them, especially in regards to status, power, comfort and material wealth. Jesus himself was the ultimate example of obedience to God. He spoke the truth about God’s kingdom and performed deeds of love and service. He was generous, kind and compassionate. Yet he was rejected and put to death for these things. Christians who follow in Jesus’ footsteps should not be surprised to experience some similar opposition.*

*But Christians are not only exiles, but God’s “elect exiles,” which means that they are God’s chosen people, just as Israel is designated as God’s chosen people in the Old Testament. This means that they can be sure that since God himself has pursued them in love, he will continue to care for them until the very end—even in and through their present suffering. The doctrine of election is given to the Church in the context of giving hope and encouragement in the midst of suffering. It means that God has taken the initiative in our relationship with him. It is not a theological concept meant to convey any sense of superiority, but the opposite! God chooses people on the basis of his divine purposes alone, and he chooses those who are wholly unworthy of his grace, kindness and mercy! Through election Christians can be confident that their faith will persevere until the end.*

*The Dispersion points to the idea that God’s people are scattered (dispersed) throughout the world as God’s witnesses to his kingdom.*

**Question 2:** *The purpose of this question is to see that the work of God comes through the unique roles of each person of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The idea of the Trinity is found throughout the Bible and verse 2 is a good example. In this passage, God the Father has set his plans and purposes before the beginning of time, so that his love for his people precedes even their existence in the world. He knew exactly what would happen. Furthermore, God directs all things towards his purposes without taking away human agency and responsibility. The sanctification of the Spirit is the ongoing work of God whereby the Spirit “indwells” (or lives within) the Christian so that they grow more and more like Christ. The Spirit sets apart his people for obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ and his good purposes in the world. The sprinkling blood of Jesus refers to Jesus’ atoning work on the cross, where all believers’ sins were washed away, giving them the power of new life in God. Another way of thinking about the Triune God is that God the Father sets all things in motion, God the Son accomplishes the work of salvation, and God the Spirit applies that redemption to his people in the present.*

*All these benefits of salvation is described as the work of grace, which means they are unmerited and undeserved. Christians do nothing to earn God’s favor—he gives it as a result of his sovereign love. God’s grace is also past, present and future. It is past in that God had planned a Christian’s salvation from eternity past and has fully accomplished through the finished work of Jesus on the cross. It is present in that the Holy Spirit continues to grow the Christian in the grace of God. It is future in that the best is yet to come, as Christians await the resurrection and life in the presence of God’s renewed creation.*

**Question 3:** *The purpose of this question is to help Christians reflect on their own experience of living out their faith in Jesus. For some, they may have no experience of opposition for their faith as they are still wrestling with the claims of Jesus and their implications for their life. For others, they may have experienced great opposition and suffering as a result of identifying with Christ. The key is connecting “obedience to Jesus” with the opposition to that obedience. This could include being considered naive and out of touch with the sensibilities and the wisdom of the current culture, which has achieved a lot of good. It also could include being associated or a proponent of oppressive and “indefensible” positions like the sanctity of human life in utero, or biblical gender roles, or the Christian sexual ethic. To follow Christ is to be in the world, but not of the world—to be God’s “faithful presence” to those around us.*