

# 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

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## *The Challenge of Being a Foreigner*

Some of you will know that my ancestors came to England at the end of the seventeenth century from France. They were Huguenots, protestant refugees fleeing the increasingly repressive regime of the Roman Catholic King of France, Louis XIV. They came to live in the east end of London. At that time there were thousands of Huguenots in the East End so that it was said that you could walk from one end of Brick Lane to another without hearing a word of English. If you know Brick Lane you will know that that is still true today. However today the language spoken is Bengali. Three hundred years ago it was French.

My ancestors, then, lived out their lives as foreigners in a French enclave. They spelt their surname in a French way – Caumont. They spoke French and they made silk fabrics according to “the Continental style.”

But it didn't last. Within a couple of generations the Huguenots were thoroughly integrated into British society. They changed the spelling of their names – Caumont became Comont. Some families even translated their names – Monsieur et Madame du Bois, became Mr and Mrs Wood. They spoke English, moved out of the East End and took diverse jobs.

That story could be repeated again and again throughout history and the world. By and large enclaves of foreigners over time assimilate into their surrounding culture. The exceptions to that are therefore all the more amazing.

One such group are the Bible believing Christians.

In almost every place and every age they have been a minority – a counter culture. That is certainly in our culture today. Hardly a week goes by without some reminder we live in a world which is profoundly different from, and at times pretty hostile to evangelical Christians.

Bible Christians are not a nationality or a race. In some senses they are a massively diverse group globally and historically. But there is a family resemblance which stretches across cultures and down through the centuries. You will find Bible believing Christians everywhere and in every age advocating fundamentally the same morality, applauding the same virtues, doing basically the same things when they gather, dealing with the same problems in the same way. The Bible believing church has had its blind spots, its dark times, its moments of compromise but something has always rescued this group from oblivion. True Christianity is extraordinarily resilient.

Today we are going to see why – or at least a part of the reason why.

Last week we saw that Peter begins addressing his hearers by calling them “scattered exiles.” They are God's special people but they are not at home – we await our future inheritance. We saw in Peter in vv1-12 explaining how they can live lives of joy as believers despite the trials of being exiles.

Peter returns to that image again in the passage before us this morning. He describes us as ‘foreigners’ in 1:17. But now the question that he focuses on is this: how can we stay true to our identity?

That is a profoundly important question for each one of us. Living as a Christian can feel like swimming for the shore against a rip tide. It would be easier to give up and abandon

ourselves to the ocean of this world. How can we stay different in how we use our money, or how we conduct our relationships, in our sexual behaviour and so many other things.

Sometimes the cost of resisting that is simply enormous. We have just mentioned the article in EN this month about battles with same sex attraction. Having walked alongside a number of people with those struggles, I have seen something of the personal costs involved. And you will have your own struggles, you know them. How will you resist?

Almost every counter-culture dissolves, because human beings can't swim against the rip tide of culture. Almost every counter-culture – except Christianity.

This morning we are going to see that we can stay different. But it is not just a matter of trying harder. What Peter is going to do for us this morning is much more like throwing a rope to that swimmer against the rip tide of our culture. We could keep swimming with all our might, or we could grab hold of that rope and be pulled toward the safe shores of eternity.

The passage before us is actually structured around five imperatives – five instructions. Together they tell Christians how to stay different.

First of all he says cultivate a new focus

➤ *New Focus*

📖 **1 Peter 1:13**

The main imperative here is “set your hope on the grace to be brought to you”

We await that great day when Jesus returns and sets up his new heaven and new earth. When all his people rise again and begin their eternal resurrection life in which there is no more mourning, or crying, or even death. Focus on that, he says.

Focus on it with alert minds. Literally he says

“with the loins of your mind girded up“

He is using language that was used at the Exodus when the Israelites fled from slavery in Egypt towards the Promised Land. They had to tuck their cloaks into their waistbands – to gird up their loins – in order to run. So he is saying “have minds that flee quickly towards your eternal inheritance.”

You see something which tempts you to be disobedient to Christ? It is as nothing to what Christ will give you on the last day. And be “fully sober.” In control of your faculties.

That constant reminder of our extraordinary, wonderful, resurrection hope is an amazing purifier. Set your hope on it.

One of my favourite films still is the 1970 children's film *The Railway Children*. It is set in the war. The father of the family gets imprisoned on the false suspicion of being an enemy agent and almost the whole of the film is about the children's life as they wait for their father to return.

The climactic scene is towards the end when the father returns, and appears out of the smoke of the steam train on a railway platform. His daughter sees him and runs to him crying “Daddy, my daddy.”

How much more will we cry with joy when we finally see Christ face to face, and have God himself wipe every tear from our eyes.

But in that film too the children's lives are shaped by their absent father. Their behaviour is influenced by whether "Father would approve," they work to speed his return, their main hope is to be reunited with him, and it shapes them.

I wouldn't blame a young person for setting out just to make as much money as possible if that was their only hope. I wouldn't blame a young man for setting out to have as many sexual partners as possible if that was the only pleasure he could imagine. I wouldn't blame a woman for leaving her difficult marriage for a better husband if her only hope lay in a good marriage. I wouldn't blame an older person setting out simply to enjoy retirement rather than to continue to serve others, if earthly pleasures were all they had to look forward to.

But Christians are promised something better – better than all the pleasures of wealth, and leisure, and present relationship. Yes better even than sex! As John Piper loves to say trying to get our heads around our eternal joys is like trying to explain sex to a six year old. They simply can't imagine how "doing that" could be nicer than playing with lego! In the same way the joy of our eternal inheritance will be so wonderful that we will look back on mansions, and fame, and fast cars, and wonderful food, and even on sex as childish trifles compared THIS!

