

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

Dr. George O. Wood

Today I begin a new series in the letters of 1 and 2 Peter. We're looking today at just the first two verses of 1 Peter chapter 1. Today's message is called "Comfort From the Rock."

1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV)

“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.”

I’ve always liked to receive mail. I suppose I developed it from my days in college going down to the campus mailbox and wondering if there was any money in the mailbox. I was always hanging around at mail-call time. I actually received not a whole lot of mail while I was in college so I developed even a respect for the junk mail that advertisers sent me. I could never understand anyone ever throwing away junk mail. Somebody out there had thought enough about me to send me a piece of information and to communicate with me. I read junk mail so well when I was in college that I still have a guilty conscience when I throw a piece of junk mail away without opening it. I want to see it all just to make sure I show proper respect to the people trying to communicate with me.

We have before us today a letter. There are twenty-seven so-called “books” in the Book of the New Testament. Twenty-one of them are letters. We’re going to approach this book of 1 Peter as though it were a letter. More than that, we’re going to approach it as though it were a letter from

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

a proven, Spirit-filled counselor written to help struggling Christians. That's why we call the whole series "Help for Struggling Christians."

When you think of struggle, I suppose there's two ways you can think of it. One idea of struggle is the person who is barely hanging on to a ledge with his feet dangling in the open air of the canyon. He's struggling for dear life to hold on. The other kind of struggle is the struggle associated with any competitive effort—the struggle of a weight lifter, working out to be able to press so many pounds; the struggle of a marathon runner in training to prepare his body to succeed at a 26-mile experience.

Some of us as we read this letter, 1 Peter, will be in the first kind of struggling. The sort of struggling where we're in an unpleasant situation, holding on for dear life. That is certainly the sense of which it was first read by the people it was addressed to in the first century. They were profoundly suffering for their Christian faith.

There is the second kind of struggle that is involved in all of our lives where we recognize that any gain that we experience in our life involves struggle or the conquering of adversity.

Therefore 1 Peter is a tremendous letter addressing all of us as struggling Christians.

First Peter especially deals with the external elements that cause our struggle. Second Peter deals more with false teachers, talks about the internal struggle that goes on with false teaching in the Christian church.

We're going to approach this letter, then, with the theme of struggle. We're going to approach it with the motif as though it were an outline for extended counseling sessions from Peter.

Counseling sessions designed to help us win the struggle. I haven't seen anyone else treat 1 Peter that way. We'll see if we can take 1 Peter as though it were an outline giving us counsel.

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

Our counseling session opens with verses 1 and 2. There are three things we learn at the opening of the counseling session—who the counselor is, who the counselees are, and what the attitude of the counselor is. All three things are very important. If you go for counseling you need to know who you're going to. The counselor needs to know who the counselees are and size up their situation. And the counselor needs to project a certain kind of attitude for the healing process to take place.

I. Who the counselor is.

Letters in New Testament times begin with the author's name stated first. Our letters in Western society are backwards. You have to wait until you've completely read a letter to find out who it's from. That's the crazy way to do it. The good way is to do it like they did in the first century, start with the author's name first. That's exactly what Peter does here.

We learn the name of the apostolic counselor, Peter. In the Aramaic, Jesus called him Cephas, which means "stone" or "rock." In Greek his name is *Petros*, Peter. Jesus said to him in Matthew 16:18, "Thou art *Petros* and upon this *petra* will I build My church." Those two words "petros" and "petra" may be synonyms, but it may also be they suggest a delicate change in imagery. A Greek scholar pointed out that *petros* may represent a large fragment of rock broken off the original massive rock. And *petra* commonly connotes the large massive rock. So when Peter is called "the rock" by the Lord—"upon this rock I will build my church"—Peter is the fragment, and the rock is the confession of faith or Jesus Christ himself.

In 1 Peter 2:5, Peter talks about us all being living stones. He has been called "the rock" by the Lord. He had not always been a rock. That's why when we look at his name at the head of this letter identifying himself as "Rock" it should tweak our curiosity just a bit. Physically, Peter probably looked like a rock. I've always pictured Peter as a rather large man. I think there is

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

substantiation for this from the Scripture itself. He was a hard-working, blue collar worker—a first-century fisherman—who toiled with his body and did not have a modern boat or fishing equipment.

But Peter on the inside was not what he looked like on the outside. On the outside he looked like rock but on the inside he was putty. The cement in our life that makes us rock is the Spirit of the Lord.

