

**Josh Mangelson 00:17**

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world

**Karin Peter 00:33**

Welcome to "New'Brew", the *Project Zion* series that takes us through the New Testament with some explanation, some exploration and some time to experience each text that we visit. So, our guides through the New Testament are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. Now before we begin, I'd like to remind listeners that you can view all the "New'Brew" episodes and the "He'Brew" and "She'Brew" episodes, and see Tony and Charmaine's slides on the *Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube Channel*. Now, in today's episode, we are in the part of the New Testament called the Letters, and this part is called, in some of the commentaries I read, the General Letters, and I suppose that's to differentiate them from my favorite, Paul's letters, or the Pauline or, as I like to call them the Paulish letters.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 01:28**

Paulish letters.

**Karin Peter 01:29**

So, yes, Paulish. So, this letter for today that's up for our discussion is 1 Peter. Now 1 Peter has one of my favorite scripture passages, and it's 1 Peter 3:15. "But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord, and always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect." That's an older translation. There's a new one out, which is great. And maybe we can talk about that at the, on our last episode about some of the changes in the new NRSV translation. But this does not make up, however, 1 Peter, for some of the other choice bits that you've got in there, including some ridiculous comments about wives submitting to husbands and women, the weaker sex. So, I'm hoping we're going to talk about some of those today. So, we better get started before I go into a long vent and lament about some of the topics that are in here.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:27**

Well, we do have some time for that.

**Karin Peter 02:30**

Oh, well, good, good. I might get some lamenting in there somewhere. So, let's hear from our scripture guides. Let's talk about 1 Peter.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 02:38**

Yeah, and I'm glad you mentioned General Letters, and so on. So, there's different ways of dividing up the New Testament, the Pauline letters, right, 13 of them. And then scholars sometimes call Hebrews, plus James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Judas, the General Letters. An older way was to take

Hebrews out of that and sort of tack it on to the Pauline letters. And then you had seven catholic epistles, they were called. They were called catholic just because the word *katholikós* in Greek means universal according to the whole, so because of...

**Karin Peter** 03:09

So, catholic, lowercase c, catholic.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:11

Right. So, and that really does apply to 1 Peter, which we'll see as we get into it. So, we're going to do our regular explain stuff, you know, what the genre, authorship, date, setting and so on. That's really, really important for trying to understand the text. And where we'll, where we'll start is with the obvious. 1 Peter is actually a real letter, right. When we, when we studied James together, James has some letter, a few letter conventions, but it's not really a letter. 1 Peter is a bonafide letter. The form and markers of an ancient letter are all there, but it's a letter of a particular type. You notice that in the start of it, it addresses Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. That's 1 Peter 1:1. These were provinces, and so instead of a letter being sent to churches in an area, or churches in a city, or a letter being addressed to a person, this, this letter is sent to churches in a large region with several provinces. And so, lots of scholars refer to it as a circular letter, a letter that was intended to be, whoever the carrier was, was going to, was going to be on the road a long time in what is today eastern Turkey, circulating through all these provinces, they're quite mountainous too, and sharing this, this letter...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 04:31

And they would have gone into a congregation, perhaps as one of the few literate people, and would have read it and interpreted it for the congregation, typically in the midst of worship. And this would be a little bit shorter worship service than you know some of the others that are like, like 1 Corinthians or something. You know, this is, this is just a few pages long, so.

**Karin Peter** 04:53

Well, that's one of the redeeming features about 1 Peter. It's much shorter, yeah. But I'm feeling some sympathy with the person out with this circular letter as a, as a 70, serving in the field for 25 years. Yep.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 05:07

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 05:08

Been there, done that. So, let's talk about what's going on here.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 05:11

Yeah, so the next question we want to deal with is the author. By whom was this written? The author identifies as Peter, meaning the apostle Peter, and says in chapter five, "Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter..." Commonly, in the ancient world, people employed a scribe to write for them. Writing was hard. It was on, was on rough material. It took a little bit of skill to do it. But the, this would mean on the surface then that, that Peter is the author, Silvanus is

the writer of the letter. But for a lot of reasons, most contemporary, solid New Testament scholarship says, no, this is not actually from Peter. And here are some of the reasons why. First of all, the Greek of this letter is of absolutely brilliant, splendid quality. It's right up there at the top with Hebrews and Luke, Acts, and James as some of the best, some of the best quality Greek of the New Testament. But you see, Peter himself was an Aramaic speaking, Galilean fisherman, and in the book of Acts, he's called unlettered. And so, one may, one may say, well, maybe Silvanus was better at Greek. But there's other reasons here. We start there with the language. This is, this is, this is from a highly literate author. And then secondly, I think this is really important, the author of this book nowhere references anything from the life of the historical Jesus, goes straight to Passion and resurrection. There's no incidents, no actual sayings of Jesus, and there's no actual incidents from Peter's life that might have been really helpful for the situation the author is writing to.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:50**

Right. If you think about Peter as having walked with Jesus, had, had all those questions, had, had his own struggles with his anger and his not knowing and his denying, there's nothing there that indicates any personal relationship with Jesus. In fact, the language about Jesus is more Pauline. It's more like Paul talking about the effect of Jesus' death and resurrection, nothing much really at all about what he did in his ministry, in his life. And there's, and there's no signs that the author was a fisherman, you know, that he, there's no, no markers that he was a laborer in a way, or his own business person. There's just none of that kind of language that would indicate that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 07:44**

