

The Privilege of Providential Pilgrimage

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:1–2)

The Pilgrim's Progress is regarded by some as the second most published Christian book after the Bible. It has never been out of print since its first publication in 1678. Charles Spurgeon said he had read it over 100 times. It has sold over 250 million copies and been translated into 200 languages. It has come out in more than 1300 editions.

What is most remarkable about it is that it was written in prison. John Bunyan was a Baptist pastor in a time in England when it was illegal to preach if you were not part of the Anglican church. He was arrested and imprisoned, and could have been released at any time, if he agreed not to preach. He had four children, the oldest of which, Mary, was born blind. He wrote, "The parting with my Wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; ... because I ... have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and needs that my poor Family was likely to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my Blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces."

Bunyan's life included many deep trials. His mother and sister died in the same month when he was a teenager, his father remarried the next month, he was drafted into military service as a teenager, his first child was born blind, he suffered much with depression in the early years of his marriage, his first wife died ten years into marriage, leaving him with four small children, a twelve-year imprisonment, imminent arrest and persecution even after his release, and he experienced his final sickness leading to death while travelling and away from his wife and children.

George Whitefield said of The Pilgrim's Progress, "It smells of the prison. It was written when the author was confined in Bedford jail. And ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross: the Spirit of Christ and of Glory then rests upon them."

So when Bunyan wrote his masterpiece book, his picture of the Christian life was not of a prince on a throne, or of a man enjoying a tropical getaway. His picture of the Christian life is of a pilgrim, a traveller who does not belong in the lands he is walking through. He took the Bible's most used metaphor for the Christian life: a journey, a way, a walk, and turned into an allegory, a story that pictures the whole Christian life as a pilgrimage through this world to the other world.

How you understand, or imagine, who you are as a Christian, and what this Christian life is all about is fundamental. If you have the wrong image of what the Christian life is, the wrong understanding of your position, you are going to experience confusion, disappointment, disillusionment, even fear and anger. Many Christians have a sub-biblical idea of their identity as Christians, and so they have some very wrong assumptions about the world. They don't think of themselves as pilgrims, so they expect to always fit in with the world. They expect to be popular, or that God's children should have easy lives, accepted by the world, celebrated.

They think something is going wrong if they are displaced, dislocated. They are bewildered, surprised when experiencing suffering, rejection. They wonder what they have done wrong.

That's why the book of 1 Peter opens by teaching Christians who they are, so they can understand their world. Identity goes before actions. Who you are, what you are determines what you do, and

what you expect. From the opening greeting, Peter wants believers to imagine themselves rightly, as Bunyan did. He wants believers to feel the privilege of who they are in Christ, of what this true grace of God means from the inside-out. This will give them hope, when their circumstances seem to produce despair.

So in this simple greeting, a very average, normal greeting, where the author gives his name first, and wishes his readers grace and peace, Peter manages to embed two life-changing truths about believers. The title he uses to address the readers of these letter give us a deep foundation for Christian living. If you understand yourself as a Christian, in the terms Peter uses, you are already on solid ground for the coming trials.

I. Christians Are Scattered Pilgrims

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Our letter begins with authority. In Scripture, only the term apostle is given this way. We never read “an elder of Jesus Christ” or “an evangelist of Jesus Christ”. But the apostles were a unique group of 12 men personally selected by Jesus Christ, to mediate the new covenant to Jew and Gentile. These men received unique miraculous gifting, unique revelation to write the New Testament, and had unique authority. So this letter is not just good advice. This comes with the binding authority of God's Word: this is the Lord Jesus speaking to us through Peter.

The very first word that Peter uses to address his readers is pilgrims. This word refers to those who live in a place where they do not hold citizenship, even if residing there for an extended time. A stranger, a sojourner, a resident alien.

Not just pilgrims, but pilgrims of the Dispersion. Here Peter uses the word Diaspora that was used of the Jews who had been scattered throughout the world after the exile to Babylon. This doesn't necessarily mean his readers are all Jewish, but he is linking New Testament Christians being pilgrims to God's old covenant people who were foreigners in the lands to which they had been scattered.

Now there's some interesting history here that explains why Peter used this image. He mentions five places where this letter was originally going to be read by Christians: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These are five regions in modern day Turkey.

But what is interesting is in the years just before this letter, the emperor Claudius colonised all five of the regions named here. Romans would come in, take over, and bring in people from another area or part of the empire introducing Roman language, culture, and politics to the native populations through the colonists. It strengthened Rome's military presence, and fostered more trade in the empire.