It's great to know when you get a letter from a person like Peter that he didn't start out with all the answers to begin with. He worked through in becoming a rock. We know that he had not always been a rock. We know that he had not always faced suffering well. When Jesus first declared He was going to the cross in Mark 8:32, Peter interrupts and takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him for talking about suffering. Peter later denied the Lord rather than suffer. Even in his apostleship in Galatia he wilts under the pressure of the legalistic believers who come there and criticize Peter for his actions. He yields to some of their criticism. He has not always been a rock in his life. He has not always been able to face suffering. But now he's writing to believers who are facing struggle, and he himself is facing martyrdom. Probably shortly after this letter is written, he himself is executed in Rome and, as church tradition says, crucified upside down.

The great thing about Peter is that by the end of his life he had become in *fact* what Christ had called him in *faith*. When Jesus first said to him, "Thou art Peter," it was a faith statement. Peter was not rock yet. What happened to Peter, by the way, is the way the Lord deals with us all.

That's what justification by faith means. Justification is a fiction—God declares us righteous when we're not. He declares us righteous in the Person of His Son. As we follow Christ we become in fact what Christ has already called us in faith. God working with us over a lifetime turns our failures into strength, turns our faults around, healing the separations in our life,

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

bringing us to stability. Sometimes we get discouraged because we only see 24 hours at a time or 30 days at a time. But when you watch the whole lifetime of how God is at work in us, He's at work in the same fashion with Peter. He is making rock out of the putty of our lives.

Peter's qualification is that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. A good qualification for a counselor. Someone sent by Jesus Christ. That's the meaning of "apostle"—one sent.

It's wonderful to know that the Lord has sent you to do something. Do you have a sense that the Lord has sent you into the world for a special reason? Do you know what the Lord has sent you for? It doesn't have to be something big. It may be a relationship. But to have the confidence that God sent you where you are.

Jesus at one time told Peter to feed His lambs, tend His sheep. Peter lived up to that sent responsibility that the Lord had given him. When he uses the word "apostle" after his name it's not an honorary title. It's the real thing. He had practiced the office that the Lord had given him.

II. Who the counselees are.

We meet ourselves, the counselees. Peter is writing to people scattered in what is now the modern country of Turkey—ancient provinces within Rome in the first century. But we can never take 1 Peter or any passage of Scripture and read it as though it was written to them. It's always written to us. I can't simply say, "There are four things we learn about the believers then." I must say, "There are four things we learn about ourselves as the counselees in receiving comfort from the Rock."

A. The first thing we learn is we are God's elect (1 Peter 1:1). The letter is written to God's elect. "Elect" simply means "chosen." People get into a lot of theological difficulty on the whole idea of election, the doctrine of election. Moody said about election, "God voted for my salvation, the

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

devil voted against my salvation. The vote was tied. I voted with God and we got a majority and we won the election.”

This word “elect” is an important first word. Why? We may be struggling and feel because of our struggle that we’re worthless. When you are struggling and especially when you are suffering or when you are sick or when you’re in adversity, you wonder, “Who cares? What’s significant in my life? What can I do in this confining place or this confining relationship? Who knows that I’m here?” The word of Peter comes to us to remind us that above all things we are God’s chosen ones. He knows we’re here. We’re elect of Him.

What an antidote to our sense of worthlessness and low self-esteem. We may cry around false ideas that the reason why we’re a Christian is God invited everybody else in town and couldn’t get the important people so He got us. We’re the leftovers. But that’s not what this letter is saying to us. You are God’s chosen. He has you in mind. He wanted you. He framed you. He made you for himself and for relationship in His family. You’re chosen in Him, according to Paul in Ephesians, “before the foundation of the world.”

You say, “I don’t understand how we can be chosen by God and yet have a free will.” I’m not so sure we should even understand the doctrine of election theologically. I think God wants us to understand it psychologically. That’s where the meaning is at. God chose me. Psychologically that says something to me about my importance in God’s eyes.

B. We’re not only God’s elect, but another term that is used of us—“We are strangers.”

Strangers in the world. Sometimes it’s very difficult to take one word from a foreign language and exactly match it with an equivalent English word. The word *agape*, for example, in the Greek has a rough time being matched by the English word “love.” Somehow “love” isn’t a big

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

enough container to contain all the meaning that's in the word *agape*. It takes many words to translate *agape*.

The same is going on here in the word that's translated "strangers." The word has been variously translated "sojourners" or "aliens." Since we have many aliens in Southern California we may understand that word a little bit better. Most of the aliens in Southern California have come from less-privileged countries, so things are better here in the USA. But the idea of "alien" in 1 Peter 1:1 is not that of someone who's come from a poor country to a richer country. But the idea of "alien" here is being employed to describe those of us who have better citizenship who are now living somewhere else. Literally the word means "alongside of" or "upon" non-Christian people. Alien nationality and temporary residence are the hallmarks of the alien status.