Yeah, and so Silvanus, by the way, Sil- or Silas was part of the Pauline mission, and we can tell in the New Testament from various places that Peter's mission and Paul's mission had some friction between them. And so, what we have here then, is a text that is trying to imitate Pauline letters because it's probably aware of some of them.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:08**

Which means it must be later as well, with Peter dying around the same time as Paul in the, in the 60s, before the mid 60s even. And so, yeah, it's, it's got to be later than that. And then there's some other language things.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 08:26**

Yes, for example, it uses the term "Babylon" for Rome, and we call that a cryptogram, right. It's, it's a way to, it's a way to say Rome without saying Rome, but everybody, everybody who's in the know, knows that this is a, this is a slam against Rome. But the thing about that is that we don't have any evidence from either Jewish or Christian texts that that term was used for Rome before Titus's armies destroyed Jerusalem in 70, 71 CE, right? So, Babylon becomes a term that, that both Jews and then later Christians used for the, for the city of Rome in the Roman Empire after Jerusalem was destroyed. Peter died well before Jerusalem was destroyed. And so that, that use of the term Babylon for Rome is a kind of a, it's, it's a, it's a code term. In the New Testament, the only other place you find that is the book of Revelation, which is from the 90s, right, from, from the late first century.

**Karin Peter 09:25**

So, it would be kind of like us using technology language when telling a story from the 1980s and talking about gigabytes on my phone. Well, that's silly, because...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 09:34

Exactly.

**Karin Peter** 09:35

...didn't have it then.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 09:36

Yeah, it's, that's a, that's a good, a good analogy, right. So, that helps date the letter and it just dates us long after Peter and Silvanus. And then also, by the way, we, we have an early Christian letter that's not in the canon. It's called 1 Clement and it was written from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth in the 90s. The church in Corinth was still messed up all those years later.

**Karin Peter** 10:00

They didn't get any better?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:02

Not, well, no, new, new things, new things happened to replace the old things, Karin.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 10:05

They just got more interesting.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:08

And so, what we, what we see here is that by the late, very late first century, the church in Rome has developed a kind of pride of place, and a certain kind of authority that allows it to...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 10:19

Within the church.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:20

Yeah, within, within, within Christianity to, to deal, to help other communities outside of Italy, deal with some of their problems. And that's exactly what 1 Peter is doing. So, you, 1 Peter, and 1 Clement come out of the Roman church in the very late first century. So, so, what we've got here in 1 Peter is a bonafide letter sent from the church in Rome, under the name of Peter, to help deal with, with an issue of, Christians are facing, facing in all these provinces in, in Rome and Asia. And it's like 1 and 2 Timothy and Ephesians, not by the person named as the author.

**Karin Peter** 10:57

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 10:58**

The real author is using that person's name for authority and to draw on perhaps traditions received from that person, but under the authority of that person, right. So, this, I know this strikes modern listeners, and readers, and students as, as always difficult and hard, but we have to, we have to do this so we don't misinterpret the letter, right?

**Karin Peter 11:19**

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 11:15**

This, these are not, these are not St. Peter's memoirs or anything like that, right. So that's just very important. So, when we've always, already kind of answered the when, current scholarship dates this letter to the last 20 years of the first century. I think it's, it's probably aptly, aptly dated, you know, in the early 90s would be, would be my best guess, sometime during the reign of the emperor Domitian and Domitian reigned from 81 to 96. We'll meet Domitian in our next podcast when we talk about the Book of Revelations.

**Karin Peter 11:49**

Yes, Domitian has quite a, quite a litany of qualities there that we can talk about.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:55**

Yes, ego being not the least of these.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 11:59**

So, what's the setting? Well, we, it's, the setting is pretty easy to kind of discern out of the letter. The, this author uses the word suffering more than any other book in the New Testament, and it's only five chapters long. So, and that's a, that's a tidbit I once learned from, from New Testament scholar Luke Johnson. It really, the verb for suffer and the gerund suffering all over the place in this little letter. So that gives us a clue as to what's happening. It appears that the recipients of this letter are facing some types of ostracism, and persecution. It's not as severe as the stuff Christians in Rome faced during Nero's reign. That was horrible. That was a local, maniacal pogrom against a minority group. It's not, not violent repression yet, but it is, it is pushback that's making these Christian communities vulnerable and uneasy. And, and so that's the situation that we're finding here. And so, they're being encouraged in this letter by the Roman church to stand, quote, "Stand fast and stay true to their identity as the chosen, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people." that's a line from, from 1 Peter 2. In other words, they're being reminded of their identity, their, actually their exalted identity as God's people in a situation where they are treated as scum, actually, right, as undesirables. So that's the, that's the setting.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:34**

And I'd say one more thing, and that is that whoever is writing it is pretty familiar with the struggle that is happening in these congregations, psychologically and spiritually. It's, they've really tuned into how hard it is to be maligned by your neighbors and family and things like that, and still live in a Christ-like way. And so, they really have tapped into and tried to bring encouragement on the day-to-day ways of

not, not letting the suspicion and ostracism, and the maligning of, of people of their character get to them. And so, I think there is a sense that they really do understand what's happening at a really human level for these *[inaudible]*.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 14:30

