"To This You Were Called": Discipleship, Suffering, and Social Identity in First Peter

Shane Patrick Gormley

Loyola University of Chicago Graduate School

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

“TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED”:
DISCIPLESHIP, SUFFERING, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN FIRST PETER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY
SHANE PATRICK GORMLEY
CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 2023
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I’ve been told that I am an external processor. Writing this dissertation has caused me to “think out loud” at length to many people who have offered their time and encouragement in many ways. They each deserve my thanks.

First, I wish to express a deep and abiding gratitude to my committee, who have borne the brunt of my external processing. I thank them for their patience and fortitude throughout this process, for their dedication to this project, and for their confidence in me as a scholar. Dr. Olivia Stewart Lester joined the committee as this project was already in progress, but the entire study has benefited from her keen insight, curiosity, and attention, not least through the generosity of her time and her incomparable ability to ask the right questions. Dr. Troy Martin, the primo-Petrine expert among us, has provided a model of discipline in attending to an “enigmatic” text like First Peter, and I am thankful for the many ways he has guided and challenged this project along the way. Dr. Christopher Skinner has been a constant support to me as a student and scholar, offering not only his time and expertise to move this project along, but also his humor, kindness, and enthusiasm to encourage me at every stage. Dr. Edmondo Lupieri, my director, who originally thought he was getting a project on the Gospel of Matthew, has exhibited steadfast devotion to see this primo-Petrine study through from the very beginning. It has been a gift to work through this rigorous and rewarding process with Dr. Lupieri, not only for the wisdom I have gained having such a director, but also because he (along with the other members of this committee) has never failed to take account of my well-being, and that of my family,
throughout this process, sincerely asking, “How is it all?” and offering a hearty “Coraggio!” as we moved from step to step. The strengths of this project are stronger because of this committee.

I would also like to acknowledge several ways in which Loyola University Chicago itself has made this project possible. I thank the Arthur J. Schmitt Foundation for the Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship in Leadership and Service, the Graduate School for the Graduate Teaching Fellowship, and the Theology Department for the John Cardinal Cody Endowed Chair Assistantship; each of these has funded a large portion of my work over these last ten years and provided me with rich experiences in research, teaching, and service. I also thank the Graduate School and the Chicago Society of Biblical Research for various travel grants throughout this process, making it more possible to present and receive valuable feedback on the research that now appears throughout this project. The faculty and staff of Cudahy Library, especially the Interlibrary Loan department and the inestimable Jane Currie, have assisted me with diligence and care. I thank Dr. Wendy Cotter, the Theology Graduate Program Director who extended me the offer of admission to the program, and subsequent directors Dr. Sandra Sullivan Dunbar and Dr. Christopher Skinner, and Theology Department Chairs Dr. Susan Ross and Dr. Robert Di Vito, for their leadership and encouragement throughout my time in this program. Finally, I thank Joanne Brandstrader, our department’s administrator, for all her support and assistance in bringing this program to a close.

During my time in Chicago, I have also been gifted with the opportunity to pastor two parishes in the throes of transition, and each has been a challenging opportunity not only to grow as a priest, but also to externally process my scholarship—usually productively—as a preacher and teacher. Church of the Ascension took me on as a curate for two years and I am thankful to
Fr. David Cobb for his friendship and mentoring during that time, and to the many supportive parishioners I have had the benefit of staying in touch with since then. I began serving Saint Peter’s Episcopal Church on a four-month contract and ended up staying for six years: words cannot describe how grateful I am for the opportunity to have been a part of this community and for the support they offered as I labored through this project. My thanks, especially, to Dcn. Garth Howe, Dcn. Nancy Meyer, Mr. Bryan Matias, Ms. Betsy Lent, the Carpenter Family, and the many members of this parish for their continued support over the years. Thanks, as well, to Bishops Jeffrey Lee, Chilton Knudsen, and Paula Clark, for their leadership and pastoral care, along with their staff, especially Mtr. Courtney Reed, Mtr. Andrea Mysen, and Mr. Tom Camell.

Several friends and colleagues have watched this project develop and have suffered my external processing longer than should have been necessary. Dr. Jeffrey Tripp was appointed to be a “peer mentor” upon my admission to the program in 2013; I could not have asked for a better introduction to Loyola, or a better friend by my side these last ten years. Dr. Jonathan Hatter, Mr. Joshua King, and Ms. Catherine Buescher have been constant writing companions over the last several years, and to them I owe not only much progress, but much sanity and laughter as well. My fellow graduate students have made this work better by their active participation in our departmental colloquia: never did I imagine that a doctoral program could be as collegial, cooperative, and uplifting as this one has been. I thank them all for their sincere interest and effort, even when it meant reading about First Peter “yet again.” Two other groups of friends also deserve mention for their constant friendship, support, and encouragement: Dr. Anna Ullmann, Mr. John Ullmann, and Dr. Stephanie Kucsera; Ms. Emily Egan and Ms. Elisabeth Loren; and Fr. Noah Lawson, Fr. Benjamin Hankinson, and Fr. Evan Simington. I also owe
thanks to Dr. Mark Lester who not only offered much friendship and support along the way, but somehow succeeded in making me a Sixers fan (though, time will tell); and to Mr. Kevin Fischer, who helped me to keep reading fiction throughout this process, too.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities I have had to teach, both to undergraduates at Loyola and to seminary students at my alma mater, Nashotah House Theological Seminary. I believe that the craft of teaching has made this project more positively eclectic and therefore more creative; given its subject matter, I also believe that this project has made me a better teacher. I owe a debt of thanks to Dean Garwood Anderson for the invitation to teach at Nashotah House and to Dr. Jim Watkins for continuing to invite me back. Most of all, my students have taught me much about what it means to be a teacher and a scholar, and I am grateful for their continued interest in this process and their support each term. They are to be commended for their perseverance through more lessons on the Catholic Epistles (and, predictably, First Peter) than most seminary students receive in surveys of the New Testament.

I wish to thank a few additional conversation partners. Dr. Travis Williams, whose work is cited often throughout this project, proved quite amenable to many conversations throughout this process, providing multiple resources and even a sounding board from time to time. I am very thankful that he has become a friend. Dr. J. Richard Middleton and Dr. George Parsenios, advisors during my B.A. and Th.M. programs, have remained friends and sources of goodwill, encouragement, and humor over these many years. Their sincere approaches to both faith and scholarship have continued to inspire my own. Dr. Garwood Anderson has been my academic mentor since seminary, watching me grow in my work and ministry more than perhaps anyone else. Words fail me to express adequately what I owe him for encouraging me to move forward.
in graduate school; for celebrating my successes and helping me persevere through failures; for providing a model of integrity, compassion, and service as a teacher, leader, and disciple; for providing rides to both airports and hospitals; and for much more. He and his wife Dawn have offered a home away from home countless times, and to them both I am incredibly grateful. It was Gar who originally asked if I was interested in pursuing graduate studies beyond seminary. After letting me speak—uninterrupted—for about twenty minutes he calmly asked, “Shane, has anyone ever told you you’re an external processor?” I am grateful to Dawn Anderson, additionally, for her assistance in proofreading the final drafts of this project.

Finally, Dr. Leslie Smebak, MD. Leslie and I began dating only weeks before I defended the proposal for this dissertation. Since then, I would say our relationship has gone through as many changes as the outline for this study. I cannot express how much her support, compassion, and patience has contributed to the execution and completion of this project. This last year, most of all, as we awaited the arrival of our first child and faced new and surprising challenges along the way, Leslie has never failed to express her excitement about the progress I make and to share in its struggles. Especially as we journey into parenthood together—having handed a three-week-old Anders William over to her so that I could complete this very paragraph—I know that I could ask for no better partner with whom I am blessed to walk side-by-side.

This project is dedicated to my teachers, which I find fitting for a study of First Peter as a summons to discipleship. Good teachers can bring out the best in their students, not only by teaching them, e.g., about “social scientific criticism” and “Greek and Roman cultural backgrounds” (without which this study would fall flat), but by modeling what it means to be good people. This has been my experience with my teachers—especially those from whom I
have learned about the Bible and theology—and I therefore dedicate this project with gratitude to them for not only teaching me how to be a good student, but for inspiring me to be a good person: Casey Davis, Tim Dwyer, J. Richard Middleton, Doug Cullum, Scott Caton, David Basinger, Gar Anderson, Eric Tully, Tom Holtzen, Joseph Kucharski, George Parsenios, Ross Wagner, Shane Berg, Edmondo Lupieri, Wendy Cotter, Bob Di Vito, Pauline Viviano, Cam von Wahlde, Chris Skinner, Olivia Stewart Lester, and Troy Martin. I also offer this work in memory of my teachers who have died over the past five years—Fr. Daniel Westberg, Fr. Steven Peay, Fr. Tom Tobin, and Fr. Mark McIntosh—and hope that what they have taught me is honored in this work.
For my teachers,
who have made me a better student—and therefore a better person
There is no follower at second hand.
— Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*


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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

All primary texts throughout this study are cited according to the conventions of SBLHS^2. The first time a text appears in each chapter, the translation and edition are noted alongside the text. Where SBLHS^2 does not provide a convention for a particular author or text, I adopt the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed.).

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<td>Academia Biblica</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJEC</td>
<td>Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity</td>
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<td>ANTC</td>
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<td>BJSP</td>
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<td>Biblical Theology of the New Testament</td>
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<td>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
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<td>Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft</td>
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<td><em>Taiwan Journal of Theology</em></td>
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<td>UJT</td>
<td>Understanding Jesus Today</td>
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<td><em>WA</em></td>
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ABSTRACT

At the center of First Peter’s rhetoric stands an exhortation to “follow” in Christ’s footsteps (2:21). Several scholars have suggested (sometimes off-handedly or in a singular footnote) that this specific exhortation utilizes the technical language of “discipleship,” but only to support a particular piece of the letter’s paraenesis (2:18–25).

I contend that such a suggestion, while a helpful place to start, does not go far enough. With this study, I propose that we may read First Peter comprehensively as a summons to discipleship in accord with ancient understandings of education, exemplified in the multifaceted system of Hellenistic paideia. I argue that First Peter’s social strategy consists in calling its audiences to (re)embody the social role of disciples or students in relation to a teacher, and that this is its primary means of encouraging those audiences to endure their present suffering. I demonstrate this with attention to three principal features: (1) the letter’s exhortations to maintain loyalty (πίστις) toward God amid the specifically verbal forms of suffering that its audiences face; (2) the depiction of the audiences’ relationship with God as one characterized by the reciprocity of benefaction (χάρις); and (3) exhortations within First Peter to habituate behaviors and attitudes understood as standard expectations of students in relation to their teachers throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Together, these aspects of First Peter’s rhetoric lead me to conclude that its first-century Anatolian audiences would understand themselves to be addressed by this letter as disciples of a teacher—and summoned to act accordingly.
Reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship, I contend, illumines the nature of First Peter’s exhortations in at least two significant ways. First, the educational context of discipleship makes sense of First Peter’s distinctive emphasis on suffering by recognizing it as part of the letter’s pedagogical program. The pedagogical context of ancient discipleship, in other words, assists us to understand First Peter’s presentation of its audiences’ suffering as a consequence of “doing good” and as in accordance with God’s will; First Peter may therefore be read as an attempt to “make sense” of its audiences’ suffering and to cope with it appropriately. Second, given that “disciple” constitutes an established social role or position throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, I suggest that this comprehensive reading of First Peter is further illumined by a nuanced “social identity approach” to the letter. First Peter’s summons to discipleship can be understood as a construction of its audiences’ social identity through its emphasis on the social self-identification of “disciple.” This social identity not only becomes a means of solidifying their commitment to God and Christ, but it also provides a means by which they may endure their present circumstances. Together, these points demonstrate the efficacy and value of reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship, provide avenues for considering the letter’s significance among the dynamic corpus of early Christian literature, and promote First Peter’s continued relevance for the academy and Christian communities today.
INTRODUCTION

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE SOCIAL STRATEGY OF FIRST PETER: A PROPOSAL

Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers; they are strategic answers, stylized answers.… These strategies size up the situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude towards them.

—Kenneth Burke (1973: 1)

First Peter has been called many things;¹ a “summons to discipleship,” as far as I am aware, is not one of them. With this study I am proposing that the concept of “discipleship”—ancient discipleship—in fact provides a comprehensive framework for reading and interpreting First Peter’s exhortations to Christ-followers beleaguered by suffering. I will contend that First Peter itself invites its first-century Anatolian audiences, in several ways, to read it as a “summons to discipleship,” and that those audiences would readily have heard themselves addressed by this

¹ E.g., First Peter has been regarded as “the storm centre of New Testament Studies” (Neill 1964: 343) and yet relegated to “second-class status” through “biased oversight and benign neglect” (Elliott 1976: 243, 254). Scholars have deemed it “an expansion or restatement of Pauline texts” (Beare 1970: 44), “une Épître de la Tradition” (Spicq 1966: 15), “the product of a Petrine tradition transmitted by Petrine tradents of a Petrine circle” (Elliott 1976: 248), and much in between. Some have found it to be “one of the noblest books in the New Testament,” representing “the genuine and pure Gospel” (Luther [LW 30:4 = WA 12:260]: der edlisten bucher eyn ym newen [sic] Testament; das rechte lauttere Evangelion); “full of apostolic authority and majesty” (Erasmus, quoted in Selwyn 1947: 4 from Erasmi Novum Testamentum, argumentum in I Petr.: plenam autoritatis ac maiestatis apostolicae [my translation]); “pastorally attractive” and “vigorously confident” (Kelly 1969: 1); “a microcosm of Christian faith and duty” (Selwyn 1947: 1); and even “the ideal choice” of New Testament letters to have while “shipwrecked on a desert island” (Marshall 1991: 12). Jobes strongly asserts that First Peter remains “a relevant and thought-provoking book for all times and places” (2002: 4). At the same time, others have determined that First Peter exhibits an “ideological imperialism” as “a supersessionist text” that “plunders the resources of a marginalized group” (Bauman-Martin 2007: 146, 149–50); First Peter has been used to command submission “to the yoke of various unjust social institutions” and “as a scriptural justification for violence against women in the present, in the same way that it gave justification to violence against African Americans under slavery in the past” (Corley 1994: 349). It should be no wonder that Troy Martin calls First Peter “enigmatic” (1992a: 1) and that David Horrell describes its legacy as “ambivalent” (2008: 112).
letter “as disciples.” Reading First Peter from this perspective, I will demonstrate, enables us (alongside those first-century audiences) to make sense of two interrelated features of the letter’s rhetoric: (1) its distinctive presentation of suffering in relation to good works and God’s will and (2) its concerted effort to construct its audiences’ social identity as “Christ-followers” and “Christians.” This study comprises, therefore, an investigation of how First Peter functions in the lives of its audiences—what I designate as the letter’s social strategy.2

In order to commence this investigation, some preliminary remarks are in order. With this introductory chapter I will establish a foundation for my proposal in the following ways: (1) I will define what I mean by the terms “(social) strategy” and “discipleship”; understanding each term is necessary for identifying both the methodological framework of this project and relevant conversation partners within primo-Petrine research;3 (2) I will describe the trajectory and scope

2 Throughout this project I will use the plural “audiences” to emphasize the wide distribution envisioned by the letter (1:1) and the variety of subjects addressed (e.g., 2:13, 18; 3:1, 8, 8; 5:1, 5). This helps to avoid imagining or rendering the audiences of First Peter as a uniform entity. I will also employ the phrase “Christ-follower(s)” as a designation for those addressed by First Peter since (1) this is a description employed by First Peter itself (2:21) and (2) the language of “following” is closely associated in a variety of ways with the practice of discipleship, which is the focus of this study. Additionally, since the term “Christian” is also utilized by First Peter (4:16)—though it likely originated as a label used disparagingly by outsiders (see Elliott 2000: 790), and First Peter effectively “claims” the label in an act of “social creativity” (see Horrell 2007b: 376–80; 2013: 207–9)—I will occasionally use the term “Christianity” to refer to the wider movements of “Christ-followers” of which First Peter is one piece (however distinctive or representative we discern it to be). This is not intended to conflate the varieties of Christian thought, practice, and experience in the latter half of the first century CE, nor is it to suggest that Christianity represented something wholly different, distinguishable, or separated from Judaism (in all its variety) by this time. When needed, therefore, I will employ the terms “Christian” and “Christianity” simply for their conciseness and functionality, but with the particularities of the subject under discussion in mind as well. For a brief discussion of this issue, see Horrell 2020: 12–18.

3 The label “primo-Petrine” (or “Primopetrine”) does not seem to have “caught on” among scholars of First Peter, though it is used frequently by Kelly Liebengood (2014; 2023) and occasionally by others. Because my study of First Peter will proceed without considering its relationship to Second Peter (as does a large swath of scholarship on First Peter), the label “Petrine” seems too broad to denote the parameters of what I intend to do. I adopt the label “primo-Petrine,” as far as it is necessary, as analogous to “deutero-Pauline.” At the same time, I note that my use of the title “First Peter” (and the abbreviation 1 Pet) simply follows the conventions of SBL Style (see SBLHS 8.2). I do not intend to use the ordinal “First” to underscore a canonical status or special relationship of First Peter to Second Peter—though there will be opportunities to account for the implications of First Peter’s canonical and authoritative status in both the academy and Christian churches throughout this study.
of my argument over the following five chapters; and (3) I will state my working assumptions regarding the authorship (pseudonymous) and literary genre (paraenetic epistle) of First Peter and discuss their relationship to reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship.

A Social Strategy of Discipleship: Methodology and Terms

I am proposing that First Peter utilizes the concept of “discipleship” as a part of its “social strategy” for addressing its audiences. With the present discussion, I will clarify what I mean by these terms. I will begin with the word “strategy” and describe the intellectual and methodological framework of this project. Following this, I will discuss the specific nuance of attending to a text’s “social strategy” and comment briefly on the attempts of some primo-Petrine scholars to identify such strategies at work in First Peter. Finally, I will describe how I employ the words “discipleship” and “disciple” throughout this project and summarize how these elements provide a conceptual framework for understanding First Peter’s social strategy.

Locating Textual Strategies

Before arguing that discipleship forms a significant portion of First Peter’s (social) strategy, it will be helpful to define what a strategy is. To do so, I begin by locating my project under the auspices of social-scientific criticism. The definition provided by John Elliott is worth quoting at length.

Social-scientific criticism of the Bible is that phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences. As a component of the historical-critical method of exegesis, social-scientific criticism investigates biblical texts as meaningful configurations of language intended to communicate between composers and audiences…. Social-scientific criticism, in its turn, studies the text as both a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural settings in which the text was produced. Its aim is the determination of the meaning(s) explicit and implicit in the text, meanings made possible and shaped by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and intended audiences. (1993: 7–8, emphasis mine)
Social-scientific criticism is carried out through a variety of approaches and with various goals determined by its many practitioners. That said, Elliott’s definition helpfully summarizes the central tenets of social-scientific approaches, regardless of their particular perspective or goal: there are aspects of a text’s meaning and significance that are properly elicited through attention to its social and cultural environments. Such environments, properly understood, provide “frameworks of meaning” (Elliott 1993: 8) within which texts can communicate effectively; attending to these frameworks enables us to understand their communicative potential.

Rather than recount the history, assumptions, and methods of social-scientific approaches writ-large (a task undertaken by several introductions and summary essays), I will focus this discussion on the aspects of a social-scientific approach most relevant to my investigation of First Peter’s strategy. Social-scientific criticism is well-positioned to ask (and answer) questions...
about a text’s strategy, as several of its practitioners have demonstrated (see below). In order to demonstrate this, it is worth augmenting the social-scientific approach by acknowledging its similarity (and, at times, indebtedness) to important theories of language and rhetoric. In what follows, I will briefly survey aspects of the work of Kenneth Burke, Vernon Robbins, and Jeannine Brown to underscore the importance of a social-scientific focus on the communicative potential of a text like First Peter.

Kenneth Burke’s emphasis on the relationship between a text’s situation and strategy, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is a helpful place to begin. As Burke documents, the term “strategy” typically carries a militaristic connotation: strategies are developed to “organize” armies, “fight” enemies,” and “maneuver” forces in response to threats, problems, and challenges. The metaphor, Burke suggests, is apt for rhetorical and aesthetical criticisms.

For surely, the most highly alembicated and sophisticated work of art, arising in complex civilizations, could be considered as designed to organize and command the army of one’s thoughts and images, and so to organize them that one “imposes upon the enemy the time and place and conditions for fighting preferred by oneself.” One seeks to “direct the larger movement and operations” in one’s campaign of living. One “maneuvers,” and the maneuvering is an “art.”

Are not the final results one’s “strategy”? (1973: 298, emphasis mine)

Burke proposes that any piece or corpus of literature (or art, broadly conceived) can create a “strategy” for life. Of interest here is the basic principle that “works of art”—a category broad
enough to include proverbs, novels, poetry, biblical literature, and more—have something to say and a reason for saying it; how they say it is what we may call their “strategy.” By means of a strategy texts “take stock of” and address a situation; in Burke’s words, a strategy “sizes things up” and then “gives us a word for it” (1973: 1, 300–1).

Foundational for Burke is the conviction that texts are “pragmatic.” Using the term “poem” to include “any work of critical and imaginative cast” (1973: 1), Burke proposes that a poem’s structure is to be described most accurately by thinking always of the poem’s function. It assumes that the poem is designed to “do something” for the poet and his readers, and that we can make the most relevant observations about its design by considering the poem as the embodiment of this act. (1973: 89)

A “Burkean criticism” of literature, in Jeffrey Crafton’s words, “is concerned with how an author uses language to act upon self, community and world.” Texts are “instruments of change and should be interpreted as such” (1993: 431). Crafton continues,

Burke would have the critic discover a text’s function: how an author uses words to create a symbolic orientation to a situation, and how a text invites an audience to participate in this world. The Burkean approach directs the critical eye toward the way literature proposes and promotes alternative visions of reality. (431–32)

This “symbolic orientation” and invitation to “participate” are discerned through attention to a text’s language (its “rhetoric”; see Crafton 1993: 434–35) and to “social situations outside” the text (see Burke 1973: 301–4), both of which provide parameters for the text’s potential strategies by which it identifies, defines, presents, and responds to a relevant situation. Attention to both of these facets (rhetoric and social environment) enables the critic “to reconstruct the motivational design of a text” (Crafton 1993: 436). I will demonstrate throughout this study that First Peter is

response. Thus, Burke cites the example of Flaubert’s Madame Bovary, which inspires the term “Bovarysme” (300). Or, to give another example, the work of Franz Kafka inspires the adjective “Kafkaesque.”
indeed a text that “acts” and “does something” and that any interpretation of this letter stands to benefit from attention to its “strategy” for action.

The rhetorical theory and criticism of Kenneth Burke has, unfortunately, “had little impact upon biblical criticism” (Crafton 1993: 430); therefore, a “Burkean” reading of First Peter and its strategy would require a more detailed introduction.9 Instead, I will turn to two other scholars whose approaches to biblical texts significantly echo the thought of Burke and intersect with the field of social-scientific criticism.

Vernon Robbins interacts briefly with Burke in developing and articulating his “socio-rhetorical” approach to biblical interpretation (see Robbins 2009: xxii, 5–6, 7, 9, 16 n. 21; 1996b: 33–34). Robbins analyzes biblical texts as “tapestries” made up of several textures. The meanings of a text are created, according to Robbins, by the interaction or dialogue between these textures, all of which combine to form “myriads of networks of meaning and effects.”10 This is fundamental to the nature of language “as a social product, possession, and tool,” and must be kept in mind as we approach and interpret biblical texts as well. Robbins writes,

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9 Crafton cites two possible reasons for the lack of interest in “Burkean” thought on the part of biblical scholars: (1) The rhetorical interests of New Testament scholars have been focused on the categories of classical rhetoric, and (2) Burke’s writings have been perceived by many as “idiosyncratic (some say cryptic)” (Crafton 1993: 430 n. 6). It is widely acknowledged that Burke’s writings do not comprise a “systematic rhetorical theory,” but this should not preclude us from recognizing “consistent, coherent, intelligible, and grounded” thinking across his works (433). For defenses of the “soundness” of Burkean rhetorical thought, see Crafton 1993: 433–37; Hochmuth 1962; Burke 1973: 66–89, 297, 302–3. Crafton’s essay, especially, is a helpful introduction to the tenets of Burke’s writings and their applicability to biblical interpretation; see also Wuellner 1987: 460–63. In a more recent summary of “Rhetorical Criticism” in New Testament studies, Clifton Black cites Burke’s work favorably, but as “less systematic and more allusive” than others’ (2010: 175).

10 These “textures” include a text’s “inner texture,” or what we might simply refer to as its “literary-rhetorical features and patterns”; its “intertexture,” meaning its references to things (including other texts) outside of the texts; its “social and cultural texture,” by which it participates in or interacts with the systems and structures of the world outside the text (in forms of acceptance, rejection, transformation, or something else); its “ideological texture,” by which it establishes “alliances and conflicts” consistent with its own point of view; and its “sacred texture,” by which it articulates its understanding of relationships between “the human and the divine.” This summary is adapted and abbreviated from Gowler 2010: 194–95.
Language is at all times interacting with a myriad of networks of meaning and effects in the world. Texts exist in the world, and we exist in the world…. [A] text is not simply a “thing unto itself” but is also a “message which is read.” As a message, it is a communication. To be what it truly is, a text must be read, which may mean “read aloud.”

Social, cultural, and ideological meanings at work in the environment of reading—whether aloud or privately to oneself—are the medium through which the text becomes communication. (1996b: 19)

Burke describes the same phenomenon as language’s “essential” and “wholly realistic” function, since language is “a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (1969: 43). Burke’s point, and Robbins’s, is that the audiences of a text should be envisioned as receiving that text in a manner consistent with their “social, cultural, and ideological” locations. Unless there are indications to the contrary, audiences receive words and visualize concepts in ways that are already familiar to them; a text’s employment of words, images, and concepts should be studied with this assumption at the fore. The study of “Rhetoric,” by which Burke means a text’s strategic deployment of language, must therefore include not only “the art of persuasion,” but also “the means of persuasion available for any given situation,” including any and all “resources” available to authors and audiences for the sake of effective communication—what Burke calls “rhetoric as ‘addressed’” (1969: 46).

11 By “read aloud,” I take Robbins to refer to a text’s “public” reception, or the text as intended for public, rather than for individual or private, consumption.

12 Robbins is contrasting his approach to texts as “tapestries” with previous (and still prevailing) approaches to texts as “mirrors and windows.” The latter approaches, according to Robbins, “treat all of the characters, actions, and episodes in a text as mirrors that reflect back and forth on one another. All the reflections create the world ‘inside the text.’” The text as a whole then provides a “window” into that world. “This metaphor of mirrors and windows has served a very useful purpose, but it is my opinion,” Robbins asserts, “that it is now causing us problems. The problem is that it separates the ‘internal’ mind of a text from the ‘external’ body of the world in a manner that is not true either to the texts we read or to the lives we live.” This separation produces “a polarity between literature and history that is part of the dualism between mind and body in modern thought and philosophy,” and it is this dualism that overlooks “the nature of language as a social product” (1996b: 19).
Jeannine Brown also draws attention to the importance of these “means” and “resources” within a text’s social and cultural contexts. Although she does not describe her approach to biblical texts as “socio-rhetorical” (or social-scientific), her broader hermeneutical program highlights several of the same tenets underlying the work of Robbins and Burke, especially regarding the communicative power of texts and the importance of attending to their sociocultural settings.\(^{13}\) Brown writes that “meaning is predicated on contextual assumptions shared between author and original recipients.” Moreover, “communicative intention can be discerned only in light of the mutually held assumptions between author and audience. So, a respectful reading of the text involves exploring these assumptions related to social setting” (2021: 189–90). Adequately accounting for a text’s ability to communicate requires our attention to its strategy—its means and resources, along with its arrangement of them, for coherently addressing its audiences for the sake of achieving its purposes. Thus, the persuasive (rhetorical) intent of a New Testament epistle like First Peter (and our understanding of it) depends heavily on the knowledge shared between those at either end of the communication—knowledge to which we become privy through our attention to the text, its rhetorical shape and movement, and its sociocultural contexts.

For Burke, Robbins, Brown, and the wider field of social-scientific criticism, reading biblical texts as communicative acts must be both “rhetorical” and “social.” This is a quintessential aspect of Robbins’s socio-rhetorical method. As Rudoph Tate summarizes,

\(^{13}\) Much of Brown’s work would typically be classified as “literary critical” and, more specifically, “narrative critical” (see Brown 2002; 2015; 2020). Textual “strategies” are also emphasized by literary and narrative critics, though they are often discussed under the heading of a text’s “discourse,” i.e., “the rhetoric of the narrative, how the story is told” (Powell 1990: 23; see also Chatman 1978; Resseguie 2005: 41–86; Brown 2020: 11–14).
For the socio-rhetorical critic, the focus of interpretation is the text as a cultural, social, ideological, historical, and theological discourse, and the data from these various areas have an intertextual relation with respect to the textual signs. The socio-rhetorical critic, then, understands the term “rhetorical” to refer to the text as a literary object, i.e., a story that must be read, and the term “socio” as referring to the text as a cultural artifact that must be opened “to the past, present, and future.” (2008: 338)

It is by attending to this interaction between a “text” (including its rhetorical shape) and its various contexts (or, for Robbins, its “textures”) that we may fully discern the strategy that it puts to work in the service of its purpose. In Robbins’s own words, such an approach “analyses the text as a strategic statement in a situation characterized by ‘webs of significance’” (2009: 6):

Underlying the method is a presupposition that words themselves work in complex ways to communicate meanings that we only partially understand. It also presupposes that meanings themselves have their meanings by their relation to other meanings…. The interplay among these textures initiates a dialogical environment among multiple modes of perceiving a text and multiple modes for a text to function within the lives of people. (1996a: 4–6)

With this study I will demonstrate how attending to the “tapestry” of First Peter—and especially to its sociocultural “textures”—does more than illumine its setting and purpose; it also reveals a comprehensive and reasonable strategy for enabling Christ-followers to understand and endure their present circumstances characterized by suffering.¹⁴

¹⁴ The preceding discussion should clearly reveal my indebtedness to the work of Robbins, but I hesitate to call my approach “socio-rhetorical” out of respect for the larger program that Robbins himself envisions for this approach to comprise. Because of how comprehensive the program of socio-rhetorical criticism aspires to be, many biblical scholars might (mistakenly) be categorized as “socio-rhetorical” simply because of their interest in more than one “texture” present within a biblical text. For example, “socio-rhetorical” is used by Eerdmans’s Socio-Rhetorical Commentary series (primarily authored by Ben Witherington) to denote an approach that “makes use of insights not just from the social sciences but also from the study of Greco-Roman rhetoric” (Witherington 1995: xii; Witherington explicitly distinguishes this approach from Robbins’s in a corresponding—somewhat dismissive—footnote: “It appears that the term ‘socio-rhetorical was first used by Vernon K. Robbins,” xii n. 8). Gowler describes this as “misleading” and as a “hijacking” of the term “socio-rhetorical” (2010: 193). Again, it is a scholar’s attention to the interaction of a text’s various “textures” that distinguishes Robbins’s approach from other forms of biblical criticism; this “holistic combination of methods and approaches to reading and interpreting texts” (Aune 2010: 4) is what enables socio-rhetorical critics to discern (1) the motives behind the formation and articulation of a text’s message and (2) the text’s ability to communicate effectively, so far as we can determine it. Thus, while I attend to the interaction of certain “textures” of the “tapestry” that is First Peter—its inner texture, its
These rhetorical and linguistic insights are well-represented in several social-scientific approaches to biblical literature. Wayne Meeks, for instance, writes that

Texts do not carry their meaning within themselves, but “mean” insofar as they function intelligibly within specific cultures or subcultures…. What a given text meant … was the resultant of the dialectic between text and the cultural-linguistic world inhabited by its hearers. (1986: 183–84)

Steven Bechtler, commenting on the work of Meeks and Elliott, remarks similarly: “Ideas are themselves radically conditioned by the social contexts in which they emerge and of which they are linguistic expressions” (1998: 28). This is all the more apparent in discerning a text’s strategy. To quote Meeks again, “The comprehensive question concerning the texts that are our primary sources is not merely what each one says, but what it does” (2003: 7). In order to determine “what it does” and how it does it, in Elliott’s words, the social-scientific critic directs particular attention to the correlation of the text’s social situation and compositional-rhetorical strategy. This entails an examination of the manner and means by which the text in its totality (its genre, content, literary organization, and rhetorical argument) is designed to address the envisioned situation and motivate to action in a plausible and persuasive fashion. (1993: 54)

It is this “motivation to action” that, I will argue, comprises the nuance of a text’s social strategy, a topic to which I will turn in the following section. In order to conclude the present discussion, I wish to state clearly that I intend to approach First Peter as a “meaningful configuration of language intended to communicate” (Elliott 1993: 7) and to determine “meanings made possible and shaped by the social and cultural systems” (8) inhabited by the letter. More specifically, my interest is in the communicative potential of First Peter—its potential to affect and shape its socio-cultural texture, and (to an extent) its intertexture—my approach differs by being less comprehensive than the program of socio-rhetorical criticism envisions.
audiences and to motivate them to action—as what Elliott elsewhere calls a “vehicle of socio(religious) interaction” (1990: 8).\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, it is worth noting that First Peter is no stranger to social-scientific criticism, even holding “pride of place as one of the first New Testament documents to be interpreted as a whole according to a social-scientific approach” (Mason and Martin 2014: 7).\textsuperscript{16} David Horrell calls Elliott’s \textit{A Home for the Homeless}, originally published in 1981, “the most important pioneering study using a social-scientific approach” in relation to First Peter. Since the publication of Elliott’s study (alongside Balch’s in the same year), social-scientific approaches to First Peter have become more diverse and eclectic: “there is no one approach that constitutes the ‘social-scientific’ reading of 1 Peter” (2014a: 138). Brown notes that “eclectic models” and approaches “are not unusual; they are in fact the norm” (2021: 36), and this is often the case in social-scientific approaches.\textsuperscript{17} While the text of First Peter remains the focus of my analysis, I also seek

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\textsuperscript{15} My approach has much in common with a specific social-scientific approach that Elliott calls “sociological exegesis,” for which “the literary text serves as the primary focus, starting point, and empirical control of sociological [or social-scientific] analysis…. Sociological exegesis asks not only what a text said ‘then and there’ but also how and why that text was designed to function, and what its impact upon the life and activity of its recipients and formulations was intended to be” (1990: 8; Elliott subsequently substituted “social-scientific” for “sociological”). Therefore, since it is the text of First Peter as a means of communication that forms the focus of my analysis, I will typically refer to “First Peter” as that which bears meaning and communicates (in its properly discerned contexts)—rather than refer to “Peter” or “the author.” This assists me to avoid hypothesizing or speculating about authorial “mental acts” and to focus on “communicative intent”: intent as inscribed or entextualized in First Peter; see Bechtler 1998: 25–27; Brown 2021: 12, 70–73.

\textsuperscript{16} For social-scientific approaches to First Peter, see Balch 1981; Elliott 1990 (first published in 1981); Bechtler 1998; Seland 2005; Horrell 2007a; 2007b; 2013; Bauman-Martin 2007; Holloway 2009; Williams 2012a; 2014; Himes 2014; Smith 2016; the summative essays of Horrell (2014a) and Joseph (2018: 426–39) summarize many of these earlier studies. See the recent use of social-scientific approaches in Martin 2016a; 2022; Hockey 2019; Wan 2021; Ok 2021; and, to an extent, Marcar 2022. See also Elliott 2000; Williams and Horrell 2023.

\textsuperscript{17} Meeks summarizes his own work thus: “In short, the application of social science in the following chapters is eclectic. I take my theory piecemeal, as needed, where it fits…. Nevertheless, given the present state of social theory and the primitive state of its use by students of early Christianity, eclecticism seems the only honest and cautious way to proceed” (Meeks 2003: 6; see Horrell 2009: 12–17). Judith Lieu’s study of early Christian “identity” begins similarly: “No single model will be adopted here as definitive: the inevitable eclecticism, which
To demonstrate the benefit of such eclecticism as I employ linguistic and rhetorical analyses (Chapter One), comparative analyses (Chapter Two), memory studies (Chapters Three and Four) and a “social identity approach” (Chapter Five)—each in service to the larger social-scientific approach described above and all of which, I hope to show, lead to a conclusion greater than the sum of its parts. As I introduce the various facets of my argument, I will discuss their relevance and the history of their employment in New Testament and primo-Petrine studies.

Locating Social Strategies

For the sake of clarifying what I am contending in this project, I will use the term “social strategy” to denote my approach to the strategy of First Peter as, again in Jeffrey Crafton’s words, “an instrument of change” in the lives of its audiences. To define this more clearly, I will discuss the work of two primo-Petrine scholars who have sought to discern social strategies at work in First Peter. Then I will clarify the relationships between a text’s “social strategy” and two other aspects: (1) its “rhetorical strategies” and (2) its “purpose.” This will lead me to a brief discussion of First Peter’s purpose and a statement of how a social strategy (such as the one I am proposing) relates to that purpose.

*Primo-Petrine Social Strategies*

Travis Williams focuses on the primo-Petrine conception and articulation of “doing good” and proposes “to diagnose the social strategy of good works in 1 Peter” (2014: 14). Williams concludes that the letter’s understanding of “good works” and its rhetorical deployment of related terminology functions to elicit “an appropriate sociological response to the conflict in
which the readers were involved” (14–15). Williams designates this as a “social strategy,” since it represents, in his words, “the author’s calculated attempt to formulate his letter in such a way that it might achieve a particular social aim (e.g., reinforce group consciousness; construct social identity; etc.)” (14–15 n. 39). I intend to use the term “social strategy” similarly: it is a means by which First Peter attempts to elicit a social response on the part of its audiences. In other cases (e.g., Horrell 2014b), scholars utilize the term “social strategy” similarly but without reflection on what the nuance of this label implies.

John Elliott’s landmark study of the “situation and strategy” of First Peter contains a helpful discussion of textual strategies. In defining “strategy” Elliott writes,

“Strategy” implies more than intention to present ideas. As in the interaction of game playing or battle tactics, strategy involves a plan calculated to have a special effect. In the case of 1 Peter this effect would not merely be that the audiences, by reading this letter, feel exhorted and comforted [see 1 Pet 5:12].… 1 Peter represents a calculated attempt by its author(s) to reinforce the group consciousness, cohesion and commitment of the Christian sect in Asia Minor. The strategy of the letter would amount to the manner in which it was designed to achieve this goal. (1990: 107, emphasis mine)

Whereas Williams’s study focuses on the language of “good works,” Elliott’s interest is in the function of a pair of terms in First Peter (παροικός, οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ) and their intended “special effect” on the letter’s audiences. Nonetheless, Elliott’s discussion of a “strategy” is remarkably similar to Williams’s definition of a “social strategy” cited above: it is the means by which a text motivates its audiences to some form of social conduct, behavior, and action.

This leads to two important clarifications regarding the nature of social strategies. First, I am intentionally distinguishing between a text’s social and rhetorical strategies—though I only intend this for the sake of a clearer discussion going forward (especially in Chapter One); both rhetorical and social strategies serve the letter’s larger purpose(s) and may motivate audiences
toward action.\footnote{This distinction is not without precedent. Burke often describes the effects of “Rhetoric” as related to reorienting the thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of audiences; this reorientation may often lead to action (“cooperation”), but the focus of Burke’s own language is cognitive and affective, rather than social. Robbins also distinguishes between the “rhetorical” features of a text (its “inner texture”) and its social function(s).} By \textit{social} strategies I denote those strategies at work in a text that serve to elicit a \textit{social} response on the part of the text’s audiences.\footnote{So, e.g., Williams concludes that the social strategy of “good works” is put to the service of First Peter’s task of eliciting a disposition of “defiance” and actions constituting “assimilated resistance” among its audiences (2014: 245–73); for Elliott, the terms παροικός and οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ function to “reinforce group consciousness, cohesion and commitment” (1990: 107).} This is distinct from (but, again, not unrelated to) what I designate as its \textit{rhetorical} strategies: in service to the articulation and realization of a text’s social strategy (and, ultimately, its purpose), a text employs rhetorical techniques, tools, devices, styles, and tropes, all of which assist in persuading its readers to adopt the social strategy that it seeks to promote.

Second, as we may observe in the summaries from Williams’s and Elliott’s studies above, scholars regularly assume that such social strategies serve a text’s larger purpose. This means that determining the letter’s social strategy is dependent on our determination of the letter’s purpose—the two might best be determined in concert with one another. As we will see below, many discussions of First Peter’s purpose focus on the authorial statement of intent at 1 Pet 5:12, but these discussions, in my opinion, often end up muddling an important distinction between the concepts of a letter’s purpose and its strategies (whether social or rhetorical). In order to move forward to contend that First Peter functions strategically as a “summons to discipleship,” I will first articulate my understanding of the letter’s occasion and purpose.

\textbf{The Purpose of First Peter}

Many, if not most, scholars regard the summative authorial comment in 1 Pet 5:12 as
indicative of the letter’s purpose:

Through Silvanus, a brother who is faithful to you, as I understand, I have written briefly, encouraging you and attesting that this is true beneficence from God; stand in it! 

