

Gamma 13

Study 1

Questions

1. Historically who were the exiles of the Dispersion? Why were they amongst ancient peoples more likely to be persecuted? Do we see this to day as well? Then why does Peter refer to believers in a similar manner? There is a term that differentiates the believers from the Jews in his description, what is it and why does it matter?

The exiles are historically the Jewish Diaspora or Jews dispersed all over Asia Minor. They of all ancient peoples tended to be persecuted because Judaism is a total culture where what they believed affected every aspect of their lives. Most ancient cultures were polytheistic as the enormity of the power of nature was more naturally understood as being dispersed amongst a multitude of “gods”. A monotheistic culture will intrinsically stick out like a sore thumb not only because the Jews believed in One God but their beliefs implied that all other “gods” were not real or inferior. Their monotheistic beliefs were held to be narrow minded and judgmental and incurred the wrath of the community. The strict adherence to the Torah in their world view and interactions in society made them out to be intolerant and non cooperative.

We see the rise of anti-Semitism today all over Europe and in USA with the march of the White Nationalists in Charlottesville who specifically targeted Jews and attacks on synagogues

Believers are referred to in the same manner as Jews because we too are going to be undergoing the same kind of treatment the community is dishing out to Jews as Christian belief is also monotheistic like the Jews.

He is also inferring that Christians today are the new Israel which means we inherit through Christ all the promises and covenantal blessings God confers to Israel now comes to us as the New Israel. Together with the new blessings come the old persecutions that the Jews also faced , the ostracism and oppression.

The term that differentiates the Jews from Christians is the term “ elect”

The term implies there is a sovereign choice of God and in Peters time when many of the supposedly elect or chosen race Jews had rejected the gospel now Peter is saying unequivocally that the new chosen race..the elect are now believers in Christ. This matters tremendously because firstly it confirms the power of God’s covenant in Genesis 12 that God’s promises to bless the world through the progeny of Abraham is now coming true. It means through thousands of years though empires fade and fail, though the earth will convulse

and change, Gods word is heavier than them all and stands true and we can trust in it as it is now coming true in our lives.

2. Joining a badminton club is different from migrating to Canada as one is participating in a subculture and the other is engaging in an entirely new culture. In becoming a Christian some of us can treat it as participating in a subculture and others will regard it as immersing in an entirely new culture. As an exile which should we be doing and why? In KL it is more difficult compared to a village why?

Joining a badminton club is participating in a subculture where the participants speak a certain badminton language that they alone will understand. They are health buffs and will talk about gyms and work outs and diets and are obsessing about so many of the things that normal non badminton players will never think or speak about. When these folk return to their work place or families they will revert and relate in their usual terms to their colleague and family members. Hence badminton is a subculture directing certain behaviour at a certain time with a certain group of people. Many believers when they first come into the church believe it is a subculture and once they are in the church environment they use spiritual terms, sing spiritual songs, treat fellow believers in a certain way and embark on activities like teaching Sunday school or even street feeding like a subculture but once back in their own communities they revert back to original culture and all that distinct language and manner of life that comes from faith does not penetrate the rest of their culture. They treat their family the same way they have always treated them. They interact with their workmate the way they usually interact in their old culture and their faith does not compel them to question or behave in a way different to their culture and more in line with the gospel. Christians with this attitude will never influence their community and will fail to be the salt and light the community needs.

The term exile is a useful picture of a Christian because an exile lives in an environment in which his culture is totally alien to the culture of the community. He is part of the community but his culture that is the way he thinks and acts and responds to his community is entirely driven by his new culture of faith.