And we also know from Roman sources from the late first, early second century, that the Romans finally, by this time, are getting on to this group, not just locally, but starting to say, what is this? And, this is not Judaism. And this seems to be a danger to us in our, our beliefs that we are the one true empire and so on. So, there's a few things we can tell about the recipients, intended recipients of the letter. The author assumes that they are Gentile Christians, that is that they did not have a Jewish background. You can tell that in a couple places in 1:18, the author says, "You know that you were ransomed, ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors." And then in 2:10 the author reminds the readers, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." So, these kinds of claims would never be made of Jewish Christians, right? And so, by the way, that also is another indicator that Peter is not the writer of this letter, because we back up to Paul's time and Peter's time, there was an agreement among the apostles that Paul would go to the Gentiles, Peter would go to the Jews. And so, this, this would be a major reneging on the agreement, if it were Peter writing to Gentiles, and it's out of his jurisdiction, in other words, if you want to put it that way. So, but I think that's really important to understand that these, that these, these recipients are of Gentile background, however, Charmaine was reading through the, the New, the New, New RSV, NRSV, and just noted how many scripture quotes, Old Testament quotes are used there. They're from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. They're everywhere here.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 16:18

And so, it means that the, these Gentiles, Gentile Christians, are very familiar with the Jewish scriptures. I mean, that's the only scripture they have at this point, because what we think of the New Testament is still letters and gospels floating around, maybe, it gets. And so, it's that they have a deep familiarity, otherwise this author would not be referencing the prophets.

**Karin Peter** 16:42

So, it's not brand new Christians who are Gentiles. We're talking about people who had been participating in the Christian community for some time, were familiar but were struggling...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 16:55

Right.

**Karin Peter** 16:55

...because of the slander, persecution, gossip, accusations, made against them.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 17:05

And, you know, I think another, another piece that might be helpful here is, you know, if we think about the descriptions and acts of Paul going into towns and going to where the synagogue met. So, there were often lots of Gentiles who hung around the synagogue.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 17:25**

They were like Deadheads. They're like groupies, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:28**

And they would already have, you know, they had a belief in this God of the Jews. They couldn't fully convert but they were very familiar with the, with the scripture and all of that. So, I think that might be a significant piece too is that these, these folks may have had association with Judaism before they became Christians and so the authority of scripture, the story that it helps to tell, is pretty ingrained for them. It's, it's part of their story now, too. And so, the author uses it very freely to get to the point to kind of some of the feeling points that he's trying to make.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 18:08**

And by the way, I mentioned that, that noncanonical letter, 1 Clement, which comes from roughly the same period and also comes from the Roman church, it, it is just full of quotes in the Septuagint. So, this is a style that the Roman church, Roman Christian community in the late first century is using, right, regular quoting of the Septuagint to support arguments and so on. So, I think it's just part and parcel of the, of the setting. So that's, that's a bit about the background and the addressees and so on. And we have, we have this letter that is addressed to people in crisis, really. They're facing a crisis. And also, we're now two generations removed from the, we'll call it the apostolic period, and so how do we, how do we address our issues now? That's, that's the situation the author is facing. So, I guess the next place we'll go then to is, is to explore. And we'll take a look at some of Karin's questions which, she's definitely already raised one, having to do, oh, I don't know, gender ideology?

**Karin Peter 19:15**

Yes.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:16**

Maybe.

**Karin Peter 19:16**

Yes. So, so again, my questions have to do with how we have traditionally, and, and many times detrimentally, interpreted and applied what we find in scripture. And so, as I read through 1 Peter, again, I mean, aside from, from my own touch points that come, we're aware by now, we've been going through this for some time, we're aware of context and culture. I mean, we can look at that and go okay, we have to apply some of that. We're also aware that as people translated, that came through a male lens as things were, you know, written down and came about. So, there's, there's lots of place in there to extend grace for some of this. But there, there are some terminologies in here that have been used harmfully. So, "the weaker sex" is, is one of them, "submit to." Those are choice words that women blanch at and in many cases are still used in talking about male-female relationships. But there are some other terminologies in here that, that are, that we need to exercise caution about when we unpack them a little bit. So, one of them is "blood". 1 Peter talks about blood, talks about being sprinkled with and ransomed by the blood of Christ. Now, that has been used in many, many different ways, through hymn, old hymnody. You know, there's that old hymn, "Power in the Blood". There's,

there's a, people who feel that they need to petition the blood of Jesus, you know, to be metaphorically sprinkled on them. So, so, we do need to talk about that, and, and why and how and what we do with that now. And then I want to go back to what you said about suffering. There's a freaking lot of suffering in 1 Peter, and if you want to be a comfortable Christian, 1 Peter is probably not the book that you want to read.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:30**

Yup.

**Karin Peter 21:31**

It's uncomfortable. It makes me uncomfortable and it's supposed to make us uncomfortable, because sometimes we get to this point where we think being a Christian should be easy, and God should bless us and everything's grand. That's not how it works. So, what do we make of that? What do we make of that concept of that it's a credit to suffer unjustly when we're a people who are really about bringing justice and peace and hope into unjust situations. So those are, those are my comments today. I'll probably get more as you guys unpack things. But that's what I've got now.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:07**

I'm glad you started with the blood one, because it really fits in with what we were just talking about, about the Jewish, Jewish influence, the scriptural Jewish influence, that is one of the first languages of these folks as their religious languages. So, this is an image that goes back to the Old Testament. So, this is the image of probably the Holy of Holies and when the sacrifices are done in the, in the very center of the temple, where only a choice number of priests might go in a year, of the sprinkling of the blood of some of the sacrifices on the Ark of the Covenant. And so, this is a sign of making things right with God.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 22:56**

It's an atonement image and it's at-one-ment image, so, yeah, absolutely.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:00**

So, that's what that is about. It's borrowing an image from the Old Testament to try to describe to these people who have a rich understanding of the Hebrew scriptures of, of what this is like, what Christ's death and resurrection is like. Here's a way of thinking about what Christ's death is about. But you'll find in this letter more than one image to explain what Christ's death and resurrection mean, or what they do for us. This is just one of them.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 23:39**

So, we've got this, the author uses Passion language, resurrection language, all, all back and forth through the letter, and the Passion language is appropriate in the sense that the people he's writing for are suffering. And so, he's trying to connect their suffering to the suffering of Jesus. Jesus didn't die in bed, and early Christianity...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:59**

Of a good ole, of a ripe old age.