In *Pontus*, Claudius conferred the status of a Roman colony on the old settlement of Andrappa, which took the name Neoclaudiopolis. In *Galatia*, the ancient city of Iconium took the name Claudiconium. Claudius also established another colony in the Galatian area of Troceni called Claudiopoli. *Cappadocia* was given the status of a Roman colony. In the province of *Asia* the Seleucid community of Laodicea became romanized with the name Claudiolaodicea. And finally in *Bithynia* the town of Boli required its name to become Bithynium-Claudiopolis.

Often, the Romans would bring in loyal Romans, often from the city of Rome. But it was also not uncommon for the emperor or senate to deport a group viewed to be troublemakers in Rome to colonize a newly acquired territory in some remote area of the empire. And also in the time of

Claudius, we read that he expelled the Jews from Rome ² (Acts 18:2). But the Roman writer Suetonius adds this interesting bit, “since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.” Chrestus is probably another spelling of Christ. At this early stage, Jews and Christians were often regarded as the same religion. The disturbances sound a lot more like what would happen if those Jews were believers in Jesus, since they would have been evangelising. It is possible that the Jews who were expelled from Rome were primarily Jewish believers. It also matches the time frame when these areas were colonised by Claudius. So it is actually quite likely that several hundred believers in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles were expelled and then sent to those colonies in Asia. Peter, residing in Rome, would have known these believers, would have known where they were sent, and so sent this letter as a circular letter to reach the believers who were now living in foreign lands.

And so not only were they deported from Rome, but they were often regarded as foreigners when they got to their destination. The local indigenous population resented them, regarded them as invaders. Rome still allowed local towns and cities to be in charge of conferring citizenship, so often these Roman colonists were not made citizens of their new homes.

So here you had Christians who had been possibly kicked out of Rome, losing their homes. They are now foreigners in foreign lands, not really at home at home here either, though they've been sent here. So Peter is likely using their actual social-political situation to teach them the deeper spiritual truth. They are not only foreigners and strangers geographically, but strangers and foreigners spiritually.

¹¹ Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11)

When you are a pilgrim, you don't really conform to the culture around you. The society around you looks on you as an outsider. Sometimes it is with ignoring you, or dismissing you, or excluding you. But sometimes it is hostile attack, persecution. There is a feeling of alienation.

There's also a very real temptation to assimilation, as the Jews experienced in the Diaspora. To remain distinct is hard, when you are the minority surrounded by a majority who don't believe what you believe.

But the Bible teaches that God's people have always been a pilgrim people. Pre-Israel, then Israel, then the church – Hebrews 11.

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13–16)

Everyone wants to fit in. It's normal to want a home, and a people, and a nation. And in God's common grace, God's people do get to enjoy those things, to some degree. But the difference is that the Christian recognises, this world in its fallen state is not my ultimate home. This country is not my final country. This world system is not my family, not my people.

But very importantly, my feeling of being dislocated, of being homeless, of being a sojourner: that

is by God's design. Being a pilgrim, scattered throughout the world is not an accident or a mistake. God has arranged it. God has decreed it. It is the plan of God, the purpose of God. It is the outworking of His providence that His children find themselves to be pilgrims journeying through this life.

Now what should that do to your hope, as you go through trials? As you suffer, partly because of the fall, partly for your own faults, and partly for your faith, how does your perspective change, when you remember, I am a pilgrim? It makes us say, the real treasures are still ahead of us. The things that truly exhilarate our souls are here only partially. Here we see through a glass darkly. Here we taste fleeting fragments of the feast awaiting us. But all this is so temporary, so fleeting.

So, we say, thank you God, for every reminder that this world is not my home, I am just a-passing through. Thank you for the reminders that come through pain that our citizenship is in heaven, where untouchable and unshakable joys await.

But there is a second, life-changing truth that Peter gives in this passage that fundamentally alters our experience of suffering.

II. Christians Are Selected Pilgrims

elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The first title was pilgrims of the dispersion. The second title is elect, or chosen. In fact, they are so closely tied together, that some translate this as elect pilgrims of the dispersion, or elect exiles, or choice sojourners. But the point is unmistakable and unambiguous. Christians are not only pilgrims scattered in the world, but we are pilgrims selected, chosen. And if you have been chosen to be a pilgrim, then it is obvious you have been chosen to be a Christian, chosen to salvation.

