

Main Idea: In 1 Peter 1:1-2 we discover two great and vital truths that we must grasp if we’re going to experience the kind of life God intends for us in this new year.

I. God’s Word tells us who we are (1-2a).

- A. We are strangers to the world.
 - 1. In one sense, this world is our home.
 - 2. In the ultimate sense, this world is not our home.
- B. We are special to God.
 - 1. We are God’s people by the design of God the Father.
 - 2. We are God’s people through the work of God the Holy Spirit.
 - 3. We are God’s people for the service of God the Son.
- C. We get in trouble when we turn things around.
 - 1. We want to be special to the world.
 - 2. We end up being strangers to God.

II. God’s Word tells us what we have (2b).

- A. We have grace.
- B. We have peace.
- C. We have all we need to live for God!

Make It Personal: As you begin the new year...

- 1. Affirm daily your true identity.
- 2. Accept daily what God has given you.
- 3. Appreciate daily the One who made it possible.

How do you begin something new? How do you launch a new year, a new phase of life, a new venture, and so on? Where do you start? Do you have anything in your life that needs to change? Where do you begin?

It struck me this past week how many of the New Testament letters begin. The epistles were given by the Spirit of God through human instruments to local churches and individual Christians. Many of them begin with a couple of sentences that, quite frankly, we’re prone to scan quickly, to view as sort of small-talk “filler,” preparatory words that we need to get through to get to the real meat of the letter.

But there’s no “filler” in God’s Word. Each word is inspired and given to us by God for our edification. So the way New Testament letters begin is very significant.

Notice some introductions, listen carefully and you’ll see some common elements...

Ephesians 1:1-2 “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:1-2 “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Colossians 1:1-2 “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.”

1 Thessalonians 1:1 “Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.”

2 Peter 1:1-2 “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

Jude 1-2 “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.”

Did you catch the common elements? When they began their letters, Paul, Peter, and Jude all began by emphasizing two things for their readers. After introducing themselves, they talked to the recipients about *who they are* and *what they have*. Notice again...

Recipients	Who they are	What they have
Ephesians	The Saints and the Faithful in Christ	Grace and peace

Philippians	Saints, overseers, deacons	Grace and peace
Colossians	Holy and faithful brothers	Grace and peace
Thessalonians	To the church To those in God the Father and the Lord Jesus	Grace and peace
Peter's readers	To those who have received a faith as precious as ours	Grace and peace
Jude's readers	To those called, loved by God the Father, and kept by Christ	Mercy, peace, and love

It's not coincidental that each of these letters begin by emphasizing the same two elements. They want their readers to remember two very basic thoughts and so they affirm them at the outset: *who they are* and *what they have*. In each of the letters they will be confronting followers of Christ about their need to work on some things, to correct some things, to change. What makes change both possible and necessary? These two things, *who they are* and *what they have*.

We too need to be reminded, and of the same two things. We need to affirm *who we are* and *what we have*. I've chosen Peter's introduction to his first epistle to be our tutor. As a church we are beginning the new year by having a daily quiet time in God's Word using the book of 1 Peter, so in this message I'd like to focus on 1 Peter's introduction. Any guesses as to what themes we will find there? Listen...

1 Peter 1:1-2 "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

There they are again. In 1 Peter 1:1-2 Peter affirms two great and vital truths. We likewise must affirm and live according to these two truths if we're going to experience the kind of life God intends for us in this new year.

I. Truth #1: God's Word tells us who we are (1-2a).

The setting of a book is important in any Bible study. That's especially true of 1 Peter.

The year was about A. D. 65. Jesus Christ had lived, died, conquered death, and ascended back to heaven more than thirty years earlier. When He left the earth, there were approximately 120 disciples. Then the church exploded upon the world. Christianity spread from its Jewish origins in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and then throughout the Roman Empire. Within one generation, the followers of Christ took the gospel of Christ to nearly every corner of the middle-eastern world. There were thousands of Christians by the year 65.

But don't get the idea that everyone in the world was clapping. They weren't. Namely a man named Nero who happened to be the emperor of the Roman Empire.

On July 19, A.D. 64, a great fire broke out in Rome. It devastated the city for three days and nights. Guess how the fire started? Historians suggest the great likelihood that Nero started it deliberately. He was a madman. He wanted to burn the city down so he could rebuild it his own way.