**Tony Chvala-Smith 24:01**

...and, and all across the New Testament, the basic traditions are that Jesus' death was not meaningless, but meaningful. There was something about it that, that was meaningful, and this sprinkling of the blood imagery, if you want to get down to, there's the image and then what does it mean? And what it means is, this is how you're set free. So, if you think about the author writing to underclass, lower, lower social strata, people who are not Roman citizens, people who have less power, people who are nobodies in the Roman Empire, really, and can be walked on like nobodies. He's, this imagery is that you've been sprinkled by the blood of Christ. That sets you free. That, that gives you a whole new status. You're not, you're not nobodies, you're somebodies. And so, not surprising, it connects it to the Passion since they are experiencing their own Passion, whatever it looked like or felt like.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:58**

Passion here meaning...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 24:59**

Suffering.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:00**

...a time of suffering.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 25:01**

Yep. So, when you find atonement language in the New Testament, you have to, you start with, what is it? What's it saying? Where does it come from? And then you have to go deeper. What is it trying to convey? And here it is trying to convey something that was done on their behalf that they couldn't do for themselves, that has now elevated their status to be a chosen race, right? They've gone from, they've gone from down here, as the Roman world looks at them, to up here, as God looks at them.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:30**

And, you know, it isn't quite as explicit in 1 Peter as in some other books, but the connection, the idea of Trinity is very much tied in here with Christ being an expression of God. And so that's very strong, even though the, you know, the three being tied together as one is not as, as clear, as clear. But, and so with that image of the blood, it is the idea that God's shedding God's own blood for them.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 26:07**

It's divine act on your behalf.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:08**

So that's part of that being raised up. God was willing to do, God loves you so much, and love and care language is there repeatedly in this letter as well. God loved and cared for you so much that, that God's blood was put on the altar for you.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 26:27**

And this is quite actually radical in the setting. You have to remember in the setting, the way people thought about deity or deities was that they were whimsical, unpredictable, malicious...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 26:40

Distant.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 26:41

...distant, not, not usually favorably disposed towards people. And here we have an image of a God who has entered into their reality and made them into somebodies, has aligned with nobodies to make them into somebodies. By the way, I should footnote where I'm getting that idea. I wish I could footnote actually, but 1000 years ago, Charmaine and I went to an interview.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 27:05

No, no, no no, no no, not, I'm not 1000. You may be.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 27:10

No.

**Karin Peter** 27:11

So, last week, you and Charmaine went to...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 27:14

Thanks.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 27:14

I'm sorry, dear, the centuries just run together at this point, but, but we went, Charmaine and I went to a Good Friday service in a Methodist church many, many years ago when we were living in Milwaukee. We went back to Michigan for, for Easter break, and to be with family, and we went to a Methodist church for a Good Friday service, and they had, the local United Church of Christ pastor was preaching, she was fabulous, and she's the one who, who, who, I wish I could remember her name. Do you remember her name? She was a magnificent preacher. And so, she was doing this image on Good Friday of, of God, our God became nobody in crucifixion so that you might become somebody. And it's just stayed with me all these years, and it's exactly what's going on in 1 Peter. So, the Christian God is a God who elevates the lowly, and who enters into reality and struggles with us and is present with us, not whimsical, not unpredictable, and so on, so.

**Karin Peter** 28:10

So, that changes the whole idea, though, when we, especially when we throw the word "ransom" in there, you know, ransom with blood, because this has gotten turned around to be we were so sinful, God had to do that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 28:22

Right, right, right. God wanted to kill us, but God killed Jesus instead.

**Karin Peter 28:25**

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 28:25**

That's horrible. It's, it's not what the New Testament means at all. It's a, it's a defacing of the idea of atonement and of the, of the Passion language of the New Testament. And it's really common because, you know, you sing it nice. You sing it in all these lovely minor, minor chord songs and everybody's like weeping and wailing and feeling bad, and it's like, oh, isn't it so wonderful that God loves us so much that God killed somebody. God really wanted to kill me. It's like, no, that is not what Christianity is about. This is, this is a divine act of love. Sorry, I'm getting a little...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:54**

You might be ranting.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 28:55**

I might be ranting. I, sorry, sorry, Karin, that I've gone into a rant.