There are two reasons that I do not subscribe to this general opinion. First, if 1 Pet 5:12 contained only παρακαλῶν I would be more inclined to take it as a statement of the letter’s purpose, since this term can serve to convey the range of activities that take place throughout First Peter (encouragement, exhortation, etc.). As it is, First Peter declares a pair of (supposed) purposes, the second being “testimony”—and testimony to a specific referent, God’s true χάρις, which then becomes the object of a subsequent imperative. “Testimony” does not appear as a theme or emphasis of First Peter, though the activity of the prophets is labeled similarly (προμαρτυρόμενον, 1:11) and the author presents himself as a “witness” (μάρτυς, 5:1) as well. The language of χάρις, however, is abundant throughout First Peter, and this leads me to suggest that the letter’s act of “testimony to God’s χάρις” (and, by implication, its act of “exhortation” or

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20 Διὰ Σιλουανοῦ ὑμῖν τοῦ πιστοῦ ἁδέλφου, ὡς λογίζομαι, δι’ ὀλίγων ἔγραψα παρακαλῶν καὶ ἐπιμαρτυρῶν ταῦτα εἶναι ἀληθὴ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ἦν στῆτε. On this text and translation: (1) Although ὑμῖν “is usually taken as an indirect object of ἔγραψα [“I have written to you”], its presence within the fronted constituent Διὰ Σιλουανοῦ ὑμῖν τοῦ πιστοῦ ἁδέλφου, ὡς λογίζομαι suggests that it needs to be explained on the basis of its function within this constituent” (Dubis 2010: 173–74). Dubis cites an “older and now forgotten interpretation” that understands ὑμῖν to modify πιστοῦ (or τοῦ πιστοῦ ἁδέλφου); Silvanus is endorsed or perhaps recognized, in other words, as a faithful and trustworthy brother (fellow believer or Christian) toward the recipients of this letter. (2) Some witnesses replace the imperative στῆτε with an indicative verb since, in Dubis’s words, it “is rare to see an imperative after a relative pronoun” (2010: 186) and later scribes may have regarded the construction to be “abrupt.” Elliott concludes, “Certain manuscripts (K L P 33 [majority of minuscules and versions], perhaps sensing this abruptness, replace στῆτε with hestēkate (‘you stand’); others substitute este (‘you are,’ 1505 2495 and syr.) or aiteite (‘you seek,’ Ψ). However, στῆτε … has superior textual attestation (𝔓𝔓 72 καὶ ΑΒ καὶ ἑτέρους). The variants are clearly secondary efforts at providing a smoother reading or at accommodating this formulation to the similar expression on Rom 5:2” (2000: 879). (3) On the translation “beneficence” for χάρις, see Chapter One.

21 The “general opinion” that 1 Pet 5:12 articulates the purpose of First Peter is represented in Williams and Horrell 2023: “By way of two adverbial participles, the purpose of the author’s letter is delineated” (2.628); they note, “Most interpreters understand παρακαλῶν and ἐπιμαρτυρῶν as denoting purpose” (2.628 n. 83). Even Elliott, who wrote earlier that First Peter’s strategy implies that the letter intends to do more than encourage and comfort (1990: 107, quoted above), states in his later commentary that these participles convey “the stated purpose” of First Peter (2000: 877). In his introductory comments on the letter’s “aims,” Elliott writes, “Our author’s statement in 5:12 comes closest to summarizing the content and aims of his letter” (103).
“encouragement”) designates not the purpose of First Peter, but its contents. First Peter is written not “to encourage” and “to testify,” but “encouraging and testifying to God’s true χάρις” (5:12).

Second, the imperatival clause that follows the participles (εἰς ἥν στῆτε) itself implies that the “encouragement” and “testimony” that First Peter provides is intended to serve a larger purpose: with this encouragement and testimony before them, the audiences are then expected to be able to “stand” in or for God’s χάρις. It would be a rather tall concluding expectation that they “stand” in and for such χάρις if the letter were not designed to motivate and equip them to do so. Again, the contents of the letter should rightly be regarded as “encouragement” and “testimony”: the widespread insistence that these represent the purposes of First Peter, however, overshadows the possibility that they may more productively be considered as parts of First Peter’s strategy for achieving a larger purpose.

I will postpone detailed discussions of the occasion and purpose of First Peter for subsequent chapters, but here I may summarily state how I understand each of these matters. First Peter is occasioned by the suffering that its audiences face as a result of their conversion to follow Christ; it begins and concludes with an explicit acknowledgment of their “trials” (1:6; 4:12); it affirms that these sufferings are difficult to endure (e.g., 1:6; 2:18–20; 3:6, 9, 14–17; 4:125:7, 8–9); and its exhortations are thoroughly conditioned by the ongoing suffering that its audiences are experiencing, as I will demonstrate throughout this study.²² I assume that the letter’s purpose is consistent with this occasion. “Rhetoric is situational,” in that a rhetorical utterance (be it a speech, an epistle, or something else) comes into existence “because of some condition or situation.” As a question controls the parameters of appropriate answers and as

²² I will discuss the occasion of First Peter at more length in Chapter One.
problems dictate the limits of acceptable solutions, “the situation controls the rhetorical response” (Bitzer 1968: 3–4). First Peter’s purpose, therefore, is to assist its audiences in understanding, confronting, and enduring the unfortunate challenges of their suffering.  

Attention to First Peter’s strategy, alongside and in light of the letter’s occasion and purpose, once again demonstrates the appropriateness of a social-scientific approach to the letter. In Elliott’s words,

“Strategy,”… rather than “purpose” or “intention,” better communicates the fact that the text is specifically designed by its producer not simply to communicate ideas but to move a specific audience to some form of concerted action. Social-scientific criticism thus aims at discovering how a given document was designed as an author’s motivated response to a specific situation and how it was composed to elicit a specific social response on the part of its audience. (1993: 54)

If First Peter’s purpose is to help its audiences to understand, confront, and endure their present suffering, its strategy for accomplishing this, I contend, is to address them or cast them as disciples so that they become disposed to understand themselves as such. I will argue in this study that First Peter’s summons to discipleship is a social strategy insofar as it depends on and affects its audiences’ relationships with both fellow Christ-followers and their Greek and Roman neighbors (along with society at large). This summons to discipleship, I will argue, provides a comprehensive perspective (more specifically, a “social identity”) from which First Peter’s audiences can perceive themselves amid their suffering and position themselves to endure it.

Locating Discipleship

In order to contend that First Peter addresses its audiences as disciples, it is necessary to define what I understand “discipleship” to mean, and I will do so by placing my approach in the

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23 I will discuss the purpose of First Peter at more length in Chapter Four.
context of previous discussions of the matter. I am not the first to find discipleship in First Peter, but two important aspects distinguish my contention from earlier studies. First, other scholars have focused on the presence of a (supposedly) technical language of discipleship within a particular pericope of First Peter (2:18–25), namely, the language of “following” (ἐπακολούθεω) in Christ’s footsteps (2:21). My approach, on the other hand, is thematic and conceptual in nature, and it expands the focus from a single pericope to the entire primo-Petrine epistle. Second, some scholars have approached primo-Petrine discipleship in a rather abstract fashion for a variety of reasons—in the interest of comparing it with the gospel traditions and the teaching of Jesus on discipleship, for the sake of recontextualizing First Peter for modern Christian praxis, or for something else. My approach, on the other hand, seeks to concretize First Peter’s summons to discipleship by placing it in the context of Hellenistic paideia and pedagogical practices widespread throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. It is at the intersection of this context and First Peter’s commemoration of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship, I argue, that we find a distinctive primo-Petrine vision of discipleship that informs its strategy for confronting its audiences’ suffering.

“Follow in his steps”: Discipleship at 1 Pet 2:21?

To my knowledge, an explicit claim that First Peter intentionally deploys the language or concept of discipleship was first articulated by Leonhard Goppelt in his posthumously published commentary of 1978 (translated from German in 1993). Goppelt’s comments are representative of several other scholars (many citing Goppelt) who identify the language of “following” (ἐπακολούθεω) in 1 Pet 2:21 as a reference to “following” Jesus in discipleship.

“Following” (ἐπακολούθεω) comes close here to the technical meaning “follow in discipleship,” i.e., going behind someone, becoming that person’s student, and thereby
participating in his destiny. I Pet. 2:21 and Rev. 14:4 are the only two passages in the NT or the Apostolic Fathers in which (ἐπ-)ἀκολουθεῖν, a technical term for following in discipleship during the earthly days of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and in John, is directly applied to the post-Easter Church. (1993: 205)

The language is necessarily metaphorical, Goppelt explains, since “after Easter this ‘going behind’ is indeed only possible in a figurative sense.” The “appropriation of this language” (from traditions containing discipleship sayings—notably Mark 8:34 parr.) provides Goppelt with a “discipleship perspective” through which he understands the audiences’ situation (1993: 205–6; see 37–38). Throughout his commentary, Goppelt refers to the original audiences as “disciples of the exalted Christ” and frequently connects their suffering to their “discipleship.”

Others have followed Goppelt’s lead. Paul Achtemeier writes that 1 Pet 2:21 “has often been understood in the sense of imitating Christ” but should, instead, be read as “a call to discipleship” (1996: 199) and “based in Jesus’ own words in Mark 8:34” (199 n. 148). J. Ramsey Michaels suggests that 1 Pet 2:21 “stands squarely in the tradition of these words in Mark’s Gospel: ‘Those who would come after me must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’” (1996: 253). Joel Green writes that it is “reminiscent of the call to discipleship as following Jesus (e.g., Mark 8:34)” (2007: 84). John Elliott claims that the “entire Petrine formulation … is similar in part to the conception of discipleship developed in the Gospels” (2000: 527). Elliott identifies other supporting evidence for his own position in an earlier essay (1985), but these are limited to the linguistic contexts of 1 Pet 2:21 and thematic parallels he finds between First Peter and the Gospel of Mark, many of which he leaves undeveloped.25

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24 Achtemeier’s claim that First Peter exhibits “a call to discipleship” might be thought an exception to my introductory assertion that First Peter has never been called “a summons to discipleship.” Achtemeier’s claim, however, only regards 1 Pet 2:21; my contention is that all of First Peter functions this way.

25 Other evidence Elliott identifies for his position includes the presence of the verb καλέω and the noun υπογραμμός (1895: 194–95). Elliott lists ten features of “contact” between First Peter and the Gospel of Mark (196–
As I have already indicated, these claims to find discipleship in First Peter are based primarily (or solely) on the presence of (supposedly) technical language at 1 Pet 2:21. In my opinion, these claims suffer from at least two shortcomings. First, the presence of a single term is a narrow foundation upon which to stake a claim (or build an argument) that we may locate discipleship in First Peter. Those cited above tend to recognize this themselves: Achtemeier’s commentary contains no further reference to discipleship; Michaels’s and Elliott’s commentaries typically mention discipleship in the context of comparable gospel traditions about discipleship or as a synonym for Christian living (see below). Goppelt does suggest that the letter embodies a “discipleship perspective” but, surprisingly, allows this to remove First Peter’s strategy from its sociocultural contexts: First Peter “flattens out the historical particulars and allows the characteristic elements of the discipleship situation to emerge” (1993: 38). The focus on a specific pericope or verse with specific, “technical” language (together with an insistence on a specific relationship with a specific gospel tradition) has, in my opinion, prevented these scholars from visualizing a larger portrait of primo-Petrine discipleship. I will contend, therefore, that this picture becomes clear if we attend not to a specific term, but to First Peter’s genre as a paraenetic epistle, to its rhetorical deployment of concepts regularly embodied by disciples and teachers in the ancient world, and to its exhortations directing its audiences to conduct themselves in ways becoming of ancient disciples.

Second, several claims to find discipleship at 1 Pet 2:21 have been preoccupied with an

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98), all of which “deserve a closer examination” (198; see Elliott 1980; 1983 for Elliott’s own arguments in favor of these connections). Elliott’s 1985 essay is slightly (but not completely) hampered by its commitment to the identification of “early Christian liturgical material in the form of a ‘Christ hymn’ or ‘Passion hymn’” in 1 Pet 2:21–25 (1985: 190–95), a position Elliott himself later rejects and corrects (2000: 548–50).
unnecessary (and distracting) distinction between “discipleship” and “imitation.” For instance, Achtemeier writes that ἐπακολουθέω “here means not to ‘imitate’ but to ‘follow’ Jesus in his willingness to endure suffering…. It is a call to discipleship rather than a call to imitation” (1996: 199, emphasis mine). Goppelt contrasts First Peter’s “following” with the Pauline emphasis on “imitation”: since “following Jesus” is possible only figuratively, “Paul describes what ‘following in discipleship’ now means with other terms…. Not until post-NT Christianity was ἀκολουθεῖν equated with μιμεῖσθαι and both often understood in the sense of an imitatio” (1993: 205–6). Elliott makes a similar point, though more cautiously. Such a stark contrast between discipleship and imitation, however, would have been foreign to most (if not all) ancient Mediterranean conceptions of discipleship, since imitation was one of the fundamental obligations that students owed their teachers.26 To make and to insist on a distinction between discipleship and imitation, in other words, neglects to acknowledge how ancient discipleship was commonly practiced.27

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26 I will demonstrate this at length in Chapter Two.

27 This distinction between discipleship and imitation is due, in my opinion, to two factors—often unspoken, but sometimes explicit—in twentieth-century New Testament scholarship.

First, throughout the twentieth century there arose an “emerging consensus” (Matera 2007: 373) that First Peter represents the thought of a “Petrine circle” or “school,” somewhat famously articulated by Elliott: “1 Peter is the product of a Petrine tradition transmitted by Petrine tradents of a Petrine circle” (1976: 248; see Elliott 1980; 2000: 127–30). Interest in primo-Petrine distinctiveness is often (though not exclusively) the result of a desire, again in Elliott’s words, “for 1 Peter to be liberated from its ‘Pauline captivity’ and read as a distinctive voice of the early Church” (2000: 40). Given the presence of an imitatio motif throughout the Pauline corpus (see Stanley 1959; De Boer 1962; Castelli 1991), it is understandable that a distinctive phrase like “follow in his steps”—distinctive, at least, within the New Testament—might be hailed within this “emerging consensus” of scholarship as evidence of a contrast between First Peter and Paul. We need not, however, deem First Peter to be so distinct from Pauline traditions and themes—scholars have not been wrong in recognizing the similarities amply present between them!—but may, as Horrell has convincingly argued, recognize in First Peter “a consolidating or synthesizing form of early Christianity” (2013: 12). One implication of this study will be that First Peter’s vision of discipleship is quite in keeping with Paul’s own use of pedagogical imagery and metaphors, even if it is described in distinctive, primo-Petrine ways. For a survey and constructive critique of arguments for a “Petrine circle” or “school,” see Horrell 2002b, esp. 43–46; 2013: 7–44, esp. 29–32.

Second, there has been (especially within Protestant scholarship) what E. J. Tinsley calls a “perceptible nervousness” around the language of imitatio Christi, a concept that many perceive to conflate the typically
The scholarly focus on the “technical” language of discipleship in 1 Pet 2:21 is not wrong or misplaced; I simply suggest that it is insufficient. First Peter provides several indications beyond the confines of a single pericope (or verse) that it intends to address its audiences as disciples. This latter point regarding discipleship and imitation is a helpful entry point for discussing the importance of attending to the pedagogical context of ancient discipleship. Before doing so, however, a second trend in studies of primo-Petrine discipleship requires comment.

“To this you are called”: Discipleship for Today?

“Discipleship” is a term used in Christian circles today to refer to a process by which the beliefs and practices of Christianity become a person’s (or community’s) worldview and way of life. This process takes different forms in different times and places, but it is often achieved through the deepening of devotion to Christ and participation in some form of Christian community. Thus, Bonhoeffer defines discipleship as “adherence to Christ” (1959: 50) and the subtitles to several popular books on the subject equate “discipleship” with “Christian living.”

Protestant distinction between soteriology and ethics (see Tinsley 1972: 45–47; Webster 1986: 311–15; Dryden 2018: 35–62). One cannot “imitate” Christ, so the argument goes, because Christ’s historical acts of suffering and death were, vicariously, “once-for-all”; to repeat them is to dilute one’s soteriology for the sake of an anthropocentric ethic (see, esp., Käsemann 1950/1968, and the analysis of R. Morgan 1998). This (supposedly necessary) distinction has led some to conclude that any notion of “imitating Christ” is misleading, including Eduard Schweizer—cited by Goppelt, Achtemeier, and Elliott in their analyses of 1 Pet 2:18–25—who begins his Lordship and Discipleship with the following prefatory note: “German Nachfolge is usually translated as ‘imitation’ which is always inaccurate and very often impossible, as is the case here” (1960: 11 n. 1; Schweizer is referring to his own English translation of his previous work in German; he does not treat the language of “following” in 1 Pet 2:21 at all throughout Lordship and Discipleship). Space does not permit further engagement with the important issues at stake in this theological quagmire. I only state here that I do not find the distinction between soteriology and ethics to be either necessary or consistent with the portrait of Christian conduct painted by First Peter (or much of early Christian literature). Further, First Peter’s call to “follow” Christ (which I do understand to mean “imitate”) is rather specific: it is the example of Jesus’s non-retaliatory conduct in the face of his suffering and death that Christ-followers are called to “follow” (2:21–25; see 3:8–18; 4:1).

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28 E.g., Ogden 2018 (Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building your Life in Christ); R. Williams 2016 (Being Disciples: Essentials for the Christian Life); Camp 2008 (Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World); Tozer 2018 (Discipleship: What It Truly Means to Be a Christian).
John Meier suggests that, in approaching the biblical materials of the New Testament, “the religious rhetoric of modern Christianity often leads us to use the word ‘disciple’ quite loosely. The drive to be relevant pushes pulpit oratory and theological musings to employ the word ‘disciple’ in as many meanings or in as broad a sense as possible” (2001: 49). This tendency to utilize the terms “discipleship” and “disciple” broadly and generically is present throughout several commentaries and studies of First Peter.  

It is readily apparent that the term “disciple” does not appear throughout the New Testament’s epistolary literature; early Christians seem to have preferred other terms (“saints” or “holy ones,” “brothers and sisters,” etc.; see Trebilco 2012). In the absence of the term “disciple,” therefore, studies of New Testament “discipleship” are burdened with a question of how to discuss such a seemingly commonplace topic in the absence of its “technical terminology.” Some compare the exhortations of First Peter with gospel traditions regarding discipleship and determine that where Mark (for instance) talks about “discipleship,” First Peter talks about a “Christian way of life,” thereby equating the two. Others more explicitly read First Peter in the light of a later practice of discipleship that already equates itself with the idea of “Christian living.” Each, to one degree or another, discerns how primo-Petrine discipleship might inform subsequent forms of Christian practice. Here I will survey two larger projects on early Christian discipleship, each containing a specific study of discipleship in First Peter. Together with the observations of the studies noted above, these will assist me in stating my own way forward in contending that First Peter functions strategically as a summons to discipleship.

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29 The academy-oriented commentaries of Elliott and Michaels, whose studies of discipleship I will focus on below, are good examples of using the language of “disciple” and “discipleship” in the manner discussed by Meier. See, e.g., Elliott 2000: 10, 360, 765; Michaels 1988: lxxi, 173, 182.
Elliott’s 1985 study cited above is part of a project (edited by Fernando Segovia, 1985a) reexamining “the shape and character of Christian existence in the New Testament” (Segovia 1985b: 1). Presupposed, immediately, is the synonymity of “Christian existence” and “discipleship.” Elliott’s particular study, as already noted, focuses on the language of 1 Pet 2:21 and its “fusion of paraenetic and kerygmatic, christological, soteriological, and ecclesial motifs and traditions” (1985: 199). Elliott concludes that First Peter’s idea of Christian existence is “dependent” on the letter’s relationship to the Gospel of Mark (191–93, 195–98; see also Elliott 1983), which more overtly depicts the followers of Jesus as “disciples” (1985: 199–200). Thus, Elliott concludes that First Peter can echo a Markan vision of discipleship, though “this image of solidarity [i.e., discipleship in First Peter] is overshadowed by others and receives only momentary and muted expression” (199). In other words, First Peter does talk about discipleship, but its concerns are typically focused elsewhere, and it therefore allows other “images” of Christian existence to take the lead.

Elliott’s essay is prefaced by an editorial clarification that it, along with the other essays in the same volume, focuses on “discipleship” (again, broadly understood as synonymous with Christian existence and self-understanding) as conceived of by the New Testament texts for the sake of their intended first-century audiences. Segovia, however, recognizes that this is only “a beginning in the right direction”:

I find the present results most encouraging, and I firmly believe that the cumulative results of such a protracted and systematic re-examination will shed much greater light not only on what Christian discipleship meant, presupposed, and implied for various traditions and communities in the first century of the Christian church, but also, and ultimately, on what Christian discipleship should mean, presuppose, and entail for the various traditions and communities today. (1985b: 23, emphasis mine)

Elliott himself asks how a primo-Petrine vision for discipleship might carry implications “for
theology and piety,” and specifically discusses the relationship between “discipleship” and “imitation,” also noted above. Despite the dearth of technical language for discipleship in First Peter (upon which much of his argument relies), Elliott insists that its vision for Christian existence stands “at the very center of New Testament proclamation and praxis” and that the primo-Petrine Christ provides “the steps in which the faithful are called” to follow (1985: 203).

A second set of essays published nearly a decade later (Longenecker 1996b) contains another essay on discipleship in First Peter, this time by J. Ramsey Michaels. This volume, titled *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, is more clearly focused on the applicability and recontextualization of “New Testament discipleship(s)” for contemporary Christian practice. In his introductory essay to the volume Richard Longenecker writes,

> Discipleship has been for centuries a way of thinking and speaking about the nature of the Christian life. Today, in fact, the topic of discipleship recurs repeatedly in both scholarly biblical writings and the popular Christian press. The expression “following Christ” is usually used synonymously.... What is needed for most of our theories about Christian discipleship, however, is a firmer rootage in the biblical materials. And what is needed for our practice is a clearer grasp of the patterns of discipleship set out in the New Testament. (1996a: 1)

The clear assumption here is that the New Testament should provide the “source material” for Christian discipleship today; as authoritative Christian Scripture, the New Testament texts should be understood to “speak directly to issues of Christian self-understanding and living” (6). They provide “models” and “patterns” of discipleship, not just for their original audiences, but for Christian communities today. This assumption clearly underlies Michaels’s essay on First Peter.

Michaels reads First Peter in light of John Bunyon’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (published in 1678) and argues that First Peter portrays the call of discipleship as the beginning of a Christian person’s “journey to heaven” (1996: 249). This disciple’s journey consists primarily of “following” the path that Jesus paved—to the cross and suffering, but also beyond it “to the
resurrection, and finally to heaven” (259). The journey, therefore, is ongoing: “Christ’s journey is complete. But ours goes on!” (262). First-century Christ-followers, Bunyon’s Puritan audiences, and Christians today may find in First Peter the path of discipleship laid out according to the pattern of Christ’s own journey “to the right hand of God” (1 Pet 3:22). Interesting points emerge from Michaels’s reading of First Peter, but ultimately his analysis of First Peter itself is overshadowed by the interpretive lens of Bunyon and the goal of recontextualizing First Peter for the sake of contemporary Christian discipleship. Each of these, in my opinion, risks reading First Peter as a theological treatise rather than a paraenetic and pastoral letter, but a more substantial point of critique is worth mentioning, and this applies to Elliott as well.

**The Pedagogical Context of Primo-Petrine Discipleship**

The impulse to apply or recontextualize First Peter’s teaching for contemporary Christian practice is understandable, especially for those who regard the letter as authoritative Scripture. At issue, however, is how to do so responsibly and with abiding respect for the text of First Peter itself. By equating “discipleship” with “Christian living” in early Christian literature—as many

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30 Exegetically speaking, I question how far First Peter goes in depicting its audiences as “on a journey”—at least with “heaven” as their goal. In the first place, I am not convinced that First Peter depicts its audiences as strangers “in this world,” as though they were on a cosmological journey from a worldly home to a heavenly home. This view was classically articulated in modern English scholarship by Victor Furnish (1975) and is represented in the commentaries of Beare (1970: 135) and Green (2007: 14–18), among others, and the CEB’s rendering of 1 Pet 1:1; for critiques of this perspective, see Elliott 1990: 41–46; Feldmeier 1992 *passim*. Similarly, I would suggest that First Peter actually depicts the present state of Christ-followers as one of “waiting” and “standing still.” Their “salvation” and God’s “beneficence” is not something toward which they are actively moving but something that First Peter explicitly says is to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:13), something they are “receiving” (1:9); since their “inheritance” is being “kept in heaven,” its delivery *to them* suggests that “heaven” is not a destination that First Peter has in mind for its audiences. First Peter’s exhortations, furthermore, are explicitly concerned with the lives of Christ-followers in this world (e.g., 1:17; 4:2); it offers counsel on how Christ-followers are to go on “fitting in” to Roman society even as it emphasizes the impending revelation of Christ and God’s visitation (1:5, 9, 13; 2:11–4:11; 4:17; 5:4, 10). A more helpful discussion of a potential “journey motif” can be found in connection with First Peter’s use of the metaphor of the Diaspora, especially as discussed in Martin 1992a: 144–61 and Smith 2016: 7–8, 30–32.
Christian authors, preachers, and literatures do today—studies like those of Michaels and Elliott neglect to ask whether these terms and concepts were actually understood synonymously by the New Testament texts (along with their authors and audiences) themselves.\textsuperscript{31} The absence of the technical title “disciple” in the New Testament’s epistolary literature (including First Peter) often leads scholars to define and discuss ancient Christian discipleship in the light of either Jesus’s teaching on discipleship or modern practices of Christian discipleship.

I suggest that we have been focusing on the wrong words, or at least too few words; perhaps, by focusing on words at all—like “following” and “disciple” (and their absence)—we have missed the opportunity to witness the dynamic way in which early Christian (specifically, primo-Petrine) “discipleship” adapted and evolved as “a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural settings” (Elliott 1993: 8) in which early Christ-followers “lived, moved, and had their being.” I propose that we would do better—both in our ability to discern the strategic presence of “discipleship” in First Peter and in any further efforts to recontextualize that discipleship—if we attend to the widespread, sociocultural relationships and structures inhabited by “disciples” in the ancient Mediterranean world, namely, those comprising the Hellenistic system and ideal of \textit{paideia}. It is this pervasive and salient \textit{pedagogical} context that enables me to find discipleship not only present within First Peter, but as an integral part of its strategy in addressing its audiences amid their suffering.

If First Peter is addressing its audiences \textit{as disciples}, as I contend it is, we must

\textsuperscript{31} One indication that “discipleship” and “Christian living” were not necessarily synonymous within many early Christian communities is the fact that, outside the Gospels and Acts, “Christians” are nowhere referred to directly or explicitly as “disciples”; see Meier 2001: 41–42. This does not preclude First Peter from utilizing the concept of discipleship as a strategy for motivating its audiences to understand and endure their suffering, as I will demonstrate throughout this study.
acknowledge and appreciate the ways its exhortations are socially and culturally conditioned by the realities of ancient forms and practices of discipleship—since First Peter was not composed or distributed in a vacuum. A full and detailed discussion of ancient discipleship will be the subject of Chapter Two, but here it will be useful to explain, in light of the present discussion, what I mean by “discipleship” when I describe First Peter as a “summons to discipleship.”

“Disciples” could be found throughout the ancient Mediterranean world wherever a teacher exerted enough skill and charisma, and this is the key point: disciples, at their core, were students of teachers. They were those who heard and listened to a teacher (ἀκούω, διακούω), followed and devoted themselves to that teacher (ζηλόω), and learned from their teacher (μαθάνω, μαθητής). At mature stages this relationship developed into one characterized by the reciprocity of patronage and dispositions of mutual loyalty, but foundationally discipleship was a pedagogical enterprise consisting of a social relationship between students and teachers. Again, more details will be explored throughout the course of this project, but for now I note that when I use the term “discipleship” (and when I write that First Peter utilizes this concept and addresses its audiences as disciples), I am referring to the social relationship shaped and conditioned by the pedagogical milieu of the ancient Mediterranean world—a world saturated with the tenets of Hellenistic paideia, which understood education to be a formative process that led students to develop not only as philosophers, orators, artisans, and professionals, but as human beings.

Herein lies the primo-Petrine strategy for motivating its audiences to understand and endure their present circumstances. When First Peter summons its audiences to discipleship, I contend, it actively engages them in a pedagogical process and invites them to participate in a

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32 Each of these terms, and others, will occur throughout the primary sources examined in Chapter Two.
widespread, familiar, and socially relevant system. This pedagogical context provides a perspective on their suffering so that they may understand it, makes sense of their suffering by relating it explicitly to their devotion to Christ, and promotes a social identification for its audiences that assists them to better encounter, endure, and even overcome their suffering. Each of these factors, I will demonstrate, makes for a compelling and comprehensive reading of First Peter as a strategic summons to discipleship in its first-century context.

**The Plan of this Study**

My contention that First Peter functions as a summons to discipleship falls into two main parts: with the first I will argue that we can and should read First Peter as a summons to discipleship; with the second I will demonstrate how reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship enhances our interpretation of the letter.

Chapter One (“Loyalty and Beneficence: Sociocultural Contexts for Reading First Peter”) is a study of two rhetorical strategies employed by First Peter as it constructs and presents its audiences’ situation—what I will describe as the letter’s “rhetorical” or “entextualized situation.” I argue here that First Peter strategically deploys two concepts as key to understanding the suffering its audiences presently face: “loyalty,” connoted by the language of πίστις, and “beneficence,” connoted by the language of χάρις. I demonstrate that with attention to such “first-level meanings” of πίστις and χάρις—language often overshadowed by theologically-determined translations and interpretations—we discover key thematic contexts present throughout First Peter enabling us to read First Peter as a summons to discipleship, since loyalty and beneficence were common components of teacher-student relationships in antiquity. Thus, close attention to the situation of First Peter, especially as constructed and presented by First
Peter through its rich rhetorical strategies and culturally loaded language, equips us to hear its exhortations alongside the “disciples” to whom it was originally written.

Chapter Two ("Teachers and Students: Sociohistorical Patterns for Interpreting First Peter") explores the pedagogical contexts of Hellenistic paideia and ancient discipleship and their relevance for locating and understanding discipleship in First Peter. After a summary of the basic aims and functions of Greek and Roman education in antiquity, I examine several texts that depict three common and widespread obligations and expectations of students toward their teachers: obedience, imitation, and representation. In this light, I demonstrate ways in which First Peter’s exhortations echo the same practices, attitudes, and behaviors. Thus, First Peter not only provides thematic contexts for its audiences to hear themselves addressed as disciples (as demonstrated in Chapter One); it also promotes behaviors that any good disciple in the ancient Mediterranean world of the first century would be expected to carry out. With Chapters One and Two, therefore, I will establish how First Peter itself invites its audiences to receive it as a summons to discipleship.

While Chapter Two investigates the wider Greek and Roman contexts of primo-Petrine discipleship, Chapter Three ("‘You are My Disciples If …’: Grammars and Paradigms of Discipleship") explores a second source that informs First Peter’s exhortations: the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth on discipleship. Here I propose a framework for understanding the gospel traditions as “remembrances” or “commemorations” of, among other things, Jesus’s teaching on discipleship, and this provides a useful analogy for discussing how First Peter itself commemorates a discipleship informed by the teaching of Jesus. I conclude that the gospel traditions reveal a “grammar of discipleship” that includes disciples’ reorientation around the
will of God; their resocialization into the family of God; and the expectation of suffering as a result of this reorientation and resocialization.

Chapters Four and Five, on the basis of the work completed in the preceding chapters, move forward to demonstrate the efficacy of reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship. In Chapter Four (“‘Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You’: Discipleship and Suffering in First Peter”), I argue that First Peter’s distinctive emphasis on suffering can best be explained by reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship. I demonstrate this in two ways. First, given the widespread pedagogical idea or trope that suffering and hardship could become opportunities to learn and grow, First Peter can address its audiences as disciples and remind them of the same principle. Second, and in light of the “grammar of discipleship” established in Chapter Three, I suggest that First Peter’s own commemoration and adaptation of that grammar carries with it an expectation of suffering; therefore, First Peter’s own emphasis on suffering is simply a result of its audiences’ commitment to “follow Jesus” in discipleship and functions as an explanation of their suffering rather than as an affirmation of a divine mandate.

Chapter Five (“‘To This You Were Called’: Discipleship and Social Identity in First Peter”) provides a second demonstration of the efficacy of reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship. Here I engage an ongoing discussion of First Peter’s ability to form the identity of its audiences and, more specifically, their “social identity.” Therefore, I employ a “social identity approach” to reading the strategy of First Peter and begin with a summary of the social-psychological theories that inform such an approach (Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel, John Turner, and their students), along with an overview of their influence on New Testament studies. I will argue that First Peter’s
characterization of its audiences as disciples makes sense from the perspective of a social identity approach, given that “disciple,” especially in the ancient world, constituted a social role or social identification. By addressing its audiences as disciples, in other words, First Peter effectively “activates” their social identity, since, according to Self-Categorization Theory, social identifications often prove more salient under particular circumstances. By constructing and activating their “social identity,” First Peter leads its audiences to fulfill the obligations they owe their teacher—even if this necessitates that they suffer. Thus, First Peter’s strategy can be understood as reasonable and appropriate to the situation it seeks to address.

A conclusion will summarize my contention in this study once again in the light of the arguments put forth in each chapter. It will then pose several questions about ways this project might move forward in various directions.

Peter, Paraenesis, and the Social Strategy of Discipleship

Two preliminary topics will assist in moving my contention forward: the choice of Peter as the letter’s implied author and the classification of First Peter as a paraenetic letter. Each of these is an aspect of the standard array of historical- and literary-critical questions surrounding the composition and distribution of First Peter, questions that the scope of this project does not permit me to treat in detail.33 For the sake of brevity, therefore, I state here that I assume First Peter to be one, genuine letter pseudonymously written in the latter part of the first century CE (perhaps in the 70s or 80s) by a leader within the Anatolian congregations to which it is

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33 I note that several of these typical questions are not determinative for the success or persuasiveness of my contention in this project. Those issues or questions that have significant bearing on my arguments will be treated as they arise throughout the study.
addressed, and that the audiences addressed are primarily gentile in background. I will focus here on two aspects pertinent to my reading of First Peter as a summons to discipleship.

“Peter, Apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:1)

I need not rehearse the arguments in favor of First Peter’s pseudonymity. More interesting is the question of why the author of this letter chose to associate it with Peter. Horrell writes that “a general reason for writing in the name of Peter is not hard to find: the (growing) prominence and authority of Peter in the early Church” (2013: 39). First Peter itself, as a pseudonymous composition, is testimony to this prominence and authority. It is possible, however, to be more specific.

The figure of Peter provides an appealing authorial perspective for this letter for several reasons. Peter was “one of the earliest and most renowned Christian martyrs” (Williams and Horrell 2023: 1.187) with ample tradition surrounding his own suffering and death (see Still 2010; Reaves 2017) and proximity to the sufferings and death of Jesus; these made him an ideal candidate to speak to the subsequent sufferings of Christ-followers, including those addressed by First Peter (so Holloway 2009: 17; Donelson 2010: 17). Given the combination of (1) the respected authority that Peter held throughout various early Christian circles and (2) the lack of much early and distinctively “Petrine” tradition, Peter’s name could also be put to several

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34 See the recent overview of arguments in Williams and Horrell 2023: 1.116–62, esp. 149–62. At the same time, it is worth recognizing that arguments for both pseudonymity and orthonymity are “somewhat more balanced than many interpreters have recognized,” even if “probability does tend to favor pseudonym[ity] (if only slightly)” (Williams 2012a: 31). Recent studies have called into question the feasibility of reconstructing the situation, the history, or the socio-economic status of the addresses of a pseudonymous composition (see Lieu 2014; Lincicum 2017; Méndez 2020; Robinson and Llewelyn 2020). My focus on First Peter’s “rhetorical” or “entextualized situation,” in part, offers a solution to this complexity, but I also find it reasonable to assume that First Peter was composed to address an actual situation of suffering experienced by actual audiences of Christ-followers in Asia Minor (see Williams and Horrell 2023: 1.173–79).

35 See Williams and Horrell 2023: 1.183–89.
different uses, depending on the motives of an author or the needs of an audience (see Novenson 2015). Ehrman, for instance, argues that First Peter represents a co-opting of Pauline tradition under the name of Peter with the intent of bolstering (or feigning) “the unity of the apostolic band” (2013: 259). Others are right, I think, to highlight the similarities between First Peter and the Pauline corpus while simultaneously underscoring the distinctive ways in which First Peter utilizes and adapts traditions it holds in common with (or might even derive from) Paul (see Horrell 2013: 12–20), alongside several other “non-Pauline” traditions as well (2013: 20–26; 2017). Thus, Williams and Horrell write that “the image of the apostle is … used to bring together a wide range of early Christian traditions” and serves “as a bridge toward the establishment of a more catholic—and broadly ‘apostolic’—form of Christianity” (2023: 1.188). Troy Martin proposes, more specifically, that First Peter utilizes the name “Peter” to provide “apostolic confirmation” for Christ-followers of northern Asia Minor unaddressed by other apostolic documents like the “Assembly Letter” of Acts 15:23–29 (see Martin 2017).

I want to suggest that there may be an even more basic and foundational benefit for utilizing the name “Peter” as a means of “discursive positioning.” The (implied) author’s name is included, as should be expected, within the epistolary prescript (1 Pet 1:1): “Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ” (Πέτρος ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). A letter’s prescript, in Philip Tite’s words, “was an act of discursive positioning of the sender(s) and recipient(s). How an author decides to open his or her letter sets the tone for the letter’s contents” (2010: 59). Tite’s analysis of letter prescripts is specifically focused on Pauline “additions and expansions” that form “intentional or unintentional discursive acts that carry persuasive force” (65). First Peter’s relatively unadorned
superscriptio (compared to those of the Pauline letters)\textsuperscript{36} might seem insignificant, but even in its brevity it stands as a “dynamic … opportunity to establish positions for both the writer and the recipients,” an attempt “to direct and shape the discussion,” and a “positional move” that establishes “the tone of, and perspective advocated by, the letter” (65–66).\textsuperscript{37} This is accomplished, perhaps significantly, by the deployment of the name “Peter.”

As the first word that the audiences of First Peter encounter, these Anatolian Christ-followers are “discursively positioned” by the letter’s superscriptio to receive what follows as a message from one of Jesus’s “leading disciples” (Williams and Horrell 2023: 187). As Elliott summarizes,

According to the NT witness, Simon Peter occupied a position of priority and primacy among the early followers of Jesus, however individual authors nuanced this role and his portrait in general. He was the first to be called a disciple (Matt 4:18–20/Mark 1:16–18; compare John 1:40–42), the first to confess Jesus as the Christ (Matt 16:13–23 par.), the first to deny his Lord (Matt 26/Mark 14/Luke 22), the first to witness the empty tomb (John 20:6–7), and the first to whom the resurrected Christ appeared (1 Cor 15:5; but contrast John 20:14–17)…. In the reflection of the early Church, the memory of Peter as proto-disciple, proto-apostle, and proto-eyewitness of Jesus Christ remained vibrant. (2000: 309)

Moreover, this was a disciple of Jesus who faced and endured (to the very end) suffering of his own.\textsuperscript{38} The choice of “Peter” immediately adds a “discipleship” perspective and tone to this

\textsuperscript{36} See the helpful comparative chart (“Table 2.1: The Sender Formula”) in Weima 2016: 12–13.

\textsuperscript{37} In addition to my interest in the use of the name (and therefore the personality and authority) of “Peter,” another significant “positional move” taken by the author of First Peter is in limiting the attention he devotes to himself. He does this in two ways. First, by immediately invoking his (pseudo-)apostolic authority, the author effectively points away from himself and “cloak[s] the message of the epistle in an authority derived from Christ” (Achtemeier 1996: 80). Second, the space devoted to the prescript’s adscriptio (the third longest in the New Testament) reveals how First Peter is wholly focused on its audiences: “The identity of the recipients is a more central concern to the author than his own identity” (Michaels 1988: 6). Again, see the helpful comparative chart (“Table 2.2: The Recipient Formula”) in Weima 2016: 32–33).

\textsuperscript{38} See 1 Clem 5.1–4: “But to stop giving ancient examples, let us come to those who became athletic contenders in quite recent times. We should remember the noble examples of our own generation. Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most upright pillars were persecuted, and they struggled in the contest even to
letter—and specifically the perspective of a foremost disciple with the authority and experience that enables him to “make disciples” of those he addresses. The choice of Peter as the implied author of First Peter does not “prove” that it functions as a summons to discipleship. But if I am ultimately correct in my contention that First Peter can and should be read as a summons to discipleship, the choice of Peter as the letter’s implied author could hardly be more appropriate.39

“Beloved, I exhort you …” (1 Pet 2:11)

Whereas the choice of the pseudonym “Peter” may assist in “filling out” or confirming the discipleship perspective of First Peter, a second preliminary point has the potential to position us strategically to encounter the letter as a summons to discipleship: its paraenetic tone, style, and function.40 Troy Martin has argued at length (and convincingly) that First Peter “corresponds to the paraenetic genre” in terms of its forms, its contents, and its social setting.

39 In response to a possible objection that Peter does not fare well throughout the gospel tradition, I would argue that Peter’s flaws (1) often serve the literary motives of the evangelists; and (2) Peter is able to represent not the “perfect” disciple, but a realistic and relatable disciple. Beyond this, traditions external to the Gospels continue to testify to Peter’s importance (Acts 1–15 passim; 1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18–19; 2:6–10, 11–14).

