

The comfort of the blood of Jesus Christ (Quality: Good)

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[0 : 00] We turn this morning to the words found in the first epistle of Peter in the first chapter and at the first verse.

The first epistle of Peter, chapter 1 and verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the full knowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit and to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Grace unto you and peace be multiplied. Now we turn once again to these words of the apostles and to the question that we are currently asking concerning them.

And that is, who are the people to whom these words and indeed the whole epistle is addressed? We have already drawn the general conclusions that the people to whom this letter was written are Christians.

And now we begin to look at the particular terms by which they are described. We have looked at the basic fact, who they are.

[1 : 26] On the one hand they are strangers, on the other hand they are elect. On the one hand strangers and pilgrims thrusts them into a state of uncertainty. On the other hand being elect puts them into a position of incomparable security and certainty.

Like all Christian people, they are aliens, pilgrims, misfits and oddities in a world that hates God. And yet, although they are so outwardly disadvantaged, they have got this inward source of comfort, this inward source of strength, this inward source of peace.

They are elect. This is the comfort. This is the comfort. This is the assurance. This is the reassurance that the apostle seeks to give to downcast, distressed, depressed Christians.

His object in writing is not primarily theological but pastoral. His object is to meet Christian people who are having a hard time in the Christian life.

And that is a practical matter. If a Christian's trials are real and hard, well then the answer to the trials must be equally realistic.

[2 : 47] Well then, here is this great basic fact. God's people in this world are pilgrims and strangers and foreigners. But they are also elect and chosen.

Call it a contradiction. Call it a paradox. It's true. And neither is true without the other. Strangers. Elect.

That's who they are. God's people. Well now that leads me this morning to the second thing. And that is Peter's explanation. The apostle's explanation of this great fact.

Not what they are, but how they became what they are. How a man becomes elect. How a man becomes a Christian.

is clearly an important and a vital and a crucial matter. Well, as we turn to it, we find the apostle telling us three things.

[3 : 46] How does a man become elect? How does a man become elect? How does a man become a Christian? Well, first of all, it's according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And secondly, it is through sanctification of the Spirit.

And thirdly, it is unto the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. This is how these people became Christians.

This is how any man becomes a Christian. Well now, this morning, bearing again, and I deliberately repeat, bearing in mind that Peter is ministering comfort to scattering distressed Christians, I want simply to look at some general matters that arise under this.

First of all, I ask the question, what is the nature of true Christian comfort? I begin with this quite deliberately.

Because I can almost hear somebody saying, well, what comfort is there in the explanation that the apostle gives as to how these people became Christians? Look at the doctrines.

[5 : 01] Foreknowledge, sanctification, and blood atonement. I thought you said, this is a practical matter, says somebody.

The practical trials have to have practical helps. Yet here we are at once landed into the realm of doctrine and into the realm of theology. Well, my friends, this isn't my doing.

I didn't write this blessed book. But I'm glad, like Peter, to stand by it. And to stand with it. If you want to quarrel with these things, well, your quarrel isn't with me, it's with God's word.

The apostle's object is to help troubled Christians, and that is at least a part of the object of any Christian pastor. So the question is, what is Christian comfort?

Well, I answer it like this, and I say, Christian comfort is the comfort of the truth. The truth of the gospel. The truth that is expressed by great terms like these before us.

[6 : 12] Foreknowledge, sanctification, the blood. There is no comfort for Christians, for anybody, outside that gospel.

There is no Christian comfort for anybody that doesn't have something to do with foreknowledge and sanctification and the blood of Jesus Christ.

And I'm here to argue that that gospel cannot be defined without doctrine and without theology. Now, this, of course, is very opposite to ideas held in modern Christendom.

There are many modern professing Christians who say immediately, well, doctrine doesn't matter. They're not interested in it. They don't want doctrine.

What they're interested in is blessings. What they're interested in is experiences. What they're interested in is spiritual tonics and pick-me-ups that are easily swallowed and easily digested.

[7 : 21] They're not interested in anything that's got to be thought about and reasoned over. They're not interested in anything that's got to be wrestled with. There's a great proportion of modern professed Christians who desire the comforts of the gospel but not the doctrines of the gospel.

Well, my argument is you can't have the comfort if you don't want the doctrine. And the less you know of the doctrine, the less you will know of the comfort. And the more you know of the doctrines, the more you will know of the comfort of the gospel.

It is characteristic of our age, the spirit of our age that has crept into the churches, that people look at matters like this, are they say, it's the result that matters.

It's the feeling, it's the sense of well-being, it's the sense of state of mind, being at ease. How you explain it doesn't matter. Whether it's resting on scriptural proof or not, it's something that doesn't matter.