**Karin Peter 28:58**

You know what, we're almost at the end of this New Testament series. If you want to rant you just go right ahead.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 29:04**

Your other, another point you made about being patient in suffering, yeah, that can be really, really abused. We have heard of it being used to keep an abused wife from divorcing her husband, being called out in a worship service, and actually that passage read to her. How, how, that's clergy abuse. Whoever that minister was should have been fired by the board of the church and silenced. But that's, that's a horrible use of scripture. So, what, another way to look at what 1 Peter is saying is, you guys, you guys are minding, you have zero social power, right. And so, what are you going to do with your suffering? Because it's, it's probably going to go from bad to worse and it's going to go from ostracism to physical, so what are you going to do with that? And so, in that setting, learning how to respond in non-violent love towards the other is the option, right. So, there's, there's a non-violence theme going through this book.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:12**

And it's that you're not doing violence to someone else, but you're also not doing violence to yourself. And that's one of those places where I think this author really gets what's happening inside people as they're dealing with this becoming more and more constant scrutiny of the people around them, and suspicion, and, you know, the little slights, and the, as you said, the gossip and the building up of them as other, as to be, to be seen as dangerous, so.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 30:50**

Yeah, I mean, if you really want to see what this looks like in practice, you know, read, read the works of Martin Luther King, Jr. and pay attention to the civil rights movement. This is exactly what Martin Luther King tried to advocate. There are, there are kinds of suffering we have to endure patiently and

non-violently in order to gain the moral high ground that we already have, in order to demonstrate the moral high...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 31:15

To claim it in effect.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 31:17

Yeah. So, the problem is, you can use anything in horrible ways. And so, texts like that, used to keep, keep women in some kind of bad state of submission and violence or whatever, that's, that's simply, that's simply biblical abuse. It's using the Bible to abuse people with and needs to be called out as such, and it does violence to the text too. So, so, go ahead, Charmaine...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 31:43

So, I think...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 31:43

...the other issue is the gender issue, right?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 31:45

Well, we'll get there. But I think one of the things that, that will be helpful, it just, this is another context piece, is to, I'll just, one of the passages that I think really help us to capture what their situation is. We've already talked a little bit about their, their standing in the culture and what's happening. And they're becoming this group that everyone is kind of like, hummm...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 32:16

Who are these weirdos?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 32:17

Who are these weirdos? And, you know, are they going to put us in bad standing with Roman officials? You know, are they gonna teach strange things to our children? You know, all of those kinds of things. And so, here we are. We've, this is, I think, captures a feel for what their circumstance is. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles..." Wow, two really feeling-laden words; aliens, that you don't belong, exiles, you've, you are not in the, the land that you would choose to be in. And so, here's probably talking about the idea of the kingdom of God. You are exiles from the kingdom of God, but you're also aliens, seen as aliens where you are. So, "I urge you to abstain from the desires of the flesh, that wage war against the soul." And I'm going to come back to that in a little bit, because I think that first line, "desires of the flesh", people always go to the sex questions, right? And I don't think that's what this is about at all. And then...

**Karin Peter** 33:28

I was thinking, sex, drugs and rock and roll, but that was just my interpretation of that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:33**

I'm gonna give us another one to deal with, it, that I think fits the situation even better. So, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles..." So, even though they're Gentile Christians, they are using again this, this Jewish idea of those who are in the covenant with God and those who are outside. So, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that though they may malign you as evildoers..." I mean, that's what they're saying, that you're doing bad stuff. "...they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when He comes to judge...For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of a, so whether of the empire as supreme, or of governors as sent by him..." God, "...to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right, you should silence the ignorance of the foolish." You know, those people who are saying bad things about you, "As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor." So, whoa, there's a whole bunch of stuff in here. There's this whole idea of accepting the authority of every human institution, including the emperor and your governors. And there's fear God, you know, or, here be in awe of God, love God. Honor the emperor. It's like you can see this, this line that they're having to walk. And it's like, okay, where, Jesus hasn't returned, okay? And here we are in this situation where we want to keep living this way, this following Christ way, but we're having to figure out, how do we live with people who don't trust us, who don't like what we believe, who, who are afraid of us? And so, in effect, what it's saying is, you need to be the best citizens of your town, or your village, or your city, that you can be. You be better, better citizens than anybody else. You follow the, the necessary conventions as best as anyone can, so that no one can actu-, in actuality, bring any charges against you that, you know. So don't make things harder for yourself. Fit in, but be really, really good at living by Roman law and convention where you are. So, this is about survival of the church, and maybe eventually survival for their own lives. But they're having to figure out, so how do we not perpetuate the distrust and fear that people have, or the anger, or the hate of when people think you're too different? So, so that's, this is kind of the main issue here that they're having to deal with. And so, we'll, we start to see the going back on some of the radical freedom that they had experienced early on when, as Paul was talking about women leaders and, and, as well as men leaders.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 37:12**

And there's neither slave nor free...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:13**

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 37:12**

...like in Galatians, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:15**

And yeah, and so, but here, what they're having to prove is that they are not evil doers, that they, there's no reason to be suspicious of them. And so, they're having to lean the other way, and say, okay, we got to show that we're gonna follow the rules, you know, the societal rules, the ones that, that, that we can, that, the best that we can. So, I think this is just an interesting place and where I would go with the desires of the flesh, I think that's about anger. I think that's about rage. I think that's about wanting

to get back at people who are saying bad things about you, and the want to have retribution and revenge for people who are spoiling your, how you're seen, your reputation, and it really fits well. But what, what the desires of the flesh, you know, lots of us can imagine being misunderstood and just, just wanting to get back and say, you have no idea what you're talking about, and, you know, argue people into submission, or, you know, maybe physically, but...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 38:22**

And this is an example of where the author knows some Pauline language and concepts and is using them the way Paul would use them. For Paul, flesh doesn't have to do with physicality. Flesh has to do with self-centered behavior, right, self-focused behavior. So that's exactly what I think's being described there. So now that, that context piece is really important than for understanding the, the difficult, the difficult backtracking on gender that goes on in 1 Peter. And so, our point here is going to be we want to understand what is the letter saying, and why is it saying it, and in what setting? But that doesn't mean then once we've understood that, we do what the letter says, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:05**