40 Martin makes an important caveat to say that a paraenetic text’s compositional structure is not determined by its paraenetic genre and is therefore not limited to a “fixed literary form”: “Each paraenetic text or document must be individually analyzed in order to establish its literary composition” (1992a: 133–34). It is also important to note that not all scholars agree that paraenesis constitutes a “genre,” per se (though this is typically how it is discussed within primo-Petrine scholarship). It might be more productive to say that paraenesis utilizes certain literary forms and tropes, but it is the purpose to which it is put that constitutes its “paraenetic” character. The discussion that follows will clarify that the importance of something being “paraenetic” lies in its social function.
Paraenesis typically takes the form of moral exhortation characterized as traditional, widely applicable, familiar to the audiences, exemplified in the lives of “models” or “patterns,” and delivered by well-regarded and morally-superior figures.

The significance of labeling a text “paraenetic,” however, lies not in a specific literary form (or combination of forms), but in characterizing the purpose of that text and the function(s) to which it is put. Wiard Popkes notes that many scholars (including scholars of First Peter) define paraenesis “as a genre, thereby regarding paraenesis as a literary form and defining certain texts as paraenetic” (2005: 14). Popkes, however, calls this “highly questionable” and concludes that “the argument that paraenesis denotes a literary genre (a Gattung) cannot be maintained.” Instead, “there are no ‘paraenetic texts’ as such; rather we must ask from case to case whether a given text serves paraenetic purposes” (15). The purpose or function of paraenesis, in Popkes’s words,

is to promote attitudes and actions which secure the future of the recipient, both short- and long-range. The present time is a time of decision which implies an element of transition. Someone has come into a state of reshaping his or her future and now needs competent advice…. Paraenesis guides and shapes conversion. (17–18).

As we will see throughout this study, First Peter’s exhortations reflect this setting well. Of particular interest to the present discussion is the function of First Peter as a paraenetic epistle.

As Abraham Malherbe observes,

The collection of sample letters which they [rhetoricians concerned with the proper style of letters] provide are not model letters so much as they are samples of various styles. They provide a guide to the tone in which one was to write letters. The samples also indicate that the intention of the writer was to be made clear, in keeping with the rhetorical practice, by adopting in the letter a style appropriate to that intention. Hence a

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paraenetic letter would be written in a style appropriate to and characteristic of paraenesis. (1992: 284)

While attention has often been paid to First Peter’s paraenetic function on the one hand, and to its epistolary form or genre on the other, little attention, it seems, has been paid to the synthesis of these two features.\(^{42}\)

Walter Wilson’s study of Colossians provides valuable insight here. Wilson states that “the large majority of Greco-Roman letters that are characterized by exhortation … originate from philosophic circles of one kind or another”; further, letters “containing moral discourse would have been immediately recognizable as a conventional form of philosophic discourse” (1997: 47–48).\(^{43}\) A letter, as a means of bridging geographical (whether actual or imagined)—and sometimes chronological—distance, provided a means through which “the teacher-mentor could continue to shape the moral character of the students without being physically present” (48, emphasis mine). This was especially relevant for students who, separated from their teacher, were vulnerable to “feelings of isolation and the demoralizing effects they might have,” often due to mainstream society’s suspicion of the distinct way of life encouraged by their teacher (47).\(^{44}\) As a letter expressly “encouraging” or “exhorting” its audiences facing adverse

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\(^{42}\) One exception is Troy Martin’s cautions against interpreting First Peter (too strictly) according to the tenets of classical rhetorical criticism without sufficient attention to the complications caused by its paraenetic features and function (2007: 43). Such a procedure, Martin suggests, should “exercise restraint” (49). This has little bearing on the present argument, however, since my interest is on the social function of First Peter as a paraenetic epistle (nor will my study focus to any great extent on First Peter’s relationship to classical rhetorical practices).

\(^{43}\) This emphasis on “philosophic discourse” might seem particularly relevant to a text like Colossians with its explicit reference to “philosophy” (φιλοσοφία, 2:8), but it is no less relevant to the contents of First Peter and the wider emergence of early Christianity in a world heavily populated with a variety of philosophical schools. I will discuss early perceptions (and self-descriptions) of Christianity as a philosophical school or circle in Chapter One.

\(^{44}\) As Wilson explains, “Generally speaking, the tradents of a particular philosophic movement, whatever it might be, were summoned to adhere to a distinct explanation of human purpose which was in some manner counter to the prevailing opinions and patterns of society This meant that the way of life plotted by the philosophy’s teachings would often prove to be arduous and controversial. It was imperative, therefore, that like-minded
circumstances, attention to First Peter’s paraenetic function proves significant for reading it as a summons to discipleship.

The audiences of First Peter receive this paraenetic letter charging them to embody and maintain a specific “way of life.” Given that the audiences of First Peter inhabited a world in which paraenetic letters were frequently used to communicate teachers’ instructions for their students, especially in the context of a teacher’s absence, it is reasonable to assume that the audiences of First Peter would have received this letter with the same disposition. The Christ-followers of First Peter, in other words, would naturally have understood themselves to be addressed in this letter as disciples advancing in their education and abiding in their teacher’s words and practices.

Two final points are worth mentioning in support of reading First Peter as a paraenetic epistle summoning its audiences to discipleship. First, as discussed above, these audiences are addressed (pseudonymously) by the towering figure of the apostle Peter; the authority borne by his name (especially as accompanied by his apostolic title) was conceivably enough to make them adopt a subordinate and deferential position, much like students learning how to think and act from their teachers.\[45\] Second, pseudonymous paraenetic letters are left to us from antiquity, especially from within philosophical circles. While the specific motives of any given letter must

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\[45\] "The one who instructs the recipient is the moral superior, generally because of a higher social position and greater knowledge" (Purdue 1990: 14–15). I will discuss the importance of teachers—and of students’ deference to teachers—in Chapter Two.
be determined from its own contents, there is a noticeable tendency across many of these letters “to propagate the philosophic life” (Donelson 1986: 41)—and a particular one at that. For example, we find Socrates to be, in Donelson’s words, “an empty vessel into which Cynic virtues are poured,” especially in letters attributed to Socrates himself (1986: 38–39). Wilson also concludes that “pseudonymous letters sought to recreate vividly the personality of the dead sage, making him accessible as an embodiment of the type of philosophic vocation propagated by the movement” (1997: 49–50). So, although the life of Peter plays little to no role in the exhortations of First Peter, this letter’s use of the name and authority is consistent with a paraenetic practice known to us from antiquity: choosing a reputable figure to exhort disciples in the doctrines and lifestyles of a teacher.

**Conclusion**

The foregoing discussions in this introductory chapter have commenced the present work as a study of First Peter’s social strategy in addressing its audiences as disciples as understood in the context of first-century Mediterranean discipliehs. The task of the chapters that follow is to demonstrate that First Peter can and should be read as a summons to discipleship and that such a reading can illumine and improve our understanding of the letter. I have also located this project among trends in social-scientific approaches to biblical literature and in relation to relevant primo-Petrine research. The final discussions of First Peter’s pseudonymity and paraenetic function have also served as an initial “taste” or “hint” of my contention that First Peter itself invites us, alongside its original, first-century Anatolian readers, to appreciate its exhortations as “reflections of and response to” the ancient sociocultural phenomena of discipleship.
CHAPTER ONE

LOYALTY AND BENEFICENCE:

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR INTERPRETING FIRST PETER

O you who first amid so great a darkness were able
to raise aloft a light so clear, illumining the blessings of life,
you I follow, O glory of the Grecian race, and now
on the marks you have left I plant my own footsteps firm,
not so much desiring to be your rival, as for love,
because I yearn to copy you.

——Lucretius

The beauty of Lucretius’s panegyric on Epicurus is arguably without rival. Through the lines quoted here and several more that follow, this first-century BCE philosopher articulates his and his fellow Epicureans’ appreciation for this “illustrious man” (inculte), the founder of their school of thought and the inspiration for their way of life. Though Epicurus is long-dead (ca. 270 BCE), Lucretius acclaims him directly as their benefactor: “You are our father, the discoverer of truths, you supply us with a father’s precepts.” From his “reasoning” (ratio) Epicureans gain insight into the nature of all things—just as Epicurus himself did—and for this Lucretius declares his own intent to follow in his teacher’s footsteps: he “yearns” to imitate Epicurus, not out of envy or in a competitive spirit, but out of devotion and in thanksgiving for the benefits Lucretius has received. His intention is that of a loving, loyal client extolling the honor of his benefactor.

1 Lucr. 3.1–6 (trans. Rouse LCL, mod.): O tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen / qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae, / te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc / ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis, / non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem / quod te imitari aveo.

2 Lucr. 3.9–10: tu pater es, rerum inventor, to patria nobis / suppeditas praecepta. “Father” was a common title for benefactors used by their clients and by third parties. I will discuss this in more detail below (pp. 74–76).
Lucretius’s encomium deftly combines two themes I will explore in this chapter: loyalty and beneficence. Epicurus, like many philosophers before and after him (and like philosophy or wisdom itself),\(^3\) bestows gifts and benefits upon his students; those students, in turn, repay Epicurus in various ways: praise, thanksgiving, imitation, and other acts that demonstrate their loyalty to Epicurus. The relationship is characterized by an ongoing, reciprocal commitment: philosopher-teachers’ gifts or benefits (of knowledge, skill, and virtue) inspire their students’ loyalty; students’ loyalty reinspires their teachers’ motivation to benefit students through more teaching. Loyalty and beneficence, in other words, are part and parcel of ancient teacher-student relationships—in a word, “discipleship.” My purpose with this chapter is to argue each of these widespread sociocultural themes is strategically employed by First Peter throughout its rhetoric; therefore, attention to the presence of these themes in First Peter provides a pair of significant frameworks for reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship.

Previous claims to recognize the concept of discipleship in First Peter have revolved around the language of 1 Pet 2:21: “that you would follow in his footsteps” (ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἰχνεσιν αὐτοῦ), as I discussed in the Introduction. With interpretations like this, 1 Pet 2:21 might stand as “a call to discipleship” (Achtemeier 1996: 199), but it stands alone and ineffectively. Claims like these are insufficient, in my opinion, for at least two reasons. First, this claim is

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\(^3\) See Seneca, *Ep.* 90.28 (trans. Graver and Long): “Wisdom indicates the things that are really bad and those that merely seem so. It purges our minds of illusion, giving them a substantive dignity while curtailing the sort of dignity that is all empty show, and insisting that we understand the difference between greatness and pomposity. It imparts to us a conception of nature as a whole and a conception of itself…. When we become devotees of wisdom, we are given access not to some local shrine but to the mighty temple of all the gods, the vault of heaven itself, whose phenomena are brought before the mind’s eye as they really are; for ordinary vision is inadequate to register so vast a spectacle.” (*Quae sint mala, quae videantur ostendit, vanitatem exuit mentibus, dat magnitudinem solidam, inflatam vero et ex inani speciosam reprimit, nec ignorari sinit inter magna quid intersit et tumida, totius naturae notitiam ac suae tradit… Haec eius initianta sunt, per quae non municipale sacrum, sed ingens deorum omnium templum, mundus ipse reseratur, cuius vera simulacra verasque facies cernendas mentibus protulit.*)
made without necessary attention to the sociocultural or thematic contexts of First Peter. Scholars have claimed that “following” in Christ’s footsteps reflects a technical vocabulary of discipleship without asking whether such (supposedly) technical language would be heard as such by the audiences of First Peter. In this chapter, I will argue that the themes of loyalty and beneficence are each a pervasive part of First Peter’s rhetoric and therefore permit us to assume that the language of “following” at 1 Pet 2:21 can be understood to connote a specific and important act of “discipleship.” Second, and more importantly, my intention with this study is to demonstrate that First Peter has much more to say about discipleship than what we find at 2:21 and its immediate literary context. Previous claims to identify discipleship in First Peter, in other words, have been too narrowly focused. Attention to the pervasive themes of loyalty and beneficence in First Peter, I will demonstrate, enables us to identify discipleship not only at 1 Pet 2:21, but throughout the letter as a whole, thereby inviting us to read it comprehensively as a summons to discipleship.

Here I will suggest that the themes of loyalty and beneficence are exhibited throughout First Peter’s strategic deployment of the language of πίστις (typically glossed in English with language of “faith,” “trust,” or “belief”) and χάρις (typically glossed in English with language of “grace”), respectively. That these terms and themes are present in First Peter has not gone unnoticed; their presence as significant aspects of the letter’s rhetoric, however, has been

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4 As discussed in the Introduction (pp. 19–21), Achtemeier, while claiming that 1 Pet 2:21 is itself “a call to discipleship,” does not suggest any way in which that “call” relates to the rest of the letter’s exhortations; the term “discipleship” does not occur elsewhere in his commentary, and any reference to “disciples” is restricted to those of the gospel tradition or discussions of students’ (pseudonymous) literary compositions in their teachers’ names. Goppelt’s understanding of discipleship throughout First Peter is, admittedly, broader: he refers to the situation of the audiences as one of “discipleship” (or as characterized by discipleship), yet this description, in my opinion, remains unsatisfactory for other reasons already expressed.
underappreciated. One likely explanation, upon which I will expound below, is the theological weight that these words have been assumed—or forced—to carry in their respective histories of interpretation. Attention to the first-century Mediterranean contexts in which this language (πίστις, χάρις) was used, however, reveals their potential to illumine specific aspects of the letter’s socio-rhetorical strategy of summoning its audiences to discipleship. More specifically, I will demonstrate that First Peter employs the language of πίστις in order to define the underlying cause of its audiences’ present suffering—their newfound loyalty (πίστις) toward God through Christ; and it employs the language of χάρις as a means of characterizing the God to whom they now find themselves loyal—he is their benefactor, and they are now related to him as recipients of his beneficence (χάρις). Just as Lucretius used this pair of themes to speak of his responsibility as a disciple of Epicurus and his indebtedness to such an illustrious teacher, so too does First Peter. Recognizing the importance of this pair of themes in First Peter positions us to read the letter in a manner similar to how its earliest audiences’ received it: as summoning them to actions and dispositions natural to those who would consider themselves loyal disciples of a beneficent teacher.

I will begin this chapter by discussing the importance of attending to the “first-level meanings” of First Peter’s vocabulary in its first-century CE Mediterranean context. The

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5 These glosses (“loyalty” for πίστις, “beneficence” for χάρις) are heuristic; I do not mean to suggest that these are the only meanings or nuances that these Greek words (or their Latin equivalents) can connote. My point in the discussions that follow will be to demonstrate that these particular connotations make the most sense of how these words (and their cognates) are being employed throughout First Peter.

6 The difference in the precise vocabulary (not to mention the language itself) used by Lucretius is ultimately inconsequential: there were many ways to speak of loyalty and reciprocity in the ancient world, and I am in no way suggesting that First Peter was specifically dependent on Lucretius. My study is thematic and conceptual in nature, so the presence of these themes and concepts, however they are expressed, is enough. That said, the presence of “stock” or “technical” vocabulary, as far as such conventions may be determined, is worth noting.
remainder of the chapter will be divided into two parts, one on the theme of “loyalty” in First Peter (and its ability to clarify the situation addressed by the letter) and the other on the theme of “beneficence” in First Peter (and its function in reframing the audiences’ understanding of their situation). By reading First Peter in these contexts, my goal is to lay a foundation to argue that those who read or heard its exhortations would have readily received them as disciples.

**Faith, Grace, and “First-Level” Meanings**

As noted above, the abundance of \(\pi\sigma\tau\varsigma\) - and \(\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma\)-language throughout First Peter has not gone unnoticed. As Troy Martin notes, “Words for faith formed on the \(\pi\sigma\tau\)-stem occur at least a dozen times in 1 Peter and demonstrate the importance of this concept in the letter” (2016b: 46). Travis Williams, likewise, writes that First Peter “employs \(\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma\) (or some cognate) eleven times in five brief chapters. Apart from the Pauline (and deuter-Pauline) literature, no other place in the New Testament has such a concentrated use of the term” (2016: 432). At issue as I begin my own analysis of First Peter, however, are the theological weights (or perhaps burdens) carried by glosses like “faith” and “belief” (for \(\pi\sigma\tau\varsigma\)) and “grace” (for \(\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma\)) across generations of Christian reception and interpretation. My intent with this initial discussion, therefore, is to ask how we might set aside the explicitly (or at least exclusively) theological connotations of words like “faith” and “grace” in the interest of discerning how the audiences of First Peter would have received and understood this kind of language.

I do not intend to propose or imply that the vocabularies of \(\pi\sigma\tau\varsigma\) and \(\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma\) appear in

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7 Modern English versions typically translate \(\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma\) as “grace” across First Peter, though this is somewhat complicated by its two occurrences in 1 Pet 2:19–20 (see below, pp. 58–59). Modern English versions are more diversified and flexible in translating the language of \(\pi\sigma\tau\varsigma\), employing “trust” in addition to “faith” and “belief” (along with related verbs and adjectives).
First Peter devoid of theological import or connotation. Both are clearly “theological” in as much as they are presented by First Peter in relation to God. Christ-followers’ πίστις is directed “toward God” (πίστιν εἰς θεόν, 1:21) and God is characterized as πιστός (4:19). First Peter introduces χάρις in an explicitly soteriological context (1:10) and then presents χάρις as both logically and temporally related to “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:13) and as “from God” (χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ, 5:12). At issue, however, is the way words like these have become, as Zeba Crook writes, “so infused with Christian theological overtones that we have lost sight of the Graeco-Roman context that provided [their] first level of meaning” (2004: 7). In the same way, theological readings may also obscure these words’ “first-level contexts,” neglecting to acknowledge how closely associated the language of χάρις is, for instance, with the language and practice of enslavement.8 Attending to “first-level meanings” and “first-level contexts,” I submit, promotes responsible interpretations of First Peter and provides important cautions for attempts to recontextualize its exhortation and testimony.

Teresa Morgan’s extensive study of πίστις (and fides) in Greek and Roman contexts (apart from First Peter) is particularly instructive here. At the outset Morgan states a “basic principle of cultural historiography”:9

New communities forming themselves within an existing culture do not typically take language in common use in the world around them and immediately assign to it radical new meanings. New meanings may, and often do, evolve, but evolution takes time. This

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8 As an example of this, the Revised Common Lectionary’s partitioning of First Peter for reading in churches includes the letter’s address to enslaved persons (typically 2:18–25), but omits 1 Pet 2:18—the verse that makes it clear that these exhortations concerning χάρις (παρὰ θεῷ) were originally addressed to enslaved persons being exhorted to endure the treatment of harsh enslavers. A full study of enslavement (and other important and overlooked contexts) in First Peter is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to recognize the dynamics at work in the use of this language, especially as texts like First Peter have been used to promote and support the subjugation of others in the history of their reception. For a brief overview of this issue, see Appendix B.

9 Daniel Howard-Snyder has termed what follows here “Morgan’s maxim” (2017: 33). For an introduction to Morgan’s work, see Morgan 2018.
is all the more likely to be the case when the new community is a missionary one. One does not communicate effectively with potential converts by using language in a way which they will not understand. (2015: 4)

First Peter itself does not appear intent on “converting” its audiences, since it assumes that they have already been “evangelized” (1:12, 25). The paraenetic nature of the letter suggests that it functions to reaffirm what its audiences already know (or to remind them of it). First Peter would be hard-pressed to achieve this goal if it used language (like πίστις or χάρις) in ways that were unfamiliar to its audiences.10 Morgan continues, specifically in relation to the language of πίστις:

In its earliest years, therefore, we should not expect the meaning of Christian pistis (or fides) language to be wholly sui generis. We should expect those who use it to understand it within the range of meanings which are in play in the world around them, and our study of it should be equally culturally embedded. (2015: 4)

The author and audiences of First Peter were “products of their complex sociocultural context as much as contributors to it” (3), and our understanding of key words like πίστις and χάρις needs to take this “complex sociocultural context” into account. With the following two sections, I will seek to establish this context and its significance for my proposed reading of First Peter.

Rereading Πίστις in the Context of Ancient Relationships

Scholars frequently conclude that First Peter uses the language of πίστις primarily to connote a sense of “trust” (rather than an intellectual assent to a body of “beliefs” or any sort of interior or emotional quality).11 This is a helpful place to begin, since the concept of trust “stands

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10 This does not preclude the possibility that First Peter might intend to clarify or even redefine the terms it uses. This may be the case in its employment of χάρις, stipulating precisely what χάρις is (2:19, 20) and that it is “true” (ἀληθῆ, 5:12); see T. Williams 2016. Still, for such a clarification or redefinition to be effective, it must happen gradually, and it must begin within the parameters of the audiences’ preunderstandings of the terms it seeks to clarify or to redefine.

11 Morgan helpfully clarifies that this distinction is typically modern: “scholarship on trust distinguishes between trust as an emotion, a cognitive process, an action, a relationship, and an aspect of community, but in practice, theories tend to involve more than one aspect of it…. What modern scholars struggle to distinguish, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and early Christian sources rarely attempt to” (2015: 19).
at the heart of the *pistis/fides* lexica” (Morgan 2015: 15). First Peter presents God as “trustworthy” (πιστός, 4:19), and one to whom its audiences may “entrust” themselves (παρατίθημι) even as they suffer. Similarly, where First Peter states that its audiences are “guarded by the power of God through πίστις” (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ φρουρουμένου διὰ πίστεως, 1:5), commentators typically interpret this to mean that God’s (trustworthy) power inspires Christ-followers to put their own “trust” in God. With this in mind, these audiences are then led to understand that it is their “trust” in God—presumably their trust in God’s power to guard them through their trials—that is under examination (1:7); the strength of their trust will carry them forward toward “salvation,” described as the “goal” (τέλος) of their πίστις (1:8, 9).¹³

Morgan’s study of πίστις and *fides*,¹⁴ however, reveals “an aspect of *pistis* which (probably under the influence of Augustine) has been relatively neglected in the study of the very early churches: the fact that it is, first and foremost, neither a body of beliefs nor a function of the heart or mind, but a relationship which creates community” (2015: 14).¹⁵ “Trust,” along with the vocabulary used to describe it, is never understood as an end in and of itself; it is

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¹² Somewhat unfortunately, given this interpretation, the majority of commentators and modern English versions still translate πίστις in 1:5 (and elsewhere in the letter’s proem) with the English word “faith.” Commentators therefore make space in their “notes” to define faith more carefully. One issue this raises, therefore, is the matter of clarity in translation, as well as commentators’ consistency or fidelity across their translations of First Peter. I will return to this below.

¹³ The participle in 1:8 (πιστεύοντες), however, is typically translated with “believe” or “believing in.”

¹⁴ On the relationship between the Greek πίστις and the Latin *fides*, see Morgan 2015: 7: “the consensus has been that (by the second century BCE, at least) the two concepts were fully mutually intelligible and functioned in very similar ways in Greek- and Latin-speaking communities.” See also Crook 2004: 201–2, 209–11.

¹⁵ Augustine classically distinguishes between faith in two kinds: there are the things “which are believed” and the “faith by which” they “are believed” (*De Trinitate* 13.2.5: *sed aliud sunt ea quae creduntur, aliud fides quae creduntur*). Morgan notes important ways in which “Augustine’s model fits poorly with the way *pistis* and *fides* are presented in any body of late Hellenistic or early imperial, Graeco-Roman, Jewish, or Christian material” (2015: 28–30). Augustine’s influence on subsequent definitions of faith can also be seen in commentaries on First Peter (see below, p. 52, n. 20).
“everywhere understood as a basic building block of societies, emerging from the need of
individuals and groups to make and maintain relationships” (75). Acts and dispositions of trust
produce a “social jigsaw,” binding parties together in “a common enterprise” (85).

The language of πίστις and fides is specifically used by Greek and Roman authors in
many cases to denote a foundational principle upon which society and friendship are built. As
one example, “The foundation of justice,” Cicero writes, “is good fides—that is, truth and
fidelity to promises and agreements.” A Babrian fable of partnership between an eagle and lion
requires a pledge (πίστις) of the eagle’s feathers as a sign of trust and fidelity: “How can I trust
you as a friend,” the lion asks, “if you don’t stay with me?” The maintenance of relationships
(civic, social, or otherwise) occurs as each party develops senses or habits of devotion and
loyalty toward one another, thereby assuring one another that they were indeed trustworthy. This
extends to the realm of relationships between humans and divine beings as well. Fourth
Maccabees, for example, uses the language of πίστις to denote what pious “sons of Abraham”
owe God. Considering the examples of steadfastness provided (e.g., Abraham, Daniel), we
should understand the use of πίστις to connote a sense of “loyalty” and “commitment”: “You,
too, therefore, having the same πίστις toward God, must not be embittered” (16:22).

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17 Off. 1.7.23 (trans Miller LCL, mod.): Fundamentum autem est iustitiae fides, id est dictorum
conventorumque constantia et veritas. See Morgan 2015: 117–20 and the accompanying notes for other references.
19 These are the words of a mother to her seven sons as they face an imminent death at the hands of
Antiochus: καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν τὴν αὐτὴν πίστιν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἐρχόντες μὴ γαλατοῦντες. This connotation of commitment
or loyalty may also be present in the other occurrences of πίστις at 4 Macc 15:24; 17:2, and may also be present in
the uses of πιστεύω at 4:7; 5:25; 7:19, 21. This is certainly the case at 4 Macc 8:6–7: Antiochus promises positions
of power to anyone who pledges to obey him characterizing himself as “one who benefits” (εὐεργετῶ, 8:6) those
who “are loyal” to him (πιστεύω, 8:7).
These texts (and many more) expand our horizon of understanding beyond an initial (or even ongoing) act or disposition of “trust” when we encounter the language of πίστις (or fides); here we see that it was the “exterior, active, interactive, and productive” function of πίστις that was of interest to our ancient sources (Morgan 2015: 53). Each significance connoted by the language of πίστις may depend on a foundation of “trust,” but trust is depicted, discussed, and celebrated as part of an “inescapable reciprocity.” Morgan explains:

[F]or the landowner to farm his estate, the father to look after his son, or the husband and wife to remain married, each must trust the other to fulfil their side of the relationship and believe that they will; each must be loyal over time; each must be reliable and have confidence in the other; each must negotiate their fear or doubt that the other will not be trustworthy. (2015: 53, emphasis mine)

This dynamic “loyalty,” I propose, is what makes the most sense of First Peter’s use of πίστις.

I am certainly not the first to recognize the potential of First Peter’s πιστις-language to connote loyalty. J. Ramsey Michaels suggests that there is much more to First Peter’s πίστις than “trust” in his commentary on 1 Pet 1:5:

It is faith understood as continuing trust or faithfulness. Ironically, in 1 Peter, ὑπακοή is the term used for the giving of allegiance, while πίστις characteristically refers to the maintaining of allegiance—almost the exact opposite of what is suggested by the respective English words “obedience” and “faith.” God protects his people by his power as they wait to come into their inheritance, but what is required of them in the meantime is faithfulness. (1988: 23, emphasis mine)

In this light, it is not Christ-followers’ “trust” in God that is under examination through their present trials (1:6–7), but their allegiance, faithfulness, or loyalty toward God. John Elliott presents a more formal definition of “faith” in light of “the ancient world, where attention focuses chiefly on external social behavior and relations”: πίστις is “the social, externally manifested behavior of loyalty and commitment to another person or group or deity.” First Peter’s use of πιστις-language, Elliott concludes, means “maintaining trust, loyalty, and
commitment” toward Christ and God (2000: 340, emphasis mine). Craig Keener clarifies that his use of the word “trust” is intended to communicate “entrusting one’s life and direction to God in a relationship of mutual faithfulness dependent on God” (2021: 70, emphasis mine).

However, as commentators progress through the text and rhetoric of First Peter, this penchant of πίστις-language to connote loyalty is often lost or forgotten. For example, as Elliott defines πίστις again at 1 Pet 1:21 he states, “Pistis here, as elsewhere, means unshakable and unswerving trust in God” (2000: 378, emphasis mine). At times commentators continue to define πίστις as a “commitment,” but do so by qualifying it with words like “personal,” thereby highlighting (or at least giving the impression of) an interiority of faith (e.g., Michaels 1988: 300; Achtemeier 1996: 342). In some cases, the gloss “faith” is left unexplained (e.g., Schreiner 2020; Jobes 2022), while in other cases the definition or explanation of “faith” provided is ambiguous. At other times the translation procedure itself seems unclear. Elliott, for example, translates the participle πιστεύοντες at 1 Pet 1:8 with “trusting,” but uses forms of “believe” to translate the substantive participles at 2:6–7. “Belief” (perhaps more than “faith”) carries the

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20 Schreiner comes close to defining πίστις as fides qua creduntur: God’s power (1:5) “is the means by which our faith is sustained…. God will preserve their faith through sufferings and the vicissitudes of life. Faith and hope are ultimately gifts of God, and he fortifies believers so that they persist in faith and hope” (2020: 62–63). Jobes may equate “faith” with “trust” (2022: 90), but it is not entirely clear; she does not include πίστις or its cognates in her “Index of Greek Words,” despite its importance in throughout the letter (363). Schreiner’s and Jobes’s commentaries are each written for theologically motivated series, which may indicate the assumption of a shared understanding of “faith” between them and their audiences.

21 For example, Achtemeier explains that, regarding 1 Pet 1:5, God’s “divine guarding is now visibly appropriated by the Christians’ trust (διὰ πίστεως), which becomes the instrument whereby the divine protection becomes reality. Such Christian faith is therefore the visible evidence of the unseen reality evoking that trust” (1996: 97). It is unclear to me, at least, as to how πίστις precisely relates, in Achtemeier’s reading, to “the unseen reality” (God?) that evokes Christian trust in God.

22 This is further complicated by Elliott’s explanation: “In the Isaian text [quoted at 1 Pet 2:6–7], the participle pisteuōn has the sense of ‘trust’ rather than ‘believe.’ In the NT, the verb pisteuō and the noun pistis also frequently denote belief in the sense of trust. However ‘believe’ in the Petrine context indicates the act that identifies the acceptance of and trust in Jesus as the living stone, which separates those who ‘believe’ (v 7a) from nonbelievers (apistou̇n, v 7b), who ‘disobey’ (apeithentes the word (v 8b))” (2000: 426). If πιστεύω “denotes” an act of trust (1)
potential to connote ideas of a person’s cognitive assent to a body of teachings (“beliefs”). My point here is to suggest that our analysis of First Peter’s πίστις-language might proceed with more precision, clarity, and consistency in both translation and definition wherever possible.

It is my contention, in light of this discussion, that we may cohesively approach First Peter’s πίστις-language (with precision, clarity, and consistency) by attending to this language’s “first-level meaning” in the context of relationships, and that this attention will assist me in reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship. As I will demonstrate below, First Peter strategically employs the language of πίστις throughout its rhetoric (especially in 1:14–2:10) as a means of defining its audiences’ resocialized existence as those who have πίστις εἰς θεόν, “loyalty toward God” (1:21; see also 2:6, 7) and to assist them in understanding the suffering they now experience. In doing so, I propose, First Peter characterizes the situation of its audiences as analogous to that of disciples who have committed themselves to a (new) teacher and thereby, I will argue, addresses its audiences as disciples. Before moving forward to argue and demonstrate this, however, I turn to a second key term in First Peter also in need of a fresh approach and perspective.

in the Isaian text quoted, (2) throughout the wider contexts of the New Testament and First Peter, and (3) within First Peter itself, why not maintain consistency by using the verb “trust” in each occurrence?

23 This might be implied, for instance, in the language of Jude 3: “the faith once entrusted to the holy ones” (τῇ ἁπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει), though I have my doubts that this is the case; Williams and Horrell suggest that this meaning is present at Gal 1:23; Eph 4:5; Phil 1:27; Col 1:23; 2:7; 1 Tim 4:1; 5:8; see Williams and Horrell 2023: 2.586). At 1 Pet 5:9, Achtemeier translates στεροὶ τῇ πίστει as “firm in the faith” (emphasis added), though he clarifies in his commentary that it “means here a personal or communal commitment of trust rather than a body of doctrine” (1996: 342). If it does not refer to a “body of doctrine,” what might be implied by the inclusion of the (unnecessary) English definite article in translation?

24 I do not deny that texts may employ a particular word having the capacity for multiple senses in variegated ways. I assume, however, that a text’s ability to successfully communicate and accomplish its social strategy depends on a relatively consistent use of language for the sake of its audiences’ comprehension. Significant variations in the meaning of a key word (like πίστις in First Peter) would, therefore, need to be adequately signaled.
Rereading Χάρις in the Context of Ancient Beneficence

Approaching the language of χάρις in First Peter is complicated in ways similar to approaching the language of πίστις, though I will presently show that there are additional complexities to which we should attend. It will be helpful, therefore, to place my proposal for a coherent reading of First Peter’s χαρίς-language in the context of ongoing discussions of χάρις and its cognates in the larger field of New Testament (and especially Pauline) studies.

The language of χάρις across the New Testament, as noted above, is typically glossed with the English word “grace.” “Grace” is a word tinged with theological (specifically, soteriological) connotations—connotations rooted in New Testament occurrences of the word χάρις (e.g., Rom 3:24; Eph 2:5, 8) but developed significantly by Christian writers of the Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation periods. James Harrison observes that studies of χάρις in the New Testament “largely ignore its Graeco-Roman context” and treat “Pauline grace as a precursor to the later theological debates of the Church Fathers” (2003: 8–9). Similarly, Crook notes that many twentieth-century studies of “grace” share the understanding that New Testament χάρις can be analysed separately from its Graeco-Roman context. They assume New Testament χάρις is imbued with a special meaning that on the one hand shows New Testament writers were doing something completely novel with the term, and on the other hand, used it in such a way that would have appeared almost foreign to Graeco-Roman hearers. (2004: 139)25

Moreover, many such studies treat grace “as a timeless construct with minimal relevance to the social and theological framework of Graeco-Roman society,” so that Paul and other New Testament authors “vanish into theological abstraction” (Harrison 2003: 9–10).26 It is difficult to

25 The studies cited and analyzed by Crook include Moffatt 1932; Manson 1932; Conzelmann 1964.
26 See Harrison 2003: 8–13 and the accompanying notes for several other examples of such studies.
overstate the Christian theological import that the word “grace” has carried in the history of its reception—what John Barclay calls its “(special) connotations” (2015: 186, 562).  

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the interpretation of First Peter’s χάρις-language (and its cognates) has followed a similar trajectory. Scholars gloss χάρις as “grace” without much explanation or proceed to define “grace” in a variety of ways. It is a “transforming power” that enables the conduct of Christ-followers (Achtemeier 1996: 116); a “designation for God’s activity in the world” roughly synonymous with the Spirit (Michaels 1988: lxv); an “experience of salvation blessings” (Grudem 1988: 73; see Howe 2000: 343); or “God’s saving work” that will “complete sanctification” (Schreiner 2020: 78–79; see Keener 2021: 93); just to name a few. Each of these definitions (among others) has a clear soteriological nuance. While I will suggest below that First Peter’s use of χάρις is integral to its articulation of its soteriology, the manner in which these definitions are put forward seems to presume later theological assumptions about the nature of χάρις that need not predetermine our reading of the term throughout First Peter.

Recent attention to the sociocultural contexts and uses of χάρις has been helpful in tempering explicitly theological interpretations of χάρις-language across the Pauline corpus; I suggest that such attention will also prove instructive for understanding the meaning and function of this language throughout First Peter.  

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27 See Barclay 2015: 79–182 for a thorough catalogue and analysis of interpretations of Paul’s employment of χάρις throughout Christian theological traditions; see Barclay 2020b: 18–23 for a summary.

28 This has been coined the “new perspective on grace” in a forthcoming edited volume (Adams et al. 2023), described as a collection of “essays inspired by Barclay’s magnum opus” (referring to Barclay 2015). See Gorman 2017: 211: “Paul and the Gift has been compared in significance to Sanders’s Paul and Palestinian Judaism, though of course that sort of judgment will not be final for some time.”
inscriptions and papyri, along with first-century Jewish and Greek and Roman philosophical contexts, confirm χάρις to be “the fundamental leitmotiv of the Hellenistic reciprocity system” (2003: 63), a system comprising structures of exchange (e.g., goods, favors, services, etc.) between individuals or groups that initiated social relationships between parties to the exchange.

Translating χάρις and its Latin equivalent gratia in this context of reciprocity is somewhat complicated, but for my purposes I will summarize it with reference to a few relevant ancient sources.29 Aristotle defines χάρις in the context of reciprocity thus:

Those to whom men feel grateful (χάριν), and for what reasons, and in what frame of mind, will be clear when we have defined what favor (χάριν) is. Let favor (χάρις), then, with regard to which the person who receives it is said to be grateful (χάριν), be a service to the one who needs it, not in return for something nor in the interest of him who renders it, but in that of the recipient.30

David deSilva comments that χάρις is used here “to refer to the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit to another person or to a group” and that it “highlights the generosity and disposition of the patron, benefactor or giver” (2022: 107). In this passage it also refers to the response that one may express toward the giver—in this case, gratitude. Moreover, χάρις is often used to refer to a “gift” or “favor” itself, and this is seen frequently across inscriptions throughout antiquity (see Harrison 2003: 27–63). What is important to note here is the way in

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29 On the general equivalency between χάρις and gratia in the context of relationships characterized by reciprocity, see Harrison 2003: 199, including its reference to the early comparative work of Valerius Maximus on Greek and Roman dispositions toward giving and gratitude (Val. Max. 4.8 [“Of Liberality”]; 5.2 [Of Gratitude]; 5.3 [Of Ingratitude]). On the range of meanings that χάρις might be used to connote, see Crook 2004: 132–36.

which χάρις itself has the capacity to denote a system of reciprocity, summarized best by
Sophocles: “It is χάρις that always begets χάριν.”

This understanding of reciprocity is artfully communicated by Seneca in his discussion of
“benefits,” wherein he appeals to the common image of three divine Gratiae (“Graces”) dancing
with and among one another—and asks why there are three of them.

Some would have it appear that there is one for bestowing a benefit, another for receiving
it, and a third for returning it; others hold that there are three classes of benefactors—
those who earn benefits, those who return them, those who receive and return them at
the same time. But of the two explanations, accept as true whichever you like; yet what profit
is there in such knowledge? Why do the sisters hand in hand dance in a ring which
returns upon itself? For the reason that a benefit passing in its course from hand to hand
returns nevertheless to the giver; the beauty of the whole is destroyed if the course is
anywhere broken, and it has most beauty if it is continuous and maintains an
uninterrupted succession.

Barclay identifies “the norm of reciprocity in giving, receiving, and returning gifts”—each
communicated regularly with the language of χάρις and gratia—as “a fundamental principle in
Greek social life” (2020b: 5). This “norm” was expressed through a variety of social structures,
but it is nowhere more evident than in relationships between benefactors (or patrons) and their
clients, relationships that were “part of the lived reality of daily lives of regular people” (Crook
2004: 91). It is this context, I suggest, that should inform our reading of χάρις in First Peter.

31 Ajax 522: χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ή τίκτους’ άει.
32 Ben. 1.3.3–4 (trans. Basore LCL): Alii quidem videri volunt unam esse, quae det beneficium, alteram,
quae accipiat, tertiam, quae reddat; alii tria beneficorum esse genera, promerentium, reddentium, simul
accipientium reddentiumque. Sed utrumlibet ex istis iudica verum; quid ista nos scientia iuvat? Quid ille consortis
manibus in se redeuntium chorus? Ob hoc, quia ordo beneficii per manus transeuntis nihilo minus ad dantem
revertitur et totius speciem perdit, si usquam interruptus est, pulcherrimus, si cohaeret et vices servat.

33 In what follows, I will tend to use terms “benefaction” and “beneficence,” since this terminology seems
to be used more commonly with regard to, in Crook’s words, gifts, favor, or “items given to collectives” (2004: 66).
David Briones concludes that “benefaction” and “patronage” need not be as finely distinguished as they have been:
“The stress on terminology is misleading. The same terms can cover a range of different forms/institutions, and
different terms can be applied to the same forms/institutions” (2013: 30). For attempts to distinguish precisely
The social context of χάρις—like that of πίστις—has not gone completely unnoticed. Though not the focus of his earlier work, Troy Martin renders χάρις at 1 Pet 1:13 and 5:12 as “boon,” emphasizing the social connotation of “a favor done or returned” (1992a: 57). Elliott also understands χάρις in First Peter to denote “the divine favor and beneficence that believers have experienced as a result of their rebirth”; at the same time, he underscores a soteriological interpretation of χάρις by suggesting that it should be “equated” with a Christ-follower’s “salvation” (2000: 345), as though the two terms could readily be understood as synonymous. Most helpful is the study of χάρις in First Peter by Travis Williams mentioned briefly above.

Williams focuses on the language of χάρις in 1 Pet 2:19–20 to argue that these complicated verses are best explained by “the flexibility of χάρις” (2016: 431), which I have already recognized above. Most occurrences of χάρις throughout First Peter, Williams suggests, portray God as a “benevolent benefactor” lavishly bestowing benefits upon human clients (2016: 432). Christ-followers are stewards of God’s χάρις and of each “gift” (χάρισμα) that God has bestowed upon them (4:10); God bestows χάρις on those who are humble (5:5); God is characterized as abundantly “beneficent” (ὁ θεὸς πάσης χάριτος) as he provides strength and support to Christ-followers who suffer (5:10); the passive form φερομένην at 1:13 suggests that the arrival of χάρις is a divine prerogative; the phrasing of χάρις at 1:10 (τῆς εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος, between ancient “benefaction” and “patronage,” see Joubert 2000; 2001; Batten 2004; and the “cautious corrections” (Williams 2014: 70 n. 6) of Joubert and Batten in Crook 2004: 59–66.