Why is this so critical that we know that we're strangers? Lest our values become corrupted. If we think that all there is is this life, we might therefore expect similar treatment to those who do not share our faith. But, in fact, the believers that 1 Peter was written to were persons who were struggling and were being deprived of certain basic human rights like life itself. Strangers. Because their citizenship belongs somewhere else.

To Christians living in the world the treatment may be altogether different from what other people experience. Why? Because we're strangers.

C. The third thing that we learn about ourselves in Peter's counselees is that we're dispersed or scattered. "Scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (verse 1). The word "scattered" in the Greek is the word "dispersion." It's a very important word in history because it was a word that was used to describe the scattering of the Jews from their homeland because of the captivity of their country, first by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians and later by other invading forces. In the Old Testament, God's people were put into the dispersion

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

because of unfaithfulness and because of sin. Here now, though, in the New Testament, are God's people in dispersion not because of sin but there because they're witnessing to the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation.

The word literally means "thrown seed." It describes seed that was scattered or sown. Here are the Christians scattered through five Roman provinces which are now located in modern-day Turkey all the way from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea—the east and west perimeters of Turkey. A vast area. Peter is reminding them they are members of the dispersion. It's as if to say, "God is raising up a new Israel in the world, a new community and you are the ones. You in this new community are suffering grief and all kinds of trials, painful trials, and your brothers are undergoing suffering."

Sometimes when I'm counseling people I wish I could have given them a different parent, a different child, a different spouse. But they are God's people called to those relationships, God's people in a difficult place, scattered and needing to remain within that environment as God's people scattered. The root meaning of the word *diaspora* is to scatter seed. It describes God's people being put into a situation, to be God's leaven, God's seed to there live for Him.

God's elect we are. Strangers we are. Scattered we are.

D. Then Peter goes on to tell us how we got to be God's elect. If we were reading 1 Peter literally there's been a few words inserted to help us understand the language in the English. Otherwise it would read with difficulty. The words actually go like this: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." "According to the foreknowledge," refers back to the first word "God's elect," "God's elect, according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father." Here Peter tells us how we got to be God's elect. The

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

situation may be against us but God is not against us. In the counseling process we must get a hold of the fact that God thinks the best of us and wants the best for us. Peter tells us that the whole Trinity is working on our behalf—God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son. God the Father at work in our salvation. That’s how we got to be God’s elect. Because of His foreknowledge—“chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (verse 2). The word “foreknowledge” here is the word which is used in medical terms today—*prognosis*, “elect according to the *prognosis* of God the Father.” You know, if you’ve ever waited for somebody to come out of surgery, you’ve waited for the doctor’s prognosis. The prognosis tells you what’s coming up next, what’s down the road short term and long term. This great statement on the election of God is that the prognosis of God for us is salvation. John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God is not willing that any should perish but that all should have life.

There are some who get all caught up in the doctrine of election and wonder, “Does God only choose the elect, or is everyone chosen to salvation?” I like the later view. It’s more consistent with the Scripture that God loves the whole world. His prognosis toward everyone is that they might come to know Him.

But this doesn’t happen simply because the Father prognosticates it or pre-knows it. There must be in addition to that the separating work of the Spirit of God. “Sanctified by the Spirit” (verse 2). This word “sanctified” is kind of a quaint theological word. It simply means “set apart.” How did the Holy Spirit set us apart? He began to set us apart when He began to convict us of our sins and to convince us of our need for Christ. That whole conviction process occurred because the Spirit was setting us apart. The conversion occurs because the Spirit of God was birthing us into the Kingdom. Our growth as Christians is occurring because the Spirit is at work, setting us apart

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

to God. In other words, our conversion doesn't happen because somebody has the right technique, because the person is able to know the right words to manipulate us toward God. It's the Spirit who is active on our behalf in setting us apart for God.

We get to be God's elect because we have a part in it as well. Our obedience to Jesus Christ. Set apart "for obedience to Jesus Christ." "Obedience" here does not mean keeping all the rules all the time, or that would result in a salvation by legalism rather than by faith. Obedience is simply responding to the word of Jesus, "Follow Me." We begin to follow Him. We learn that we're not obeying our own impulses anymore. We're not obeying the expectations of other people. We're not simply following the standard of what someone else constitutes as success. We're obeying the Lord from the heart, with faith.