Well, because first and foremost, we don't think scripture is like words right out of God's mouth that we're supposed to align with. These are people writing about their experience with God, Christ's Spirit, and, and trying to figure out how do we keep living with God? And so, these are, these are their experience, not words that we're supposed to impose upon each other.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 39:33**

And so, maybe we should go to the, those texts in 1 Peter 3 that...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:36**

Sure, I'll do that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 39:37**

...that made, made Karin twitch earlier.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:42**

And as you say, it's, it's good to, at times to...hang out. Let me just try to share screen again...There we go. All right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 39:55**

All right. So, keeping in mind the context piece, the author does do some, I would say, I would call it gender backtracking. And this has had some negative consequences in centuries. But part of the negative consequences have arisen by uses of scripture that treat scripture as simply an oracle and not human literature struggling to understand the divine human experience, and then also not, not remembering or understanding original context, which is a modern historical idea, so we can't blame ancient medieval people for not getting that, but, but now that we know how to do that, we need to do it. And so, what we've got here then is in...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:41**

Do you want me to go ahead and read it?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 40:41**

Yeah, why don't we go ahead and read it, Charmaine.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:43**

So, this is chapter 2:18, to roughly 24. "Slaves accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. For it is a credit to you, if being aware of God, you endure pain, while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to you this, for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judge, judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds, you have been healed." And then right after that, is the part about, "Wives in the same way, except the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of you, some of them, do not obey the word," meaning aren't Christian, "they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourself outwardly..." And it goes into what not to do, you know, fancy braids and gold ornaments and blah, blah, blah, blah, doesn't say anything about eyeliner or earrings, so we're okay. "But rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty, beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight." And then it goes on to talk about husbands. "Husbands..." Oops, oh, I always do this. So sorry, make you dizzy. Oh, one more, "Husbands, in the same way show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing may hinder your prayers." And just, the updated edition of the New Revised Standard Version has a slightly different wording for this last one, which I think is actually going to be helpful for our explanation. "Husbands in the same way show consideration for your wives and your life together, paying honor to the woman - though the weaker vessel, they are joint heirs of the gracious gift of life - so that nothing may hinder your prayers." So that, that, the reason I like that one a little bit better is that there's not, it's just so much clearer, clearer that the women and the men are joint heirs of what God is doing. Whatever the culture is saying about where they are, they're joint, they're in the same, they have the same...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 43:59**

Status?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:59**

Status, but, but more than that, its heirs are receiving something. They're receiving these things at the same level.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 44:07**

They're not getting less, right? Not receiving less, right, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:09**

Women are not receiving less in, you know, the whole idea of heirs. So, you know, this is, this is kind of getting right at those, those three, three different groups that are being spoken to; slaves, wives and husbands.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 44:25**

And so, where we need to go with these passages first of all, is what do we have here in terms in literary terms? And this is very easy to answer. What we have here is what, what we call household codes. And in the ancient world, there's all these wandering Greco-Roman moral philosophers. They wander from town to town. They teach. They, they get disciples. They make money. You know, they're, they're like the, they're like the talk show hosts. They're always giving advice, and it was part of the trade to have memorized lists of things that people in a patriarchal household were supposed to do; husbands do this, wives do this, children do this, slaves do this. You can, the description of women there as having to be kind of quiet and demure and, and not overly adorned. You can find the same stuff in all kinds of pagan writers from antiquity. In other words, this is, there's nothing distinctively Christian there. The author is speaking the stuff of the culture about how, how women should not draw attention to themselves, right?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:35**

Well, one of those things of, you know, don't make this harder for yourself. Don't, don't be provocative in how you appear in, in the culture.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 45:45**

Sometimes, Charmaine, I describe these, these ancient Greco-Roman household codes is kind of like, you know, you don't smoke and you don't chew and you don't go with the girls who do. It's kind of like, it's that kind of stuff. And some of the, some of these, some of these moral philosophers, they have just list after list after list of things that, you know, of how to govern a household. So that's what's being used here. The other thing is this whole thing about the woman being the weaker vessel. Now, where we are at this point is we are in the realm of ancient Aristotelian biology. And the first, the first scholar who got us on this was Bart Ehrman in his *Introduction to the New Testament*. He's very good on this topic. So, ancient Aristotelian biology did not, did not see male and female as two sexes. They thought, there was one sex, male, and that females were, in essence, a kind of mis-formed, or deformed male. The male was the ideal figure, and, Charmaine's laughing. She's looking at me. Now, not me. I'm not talking about me, dear. The male was the ideal figure, and, you know, think about Greek statuary, right, and how male, the male form is portrayed. That's the ideal, and women are less than the ideal because they're different, and they don't have all the things men have, right. So, they, so in other words is, they saw the female as deformed, i.e., weaker, the weaker vessel. And so, this passage is using ancient biology, the biology of the day, to say something to husbands about how they should behave towards wives. Is that our biology? No, it's not. Should this be taught as biology in public schools? No, no, it's not?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:37**

Please no.



