

1 Peter 1 – Part L

1Pe 1:1 (NKJV) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The next major phrase that we want to address is the simple term “**for obedience**”. The NASB reads “**to obey**” and the AMP reads “**to be obedient**”. Whenever the Holy Spirit is working in a believer’s life, He will always be working in the area of “**obedience**”. The Greek noun for “**obedience**” is “*hupakoe*” and refers to that attribute in a person’s life where they willingly and sincerely subject themselves to God’s will for their life. Sincere “**obedience**” to the Word of God is the hallmark manifestation of the Christian faith.¹ In fact, this is the same Greek word that is consistently used regarding the “**obedience**” of Christ in undertaking and carrying out the will of God the Father relative to salvation.²

It is important at this point in the exegesis of the passage to address whether or not the noun “**obedience**” is referring to the initial work in salvation or the ongoing work in salvation. There are very good commentators who take the position that it is only referring to the initial experience when someone is saved. It appears that they take that position because of Peter’s reference to election at the beginning of v2. In other words, God chose the individual, the Holy Spirit draws them, and they respond in obedience to the initial gospel call of God on their life. Now, no one should really argue that point. The obvious consequence of God choosing someone for salvation and of the sanctifying or setting apart work of the Holy Spirit in bringing them to Christ should be fully appreciated and accepted. That is the process and exactly what happens.

On the other side, though, there are some very good commentators who say that the noun “**obedience**” is referring to the ongoing obedience in the believer’s life that is demanded by the process of sanctification. No one should argue that point either. There are a number of excellent reasons why they take that position. One reason is that there is no other place in the New Testament where the word “**obedience**”, which is only used 12 times in the New Testament, actually refers to someone’s initial saving response to the gospel.³ Then another good reason is because the idea of “**obedience**” is identified twice later in this chapter and in both cases is clearly referring to the continued daily obedience that should characterize every believer’s life. [1 Peter 1:14](#) says,

1Pe 1:14 (NKJV) as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

[1 Peter 1:22](#) says,

1Pe 1:22 (NKJV) Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

In the Greek Interlinear for v22, the phrase “**in obeying the truth...**” reads “**by obedience to the truth...**” The Greek word there is the same as in v2 – “*hupakoe*” and it is still a noun. The NASB gets it correct and says “**in obedience to the truth...**” The ESV say “**by your obedience to the truth...**”

Now, without overly analyzing if only one view is correct, it appears that the term “**obedience**” has to actually refer to both. Why say that? Well, for each of the reasons just mentioned. It is not a proper understanding of what salvation is and what it does for someone to just think of it in terms of their initially being obedient to the gospel so they can be saved, but then divorcing it from the ongoing sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in their life. None of us ever think of marriage as just the initial marriage ceremony. In the same way, we cannot just leave the initial work of coming to Christ on an island by itself anymore that we can leave the idea of marriage at the altar where it actually started. The two are integral to one another and inseparable from one another.

Unfortunately, the modern church in its zeal to get people into its membership has done exactly that, but it is not a legitimate biblical reality. Just sign a card, get baptized, and join the church – that is the modern biblical mantra and message. It leaves salvation at the altar. Baptists seem overly infatuated to say “once saved, always saved”, but they rarely ever define what it actually means to be saved. So, their emphasis on the initial experience almost disregards and overrides what is the biblical evidence of genuine salvation - which is a life of sincere and continued obedience to Jesus Christ.

It would be contrary to biblical truth regarding salvation for someone to think that they are saved simply because of what they did initially, but then afterward to live a persistent and continuing life of disobedience to that gospel call. That position and that perspective is in complete contradistinction to the nature of saving faith and biblical salvation. It is clearly not a legitimate spiritual reality regarding genuine salvation. We cannot separate the Holy Spirit’s initial work of saving faith from His ongoing work of sanctification. Then when Peter adds the phrase “**and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ**” to the sentence, that phrase is clearly referring to the ongoing forgiveness that Christ provides to the believer when they do fail. However, the ongoing forgiveness cannot happen without the initial forgiveness and justification that occurs at the believer’s conversion. Those who are not saved are not forgiven, nor can they be until they come to Christ. Every true believer is painfully aware of how very often they actually do fail in their Christian life, so Peter simply added the idea of Christ’s ongoing forgiveness when we do fail to his dialogue for our encouragement.