Set your hope fully on that! Flee to those promises. They will give you the strength to be different.

Beyond a new focus we need to live our new identity.

### ➤ *New Identity*

#### **1 Peter 1:14-16**

The imperative here is "be holy in all you do."

Again this is not simply a command to try harder. Rather it is an instruction to work with something wonderful that is happening in every believer. We are taking on the character of God.

The instruction:

Be holy for I am holy

Is based on a reality we are God's "children". And because we are adopted children we have a new identity. And that new identity will work itself out in a new character.

Imagine a boy from a really rough family. That family finally becomes so dysfunctional that he is taken into care and adopted. When arrives in his new home he swears. His adoptive father says "we don't do that in this family." He is shocked and at first uncooperative, but over time the atmosphere in which every speaks kindly sees into him. He moves from swearing, to making an effort not to swear, to naturally avoiding expletives.

He was used to staying up late but his new family insist on a bedtime. He hates it at first, but slowly he discovers he is happier after a good night's sleep, and his body adjusts so that he actually feels sleepy at bedtime.

There was always anger and sometimes violence in his former home, and he was brought up punching and kicking. All of that slowly seeps away.

After a couple of years the social worker says “he is a different boy.”

So for us as Christians. As we live as adopted children of the Holy God, we imbibe his character. We live in an environment of grace, and love, and forgiveness, as well as discipline and justice. The holiness of God, becomes holiness in us.

Be holy for I am holy.

As you rejoice in your new identity you will find the strength to be different.

And then there are new habits.

➤ *New Habits*

📖 **1 Peter 1:17**

The imperative is “live out your time.”

The word is sometimes related to the idea of walking – putting one foot in front of the other. Or sometimes to a the habit of turning – “whenever you do this turn here.”

How do we walk? Where do we turn? The answer is in the next couple of verses

📖 **1 Peter 1:18-19**

The forgiveness won for you on the cross is unalterable. It is

Not..perishable

It was achieved at extraordinary cost.

The precious blood of Christ

It was planned from eternity past

📖 **Peter 1:20a**

In his love for you God chose to reveal it to you now

📖 **1 Peter 1:20b**

And when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into glory it was confirmed as standing for all eternity in the future.

📖 **1 Peter 1:21**

What should your new habit be? Yes to avoid sin –

you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors v18

But more fundamental than that, your habit should be to turn to Christ for forgiveness, again and again and again. His forgiveness is like an eternal stream springing up from eternity past and flowing on to the great eternal ocean of forgiveness in the future and we walk by that stream drinking from it, we float in that river, we relax in its great majestic flow onwards to our eternal home.

Won't such freely available forgiveness weaken our resolve to be different? It doesn't. Rather it preserves our relationship with God, so that in him we find the strength to be different.

New focus, new identity, new habits – all of these keep Christians living differently. And two more imperatives Peter gives us. In verse 22 he speaks about new affections.

➤ *New Affections*

 **1 Peter 1:22**

“love one another deeply from the heart”

Notice that whilst the previous imperatives were about our relationship with God this is about one another.

We need one another to stay different. My Huguenot forebears knew that their identity would dissolve if they spread out – and it did. Though Christians are spread out over the world, and we are spread out over Oxford and beyond – we gather for a reason. We love one another, we support one another, we admonish and encourage and teach and care for one another.

If you are semi-detached from church as a Christian you are utterly vulnerable. You will not be different for long. Join a homegroup. Find a couple of people to pray with. Confess your weaknesses and failures to one or two trusted friends – and seek their support. Learn to deeply love and be loved – then you will find the strength to be different.

The final imperative is found in 2:2 – it is cultivate a new appetite.

➤ *New Appetite*

 **1 Peter 2:2**

When he says “crave pure spiritual milk” he means the truths of the bible. That is clear since he prefaces it with

 **1 Peter 2:23-25**

The word of God gave us new birth. The word of God lasts forever. We live forever as we feed on that word – like babies whom Ruth Moore will tell you wake up again and again needing to be fed.

In the past Christians used to speak of their bible reading discipline as ‘no bible no breakfast.’ Modern Christians tend to criticise such rigor as legalistic – but it produced giants! Sadly today I am constantly dealing with undernourished, emaciated Christians who struggle to follow Christ in this world but whose appetite for, and discipline in Bible study is minimal. Bible reading will not make you automatically a better person any more than feeding a baby automatically makes it walk. But without it we don’t walk – we die.

So how is God calling you to respond to this? I want to tell you absolutely the wrong response is to work harder as a Christian. Perhaps we could summarise what Peter is saying in this way: don’t work harder, work smarter!

Cultivate a new focus on your eternal future. Enjoy your new identity as a holy child of your holy father. Learn habits of turning to the forgiveness of Christ so that no sin alienates you from God for long. Learn to love and be loved in God’s new community. Cultivate an appetite for God’s word. Don’t work harder, work smarter!

When I was a young Christian I had the privilege of getting to know a truly great Christian – his name was Professor Sir Norman Anderson. His titles tell you how much he was respected in the world. But it wasn’t his titles that impressed you when you met

him. It was his humble godliness. Norman Anderson also knew deep suffering. All his children predeceased him. He used to say that there was one thing that stopped him being seduced by all the praise heaped on him, and stopped him giving up on God as one by one his children died tragically. He put it as the title of his autobiography. He stayed different to the end of his life because he was amazed and enthralled that before God he was "an adopted son."