**Tony Chvala-Smith 47:38**

No. And so, in other words, the author is using the stuff of the culture to make these statements about how to govern a household. Interestingly, the author does try to Christianize it a little bit and that's where you need to pay attention, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:54**

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 47:54**

Right. So that, and I, I'm really intrigued by the updated edition of our NRSV, what they do here. I'd have to look at the Greek. I'm guessing that they've, they've seen that, that phrase as, "as the weaker sex", as actually connected to the next phrase, and not to the one before it, and that, very likely, is, is quite possible in Greek. So just interesting. So, in other words...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:21**

I'll go back up to...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 48:22**

...we're, we're, we're reading, ancient household management, an ancient household management guide, with some Christian tweakings to it, and also some ancient biology, and we have to recognize this is not the gospel, right. We, in our readings and use of the Bible, we always have to distinguish message from worldview, message from, from cultural trappings, message from the ways people looked at stuff and thought about stuff, and just say, what can we separate out of this? What can, what can we discern from this that might be relevant still. And what we can discern that's relevant here still is, men and women, after all, are co-heirs, right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:09**

Right. There's a mutuality. And even in what husbands are asked to do, to "show consideration in your life together, paying honor", even if they say "weaker sex" or "weaker vessel". But there's still, that's something that might not typically be included, is instructions to men. And here there is this expectancy of there being mutuality. There's another piece here, too, that shows that there's some, there is still some countercultural things that they're hanging on to and one of them is in the, the wives part where it says, you know, it, let's see, "...even if they do not obey the word", so basically saying they're not Christian, you know, even though they may not be Christian. Well, it was most typical and most expected that everyone in the household would take on the religious affiliation of the man, of the master of the house, of the primary male. And here, they are not. This, this author is not suggesting that the woman do that. And even in the part about the slaves, there's an indication that, you know, even though your master may not be Christian, "...though they may be harsh, and they may not see you as a brother..." You know, there again, there's a expectation that you can hold this belief, independent of the people who have power over you, and that's something they haven't relinquished. So, I think that's another piece here that's helpful, is to say, you know, you are independent. You have independent choices about how you know God, how you follow Jesus, and you, and they're not compromising on that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 51:06**

At the same time, if one had to preach on this text, as the lectionary, unfortunately, brought it up on Sunday, and that somehow that was themed scripture, the preacher really does need to say, there's a lot in this text that has a "Don't try this at home" label attached to it, right. This is not direct advice from God. This is an ancient Christian author, in a difficult situation, trying to help soon to be embattled Christian communities figure out how to fit in and not attract attention to them. By the way, this "honor the emperor" would lead me to think this letter is written early in the 90s because by the time you get to, by the time you get to the Book of Revelation, a little later in the 90s, "honor the emperor" means worship the emperor, and the book of Revelation is going to say, no, no, absolutely not. I suspect the author of 1 Peter, when pushed to that, would have said, "no" too, but...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:01**

That wasn't the situation yet.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 52:03**

...not the situation. And basically, the author's trying to say, do your best to fit in, and not draw attention to yourself, but also, at the same time, live, live out your best identity in Christ in the midst of that. So, complicated, complicated stuff, but no...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:17**

Yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 52:17**

... no, no less complicated than our own situations today, so.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:21**

Yeah, and let Christ and the Spirit with you give you the strength to live a different way than, you know, when you really want to fight back and do damage. Let, let Christ help you to not be victim of your own inner violence. I just think there's a whole lot here that, that can be helpful to us in, in our time.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 52:49**

And so, there's, there's actually, I mean, actually, part of our job as interpreters is trying to fish out the actual Good News in a text like this, and there's some actual Good News here, you know, it's though God has acted on behalf of those who society deems as less, God is with them and for them. God's gift elevates. God's gift of new life in Christ elevates people and gives us a status we didn't have before, not, not a status of power over others, but a status of dignity that we didn't have before. And there's, there's always, there's always the need to imitate Christ's way, even sometimes, when that means imitating his, his, his form of suffering. So, there's plenty of Good News in the text, but we have to get by legitimate, our legitimate reactions to text that have been misused,

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:42**

Right, which, you know, we only have to have heard them once for them to be spoiled for us forever because we hear the judgment every time we hear it, or we hear the, the dismissing of, of who we are, or what we should be. So, any, any further questions there, Karin?

**Karin Peter 54:03**

No, but I'll make a comment. It is rather like, if we're going to be, if we're going to use scripture responsibly, then it isn't just a matter of learning to explore the context and the culture of when it was written. We also have to be willing to go back and erase tapes that play, right, in our own minds, and set that aside and try to look at it with new eyes and ears and see if it can say something different. So, there's a responsibility to the hearer and reader of scripture today, to be willing to do that and take personal responsibility in how we use and interpret scripture.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 54:42**

Absolutely, absolutely.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:43**