There is abroad in Christendom today what I would call a doctrinal indifferentism. Which means simply you can be indifferent. In matters of what you believe, matters of doctrine.

[8 : 37] That's a matter indifferent, it's a matter of no importance. What matters is whether you've got certain experiences. You love Jesus, I love Jesus, as someone said to me recently.

Therefore, the things in which we differ don't matter. You believe in the virgin birth, said the person to me, I don't. Doesn't matter. You believe in a literal creation from the hand of God, I don't.

I believe that God did it by evolution. But that difference doesn't matter. You believe in Jesus, I believe in Jesus. We're all alike. Doctrinal indifferentism is the spirit of the age.

People want the comforts of the gospel. But they don't want the doctrines of the gospel. Now, my friends, that's a very faulty shortcut.

And it's a shortcut that is deceptive. And it's a shortcut that leads not to Christian comfort, but to counterfeits. So I say, if we're going to think, as Peter was thinking, about the whole matter of a Christian man's true comfort, we must stop and we must ask, what is the nature of that comfort?

[9 : 52] Scripture, as witness, the example of Peter in our text presents us with the comfort of the truth. And without the truth, there's no comfort.

Surely it is crucial, surely it is important to know that in our comfort we are not deceived. If your idea of comfort is nothing more than a certain inward restful state of mind or spirit, or a certain state of joy and exhilaration, how are you going to distinguish between false joy and truth?

How are you going to distinguish between false hope and true hope? How are you going to distinguish between false peace and true peace?

You can't distinguish except in terms of doctrine. The devil counterfeits every blessed and precious Christian comfort and joy.

And if you're concerned only with the end result, only with the experience, not with its real character, how are you going to know whether your state of placidity, your state of well-being, is God's gift or the devil's deception?

[11 : 14] There's only one way to know. And that is doctrine. If Christian comfort is only a matter of feeling, then I bid you take notice of the fact that psychology can produce feelings, and does.

That is very largely the function of applied psychology. If your idea of Christian comfort is simply a matter of feeling, an inward persuasion, well, let me remind you that ought to suggestion, as Madame Curie taught us years ago, can produce that.

Your own evil heart can lull you to sleep when you ought not to be asleep. Your own evil heart can deceive you into thinking that all is well. So you slumber.

But it's the slumber of the cemetery. You slumber when you ought to be up and doing. The cults can produce comforts and feelings. That's exactly what Christian science exists for.

To say nothing of others. The cults can produce comforts and feelings and states of mind. And you can have all of this, and none of it is authentic Christian comfort.

[12 : 29] Though, alas, it all too often passes under the name of Christian comfort. Hence my question, what is the nature of true Christian comfort and consolation?

For let's not apologize for the fact that Christians often are in need of this comfort. They live in the world with all its hardship, with all its trouble, with all its misery, and all its disappointment and frustration.

And Christians need comforting as well as anybody else. What then is the nature of true Christian comfort? Well, it rests on facts.

It doesn't rest on theory. It doesn't rest on hypothesis. Christian comfort rests on facts. The facts of history. The facts of the faith.

The facts in which the gospel is born. The facts that don't dissent. It rests on what God has done in eternity and in time, in himself, in his Son, and in his Holy Spirit.

[13 : 39] And whenever the word of God administers comfort, he does it in the way that Peter does it here. It calls the minds of the people of God to the truths of the gospel by which they are saved.

It's as though Peter is saying, you're strangers, you're pilgrims, you're ailing aliens, you're feeling oddities and misfits. Remember, remember who you are.

You are elect. And then, remember how you came to be elect. Remember that God's foreknowledge rested on you, that the Spirit's power has sanctified you, that the blood of Jesus Christ has been sprinkled upon you.

Now, says Peter, these are facts. These are not theories. These are not hypotheses. These are events of history. These are the doctrines. These are the truths that'll stand, that'll last, wherever you are, whatever you are.

Whatever shape or case or condition you're in, however hard the pilgrim warfare goes, however cast down your spirit may be, nothing alters the fact that the Father foreknew you, the Spirit sanctified you, and the blood of the Saviour was sprinkled upon you.

[15 : 16] Well, my friends, isn't this practical comfort in the best sense? Whether it's peace or hope or joy or strength you need, here it comes.

from the infallible, immutable, indestructible facts of the gospel that has made you what you are if you are a child of God.

So that if it's comfort you need, it is the comfort of the truth. And only the comfort of the truth can truly set free the downcast soul of a Christian pilgrim.

because whenever he comes back to it, it's always the same. God never withdraws that foreknowledge, the Spirit never undoes his sanctifying work, the blood of Christ that was shed, oh, it's never reversed.

It is irreversible. seek your comfort. Seek your consolation. Not in passing palliatives and superfluities, but seek your comfort in the truth, the facts of the gospel that have made you by grace what you are.