34 See also Bechtler 1998: “In 1:10 χάρις is virtually equated with σωτηρία” (183); “First Peter 1:10 now expands this list of synonyms [for salvation] by identifying χάρις with σωτηρία. Furthermore, this identification of χάρις with σωτηρία is made even clearer in 1:13” (184); M. Williams 2011: “The parallelism between the two phrases [in 1:10] suggests that the two terms [χάρις, σωτηρία] are virtually synonymous in this context…. In that case, the χάρις of 1:13, like 1:10, denotes the eschatological grace-gift, final salvation” (176–77); see also Williams and Horrell 2023: 1.424. I will argue below that there is an important nuance overlooked with claims like these.
“the beneficence that is for you”) and its connection to Christ-followers’ σωτηρία (1:5, 9, 10; see below) suggests the same.35 A benefactor’s prerogative to exhibit beneficence easily explains these appearances of χάρις, according to Williams, since χάρις often refers to “favor” or “gift” bestowed upon a recipient, as well as to the giver’s favorable disposition toward a recipient.

As mentioned briefly already, however, the language of χάρις could also designate the “counter-gift” or “socially-obligated response” of the recipient toward a benefactor or patron (T. Williams 2016: 431); χάρις has the capacity to designate the recipient’s return for χάρις received. This assists Williams to argue that the “endurance” to which First Peter exhorts enslaved Christ-followers (2:19–20) should be understood neither as evidence of “divine favor” (as though their ability to endure is χάρις from God) nor as culminating in a “divine reward” (as though their endurance will result in χάρις from God).36 Rather, in keeping with the reciprocal nature of χάρις (and of the relationships in which χάρις was widely understood to operate), Williams argues that the language of χάρις in 1 Pet 2:19–20 indicates that (enslaved) Christ-followers’ patient endurance is (a part of) their “socially-obligated response” to God who (already) favors them with his beneficence.

While I do find Williams’s interpretation of 1 Pet 2:19–20 to be convincing, my point here is to demonstrate what may be gained by interpreting First Peter in the context of systems and structures of reciprocity, “the most common social domain in which the term [χάρις] was employed in the Hellenistic world” (T. Williams 2016: 428). Thus, appreciating a “first-level meaning” of χάρις (as with πίστις) has heuristic value, illuminating the full range of χαρις-

35 God’s beneficent actions are not limited to instances where the term χάρις appears: God gives new life (1:3, 23); provides an inheritance (1:4; 3:7, 9); protects (1:4, 5; 5:7, 10); and rewards (1:7, 9; 5:5), to name a few.

36 For a survey of these (widespread) interpretations, see T. Williams 2016: 422–28.
language throughout First Peter. As I will demonstrate below, attention to this “social domain” is particularly effective when we recognize that First Peter employs the language of χάρις in two strategic ways. First, the letter proem concludes by climactically imbuing its audiences’ “salvation” with the connotation of “beneficence” (χάρις, 1:10). Second, First Peter presents its entire message within the framework of God’s beneficence (1:13; 5:12). Each of these points will be discussed in detail below.

This attention to the social characteristics of χάρις also assists to read First Peter as a summons to discipleship. With God depicted by First Peter as a divine “benefactor” to the audiences of First Peter, they would find themselves addressed as God’s “clients” or recipients of divine beneficence, as already stated. As also noted above, however, the relationship of a benefactor or patron to his or her clients also had immense metaphorical power and versatility. Not only did benefaction “supply the conceptual and practical framework within which Graeco-Romans, including Hellenized Jews like Philo and Josephus, expressed their understanding and their interactions with their gods” (Crook 2004: 53); it was also a typical way of understanding the relations between teachers and their students. First Peter’s emphasis on God’s χάρις and the “beneficent” character of God toward Christ-followers, in other words, enables its audiences to imagine themselves in ways analogous to how students or disciples related to their teachers. First Peter’s audiences, therefore, could understand this letter to be addressing them \textit{as disciples} who look to their teacher for the benefit (χάρις) of his wisdom, example, and support.

\textbf{Loyalty, Beneficence, and First Peter}

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter with the example of Lucretius, ancient expressions of loyalty and beneficence are closely related and are exemplified through the
relationship between teachers and their disciples. Though in this particular case the specific words (πίστις/fides, χάρις/gratia) are not employed, Crook demonstrates that “loyalty” is what often “stands behind … appropriate client conduct” that seeks to “increase the honor of one’s patron” or benefactor (2004: 215–16). Given that God is depicted as a benefactor to First Peter’s audiences, it would only be natural to find within First Peter exhortations encouraging Christ-followers to acts and dispositions that assist them to express their loyalty to God, by which they would then hope to secure God’s ongoing beneficence. These thematic concepts, therefore, mutually reinforce one another, and I will keep this connection between loyalty and beneficence in mind as I proceed to examine First Peter’s situation and rhetorical strategies below. Together, these thematic contexts will assist me in demonstrating that First Peter addresses its audiences as disciples and exhorts them to act accordingly.

“Loyalty toward God”: The Situation of First Peter

My purpose with the following discussion is to demonstrate that the situation presented and addressed by First Peter invites us to read the letter as a summons to discipleship.37 In order to

37 I refer (and will continue to refer) consciously to First Peter’s “presentation” or “construction” of its audiences’ situation—including their experiences of suffering. This is not to deny or to hint at any skepticism regarding the historical reality of the situation addressed by First Peter, but to recognize a pair equally important rhetorical realities: (1) our only direct evidence for the situation addressed by First Peter is First Peter itself; and (2) First Peter exhibits a motivation to do more than recount “just the facts”—First Peter is invested in giving its audiences’ situation (theological) meaning, and this colors the language with which it presents their circumstances back to them and to us (e.g., labeling its audiences’ sufferings with the metaphor of “trials” [1:6; 4:12] and connecting it closely with God’s will [3:17; 4:19]; I will return to this point at length in Chapter Four). What we have in First Peter, therefore, is “a selected, limited and crafted entextualization of the situation” (Stamps 1993: 193, emphasis mine; see also Bitzer 1968). Yet for First Peter’s “presentation” of its audiences’ situation to be compelling, and for its solution to that situation to be well-received, it “must present the entextualized situation in such a manner that elicits correspondence with some, if not most, of the audience” (Stamps 1993: 200). In David Horrell’s words, “the letter’s broad and generalizing address adds to the historical value of 1 Peter, since it reveals what the author presumes as a plausible depiction of early Christian communities across Asia Minor, and a depiction that must match the realities reasonably well if the letter is to be an effective communication” (2013: 103). See also the note regarding recent studies of the audiences and situations presupposed by pseudonymous compositions in the Introduction (pp. 33–34 n. 34).
do so, I will begin by accounting for the exigence that has prompted the composition and
distribution of First Peter—the “suffering” that pervades and saturates First Peter. Specifically,
by attending to First Peter’s strategic use of πίστις, and in light of the discussion of πιστις-
language above, I will seek to identify the cause and form(s) of suffering in First Peter. I will
conclude (1) that First Peter portrays the cause of its audiences’ suffering as their newfound and
exclusive loyalty toward God through Christ; and (2) that the manifestation of this suffering
emphasized by First Peter is best categorized as “invective.” Together, these factors support my
contention that First Peter positions its audiences to regard themselves as disciples of Christ and
to understand themselves to be addressed as such by the letter’s exhortations.

The Occasion of First Peter

Broadly speaking, First Peter addresses a situation characterized by “suffering,” and it is
this suffering that has prompted the composition and distribution of the letter.38 Christ-followers
are persistently said to suffer (πάσχω, 2:19–20; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15–16, 19; 5:10; πάθημα, 4:13;
5:9) and First Peter implores them to understand their circumstances in the light of Christ’s
suffering (1:11; 2:21–25; 3:8; 4:1, 13). A general term like “suffering,” however, remains
ambiguous, as do other terms like κακός (3:9), κακόω (3:13), and πειρασμός (1:6; 4:12).
Fortunately, First Peter’s presentation of its audiences’ suffering allows us to be more specific
about both its form(s) and cause.

38 As discussed in the Introduction, the purpose of First Peter is to assist its readers in understanding and
enduring their suffering. Other purposes that might be discerned are, in my opinion, secondary to the primary
purpose of strategically addressing this suffering (see Hill 1976; Davids 1990: 23; Brox 1993: 24; Goppelt 1993:
A series of synonymous terms scattered throughout the letter body of First Peter describe particular forms of hostility: καταλαλέω (2:12; 3:16); λοιδορία (3:9); ἐπηρεάζω (3:16); βλασφημέω (4:4); ὀνειδίζω (4:14). These terms have led most scholars to conclude that First Peter is addressing forms of suffering that are verbal in nature, along with their social (and perhaps psychological) ramifications. John Elliott is typical in this regard:

All of these terms illustrate the kind of oppression to which the nonbelievers subjected the believers: verbal abuse, disparagement, denigration, maligning, insult, contemptuous reproach, defamamtion of character, and public shaming on the suspicion of their “doing what is wrong.” (2000: 467)

Alongside these forms of suffering, we should note indications that less-privileged members of First Peter’s audiences are targets of physical abuse. Explicitly, enslaved Christ-followers are said to bear abuse (λύπη, κολαφίζω) at the hands of enslavers who do not follow Christ (2:19–20). While it is not explicit, it is likely that Christ-following women in mixed marriages (i.e., those married to husbands who did not follow Christ) also suffered physical abuse at the hands of their husbands.39 Still, First Peter’s presentation of suffering—along with its exhortations offered as encouragement—appear to be strategically focused on the verbal abuse faced by its audiences.

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39 Commentators generally agree that husbands who did not follow Christ verbally abused (or were capable of verbally abusing) their Christ-following wives; they are divided as to whether physical abuse posed a legitimate threat in the eyes of First Peter. Karen Jobes, for instance, writes, “the suffering that Peter is addressing is primarily verbal abuse and loss of social standing,” since “even Greco-Roman statutes did not sanction spousal abuse” (2022: 207). Jobes’ reasoning is that (1) men would not risk their own social (or legal) standing by transgressing the standards of society, and that (2) women would not be considered any more virtuous for enduring domestic violence. Jobes also comments that the author’s “delicate” advice to husbands at 3:7 prohibits domestic violence (207), but this point is rendered moot by recognizing that the husbands addressed by 3:7 are not the same husbands in mind in 3:1–6; in other words, the men exhorted in 3:7 are not the ones that the women of 3:1–6 are potentially living in “fear” of (3:6). Regarding Jobes’s two former points, whether “sanctioned” or not by wider society (as though a legal proscription were completely effective in prohibiting illegal behavior), domestic abuse perpetuated against women remained a plausible reality, as several ancient witnesses attest; see further discussion and references in Williams 2012a: 320–21.
We have before us a basic idea of the form of suffering that First Peter seeks to address: verbal abuse. With this in mind, I will now turn to explore how First Peter presents the cause of this verbal abuse, and ask whether understanding the cause might shed more light on the nature, force, and significance of that verbal abuse. Specifically, I will contend that First Peter portrays its audiences’ suffering as a consequence of their “loyalty toward God” and attempt to demonstrate this with attention to the letter’s strategic employment of πιστις-language throughout 1:14–2:10. This will ultimately assist me to classify the verbal abuse experienced by First Peter’s audiences more specifically—as “invective” or “vitriol”—and to propose that First Peter’s presentation of the cause and form of its suffering, together, invite us to read the letter as a summons to discipleship.

Πίστις as the Cause of Suffering in First Peter

I will argue here that the key to understanding the cause of suffering in First Peter is found in the first movement of the letter body (1:14–2:10) and its strategic employment of the language of πίστις (1:21; 2:6, 7). I will begin with a short survey of two passages that depict the circumstances of First Peter’s audiences more palpably (2:11–12; 4:1–6). With these in mind, I will then engage in a detailed analysis of 1:14–2:10 with attention to the language of πίστις. This will then allow me to move forward to diagnose the verbal harassment faced by First Peter’s audiences as akin to the vitriol or invective that would be directed against the students or

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40 Again, this is not to suggest that other forms of abuse (e.g., physical) were not taking place, but to recognize that First Peter has chosen to focus its attention on the verbal manifestations of their suffering (along with its consequences; see below). Some have also suggested that the tension between Christ-followers and outsiders may be the result of the formers’ “effectively illegal status” in the eyes of both the Roman imperium and populace (Horrell 2008: 56–57), and arrests, legal trials, and executions also posed a likely threat. For this position, see Horrell 2007b; 2013: 135–210; Holloway 2009; Williams 2012a; 2012b.

41 On the structure and movement of First Peter, see Appendix A.
disciples of a teacher by outsiders who were suspicious of their way of life—thus supporting my contention that First Peter addresses its audiences as disciples and that it may be read as a summons to discipleship.

“They are surprised”: The Circumstances of First Peter’s Audiences (2:11–12; 4:1–6)

Two passages are especially helpful for understanding the cause of the suffering addressed by First Peter:

[11] Beloved, I exhort you as sojourners and strangers to abstain from fleshly desires that wage war against life, [12] maintaining your honorable conduct among the gentiles so that, in respect to that very thing causing them to slander you as “wrongdoers,” by observing your good works, they may glorify God on the day of his visitation. (2:11–12)

[1] Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same intention (since the one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin) [2] in order to live no longer according to human desires but according to the will of God for the time remaining in the flesh; [3] for the time that is past is sufficient for carrying out the will of the gentiles, living in excess, passion, drunkenness, reveling, carousing, and unlawful idolatry. [4] In this very thing they are surprised, that you no longer run together with them in the same flood of dissipation, and so they defame you. [5] They will give an account to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead. [6] (For this reason the gospel was also preached to the dead, so that while they were condemned in the flesh from a human point of view, they might live in the spirit from God’s point of view.) (4:1–6)

On the translation and meaning of ἐν ᾧ, and for “good works” as related to gentiles’ slander, see Davids 1990: 94, 96–98; Williams 2014: 172–73; and my large discussion in Chapter Four. In sum, First Peter understands the (synonymous) “honorable conduct” and “good works” as giving rise to outsiders’ slander and as the ultimate cause of their act of glorifying God; the distinction is temporal: now they see these acts and slander them, but later they will glorify God by acknowledging that they were truly “good.”


From each of these passages—and in the picture that they combine to present—we acquire important information about the way in which Christ-followers are perceived by outsiders (“gentiles”). A brief word on each will be helpful.

In 1 Pet 2:11–12, Christ-followers are exhorted both “to abstain from fleshly desires” and to maintain their “honorable conduct” as they live among others who slander them. It is their “conduct” and “good works” that outsiders presently find objectionable (see 3:16), causing them

44 I regard 1 Pet 2:11–12 and 4:1–6 (along with 4:7–11) to function as a frame surrounding and governing the second movement of First Peter’s letter body (2:12–4:11). For a discussion of the relationship between these passages, see Appendix A.

45 Modern versions and commentaries typically gloss the forms of ἔθνος at 1 Pet 2:12 and 4:3 as “gentiles.” In the context of First Peter’s rhetoric this remains an appropriate translation, but without explanation it risks misidentifying the audiences of First Peter as comprising (primarily) Jewish Christ-followers, as does Ben Witherington, who writes, “It would be rather strange to say to an audience of Gentiles, or largely Gentiles, to live like Christians among the ‘Gentiles.’ Gentiles do not talk about themselves as ‘the other nations.’ This is Jewish language, and it best suits the theory that the audience itself is Jewish, in this case Jewish Christian” (2007: 25; see also Jobes 2022: 22–27; Dunn 2009: 1158–60).

With the majority of scholars (see Dubis 2006: 204–5), I understand the audiences of First Peter to comprise (primarily) gentiles, based primarily on two factors. First, the reference to “the fruitless conduct of your ancestors” (τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου, 1:18) likely represents a critique of “paganism,” which First Peter represents “as a unified whole, and more as a way of life (ἀναστροφή) than as a belief system” (Michaels 1988: 22; see Unnik 1969; Elliott 2000: 370). Second, the audiences are said to be “no longer” (μηκέτι) joining their neighbors in the activities listed at 4:2–4; this suggests that these audiences are “gentiles” whose regular way of life has been disrupted by their conversion. As Williams asks, “Why would conversion from Judaism to Christianity suddenly alter the audience’s propensity to dine at tables and partake of sacrificial meat? It is quite possible that Christian tradition would have been more lax when it came to such practices (cf. 1 Cor 10.27–30). The situation in the passage therefore seems much easier to explain if the readers were formerly pagans who had no association with either Judaism or Christianity” (Williams 2012a: 94). With these points in mind, therefore, I read Witherington’s conclusion as based in a (false) assumption that this “Jewish language” would not be appropriated onto these gentile Christ-followers. Understanding this appropriation, especially as it regards these “gentiles,” has important implications for understanding the audiences’ social circumstances.

Rhetorically speaking (and as is recognized by many), First Peter appropriates the language of Israel and its scriptural texts and traditions onto its (primarily) non-Jewish audiences (see, e.g., Achtemeier 1996: 69; and the helpful analysis of Bauman-Martin 2007). First Peter understands the nascent, growing fellowship of Christ-followers akin to the formation and reconstitution of Israel, as can be seen from the combination of titles and motifs from Exod 19:5–6; Isa 43:20–21; and Hos 1–2 at 1 Pet 2:9–10. Just as Israel found themselves distinct from other nations, so too do the assemblies of Christ-followers find themselves “among the gentiles” (1 Pet 2:12). Despite potential complications that may arise in translation, labeling its audiences’ detractors as “gentiles” fits with First Peter’s rhetorical framing of Christ-followers with the symbols and scriptural language of Israel. While “gentiles” therefore remains an appropriate gloss in the context of First Peter’s rhetoric, the rhetorical function of the term ἔθνος at 2:12 and 4:3 cannot be forgotten: it designates “others” or “outsiders,” and specifically those who slander and defame Christ-followers. In my translations I will continue to gloss ἔθνος with “gentile,” but in my discussions I will emphasize that this label is intended to communicate that it designates “outsiders.”
to regard Christ-followers as “wrongdoers.” Further detail is provided by 4:1–6. First Peter reminds its audiences that they “no longer live according to human desires” since “the time that is past is sufficient for carrying out the will of the gentiles.” Instead, they now live “according to the will of God” (4:2–3). It is clear from these statements that there has been a change in the lives of those addressed by First Peter, and that this change is affecting their relationships with their neighbors. Specifically, First Peter notes that “they [neighbors, others, outsiders] are surprised” that Christ-followers no longer “run together with them in the same flood of dissipation” that they once did, and this causes outsiders to defame them (4:4).

First Peter makes it clear that a pair of interrelated changes has taken place in the lives its audiences. First, they “no longer” do what they once did, “abstaining” and refusing to participate in practices that once characterized their way of life (2:11; 4:2–3); instead, they “maintain” a mode of “honorable conduct” and practice “good works” (2:12). Second, and in part because of their “abstention” from certain practices and “no longer” living as they once did, these audiences have also withdrawn from previous associations: they no longer “run together” with their neighbors (4:4); they are no longer “gentiles” themselves but live “among the gentiles” (2:12) as

46 On “good works” (and related vocabulary) as a source of conflict with outsiders, see Williams 2014. This position is in contrast with a longstanding “optimistic” opinion of First Peter’s presentation of good works, i.e., “‘doing good’ involved acts which were approved by Greco-Roman society” (Williams 2014: 3) and behavior “consistent with popular, Hellenistic standards of conduct” (5). Performing such good works, the argument goes, would reduce the tension between Christ-followers and outsiders and might even serve missionary ends. For a summary of this “modern consensus” and a catalogue of the relevant scholarship see Williams 2014: 3–9. I will discuss Williams’ position, with which I agree, in Chapter Four.

47 “Abstention” from certain activities may constitute a form of “good work”: “the good works of 1 Peter were not merely pursuits in which Christians actively participated. In some cases, the ‘good’ which the author expects is simply abstinence (e.g., 1.14; 2.1, 11; 3.3, 6, 9, 14; 4.1–3, 15). By avoiding the sinful behaviors which previously consumed their lives and which presently tested their faithfulness, they were actually doing good” (Williams 2012a: 274). I would modify Williams’ conclusion here only by removing the word “simply”: given that the consequence of Christ-followers’ abstention from certain activities resulted in their suffering, it seems that this was no simple task; the social pressure to conform through participation in such activities should not be underestimated.
“sojourners and strangers” (2:11). Christ-followers, therefore, are slandered for what others perceive as “wrongdoing” and defamed for abandoning established social networks.

More will be said on each of these aspects below, but these initial considerations put us in a position to appreciate better the cause of Christ-followers’ suffering and First Peter’s rhetorical presentation of that cause. In short, Christ-followers have experienced a fundamental change that has affected their way of life, both in terms of their conduct (what they do and do not do) and in terms of their associations (whom they associate with and whom they do not). For all intents and purposes, we may understand that the audiences’ conversion and resocialization have precipitated their suffering. It is with this in mind that I now turn to examine 1 Pet 1:14–2:10.

Conversion and resocialization are, obviously, etic terms that require a brief explanation. Conversion, especially, bears certain connotations that should be suspended as we continue to explore First Peter’s (first-century) description of this phenomenon, and Zeba Crook’s study of conversion is instructive here. Crook notes that modern investigations of ancient conversion phenomena are often framed “in psychological categories”: conversion is considered “personal, introspective, individualistic, and emotionally tumultuous (to varying degrees).” Crook argues that this perspective on conversion “is not only psychological; it is also modern and Western” and therefore represents “a very narrow perspective both temporally and geographically” (2004: 14; see pp. 17–31). A modern, psychological approach to conversion depends on a modern, psychological understanding of personhood, which we cannot automatically assume to be the same as an ancient, Mediterranean understanding of personhood (33–34). Many studies of ancient conversion (including several regarding New Testament descriptions of conversion) share what Richard Shweder (1991) calls an assumption of “psychic unity,” summarized by Crook as the idea that “Western and non-Western peoples … are united by a similar psychological ‘hardware’ that enables them to think in similar ways, to act in similar ways and for similar reasons, and to experience emotion similarly” (2004: 32). Edward Said has illustrated the problematics of the label “Western” (Said 1978; see also Newsom 2022: 8–14), but Crook’s point regarding the tendency to “psychologize” ancient conversion phenomena remains valid. For his part, Crook proposes an emic description of (Paul’s) conversion with attention to the language and categories through which Paul described his experience of conversion (2004: 51–52). Rather than eschew the term “conversion,” therefore, I adopt the term in light of Crook’s cautions and use it to designate the changes in motivations, attitudes, and behaviors in First Peter’s audiences.

Conversion remains a broad term that covers a range of changes in both individuals and groups. Therefore, I also adopt the term resocialization in two related senses. First, resocialization is an important concept in the field of the sociology of knowledge. In Peter Berger’s and Thomas Luckmann’s words, “To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 158). This is the function of resocialization, described by Steven Bechtler as “the process by which one ‘switches worlds’ or undergoes ‘alternation,’ as in the case of religious conversion” (1998: 35). The communities of Christ-followers, both local and worldwide (1 Pet 1:1; 5:9) are responsible for this resocialization at the level that Bechtler describes; for a primer on the sociology of knowledge and its relevance for interpreting First Peter, see Bechtler 1998: 30–39. Second, as this study progresses, the term resocialization will also prove useful for describing an essential aspect of discipleship: the process by which newly converted Christ-followers prioritize their associations with fellow Christ-followers. I will discuss this below and in Chapter Three.
“You are now God’s people”: The Loyalty of First Peter’s Audiences (1:14–2:10)

The audiences of First Peter have experienced a conversion from one way of life to another: God “has begotten us anew for a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν, 1:3).49 First Peter constructs an elaborate portrait of this conversion through a series of patterned exhortations (1:14–2:6) that culminate in a climactic summary of Christ-followers’ collective identity as “God’s people” (λαὸς θεοῦ, 2:7–10).50 Each exhortation consists of a command and a warrant or proof for that command—four times in the form of a quotation of a scriptural text, once in the form of a christocentric tradition or teaching (this pattern is visualized in Figure 1).

Moreover, the foci of these exhortations reflect the same pair of changes described above and may be divided accordingly. The first two exhortations (1:14–16; 1:17–21) exhort Christ-followers regarding their conduct, while the remaining three (1:22–25; 2:1–3; 2:4–6) exhort Christ-followers concerning their associations.

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49 Katie Marcar has drawn attention to the importance of retaining a “masculine” translation of ἀναγεννάω here at 1:3 and, especially, at 1:23, since the latter “is followed by a contrast between perishable and imperishable seed” (2022: 115). See also Achtenmeier 1996: 94; Giesen 1999; and further discussion in Marcar 2022: 63–117.

50 For a similar description of this scheme, see Holloway 2009: 159–61. My analysis differs from Holloway’s specifically with regard to 2:4–10, as well as to the overall purpose of 1:14–2:10. Holloway regards First Peter to engage here in a (coping) strategy of “disidentification”; what follows here need not rule out Holloway’s conclusions, but may simply represent a different way of analyzing the textual data.
Further warrant for dividing these exhortations into these two groups, along with the final summation in 2:7–10, is the way each section appears to be punctuated with by the language of πίστις. With the following discussion, I will seek to demonstrate that the placement of this language constitutes a rhetorical strategy designed to designate and underscore the importance of Christ-followers’ “loyalty” toward God and Christ as critically affecting their conduct and associations. If this demonstration proves convincing, I will have placed us in a better position to perceive First Peter as addressing its audiences as disciples whose loyalty to their teacher is being tested through the verbal harassment of outsiders.

“So that your loyalty would be toward God”: Loyal in Conduct (1:14–21)

The first pair of exhortations (1:14–16; 1:17–21) command Christ-followers to be sure that they now live differently than they did before their conversion. The “desires” they once had, based on their “former ignorance” (ταῖς πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἄγνοιᾳ ὑμῶν ἐπιθυμίαις, 1:14), are now to be replaced by holiness (ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε, 1:15). “Foolish ancestral ways” (τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου, 1:18) now give way to “reverence” (ἐν φόβῳ … ἀναστράφητε, 1:17). Now that they follow Christ, in other words, First Peter expects that its audiences “conduct” themselves differently than they did before. This expectation is made clear by a contrast between Christ-followers’ present conduct and what is “former” and “ancestral.” First Peter also appeals to the character and action of God as warrant for this change in behavior (1:16; 1:18–21; respectively). Here I will focus my attention on the second exhortation (1:17–21) and then return to offer summative comments on the first (1:14–16).

First Peter exhorts Christ-followers to conduct themselves “with reverence” (ἐν φόβῳ … ἀναστράφητε), specifically because God has redeemed them through the death of Christ (1:17–
18). God accomplished this act of redemption, however, for a larger purpose: it was done “so that” these audiences’ πίστις would be directed “toward God” (ὡστε τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν … εἶναι εἰς θεόν, 1:21). Several scholars and translations gloss πίστις with the word “trust,” thereby interpreting the verse to imply that Christ-followers’ redemption was effected so that they would, in Elliott’s words, put their “unshakable and unswerving trust in God,” a trust that is “evoked by God’s raising Jesus from the dead and giving him glory” (2000: 379). While an attitude or disposition of “trust” may be a part of what First Peter expects of Christ-followers in 1:21, the immediate context of this declaration suggests that First Peter means to connote more.

First Peter 1:18 begins by reminding its audiences that they have been “redeemed” or “ransomed” (λυτρόω) from their former ways; in ancient Mediterranean contexts this language readily connoted ideas of enslavement and the manumission of enslaved persons. Such a redemption legally “freed” an enslaved person, but it also functioned as a form of beneficence that initiated a new form of relationship between the (formerly) enslaved person and his or her

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51 It may be noted that the effect of “God’s raising Jesus from the dead” has already been stated at 1 Pet 1:3, and there it was not for the purpose of evoking “trust” in God. Rather, through Jesus’s resurrection from the dead, the audiences of First Peter were “begotten anew” into a relationship with God so that they are now addressed “as obedient children” (ὥς τέκνα ὑπακοῆς, 1:14; see 1:2) who call upon God as a “father” (πατέρα ἐπικαλεῖσθε, 1:17). This is not to say that “trust” is not an integral part or consequence of being in this new relationship with God; rather, my point is to suggest that First Peter has already stated programmatically (in keeping with the purpose of the letter proem) that the effect of “God’s raising Jesus from the dead” is to be understood as Christ-followers’ reoriented and resocialized existence in relationship with the one who has “begotten” them anew. More proximate to 1:21, First Peter may already be signaling what it intends to communicate by the preceding description of its audiences as ὑμᾶς τοὺς … πιστοῦς εἰς θεόν (1:20–21; see below).

52 More broadly, λυτρόω and its cognates were used to denote the “release” of persons in many forms of captivity (upon receipt of some form of payment); see Plutarch, Cim. 9.4; Demosthenes, Fals. leg. 19.170; and other examples cited, with discussion, in M. Williams 2011: 83–84.
manumitter. This, I suggest, is key to recognizing the connotation of πίστις at 1 Pet 1:21. In
Crook’s words, 

The freed slave … was still obligated to his or her former owner. The relationship, because of the profound benefaction of manumission, was that of a patron and client, no longer strictly that of a master and slave. But the freedperson was expected, both socially and legally, to be loyal and grateful to his or her former owner. (2004: 234)

This expectation of loyalty would be present whether the manumitter was the freedperson’s former enslaver or not, and loyalty could be expressed in several different ways (see Crook 2004: 229–34). However it was expressed, ancient freedpersons understood that the one who redeemed them became their patron and was to be honored with loyalty, “the defining characteristic of a freedperson’s relationship with and response to a patron” (234). Two short examples will assist me to illustrate this.

Terence’s play Andria (mid-second century BCE) establishes early on that freedpersons are valued for their loyalty. Simo, the paterfamilias, hopes to deceive his son Pamphilus to learn his intentions regarding marriage. To do so, Simo draws his freedman Sosia into his confidence, in part, because of his loyalty: “It’s not your art [cooking] that’s needed for what I have in mind, but qualities which I have always known you to possess, loyalty (fides) and discretion.”

53 “The unassailable fact remains that for the owner setting a slave free was an act of indulgentia, the conferment of a beneficium” (Bradley 1994: 165).

54 Crook rightly assumes that the most likely scenario of manumission was one in which the enslaved person’s former enslaver became his or her manumitter. The important points he makes regarding obedience, gratitude, and loyalty in this scenario remain applicable, regardless of the identity of the manumitter (and the redeemed person’s former relationship, or lack thereof, to the manumitter). This is important for the context of First Peter, since the letter does not portray God as an enslaver manumitting enslaved persons who are already in service to him; rather, they were (we might say) enslaved to the “foolish ways of their ancestors” (1:18) and now find themselves, as Christ-followers, both free and yet “enslaved to God” (2:16).

exposition that follows immediately afterward reveals why Simo is so trusting of Sosia:

Ever since I bought you, when you were a small child, you know just how kind I have been to you as a master. You were my slave, but I gave you your freedom, because you served me with the spirit of a free man. I bestowed upon you the highest reward that was in my power.

Worrying that he has appeared ungrateful, Sosia reaffirms his gratitude for the “reward” of his freedom. With this relationship (re)established, Simo unfolds his plan and enlist Sosia’s assistance. The dynamic here reflects the cultural obligation of loyalty expected of freedpersons toward their manumitter-patrons.

The fictional Sosia’s fear at the perception of ingratitude is reflective of a wider expectation accompanying manumitted persons. Suetonius reports that Claudius was keen to regulate the activities and attitudes of freedpersons in this regard:

He confiscated the property of freedmen who passed themselves off as Roman knights. Those whose ingratitude caused their patrons to complain he forced back into slavery, insisting to those who acted as their advocates that he would refuse to hear cases against their own freedmen.

Tacitus also relays the discontent of “patrons” over “the misconduct of freedmen” as discussed by the Roman Senate in 56 CE. “Some grumbled that freedmens’ disrespect, reinforced by their new liberty, had become so out of control that they could consider dealing violently, or at least

56 Andr. 1.1.35–39: ego postquam te emi, a parvolo ut semper tibi apud me iusta et clemens fuerit servitus scis. feci ex servo ut esses libertus mihi, propterea quod servibas liberaliter. quod habui summum pretium persolvi tibi.

57 Terence’s Andria is a self-conscious adaptation of Menander’s two earlier plays Andria and Perinthia (Andr. pro.5–23). The dialogue between Simo and Sosia, as noticed by Aelius Donatus, is based on the dialogue between the paterfamilias and his wife in Menander’s Perinthia (see Barsby 2001: 43–44). As Morgan has shown (2015: 47–49), a wife’s loyalty toward her husband was a highly desirable quality and one without which a marriage could easily faulter. Terence’s choice to substitute a freedman for a wife may testify to the degree to which freedpersons were expected to be loyalty to their manumitters—a degree akin to that of a wife toward her husband.

on terms of equality, with their patrons.”  

Official, legal prescriptions for dealing with freedpersons’ disloyalty (however it was perceived or expressed) are admittedly few, but those we do have consider “re-enslavement” a suitable punishment. Freedom was a “gift” or “benefaction,” not a right, and those who received it had to prove themselves worthy of it. An enslaved person may become “redeemed,” but they remained in debt to their redeemer.

First Peter itself recognizes this complex social dynamic. Though they are redeemed by God through the death of Christ and are, by implication, “free,” Christ-followers’ redemption was achieved for the purpose of directing their πίστις toward God (1:21). First Peter will articulate this in other ways: it addresses Christ-followers as “free persons” and yet as “enslaved to God” (ὡς ἐλεύθεροι … ὡς θεοῦ δοῦλοι, 2:16), and “as honorable stewards of God’s variegated beneficence” (ὡς καλοὶ οἰκονόμοι ποικίλης χάριτος θεοῦ, 4:10). The immediate “redemptive” context of 1:17–21—together with the capacity of πιστις-language to connote acts and dispositions of “loyalty” (as demonstrated above)—strongly suggests that πίστις here should be understood to connote Christ-followers’ loyalty to God as the one who has redeemed them. As those who are redeemed by God, Christ-followers are now “loyal,” “allegiant,” or “faithful” to God as their redeemer-patron (πιστοὺς εἰς θεόν); God has bestowed this great benefit upon them “so that [their] loyalty and hope would be toward God” (ὡστε τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν καὶ ἐλπίδα εἶναι εἰς θεόν, 1:21).

This understanding of πίστις at 1 Pet 1:21 also makes sense in light of other themes and vocabulary found throughout 1:14–21. Freedpersons often regarded their manumitter-patron as,

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in Arnold Duff’s words, a “legal father,” going so far as to change their names to identify themselves with their patrons; thus Marcus Tullius Cicero’s slave Tiro became Marcus Tullius Tiro (see Duff 1928: 52). Freedpersons’ funerary inscriptions often named their patron analogous to the way sons named their fathers. In Georges Fabre’s words, “This parallelism is not merely formal: it underlines the place of the patron in relation to the freedman, in the same way as that of the father in relation to the son” (1981: 114). Given that the relationship between a redeemer-patron and redeemed person was often understood akin to the relationship between a father and child (see Duff 1928: 36–49), it makes sense that First Peter would address its audiences as “obedient children” (τέκνα ὑπακοῆς, 1:14; see 1:2, 22) who call upon God as a “father” (πατέρα ἐπικαλεῖσθε, 1:17; see 1:2, 3). No official or legal names are changed, but they are exhorted to “be holy in all [their] conduct,” since “the one who called [them] is holy” (κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἅτιον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε, 1:15). This description of God as “the one who called [them]” (see also 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10) is an apt confirmation of patronal function (especially in the context of redemption), since “patrons … were reputed to have called their clients into relationships of benefaction” (Crook 2004: 6; see 93–100) and the

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60 It is worth recognizing the problematic nature of the context. Given the widespread expectations of a freedperson’s loyalty to his or her manumitter, the freedperson may have had (or at least imagined themselves to have had) little choice in the matter. Nonetheless, the practice itself (whether or not it was “freely” taken up) testifies to a wider perception of the relationship between freedpersons and their patrons: they were now like children of the household. This was not “absolute,” however. As Crook cautions: “Yet the relationship of son, freedmen, and slave for that matter, while each of them is roughly analogous to each other vis-à-vis the paterfamilias, should not be confused for the others. A freedman and a son were not social equals, nor were they characterized by the same relationship to the legal and real father, respectively” (2004: 231) The metaphor, persistent as it was, remained metaphorical: as a son was to show honor and loyalty to a father, so was the freedperson (client). See Fabre 1981: 23–121; Duff 1928: 52–57.

61 Quoted in Crook 2004: 230–31; my translation. Ce parallélisme n’est pas simplement formel: il souligne la place du patronus par rapport à l’affranchi, au même titre que celle du pater par rapport au filius.
manumission of an enslaved person typically depended on the willingness of and conditions stipulated by the manumitter (see Bradley 1994: 154–65; Duff 1928: 12–35).

Together, these first two exhortations (1:14–16; 1:17–21) portray the conversion of First Peter’s audiences as effected by a change in their loyalty that specifically results in a change in their conduct. Called into relationship with this divine and holy benefactor-father-redeemer, the audiences of First Peter demonstrate their loyalty to God by their manner of conduct (ἀναστροφή): they are to be obedient (1:14; see 1:2); holy (1:15; see 1:2), and reverent (1:17; see 2:17, 18; 3:2, 16)—qualities that reveal the genuineness of their “loyalty toward God,” their πίστις εἰς θεόν (1:21). As we have also seen, this obedient, holy, and reverent conduct has necessitated a break from previous manners of conduct characterized by ignorance and foolishness (1:14, 18); this implies, as we will see below, that Christ-followers’ loyalty toward God is an exclusive loyalty leaving no room for competition (see 4:2–4). I will revisit this below.

“*The one who is loyal to him*”: Loyal in Association (1:22–2:6)

The next three exhortations (1:22–25; 2:1–3; 2:4–6) shift from focusing on Christ-followers’ conduct to focus on the effect of their conversion on their associations. This is not to say that the audiences’ conduct is irrelevant to these exhortations. First Peter commands its audiences to “love one another” (ἀλλήλους ἀγαπήσατε), but this command is related to their previous act of “purifying” themselves “by obedience to the truth” (τὰς ψυχὰς ἡγνικότες ἐν τῇ ὑπακοῇ τῆς ἀληθείας, 1:22); the participial phrase is subordinate to the finite command to “love one another.”62 This pattern is repeated in 2:1–3: “laying aside” or “putting away” from

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62 This is true whether the phrase is understood as causal (because you have purified yourselves) or temporal (now that or you have purified yourselves). The same is true for the following exhortations.
themselves (ἀποθέμενοι, 2:1) all kinds of behaviors and dispositions, Christ-followers now “desire” or “long for” (ἐπιποθήσατε) food that nurtures and helps them “grow (together) into salvation” (αὐξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν, 2:2). Likewise, I suggest, the same is true of 2:4–6: by first “coming together” (προσερχόμενον, 2:4), they can let themselves, “as living stones, be built up as a spiritual house” (ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικός, 2:5). Each exhortation regarding Christ-followers’ associations, therefore, keeps in mind requisite and related conduct.

Broadly speaking, now that Christ-followers have “loyalty toward God” (πίστιν εἰς θεόν, 1:21), they also find themselves part of a new fellowship comprising fellow Christ-followers. The thought across these next three exhortations develops sequentially from new birth (1:22–25), through a process of growth (2:1–3), and on to being fully formed as a “spiritual household” (2:4–6). Moreover, First Peter’s description of these “steps” concludes with a second deployment of πιστις-language that signifies the identity of Christ-followers (2:6). I will treat each exhortation briefly.

The first exhortation begins at the beginning, recalling God’s merciful act of “re-begetting” them (see 1:3). Reminding them that they have been “begotten anew”  

63 I take οἰκοδομεῖσθε (2:5) as an imperative. Many scholars regard it as an indicative (“you are being built up [by God]”), but typically rely on the claim that an imperative would be “without parallel” in the Septuagint or New Testament. Elliott also claims that an imperative here “would be inconsistent with the indicative mood of vv 4–10 as a whole” (2000: 413; see also Michaels 1998: 99–100; Davids 86; Achtemeier 1996: 155; Schreiner 2020: 110–11). I am not persuaded by the argument that a word is “never used” in a particular way within a specific set of literature (all of which is written by different authors addressing different circumstances). Moreover, and in response to Elliott’s perception of inconsistency, I find the presence of an imperative at 1 Pet 2:5 wholly consistent with the exhortations that have preceded it. In 1:14–16; 1:22–25; and 2:1–3, each imperative (γενήθητε, ἀγαπήσατε, ἐπιποθήσατε) is preceded by a participle (συσχηματιζόμενοι, ἡγιασμένοι, ἀποθέμενοι); in 1:17–21 the imperative (ἀναστράφητε) precedes the participle (εἰδότες), but both are still present. 1 Pet 2:4–6 conforms to this general pattern: προσερχόμενοι … οἰκοδομεῖσθε. For others who regard οἰκοδομεῖσθε as an imperative, see Goppelt 1993: 140; Brox 1993: 94; Senior 2003: 53.
(ἀναγεγεννημένοι, 1:23), First Peter exhorts them to “love one another.”\(^{64}\) That they are to “love one another,” moreover, is a sign that this re-begetting has brought them into a new relationship not only with God as their father but also with fellow Christ-followers as their sisters and brothers: they have purified themselves “for the sake of genuine brotherly love” (εἰς φιλαδελφίαν ἀνυπόκριτον, 1:22). Thus, while First Peter exhorts its audiences toward a form of conduct (“love”), it is clearly one that they exhibit first and foremost among themselves. It may also be said that the quotation from Isa 40:6–8 points to this internal dimension as well: there the prophet proclaims that Israel—corporately—is to be restored by the power of God (Isa 40:1–5). The “word of our God” (τὸ ρῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 40:8) and the Lord’s speech (ὅτι κύριος ἐλάλησεν, 40:5) provide the guarantee to the scattered nation of Israel that they will be gathered and reconstituted—just as “the word that was preached to you” (τὸ ρῆμα τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν εἰς ὑμᾶς, 1 Pet 1:25) provides a guarantee that Christ-followers dispersed throughout northern Asia Minor and beyond (1:1; 5:9) are now reconstituted as a community characterized by loyalty to God (1:21) and love for one another (1:22) as “the (spiritual) household of God” (2:5; 4:17).