The Greek word translated elect is the ancestor of our English word eclectic (to select things out of a range) and our English word elect. An election is where you choose or select a candidate.

Now think how this language jars and clashes. To be a pilgrim is to be rejected by the world. The world does not choose you; it actively rejects you. But here Christians are said to be chosen by God. One commentator puts it this way, “ they may be rejected in the eyes of their society because of their commitment to Christ—perhaps doubly so, if that was the cause of their expulsion from Rome—they are in fact chosen by God and fully entitled to the promise and inheritance of his kingdom.”

Peter wants us to know that our selection by God to be pilgrims involved the whole Triune God. Father, Son, and Spirit, were involved in calling us out of the world, to be His people, with His promises, and His inheritance for us. You can see this in the three prepositional phrases that each modify the word elect: **according to** the foreknowledge of God the Father, **in** sanctification of the Spirit, **for** obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

Selected According to the Father's Foreknowledge.

The first action in choosing you to salvation was the Father's foreknowledge. What does it mean? Some say, this is God foreknowing that we would choose Him. He saw our choice and then chose us.

But unfortunately, it creates more problems than it solves.

First of all, it makes us first and God second in the order of salvation. In this order, in some

hypothetical world I first choose God (apparently on my own). Second God sees my choices, and responds by choosing me. And then third, in the actual world, I choose God. But if that's all foreknowledge is, then the initiative is mine. I choose first, God chooses second. And that doesn't answer the question, who or what made us decide for God? If God did not influence us at first, then we are left with the idea that we found God by ourselves, and then God looking ahead of time, saw that, and chose us. We know from Scripture that man does not seek God on his own initiative, "there is none that seeketh after God." (Rom 3:11). Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." (Joh 15:16)

More than that, placing us first seems to strip these passages of the very thing they are communicating, which is the security and assurance found in God's initiative. The whole point of when Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:4 that this choice was before the foundation of the world is to remove you and me as causes for our salvation.

If election is to mean anything significant, it must mean something like this: you didn't do anything to attract God's love, and you can never do anything to lose God's love. Nothing you did made Him love you more, and nothing you can do can make Him love you less. Once you reduce election to God responding to your choices, you've removed the sense of freeness and pure graciousness, and made it dependent on you, in the past, in the present, and seemingly into the future.

Second, this word *foreknowledge* doesn't only mean passive foresight of what will happen. The exact same word is used in 1:20 ²⁰ He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Peter 1:20). There, Christ is spoken of as foreknown before the foundation of the world. The NKJV translates it foreordained, because clearly it does not mean God looked into the future and saw that Jesus would voluntarily die for the world, and on that basis made Him the Saviour. No, He actively knew Him and chose Him to His role as Saviour of the world before the foundation of the world.

Third, the New Testament refutes the idea that foresight always equals election. It actually has examples of where God's foresight saw possible worlds in which people were saved, but did not choose them. For example, Jesus said to the hard-hearted Jews of Chorazin and Bethsaida. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (Matthew 11:21) In other words, Jesus knew that in a possible world, had He gone and preached and done miracles in those Gentile cities, He knows they would have responded positively and believed. So why aren't they automatically elect? It seems foreknowledge means more than just foreseeing a positive response.

So what is included in foreknowledge? The truth is, the Bible doesn't tell us. It is more than just passive foresight. Possibly it includes God's knowledge of all that could be, all that would be under different circumstances. Possibly, it includes the idea of simply knowing you and choosing you. In fact, the Old Testament includes the idea of knowing someone before birth, and choosing them: ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5)

Amos 3:2 : "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amo 3:2)

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

God's sovereignty is guided by His knowledge. God's choices are guided by infinite wisdom,

infinite knowledge. Nothing God chooses is arbitrary, random, capricious. But in the end, God knows perfectly what will be, because He has chosen it to be.

But when all is said and done, God the Father chose according to His foreknowledge. . . Before you were born, God had taken the initiative to choose you. This plan of God is even bigger than your life. It forms the ultimate foundation for hope.

Selected By the Spirit's Drawing

in sanctification of the Spirit

We now go from before the foundation of the world, to an action that takes place here and now. It is an instrumental action – the mechanism that brings you to salvation. It is called here the sanctification of the Spirit. This refers to the Spirit's work of calling you, drawing you apart from the world, calling you out of sin and darkness. Sanctify means to set apart, and here it refers not to progressive sanctification, every day spiritual growth. This refers to the Spirit setting you apart for salvation.

¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14)

This is the work of the Spirit persuading you through the Word of God. He convicts you, of sin, and shows you the beauty of Christ. He influences and affects what you know and what you love so that you can turn away from the madness of rebellion and sin, and freely embrace Christ. The New Hampshire Confession describes this as: “ giving a holy disposition to the mind...effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.”

The beauty and glory of Christ are always there. But sin and rebellion are like cataracts in our spiritual eyes. The Spirit of God comes, removes the cataracts, and says, “Look”. Once we look, and see the beauty, we voluntarily, freely go towards Him.

And that's the third phrase.

Selected To the Obedience of Faith & Saved by the Son's Death

for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

The first part of the phrase for obedience refers to our obedience. That is, once the Spirit has drawn us, we are brought to the moment of submitting to Christ, what Paul calls the obedience of faith. That moment of repenting and believing is the moment of obedience, when we become Christians, become pilgrims. So wait, how do we reconcile God's choosing of us, and our choice to believe? “I think we must take a leaf out of the scientists’ book. They are quite familiar with the fact that for example, Light has to be regarded *both* as a wave in the ether and as a stream of particles. No-one can make these two views consistent. Of course reality must be self-consistent; but till (if ever) we can *see* the consistency it is better to hold two inconsistent views than to ignore one side of the

evidence.¹⁷

And in that moment when we believe, we are cleansed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the moment of Christ's death on the cross being applied to us. Just as when Moses brought Israel into the covenant, he took half the blood and put it on an altar, and half he sprinkled the people with, initiating them into the covenant. So in the same way, when we repent and believe, we are sprinkled, as it were, with Christ's blood, brought into the covenant.

The reason Peter used this order, Father, Spirit, Jesus, is because he is giving us the order of salvation. Election is first, then the call, then faith, then forgiveness and justification.

But it is no accident that he sounds just like Paul here in Ephesians 13-14, narrating the Father's work, the Son's work, the Spirit's work in our salvation. Yes, they are inseparable in their offices: what one Person of the Godhead does, the others also do, but the Bible highlights or emphasises the work of one person associated with certain works.

Why would God tell us we are chosen? Why would He tell us that He knew us in eternity past, drew us, and when we believed, forgave us? Why say, elect? Why not just say, "saved" or "born again". What effect is this meant to have on us?

Some people say that the doctrine of election make people proud. But do you think God would include something in His Word that would provoke in us the cardinal sin?

What if election, rightly understood, produces the very opposite? What if it takes us up to the Mount Everest of His grace, and there, looking over the edge, the breathtaking size of His unconstrained, unconditional love gives us spiritual vertigo, and we are speechless with gratitude? We are just left asking, why me? And we know that there is no answer in me to explain *why me*.

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
it was not I that found, O Saviour true;
no, I was found of Thee.*

Rising out of the knowledge that God chose me, for His own reasons, means I don't need the world to accept me. I don't need the culture to validate me and affirm me. I don't need subscribers and likes and followers. I have a status – not what I have done – but God put a golden chain around my neck called salvation. He chose me. And if I suffer, it is part of His plan.

So however dislocated, however rejected, however dispossessed they feel in this world, Christians need to know – they are chosen to be pilgrims. God's sovereignty has made them pilgrims, like the scattered Hebrews of old. God's sovereignty has selected them. Providentially, we are pilgrims. Our suffering is part of the journey: a journey our Father mapped out for us and accompanies us on.

If you do not drink deeply on God's sovereignty, you will be agitated, fearful, angry, upset, bewildered. But if you begin with the soul-anchoring truth of God's benevolent control of all, and treasure the riches of God's will, then you feel underneath you the rock-solid, assuring, securing privilege of having been chosen, drawn, cleansed. You can say, "This, too, is God doing all things well."

1 Stott, J. (2018). [*The Preacher's Notebook: The Collected Quotes, Illustrations, and Prayers of John Stott*](#) (M. Meynell, Ed.). Lexham Press.

In 1684, John Bunyan wrote an exposition for his suffering people based on 1 Peter 4:19, “Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator”. The book was called *Seasonable Counsel, or Advice to Sufferers*.

“I have, in a few words, handled this . . . to show you that our sufferings are **ordered and disposed by him**, that you might always, when you come into trouble for this name, not stagger nor be at a loss, but be stayed, composed, and settled in your minds, and say, ‘The will of the Lord be done’”