A Nepalese guard has to come to KL and work in an entirely new environment. He comes from a Nepalese culture which is alien to Malaysian culture. When his boss treats him badly he will react the way he knows how to react in Nepal and not the way he is supposed to react as a Malaysian. The manner in which he carries out his duties as a guard has been honed for years in Nepal with its proud tradition of Gurkha guards whose loyalty and bravery is legendary and when he looks around and sees the way the typical Malaysian guard behaves he cannot understand and he feels at ease. Since he has no referent point but his own background he will judge the Malaysian guard as lackadaisical or unmotivated with little pride in his work aside from a desire for financial remuneration. This causes misunderstanding and conflict. If one would take this example and look at ourselves as Christians, our faith should determine how we look and act in our society in totality not just in church and we will find the motivations and outlook of the society will be in direct conflict with our faith and in that sense we are like the Nepalese guard as an exile. Having one culture our faith and constantly

having it examine, confront and at times influence our community for the better. We can therefore never be complacent, we must always be adapting as our society is adapting. The world is an amalgamation of all sorts of culture especially in a cosmopolitan city like KL where there are many diverse cultures and the challenge is for the believer to constantly examine these cultures in the light of the Word and decide how he is to live in them and not become of them. The crucial difference is how to make the distinction. The extent to which the believer is able to do this will be pivotal in determining whether they are truly going to be the salt and light of their communities.

3. Why does Peter take the trouble to remind the believers that they were the elect according to the foreknowledge of God so early in this letter? Did we choose God or did God choose us? Does it matter? How does knowing that we are chosen help us in our trials and tribulations in exile?

Peter reminds them of the wonderful truth of election because this theological fact is the crucial upon which the believer must anchor his emotions and actions upon during the time of testing. Theological truths are not pie in the sky theories of no earthly significance. They are the very stars upon which we fix our eyes and directs our paths in our navigation through life. They are the jewels that we recall to our minds and remind ourselves when life serves up all sorts of trouble and when our individual idols come crashing to the ground. These facts remind and strengthen us to a basis of the way we live. For example, in many parts of rural Australia the drought has caused many farmers to go in to debt and bankruptcy. They lose their farms which have been in their families for generations and many turn to suicide. The reason for this is that their farms is what they live for. Their reputation as good hard working farmers who provide for their families is what their life has been all about and once this is gone there is nothing else in their life that is worth living for. Look at the back of every suicide and one will find a fallen human idol.

Instead Peter points us early to the only purpose of life that is worth living for which is our calling ...we were chosen ...elected by God Himself. According to His foreknowledge which means before we were even conceived as a twinkle in our father's eye. Which means this election could not have been due to merit or performance or morality it was based entirely upon the desire and will of God. The question that must come into our minds is that which hides behind the phenomenon of "survivor's guilt" which is "why me". Why me instead of the hundreds who have died and it could have so easily have been me? These survivors never find their answers to this but the event totally changes the way they live. Suddenly life is full of value, it must be otherwise why did God spare them and took the hundreds of others. They begin to live in a circumspect manner and with renewed purpose because they realise they are part of some divine plan and not just a random accident.

Likewise believers are totally overwhelmed by this issue of God's election and foreknowledge of them. No matter where they are and what jobs they hold, what they do and how they live is no longer insignificant. It matters not because they have such an important task that they have just to carry out that God deemed that

they were important enough to save compared to others but because it was God who chose them. The value is in the One who chooses and not the work or mission to which the believer is tasked by God to carry out. For example, God saved Hudson Taylor and we know this man became a great missionary starting what is now known as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. Did God save Hudson Taylor because he knew he would do great work? Alternatively God saved Hudson Taylor to do great work which means He could easily have chosen anyone else. So being elected can fill us with pride in ourselves and our mission for God as it makes us feel indispensable to the purposes of God which is the basis of his election of us. If this was the case then our worth is then measured on the basis of our mission or accomplishments which places tremendous pressure on us to perform. Being elected should make us feel such awe, wonderment, feel unworthy and yet thrilled that He smiles on us and His Son bled on the cross for us. That we have a purpose yes that is important, our mission and our love for Him is a reciprocation to His love but not the basis of his choice of us.

So when we are under trials we just need to take a few steps back and no matter how ugly the scene in our lives has become we know that we have been chosen by the King and one day we will be with him basking the glory that God lavishes on us

4. The key to living a fulfilling life is finding our purpose. What were we chosen to be and to do? What does the term “sanctification” mean? How has this been a priority in your life can we share?