The second exhortation moves from the “re-begetting” of Christ-followers to their growth and maturation. Here they are commanded to “desire” or “long for” the proper nourishment that enables them to “grow up toward salvation” (τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ οὖξηθῇ εἰς σωτηρίαν, 2:2). A closer look at specific aspects of this exhortation reveals its continued concern for the “association” of Christ-followers. First, the transitional conjunction

\(^{64}\) On the possible allusion to the rite of baptism, see Senior 2008: 48: “it is likely that the author refers to the entire inaugural experience of the Christian, one rooted in God’s own act of salvation, signified in the baptismal ritual of initiation and expressed in a transformed moral life.” On the theme of baptism in First Peter, see Hill 1976 and my brief discussion below (n. 65).
οὖν between 1:22–25 and 2:1–3 suggests that the latter exhortation follows from the former: Christ-followers’ abstention from certain vices and commitment to “grow up” is intimately related to the command to “love one another.” A second observation confirms this. Regarding the list of vices that Christ-followers are to “put away” or “reject” at 2:1 (ἀποθέμενοι), Sean du Toit has recently demonstrated that “this list is not random, but specifically suited” to First Peter’s strategy (2022: 71). Two of these vices that they are to avoid (δόλος, ὑποκρίσις) should be seen in immediate contrast with the proper desires and conduct of Christ-followers (ἀδόλον γάλα, 2:2; φιλαδελφίαν ἀνυποκρίτων, 1:22), but all “relate to activities that undermine the social cohesion of the Christian community” (Toit 2022: 72). Third, that the exhortation of 2:1–3 flows from 1:22–25 is also suggested by the characterization of both the audiences’ “re-begotten” and the “milk” they are to desire. They were “begotten anew” by means of “the living and abiding word of God” (διὰ λόγου ζῶντος θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος, 2:23), also identified as “the word that was preached to you” (τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 1:25); now they are to desire (and presumably feed upon) a milk that is λογικός: “logical” or perhaps “of the word.”

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65 Some scholars have found in this verb a plausible reference to the rite of baptism, wherein one would “put off” an old garment (literally, but also symbolically; see Kelly 1969: 83–84); this might be strengthened by the preceding reference to Christ-followers as “begotten anew” (ἀναγεγεννημένοι, 1:23), but this is not a necessary connection. Martin recognizes that “this verb is indeed used to describe believers as having put off the vices of their old life as they would an old garment,” but argues that the participle “belongs more appropriately to the nutritional metaphor that the Petrine author develops in 1 Pet 2:1–3” (2016c: 518; see below, n. 66). Whether the metaphor is baptismal, nutritional, or neither, the participle ultimately connotes a cessation of sinful activity.

66 Regarding this vice list Elliott likewise comments, “What follows is a general list of vices to be avoided as barriers to the practice of ‘unhypocritical brotherly and sisterly love’” (2000: 369, see 398). Elliott regards this list (as well as the vice lists at 4:3, 15) as “conventional” and “illustrative.” Toit’s study (2022), in my opinion, draws helpful attention to the possibility of an intentional selectivity behind the vices present in these lists.

67 Martin (2016c) claims that “milk of the word” is a “highly unusual if not unprecedented” rendering of λογικός, while Williams and Horrell suggest “that the verbal resonance between λογικός and the λόγος θεοῦ should be attributed due weight” (2023: 1:584). Martin’s argument for the translation “logical” might still encompass Williams’s and Horrell’s, however, since he demonstrates that, according to ancient nutritional theory, “the same blood-nutriment out of which each animal is formed in the womb” then “nourishes the animal upon its birth.” Further, “A newborn baby’s desire for its mother’s milk is therefore logical according to the basic nutritional
That is, Christ-followers are to “grow up” by feeding on nutrients similar to that which “begot them anew.” Fourth, and finally, this exhortation segues neatly into the following one (2:4–6), which is clearly communal in focus (see below). It seems reasonable to recognize here in 2:1–3, therefore, an exhortation to “grow up together into salvation.” Christ-followers who now associate with one another as sisters and brothers “begotten anew” by the word of God put away all practices that would cause division and disruption to their “genuine brotherly love” (2:1; see 1:22) and now progress forward by desiring—together—what will be “useful” (χρηστός) to their growth and maturation.

Christ-followers’ new association to one another—re-begotten of God and growing up together—is now brought into climactic relief in the fifth exhortation (2:4–6) as they are told that they are not merely individuals or small groups of Christ-followers throughout northern Asia Minor (1:1); rather, they are to (let themselves) “be built up into a spiritual house” (οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικός). They do so by coming to “the Lord” who, though rejected by people, is “chosen and precious in God’s sight” (παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον, 2:5). Christ-follower are invited to understand their own “building up” akin to God’s reconstitution of Israel (signaled by the allusion to Isa 28:16 in 1 Pet 2:6). The foundation upon which Christ-followers are “built

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68 The allusion is not specifically to the LXX, but “there is no question that the language derives from Isa 28:16” (Achtemeier 1996: 159).
up” together, moreover, is “a chosen and precious cornerstone” (ἀκρογωνιαίον ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον, 2:6), language that immediately recalls the description of “the Lord” as “chosen and precious” (ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον, 2:4). Their association with one another—being begotten anew, growing up, and built together—results in honor for a Christ-follower, now described as ὁ πιστεύων to the foundation upon which he or she is placed (ἐπ’ αὐτῷ); that one “will not be put to shame” (οὐ μὴ καταισχυνθῇ, 2:6).

This πιστις-language, I suggest, is once again significant, occurring as it does at the conclusion to this triad of exhortations focused on Christ-followers’ new association with one another. Scholars and modern versions typically translate ὁ πιστεύων to denote one who “believes” or “trusts” in the designated cornerstone. While Christ-followers may indeed “trust” Christ—“trust” or “believe,” for example, that Christ provides an unshakable foundation upon which they allow themselves to be built—I suggest that our understanding of ὁ πιστεύων take a step further and that this language be read in concert with the function of the πιστις-language already described at 1:21, namely, to denote one who is “loyal.” Ὁ πιστεύων, in other words,

69 For “believe,” see Michaels 1988; Senior 2008; Green 2007; Schreiner 2020; as well as modern English versions such as the NRSV and ESV; see also Elliott 2000 and my discussion above (pp. 48–53). For “trusts,” see Davids 1990; Achtemeier 1996; Donelson 2010; Keener 2021; Jobes 2022; Williams and Horrell 2023; as well as modern versions such as the NIV.

70 Morgan identifies 1 Pet 2:6 as one of the New Testament’s clearer instances of ὁ πιστεύων as a “designative” label for Christ-followers with the specific connotation of being “faithful towards God (and Christ)” (2015: 234–41). Morgan also concludes that the plasticity of πιστις-language may have served to resonate with various audiences: “A probably incidental but, to early community members, surely a useful aspect of the double designation pistos/pisteuōn is that both terms encompass and, in slightly different ways, are equally applicable to, Jewish and gentile followers of Christ. A Jew could hear being pistos/pisteuōn as meaning that s/he was properly faithful to God (unlike those Jews who did not follow Christ). A gentile could hear it as meaning that s/he put his or her trust/believed in the true and living God (unlike those who continued to put their trust in idols). Both groups could thus use the same terms of their community membership, while implicitly acknowledging that they arrived at it from different starting points” (2015: 241). As discussed above, “trust” and “loyalty” go hand in hand, and First Peter’s deployment of πιστις-language appears to takes this into account.
should be understood as “the one who is loyal” to God and to God’s “cornerstone,” entrusting himself or herself to be built up with fellow Christ-followers.

Just as their conduct has been reoriented by their newfound loyalty toward God (1:14–21), so too have Christ-followers’ *associations* been transformed by their new allegiance; as those who are “loyal to God” (ὁ πιστεύων, 2:6), they have been resocialized into a fellowship with others who “love one another” (1:25), who “grow up (together) into salvation” (2:2); and who are “built up into a spiritual house” (2:5)—all as a result of their conversion. Their common loyalty to God has initiated them into new associations with others who are likewise loyal to God and, together, they are assured that this loyalty will not put them to shame. As with their conduct, however, the loyalty upon which this resocialization is founded requires a complementary form of *disassociation*, and this is made clear in the concluding exhortation of 1 Pet 2:7–10.

“For you ... but for those ...”: Loyal through Disassociation (2:7–10)

With the preceding five exhortations First Peter has described the implications of Christ-followers’ “loyalty toward God” (πίστις εἰς θεόν, 1:21) and their identity as “those who are loyal” (οἱ πιστεύοντες, 2:6)—both in terms of their *conduct* (1:14–21) and their *associations with fellow Christ-followers* (1:22–2:6). As this first movement of the letter body draws to a close, it takes up the language of πίστις once again (2:7) in an effort to underscore the implication that these new forms of conduct and of association have also resulted in an act of *disassociation* or *withdrawal* from those who do not follow Christ—from those who are not πιστός toward God.

First Peter 2:7–10 starkly reaffirms the implications of Christ-followers’ conversion in two ways. First, following the affirmation that their loyalty to God (expressed toward the cornerstone that God has laid down) will not put Christ-followers to shame (2:6), First Peter
identifies the contrast that now exists between Christ-followers and others. In keeping with the nuance of the πιστίς-language discerned above, 1 Pet 2:7 once again describes the audiences as those “who are loyal” (ὑμῖν … τοῖς πιστεύουσιν); the cornerstone to which they are loyal is now a source of “honor” (τιμή, 2:7a). This distinguishes them from those who are “not loyal” (ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ, 2:7b) and for whom the same stone is “a stone that causes them to stumble and a rock that causes them to fall” (λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου, 2:8). Christ-followers’ conversion—their expression of loyalty toward God—distinguishes them from others and, as we see from 4:2–4, discussed above, causes them to withdraw or disassociate from others.

Second, the conclusion’s final verses (2:9–10) build upon this contrast (ὑπεῖς δέ) by emphasizing that Christ-followers’ conversion has fundamentally reconstituted them as a collective body: “once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (οἵ ποτε οὐ λαός, νῦν δὲ λαός θεοῦ, 2:10). They constitute a new “people” (λαός), “race” (γένος), and “nation” (ἔθνος, 2:9–10) founded upon its members’ πίστις.71 Plutarch discusses the merits of politicians having ambition based on πίστις, as Morgan notes:

He [Plutarch] is commending pistis as a way of forging new relationships which enable new social networks to develop, which in turn benefit both individuals and society as a whole. In this vision, pistis/fides not only sustains society in its existing forms; it also renews and reconfigures it. (2015: 64)

Morgan therefore concludes, as also noted above, that πίστις forms “a basic building block of societies, emerging from the need of individuals and groups to make and maintain relationships” (75, emphasis mine). Having entrusted themselves to God, the audiences of First Peter now create new social networks and relationships that form the infrastructure for their newly

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71 On the significance of this ethno-religious terminology (λαός, γένος, ἔθνος), see Horrell 2011; 2013: 133–63; Ok 2021; and Marcar 2022.
constructed οἶκος πνευματικός. This observation makes it all the more reasonable to see First Peter’s employment of πιστις-language throughout this movement of its letter body as connoting the social commodity of “loyalty.”

Summary: The Exclusive Nature of Christ-Following Πίστις

The foregoing survey of 1 Pet 1:14–2:10 confirms and strengthens the initial observations I made regarding 2:11–12 and 4:1–6: the audiences of First Peter have experienced a pair of fundamental changes in terms of their conduct and their associations that has affected their ongoing relationships with wider society (“gentiles”). Throughout 1:14–2:10 First Peter strategically presents these changes as due to its audiences’ new-found “loyalty” (πίστις) toward God, expressed through (1) new forms of conduct (obedient, holy, reverent) that contrasts with previous forms of conduct (1:14–21); (2) a new association with others who are loyal toward God (1:22–2:6) that has also necessitated (3) a disassociation from previous associations (2:7–10). Because Christ-followers are “loyal toward God,” any loyalty that they had toward their “gentile” neighbors is now diminished, hindered, or even rendered impossible.

This “exclusive” nature of Christ-followers’ loyalty toward God is key. First Peter, among other early Christian (and Jewish) literature, explicitly draws a line at the point of worshipping or offering sacrifice to other gods—what it calls “idolatries” (εἰδωλολατρίαι, 4:3).72 As the climax to a list of vices at 4:3, “idolatries,” in Sean du Toit’s words, “suggests that the aforementioned activities culminate in a variety of acts which Peter considers abominable and idolatrous” (422). Toit also demonstrates that First Peter’s combination of

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72 Williams and Horrell note that this is “the only vice not found among similar catalogues in Greek and Roman writings” and that it “specifically reflects Jewish and Christian perspectives” (2023: 2:324). This perspective is easily documented; see the (many) texts cited in Toit 2021: 441–42 nn. 1–3.
μάταιος and πατροπαράδοτος at 1:18 indicates “a rejection of their previous religious traditions which included worshipping the gods” (2021: 420). Eugene Boring describes the situation as follows:

The activities here [at 4:3] refer particularly to the practices of civic and religious festivals, the community celebrations and social activities of business and professional guilds—in short, to the social world in which the readers were once active participants. Their new faith had caused them to withdraw from much of this social scene, and they are now criticized and reviled by those who were once their associates, who cannot understand this new commitment and its consequences in the lifestyle of its adherents. (1999: 145–46; also cited in Toit 2021: 422)

What we tend to think of in modern terms as “religious” life and practices (as opposed to secular ones) were far from separate from the daily life of those addressed by First Peter. “Religion was embedded in all aspects of society, including such things as economics, politics, the administration of justice, the conduct of war, and public festivities, as well as everything one did in private life” (Maier 2019: 30–31). Since Christ-followers’ loyalty was exclusively to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κύριοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:3), any conduct or association that betrayed or diminished that loyalty was to be avoided.

The significance of this exclusivity becomes apparent in the light of what appears to be a presupposition or modus operandi of toleration on the part of wider Roman society. The standard Roman attitude, in Larry Hurtado’s words, was that “all deities were deemed worthy of reverence. To deny a deity worship, and that typically meant sacrifice, was, effectively, to deny

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73 Williams writes that, with regard to the imperial cult in ancient Asia Minor, “The heart of the problem for Christians would have been the fact that the imperial cult was an inevitable part of everyday socio-religious life, and it would have been impossible to escape. The institution pervaded Anatolian society to the extent that non-participation (essentially) meant complete social withdrawal” (2012a: 253). Regarding the worship of “traditional gods,” as well, had important implications: “failure to worship the gods bore certain implications for members of the entire community. If one member slighted the gods, it was believed, retribution could have been exacted upon everyone…. [W]ithdrawal from pagan worship would result in public backlash” (257–58).
the god’s reality” (2016: 45, 47). The average person living within the confines of the Roman Empire—including the audiences of First Peter—saw “no need to avoid reverencing other deities…. Outright refusal to worship deities was deemed bizarre, even antisocial, and, worse still, impious and irreligious” (48). Christ-followers’ withdrawal from socio-religious practices and gatherings, in other words, was likely to raise suspicion and garner some forms of hostility on the part of “outsiders.” As First Peter itself reveals, Christ-followers still find themselves to be part of larger society, embedded as they are in relationships of civic responsibility (2:13–17) and domestic structures (2:18–3:7), and as simply present before the ever-watchful eyes of their neighbors (3:8–17). Christ-followers live out their loyalty to God “among the gentiles” (2:12)

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74 Peter Oakes’s study of the Philippian church(es) provides an incredibly helpful imagining of the social (especially economic) toll that would have resulted from following Christ; see Oakes 2001, esp. 89–96. See also: Hurtado 2003: “In itself … reverencing Jesus as divine would likely not have been such a problem. A sophisticated Roman such as Pliny was quite ready to accept religious diversity, and was well aware that a variety of gods and heroes were revered in various religious circles. Nor did recognizing another new deity present a difficulty. What caused Pliny’s concern about the Christians in Bithynia was that their reverence of Jesus as divine was accompanied by a refusal to reverence images of ‘the gods’ and the emperor. This religious exclusivity created a major (indeed, sometimes a mortal) social and political problem for Christians, and made their worship of Jesus pointedly offensive to pagan outsiders” (606); Ehrman 2003: “The problem posed by the Christians was not that they worshiped their own God, or that they considered Jesus a god, or that they had their own prescribed rituals and practices. The problem was that the Christians refused to worship the other gods, especially the gods of the state” (255). Warren Carter proposes that First Peter actually “responds to these pressures not by forbidding participation, but in fact by advocating it” (2004: 24, emphasis mine), but scholars have typically found his argument unconvincing; see the critiques of Horrell (2013: 231–34) and Toit (2021).

75 “City life was lived publicly, in the open. Thus, whatever one was or did, everyone knew at once” (MacMullen 1974: 62). I disagree with the “commonplace” reference to early Christianity as “a sectarian movement” (Elliott 1990: 50; Elliott specifically wrote that he had “no doubt” about the sectarian character of the intended recipients of First Peter). Such a “commonplace” designation may be waning, and space does not permit a detailed discussion or critique of it here. See the discussions in Barton 1993; Bird 2002; and esp. Regev 2011. Philip Harland’s (and others’) work on Greek and Roman associations, in my opinion, provides a more adequate comparison for understanding the make up and functions of early groups of Christ-followers, including those addressed by First Peter. Harland writes, “Looking at this [First Peter’s] advice to Christians in Asia Minor in light of the concrete practices of many other associations and synagogues in the same region may draw a more complicated picture regarding the range of possibilities in group-society interactions among Christian assemblies. This [shows] that the usual sectarian-focused approach does not do justice to all the evidence” (2003: 13); see also Kloppenborg 2019; Longenecker 2022; Ascough 2022: 1–88.
and alongside “those who are not loyal” (2:7), all while remaining cognizant of the fact that their loyalty has fundamentally altered their conduct and their associations.

In this light, we may properly and fruitfully understand why outsiders “are surprised” that Christ-followers “no longer run together with them” (1 Pet 4:4). Typical Romans would have expected Christ-followers to contextualize this “new god” within and alongside the standard fare of deities. Instead, First Peter (along with Paul’s letters and plenty of other early Christian literature) requires its audiences to demonstrate proper loyalty toward God and Christ—a loyalty which required a magnitude of exclusivity and a calculated navigation of (and even a cautious resistance against) the status quo of typical social conformity and obligation. In so doing, First Peter’s audiences now find themselves at odds with their neighbors—and suffering for it. It is in this context that we may now turn to reexamine the significance of the “slander” (2:12), “defamation” (4:4), and other forms of verbal harassment directed at them by outsiders.

Invective as the Form of Suffering in First Peter

As noted above, First Peter’s presentation of its audiences’ suffering is variegated. They are “grieved by various trials” (λυπηθέντας ἐν ποικίλοις περιασμοῖς), both physical (e.g., 2:19; 3:9) and verbal (e.g., 2:12; 3:16; 4:4). We would also do well to keep in mind the lasting effects—social, emotional, and even psychological—that may result from such physical and

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76 The language of “conformity” and “resistance” echoes the terms of a discussion set by David Balch and John Elliott regarding the level of accommodation to Roman society that First Peter envisions on the part of its audiences (see Balch 1981; Elliott 1990; as well as Elliott 1986 and Balch 1986). It is not in my interest to reopen this debate, but in my use of the language of “cautious navigation” and “resistance” here I note that I find the later proposals of Horrell (2007a; 2013: 211–38) and Williams (2014), building on the insights of postcolonial theory, to be a helpful way “beyond the Balch-Elliott debate” (Horrell 2013: 217). See, esp., Williams 2014: 185–244 for discussions of “Calculated Conformity” and “Cautious Resistance.”

77 The example of Christ’s (physical) suffering (2:21–25; 3:18; 4:13) also indicates that the Christ-followers addressed by First Peter may be accustomed to physical suffering. On further possibilities of physical sufferings, see above (nn. 39–40).
verbal harassments. 78 By all accounts, however, First Peter chooses to focus on the verbal abuse that its audiences are presently experiencing as a result of their conversion: as Christ-followers’ new conduct and new associations (and simultaneous disassociation) reflect the reality of their conversion, outsiders (“gentiles”) take offense at what they perceive to be irreligious and antisocial behavior; as a result, they verbally harass Christ-followers. My task with the present section is to define and describe this verbal abuse, so that I may then demonstrate how First Peter’s focus on such verbal harassment coincides with the letter’s established focus on Christ-followers’ “loyalty toward God” (πίστις εἰς θεόν).

The verbal abuse highlighted by First Peter—slander, defamation, name-calling—belongs to the rhetorical category or genre of invective (vituperatio). 79 Techniques and forms of invective were pervasive in the public affairs of Roman society. Alicia Batten writes,

> Whether it is in a graffiti scrawled upon a wall, epithets, gossip, or the more sophisticated genres of satire and oration, invective surfaces in many places throughout Graeco-Roman forms of communication…. Thus invective was not particularly surprising or shocking; rather, it was an anticipated form of expression that the public noticed…. In agonistic cultures, in which people are constantly jostling for honour, power and resources, such insinuations, arguments and brawls are commonplace. (2014: 3)

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78 Brox therefore characterizes the suffering in general terms: “‘Suffering’ is, in any case, the term for negative experiences of mistrust, suspicion, hatred, hostility, and aggression which Christians, because they are Christians, incur from non-Christian contemporaries” (24: »Leiden« ist dabei jedenfalls der Begriff für negative Erfahrungen von Mißtrauen, Verdächtigung, Haß, Feindseligkeit, Aggression, die die Christen sich darum, weil sie Christen sind, von nichtchristlichen Zeitgenossen zuziehen).

79 Alexandra Robinson calls invective a “sub-genre,” since invective could be used as a technique within each species of ancient rhetoric (deliberative, forensic, and epideictic); see Robinson 2018: 35. Here I also assume a “broad” definition of rhetoric as proposed by Valentina Arena: “In the strict sense only speeches delivered, or supposedly delivered, as a direct attack against an individual should be considered invective…. However, if we are prepared to broaden our definition, speeches whose first aim was not to attack the opponent directly, but to discredit him or her in order to achieve a specific persuasive goal, might also be considered invective” (2007: 35; quoted in Robinson 2018: 35 n. 146). Robinson also notes: “In reference to a literary genre, the term itself did not make an appearance until the fourth century CE, though it is widely understood that the technique was being used long before this by orators such as Cicero, Isocrates, and Demosthenes” (36). It is to the “technique” of invective that I refer in the present discussion.
Invective aims to persuade audiences of another’s “worthlessness” or “wickedness”; in the light of such an estimation, it intends to dissuade others from following the subject’s example. In the words of *Rhetoric ad Herennium*,

> We shall say that since our hearers know the man, we shall confine ourselves to a few words on the subject of his worthlessness; but if they do not, we shall try to make them know him, in order that they may avoid his wickedness; since our hearers are unlike the subject of our censure (*vituperatur*), we express the hope that they will vigorously disapprove his way of life.  

Invective identified a person or group “as unfit for the community” (Corbeill 2002: 199), even going so far as to suggest and demonstrate that their way of life posed a danger to society at large. Invective, therefore, was an apt means of shaming Christ-followers for what could be perceived as “religious and social apostasy” (Hurtado 2016: 54), as well as for stigmatizing the early Christian movement and dissuading others from “joining up.”

First Peter’s own presentation of the invective leveled against its audiences also appears designed to highlight the “otherness” and “difference” of Christ-followers that has prompted it. Being “begotten anew” has changed how these Christ-followers interact with their neighbors and how they conduct themselves “among the gentiles” (2:12). Their “good conduct” is now characterized by their loyalty to God and Christ (3:16; 4:2); they have withdrawn from previous

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80 *Rhet. Her.* 3.6.12 (trans. Caplan LCL): *quoniam norint, pauca de nequitia eius dicturos; quod si ignorant, petemus uti gnoscant, uti malitiam vitare possint; quoniam dissimiles sint qui audiant atque ille qui vituperatur, sperare eos illius vitam vehementer inprobatus.*

81 Corbeill notes that for an orator such as Cicero, “Invective works as a series of examples of what a Roman is not…. [T]he perceived violator becomes exposed to public ridicule and is thereby excluded from the community” (Corbeill 2002: 199).

82 See Keener 2021: 163–66. The comment of Meeks is especially relevant to the contents of First Peter: “In imperial times, conflicting loyalties threatened the city in yet more complex ways. Sometimes it was foreign cults that, the authorities feared, would undermine public order by teaching wives to disobey their husbands, and slaves their masters, and thus all to cross ‘bounds beyond established law’” (1986: 22).
associations (4:4) and been admitted to a new, exclusive fellowship with other “Christians” (1:22; 2:1–2, 4–6, 7–10; 4:7–11; 5:9). Hurtado paints the picture well:

Prior to their Christian conversion, these individuals, no doubt, had taken part in the worship of the traditional gods, likely as readily as other pagans of the time among families, friends, and wider circles of their acquaintances. One month or even one week earlier, perhaps, they could have been joining family and friends in sacrificial rites to various deities. But then … after being baptized as adherents of the local Christian church, they were to desist from this activity . . . totally. (2016: 53)

As described above, the exclusivity of Christ-followers’ “loyalty toward God” would likely have been perceived as unnecessary to the average Roman observer: “This total withdrawal from the worship of the many deities was a move without precedent, and it would have seemed inexplicable and deeply worrying to many of the general populace” (54). Therefore, those who do not follow Christ “revile” (ἐπηρεάζω) Christ-followers’ “good conduct in Christ” (ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν); they slander (καταλαλέω, 2:12), defame (βλασφημέω, 4:4), and mock (ὀνειδίζω, 4:14) them; they call them “wrongdoers” (κακοποιός, 2:12). They utilize a common tool at their disposal to declare that these “Christians” are odd, not to be trusted, to be regarded with contempt, and a threat to the good of society at large.

One further detail of First Peter’s rhetoric confirms and underscores, in my opinion, the letter’s rhetorical emphasis on the verbal nature of the abuse that its audiences face: its identification of their cosmic “adversary” (ὁ ἄντιδικος ὑμῶν, 5:8). Throughout most of the letter, Christ-followers’ detractors are clearly human beings who take offense at their reoriented behavior and resocialized networks: “the Petrine author blames Anatolian society for the conflict.

83 The final ellipsis is Hurtado’s. Hurtado’s analysis focuses on the communities evangelized by Paul (especially the Corinthians) and those addressed by Revelation. For helpful cautions on Hurtado’s understanding of early Christian “distinctiveness,” see Novenson 2020.
in which his readers are involved (1 Pet 2.12; 3.13–17; 4.3–4)” (Williams 2014: 218). But as First Peter makes its final attempt to fortify the “household of God,” it names “the devil” (διάβολος, 5:8) as the one they must resist, and exhorts them to do so by remaining “firm in [their] loyalty” (στερεοὶ τῇ πίστει, 5:9). Though the devil is described “as a lion” (ὁ λέων), and though leonine imagery may well have “inundated” the Roman world (and especially the Greek East), it is worth remembering that the word διάβολος “literally means ‘slanderer.’” Elliott summarizes: “In the LXX, diabolos … refer[s] to a celestial agent who tests loyalties for the king.” Moreover, “Originally, the celestial or angelic figure referred to as šāṭān/diabolos was seen as a heavenly prosecutor under God’s control…. His function was to question and test the genuineness of human virtue and loyalty” (2000: 854). First Peter has already presented its audiences’ sufferings as a series of trials that is intended to reveal the genuineness of their “loyalty” (πίστις); here it elevates their earthly struggle to a cosmic level and reaffirms that “the God of all beneficence” is on their side against all enemies—human or otherwise (5:10–11).

Furthermore, in the face of this cosmic slanderer, I suggest, it is telling that First Peter specifically commands its audiences to “resist him, firm in your πίστις” (ὁ ἀντίστητε στερεοὶ τῇ πίστει, 5:9a). The very thing that has caused human detractors to “slander” and “defame” Christ-followers—their loyalty to God—is the very thing that they are to cling to when they are confronted by an ancient slanderer. Moreover, they are to do so “knowing” (εἰδότες) that they

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85 This remains true even if “διάβολος had taken on an almost technical sense as a title of the leader of the demonic forces who opposed the purposes and people of God” (Williams and Horrell 2023: 575). It is possible for the word διάβολος both to have developed such a “technical sense” and for it to connote more than just that technical sense alone—especially considering that we cannot be sure that the (primarily gentile) audiences of First Peter were familiar with this technical sense.
are not alone in this struggle: they are united to brothers and sisters “throughout the world” who face the same adversary (5:9b). The reorientation and resocialization that has caused them to suffer, First Peter affirms, is also the key to their resistance and eventual vindication. By elevating its audiences’ present struggles to a cosmic level, and by connecting those struggles back to its emphasis on the importance of their “loyalty toward God,” First Peter signals that this invective—the slander, the name-calling, the defamation, and any other forms of verbal abuse—is an important (though unfortunate) part of their existence as God’s people and household; understanding this emphasis on verbal harassment will help them (and us) understand the identity that First Peter is attempting to construct.

Loyalty, Invective, and Discipleship in First Peter

With the foregoing discussions I have sought to demonstrate two things. (1) First Peter portrays its audiences’ suffering as a consequence of their πίστις εἰς θεόν, language that I have proposed should be read to connote their “loyalty” toward God. Since God requires Christ-followers’ exclusive loyalty, they are no longer able to show loyalty (at least to the same degree) toward their neighbors who do not follow Christ; First Peter, therefore, recognizes and underscores the precarious position in which Christ-followers find themselves vis-à-vis society at large because of this shift in their loyalty.86 (2) Christ-followers express their loyalty to God (through changes to their manners of conduct and association) in ways that appear deviant and even dangerous to outsiders. This leads these outsiders to confront Christ-followers with

86 “Like modern sociologists,” Morgan writes, “Greeks and Romans assume that trust, good faith, and related qualities are endemic in human societies. No society can evolve, develop beyond the most rudimentary level, or survive without them” (2015: 117). Alongside (if not undergirding) qualities like justice, righteousness, love, obedience, and hope is πίστις, which has a power “to forge social relationships, create polities, and change sociopolitical landscapes” (118).
slanderous accusations, name-calling, and other verbal harassments helpfully summarized under the category of invective (vituperatio). By these means detractors would hope to shame Christ-followers (perhaps into abandoning their new “loyalty to God”) and to dissuade others from joining their ranks.

These two features combine, I now propose, and provide the first of two important thematic contexts enabling us to read First Peter as a summons to discipleship. In this case, I suggest that First Peter’s presentation of its audiences’ situation (as I have just described it) provides a context in which its audiences would hear themselves addressed as disciples and summoned to act accordingly. In order to proceed toward this conclusion, a brief word regarding the nature of early Christian groups (especially as they were perceived by outsiders) is in order.

While we may be used to thinking of figures like Justin Martyr (ca. 100–150 CE), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) and Origen (ca. 185–250 CE) as “Christian philosophers,” it is also appropriate to understand the emergence of earliest Christianity as part of the first century CE’s multifaceted tapestry of “philosophy.” The nature of first-century “philosophy” is particularly relevant here. In Luke Timothy Johnson’s words,

Philosophy had become less a matter of metaphysics than of morals. Since the classical age there had been a shift from theory to therapy. One converted to the philosophical life by leaving vice and seeking virtue, a quest for health by those morally ill. Philosophy was a way of life embraced by many with a religious fervor. (1989: 429, emphasis mine)

87 This is all the more relevant and important in the light of the ways that various strands of Hellenistic Judaism were regarded, both from within and from without. In Marin Hengel’s words, “the earliest Greek witnesses, for all their variety, present a relatively uniform picture: they portray the Jews as a people of “philosophers”” (1974: 255; see 255–67 for discussion and documentation with several references to primary sources).

88 “In short, there is in this period [i.e., the Hellenistic period] broad and deep agreement that the central motivation for philosophizing is the urgency of human suffering, and that the goal of philosophy is human flourishing, or eudaimonia. Philosophy never ceases to be understood as an art whose tools are arguments, an art in which precise reasoning, logical rigor, and definitional precision have an important role to play. But the point of these devices, and of philosophy insofar as it is wedded to them, is understood to be, above all, the achievement of flourishing human lives… For [Epicureans, Skeptics, and Stoics] is above all the art of human life; and engagement
First Peter’s presentation of Christ-followers’ conversion in terms of “loyalty,” along with the letter’s emphasis on their “conduct” or “way of life” (ἀναστροφή) affirms that “philosophy” provides an applicable framework for understanding the dynamics of First Peter’s rhetorical situation. Moreover, several scholars have also demonstrated that early Christ-following groups behaved in ways comparable to philosophical “schools” or “circles”: “Teaching or preaching, moral exhortation, and the exegesis of canonical texts are activities associated in the ancient world with philosophy” (Alexander 1994: 60–61).89 First Peter engages in each of these activities, but also emphasizes the importance of its audiences’ resocialization among fellow Christ-followers as they devote themselves to God and Christ, much as the disciples of a philosopher would find themselves part of a new community centered around their teacher.90

**Discipleship and Philosophical Loyalty**

Crook notes that ancient philosophers (and the circles and schools they inspired) “required and invited a considerable degree of exclusive loyalty. One generally did not follow the teachings of more than one philosopher at a time because their teachings could be quite at odds with one another” (2004: 101). Conversion to philosophy—or from one philosophical

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in it that is not properly anchored to the business of living well is regarded as empty and vain” (Nussbaum 2018: 15). See Cicero, *Tusc. 3.3.6; Fin. 4.;* Sextus, *Math. 11.169* (Epicurus, Us. 219); Seneca, *Ep. 90.*

89 In addition to Alexander 1994; see Nock 1933: 164–253; Judge 1960–61; Malherbe 1986; 1987; Meeks 2003: 81–84; Wilken 2003. This is not to suggest that early Christianity (broadly speaking) formed a well-defined, institutionalized “school” of thought; rather, it is to recognize that ancient philosophical “schools” and “circles” provide an analogue for thinking about the dynamics of early Christ-following groups, centered as they are around a founding figure and his teaching—not least because this was how some ancient (non-Christian) authors perceived them and interacted with them (e.g., Galen: see Alexander 1994; Wilken 68–93; as well as Porphyry: see Wilken 2003: 126–63). For a helpful caution against making one-to-one comparisons, see Malherbe 1983.

90 The Epicureans, especially, provide numerous examples of the importance of the community: “In going to the Garden [the Epicurean community surrounding Epicurus] she has decided to separate herself from her old way of life in the city and, so long as she is there, to live a life devoted entirely to the philosophical community itself. Its members become her new family” (Nussbaum 2018: 119; see 117–20; see also Malherbe 1986: 11–12; 1987: 34–60. On the Stoics, see Nussbaum 2018: 341–44.
tradition to another—“is expressed above all in terms of loyalty to the teacher and that teacher’s doctrines” (243). Diogenes relates the influence of Stilpo of Megara in such terms:

He so far surpassed the rest in ingenuity and subtlety that nearly all of Greece looked to him and started to ‘Megarize.’ About him Philip the Megarian says, and I quote, ‘For from Theophrastus he drew away Metrodorus the theorist, and Timagoras of Gela; from Aristotle of Cyrene, Clitarchus and Simmias; and from the dialectitians he drew Paonius from Aristides. And he made Diphilus of the Bosporus, son of Euphantus, and Myrmex, son of Exaenetus, who had both come to refute him, his zealous admirers (ζηλωτὰς).’ Besides these he won over Phrasidemus, the Paripatetic, an expert in natural philosophy, and the rhetorician Alcinus, the foremost among the Greek orators; he also captivated Crates and a great many others; along with these, he even carried off Zeno the Phoenician.\footnote{Vit. phil. 2.11.113–14 (trans. Mensch): τοσοῦτον δ᾿ εὑρεσιλογίᾳ καὶ σοφιστείᾳ προῆγε τοὺς ἄλλους, ὡστε μικροῦ δεῖχσαι πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀφορῶσαν εἰς αὐτὸν μεγαρίσαι. περὶ τούτου φησὶ Φίλιππος ὁ Μεγαρικὸς κατὰ λέξιν οὕτω· “παρὰ μὲν γὰρ Θεοφράστου Μητρόδωρον τὸν θεωρητικὸν καὶ Τιμαγόραν τὸν Γελῶον ἀπέσπασε, παρ’ Ἀριστοτέλειος δὲ τοῦ Κυρηναϊκοῦ Κλείταρχον καὶ Σιμμίαν: ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν διαλεκτικῶν Παιώνειον μὲν ἀπ’ Αριστείδον, Δίφιλον δὲ τὸν Βοσποριανὸν Εὐφάντου καὶ Μύρμηκα τὸν Ἐξαινέτου παραγενομένους ὡς ἐλέγξοντας ἀμφοτέρους ζηλωτὰς ἔσχε.” χωρὶς τοίνυν τούτων Φρασίδημον μὲν τῶν περιπατητικῶν καὶ φυσικῶν ἐμπειρὸν ὄντα προσηγάγετο, καὶ τὸν ρητορικὸν Ἀλκιμόν, ἀπάντων προτείνοντα τὸν ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι ρητόρον, Κράτητα τε καὶ ἄλλους πλείστους ὅσους ἐθήρασε· καὶ δὴ καὶ Ζήνωνα τὸν Φοίνικα μετὰ τούτων ἀφείλετο.}

It is clear from such summaries that loyalty and devotion to a new teacher would often require the student to reconsider and forsake his or her loyalty to a previous one. An important part of Alcibiades’s journey toward devoting himself to Socrates is his recognition that his previous teachers have offered him little by comparison to what this superior teacher can (Plato, Alc. Maj. 109D–114B; 118A–119D).

This dynamic of “loyalty exchange,” I suggest, is what enables us to recognize the sociocultural context of discipleship in First Peter. There were plenty of relationships in the ancient world that were founded upon loyalty; a manumitted person, as noted above, was expected to demonstrate loyalty toward his or her manumitter-patron. It was in philosophical contexts, however, that a disciple was expected to demonstrate exclusive loyalty toward his or
her teacher, and this is especially distinctive when we recognize that these teachers functioned as patrons to their students.\textsuperscript{92} Such exclusivity was not typical of other forms of patronage: “literary patronage, social (general) patronage, some manumission relationships, and political patronage all allow for one to have multiple patrons” (Crook 2004: 235). By contrast, “what gives philosophical movements their cohesion and identity is less a disinterested quest for the truth than a virtually religious commitment to the authority of a founder figure” (Sedley 1989: 97). Crook explains,

One could not serve two philosophical masters at the same time because their messages and world-views were usually, or they strived to be, mutually exclusive and unique…. Philosophical conversion necessarily involved disloyalty to someone while in the process of expressing loyalty to a new teacher. (Crook 2004: 243)

This is precisely what First Peter expects of Christ-followers: even as they strive to “fit in” to their surroundings (ὑποτάσσω, 2:13, 18; 3:1; 5:5),\textsuperscript{93} they are to do so without compromising their loyalty toward God.\textsuperscript{94} They are to abstain from practices and associations that undermine the genuineness of that loyalty (1:14, 18; 2:1, 11; 4:3–4) and to adopt those that demonstrate the vitality of their new life of faithfulness, having been “begotten anew” (1:15, 17; 1:22; 2:12; 3:8).

\textsuperscript{92} This will become even more relevant in the following discussion of χάρις, below.

\textsuperscript{93} On the meaning of ὑποτάσσω as “fit in,” see Martin 2022.

\textsuperscript{94} This is shown in several ways. For example, all Christ followers are told to “honor the emperor” (τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε), but this is the same amount of esteem in which they are to hold all people (πάντας τιμήσατε); God, on the other hand, is to be “feared” or “revered” (τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε, 2:17; see 1:17). Enslaved persons are exhorted to “fit in” to the household and “endure” their treatment, but explicitly in light of their “consciousness of God” (διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ, 2:19). Wives, similarly, are told to “fit in” with their husbands, but the explanation that those husbands may see the way they live “with reverence” (ἐν φόβῳ, 3:2) suggests that their conduct (ἀναστοφή, 3:2) is to be determined by their commitment to God and Christ more than their relationship to their husbands; they are not to accord such reverence to a husband’s authority (μὴ φοβούμεναι, 3:6; see 3:15). Further, the “good conduct” of First Peter’s audiences is conditioned by their relationship to Christ (ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν, 3:16), and they are constantly exhorted to maintain their commitment to such behavior (e.g., 2:12; 3:17; 4:19); I will return to this latter point in Chapter Four.
By exhorting its audiences in these terms, First Peter addresses them as *disciples of a teacher*, and this enables us to read First Peter itself as a summons to discipleship.