You can imagine how the citizens of Rome felt. They were filled with bitter resentment towards Nero. To divert suspicion from himself, Nero realized he needed a scapegoat. He found one. Nero made the Christians his scapegoat.

But why? Why did Nero pick on the Christians? And how could he blame the fire on them and persuade the world to hate them? Here's how. Anti-Semitism is nothing new. Hatred of the Jews has been around for along time, and where did Christianity begin? With a Jewish Messiah and His band of Jewish followers. The Roman world commonly thought of Christianity as a Jewish sect.

Furthermore, he world did not understand Christianity. In fact, some strange rumors circulated about what Christians did. Take for instance the Lord's Supper. Can you imagine how this talk about "eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ" could be misinterpreted by the crowds? It was. A rumor spread that Christians were cannibals. The rumor grew until it became a story that said that when the Church had communion, they killed and ate a Gentile, or even a newly born child. To top it off, the Christians called their meeting the "Love Feast." Stories soon spread that the Christian meetings were orgies of vice.

In addition, the world did not understand the message of Christianity. Christians talked about a coming day when the world would dissolve by fire. Preachers told people to get ready for the coming of Christ and His fiery judgment. It wasn't too hard for Nero to put the blame for his fire in Rome on to people who spoke like that.

Nero did a whale of a smear campaign against Christians. And it worked. Severe persecution rocked the Church in the mid-60's. Nero rolled some Christians in pitch, set them on fire, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. Others he sewed up in the skins of wild animals and turned loose his hunting dogs on them, to tear them apart limb from limb. Later it got so bad that laws were enacted which made Christianity illegal. It literally was against the law to be a Christian.

Now answer this. How do you encourage people who are being told they are the scum of the earth? You start by reminding them of the truth. You remind them of *who they really are*. That's what Peter did.

Who are we? Peter uses two important words to establish our identity. First of all...

A. We are strangers to the world.

Verse 1 begins—"Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ." Who was Peter? He was an apostle. He had been for more than three decades. And he was no stranger to suffering. In fact, within a year or two of writing this letter, Peter became a martyr for Christ.

His thoughts were not for himself, however, but for his brothers and sisters in Christ. They were hurting. Peter writes as a loving pastor. Notice how he identifies them:

"To God's elect, *strangers in the world*." The KJV uses the term 'sojourners.' What did Peter mean by that word? For starters, in a literal sense Peter's readers were sojourners. The word (*parepidemos*) means 'exile' or 'resident alien.' Peter is writing to Christians who had been forced to leave their businesses, and leave their homes.

Where did they go? Verse 1 says they were "scattered." Scattered where? Throughout the five provinces of Asia minor: "throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia."

The Greek word for 'scattered' is a technical term. It's the word *diaspora*. The Jews who were forced to live outside of the Promised Land in pagan lands were called the *diaspora*. Here Peter identifies Christians as the *diaspora*.

Let this sink in. The Christians to whom Peter is writing were hurting. They'd been battered and bruised and slandered. They'd been told by society that they were the filth of society.

Do you think they ever got weary? Without a doubt. What did they need? A reminder. The same reminder we need, the reminder of who we are. We are *strangers to the world*.

Peter's readers were literally sojourners. In a figurative sense, all Christians are sojourners. We're temporary residents. We don't belong where we are living. And in fact, this world is not our permanent residence. What is? Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

People who live by faith see themselves as strangers, as Hebrews 11:13 reveals, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that *they were aliens and strangers on earth*."

Right after Sherry and I finished seminary and right before the Lord brought us to Wheelersburg, there was time of waiting. We had to leave the residence hall where I had served as an RD for three years, and we moved to an apartment. We didn't know how long we'd be there. Instead of unpacking, we lived out of boxes. We lived there, but we knew that this was not our permanent home. It was temporary.

My friend, if you are a Christian, then you are a stranger, a sojourner. And so am I. Granted we need to keep this truth in balance.

1. *In one sense, this world is our home*. According to Genesis 2 God put mankind here to have dominion over the earth. There's a song that says, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through." But this world IS our home.

Should it matter to Christians when people dump toxic waste into lakes and rivers? Should followers of Christ be concerned when they hear that the environment is being raped? Should believers take care of their properties? After all, we're just *passin' through*.