We are chosen to made holy by the Spirit and we do this by obedience to our Lord Jesus. Above and beyond everything that we are called to be as believers we are most of all called to reflect God because we were made in the image of God in Genesis 1:17. The reflection of God as our image will necessarily involve reflecting His communicable attributes like love, justice, mercy and goodness not his incommunicable attributes like omniscience, omnipotence and asaity. We cannot do this unless God has revealed himself to us and the ultimate revelation is Jesus as if we have experienced Jesus we have experienced God.

John 1:18 (ESV) No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

So our life's calling is reproducing the life of Jesus in our own lives being obedient to Him.

5. How can we know that we are truly chosen and beloved of God? Why does Peter use this rather crudely violent phrase that we are “for sprinkling with his blood” Refer to Ex 24:4-8 What are the two most common Non-Christian responses to the death of Christ on the cross and its relevance to the average person on the street? What is the underlying motive behind these responses

The way we know for sure we are truly chosen and beloved of God is to look at the cross. Our total worth in the eyes of God is on the very person of His Son impaled upon a tree. Everytime we are tempted to feel that life sucks and no body really cares we think about the cross. The last phrase “for sprinkling with

his blood” comes from Exodus 24:6-8 (ESV) And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” 8 And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

This is the ceremony whereby Israel commits herself to God and the covenantal ceremony is sealed by blood which represents life. There are two parties to the covenant and the blood is splashed on the temple altar and the other half sprinkled on the people. Both parties bound by blood –life.

When Jesus died on the cross, his death became that blood poured out on the altar to God to appease the wrath for the sin of the people and the same blood poured out upon the people who have come under the covering or protection of that blood which was shed for the remission of sins. If the blood was not sprinkled on the people then they will bear the penalty of their own sins. When God looks at the people of Israel and today's church He will see the blood of his Son because they have been sprinkled with it. He will not see them and their sins and their unworthiness He will see the blood of His Son and His righteousness

The two most common responses are

1. Moral superiority
2. Moral inferiority

In the first place there are moral superiority when they feel the **cross is not necessary**. Those who feel that yes it is a good thing that Jesus died but I am living a good life, I don't steal or rape or kill and I am a good mother to my children and upstanding citizen of the community and if I am all those things God who is a loving God will surely accept me as I am. I don't really need the cross as it is a grotesque issue relevant 2000 years ago probably but not in modern KL now.

In the second place there is moral inferiority they think the **cross is not enough**. The person acknowledges that they have sinned and it is a big issue in their lives and they hear about the cross and think it is great but when they look at their own sins they are thinking that the sins are so great that God could not possibly forgive their sins. So they accept the cross but add to it good works done with the motive of augmenting to what Christ had already done for them on the cross. This devalues the cross and impugns the Word of God that says Christ is enough.

The underlying motive behind both responses are human pride

In the first instance it is the pride of people who think that cross is not necessary because they are morally superior. They create their own moral standard and expects God to grade on the curve with a set of laws tailor made for their own lives and with lots of exceptions for when they mess up. This kind of pride is the antithesis of grace

In the second instance the pride of the people who think that the cross is not enough because they can make up for the deficiencies of the cross with their own

acts of contrition or good works or wallowing in guilt and pain and self inflicted suffering in an effort to self atone which is basically another way in which human pride rejects the grace of God.

6. Why it is that in Paul and Peter one of the most common greetings is “ grace and peace to you” How does this change the colour of your day?

The gospel is all about grace and how that grace brought about the reconciliation between God and man. The whole of the gospel can be summed up in these two words. We were once enemies of God through our rebellion and were heading to eternal separation from God in hell and then grace came in the person of His Son who died for us. This death was for our sins. We neither deserved this nor sought it. The grace was given to us while we were dead in sin.

All of our lives are lived by works as we strive under our own pride and effort for everything. Grace is the opposite to pride of human effort. Grace is God coming to give us what we needed, when we did not deserve it. As the result of grace we have “shalom “which is the all encompassing Hebrew word for the ideal state of affairs in relationships of one with God and with each other.

It changes the colour of our day because no matter what our day starts out with , when we mentally invoke this idea of grace and the peace grace brings we automatically feel a sense of relief and joy because we are not trying under a crushing standard to live lives good enough for God. We rest because we are already accepted by grace and we already have peace....We must not let any other thought overwhelm these eternal truths. When we do this how can we not let this change the colour of our day?