**Discipleship and Invective**

Furthermore, the rhetorical techniques of invective, especially as highlighted by First Peter, was particularly at home among ancient philosophers and their disciples. Johnson writes,

> Certain standard charges were leveled against opponents on either side of the debates between ancient teachers and members of ancient rival traditions. Epicureans attacked Stoics, Platonists reviled Epicureans; Gentiles and Jews criticized each other with scathing language; Pharisees scorned the Sadducees; and the Essenes vituperated against the Pharisees. These conventional attacks were used in protreptic discourse to provide foil for the ideal teacher. (Johnson 2001: 391)

Thus Lucian portrays invective as a “philosopher’s tool” by having Zeus identify Timon by his use of it: “A mouthy fellow and an impudent one. Very likely he is a philosopher, otherwise he would not talk so impiously against us.”

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Reflecting further on his distaste for philosophy, Zeus remembers:

> I haven’t even looked at Attica for a long time, particularly since philosophy and debates grew rife among the Athenians, for it is impossible even to hear the prayers on account of their wrangling and shouting; one must therefore either sit with his ears stopped or be dinned to death with their harangues about “virtue” and “things incorporeal” and other piffle.

The constancy of verbal sparring between different “philosophies,” Lucian implies, is enough to make gods stop their own ears! Epictetus is of a different opinion regarding philosophers but expresses himself similarly. None, he says, are truly “philosophers” or even “educated” unless

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96 *Tim.* 9: πολὺν ἡδὴ χρόνον οὐδὲ ἀπέβλεψα ἐξ τὴν Ἀττικὴν, καὶ μᾶλλα εὗ ὁ ϕιλοσοφία καὶ λόγων ἐριδές ἐπεπάλλασαν αὐτοῖς· μαγχωμένων γὰρ πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ κεκραγότων οὐδὲ ἐπικουοῦεν ἐστὶ τὸν εὐχόν· ὥστε ἢ ἐπιβισσάμενον χρῆ τὰ ὅτα καθῆθαι ἢ ἐπιτριβήναι πρὸς αὐτῶν, ἀρετὴν τινα καὶ ἄσωμα καὶ λήρους μεγάλῃ τῇ φωνῇ συνειρόντων.
they practice appropriate discernment and virtue. Epictetus finds those who cannot approach life (and hardship) in the Stoic (and Epictetian) way to be worthy of his reproach:

But if you show envy, wretched man, and pity, and jealousy, and timidity, and never let a day pass without bewailing yourself and the gods, how can you continue to say that you have been educated? What kind of education, man, do you mean? Because you have worked on syllogisms, and arguments with equivocal premises? Will you not unlearn all this, if that be possible, and begin at the beginning, realizing that hitherto you have not even touched the matter?97

Epictetus’s critique is mild in comparison to the name-calling and ridicule that is often leveled against rival philosophers and their followers.98 The point here is to recognize that the techniques of invective were directed at the character and behaviors of philosophers and their disciples as much (if not more) as at their “doctrines”; it was intended to shame its targets and to make their way of life appear undesirable to others.

First Peter clearly portrays its audiences as the targets of invective, and its emphasis on this form of suffering indicates that the letter addresses Christ-followers as disciples, since these were natural targets of such abuse. As disciples, First Peter can assist its audiences in making sense of their suffering, since they would naturally understand that this is the kind of attention that disciples of a charismatic teacher often received—especially one who had upset religious authority figures and who suffered and died at the hands of imperial authorities. This does not make the suffering disappear, but it does provide a context in which it might have less power.99

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97 Epictetus, Diatr. 2.17.26–28 (trans. Oldfather LCL): εἰ δὲ φθονεῖς, ἀταλαίπωρε, καὶ ἐλεεῖς καὶ ζηλοτυπεῖς καὶ τρέμεις καὶ μίαν ἡμέραν οὐ διαλείπεις, ἐν ᾗ οὐ κατακλάεις καὶ σαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν θεῶν, καὶ τί ἔτι λέγειςπαιδεῦσθαί; ποιήσεις παιδείαν, ἁθροποιήσεις; ὅτι συλλογισμοῖς ἔφαγες, μετατιθέμενος; οὐ θέλεις ὁσιοθενεῖν, εἰ δυνατόν, πάντα ταῦτα καὶ ἄνωθεν ἀρξάσθαι συναισθανόμενος ὅτι μέχρι νῦν οὐδ᾽ ἦσο τῶν πράγματος.

98 See the discussion with several examples in Johnson 1989: 430–34; 2001: 391–92.

99 I will deal with this at more length in Chapter Four.
While outsiders slander them “as wrongdoers” (1 Pet 2:12), for instance, Christ-followers can contextualize this (attempted) slight against their character within the common rhetoric of invective among the philosophical debates and rivalries of their world. Moreover, they can recognize that their character is ultimately judged not by the standards of society, but by God (1:17; 2:12, 19–20; 3:15; 4:17; 5:5) and is dictated by Christ as the one whom they follow (3:16). As disciples, therefore, they are encouraged to maintain their loyalty to their teacher in the face of such hostility—because this is what disciples can expect; this is what disciples do.

Summary

These last two observations have demonstrated that First Peter’s audiences could readily—if not naturally—hear themselves addressed by this letter as disciples of a teacher. First, disciples in the ancient Mediterranean world were expected to show loyalty to their teachers. This is what First Peter describes and seeks to strengthen throughout its exhortations: loyalty to God and loyalty to Christ; according to First Peter, they are to be committed to God and Christ as students would be committed to their teachers. Second, because of their loyalty to their teachers, disciples could expect to face the rhetoric of invective from both the general public and members of rival philosophical schools or circles. First Peter’s focus on the verbal abuse its audiences face (including slander, defamation, ridicule, and name-calling) likens them to beleaguered students who are expected to persevere through such abuse by maintaining their loyalty to their teachers.

This attention to the situation of First Peter—suffering caused by “loyalty toward God” (πίστις εἰς θεόν) and taking the form of invective (vituperatio)—has helped me to identify a thematic context against which we may read First Peter as a summons to discipleship. The
significance of “loyalty” (πίστις) for this reading of First Peter, however, can be supplemented and even amplified with attention to the letter’s equally significant employment of the language of χάρις (“beneficence”)—not least because ancient philosophers are often compared to benefactors who “offer enlightenment and salvation that constitute benefactions,” whose clients “are their disciples” (Lamoreaux 2021: 245). If First Peter portrays the relationship between God and Christ-followers as akin to that of a benefactor and his clients (which I contend that it does), then its audiences will be all the more primed to hear themselves addressed as disciples.

“True Beneficence from God”: Χάρις and the Rhetorical Strategy of First Peter

Just as the foregoing discussion of πίστις and the situation of First Peter revealed the letter’s capacity to address its audiences as disciples, here I will demonstrate how First Peter’s strategic deployment of χαρις-language also enables us to read the letter as a summons to discipleship. Perhaps most significantly, First Peter summarizes the contents of its message as, in part, “testimony” to something (“this,” ταυτήν) that is God’s “true χάρις” (5:12). Many scholars regard ταύτην to refer to an elided or implied ἐπιστολή, representing the contents of the letter comprehensively: the message that First Peter bears is ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ.100 This requires some nuance, but that will only be possible in light of a more detailed study of χαρις-language throughout First Peter, to which I will turn below. Here it is important to note that First Peter is particularly concerned to attest that “this” is “true χάρις” from God. This is curious, Williams

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100 This position comprises two variations: (1) letter itself is χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ or (2) the letter’s message is χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ; for a clearer distinction between these two variations, see Williams and Horrell 2023: 2.630–31. See Bigg 1902: 196; Michaels 1988: 309–10; Davids 1990: 200; Achtemeier 1996: 352–53; Dubis 2010: 175; Watson 2012: 125; Forbes 2014: 184; Jobes 2022: 319. While this host of scholarship is impressive, I am persuaded by Wand’s conclusion that this reading results in an “unnecessary tautology,” which Wand regards as “absurd”: “If it refers merely to the contents of the present epistle, it would be equivalent to saying, ‘I write this epistle in order to confirm the contents of this epistle’” (1934: 128). I also find Wand’s solution—that “this” refers to “the teaching given by Silvanus” (129)—to be unconvincing.
remarks, since “χάρις was perfectly recognizable in the ancient world. It did not require verification or validation, for it was an unmistakable benefit for those to whom it was directed. This was especially true in the case of χάρις received from the divine realm, as it is here” (2016: 434). It is therefore important that we understand the χάρις to which First Peter testifies.101 As I demonstrated above, First Peter’s χαρις-language has often been interpreted apart from its sociocultural context and “first-level meaning,” resulting in wholesale soteriological definitions of χάρις that neglect the nuance of First Peter’s effort to testify to this χάρις.

With the following discussion, therefore, my goal is to focus on the language of χάρις with attention to the context of ancient practices of reciprocity, “the most common social domain in which the term was employed in the Hellenistic world” (Williams 2016: 428). This attention will assist us to hear the language of χάρις alongside the Christ-followers addressed by First Peter—and to hear First Peter addressing them as disciples.

In light of the many references to “God’s” χάρις throughout the letter and my earlier discussion of χάρις’s “first-level meaning,” I will argue here that First Peter employs χάρις strategically to denote God’s “beneficence” as a category, perspective, and framework through which Christ-followers are invited to understand and reconceptualize their present circumstances—in terms of both their relationship with God and the “salvation” that they await. I will demonstrate that First Peter achieves this chiefly in two ways. First, χάρις or “beneficence” first appears climactically at the end of the letter’s proem (1:3–12), thereby providing a category

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101 Norbert Brox (1993: 244) offers an unassuming interpretation of παρακαλῶν and writes, “So far there are no difficulties” (So weit gibt es keine Schwierigkeiten). As he turns to ἐπιμαρτυρῶν, however, he remarks, “But real understanding depends on the content of the testimony” (Aber für das wirkliche Verständnis kommt es nun auf den Inhalt dieses Zeugnisses an).
through which the audiences are to understand their “salvation.” Second, the language of χάρις provides a frame or inclusio around the letter body itself (1:13; 5:12), inviting us to read First Peter’s message (including its rhetorical presentation of its audiences’ situation) within the framework of divine beneficence.

The Climactic Function of Χάρις in the Letter Proem (1 Pet 1:10)

The first strategic employment of χάρις by First Peter’s is at the end of the letter’s proem (1:3–12).102 Here I will demonstrate that the thought of this long periodic sentence moves forward in order to introduce the language of χάρις climactically (1:10) as a category through which its Christ-following audiences are meant to understand or conceptualize their “salvation” (σωτηρία, 1:5, 9, 10). The main point of First Peter’s proem, I suggest, is twofold. First, the proem foregrounds the audiences’ hope for salvation, thereby reminding them of the “goal” or “end” of their loyalty toward God (1:3–9). Second, and significantly for locating discipleship in First Peter, the thought of First Peter’s proem moves forward in such a way as to climactically introduce the language of χάρις as a category for understanding this salvation (1:10).

The long periodic sentence of 1 Pet 1:3–12 is easily demarcated into three digestible units (1:3–5, 6–9, 10–12). The first focuses on what God has done and continues to do for the audiences of First Peter:

Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In keeping with his great mercy he has begotten us anew for a living hope through Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead, [a hope] for an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven

102 Briefly put, the letter proem, situated at the beginning of the letter, sets the tone through which the rest of the letter would be received, often signaling some of its key themes and topics. On the position, parameters, and function of the letter proem in First Peter, see Appendix A. See also Schubert 1939; Weima 2016: 51–90.
for you who by the power of God are being guarded through [your] loyalty for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.\(^{103}\)

God has “re-begotten” the audiences of First Peter (ὁ ἀναγεννήσας) so that their lives would be reoriented toward hope in an inheritance presently held in trust by God. This “inheritance” is the object of their hope; they expect it and look forward to it.\(^{104}\) The substance of their inheritance is then identified as their “salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time” (1:5). Through the rich vocabulary of these verses First Peter gradually unpacks the benefits of Christ-followers’ new birth: they now hope that they will inherit salvation.\(^{105}\) First Peter’s proem begins, therefore, by providing a rich account of Christ-followers’ salvation and, consequently, an important soteriological lens through which the audiences will encounter the message of the letter.

Some scholars then understand the proem to “digress” as it begins to discuss its audiences’ circumstances in 1 Pet 1:6–9 (e.g., Michaels 1988: 26; Williams 2011: 162–64).

Attention to the movement of this complex sentence, however, reveals that these circumstances, so described, are integral to the soteriological scheme that the proem presents. After announcing that Christ-followers’ salvation is “ready to be revealed,” First Peter directly addresses their suffering, affirming that they are “grieved by various trials” (λυπηθέντας ἐν ποικίλοις

\(^{103}\) Eὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ τοῦ κυρίου ἢμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν διὰ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν, εἰς κληρονομίαν ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμάραντον τετηρημένην ἐν οὐρανοῖς εἰς σωτηρίαν ἑτοίμην ἀποκαλυφθῆναι ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ.

\(^{104}\) On the relationship between hope and expectation, see Keener 2021: 64–65.

\(^{105}\) Others read these verses as designating the “consequences” (plural) and “threefold goal” of their new birth (Achtemeier 1996: 92, 94) or as “three related results or benefits” (Elliott 2000: 333), each introduced by a (supposedly) parallel prepositional phrase beginning with εἰς (εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν, εἰς κληρονομίαν, εἰς σωτηρίαν). This supposed parallelism, however, is interrupted by several other prepositional phrases (including a fourth εἰς-phrase in 1:4) and is unbalanced by other grammatical constructions (see Martin 1992a: 52–54), and I find it easier to understand each εἰς-phrase on its own terms. My reading still assumes that each εἰς is to be taken with telic force and that the repetition of the preposition is intended to propel the movement of thought forward.
πειρασμοῖς and that these unfortunate, present concerns will last “for a little while” (ὄλιγον ἄρτι, 1:6); though they suffer now, they will rejoice when Christ and their salvation are revealed. 106 These trials, First Peter declares, are tools serving to prove the genuineness of Christ-followers’ loyalty (τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως), stressing the importance of this loyalty by (1) comparing their trials to the process by which perishable gold is tested and purified and (2) declaring what awaits them as a reward for their steadfast endurance: “praise and glory and honor” (ἐπαινόν καὶ δόξαν καὶ τιμήν). First Peter also assures its audiences that they are off to a good start, since they already love Jesus Christ without having seen him (1:8a). Now, when these trials are upon them, they must press on, still without any sight of Jesus; they must be loyal to Christ so that they may one day rejoice (1:8b). This emphasis on the audiences’ love for and loyalty toward Jesus will prove relevant for the letter’s construction of their (social) identity as disciples.

This summary of Christ-followers’ circumstances (1:6–9) is framed by soteriological language (1:5, 9). First Peter depicts their salvation as the object of their hope and the content of their inheritance, characterizing it as something “ready to be revealed” (1:5), stating that when this salvation is revealed, Christ-followers “will rejoice” (1:6). Now the text reiterates this

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106 I take the initial relative pronoun of 1:6 (ὧ) as masculine and as referring to the preceding καρῷ ἐσχάτῳ, and I take the present tense verb ἀγαλλιᾶσθε in 1:6 (and 1:8) to bear a future sense: salvation will be revealed “at the last time,” and then they will rejoice. Taking καρῷ ἐσχάτῳ to be the antecedent of ὥ is, in Martin’s words, “the most obvious” and “simplest solution” (1992b: 310), since the text’s repetition of ἐν would draw the audiences’ attention back to the immediately preceding phrase that also begins with ἐν, rather than to the entirety of 1:3–5 (cf. Jobes 2022: 94–96; Achtemeier 1996: 100; Elliott 2000: 339–40; the latter two take ὥ in an “absolute sense referring to the “cause” of the audiences’ rejoicing). Given this temporal reading of the relative pronoun, I also understand the present-tense ἄγαλλιᾶσθε to bear future significance: “you will rejoice.” For the ability of a present-tense verb to bear future significance, see Smyth §1879; BDF §323; see also Michaels 1988: 27; Martin 1992b: 310–12. In a later essay Martin marshals considerable evidence from the realms of ancient physiology and consolatory etiquette to argue that ἄγαλλιᾶσθε would be naturally understood with solely future significance by audiences who were presently “grieved by various trials” (2016a).
conviction by assuring them, “you will receive the goal of your loyalty” (κομιζόμενοι τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως ύμων), explicitly called “your life’s salvation” (σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν, 1:9). This resumption of explicitly soteriological language assists to draw the letter proem to its conclusion with 1:10–12.

The final movement of First Peter’s proem is unambiguous as to its topic: “Now, about this salvation” (περὶ ἡς σωτηρίας, 1:10a). First Peter begins here by immediately redeploying the word σωτηρία, calling attention back to the previous phrase (σωτηρία ψυχῶν, 1:9) and signaling the beginning of a new line of thought specifically related to “this salvation.” As Martin Williams points out, “the idea of salvation mentioned at the end of the two previous sections (vv. 5, 9) … now stands at the head of this new subunit” (2011: 176; see also Michaels 1988: 39). First Peter, in other words, strategically builds up to its discussion of “this salvation.” It may now present its audiences with a word about the character of “this salvation” as First Peter wants them to understand it.

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107 The adverbial participle κομιζόμενοι is related to both the finite verb ἀγαλλιᾶσθε (1:8) and the object that they are receiving (τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως ύμων σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν, 1:9). First Peter 1:3–12 presents σωτηρία, in my opinion, as wholly future (however impending that future may be). It is something that will be revealed “at the last time” (1:5), something that will be brought to them “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13), and something that Christ-followers are to “grow up into” (2:2). This is not to say that Christ-followers do not experience some aspects of their salvation in the present—they have been “begotten anew” (1:3, 23), and the God’s χάρις is also a present reality in some way (see below)—but this is not what First Peter itself emphasizes, especially here. First Peter focuses on the “future” of salvation, toward which Christ-followers look and for which they hope. First Peter’s emphasis on the “present” is preoccupied with Christ-followers’ conduct and lifestyle in the light of their impending salvation—impending, but still future. Therefore, since the object that the audiences “receive” is future, the participle (like ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, see above, n. 105) bears future significance: they will rejoice because they will receive the “goal” of their loyalty: their life’s salvation. On the translation of ψυχή, I understand First Peter to refer with this term to “the whole person,” and not an eternal or immortal soul as separate from a body; “life” or “lives” appears to be the most succinct way to communicate this. This is the position of Martin in his forthcoming commentary, where he provides a detailed analysis of several Greek texts.

108 The transition between 1:9 and 1:10 is similar to the one between 1:5 and 1:6 (ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ, ἐν ᾧ): here First Peter moves from σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν (1:9) to περὶ ἡς σωτηρίας (1:10). See Michaels 1988: 39; Williams 2011: 178–79.
As soon as First Peter reintroduces the topic of salvation (1:10a), it also recharacterizes it. “Now, about this salvation: Prophets who prophesied about this χάρις destined for you inquired diligently” (1 Pet 1:10). The introduction of prophetic activity carries with it the introduction of the term χάρις through a synthetic parallelism (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Synthetic Parallelism in 1 Pet 1:10 (1)

To explicate its audiences’ “salvation,” First Peter announces that prophets prophesied and made careful and diligent inquiry about that salvation, but now uses the language of χάρις: “the χάρις destined for you.” The effect of this language, I suggest, is twofold.

First, the letter proem climactically introduces the language of χάρις as a category through which First Peter wants its audiences to understand their salvation. Here I disagree with several scholars who claim that χάρις is merely synonymous with σωτηρία. Elliott, for example, understands First Peter to “equate” σωτηρία with χάρις (2000: 3454). Martin Williams, on the basis of the same parallelism I have identified above, claims “that the two terms are virtually...
synonymous in this context” and that χάρις “denotes the gift of eschatological salvation” (2011: 176). Williams helpfully introduces the language of “gift” here, but I think he goes too far in defining χάρις as this one specific gift. Given the sociocultural context in which χάρις would commonly be received and understood, it need not bear such immediate, soteriological weight. 111 Since the language of χάρις was already well established to communicate the reciprocity involved in relationships of benefaction and patronage, it is reasonable to assume that when First Peter’s audiences encountered this language, they did so with its “first-level meaning” at hand. 112 Therefore, it seems simpler to understand First Peter here designating or categorizing “this salvation” as a “gift” or “beneficence” from God that is destined for Christ-followers. First Peter writes, therefore, “about this salvation—a beneficence or gift destined for you.”

The importance of this point is confirmed by the second effect of the introduction of χάρις. First Peter further characterizes this χάρις as prophetically (and therefore scripturally) verifiable. 113 In part, this signals First Peter’s preoccupation with scriptural attestation and warrant for its exhortations. More importantly for Christ-followers presently “grieved by various trials,” these prophets gained a particular insight into the character of this “beneficence”: by their

111 It is my suspicion that the haste with which many scholars “equate” χάρις and σωτηρία is due to the soteriological connotations that the language of χάρις has come to bear throughout the history of its reception, as discussed above.

112 It is possible that First Peter (and its audiences) might assume a soteriological connotation to the language of χάρις, based perhaps in early Christian preaching and teaching. While possible, First Peter’s insistence on defining χάρις (2:19–20; 5:12) and its use of χαρις-language in ways easily understandable in the contexts of reciprocity and beneficence (e.g., 4:10), together with this specific construction at work in 1:10, each suggest that First Peter does not assume a developed soteriological understanding of χάρις.

113 That the προφῆται in 1 Pet 1:10–12 refer to prophets of the Jewish scriptures is widely accepted by scholars today and remains the most plausible reading of these figures (see Achtemeier 1996: 108–9 and those cited there). Cf. Selwyn (1947: 133–39, 259–68), who argues that the προφῆται refer to prophets roughly contemporary with the audiences of First Peter. See the discussion of Selwyn and critiques of his position in Egan 2017: 46–49.
diligent inquiry, they learned specifically of “the sufferings destined for Christ and the glories that would follow” (τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα καὶ τὰς μετὰ ταῦτα δόξας, 1:11). This extends the parallelism of 1:10 one line further; Horrell calls this a “parallel juxtaposition” (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Synthetic Parallelism in 1 Pet 1:10 (2)

Michaels interprets this parallelism to signify that “grace and glory awaited the Christians, while sufferings were in store for Christ” (1988: 44), as if to say that it was Christ’s (vicarious) passion that effected salvation—once again thinking of χάρις in wholly soteriological terms. Again, given the sociocultural connotations of the language of χάρις, it is preferrable to see the parallel construction as an effort to continue characterizing this “benefaction” or “gift,” just as the category of χάρις characterizes First Peter’s presentation of salvation.

In other words, just as the category of a “gift” or “beneficence” provides a lens through which Christ-followers are to understand their salvation, First Peter also provides the perspective of a christological pattern comprising “sufferings and subsequent glories” through which they are to understand this “gift.” The salvation that Christ-followers hope to inherit is a part of God’s beneficence toward them; in the present time, however, Christ-followers experience hardships which might lead them to question the truth or reliability of this divine beneficence. First Peter assures them that their loyalty to God will not be in vain, since their salvation is still on its way. In the meantime, they should consider their own trials in the light of Christ’s, who inherited glory just as they will inherit salvation—but only as subsequent to suffering.

First Peter states that this prophetic activity—the diligent inquiring after both the “beneficence” destined for Christ-followers and the “sufferings” (and glory) destined for
Christ—was for the benefit of its audiences: “They were serving not themselves but you” (οὐχ ἐαυτοῖς, ὑμῖν δὲ διηκόνουν, 1:12). In describing salvation for which they wait (1:5, 9) with the category of χάρις, First Peter presents it as a “gift” or “benefaction” from God (1:10, 13). But by describing this benefaction through the pattern of Christ’s suffering (and subsequent glory), First Peter also prepares its audiences to rethink the nature of the gift they are to receive. Their salvation is indeed a divine gift, and they will receive it (1:5, 9, 13). More importantly, their present circumstances should not dissuade them or make them doubt; the pattern of Christ’s own life (which provides a pattern for their own) demonstrates that the reception of divine beneficence may in fact be accompanied by suffering.¹¹⁴ From its very introduction of χαρίς-language, First Peter seems interested in presenting χάρις as involving suffering.

This makes sense of what we have seen in the first half of this chapter: Christ-followers’ loyalty toward God, through which they are growing up “toward salvation” (2:2), results in their (unjust) suffering. While salvation surely encompasses more than suffering (since Christ’s sufferings are followed by “glory,” 1:11), I suggest that First Peter’s effort to characterize salvation as a “gift” from God is intended to help its audiences understand that they currently exist in a relationship of beneficent reciprocity with God that has resulted in their suffering, based on the nature of the gift God is giving them. This gift includes their new birth, their living hope, their inheritance, their salvation, and more, all of which has led to their new forms of conduct, their new associations, and their dissociations—all of which is detailed throughout First Peter. Since God’s beneficence has resulted in their suffering (as described in this letter), it

¹¹⁴ I will discuss the presence and implications of this christological pattern in Chapter Four.
makes sense that First Peter would conclude by affirming that God’s beneficence remains “true” (5:12)—even if the present circumstances might lead them to conclude otherwise.

By now it should be clear that First Peter has spared no rhetorical effort in the construction of these introductory verses (1:3–12). From beginning to end its focus has been soteriological, unpacking the significance of Christ-followers’ new birth and assuring them that the suffering they now face is not only temporary, but that it follows a pattern laid down in the life of Christ. At the same time, the author has introduced this soteriological concept and categorized it under the language of \( \chiάρις \), leading its audiences to better understand what they receive from God as a mark of his beneficence—and to understand themselves as clients in relation to a benefactor.

The Framing Function of \( \chiάρις \) in the Letter Body (1:13; 5:12)

With the letter proem (1:3–12) First Peter moves its thought forward to the point of thinking about salvation under the category of God’s “beneficence” (1:10)—their salvation is to be understood as a “gift” from God, even as it results in their present, undesirable circumstances. With the opening of the letter body (1:13), this beneficence is highlighted as the object of the audiences’ hope:

Therefore, girding the loins of your mind for action and being completely sober-minded, set your hope upon the beneficence that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.\(^{115}\)

With the conjunction \( διό \), First Peter signals the dependence of this command on the material that preceded it. This verse forms a bridge between the proem and the letter body (Toit 1974: \( Διό \ \αναξιωσάμενοι τάς \ όσφύας τῆς \ διανοίας ύμων \ νήφοντες \ τελείως \ \ ἐλπίσατε \ ἐπὶ \ τὴν \ \ φερομένην ύμῶν \ χάριν \ \ ἐν \ \ ἀποκάλυψις \ \ Ίησοῦ \ \ Χριστοῦ \).
combining key terms from the beginning of the former (ἐλπίς, 1:3; χάρις, 1:10) in order to commence the latter. God’s “beneficence” has already been characterized with reference to the sufferings of Christ; now it becomes the explicit object of Christ-followers’ hope. While this beneficence includes their salvation, it stands as a larger social (and rhetorical) category through which their salvation—and their situation, as discussed above—is to be understood.

In his argument for the “compositional unity” of First Peter, Martin identifies a “consistent use of χάρις in 1:13 and 5:12,” forming “an inclusio or ring structure” around the body of the letter (1992a: 58–59). While there are other instances of χάρις throughout the letter (1:2; 2:19, 20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10), these instances at 1:13 and 5:12 are distinguishable from the others by being the objects of imperatives (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Χάρις as the Object of Imperatives at 1 Pet 1:13 and 5:12

ἐλπίσατε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν (1:13)
ταύτην εἶναι ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ἣν στῆτε (5:12)

At the beginning of the letter body, the audiences are commanded to hope for the beneficence that is being brought to them; at the end, First Peter assures them that this beneficence is true, and it is “in” or “for” (εἰς) this beneficence that they are to “stand.”

While the primary function of an inclusion may be to mark the boundaries of a literary unit (Weima 2016: 159), this frame around the entirety of Frist Peter’s letter body also functions to signal the text’s preoccupation with the category of “beneficence” as a lens through which its message is to be understood. The proem, as already discussed, reframes the audiences’ understanding of their salvation under the category of “beneficence,” and hints that their suffering is also to be understood in this light. By framing the letter body—which is entirely concerned with presenting advice related to the audiences’ situation of suffering—with the language of χάρις as well, First Peter similarly characterizes their situation under the category of
“beneficence,” thereby depicting their relationship to God as one of clients to a benefactor or patron. The social domain of χάρις, characterizing both their salvation and their situation, would readily suggest that these audiences were to think of themselves as active recipients of God’s beneficence.

John Barclay’s study of gift exchange in the ancient world is helpful here. “Everyone is agreed,” Barclay writes, “that recipients of gifts are under a strong (though non-legal) obligation to make some return for a gift—even if only in gratitude” (2015: 18). Seneca begins De Beneficiis lamenting the “ill placement” of gifts upon those who do not reciprocate, and constantly returns to describe what makes a recipient “worthy” of a benefit. One essential feature of a worthy recipient is his or her predisposition and willingness to “repay” of his or her own accord: “An unworthy person will not repay it even when asked; a worthy one will return it on his own.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, as Barclay remarks, relations between humans and the gods are closely modeled on the expectations of gift-reciprocity at the human level, even where the relationship is acknowledged to be grossly asymmetrical. Fundamental to the structure of Greek religion is, in fact, the acknowledgment of the gods as benefactors (to nations, cities, and individuals), distributing their favors (χάριτες) with appropriate discrimination, while humans, in prayer, in dedicatory gifts, and, above all, in sacrifice, participate in the reciprocatory cycle of gifts. (2015: 27)

We may assume that the audiences of First Peter are familiar with (and participants in) the sociocultural systems of benefaction and patronage that surrounded them. Therefore, First Peter’s presentation of their salvation and situation as “benefactions” from God places them

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¹¹⁶ Ben. 1.1.1–8 (trans. Griffin and Inwood CWLAS): Indignus etiam repetenti non reddet, dignus ipse per se referet.
“under obligation” to make a return to God and thereby show themselves worthy of receiving such benefactions in the first place.

First Peter does not explicitly command prayers, the giving of “dedicatory gifts,” or cultic sacrifices; nor does it prescribe “thanksgiving”—though it does begin by “blessing” God (1:3). How, then, are the Christ-followers addressed by First Peter to show themselves worthy of the benefaction they are hoping to receive? Framed as the message of First Peter is by the language of beneficence, I suggest that the acts of loyalty that First Peter expects and commands—holy, obedient, and reverent conduct (1:14, 15, 17); love for one another (1:22); the desire for the appropriate food that leads them to salvation (2:2); the maintenance of good conduct among the gentiles (2:12; passim); honoring all people (2:17); and more—should be understood as ways in which Christ-followers make a return for God’s impending beneficence, showing themselves to be worthy of the gift they are about to receive.

Yet more may be inferred, recognizing that it is not only Christ-followers’ salvation that is characterized as God’s beneficence, but their situation as well. While 1 Pet 1:13 envisions an impending (and therefore “not yet”) beneficence from God; the complement of 5:12 affirms that the message of First Peter’s letter body—focused on the present circumstances, including their suffering—is intended to function as a “testimony” to God’s beneficence, and assures them that this beneficence is “true,” even if it may appear not to be. The new conduct and new associations that Christ-followers inhabit, as argued above, have led to the suffering they presently experience. Given this reality, First Peter can readily depict not only their “new birth” and “salvation” as divine benefactions from God, but their (unjust) suffering as well—since it has emerged as a logical consequence of the loyalty they now have toward God. Christ-followers’
endurance of these “trials,” therefore, becomes a means of “making a return” for God’s beneficence. This endurance is a mark of their commitment and loyalty to God, as disciples would be loyal to a teacher, and clients would show themselves grateful to a benefactor.

Benefactors, Clients, and Discipleship in First Peter

I have already said much regarding the portrayal of God as a benefactor in various ways across First Peter. In sum, God bestows his beneficence upon Christ-followers in myriad ways, and Christ-followers are “stewards” of the gifts they have received and thereby embody the role of loyal patrons to this divine benefactor. It remains to acknowledge more clearly that, alongside the image of God as a general benefactor and as a “manumitter-patron” (1:17–21), this broader social domain of beneficence also provides a context in which the audiences of First Peter would understand themselves to be addressed as disciple-clients of a teacher-patron.

Students in the ancient Mediterranean often referred to their teachers as benefactors. We saw this in the language used by Lucretius to describe Epicurus at the beginning of this chapter, characterizing the latter as a “father” and one who could impart life’s “blessings” through the medium of philosophy. Lamoreaux, quoted above, notes that philosophers were understood to offer “enlightenment and salvation” (2021: 245). Crook remarks similarly: “philosophers were seen to bestow benefactions in the form, most commonly, of teachings designed to bring salvation from slavery to ignorance and from suffering” (2004: 186). This is the expressed experience of one of Lucian’s speakers in Nigrinus: after meeting the titular philosopher he declares that though “once a slave, I am now free! ‘once poor, now rich indeed’; once witless
and befogged, now saner.”\textsuperscript{117} Having originally traveled to Rome to see a doctor about his poor eyesight, the speaker admits that Nigrinus revealed to him his true weakness: “I actually forgot my eye and its ailment—would you believe it?—and by degrees grew sharper-sighted in my soul; which, all unawares, I had been carrying about in a purblind condition till then.”\textsuperscript{118} Like Lucretius toward Epicurus, this speaker owes much to Nigrinus:

So I, too, in the absence of my mistress Philosophy, get no little comfort out of gathering together the words that I then heard and turning them over to myself. In short, I fix my gaze on that man as if he were a lighthouse and I were adrift at sea in the dead of night, fancying him by me whenever I do anything and always fearing him repeat his former words. Sometimes, especially when I put pressure on my soul, his face appears to me and the sound of his voice abides in my ears. Truly, as the comedian says, “he left a sting implanted in his hearers!”\textsuperscript{119}

Nigrinus’s teaching and presence in the life of this speaker constitute benefactions, and the speaker gives a return not only through gratitude, but by leading his dialogue partner to long for the same benefactions himself: “As you talked I felt something like a change of heart.”\textsuperscript{120} He perceives a wound in need of healing, and they resolve to journey to seek the remedy out of Nigrinus’s beneficence.

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Nigrinus} 1 (trans. Harmon LCL): ἀντὶ μὲν δούλου με ἐλεύθερον, ἀντὶ δὲ πένητος ώς ἀληθῶς πλούσιον, ἀντὶ δὲ ἀνοήτου τε καὶ τετυφωμένου γενέσθαι μετριώτερον.

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Nigr}. 4: ὡστε δὴ, τὸ καινότατον, τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ μὲν καὶ τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν ἀσθενείας ἐπελανθανόμην, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν ὀξυδερκέστερος κατὰ μικρὸν ἐγηγομήν· ἐλελήθειν γὰρ τέως αὐτὴν τυφλόττουσαν περιφέρειν.

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Nigr}. 7: οὕτω δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς φιλοσοφίας οὐ παρούσης τοὺς λόγους, οὓς τότε ἦκουσα, συναγείρων καὶ πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν ἀναπληρῶν τὸν μικρὸν ἐχθρὸν εὐτύχιον, καὶ δόλως καθάπερ ἐν πλάγιτι καὶ νυκτὶ πολλῇ φέρόμενος, ἐξ ὑπερτοῦ τινα τοῦτον ἀποβλέπω, πάσι μὲν παρεῖσθαι τοῖς ὑπὸ ἐμοῦ πραττομένοις τὸν ἄνθρωπον οἰόμενος, ἀεὶ δὲ ὥσπερ ἄκοιουν αὐτὸ τὰ αὐτὰ πρὸς με λέγοντος· ἐνίοτε δὲ, καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν ἐνερείσαι τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ μοι φαίνεται καὶ τῆς φωνῆς ὃ ἦχος ἐν ταῖς ἀκοαῖς παραμένει· καὶ γὰρ τοι ἐκατέλησεν τὸς οἰόμενος ἐγκατέλιπεν τι κέντρον τοῖς ἀκούοντος.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Nigr}. 38: ὡστε καὶ μεταξῷ σοῦ λέγοντος ἐπασχόν τι ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ.
benefactor in philosophy.”\textsuperscript{121} This text is somewhat complicated by its pseudonymous nature, but revealingly so: likely composed by a follower of Diogenes wishing to promote the Cynic way of life, the writer presumes that the title “benefactor” is an appropriate one by which he may characterize Diogenes. Ps.-Diogenes pledges to support Hipparchia if she continues to devote herself to his teaching, especially through letter-writing. In another of Lucian’s writings, the Academy is personified as a “benefactor,” much like philosophy itself, defending itself against the charge of kidnapping and brainwashing the student Polemo. The Academy’s defense rests on recounting the beneficence it has showed to Polemo (and by implication, all its students):

\begin{quote}
Please summon him now, that you may see how he has fared at my hands. . . . Taking this man, gentlemen of the jury, taking this man, when he was in a ridiculous plight, unable either to talk or to stand on account of his potations, I converted him and sobered him and made him from a slave into a well-behaved, temperate man, very valuable to the Greeks; and he himself is grateful (χάριν) to me for it, as are also his relatives on his account.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

Crook writes, “What makes the philosopher a patron is that something is being given to someone in need, there is a beneficiary, and there is an expression of gratitude…. The philosopher teacher was a benefactor too, and his followers fell into the client mold” (2004: 127).

Two factors now combine to confirm the basic point of this discussion—that First Peter’s audiences would hear this letter addressing them \textit{as disciples} of a teacher. First Peter strategically utilizes the language of χάρις (1) connote God’s beneficence toward its audiences and to (2) characterize both their salvation and their present situation. This alone places First

\textsuperscript{121} Ps.-Diogenes, \textit{Ep}. 3 (Malherbe 1977): τοῖς εὐεργέταις τῆς φιλοσοφίας.

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Bis. acc.} 17 (trans. Harmon LCL; the ellipsis is Harmon’s): Καί μοι ἤδη κάλεσκεν αὐτὸν, ὅπως καταμάθητε ὅν τρόπον διάκειται πρὸς ἐμοῦ.—τοῦτον, ὁ ἄνδρας δικασταῖ, παραλαβοῦσα γελοιόως ἔχοντα, μήτε φωνὴν ἀφεῖναι μήτε ἑστάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀκράτου δυνάμενον, ὑπέστρεψα καὶ ἀνένηψα καὶ ἀντὶ ἀνδραπόδου κόσμιον ἄνδρα καὶ σώφρονα καὶ πολλοῦ ἄξιον τοῖς Ἑλλησὶν ἀπέδειξα· καί μοι αὐτὸς τε χάριν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ οἱ προσήκοντες ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ.
Peter’s Christ-followers in a relationship characterized by benefaction and beneficence: God is the benefactor, and they are expected to be loyal clients. Beyond this, however, we can see that the relationships between philosophers and their students or disciples was also characterized as akin to that of benefactors and their clients; this characterization was pervasive throughout the ancient Mediterranean. This context, in other words, provided the teacher-disciple relationship as a readily accessible model according to which the audiences of First Peter would understand their own relationship with God as their benefactor.

**Conclusion**

This chapter began by acknowledging that previous claims to find “discipleship” in First Peter primarily relied on the supposedly technical language of “following” (ἐπακολουθέω) at 1 Pet 2:21. There I suggested that a holistic reading of First Peter as a summons to discipleship would be better served by paying attention to the letter’s thematic and sociocultural contexts. The pair of discussions I have carried out throughout this chapter, therefore, have sought to describe two major contexts that pervade First Peter’s rhetoric: those of “loyalty” (connoted by the language of πίστις) and “beneficence” (connoted by the language of χάρις). Attention to “first-level meanings” of such language (as described by Zeba Crook and Teresa Morgan) provided a helpful avenue for receiving First Peter’s rhetoric alongside its original Anatolian audiences. My discussions of Christ-followers’ loyalty and of their relationship to God as their benefactor each revealed that First Peter adeptly positions its audiences to understand themselves as disciples of a teacher, and thereby disposes them to act accordingly. The following chapter, therefore, will take these contexts for granted and ask what “acting like disciples” would look like.
CHAPTER TWO

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS:

SOCIOHISTORICAL PATTERNS FOR READING FIRST PETER

If a follower, he would also be a pupil. For whoever really follows any one surely knows what that person was like, and by imitating his acts and words he tries as best he can to make himself like him. But that is precisely, it seems, what the pupil does—by imitating his teacher and paying heed to him he acquires his art.

—Dio Chrysostom

As I discussed briefly in the Introduction, modern Christian rhetoric employs the word “disciple” quite loosely. The term typically connotes ideas of devotion and adherence to Christ and of progress along the path of one’s “journey of faith.” But while “discipleship” tends to denote a Christian practice and lifestyle today, the ancient Mediterranean world of Jesus and his followers (including those whom First Peter addresses) was saturated with “disciples” of many different walks of life. At the core of each was a desire to learn and grow under the watchful eye of a teacher. Thus Dio Chrysostom, quoted above, asserts that Socrates should be thought of both as a “follower” or “devotee” (ζηλωτής) of Homer and as Homer’s “pupil” or “student” (μαθητής).

What made both terms applicable, according to Dio, was Socrates’s willingness and dedication to learn from Homer, to pay heed to him, to imitate him, and thereby to “acquire his art.” To become a “disciple” in the ancient Mediterranean was, at the most basic level, to become a student—and to acquire an education.