[16 : 34] What is true Christian comfort? It is the comfort of the truth. There is no comfort apart from the truth. And truth is doctrine. And that is why doctrine is important.

And that is why all experience must be tested by doctrine in order to establish and assess whether it is Christian. So I come to this.

What then is the origin of this true comfort? You cannot but have noticed in our text that Peter's explanation of how these elect strangers became what they were, namely Christians, involves each of the three persons of the Godhead.

In the making of a Christian, the entire Trinity is engaged. Surely the marvelous thing of any man's experience.

There is the Father's foreknowledge, the Spirit's sanctification, the Son's atoning blood. My friends, can anything ever console and reassure a Christian in his hours of despondency so much, so clearly, so impressively, as the fact that the whole matchless Trinity in his total being has given attention savingly to my poor soul.

[18 : 21] The Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, all have engaged in this glorious drama of redemption, as concerns me, a wretched, unworthy soul.

This is no little thing. Indeed, I put it to you, there can be no greater thing. Who is on your side when the world, the flesh, the devil, bring in circumstances that distress you and bring you down?

Who greater can you count on your side than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? The Father, who designed and determined the plan of salvation, the Son, who executed the plan in his life and death, and the Holy Spirit, who applies the fruit and the benefit of it in a sinner's side.

Here's the greatness, here's the grandeur of the gospel. So I put it like this.

Gospel comforts arise from the triune God. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is one of the most fundamental and also one of the most comforting doctrines of the gospel.

[19 : 48] Because the three members of the divine Godhead have not collaborated in order to save you if you are a Christian. only then to desert you when, because you are a Christian, you find yourself hard pressed in your pilgrim path.

that unholy trinity, the world, the flesh, and the devil will arise against you, will away itself against you, but you have a better trinity than that.

the father says of his people, I will be their God, they shall be my people. The son says of his people, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

The Holy Ghost says of his people, I am with you, I shall be in you. Gospel comfort.

This is where it comes from. This is where it originates. Doesn't come from some temporary feeling, something worked up, something induced by some psychological means, some passing circumstance.

[21 : 06] No, no, it comes from the entire God. Oh, my friends, when you're in trouble, when you're in need of comfort, what you need to remember is your relationship to the entire divine being, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

So, I've got to make this point, that gospel comfort is weakened and is lessened if we neglect or if we overstress any single person of the divine Godhead.

God is one, three in one, and one in three. And, our thinking about God, our praying, our whole thought of God, must always preserve this blend and this balance.

Martin Luther used to say that the greatest of heresies was to sunder the Godhead. And he's absolutely right. There are people, there have always been people, who are preoccupied with God the Father.

Unitarians believe in God the Father and worship him, but not in the Son or the Holy Ghost. Jews believe in God the Father and worship him, but not in the second or the third members of the Godhead.

[22 : 48] Muslims believe in God the Father and worship him, but not in the Son nor in the Holy Ghost. And neither Unitarians nor Jews nor Muslims are Christians, nor do they know anything at all about the comfort of the gospel.

Preoccupation with one member of the Godhead is disastrous. And the same thing, of course, can be said about those who are preoccupied with the second person in the Godhead.

There are those who are preoccupied with the Son, with the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many people bearing the name evangelical who think, speak, pray, live, only in terms of an earthly saviour whom they call Jesus.

This is nothing new, this is an old thing. Godhead, they have no concept of the majesty of the Father. They have little reliance on the effectual working of the Holy Ghost.

They have what has long been known as Jesus religion, or Jesusology. It's a pathetic thing, it's a sad thing. But you see, it's an unbalanced religion, and their gospel comfort is diminished and weakened accordingly.

[24 : 15] But then of course there are others who are preoccupied with the Holy Spirit. There are some people whose religion is entirely a matter of thinking and speaking about the Holy Ghost and his works and his gifts, real or supposed.

They distort the place and the function of one member of the Godhead to the neglect of the others. And they lose whatever else they lose.

They lose the true comfort of the gospel. Now I say we must hold these things in remembrance. This is a matter of doctrine, this is a matter of theology.

And I don't apologize. Peter brings us prominently to the fact of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. We must not be guilty of sundering the Godhead in our thinking, in our religion.

God, the triune God, he is the origin of the gospel, he is the origin of the truth, and he is the source of Christian comfort.

[25 : 30] Surely this is practical comfort for Christians. Surely there is nothing that can be more practical than that the Lord of hosts, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is on our side.

So that leads me to this point where I would underline the exclusiveness of a Christian's true gospel comfort.

Peter shows us that it's a comfort that arises from the truth, a comfort that originates in the triune God. Now the question arises, at least the question has to be asked because there are those who beg the question in one way or another, the question has to be asked, does anyone else contribute anything to gospel comfort?