But we're not just passing through. We live here. And it matters to God how we treat His world. Christians ought to lead the way (and have throughout history) in the fields of health care, education, agriculture. Why? Not to glorify man, but to glorify God. *This is my Father's world*.

This world is our home. However...

2. *In the ultimate sense, this world is not our home*. It's our temporary home. In fact, we're living on enemy soil. The world has been, is now, and will grow increasingly hostile to Christianity. We are strangers. That's our identity.

What difference should that make? Peter will have a lot more to say about it in this letter...

1:17 "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, *live your lives as strangers* here in

reverent fear.”

2:11 “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”

Do you view yourself that way, as a *stranger*? I get the feeling that lots of Christians think they're going to live forever in this world. You'd have to draw that conclusion based on how they spend their money. George Gallup has found that only 25% of evangelicals tithe. While 40% say faith in God is the most important thing in their lives, those who make between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year give only an average of 1.5% to charity, religious or otherwise. This same group spent 12% of their income on leisure pursuits.^[1] J. I. Packer calls it 'hot tub religion.'^[2]

Beloved, we need this reminder. I need it continually. This is our identity. We are *strangers to the world*. That's who we are.

If that was the end of the story we might despair. Thankfully, there's more to our identity than the word *strangers*! Peter uses a second critical word to reveal our identity in verse 1—“To God's *elect*.”

B. We are special to God.

What a way to talk to Christians! Peter calls his readers, *God's elect*. If you have a KJV, you'll note that the first word of verse 2 is the word 'elect.' Actually, in the original text, the word *elect* appears right before the word 'strangers.' Hence, verse 1 literally reads, “Peter an apostle...to the ELECT strangers.” We are not strangers by accident but by design, God's design.

The doctrine of election is such a wonderful doctrine. It's found throughout the Bible (Ephesians 1:4ff, Romans 8-9, John 6:65, Col 3:12). It's one of the most encouraging doctrines in God's Word. Paul said the doctrine of election motivated him to do evangelism even in the face of great danger (2 Tim. 2:10). Here Peter uses it to bring hope to hurting Christians. “You are God's *elect*,” he says.

Elect simply comes from the Greek word *eklektos* which means “chosen.” We are “chosen ones” (the word has a plural ending here). We have been selected. You say, “How did that happen? How did we become *elect* ones?” Peter explains in verse 2. He shows that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in the work that has resulted in our special status.

1. *We are God's people by the design of God the Father.* Verse 2—“Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

Please notice something very wonderful. Peter says that the reason his readers were *elect* is because of something God the Father did. He says they were chosen ‘according to’ (the preposition means ‘in keeping with’) the foreknowledge of God the Father. What does that mean?

We find the same word in Peter's sermon recorded in Acts 2:23. “This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and **foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” Why did Jesus die? Peter says that God *knew it beforehand*. That's what foreknowledge means.

Nothing surprises God. He knows all things. He has never learned anything. His knowledge is complete and always has been. He is sovereign. He is in total control...of His Son's death...and of His people's salvation.

Romans 8:28-29 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those **God foreknew** he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Please notice that God's foreknowledge involved both a people and a purpose. God chose a people for a very specific purpose, to be like His Son.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are special. You are special by the design of God the Father. What an encouragement Peter knew that truth would be to suffering Christians. The Church is not just a human organization. The Church exists by the very design of God!

God chose us to be His. And why? Peter says we have been chosen *in accordance with God the Father's foreknowledge*. Some see that word ‘foreknowledge’ and picture a sort of crystal ball into which God gazed, looking from eternity past to see who would chose Him, and based on His knowledge of their choice, He then chose them. His election of them was based on their choice of Him.

But as we've just seen, God's knowledge has always been complete. He doesn't learn information that affects His decisions. He's always known everything!

In the Bible there's a connection between the word “know” and “love.” For instance, Genesis 4:1 states, “Adam knew his wife,” and the result was the birth of a child. Adam loved Eve as expressed by their sexual union and Cain was conceived.

To “foreknow” is to “fore-love.” It's to set one's love on a person or persons ahead of time. That's what God did with us.

On what basis then did the Father chose His people? 2 Timothy 1:9 explains, “Who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” Note the word *grace*. Paul mentions it twice. Peter will mention it momentarily. God does what He does on the basis of His grace, a word that speaks of *unmerited favor*.