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My intention with this chapter is to identify and examine the pedagogical context of ancient discipleship by exploring widespread assumptions about what “being a (good) disciple” looked like in the first-century Mediterranean world. This context, as mentioned in the Introduction, cannot be neglected: First Peter was composed and received in an environment saturated by concrete examples of “disciples” and teachers relating to one another in predictable ways, and it is my contention that this pedagogical context played a significant role in shaping the rhetoric of First Peter and its audiences’ response to that rhetoric. What I am calling First Peter’s “summons to discipleship,” I will demonstrate, reflects pervasive and consistent expectations about what it meant to be a (good) student—expectations informed by the historical and social manifestations of Hellenistic paideia prevalent throughout the first-century Mediterranean world of First Peter’s audiences. By contextualizing ancient discipleship as a multifaceted form of paideia, and by locating several manifestations of that context in First Peter, I will be well-positioned to regard First Peter as a summons to discipleship—and to understand better the kinds of disciples it seeks to form through its exhortation and testimony.

In particular, my interest is in the obligations which disciples understood themselves to owe their teachers and the expectations that teachers had of their disciples. These obligations and expectations, I will demonstrate, constitute a set of “standards” for ancient discipleship. If we can identify such standards, and if we can locate reflections of them throughout First Peter, this will constitute a second set of evidence that First Peter itself comprises a summons to discipleship. This chapter, therefore, functions in tandem with Chapter One, where I argued that First Peter’s strategic uses of πίστις and χάρις each encouraged its audiences to hear themselves addressed as disciples. This chapter, specifically, is comparative in nature—“a disciplined
exaggeration in the service of knowledge” (Smith 1990: 53)—asking how the specifics of First Peter’s exhortations compare (and contrast) with a wide range of literature depicting relationships between teachers and students in antiquity. I will introduce the range and contexts of specific texts for comparison below, but here I note that I will focus in this chapter on Greek, Roman, and Jewish depictions of teacher-student relationships. The influence of Jesus of Nazareth’s teaching on discipleship will require a separate and extended discussion; this will occupy the space of Chapter Three.

The present chapter will proceed in two parts. First, it is important to recognize that by the time that anyone formally attached themselves to a teacher, they would already be likely to understand what was expected of them. In other words, nascent “disciples” devoted themselves to philosophers and professional orators knowing (at least in part) how to be good disciples. Therefore, I will begin with an overview of the general goals and functions of paideía in the ancient Mediterranean world and the foundation that “primary education” (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία) laid for subsequent, advanced study. Second, the remainder (and majority) of the chapter will focus on that “advanced study” wherein students devoted themselves to chosen teachers of renown—philosophers, sophists, and rhetoricians—and thereby placed themselves under obligation to those teachers. Specifically, I will demonstrate (1) how disciples paid deference toward their teachers, understanding themselves to be in an inferior and dependent social position; (2) the obligation upon disciples to imitate and emulate their teachers responsibly for

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2 For helpful discussions of the “comparative task” in New Testament studies, see Kloppenborg 2019: 4–10 and the recent volume of essays edited by John Barclay and Ben White (2020), especially the essays of Barclay and Mitchell. My focus here will be on the similarities present between First Peter and the other texts under examination, but this focus should assist us to recognize the differences as well.
the purposes of formation (both moral and political); and (3) the responsibility of representing a
teacher faithfully before others and of carrying on a teacher’s legacy once he or she had died.
Along the way, I will demonstrate the significance of each of these obligations for reading and
interpreting First Peter as a summons to discipleship.

**Ancient Paideia: The Formation of Students**

Several robust discussions of education are left to us from authors across the ancient
Mediterranean—historians, philosophers, and orators alike devoted to the multifaceted
development of their students. An education, as I will demonstrate below, became not only a
mark of one’s class and status, but also the tool for molding human nature into maturity—both
cognitively and culturally. This is the Hellenistic ideal of *paideia*, described by Werner Jaeger as
“the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature” (1945:
xxiii). I will return to this point below as we begin to observe the culturally conditioned ways
this process took place. Here it is worth noting that, despite the relatively systematic or
prescriptive approaches of some of these authors, “*Paideia* was not a single, doctrinally coherent
system, but the locus for a series of competitions and debates concerning the proper way in
which life should be lived” (Whitmarsh 2001: 5). Education, in other words, was not merely
aimed at making students smarter or better at a particular skill. It was, as we shall see, ideally for
producing mature human beings and particularly for making those human beings *bona fide*
embodiments of the society and culture that facilitated their education.

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3 It is worth noting that the concept of *paideia* represents a distinctively Greek idea of education and
culture, one that came to have enormous influence throughout the ancient Mediterranean (especially among those
intent on the maintenance of a distinctly “Greek” identity in the context of Roman imperialism; see Whitmarsh


Paideia, Human Nature, and Identity Formation

Pseudo-Plutarch begins a discussion of education by stating that “nature without learning is a blind thing, and learning without nature is an imperfect thing, and practice without both is an ineffective thing.” Education is necessary, in other words, for human nature to develop and to flourish properly; without an education, one’s “nature” is incomplete. At a later point Ps.-Plutarch proclaims (“an oracle … rather than advice”) that “the beginning, the middle, and end … is a good education and proper training (ἀγωγὴ σπουδαία καὶ παιδεία νόμιμος).” By these tools students may progress toward “moral excellence” (ἄρετή) and “happiness” (εὐδαιμονία). The mind and reason are themselves “supreme over all” and these elevated elements of human nature deserve nothing less, according to Ps.-Plutarch, than “learning” (παιδεία), which “of all things in this world is alone immortal and divine.”

Philo (ca. 30 BCE–50 CE) similarly praises “knowledge” as “the great sunlight of the soul”: “For as our eyes are illumined by the sun’s rays, so is the mind by wisdom, and anointed with the eyesalve of ever fresh acquisition of knowledge it grows accustomed to see with clearer vision.” Yet, Philo insists, knowledge is not profitable if it is not “combined with practice.”

Philo illustrates the process he has in mind with a rich and complex allegorical interpretation of

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4 Lib. ed. 2B (trans. Babbitt LCL): ἡ μὲν γὰρ φύσις ἄνευ μαθήσεως τυφλόν, ἡ δὲ μάθησις δίχα φύσεως ἐλλιπές, ἡ δ᾿ ἀσκήσεις χωρίς ἀμφοῖν ἀτελές. Several works attributed to Pseudo-Plutarch are often dated to the third or fourth centuries CE, but there is good reason to regard De liberis educandis as roughly contemporaneous with Plutarch’s lifetime (c. 46–119 CE), if perhaps slightly later; see Berry 1958.

5 Lib ed. 5C, E: Συνελὼν τοίνυν ἐγώ φημι (καὶ χρησιμολογεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ παραδείγματι ἤν εἰκότως) ὅτι ἐν πρῶτον καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευταῖον ἐν τούτοις κεραίαν ἀγωγὴ σπουδαία καὶ παιδεία νόμιμός ἐστι, καὶ ταῦτα φορά καὶ συνεργά πρὸς ἄρετήν καὶ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν φημί … παιδεία δὲ τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν μόνον ἐστὶν ἀθάνατον καὶ θείον. καὶ δόο τὰ πάντων ἐστι κυριώτατα ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει, νοῦς καὶ λόγος.

Abraham’s and Jacob’s sexual relations with their wives and enslaved women. Thereby he provides a defense of “preliminary studies”—primary education represented by Hagar, Zilpah, and Bilhah—which must be completed before a person can study and achieve a higher course of learning represented by Sarah, Leah, and Rachel. The educated person, according to Philo, will then rest nourished by the food of virtue, “suited for those who really are men.”

Primary and higher education are each to be pursued, Philo explains, because their lessons are “suited to human nature” insofar as they assist the learner in attaining to virtue and wisdom.

Finally, the Roman orator Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) similarly remarks that as students begin to learn even the basics of literacy, they should do so with lessons leading toward virtue. “The lines set for copying should not be meaningless sentences, but should convey some moral lesson. The memory of such things stays with us till we are old, and the impression thus made on the unformed mind will be good for the character also.” These “lines” refer to gnomic exercises, and through constant copying and recitation students would become inculcated with the values and ethics asserted within these texts. Moreover, education itself was described in several exercises as a personal good: “The man who knows his letters has a superior mind”

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7 Congr. 19: οὕτως ὄρας, ὅτι καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἦμών οὐ πρῶτον πεπηγυίας καὶ πολυτελέσι χρῆται τροφαῖς, πρὶν ἢ ταῖς ἀποικίλοις καὶ γαλακτώδεσιν ἐν ἡλικίᾳ τῇ βρεφώδει; τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ παιδικὰς μὲν νόμον εὑρεσίσθαι τροφὰς τὰ ἐγκύκλια καὶ τὰ καθ’ ἐκατοντάαν τοὺς δεῖ τελειοτέρας δὲ καὶ πρεποῦσας ἀνθρώποις ἀληθῶς ἐλθόντος τὰς ἀρετὰς. The androcentric nature of this passage is in keeping with Philo’s conceptions of sex and gender (see Conway 2003) which featured the “perfect male” at the top of a vertical continuum and “commensurate with divinity” (Conway 2003: 473–74). This understanding is also consistent with the comments of Ps.-Plutarch and the texts below which speak of the mind and its education as “divine.” Moses, as one of only a few people whom Philo regarded as “self-taught,” was Philo’s “ideal man,” and I will return to this point later in this chapter.

8 Congr. 122: Διὸ τὰκόλουθον προσφέρονται τὸ “εἰσῆλθε πρὸς Ἁγαρ”· ἦν γὰρ ἁρμότον τοῖς μανθάνοντι πρὸς ἐπιστήμην διδάσκαλον φοιτῶν, ἵνα ἀναδιδαχθῇ τὰ προσήκοντα αὐτῶν ὡς ἐπίστημως παιδεύματα.

9 Inst. 1.1.36 (trans. Russell LCL): Et quoniam circa res adhuc tenues moramur, ii quoque versus qui ad imitationem scribendi proponentur non otiosas velim sententias habeant, sed honestum aliquid momentis. Prosequitur haec memoria in senectutem et impressa animo radius usque ad mores proficiet. This “character” presumably refers to a moral quality or ethical behavior.
(P.Mon.Epiph. 2.615); education is “a gift from the gods” and the mind, cultivated by education, is “a most prophetic god in us” (P Bour. 1).¹⁰

So far, we have seen that education was understood as a key to unlocking human nature’s maturity. The educated person was as superior to the uneducated “as the farmer is to the land he farms” (Morgan 1998: 241).¹¹ More particularly, the success of a student’s education was manifested socially as, in Teresa Morgan’s words, a “mechanism for admission” to a particular way of life (1998: 74). *Paideia*, in other words, became a means of navigating the tapestry of ancient Mediterranean civilization, saturated as it was with intersecting cultures and competing objects of loyalty.¹² When students read, wrote, recited, imitated, and paraphrased authors like Homer and Euripides, for example, they were doing more than acquiring the technical skills of a literate education; they were also imbibing the legends, myths, morals, and virtues of a particular culture and, consequently, being transformed into the embodiments of that

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¹⁰ Each of these texts, along with other examples, is documented and translated in Morgan 1998: 131–32.

¹¹ Diogenes Laertius preserves several comments to this effect. Aristippus (c. 432–356 B.C.E) is reported to have said that “it was better to be a beggar than to be uneducated; for the former is in need of money, the latter of humanity” (*Vit. phil. 2.70* [trans. Miller and Mensch]: ἢμεινον ἔφη ἐξαίτην ἢ ἀπαιδευτὸν ἐλναι ὁ μὲν γὰρ χρημάτων, οἱ δ’ ἄνθρωπομοῦ δόεινται). The following story is particularly telling: “When someone brought his son to him as a student, Aristippus asked him for five hundred drachmas; and when the man said, ‘For that much I can buy a slave,’ he replied, ‘Buy one, then, and you’ll have two’” (*Vit. phil. 2.72*: συνιστάντος τινὸς αὐτῷ ὡν ἦτερες πεντακοσίας δραχμάς τοῖς δ’ εἴπόντος, “τοσοῦτού δύναμαι ἀνδράποδον ὀνήσισαθαι,” “πρίω,” ἔφη, “καὶ ἔξει δύο”). Diogenes similarly records that Aristotle, “being asked how the educated differ from the uneducated” replied, “As much as the living from the dead” (*Vit. phil. 5.19*: ἐρωτηθεὶς τίνι διαφέρουσιν οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι τῶν ἀπαιδεύτων, “ὅσῳ,” ἔπει, ἀξίζουν τὰς τεθνεώτων”).

¹² This was particularly evident in the establishment of *gymnasia* through the spread of Hellenism under Alexander. As a “characteristic” institution connected to Greek education, the *gymnasia* “were to be found everywhere” (Marrou 1956: 104) and served “a powerful hellenizing force: anyone who had received a Greek education was a Greek” (110; see 2 Macc 4). Hengel writes that *gymnasia* were to be found not only in the cities but even in larger villages, i.e., everywhere that Greeks settled in self-contained groups…. School and gymnasium together gave the Greek minority support against the threat of assimilation to the ‘barbarian’ environment; they were ‘the basis on which Greek culture was built up’” (1974: 1.66, quoting Nilsson 1955: 83). As Morgan makes clear, however, a “Greek” (or “Roman”) education was not only aimed at resistance, but also admission.
culture. By giving students access to the building blocks of their cultural surroundings—whether for the sake of acquisition or for maintenance—their education became, again in Morgan’s words, “a measure of social identity”:

It constituted a mechanism for the admission of cultural non-Greeks or non-Romans into Greek or Roman cultural groups, while simultaneously controlling the numbers admitted. And it maximized both the acculturation of learners and their differentiation from one another, producing a pool of people who shared a common sense and common criteria of greekness or romanness but who were placed in a hierarchy according to their cultural achievements. (Morgan 1998: 74)

While this particular statement focuses on “admission” into a particular cultural group, it is equally applicable to those who sought to maintain their inherited cultural identity: education was one (significant) element “in the creation of identity which was available for those aspiring to Greekness as much as for those acquiring the trappings of the identity with which they were born” (Morgan 1998: 76).

Philo was not alone among his fellow Jews in utilizing the tools of Greek paideia in the process of their own moral and socio-cultural formation. Several texts reflect both its methods and goals. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (second century BCE), for example, command reverence and integrity before God by walking “according to his Law,” but this is only possible if parents obey the command to “teach your children letters (γράμματα) also, so that they might have understanding throughout all their lives as they ceaselessly read the Law of

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13 On the importance of Homer, Euripides, and others in Greek education, see Cribiore 2001: 194–201; Morgan 1998: 53–67, 75–78; Marrou 1956: 3–4, 9–13. Homer (and other Greek writers) remained a staple of Roman education as well, but Roman students’ education was also supplemented the writings of (Latin) authors more representative of Roman society, including Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and others; see Bonner 1977: 212–49.
God.”

Attention to “letters” brings students “understanding” (T. Levi 13.1–2) but also honor and friendship wherever they go (13.3–4). Josephus paints a similar (idealized) portrait when he writes that the law itself
gave instruction to teach reading (γράμματα), in relation to the laws, so that they [children] know about the exploits of their forbears, in order that they may imitate the latter, and, being brought up with the former, may neither transgress nor have an excuse for ignorance. 

Josephus here explains that the ability to read the law enables children to imitate their law-abiding ancestors so that they may grow into righteous, law-abiding Jews themselves—the same way that reading and learning the lessons of Homer and Virgil enabled students to become embodiments of Greek and Roman virtues.

Thus, we see that an important connection was made between the means of education and the acquisition and maintenance of the students’ sociocultural identities. By becoming immersed in the literature and ideas that epitomized the values and ideals of their respective cultures, students became inundated with a sense of who they were—in relation to their fellow students, to their teachers, and to their national contexts, as well as to foreigners and outsiders. Paideia, therefore, played a major role in the formation of students’ personal and social identities.

My point so far has been to highlight the significance of pursuing an education in ancient Mediterranean contexts: even as students submitted themselves to an educational program at the behest of their parents, they commenced a process that would effectively form them into the

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embodiments of their cultural and social milieus for the rest of their lives. How much more attention, then, should we pay to the formative nature of educations pursued beyond a “primary course” of education discussed so far? Students who pursued further courses of education (in philosophy or advanced rhetoric) chose to do so out of their own desire and free will, submitting and entrusting themselves to the authority of a new teacher not merely as classroom pupils but as disciples devoted to the teachings and the lifestyle of the teacher they chose to follow. Before exploring this in detail, it is important to say a few words about the relationships between students and teachers during this earlier course of education, since these relationships grounded the expectations and responsibilities of subsequent interactions between disciples and the teachers to whom they chose to attach themselves.

The Authority of Teachers: Mediators of Paideia

No small part was played by teachers in the formation of students in the course of their primary education. Plato argues that students required more than books and written sources to learn: “to learn the really important things like virtue,” Morgan summarizes, a student required “an exceptionally wise and able teacher” (1998: 20). According to Raffaella Cribiore, teachers occupied a “hierarchical pyramid” in antiquity and most found themselves at its lowest level teaching the basic skills of reading and writing; fewer taught grammar; and only a few taught the initial stages of rhetoric. “The higher a teacher stood on the educational pyramid, the more credibility and respect he was accorded and the more secure his economic situation” (Cribiore 2001: 59). Reviews of teachers in antiquity range from praise and high esteem to enraged name-calling and derision.16

16 Praise and high esteem may be found, e.g., in the honors accorded Menander the “grammar teacher” (τῶ γραμματικῶ) at Delphi; there he was given an honorary title (πρόξενος) along with several rights and privileges (SIG
Unfortunately, we do not have many literary sources depicting sustained day-to-day interactions between teachers and students. In the prescriptive texts above, however, we do find clear reflections on the importance and necessity of teachers for the intellectual and moral growth of students. Ps.-Plutarch, for instance, writes, “Just as in farming, first of all the soil must be good, secondly the husbandman skillful, and thirdly, the seed sound, so, after the same manner, nature is like to the soul, the teacher to the farmer, and the verbal counsels and precepts to the seed.”¹⁷ Nature, he goes on to say, combines with a competent teacher to form “a perfect union” in the soul.¹⁸ Quintilian writes that “perfect orators owe more to teaching than to nature. Similarly, an infertile soil will not be improved even by the best farmer, and good land will yield a useful crop even if no one tills it, but on any fertile ground the farmer will do more than the goodness of the soil can do by itself.”¹⁹ Teachers impart wisdom and “new habits of mind” to

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¹⁷ Lib. ed. 2B: ὡσπερ δ’ ἐπὶ τῆς γεωργίας πρῶτον μὲν ἁγαθὴν υπάρξαι δεὶ τὴν γῆν, εἶτα δὲ τὸν φυτουργὸν ἑπιστήμονα, εἶτα τὰ σπέρματα σπουδαῖα, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον γῆ μὲν ἔοικεν ἡ φύσις, γεωργῷ δ’ ὁ παιδεύων, σπέρματι δ’ αἱ τῶν λόγων ὑποθῆκαι καὶ τὰ παραγγέλματα.

¹⁸ Lib ed. 2C: ταῦτα πάντα διατεινόμενος ἂν εἴποιμ’ ὅτι συνῆλθε καὶ συνέπνευσεν εἰς τὰς τῶν παρ’ ἀπασίν ἄδομένων ψυχάς.

¹⁹ Inst. 2.19.2: Sin ex pari coeunt, in mediocribus quidem utrisque maius adhuc naturae credam esse momentum, consummatos autem plus doctrinae debere quam naturae putabo; sicut terrae nullam fertilitatem habenti nihil optimus agricola profuerit: e terra uberi utile aliquid etiam nullo colemente nascetur: at in solo fecundo plus cultor quam ipsa per se bonitas soli efficiet.
their students, thereby promoting “a fundamental and irreversible difference to the pupil” (Morgan 1998: 256).

Most importantly, the processes of primary education documented throughout the ancient Mediterranean instilled in students an awareness of their need for teachers. According to Cribiore, “insofar as teachers were the individuals who knew, and could apply and transmit, the rules of knowledge, their authority was above that of parents. The rules conferred on them an external, unobjectionable power, and in the rules they trusted” (2001: 162). This is clear in the pedagogical strategies employed at each stage of a pupil’s education, beginning with exercises that focused solely on infusing the student with information: students were sponges soaking up the direction and wisdom of their teachers. This is a hegemonically structured education that prearranges the path of learning in such a way that the pupil must accept what the teacher tells him before he can think or articulate for himself.… The pupil did not have the option, on this model of learning, of doing things his own way, or in an unconventional order. He was dependent on his teachers to tell him what to do and when…. An education arranged like this may have taught what it set out to teach very effectively, but the autonomy of the pupil was not, until the very highest levels, among its aims. (Morgan 1998: 92–93)

Especially in these early stages, students were compelled to entrust themselves completely to their teachers as the ones who could make them better—more wise, more virtuous, and more adept at participating in society at large.

As students progressed through the early stages of their education, their autonomy grew; by the time they learned the basic tenets and tools of rhetoric students were less and less the objects of their education and growing into responsible, active products and embodiments of

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20 There is, of course, a diversity of opinions among philosophers and teachers regarding the teachability of the “soul,” and this may prove a valuable point of difference between First Peter’s summons to discipleship and its intellectual milieu. The point remains, however, that teachers functioned as important sources of wisdom, knowledge, and guidance for their students.
The educated person grew out of the ploughed and tilled soil to become a flourishing crop—and even to become a reaper engaged in the harvest. This was Quintilian’s hope when he wrote that a good education should ensure that students “do not always need to be taught.”

Seneca, too, seemingly goads Lucilius into making his own way:

“This is what Zeno said”: what do you say? “Cleanthes said this”: what do you? How long will you march under another’s command? Take charge: say something from your own store…. “Zeno said this, and Cleanthes that.” Let there be some distance between you and the book! How long will you be a pupil? Now, be a teacher as well.

For Quintilian and Seneca, a solid education enabled students to become effective members and leaders of society (not to mention acclaimed orators); for Philo and Ps.-Plutarch, it laid the foundation for the (advanced) study of philosophy, which in turn produced the most able and noble citizens. None of this was possible, however, without effective teachers to lead the way, whose task it was to equip students to grow into their (mature) nature more fully and effectively, a task that began by exerting complete authority over their students and conditioning them to accept and appreciate their own dependent and subordinate position.

Students’ deferential attitude toward their teachers will show itself to be a prominent, ongoing part of the relationship between teachers and students in the examples of discipleship examined below. The foregoing discussion is intended to stand as a foundation upon which I may build throughout the rest of this chapter. First Peter’s summons to discipleship is not a call

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21 Inst. 2.5.13: Nam quid aliud agimus docendo eos quam ne semper docendi sint?

to reinhabit the role of elementary school students learning their letters for the first time but to “follow” in Christ’s footsteps in a manner akin to the disciples of philosopher-teachers through the ancient Mediterranean—including Jesus’s disciples remembered in the canonical Gospels. The observations I have made regarding primary education in the ancient Mediterranean—its functions in the formation of moral and cultural identities; the indispensability of teachers—provide important assumptions that remained in the mind of students who went on to devote themselves to the teachings and lifestyles of teachers like Socrates, Epicurus, Seneca, Epictetus, or, in the case of the audiences of First Peter, Christ.

**Obligations and Expectations in Ancient Pedagogy and Discipleship**

There were, arguably, as many specific sets of expectations upon ancient disciples as there were teachers who garnered a following; space does not permit a comprehensive survey of ancient Mediterranean “eminent philosophers” and their devoted adherents. Nor am I able to focus on a few specific teachers and their distinctive expectations of their own disciples, since we lack any concrete evidence of which teachers or philosophical circles would be most familiar to the author and audiences of First Peter. More useful will be the following questions: If First Peter functions as a summons to discipleship—that is, if First Peter is constructed in such a way as to remind its audiences that they are disciples and that they should act accordingly—what could it have

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23 See the previous chapter’s discussion of understanding the early Jesus movement in terms similar to ancient philosophies (pp. 92–94). Two additional caveats are necessary at this point. First, the presence of ὑπογραμμός at 1 Pet 2:21 is reminiscent of exercises common to “primary education,” but this does not mean that the educational program that First Peter has in mind is limited to these early stages. Second, I do not assume that the author or audiences of First Peter are dependent on the canonical Gospels’ literary portrayals of Jesus and his disciples. While First Peter is almost certainly aware of Jesus traditions—whether generally or as they appear in one or more particular Gospel—this does not mean that First Peter’s understanding of discipleship is determined only by those traditions, as though First Peter were not able to adapt the traditions of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship to suit its setting and purpose (see Chapters Three and Four). On the question of First Peter’s knowledge and use of gospel traditions, see Horrell 2008: 35–36 and the debate between Robert Gundry (1967; 1974) and Ernest Best (1970).
plausibly expected its rhetoric of discipleship to yield? What could First Peter most readily expect its audiences to assume about the duties and responsibilities of disciples, especially in relation to their teachers? In summoning its audiences to act like disciples, what behaviors did First Peter expect to elicit?

In order to answer these questions, I will cast a wide net and focus on three well-documented obligations to which most (if not all) would-be disciples were committed as they attached themselves to a particular teacher. First, and in keeping with the observations made in the discussion above, disciples understood themselves to occupy a subordinate and dependent position in relation to their teachers, paying deference to those teachers in the forms of humility and obedience. Second, perhaps the most important means of building relationships with teachers and learning from them came about through the habituating act of imitation. This process transformed students into the embodiment of their teacher’s distinctive lifestyle, doctrines, and worldview, and positioned students to be responsible representatives of the same, especially in the eyes of wider society. Third, this task of representation developed a life of its own: disciples who remained with their teachers long enough also understood themselves to be responsible for their teachers’ legacies after those teachers died.

My goal with the remainder of this chapter is to demonstrate the pervasiveness and significance of these obligations through several (textual) representations of teachers and their disciples throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, showing them to be commonplace enough that the audiences of First Peter—as disciples of Christ—would understand themselves to be under the same obligations. My focus will be on the lasting influence of figures such as Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), Socrates (fifth century BCE), and Epicurus (fourth and third
centuries BCE), along with Stoic writers relatively contemporaneous with First Peter including Seneca (c. 4 BCE–65 CE) and Epictetus (c. 50 CE–135 CE). Other relevant texts, including the Wisdom of Ben Sira (c. 180 CE) and examples from the repository of Diogenes Laertius’s *Vitae philosophorum* (third century CE) will also prove illuminating.

One final caveat is necessary at this point, but only as a reiteration of a discussion from this study’s Introduction. The following discussion does not (and cannot) depend on occurrences of the Greek word typically translated as “disciple” (μαθήτης). As the texts I discuss below will show, those who attached themselves to philosophers were referred to in several ways, most commonly with verbs like ζηλόω, ἀκούω, and διακούω. While Michael Wilkens has helpfully traced a “historical progression” of the term μαθήτης from Plato to Diogenes and demonstrated its role as a *terminus technicus* for many teachers’ devoted “adherents” (1995: 11–42), and while μαθήτης stands as the primary designation for Jesus’s own followers in the canonical Gospels, there is no need to limit my study to occurrences of this single term—especially considering that First Peter itself does not use μαθήτης as a label for its audiences. The purpose of this chapter is to assist us in stepping back from overtly theological or spiritual understandings of discipleship and to locate First Peter’s summons to discipleship within the context of socio-historical relationships between teachers and students of the ancient Mediterranean world. Therefore, I will use the terms “student” and “disciple” (along with “adherent,” and “follower”) in order to keep this social context of ancient *paideia* firmly fixed before our eyes, noting here that the texts and examples of discipleship I include below clearly depict relationships between teachers and those who have chosen to be taught by them—students or disciples who have consciously attached
themselves to a teacher in order to learn and to mature in the light of that teacher’s guidance, lifestyle, and worldview—regardless of the specific Greek or Latin terms used to designate them.

**Obligation 1: Obedience**

It was widely understood that wisdom and maturity (whether moral, intellectual, or otherwise) could only be attained with the help of others. Even those whom Philo regards as “self-taught” (αὐτομάθαι, αὐτομαθῆ) needed the assistance of an “internal teacher” (Najman 2010: 258–59), the point being that a process of learning and assistance are always necessary. Epicurus, according to Seneca, held that very few could strive toward truth “without assistance from anyone, forging his own path.” More (including Seneca and Lucilius, to whom Seneca writes) “require aid from someone else: they would not get there if no one went before them.” Aristotle appealed to “friends” as ideal partners for this journey of (self-)discovery, but he also assumed that one person should be advanced enough to serve as a guide to the other. It was natural, therefore, for anyone wishing to progress in the study of philosophy (or any other advanced subject) to submit themselves to the tutelage of an experienced teacher. This was a first step in discipleship: a willingness to submit to the authority of one’s chosen teacher and to obey that teacher throughout the course of one’s education.

An explicit, direct demand for obedience is actually quite uncommon in the literature I am investigating, yet obedience reoccurs as a consistent feature of texts depicting interactions

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24 Seneca prefaces this citation of Epicurus with his own belief that “no one is strong enough to swim on his own to safety: someone has to extend a hand; someone has to give a pull” (Ep. 52.2 [trans. Graver and Long]: Nemo per se satis valet ut emergat; oporet manum aliquis porrigat aliquis educat).

25 *Ep. 52.3*: Quosdam ait Epicurus ad veritatem sine ullius adiutorio exisse, fecisse sibi ipsos viam.... Quosdam indigere ope aliena, non ituros, si nemo praecesserit, sed bene secuturos.

26 See, e.g., *Eth. eud*. 7.12; *Eth. nic*. 10.7.4; *Mag. mor*. 2.15.
between teachers and students in the ancient Mediterranean. Below I will examine two particular ways that this obedience is expressed: (1) through the metaphor of a father giving instructions to his children and (2) expectations of deference on the part of students toward their teachers. Each will prove fruitful for appreciating the social dynamics between teachers and their students.

Obedience 1: The Metaphor of Father Figures

The Wisdom of Ben Sira (early second century BCE) is a helpful place to begin, written as it was for the sake of “instruction and wisdom” (prologue). The text bears the influence of its author’s travels in the Hellenistic world (13:12–13) and reflects an amenability to “Gentile thoughts and expressions as long as these could be reconciled with the Judaism of his day” (Skehan and Di Lella 1987: 16; see also 47–50).

Ben Sira does call his readers (as ideal students) to be obedient to the figure of Wisdom as their teacher (Sir 4:15, 19; 24:22; 51:19, 26), but the text is also replete with exhortations to remain close to wisdom (e.g., 14:20–27; 51:13–17) and to understand themselves as Wisdom’s “children” (4:11). More significantly, the reader of Sirach “is positioned as a student of Ben Sira’s and is expected to regard him as a teacher” (Shiner 1995: 159). In his capacity as a teacher, however, Ben Sira frequently positions himself as a father exhorting students as he would his own children. This introduces an important context for appreciating the dynamics of the relationship between teachers and their disciples.

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We are not, Benjamin Wright argues, to understand Ben Sira as an actual parent to his readers, but as “a teacher engaged in training Israelite young men for successful careers as public servants.” Wright continues,

By assuming the language of a parent speaking to a child, the sage does more than simply invoke that relationship, however. He constructs his students as his children and thereby claims the authoritative leverage with them that a father has with his sons. The student, who is on the receiving end of the construct, is subtly coerced into the role of the submissive child. “I am not merely a teacher to whom you should listen,” says the sage, “I am your father to whom you must listen.” (2008: 25, emphasis mine)

This rhetorical strategy is not unique to Sirach; it is a “potent weapon” in the hands of several Israelite and Jewish writers, as Carol Newsom argues with regard to Proverbs (Newsom 1989) and as Wright demonstrates with an array of Second Temple literature (including literature from Qumran, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and 1 Enoch). The “sage-as-father” motif assists authors to construct their readers as “children of an authoritative father” and, within this construction, “places obligations on them to accept those values [i.e., the teacher-father’s values] just as they would those of their ‘real’ fathers” (Wright 2008: 47).28

This tendency to co-opt the authority of father figures was not limited to Jewish teachers like Ben Sira; it also occurs in the circles surrounding several Greek and Roman philosophers. Bernard Frischer hails Epicurus as “one of the most important examples” of philosophers assuming the role and rule of a father toward his disciples (1982: 207 n. 17); A.-J. Festugièrè suggests that Epicurus’s paternal approach to his disciples was even “the secret to his lasting

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prestige” (1966: 241). Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE) addresses Epicurus as “father” and gives thanks for the store of fatherly “precepts” that he left behind. Norman DeWitt catalogues several instances of reverence paid to Epicurus and other Epicurean teachers in a manner similar to children paying reverence to their fathers (1954: 97–100) and Frischer describes the pervasive visual portrayals of Epicurus as a “seated father-figure on Attic funerary reliefs” (1982: 203–8).

Other examples may be cited briefly. Several scholars argue that by means of the “Hippocratic Oath” students of medicine pledged to revere their teachers as they would their fathers, and this is cited frequently in connection with the Pythagoreans (see, e.g., Vogel 1966: 240–5; Burkert 1972: 179–80). Iamblichus (third and fourth centuries CE) portrays Pythagoras caring for his own teacher as a son would for his father (De vit. pyth. 30.184–85) and notes that Lysis was addressed as “father” by his own disciple Epaminondas (250). Epictetus praises Diogenes the Cynic as one who “fathers everyone: every man is his son, every woman his daughter. That is how he regards everyone, and how much he cares for them.” There is ample evidence “for supposing that in the ancient Greek world it was not at all exceptional for a pupil to regard his teacher as a father” (Burkert 1972: 241), and there was no question of the respect, deference, and obedience that children owed to their fathers. So long as teachers stood before their disciples as “father figures,” the same obligation of obedience was owed to them.

29 “Dans un monde où les cadres civiques et familiaux tendaient à disparaître, Épicure avait su fonder une nouvelle famille. Ne doutons pas que ce ne fût là le secret de son long prestige.”

30 De rerum natura 3.9–10: Tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis / suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis.

31 Diatr. 3.22.81 (trans. Dobbin): ἄνθρωπος, πάντας ἀνθρώπους πεπαιδοποίηται, τούς ἄνδρας υἱοὺς ἔχει, τὰς γυναῖκας θυγατέρας· πάσιν οὕτως προσέρχεται, οὕτως πάντων κηδεῖται.

32 The “father figure” in First Peter is not Christ but God; First Peter envisions obedience being owed to God (e.g., 1:2, 14). There is, therefore, some ambiguity as to how First Peter’s exhortations to Christ-followers (i.e., disciples of Christ) relate to the larger picture that depicts them as disciples of God. More investigation of this issue
Obedience 2: Deferential Submission

An equally pervasive means of expressing obedience toward a teacher was in a disciple’s act of voluntary deference to a teacher, based especially on an awareness of that teacher’s experience and reputation. Obedience in the form of deference is seen best in Socrates’s approach to potential disciples, illustrated amply throughout Plato’s dialogues. In Plato’s *Apology*, we hear Socrates describe a common way in which teachers (specifically, Sophists) approached potential students:

Once again, I think it would be a fine thing to be able to educate men, as Gorgias of Leontini does, or Prodicus of Ceos, or Hippias of Elis. For each of them … can enter any given city and convince the youth—who might freely associate with any of their fellow citizens they please—to drop those associations and associate rather with them, to pay money for it, and give thanks in the bargain.

Plato’s Socrates emphasizes that these “youths” whom the Sophists attempt to court have agency; they have options for their associations and could easily choose to remain with “their

is necessary, but here it may suffice to acknowledge that the disposition of obedience, regardless of the one to whom it is paid, is a disposition common to disciples. Without necessarily specifying the identity of the teacher, the audiences of First Peter are still called to embody the deference expected of disciples.

Socrates does, admittedly, present an interesting case study since most of the relationships that we learn of from Plato’s and Xenophon’s writings describe only short-lived relationships that last the length of one respective conversation. Especially with regard to Plato’s Socrates, “it is doubtful whether … this divinely appointed physician of the soul could ever be judged to have had a measurable, lasting effect on another person” (Scott 2000: 1). Nonetheless, I highlight Socrates here because of his reputation as a teacher, a reputation held up by a wide range of authors—from fellow philosophers to satirists and dramatists, from his immediate successors to commentators centuries later, including the first century CE (see Long 2010), which witnessed a resurgence in the philosophical interest in Socrates and his school(s) of thought. For a discussion of Socrates, Plato, and their approach to the title of “teacher,” see Scott 2000: 13–49; Wilkins 1995: 15–22.

fellow citizens” rather than follow a foreign teacher. These teachers, therefore, have the task of convincing or persuading (πείθω) potential students to associate with them.

While Socrates distinguishes himself from teachers like these Sophists, his approach to his own would-be disciples is remarkably similar, insofar as he convinces others of their need for him.35 In most of Plato’s dialogues an initial portion of the text is devoted to an introductory exchange through which Socrates convinces someone to converse with him (the protrepticus; see Gaiser 1959; Crook 2004: 104–6). Within these sections we find Socrates’s various attempts to convince nascent conversation partners that they would benefit from becoming Socrates’s disciples. Specifically, Socrates uses these opportunities to persuade his interlocutors to adopt a position of deference toward him as their teacher.

In the Lysis, for example, after a brief discussion on the topics of happiness, freedom, and love, Socrates convinces his young conversation partner that his assumptions about these concepts are incomplete and that he is not yet, therefore, wise. If Lysis is to be happy, free, and loved, he must (according to Socrates) become wise, and in order to become wise, he needs a teacher. The initial conversation concludes with the following exchange:

“Now, tell me, Lysis, is it possible to be really wise in areas in which one hasn’t yet acquired wisdom?”
“How could it be?” he said.
“And if you need a teacher, you haven’t yet acquired wisdom.”
“True.”
“Then you’re not really wise either—since you lack wisdom.”

35 Socrates’s pedagogical method, of course, is different. His is “deconstructive,” in that he convinces his (potential) disciples that they, in fact, know nothing and need to start “from scratch.” The Sophists’ method is “constructive” by building on and advancing earlier forms and sources of knowledge. I am grateful to Troy Martin for providing me with this language.
“You’ve got me there, Socrates.”

Before Lysis can succeed as a student of Socrates, he must acknowledge and accept his “need” of Socrates. In Gary Scott’s words, “Socrates initially unsettles what Lysis takes for granted to bring the youth to acknowledge his present inadequacies and to confirm his willingness to learn” (2000: 63). This admission and consequent subordination marks Lysis as a teachable—that is, as a good—student and disciple.

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates describes his role as a teacher with the analogy of a midwife; students can trust Socrates to help them with their “birth pains” of confusion and ignorance as they progress toward wisdom. “Those who associate” with Socrates and who “continue being together” with him can make “the most amazing progress.” In this particular instance Socrates has asked another teacher, Theodorus, to point out promising students (*Theaet. 143D*).

Theodorus presents Theaetetus, one of his own students, as particularly promising. Theodorus’s recommendation leads Socrates to assume that Theaetetus will exhibit the virtue of obedience. “I don’t think,” Socrates asserts to Theaetetus, “it’ll be your wish to disobey him, and it wouldn’t be right in any case, when a wise person gives instructions in such matters, for the young not to listen.” Theaetetus responds by affirming that he has no choice in the matter, “seeing that the two

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37 This is also confirmed by Socrates’s subsequent narrative aside (*Lys.* 210E), whereby he states plainly—once Lysis has admitted his need of Socrates—that he has adeptly completed the task asked of him, i.e., showing Hippothales the proper way to court Lysis (see *Lys.* 206B-C). This exchange, concluding as it does with Lysis’s admission of inferiority to Socrates, affirms to Socrates that he has succeeded in garnering a promising new student.

of you are telling me to.” Theaetetus, as the good student Theodorus and Socrates expect him to be, knows his place in relation to his teachers: he obeys. Specifically, this obedience takes the form of deference: the student prefaces his own submission to Socrates’s questioning by saying, “If I do somehow miss the target, you’ll both set me right.”

Nowhere among Plato’s dialogues is the expectation (and benefit) of deference more palpable than in the *Alcibiades Major*, a dialogue devoted entirely to “a detailed exploration of the need to enter into a learning relationship” (Robbins 2009: 90). The infamous Alcibiades is portrayed in terms similar to those of Lysis: “The yearning for power arouses both characters, and here again, Socrates utilizes a youth’s unabashed desire for dominion as the catalyst in his approach” and “makes his assistance a precondition for the boys to attain the power they seek” (Scott 2000: 81). Socrates’ goal is not to help Alcibiades win political power or influence, however, but to invite him into a process of self-examination that requires the guidance of an experienced teacher. A closer look at the *Alcibiades Major* strengthens the observations made above regarding the *Theaetetus* and the *Lysis*.

In this lengthy exchange between Socrates and Alcibiades, Socrates presents the benefits of his assistance more strongly than elsewhere, thereby driving home Alcibiades’s (and all

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39 *Theaet*. 146C: Ἀκούεις δή, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ᾧ λέγει Θεόδωρος, ὃ ἀπειθεῖν, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, οὔτε σὺ ἐθελήσεις, οὔτε θέμις περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀνδρὶ σοφῷ ἐπιτάττοντι νεώτερον ἀπειθεῖν…. Ἀλλὰ χρῆ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐπειδή δὲ πάντως γάρ, ἃν τι καὶ ἀμάρτω, ἐπανορθώσετε.