Then Peter says we're elect because of the sprinkling of His blood. This is an odd term for us—sprinkling with blood. Whose twentieth-century culture has been sprinkled with blood? It's a very meaningful Old Testament term to Peter's listeners. There are three high moments in the Old Testament where the word "sprinkle" is used. One is as a sign of cleansing when a leper is declared clean by the priests. As a sign of that cleanness he is sprinkled with blood. When a high priest was set aside, Exodus 29, then the high priest was sprinkled with blood, ordained for service. When all of God's people at Mount Sinai stood before Moses and Moses read them all the works of the Law and they said, "We'll do everything that you said that we should do," then they were all sprinkled with blood as a sign of obedience.

What this passage is simply saying to us is that part of being God's elect is that Jesus with His own blood has cleansed us, has set us aside for serving Him, has given us a sign of His covenant, His own blood. Set aside for election.

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

That's who we are. We are in Christ elect, strangers in the world, scattered. And we're elect because of the work of the Father, the Spirit and the Son and our own obedience.

III. What the attitude of the counselor is.

Peter goes on to say, when he's finished introducing us to himself and to the counselees, he gives us his attitude toward all who are being counseled in this letter: "Grace and peace be yours in abundance" (1 Peter 1:2). Of the twenty-one New Testament letters, all thirteen of Paul's letters include this word in the greeting—"grace and peace." Peter's letters and also 2 John have "grace and peace." Sixteen of the twenty-one letters of the New Testament begin in their greeting with the words "grace and peace." And always in that order. It's never "peace and grace." It's always "grace and peace." Why? People are looking for peace, looking for peace under a lot of different terminologies. We today call it self-actualization, inner coherence, satisfying lifestyle, or maybe just happiness. The New Testament teaching is you'll never find peace until you discover God's grace. When you've discovered God's grace then you can begin to experience God's peace.

Dr. Chapman tells a story, a beautiful illustration. In one of his meetings a man stood up and gave this testimony.

He said, "I was at the Pennsylvania depot one day as a tramp. For a year I begged on the streets for a living. One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said to him, 'Mister, can you spare a guy a dime?' As soon as I saw his face, I recognized my old father. 'Father, don't you know me?' Throwing his arms around the tramp, the father cried out, 'I have found you! All I have is yours.'"

Dr. Chapman said, "Think of it! That tramp stood begging his father for ten cents, and for eighteen years his father had been looking for him to give him all he had."

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

That's exactly what grace is about. We just want God to give us something that will get us by.

God says, "I've got riches and inheritance for you, you haven't even begun to dream about."

Grace. God is willing to treat us from a standpoint of mercy and acceptance. We begin to discover God's grace, then we can begin to walk in peace. Peace includes all material and spiritual blessings. But, more especially, peace was something the Messiah would bring in the form of salvation. That's how the Old Testament thought of peace.

In the New Testament peace is far more than inner tranquility. Inner tranquility comes and goes. Feelings differ from time to time. Sometimes we feel up, sometimes not so up. But the peace that is promised by God is the reality of being right with God all the time. The blessedness that flows in our life as a result of that.

Grace to you. God's favor. And peace. The joy of a right relationship with God which spills out and has all kinds of implications for our lives as we'll see in 1 Peter.

Peter does more here than say, "Grace and peace be to you." He says, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance." Grace and peace are never rationed by God. He doesn't ration it out and say, "You can just have a little bit and then no more. Come back another day and I might give you something later." God gives in abundance. So for a Christian in a struggling kind of situation we're already being told in this letter, God has some delightful surprises for you. God has some ways to strengthen and fortify you in your experience. Don't just focus on your problems. Focus on the nature of the God who has called you and the God you serve. He is for you and He is with you. He will give you the grace and peace you need.

Closing Prayer

We delight, our Father, in calling Thee, the God of grace. And in calling Thee, Lord Jesus, the God of peace. To Thee we come with thanksgiving for what You have done in our life. You've

COMFORT FROM THE ROCK

1 Peter 1:1-2

given us a salvation not rationed out, but given us a salvation that flows in fullness from Your own heart to ours. Even, Lord, that You have not rationed out Your love for us, so may we in our response not ration our response to You. Nor in any way limit Your power to work in our life. Maybe the situation that we are in has already developed a feeling within us that we know exactly what we can expect and no more. Suddenly, Lord, You want to remind us that You are the Lord who specializes in doing the superabundant and making yourself available to us in ways that we've never envisioned. Bring Your grace and peace in new and living ways to each one here today. Thank You, Lord, for calling us. Thank You for encouraging us and being with us in our dispersion and scattering in this world. Through Jesus our Lord we give thanks. Amen.