And we might even get some help from the text about letting go, letting go of our, our anger, even if it's justified. But sometimes our, our anger and our bitterness do us more harm than those who are the ones who, who misuse the scripture in the first place. So yeah, not, not dismissing it at all but, but to say, sometimes we do ourselves injury, by hanging on to the, to the hurts. So, we're going to go into the experience part. And, as always, we will say that when we begin with the awareness that scripture is first human writings, shaped by the author's time and culture, understandings of the universe, of science, of the body, of relationships, and the author's understanding of God. We do not assume that these words were dictated by God to be used to coerce or instruct all future people in how to follow Christ. Rather, we approach scripture as the stories of people and their desire to share their understandings of and their interactions with, with God, with Christ, with the Spirit, in their own lives. They don't want it to be lost, and they want to pass it on, and we are the recipients of their stories. So, we come to scripture with our own stories, in our own time, in our own culture, with our own biases, our own understandings of relationships, and bodies and science, and our own experience with God. But scripture can be a place where we, we read other people's words, or see their experience, and we ask ourselves, is there something here for me? And that's kind of how we approach this experience part. So, we've already talked today about some scriptures that get used to harm the body of Christ, usually for the sake of somebody else having power over, over someone. And, but we do have the opportunity to also look to say, where does this author understand me? Is there something here that can help me grow, let go of some things, hold on to some things? So, there's, we may, you know, this whole idea that, this idea that diminishes women, that they're less than men somehow, and this can raise lots of hackles if we think God dictated or intended these words to be used in this way. But again, we go back to human words come from human realities of the writer. And so, we want to explore what might this writer give us to think, or pray about in our own lives. So, we're going to just go ahead and try and share the screen. You get to see my notes. Experience. So, I'm going to take some of the passages we've already talked about and just add a question to them. So, 1 Peter 2:11-12, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the gentiles so that, though they may align, malign you as evil doers..." So, it goes on from there. But I want us to ask ourselves the question, when has my desire to angrily strike back, to be outraged, to seek retribution or revenge, outweighed my other desires to live peaceably, to let Christ shine through my words and actions? I'll just pause for a minute for us to think about, you know, when have I, that desire to fight back kind of outweighed my desire to live in that more

peaceable way with Christ as my help? And again, these are not questions intended to make us feel bad or guilty, but to start to identify with the realities of the people that the writer is writing to, as they struggle to figure out how to let God help them, to, to show a different way of living and to be, to not compromise what they have committed to. So, here's our, the beginning of those three statements about, "...Slaves accept the authority of your masters with all deference...Wives in the same way except the authority of your husbands and husbands in the same way show consideration for your wives and your life together." So, who of us doesn't need to ask ourself the following question: What old understanding of gender, or gender roles, or body image, or of those who are unfree, you know, think about the slaves in the story, but who in our culture is unfree, whether by incarceration or addiction or they've been intentionally marginalized in our society? They're employed below the living wage, and so they are unfree to live with dignity and, and where have, what of these cultural understandings have I accepted unquestioningly? And here we expand our view of the ways in which we might want to be free of some of the things that our culture tells us about people's worth. And then, as Tony said, there's some Good News in this, in this book, and I've picked three of them. There's a few more, earlier on, but these are from the last three chapters. And this is about advice on practicing Christ-like living in difficult times. So, "Finally, all of you..." and, and you, this has just addressed, slaves, and women and men, and a little bit later, young people, but this is, says, "Finally, all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this, that you were called-that you might inherit a blessing." And then again, to the community, "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever." So already, you can see that what's being given here is encouragement for how to practice loving, how to practice having humility, because you're going to need to have that practice if you're going to live in the society around you when, when things, as things are getting more and more difficult. And then the last one, "And all of you..." again, all, all, all, "And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another." So again, there's this sense of mutuality, not that the men are higher than anybody else. It's calling us back to, when we live with each other we live in a different way, and it's about mutuality and humility in your dealings with one another, "For God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because God cares for you. Discipline yourselves and keep alert." And then it's about the things that will take you off the path. So, these are all statements of encouragement that are to the whole community, to practice Christ-like love and community together, because they're going to need the strength that comes from that. These passages encourage the hearers to practice this life in Christ in their times together. They are all to exercise unity, love, humility, hospitality, service, etc. So, which part or parts of these passages might encourage you or someone you know who is struggling? How would you pray for more of this in your life? So, I'm just going to go back up to the passages for a minute, so you can take a look at them. Which part or parts of these passages might encourage you or someone you know who is struggling? How would you pray for more of whatever that is, in your own life? Amen.

**Karin Peter** 1:05:07

Thank you, Charmaine. And just for our listeners, I'll let them know that mine was the, "...love covers a multitude of sins." I tend to follow Martin Luther's advice and sin boldly. So, the love covers a multitude of those is always helpful in my experience. So, any last thoughts or last comments about 1 Peter before we end our episode today?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:38**

Difficult texts are worth taking extra time with. You may be surprised at what you unearth, or what's unearthed in you as you take the time. cursory, superficial, shallow readings and uses don't let scripture be scripture for us. And so, we have to sometimes get by our justifiable discomfort with the text, or also sometimes get by our liking of a text, to get down to what's deeper there. So deeper, deeper, deeper. That's, that's what, that's what we're here for.

**Karin Peter 1:06:10**

All right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:06:11**

I think the other thing I would add is just when you're reading passages like this, or books like this, where there's some, some gnarly things in it that you'd rather not, you know, have to read again, try compassion. Try compassion for the people that they were originally written for. And so rather than it being about you, practice imagining their need for God's encouragement and love in a really difficult time in this case, and see if that doesn't open some doors in you.

**Karin Peter 1:06:47**

Well, that's a wonderful lead in to our closing thought today, Charmaine, so, thank you. Our closing thought is from John Coltrane, who was a black American jazz musician. He lived in a time of oppression and suffering because of his race. He happens to be canonized as St. John Coltrane in the African Orthodox Church, which has a interesting story of its own. You can Google that and learn about that if you'd like. But this is the quote from Coltrane: "I want to be a force for real good. In other words, I know that there are bad forces, forces that bring suffering to others and misery to the world, but I want to be the opposite force. I want to be the force which is truly for good." So, with his words, which I think the writer of 1 Peter would approve, we will close. And to our listeners, we hope you will join us for our next episode which is the thrilling look at the Book of Revelation. I can hardly wait, but until then, I said sarcastically, but until then, I'm Karin Peter, as always, your host of this "New'Brew" series and I'm with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. Thanks so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson 1:08:26**

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