Beloved, remember our condition. We would never have chosen God if He had not first chosen us. We were dead in our sins. Dead men are incapable of doing anything. Grace was the only way.

Keep in mind why Peter is emphasizing this. His readers were hated by the world. His readers were hearing it said that they were the lepers of society. To which Peter says, “Not so!” We are special! We are God’s people, first by the design of God the Father. In eternity past, the Father set His love on us.

But it’s not just the Father who was involved in our salvation.

2. *We are God’s people through the work of God the Holy Spirit.* Do you remember the day you became a Christian? How did it happen? You say, “I cried out to God and asked Him to save me!” Indeed, you did. And here’s why you cried out to Him...

Verse 2—“Who have been chosen...through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.” God the Father brought you to Himself by means of the ‘sanctification of the Spirit.’ That’s referring to the Holy Spirit. To sanctify means ‘to set apart.’ The Spirit set you apart from the world, to God.

Martin Luther said, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him.” Left to ourselves, we were helpless. But thank God for His Spirit!

It’s the Holy Spirit who awakens within us that first longing for God. It’s the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin (John 16:8). It’s the Spirit who leads us to the cross. It’s the Spirit who regenerates our dead hearts and produces in us faith in Christ (John 3:6). It’s the Spirit who gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven.

How does the Spirit do all of that? Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:23, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Our salvation is by the design of God the Father and through the work of God the Holy Spirit. What about the Son? Peter tells us next...

3. *We are God’s people for the service of God the Son.* “For obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”

God designed a means to restore rebellious sinners to Himself and turn them into obedient children.. How? Here it is. By the work of His Son.

Notice the words ‘sprinkling by his blood.’ That’s an Old Testament phrase. For instance, Leviticus 14 says that when a leper had been healed, he was sprinkled with the blood of a bird. Sprinkling with blood was a symbol of cleansing. Also, in Exodus 29 sprinkling with blood was a part of the ritual in setting apart priests for God’s service. Sprinkling with blood indicated a person was set apart to serve God.

The greatest picture of sprinkling is found in Exodus 24:7-8. In that account God entered into a special covenant relationship with the Israelites. He had just given His Law to Moses in chapter 20. Moses then took the book of the covenant and read it to the people (24:7). The people responded in verse 7, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.” What Moses did next was very significant. Verse 8—“Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

Why did Moses sprinkle the people with blood? Sprinkling signifies obedience.

According to Hebrews 12:24 Jesus’ blood is the blood of sprinkling. Jesus’ blood provided our atonement. Jesus’ blood delivered us from our bondage to sin so we could live in obedience to God! And Peter says that is what we have been chosen FOR, *for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood*.

Dear friend, do you want to be delivered from your sin? Then look to Jesus Christ. His blood can make the foulest clean!

Let’s make this personal. As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the creation of the world. As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross. As far as God the Holy Spirit is concerned I was saved one Sunday morning in December nearly thirty-five years ago when, as my pastor shared the gospel with me, the Spirit worked in my heart and by His enablement I received Jesus Christ as my Savior. All three persons of the Godhead were involved in my salvation. I praise Him!

What about you? Perhaps the Spirit of God is at work now. Don’t resist Him.

Who are we? We are strangers to the world. We are special to God. That’s our identity. Know this...

C. We get in trouble when we turn things around.

And that’s our tendency...

1. *We want to be special to the world.* We want to fit in, to be liked, to be accepted. And so tone down our Christianity. In so doing...

2. *We end up being strangers to God.* If we love the world, our love for God grows cold.

Have you ever heard of Joon Gon Kim? I read a brief summary about his life in the book *More Than Conquerors*. Dr. Kim started Campus Crusade for Christ in Korea. He was born in 1924, and became a follower of Jesus Christ in 1942.

Did you realize that today 25% of Korea's population of 43 million claim Christianity as their faith? Dr. Kim is a key reason for this. The Korean church has experienced genuine revival. Korea is on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the world today.

But revival has not come to Korea without sacrifice. During the occupation of Korea by the Japanese between 1910 and the Korean War in the 1950's, the church faced severe persecution. The Japanese made their Shinto beliefs the religion of the state. On one occasion, the Japanese burned a church with the Korean worshipers still inside.

Later, it was the Communists that caused great suffering for the Church. Here's where Dr. Kim enters the story.

