

# The Pilgrims' Passport

1 Peter 1:2

*The Second Sermon on 1 Peter*

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A while back I started using my passport when I travel instead of just my driver's license. It's been interesting. I feel a little more confident in giving it and it feels like the security has more confidence in me. "Oh, a *passport*; come on in, Mr. Hyde!"

Recall that Peter calls us "exiles of the Dispersion" in verse 1. We live in this world but we do not belong to this world. We are citizens of another world, of heaven (Phil. 3:20). And here in verse 2 Peter gives us our passport as we travel from this life to the life to come. Our passport, as you can see, is that we belong to the Triune God of grace. And what about our Triune God makes our passport? Well, notice as he describes Father, Son, and Holy as well as what they do, that there is one way of reading this text as seeing it as speaking of election by the Father, sanctification by the Spirit, and justification by Christ.<sup>1</sup> This is true. But I think *this text* is best understood by following the older interpretation of both Martin Luther and John Calvin. They understood the grammar and syntax of this verse as saying God the Father chose us that we would be converted and set apart

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Traill, "Eleven Sermons on Important Subjects, From 1 Peter 1:1-4," in *The Works of Robert Traill*, 4 vols. (1810; repr., Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, n.d.), 4:18-23.

by the Spirit for the purposes of our being obedient and our being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

So what does this mean in terms of our pilgrim passport? Our passport mentions where we are from and where we are going:

1. *Our Origination: Election*
2. *Our Destination: Sanctification*

May the Lord open our hearts and minds to his truth tonight.

## **Our Origination: Election**

How did these first readers of 1 Peter become elect exiles of the dispersion in this world? How did we? Our passport marks *our origination* as being the electing work of God the Father: **according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**. There was a viral video going around this week of a border stop in Texas. A trucker was asked what country he was a citizen of and he answered, “The U.S., but does it matter anymore?” The border patrol agent then said, shockingly, “Unfortunately, not anymore.” Our origin in the purpose and grace of God, though, does matter. Let look at this closer.

In classical Greek literature **foreknowledge** means “to know ahead.” We see this also in 2 Peter 3:17, which warns believers who know “beforehand” that false teachers will twist the Scriptures to watch out for them. But most of the time

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<sup>2</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, 20–24; Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 12:230–231. See also the lengthy discussion in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 54–56.

this term is used in Scripture it speaks of having a relationship with someone more than merely mentally having a picture of them or knowing a few things about them. Let me give an example. In Romans 8:29 Paul speaks of “*those*”—notice the personal term—“whom he foreknew he also predestined.” Paul is saying that those whom God knew in intimate love before he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Peter uses this word about Jesus two times. In Acts 2:23 Peter says Jesus was “delivered up according the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” The phrase “definite plan” translates the term will. So God gave us Jesus according to his will and foreknowledge. These two words are complementary. God actively knew us in his plan. In 1 Peter 1:20 Peter speaks of our redemption through Christ’s blood like this: “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake.” Did the Father sit in heaven and wait for his Son to decide to go to earth or not, and then God’s plan kicked in? No, because from eternity Jesus was loved by his Father and in that love was manifested to the world in the last days.

You see, what Peter is saying to us is that we are pilgrims because of God’s love for us. His eternal love for us is the basis upon which we can know he is with us in our deepest struggles in this life. Has God left me when I go through fiery trials? No, because you were loved before eternity. Has God forgotten about me when I am persecuted for my faith? No, he’s loved you since eternity. Election is a

doctrine that is meant to comfort us, not confuse us. It is only when we get in the way that it confuses and becomes speculative.

Election makes so much more sense and is so much more comforting now that I am a father. Did I choose to love Cyprian son only after he first showed signs of loving me? No, I love him now because I loved him from the womb, and even before that, when we decided to be parents. God has loved us as his children before our birth and second birth as well.

## **Our Destination: Sanctification**

So we become elect exiles of the dispersion because of the work of the Father in election and as pilgrims in this world *our destination* is also stamped on our passport: sanctification.

When Peter speaks of sanctification here, it's not merely in the typical sense in which we think of our ongoing process of being conformed to Jesus Christ. That means Jesus is a perfect sculpture and we are a piece of stone that is slowly being sculpted to look like Jesus. Instead, when Peter speaks of sanctification he is speaking of the entirety of our becoming God's set apart people. He's describing that God took us as a piece of stone from among other stones and set us apart for his sculpting work. And here in verse 2 he says we were set apart by the Spirit so that we would be obedient and so that we would be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

Our sanctification is being *set apart from* our sins, flesh, the world, and the power of the Devil and *set apart for* purity, holiness, love, and the service of God. When we are converted to faith in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit cut us off from being enslaved by the power of the Devil, the lust of our hearts and minds, from the enticements of the world, and from our sin nature. This is what article 24 of the Belgic Confession says:

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, freeing him from the bondage of sin.

Sanctification is also our being *enabled* to strive in the power of the Holy Spirit against our sin natures, like soldiers striving in a war. Chapter 1 says we are called to be “holy, for I am holy.” Chapter 2 says we are being made the spiritual house of God and a holy priesthood to offer *spiritual* sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an example of a bad theology of sanctification: “Let go and let God.” The idea is that we do not have to resist getting angry, we do not have to strive against sexual lust, and we do not have to resist the Devil so that he will flee from us. Instead we are to cease from actively participating in our sanctification and let God take all our sin away and sort of zap us from heaven. To use the words of one country song: “Jesus take the wheel.” Beloved, this is not to be our attitude and theology of sanctification. As one hymn puts it, “we are redeemed from sin and shame, and called to holiness.”

Peter also says we were set apart by the Spirit so that we would be **sprinkled with [the] blood** of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we have a sacrifice that not only *clears* us of our *guilt* and brings us to the throne of God's mercy and grace one and for all, but continually *cleanses* of the *stain* of our sins. He has set us apart and he continues to set us apart.

## **Conclusion**

Are you traveling with your passport tonight? Are you ready at a moment's notice to declare your origin is the eternal electing love of God the Father? Are you ready to declare your purpose in this world that you are just visiting is to be obedient to the Lord all the while being cleansed by his blood? This is who you are. This is where you have come from. This is where you are going. Amen.