Well, does Peter include anyone else? He includes the Father, he includes the Son, he includes the Holy Ghost. Who else? No one else.

This thing is exclusive. It excludes all others. And this is the consistent teaching of God's holy word that salvation is of the Lord and of no other.

[27 : 04] That we are saved by grace, not by works. That God has no assistance and no helpers in this. That men don't save themselves, neither do they save one another.

That God and God alone is the source of the gospel. he is the source of its truth and therefore he is the source of its comfort.

This is the most exclusive thing in the world. Well, most will say it in those bold, bold, uncompromising terms.

It is all of grace because it is all of God. So Peter says, elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, the blood of Jesus Christ, but nothing else.

Paul, you see, says exactly the same thing, writing to Titus, chapter 3, verse 4, he says, after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal watch.

[28 : 41] So Paul is exactly the same as Peter, the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost. And then you see, even those things by which a man consciously takes the gift of life, repentance and faith, these two are God's gifts.

Here too is where the matter of doctrine is so vital and so important, because there are professed Christians who will tell you that any man has faith, all you've got to do is to put the gospel to him and convince him, and if he wants to believe it, well he can believe it.

Why? Because he's got a deposit of saving faith within his own natural being. That isn't what the apostle says. The apostle says that man is dead in trespasses and sins.

the apostle says that man left to himself cannot repent and cannot believe the gospel. These things, repentance and faith, like the whole grand scheme of salvation, are the gifts of God, else otherwise they would be the works of creature effort.

When Peter was in Joppa, we read in Acts chapter 11 and verse 18, he made the discovery that God also to the Gentiles granted repentance.

[30 : 12] There was no need to grant them repentance if they were already possessed of the ability to repent. And when Paul writes to the Ephesians about the place of faith, he says in chapter 2 and verse 8, for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

So we say as we have to say with Top Lady in his hymn, nothing in my hands I bring when I come, when I come for salvation, I don't bring repentance in one hand and faith in the other.

I come with empty hands. and because my hands are empty he fills them. He gives me repentance and he gives me faith. And that is how I can lay hold upon the gift of life.

So here is this sheer exclusiveness of the gospel and its truth. It comes wholly from God. This is something our great reformers rediscovered.

That's why they used that great slogan of this, sola gratia, by grace alone. Grace alone. Too many Christians are willing to obscure this fact by overstressing what they call man's part in the plan of salvation.

[31 : 49] Man has no part in the plan of salvation. Man's place in the plan of salvation is that he is what he is, dead in trespasses and sins.

And if he becomes a Christian it is because of the foreknowledge of the Father, of the sanctification of the Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

And my dear friends, if you think you can contribute something to your salvation, your comfort, your consolation will be reduced accordingly.

gospel comforts rest on the exclusiveness of the gospel. It is all of God. It is always of God.

And it is of God alone. There is no other author of life and salvation. What can sinful men add to what has been done done by God the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost.

[32 : 53] The very idea is preposterous. The very idea of the terms, the good news of the gospel, the very idea of adding to something done by the Holy Trinity is to argue that he cannot do anything properly, perfectly, completely, that he needs the help of those whom he saves.

that is a total contradiction of the gospel. So you see, when Peter presents the comforts of the gospel to unsettled and anxious Christians, he sets before them nothing except God's redeeming work.

Why should he? It needs no more. Well, do you this morning stand in need of comfort? I say, then take this word to yourself.

Here's comfort. The comfort that rests in the truth of the gospel. The comfort that comes from the triune God in all his sheer sufficiency.

The comfort that comes from him alone. What Peter says to the elect strangers of his day and ours is just this.

[34 : 17] There is no comfort greater than the sheer fact of being a Christian. Being a Christian means that I'm alive unto God, means that I'm in communion with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, means all that he is, is mine.

God. The trouble is that we Christians don't realize who we are and what we are. And the principal reason we don't realize what we are is because our doctrinal views are too low, are too small.

We have too small a view of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And there is this great tendency to be preoccupied with blessings and with experiences.

Beloved, make God your concern. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, make Him your concern, living and dying. And you'll not want blessings.

And you'll not want experiences. And those blessings and those experiences will be the greatest comfort and the greatest consolation you can ever know.

[35 : 37] You want the comfort of the Gospel? Well, then I say seek Him. There is no comfort outside of Him. The more you know of Him, the more you understand from His Word of His being and His glory and His person, the more the comfort of the Gospel will be yours.

Strangers, elect. It's a marvelous thing to be a child of God. You end as you can only end by saying, well, why should I have this honor?

Why should I have this privilege? Why me? And the only answer you can give for it, grace alone.

Sola gratia by grace alone. If your salvation comes by grace alone, your comfort must come the same way.

Amen.