So, if “**sanctification**” involves both an initial setting apart of the believer for Christ in regeneration and conversion, as well as ongoing work of conforming them to the image of Christ, then there is no reason why Peter would not have had in mind both the initial work and the ongoing work of sanctification in the believer’s life. It must be appreciated that an ongoing and continued obedience to Jesus Christ is the actual evidence of genuine salvation in a person’s life. We can safely say and conclude from the New Testament teaching on salvation that genuine and continued “**obedience**” to Jesus Christ is the equivalent of being saved.⁴ At a personal level, I would never be comfortable giving someone who was continually disobedient to Christ some kind of assurance that they were saved just because they may have had some kind of initial “salvation” experience.

Now, in the overall process of sanctification, the believer has both a passive role and an active role in which they participate. Passively, the believer has to depend on the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to continue His work of conforming them to the image of Christ. For instance, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#) says,

1Th 5:23 (NKJV) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know from [Philippians 2:13](#) that God is actively at work in every believer's life.

Php 2:13 (NKJV) **for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.**

[Hebrews 13:20-21](#) speaks of this same work when it says,

Heb 13:20 (NKJV) **Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.**

We know that the Holy Spirit is the One who creates and produces the “**fruit of the Spirit**” in the believer. So, the more that the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work is completed in the believer, the more they will “**walk by the Spirit**” and the more they will be “**led by the Spirit**”. Just His title alone, the “**Holy Spirit**”, implies that He is a Spirit of holiness, and if that be the case, then we know that He will be producing that same holiness in the life of every believer.⁵ However, because all of this is God's guaranteed and predestined work in the believer's life, it is the passive side of sanctification. This deeply spiritual work is being done to us and for us by God. In this work, we simply cooperate. We do not create the work, we do not fashion the work, and we do not originate the work. We simply cooperate and respond as God chooses to work within us.

I know someone who professes to be saved who is constantly struggling in their relationship with another person who is not a Christian. It is almost a day to day kind of spiritual battle for them. The sad part is that they are constantly complaining about the other person and never seem to be able to find any peace in a relationship that quite frankly they seem to constantly aggravate. One simple truth that they have not been able to perceive is that very often when God allows people into our lives that may frustrate or irritate us that it is His way of revealing and exposing areas of our life that do not reflect Christ. I have stated it often, but an irritation or a frustration with other people is simply a reflection that we do not possess a spiritual quality that God wants us to have. The individual that annoys us is actually just a tool that God uses to bring attention to what is lacking in our own life. We are the ones who become angry, impatient, irritable, and temperamental, and so God allows those characteristics to be brought out in our life so that we can see that we need this sanctifying work of God in our life. If we are ever going to be conformed to the image of Christ, then obviously, major changes in our life will be necessary. Our problem is that we seem to always want other people to change, but not ourselves. The difficulty with that scenario is that first of all that we do not have the power to change anyone, and if we did have that power, that unfortunately we would change them to be like us. The only person that I can actually change is “ME”, and so I must allow God the opportunity to use other people to irritate and frustrate me so that I can actually develop the “**fruit of the Spirit**” in my own life. Based on [Galatians 5:22-23](#), their irritation and frustration of my life allows me the opportunity to grow in and more deeply express God's love, His joy, His kindness, His goodness, His gentleness, and His self-control in my life. It is almost as if we are so often blinded by someone else's lack of maturity that it prevents us from actually seeing the greater work that God wants to do in our life – and that is to conform us to be like Christ. We literally miss God's best for our life.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Zodhiates, 1408.

² Renn, 683.

³ Grudem, 1 Peter, 52.

⁴ MacArthur, 22.

⁵ Grudem, Systematic, 753-754.

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