Dr. Kim was studying to be a minister when North Korean soldiers invaded South Korea. The soldiers began murdering any civilians who disagreed with the Communist ideology.

Dr. Kim and his family fled to his father's house on Chi-do Island. There they waited for the coming blood-bath.

One night at family devotions, Kim's wife, Junjin, prayed for each family member, asking God to prepare them for death. That night at 2:00, the Kim family was awakened by harsh voices. They were taken, along with 60 others, to a mountain top, lined up, and one after another, savagely beaten.

Kim recalls, "Just a stone's throw away from me, my father was struck on the head several times and fell dead. Then my wife, trying to keep back her tears, said good-bye to me and said she would see me in Heaven. Before my eyes, she was brutally killed."

Kim himself was beaten with a club, and left for dead. When the killing spree on the island ended, 2000 lay murdered.

Can you imagine the bitterness after witnessing the killing of his own wife and father? Yet God did a work in Kim's life. In his own words, "All during this persecution, I was not at peace with God. Although I was a Christian then, I was at the bottom of human tragedy. Then I recalled my Savior—God heard my crying. As I looked upon my Savior on the cross, I renewed my fellowship with Him."

God took away Kim's anguish, and replaced it with peace and joy. God removed Kim's fear and hatred of the Communists too. He prayed for the very Communist who murdered his family.

Kim took his surviving daughter, and the two of them went to visit the home of his enemy. The man was shaken by Kim's boldness. He invited him into his house.

Kim recalls, "As I spoke to him of salvation through Christ, he wept over his sins. We prayed together, and this man later became a faithful witness among the Communists."

The experience convinced Kim that God had called him to proclaim the gospel to the Communists. When the United Nations' soldiers later retook the island, Kim asked them to spare the lives of the men who killed his family. Because of this act of mercy, Kim was later to pastor a church in Communist controlled territory. In fact, God used him to lead a great number of Communists to Christ.^[3]

This is our identity, beloved. We are strangers to the world, but oh how special—undeservedly so for sure but true nonetheless—how special to God! You say, "I could never do what Joon Gon Kim did. I don't have what it takes." Perhaps that's how Peter's readers were feeling—weak and wondering how much more they could take. The fact is, we do have what it takes explains next.

II. Truth #2: God's Word tells us what we have (2b).

What do we have? Verse 2 concludes, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

A. We have grace. The word appears 131 times in the NIV Bible. Peter uses it nine times in his letters. In 1:13 Peter says we will receive grace when Christ returns. But here he says that grace is ours. "Grace *be yours in abundance.*"

What is grace? Grace is the unlimited and undeserved favor and help of God. "For by grace are you saved," Ephesians 2:8 declares. We didn't deserve the gift of salvation, but on the basis of grace God saved us. And He continues to give to us.

"Give what?" you ask. Everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). His supply of grace is ever full.

"How do we tap into this supply of grace?" you may be thinking. 1 Peter 5:5 tells us, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." The only thing we need to tap into grace is the admission of need.

What do we have? Peter says we have *grace*. What's more...

B. We have peace. "Peace be yours in abundance." The Hebrew term for peace, *shalom*, speaks of wholeness and wellness. The Greek term for peace, *eirene*, carries the idea of harmony and tranquility. Peace means "freedom from worry." Peace is the confidence of heart and mind that comes from knowing that everything is okay because God is at work in everything.

What do you need when the world is against you? You need peace. And Peter says that peace, like grace, is ours. We have it. It's in the bank account.

This is what we have, beloved. We have grace. We have peace. In other words...

C. We have all we need to live for God! You say, "Okay, we have it. But how do we experience God's grace and peace? 2 Peter 1:2 tells us, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance *through the knowledge of God* and of Jesus our Lord." Grace and peace are linked to a growing knowledge of God. If I don't have a growing knowledge of God, then I won't have a growing experience of His grace and peace. Make it your aim to get to know God better. That's why He gave us His Word.

Make It Personal: As you begin the new year...

Do three things daily...

1. *Affirm daily your true identity.* Who are we? Strangers. And special to God.
2. *Accept daily what God has given you.* What do we have? Grace and peace.
3. *Appreciate daily the One who made it possible.*

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[\[1\]](#) Chuck Colson, *The Body*, p. 31

[\[2\]](#) Colson, p. 45.

[\[3\]](#) John Woodbridge, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 86.