40 I accept the *Alcibiades Major* as an “authentic” dialogue of Plato (see Denyer 2001: 14–26; Scott 2000: 205–7 n. 1). Even if we were to regard it as “spurious” (a position argued by Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century and subsequently accepted by many), it would still support my argument: another author writing a dialogue about Socrates’s most infamous disciple still represents Alcibiades as submitting to the subordinate role of Socrates’s disciple, thereby recognizing the need to pay deference toward and to entrust himself to his teacher as an obedient disciple.
students’) need of their teachers. Alcibiades, after all, has already eschewed the tutelage of several other teachers (*Alc. maj.* 104C), but Socrates insists:

> It is impossible to put any of these ideas of yours into effect without me—that’s how much influence I think I have over you and your business…. I hope to exert great influence over you by showing you that I’m worth the world to you and that nobody is capable of providing you with the influence you crave, neither your guardians nor your relatives, nor anybody else except me—with the god’s help, of course.41

Socrates entertains a discussion of his and Alcibiades’s definitions of what is “just” (Δίκαιος) and “advantageous” (Συμφέρον), but an essential question lingers: “Who was your teacher?” (ὅστις ἐστὶν ὁ διδάσκαλος; 113E). Amid Socrates’s own refutations of Alcibiades’s definitions and positions, he reminds the young man that he has not actually been taught—at least not properly.

> Good god, Alcibiades, what a sorry state you’re in! I hesitate to call it by its name, but still, since we’re alone, it must be said. You are wedded to ignorance, my good fellow, ignorance in the highest degree—our discussion and your own words convict you of it. This is why you’re rushing into politics before you’ve got an education (πρὶν παιδευθῆναι).42

Now Alcibiades is convinced: he is at a disadvantage and (still) needs someone to help him.

> Socrates poses the crucial question: “What do you propose for yourself? Do you intend to remain in your present condition, or practice some self-cultivation?”43 Such “self-cultivation,” Socrates insists, takes the form of heeding Socrates’s advice as he himself heeded the Delphic

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42 *Alc. maj.* 118B (trans. mod.): Βαβαὶ ἄρα, ὦ Ἀλκιβιάδη, οἶον πάθος πέπονθας· ὃ ἐγὼ ὁ νόμος μὲν ὀκνῶ, ὃς ἐπιτροπάνθησας ὕσεις· ὃς ἐγὼ ὁ νόμος ἢς ἀξίως εἰμί σοι, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπιτροπάνθησας ὡς σὺν μένῳ ὑπάρχως σὺν μένῳ καὶ τῇ ἐσχάτῃ, ὡς ὁ λόγος σου κατηγορεῖ καὶ σὺ σαυτοῦ· διότι καὶ ἐπιτροπάνθησας ὡς σὰρκα πρὸς τὰ πολιτικὰ πρὶν παιδευθῆναι.

43 *Alc. maj.* 119A: τι οὖν διανοῆν περὶ σαυτοῦ; πότερον εὖν ὡς νῦν ἔχεις, ἢ ἐπιμέλειαν τινα ποιεῖσθαι;
oracle: “trust in me and in the Delphic inscription and ‘know thyself.’”

Alcibiades, convinced that he is not yet able to lead or to advise the citizens of Athens (as he was setting out to do; see Alc. maj. 106C), now understands that he must defer to Socrates, submit himself to his tutelage, and become properly equipped to lead others. When Socrates asks how he will do this, Alcibiades replies, “It’s up to you, Socrates…. From this day forward I will never fail to attend on you, and you will always have me as your attendant.”

Not only does Alcibiades defer to Socrates’s expertise; he also entrusts himself to Socrates, thereby pledging to be a loyal disciple. Socrates and Plato were not alone in expecting such deferential attitudes and behaviors from their students. I began this discussion with Seneca’s favorable citation of Epicurus, affirming the need most people have of teachers if they seek to become virtuous or wise. Seneca himself is unashamed to be among that majority and tells Lucilius not to begrudge this second-rank status: “the willingness to be saved is very important as well.” As with the Socratic disciples discussed above, Epicurus and Seneca appreciate the necessity that students have of submitting themselves to the experience and expertise of a teacher.

Seneca reiterates Epicurus’s advice. After presenting an analogy of the foundations upon which buildings are constructed, he writes, “Such a hard, unyielding intellect is ours to work on: you may well recognize that fact. There are obstacles in our way. So let’s put up a fight—and

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44 Alc. maj. 124A: ἀλλ’, ὦ μακάριε, πειθόμενος ἐμοί τε καὶ τῷ ἐν Δελφοῖς γράμματι, γνῶθι σαυτόν.

45 Alc. maj. 135D: Ἐὰν βούλῃ σὺ, ὦ Σώκρατες… οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὁποίος οὐ παιδαγωγήσω σε ὀπὸ τῆς τῆς ἡμέρας, σὺ δ’ ὑπ’ ἐμοὶ παιδαγωγήσῃ. This was ultimately, of course, not to be. Alcibiades’s infamous reputation precedes him in every tradition that features him. I will return to this in my discussion of imitation below in Xenophon’s defense of Socrates as Alcibiades’s teacher below.

46 Ep. 52.3: Ne hunc quidem contemperis hominem, qui alieno beneficio esse salvus potest; et hoc multum est, velle servari.
let’s call in some reinforcements.”⁴⁷ We cannot make progress alone, Seneca asserts; we need someone to help us along. In a subsequent letter Seneca describes his appreciation for “both the discoveries of philosophy and those who have made those discoveries.”⁴⁸ These include both his own teachers and prior generations of teachers, all of whom he reveres: “The same homage I render to my teachers, I owe to the teachers of the human race, who are the source of so much good.”⁴⁹ There is an expectation of honor and deference due to all teachers, whether those at whose feet Seneca himself has sat or those whose legacies have endured for several generations.

Epictetus also echoes this in his expectations of his students. Specifically, Epictetus names qualities common to those with “great talent” and climactically asks, “Has he shed his presumption, and begun looking for a teacher?”⁵⁰ Once again we see that the relationship between teachers and their disciples begins with a humble act of submission to the authority of those teachers. In response to those who seek out the most eloquent speakers to be their teachers Epictetus suggests, instead, that “the school of a philosopher is a hospital. When you leave you should have suffered, not enjoyed yourself.”⁵¹ A. A. Long suggests that in this passage we find an excellent illustration not only of Epictetus’s teaching style and its rationale but also of what he expects from any promising student…. It is his job, as a philosopher physician, to identify his students’ mental and moral weaknesses, and to stimulate them to

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⁴⁷ Ep. 52.7: Hoc durum ac laboriosum ingenium nobis datum scias licet. Imus per obstantia. Itaque pugnemus, aliquorum invocemus auxilium.

⁴⁸ Ep. 64.7: Veneror itaque inventa sapientiae inventoresque; adire tamquam multorum hereditatem iuvat.

⁴⁹ Ep. 64.9: Quam venerationem praeceptoribus meis debeo, eandem illis praeceptoribus generis humani, a quibus tanti boni initia fluxerunt.

⁵⁰ Diatr. 3.23.16–17: ἀποβέβληκεν οἴησιν; ζητεῖ τὸν διδάξοντα;

⁵¹ Diatr. 3.23.30: Ἰατρεῖον ἔστιν, ἄνδρες, τὸ τοῦ φιλοσόφου σχολείον· οὐ δεὶ ἡθέντας ἐξελθεῖν, ἀλλὰ ἄλγησαντας.
understand and practice the regime he prescribes. But it is also incumbent on them to be receptive and actively involved. (2002: 52)

Such active involvement on the disciples’ part is not merely a commitment to the art of philosophy itself, but a devotion to the relationship formed between themselves and their teachers. In the words of Attalus, another Stoic, “Teacher and learner should have the same purpose, the one to enable progress, the other to make progress.”52 It is in and through one’s obedience, deference, and willingness to be guided by one’s teacher that such progress is made.

**Obedience: Summary**

Horace (65–8 BCE) poignantly summarizes the obligation I have been discussing in a letter to his patron Maecenas: “That you may cease to care for the things which you foolishly admire and crave, will you not learn and trust one wiser than yourself?”53 It was incumbent upon any up-and-coming disciple wishing to become wise, virtuous, or more skilled in any given way to submit themselves to the authority of a teacher; we have seen this demonstrated through several texts and teachers of the ancient Mediterranean contexts surrounding First Peter. First Peter itself emphasizes the importance of “obedience” as a characteristic of its audiences as those who have been set apart “for obedience” (εἰς ὑπακοήν, 1:2) and exhorting them as both “obedient children” (tékna ὑπακοῆς, 1:13) and “obedient to the truth” (τῇ ὑπακοῇ τῆς ἀληθείας, 1:22).54 When First Peter’s audiences hear themselves summoned to be disciples who follow in


53 Horace, Ep. 1.1.48 (trans. Fairclough LCL): Ne cures ea, quae stulte miraris et optas, discere et audire et meliori credere non vis?

54 This emphasis on obedience is also clearly present in the “household code” of 1 Pet 2:18–3:7. On the theme of obedience throughout First Peter, see Frederick 1975.
Christ’s footsteps (2:21), “obedience” to God and Christ as their teacher would naturally be among the obligations they understood themselves to be under.

Obligation 2: Imitation

When First Peter exhorts its readers to follow in Christ’s footsteps (1 Pet 2:21), it conjures an image of walking in the same way that Jesus of Nazareth walked—of taking the same steps and doing the same things that he did. This is a metaphor of imitation and loyal disciples would recognize this as a paramount obligation that they owed to their teachers: “The idea of emulation for the purpose of learning is essential to the Greek discourse” (Uusimäki 2017: 7).55 This is an important point to keep in mind as we come closer to a detailed discussion of discipleship in First Peter, especially in light of the distinction some scholars have made between the concepts of “discipleship” and “imitation.” A brief word in this regard is in order.

Some scholars have insisted that the language of discipleship in First Peter (specifically the language of “following”) is to be understood in contrast to any idea of “imitation” and, more particularly, the conception of imitation as found in Paul’s letters and the Pauline tradition.56

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55 I will use the verbs “imitate” and “emulate” (along with related nouns “imitation” and “emulation”) as basically synonymous. The distinction worth making between the terms, at least to our twenty-first century minds, may be that imitation is more easily envisioned as a habit and process with the goal of emulation. Once students are proficient at imitating their teachers, they could be said to emulate them, or to be the “exemplification” of them; this is important when we consider the obligation of students to represent their teachers faithfully in the eyes of others.

56 Additional perspectives are offered in Schweizer 1955: 11–21; Schultz 1962; and Betz 1967; each of which is discussed briefly as a “major treatment” and “standard approach” to New Testament discipleship in Segovia 1985b: 3–4 (along with Hengel 1968); see also Lee 1962 (I am grateful to Troy Martin for pointing out the relevance of these studies). The discussion that follows focuses on pedagogical forms and practices of imitation, which I contend provide particularly suitable parallels for reading First Peter. This is not to say that there are no other forms or modes of imitation to which an author or text might appeal. Betz and Lee, for instance, argue that a distinction can and should be made between imitating a person’s moral qualities and emulating the historical details of that person’s life. More than one type of imitation may be at work in First Peter, but, again, my focus will be the ways in which First Peter portrays Christ and God as a teacher worthy of its audiences’ imitation.

On the Pauline idea of imitation see, e.g., 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 2:5; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 2:14. For secondary literature see Stanley 1959; De Boer 1962; Sanders 1981; Castelli 1991; and Eastman 2008.
Paul Achtemeier, for instance, contends that First Peter’s language (in 2:21) “means not to ‘imitate’ but to ‘follow’ (ἐπακολουθήσητε) Jesus in his willingness to suffer, a notion deeply rooted in early Christian tradition. It is a call to discipleship rather than a call to imitation” (1996: 199, emphasis mine; see also Goppelt 1993: 205–6; Elliott 2000: 527). As the following discussion will demonstrate, any given form of discipleship throughout the ancient Mediterranean would have included the imitation of one’s teacher as a standard component—both for the sake of forming a bond between teacher and student and for the sake of learning. Distinctions between imitation and discipleship like Achtemeier’s do not account for the imitative nature of discipleship and paideia more broadly. With the texts below, we will see that a student’s imitation of his or her teacher was part and parcel of his or her discipleship.

I will discuss the pedagogical obligation of imitation under two headings. First, I will examine some general discussions of imitation and its pervasiveness throughout the ancient Mediterranean world as a means of moral formation. Second, I will narrow my focus and examine the way this moral formation exhibited political dimensions when used for the sake of negotiating and maintaining one’s cultural identity. This discussion of imitation will prove to be the lengthiest part of this chapter, but it will also serve my argument well as I examine First Peter’s vision for discipleship moving forward; I will punctuate this portion of the chapter, therefore, with brief considerations of how this discussion relates to my larger interpretation of First Peter.

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*Imitation 1: “Develop Likewise”*

Imitation was understood to be a “natural ability” that students brought to their education and a “prime means of moving the pupil forward” (Morgan 1998: 251).\(^{58}\) Students’ ability to imitate others—especially their teachers—was measured and developed throughout the primary courses of their education: copying words (even nonsense words) and sayings as they were instructed; constructing grammatically correct sentences as their teachers demonstrated; mimicking their teachers’ recitations and paraphrases of significant literature and oratory. At these early stages imitation was not a goal in itself but a means of “habit-forming,” a process by which students learned—again, at the direction of their teachers—what was worthy of imitation for the sake of becoming virtuous and culturally adept. Its aim, in other words, was to form a habit of discernment and an ability within students to decide for themselves what was worth imitating.\(^{59}\) When students then chose to continue beyond the primary stages of their education, answering the calls of teacher-patrons and learning from them closely, this habit of imitation that they had already formed would remain with them; this ability to imitate would arise as second nature for the sake of devoting themselves to the life and legacy of their chosen teacher with the

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\(^{58}\) As a “natural ability,” imitation is easily recognizable in children who imitate their parents and other caretakers in speech and in action. Quintilian, for example, writes of choosing the best “nurses” who “speak properly, since ‘these are the first people the child will hear, theirs the words he will try to copy and pronounce’” (*Inst.* 1.1.4–5: *Ante omnia ne sit vitiosus sermo nutritibus.... Has primum audiet puer, harum verba effingere imitando conabitur*). The ability to imitate is “a mark of a teachable nature” (1.3.1: *Proximum imitatio: nam id quoque est docilis naturae*).

\(^{59}\) “Education constructs identity ... by editing the models that the student must emulate.... Teachers are invariably caught between presenting themselves as paradigms to be replicated and furnishing their students with the means with which to debunk the authority upon which their own paradigmatic status rests. Teaching is both conservative, in that it replicates the social order, and subversive, in that it transforms statuses and redistributes social power” (Whitmarsh 2001: 93).
result that their own lives and identities as students—and as human beings—would become shaped by their teachers’.

It was common enough for philosophers to present their disciples with exemplary models upon which they could pattern themselves. This was an important part of Seneca’s advice to Lucilius:

Choose Cato, then; or, if you think Cato too stern, choose Laelius, a man of milder temperament. Choose anyone whom you admire for his actions, his words, even for his face, since the face reveals the mind within. Keep that person in view at all times as your guardian or your example. I repeat: we need a person who can set the standard for our conduct. You will never straighten what is crooked unless you have a ruler.

Isocrates (fifth and fourth centuries BCE) similarly explained to Nicolas that many exhortations to philosophy consist in “praising others in order that they, emulating those who are eulogized, may desire to adopt the same pursuits.” Iamblichus puts forward the long-dead Pythagoras and his successors (also long-dead) as praiseworthy models for his own Pythagorean readers.

But while exemplary politicians of old, heroes of legend, and long-dead philosophers were helpful, nothing could be better than the example set by one’s own teacher. Seneca himself was well-aware of this when he implored Lucilius to visit him personally:

Formal discourse will not do so much for you as direct contact, speaking in person and sharing a meal. You must come and see me face to face—first of all, because humans

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61 Ep. 11.10: *Elige itaque Catonem. Si hic tibi videtur nimis rigidus, elige remissioris animi virum Laelium. Elige eum, cuius tibi placuit et vita et oratio et ipse animum ante se fereat vultus; illum tibi semper ostende vel custodem vel exemplum. Opus est, inquam, aliquo, ad quem mores nostrīs se ipsi exigant; nisi ad regulam prava non corriges.*


63 See, e.g., *De vit. pyth.* 27.122–33; and the discussions in Dillon and Hersbell 1991: 1–5.
believe their eyes much more than their ears, and second, because learning by precepts is the long way around. The quick and effective way is to learn by example.\(^64\)

Seneca demonstrates this by citing the inspiring conduct of Zeno, Socrates, and Epicurus in the sight of their own students (Cleanthes, Plato and Aristotle, Metrodorus, Hermarchus and Polyaenus); Lucilius must remember that it was not the teacher’s words (alone) that persuaded and transformed his students but “whether he lived in accordance with his own rule” (*an ex formula sua viveret*).\(^65\) Lucian states this as a part of his purpose in relating the story of his visit to Demonax: “that young men of good instincts who aspire to philosophy may not have to shape themselves by ancient precedents alone, but may be able to set themselves a pattern from our modern world and to copy that man.”\(^66\) Xenophon expects that “all teachers show their disciples how they themselves practice what they teach.”\(^67\) Thus we hear Ben Sira consistently present his own journey for wisdom as a model his students should imitate (e.g., Sir 24:30–34; 34:13–16; 51:27–28), and we find numerous examples of other disciples choosing to “model themselves” on the patterns laid down by their teachers across the ancient Mediterranean. The point is that

\(^{64}\) Ep. 6.5: *Plus tamen tibi et viva vox et convictus quam oratio proderit. In rem praesentem venias oportet, primum, quia homines amplius oculis quam auribus credunt; deinde, quia longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla.* By “formal discourse” Seneca is referring primarily to lectures and even, in this case, his own letters. Lucilius can glean much from them, but it is the flesh-and-blood example that Seneca can set before his own eyes that will be most beneficial. This is analogous to the difference between past and present examples: heroes of old may be useful but seeing a teacher with one’s own eyes will be of much more benefit.

\(^{65}\) Ep. 6.5: *Zenonem Cleanthes non expressisset, si tantummodo audisset; vitae eius interfuit, secreta perspexit, observavit illum, an ex formula sua viveret. Platon et Aristoteles et omnis in diversum itura sapientium turba plus ex moribus quam ex verbis Socratis traxit; Metrodorum et Hermarchum et Polyaenum magnos viros non schola Epicuriae sed contubernium fecit.*

\(^{66}\) Demon. 2 (trans. Harmon LCL): καὶ οἱ γενναιότατοι τῶν νέων καὶ πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν ὁρμῶντες ἐχον μὴ πρὸς τὰ ἄρχαια μόνα τῶν παραδειγμάτων σφᾶς αὐτούς ῥυθμίζειν, ἄλλα κάκο τοῦ ἡμετέρου βίου κανόνα προτίθεσαι καὶ ζηλοῦν ἑκίνον. Lucian is, of course, talking about Demonax, the “best of philosophers” whom he knows (ἄριστον ὦν οἶδα ἐγὼ φιλοσοφῶν γενόμενον), but the point is applicable to any worthy teacher. As important as heroes of old may be, Lucian understands the value in having a flesh-and-blood example for students to imitate.

\(^{67}\) Mem. 1.2.17 (trans. Marchant LCL): πάντας δὲ τοὺς διδάσκοντας ὁρῶ αὐτοὺς δεικνύντας τῇ τοῖς μανθάνουσιν, ἣπερ αὐτοὶ πιουσίν ἂ διδάσκουσι.
teachers consistently provided their disciples with the most immediate and effective models upon which those disciples were expected to pattern their own thoughts and actions.

Here it is worth pausing to ask how these conceptions of imitation relate to my forthcoming interpretation of First Peter. First Peter’s appeal is to “follow” (ἐπακολουθέω) in Christ’s footsteps and thereby imitate the “example” (ὑπογραμμός) that he has left behind (1 Pet 2:21). That said, the letter is clearly intended for audiences who have not seen Christ face-to-face (1:8); they have only had “good news proclaimed” to them by others (1:12; 25). Could they legitimately be called “disciples” or “students” of Christ?

The argument of Dio Chrysostom (roughly contemporaneous with First Peter), cited at the beginning of this chapter, is relevant here. An interlocutor asks whether Socrates could legitimately be considered a disciple of Homer since the former “neither met Homer nor ever saw him, but lived so many years later.”68 Dio’s response is clear: chronological or geographical distance makes no difference so long as the students’ sincere intent is to imitate the one they regard as their teacher:

For whoever really follows (ζηλῶν) anyone surely knows what that person was like, and by imitating (μιμούμενος) his acts and words he tries as best he can to make himself like him. But that is precisely, it seems, what the pupil (μαθητής) does—by imitating (μιμούμενος) his teacher and paying heed to him he acquires his art.69

The resemblances Dio observes between the temperaments of Socrates and Homer prove his point (e.g., Hom. Socr. 7–9, 22). As valuable as having a flesh-and-blood, face-to-face teacher

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68 Hom. Socr. 3 (trans. Crosby LCL): Καὶ πῶς οἶδον τε τὸν μήτε ξυγγενόμενον Ὁμήρῳ μήτε ἱδόνη πώσοτε, ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτος ἐτεσίν ὑστερον γενόμενον Ὁμήρου φάναι μαθητήν;

69 Hom. Socr. 4–5: γὰρ ἵηλὼν τινα ὀρθῶς ἐπιστάτατα ὁδής ἐκείνῳ ὧν καὶ μιμοῦμενος τὰ ἐργα καὶ τοὺς λόγους ὡς οἶδον τε ἐπιχειρεῖ ὃμιλον αὐτὸν ἀποφαίνειν, ταύτῳ δὲ τούτῳ καὶ ὁ μαθητής ποιεῖν ἔοικε: μιμοῦμενος τὸν διδάσκαλον καὶ προσέχον ἀναλαμβάνει τὴν τέχνην.
would be, disciples can be found wherever the imitation of the teacher is sincerely attempted. The audiences of First Peter are not nearly as removed from the example of Christ as Socrates was from the legends of Homer, but it is worth acknowledging that the discipleship to which First Peter summons its audiences lacks the immediacy of the physically present teacher who was so instrumental in making the effects of imitation take hold (see Eastman 2008: 433–34)—not least in providing the tangible example for their students. This absence will prove to be a significant factor for discipleship in First Peter from the perspective of Social Identity Theory (see Chapter Five).

It should now be clear that the task of imitating one’s teacher was a prevalent and relevant obligation that students were expected to fulfill. Here I will conclude these general observations with a brief account of imitation’s formative power. As just seen in the example of Homer and Socrates, there was a general hope that by imitating teachers, students would acquire the virtues and other positive characteristics of those teachers. Xenophon himself recounts that this was Socrates’s own goal: “by letting his own light shine, he led his disciples to hope that through imitation of him they would develop likewise.”

Diogenes Laertius remarks that Xenophon “modeled himself closely on Socrates,” and he was in good company. Antisthenes was so captivated by Socrates’s “hardiness” (κατερικός) and “impassivity” (ἀπαθής) that he determined to imitate it and “derived so much benefit from him that he would advise his own

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70 Mem. 1.2.3: ἀλλὰ τῷ φανερῷ εἶναι τοιοῦτος ὃν ἔλπίζειν ἐποίει τοὺς συνδιατρίβοντας ἐαυτῷ μιμουμένους ἑκείνον τοιούτους γενήσεσθαι.

71 Vit. phil. 2.56: καὶ Σωκράτην ζηλώσας ἀκριβῶς.
disciples to become fellow disciples of Socrates.”

Imitating Socrates’s manner of life, in other words, led Antisthenes to “develop likewise” and to invite others to do the same.

Polemon, whose youth was characterized by the vices of promiscuity and indulgence (Vit. phil. 4.16), matured through his own study of philosophy under Xenocrates. “It would appear that in all respects Polemon emulated Xenocrates…. Polemon had Xenocrates constantly in mind, and clothed himself in the man’s candor, austerity, and gravity.”

Imitating Xenocrates, in other words, made Polemon more like Xenocrates, and to positive effect. The result of imitation, however, was not necessarily positive, as we may also see from the examples of those whom Diogenes ridicules. Dionysius, for example, abandoned Zeno and “went over to the Cyrenaics.” Upon this transfer of his philosophical allegiance, Dionysius, according to Diogenes or his sources, “took to frequenting brothels, and abandoned himself without disguise to all the other pleasant pursuits.”

So while the effect might not be interpreted favorably (in the eyes of subsequent philosophers or historians), the effect remained consistent: the imitation of one’s teacher caused a disciple to “develop likewise.”

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72 Vit. phil. 6.2: “Ὑστερον δὲ παρέβαλε Σωκράτει, καὶ τοσοῦτον ὄνατο αὐτοῦ, ὡστε παρήμει τῶν μαθητῶν γενέσθαι αὐτῷ πρὸς Σωκράτην συμμαθητάς. οἷον τ’ ἐν Πειραιᾷ καθ’ ἑκάστην ἡμέραν τοὺς τετταράκοντα σταδίους Ἱνων ἣκουε Σωκράτους, παρ’ οὗ καὶ τὸ καρτερικὸν κατήρξε πρῶτος τοῦ κυνισμοῦ.

73 Vit. phil. 4.19: ἐῴκει δὴ ὁ Πολέμων κατὰ πάντα ἐξηλωκέναι τὸν Ξενοκράτην… ἢ ἀνεύ ἐμέμητο αὐτοῦ, τὴν τ’ ἀκακίαν καὶ τὸν αὐχμὸν ἐνεδέδυτο τἀνδρὸς καὶ τὸ βάρος οἱοῦ τῆς Δωριστὶ ἀρμονίας.

74 Vit. phil. 7.167: ἀποστὰς δὲ τοῦ Ζήνωνος πρὸς τοὺς Κυρηναϊκοὺς ἀπετράπη καὶ εἰς τὰ τὰ ἐξηλωκόνατο ἐξηλωκέναι τὸν Ξενοκράτην… ἢ ἀνεύ ἐμέμητο αὐτοῦ, τὴν τ’ ἀκακίαν καὶ τὸν αὐχμὸν ἐνεδέδυτο τἀνδρὸς καὶ τὸ βάρος οἱοῦ τῆς Δωριστὶ ἀρμονίας.

Hicks (LCL) translates this final phrase as “indulge in all other excesses without disguise.” That Diogenes is presenting Dionysius in a derogatory fashion is clear from the title he provides (“Dionysius the Renegade,” Διονύσιος δ’ ὁ Μεταθέμενος, 7.166) and his classification of Dionysius as one of three “heterodox Stoics” or “those holding divergent views” (οἱ διενεχθέντες, 7.167) along with Ariston and Herillus. See below, in the section on “Students as Representatives.”
So far, I have sought to demonstrate that imitation was a common expectation teachers would have of their students. Not only was it a widespread pedagogical tool, but it was also lauded by teachers as one of the most formative aspects of any student’s education. As disciples attached themselves to honorable, wise, and virtuous teachers, they themselves could hope to become honorable, wise, and virtuous (or the opposite, if their teachers were dishonorable, unwise, and vice-ridden). This is in keeping with the general aims of *paideia* noted at the beginning of this chapter—specifically that an education (thoroughly characterized by acts of imitation and emulation) functioned to form students and disciples into mature human beings.

These observations have been general and have focused on the formation of students’ moral characters. In the following section I will revisit a second thread from this chapter’s introductory discussion about the functions of *paideia*: the formation of students’ social or cultural identities. This is not to suggest that there is no relationship and interaction between one’s moral and cultural identities—there certainly is, not least in the ways that one’s morality is formed by a process of socialization. But one clear function of imitation—especially as a part of one’s educational program—was one’s progress in virtue.

**Imitation 2: Maintenance and Resistance**

With the following discussion, my goal is to demonstrate and examine the way the pedagogical tool of imitation could be used to help individuals solidify their cultural and social identities. I suggested this educational aspiration in this chapter’s initial discussion of teachers’ choice of texts: Homer was hailed as “the educator of Greece” (τὴν Ἑλλάδα πεπαίδευκεν [Plato, *Resp.* 606E]), in that reading and reciting Homer inculcated students with Hellenistic ideals and virtues; the Elder Cato fulfilled a similar function for many Romans. For the Jews, it was
scriptural texts and patriarchal and prophetic figures, as seen above, that taught them to live in accordance with God’s will.

Imitation was a practice that took this a step further, inviting individuals to embody the lives of their heroes and their ideals. As two (or more) cultures came into contact with one another, however, the question was naturally raised as to whose values, virtues, and “heroes” offered the best or most convincing portrait of how life should be lived. This often placed minority groups like Jews in a somewhat precarious position, needing to articulate (and even negotiate) their own identity in relation to surrounding majority Hellenistic and Roman cultures.

Susan Eastman, citing the work of Tim Whitmarsh discussed above, briefly suggests that in such situations an act of imitation could be employed “as an act of resistance” in the ongoing construction of corporate identities (Eastman 2008: 434 n. 25). This is what I will explore in the following discussion, examining two texts written in the paired first-century contexts of Roman imperium and Jewish diaspora: Philo’s *De vita Mosis* and the anonymous Fourth Maccabees.

Each of these texts, I will show, highlights the pedagogical tool of imitation and puts it to use not only for the formation of its audiences’ moral identity, but for the solidification of their cultural (and perhaps political) identity in relation to Roman ideals and Roman society.

A brief caveat is in order. In using the term “resistance,” I am not intending to paint imitation as an exhortation to “take up arms” or to withdraw from interaction with society-at-large (though these are not impossible implications). The two texts I examine below presuppose a negative view of the Roman Empire, an imperial force with which First Peter and its audiences must also reckon. First Peter’s stance vis-à-vis the Roman Empire is debated, and while I do find several indications that the letter intends to subvert Roman imperial power and encourage a
“polite resistance,” my intention is not to use the word “resistance” as it might be understood in prophetic or apocalyptic settings. Rather, the “resistance” that these texts (including First Peter) encourage is to be understood in the context of “competing cultures”; it is resistance against assimilation to outside influences (including Rome) that would diminish their distinctive, corporate identities. Imitation, thus, is a tool of resistance.

The Imitation of Moses in Philo’s De vita Mosis

Philo’s Moses is a philosopher (Mos. 2.2) and Philo, together with his fellow Jews, are his students or disciples (γνώριμοι, QG 3.8). Philo’s Moses is also a teacher worth imitating:

In himself and his life displayed for all to see, he has set before us, like some well-wrought picture, a piece of work beautiful and godlike, a model (παράδειγμα) for those who are willing to copy it (μιμεῖσθαι). Happy are they who imprint, or strive to imprint, that image (τύπον) in their souls.

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75 “Polite resistance” is the preferred language of David Horrell (2007a; 2013: 211–38); see also Williams 2014: 185–273.

76 See Niehoff 2011: 157 n. 18. For a discussion of Moses’s function as a philosopher-sage, see Clifford 2007. This is not a unique contribution of Philo; “the view that Moses was the fount of philosophy and a sage” is found in Philo’s predecessors Artapanus, Eupolemus, and Aristobulus (see Clifford 2007: 164, with n. 58). For Philo, the portrait of Moses as a philosopher grounded each part of his “fourfold office” of king, law-giver, priest, and prophet (160).

77 That Philo is himself employing the tenets of paideia is inferable from his own Hellenistic context in Alexandria, as has been demonstrated at length by Borgen (1997) and several others (see those cited in Najman 2010: 254 n. 3). With regard to Philo’s portrayal of Moses, Najman writes, “Philo’s strategy … is to inscribe the Jewish tradition of Moses and Mosaic law into the school of Plato. He does this … by reading the Mosaic tradition in light of the Greek concept of paideia.” At the same time, “Greek conceptions of paideia get reworked in a Jewish register,” which Najman demonstrates in this essay and in her larger work on “Mosaic Discourse” (2003: 70–107). There she demonstrates Philo’s ability to “fuse” Second Temple traditions and Hellenistic philosophy (100, 107). See also Reed 2009 for Philo’s similar approach to Abraham (alongside Josephus’s and the Testament of Abraham’s) and Uusimäki 2017 for a thorough discussion of the tool of exemplarity in Greek and Jewish (including “Greek Jewish” literature such as Philo).

78 Mos. 1.158–59 (trans. Colson LCL): καθάπερ τε γραφήν εὖ δεδημιουργημένην ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον εἰς μέσον προσαγαγόν πάγκαλον καὶ θεοειδὲς ἔργον ἔστησε παράδειγμα τοῖς ἐθέλοντι μιμεῖσθαι. εὐδαίμονες δ’ ὅσοι τὸν τύπον ταῖς ἑαυτῶν ψυχαῖς ἐναπεμάζαντο ἢ ἐσπούδασαν ἐναπομάζασθαι.
In this context, however, Moses is not merely a teacher; he is the “leader” of the Hebrews as they emerge from Egypt, “invested with this office and kingship.” Two significant observations emerge from this context. First, although Moses is a model to imitate by merit of his position as a leader or king, Philo insists that emulating him is not limited to a ruling class. Moses is a paradigm for all Jews—both individually and corporately. The significance of this will become clear as we take a closer look at Philo’s socio-political context.

Second, Philo contextualizes his Mosaic paradigm in opposition to the leaders of Egypt. Specifically, Philo stipulates that Moses received his office from God, unlike the Egyptians who waged war and handed their offices down to their children (see Mos. 1.148–50). Moses had only one goal as ruler of the people: “to benefit his subjects.” Moses’s reward for his noble stewardship is important: “God judged him worthy to appear as a partner of His own possessions, He gave into his hands the whole world as a portion well fitted for His heir.” Therefore Moses, as a possessor of all that is God’s, is called “a world citizen” (κοσμοπολίτης) and could count “the whole world” (ὅλον τὸν κόσμον) as his own (1.157): “For he was named god and king of the whole nation.” These rewards—and Philo’s invitation to imitate Moses as

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79 Mos. 1.148: τούτων ἄπαντων ἤγεμον ἔχειροτονεῖτο Μωυσῆς τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ βασιλείαν λαβὼν.

80 Philo proceeds to discuss the ways that “meaner men emulate men of distinction, and set their inclinations in the direction of what they [the men of distinction] seem to desire” (Mos. 1.160: καὶ μὴν οὐδ᾿ ἐκεῖνό τις ἄγνοει, ὃτι ζηλωταὶ τῶν ἐνδόξων οἱ ἄφανεῖς εἰς καὶ, ὃν ἄν ἐκείνου μᾶλιστ᾿ ἀρέσχεται δοκῶσι, πρὸς ταῦτα τὰς αὐτῶν ἀποτείνουσιν ὀρμάς). He suggests that Moses was divinely appointed to his role so that there could be no mistake that Moses was to be understood as worthy of such imitation.

81 Mos. 1.151: προοίκειτο γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ τέλος ἀναγκαιότατον, ὡνήσαι τοὺς ἀρχομένους.

82 Mos. 1.155: κοινονὸν γὰρ ἄξιόσας ἀναφανῆναι τῆς ἑαυτοῦ λήξεως ἀνήκε πάντα τὸν κόσμον ὡς κληρονόμῳ κτῆσιν ἀρμόζουσαν.

83 Mos. 1.158: ὡνομάσθη γὰρ ὅλου τοῦ ἔθνους θεός καὶ βασιλεύς.
their recipient—are especially potent when seen in the context of popular discourse surrounding Roman imperial power and dominion.

The dominance of Rome was recognized and rehearsed by Philo’s Roman neighbors. Authors like Virgil, Cicero, Livy, and Pliny attributed Rome’s superior status to divine providence or to the kindness of fate.\textsuperscript{84} Other authors like Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus discount personal or positive forces behind Rome’s supremacy while still acknowledging that supremacy, whether as the result of hard work or of blind chance.\textsuperscript{85} Philo may have been “pro-Roman” insofar as Rome enabled his intellectual pursuits and benefited the Jews to some degree, but scholars have also shown that Philo’s perception and depiction of Roman imperial power is at best ambiguous, but more likely offers “little by way of evidence for a positive evaluation” (Pearce 2012: 133).\textsuperscript{86} Philo’s writings are entirely devoid of any insinuation that Rome’s success is due to divine providence; this is reserved for the Jews (see Berthelot 2011: 177–79). Instead, Rome’s dominion and its far-reach is the same as any other nation’s: fleeting. This is clear from several passages.

Philo rehearses “the classical discourse about the instability of empires” in \textit{De Iosepho} (see Berthelot 2011: 181–82) and similarly reminds his readers that “no less necessary a change

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\textsuperscript{85} See Polybius, \textit{Hist}. 1.63.9; Dionysius, \textit{Rom. Hist}. 1.4.2; and the discussion of these texts in Berthelot 2011: 171–73.

\textsuperscript{86} For Philo’s positive regard of Rome, see \textit{Legat}. 155–58; \textit{Flacc}. 50; and the discussions in Borgen 1997: 14–45; Niehoff 2001: 111–12. For the more “ambiguous” and negative appraisals, see the trio of essays (by Eric Gruen, Daniel Schwartz, and Joshua Yoder) showcasing Pearce’s conclusion in Runia and Sterling 2012: 129–82. See also the important essay of Katell Berthelot (2011) and the earlier work of Erwin Goodenough (1962; 1967).
awaits” every subsequent nation, “though they have become illustrious and conspicuous in the meantime.” In De Plantatione, however, we find a “sharper criticism” (Berthelot 2011: 183):

Let those cease their proud boasting who have acquired royal and imperial sway, some by bringing under their authority a single city or country or nation, some by having over and above these, made themselves masters of all earth’s regions to its fullest bounds, all nations, Greek and barbarian alike, all rivers, and seas unlimited in number and extent.

No matter how far they could hope to extend their empire, however,

They would be reckoned ordinary citizens when compared with great kings who received God as their portion; for the kingship of these as far surpasses theirs as he that has gained possession is far better than the possession, and he that has made that which he has made.

Philo here exhibits a pessimistic attitude toward Rome’s superiority. Berthelot goes so far as to say that the pro-Roman discourse concerning Rome’s privileged and superior status represented a direct challenge to Jews living in the empire, insofar as the Roman claims to be a chosen people elected by the gods to bless the whole οἰκουμένη not only strongly conflicted with Jewish discourses about the election and call of Israel, but also closely resembled these Jewish claims to chosenness. (Berthelot 2011: 169)

It is in this context, moreover, that Philo’s discussion of Moses-as-exemplar takes on a particularly important nuance.

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87 QG 4.43 (trans. Marcus LCL).


89 Philo “must have had Rome in mind, the only political power in his time that claimed to have conquered the entire civilized world” (Berthelot 2011: 183). That Philo does not mention Rome by name can be explained in several ways (see Berthelot 2011: 182–83). For example, proclaiming that Rome would eventually fall like previous empires ran against the dominant pro-Roman discourse with which Philo was likely to be familiar; Philo’s censure in QG itself suggests that such a critique of the ruling power was a shameful and laughable offense; Philo himself was involved in public affairs, specifically preparing to travel to Rome and defend the rights of Jews in Alexandria.
To imitate Moses, Philo writes, is to become with him "a world citizen" and to receive "no mere piece of land but the whole world as his portion," just like Moses. Moses therefore functions as a reminder to Philo’s audiences of the Hebrew people’s successful flight from Egypt and their emergence as a nomadic nation—but also as an example for Jews of the diaspora that they may imitate as they seek to embody their national identity and navigate their own existence as a marginal(ized) group at the mercy of Roman power. The figure of Moses recalls the time of Israel’s new-found freedom from foreign oppression and promises that Philo’s compatriots may also receive “the whole world as their portion” if they are able to imitate Moses—no matter what claims to dominion or superiority Rome (or any subsequent rising power) may make. Philo and his fellow-dispersed Jews, as the inheritors of Moses’s legacy, may through imitation not only learn to think and act like Moses, but also grow to embody their conviction that they (and not Rome) have been chosen by God to inherit “the whole world.”

Models for Imitation in Fourth Maccabees

Fourth Maccabees shares several contextual features with Philo’s *De vita Mosis*, including its first-century CE diaspora setting. Fourth Maccabees assumes the form of a

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90 Mos. 1.157: ὃς μέρος χώρας ἀλλ’ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον κλῆρον λαβών.

91 An examination of Philo’s attitude concerning the future of the Jewish “nation” or “people” would also be relevant to this discussion here, but space precludes it. Berthelot has provided a helpful summary (2011: 184–86).

92 The precise circumstances surrounding the composition of Fourth Maccabees are unknown; see a discussion of the possibilities for its date and provenance in deSilva 2006: xiv–xx. Most scholars today place its composition confidently in the first century CE based partially (but convincingly) on the political-geographical reference to “Syria, Phoeneicia, and Cilicia” (4 Macc 4:2), reflecting a time after which these regions began to be governed together (i.e., after 19 CE; this union was dissolved in or around 72 CE, but this does not rule out a later date for the text’s composition; see Henton 1997: 74; Collins 2000: 203–4; Klauck 1989; 668). Collins writes that “the balance of opinion has generally shifted to a date in the late first or early second century CE” (2000: 204). There is less certainty or specificity as to the provenance of Fourth Maccabees, but scholars generally agree “that the book was composed in the diaspora” and that “either Syria or Asia Minor seems more probable than Alexandria or Palestine” (Collins 2000: 204). Barclay suggests that the text’s “linguistic ‘Asianisms’” point to “a location in the north-east of the Mediterranean” and entertains the interpretive significance of assuming a provenance of Syrian
philosophical treatise concerning the superiority of reason over the emotions (1:1), but the bulk of the text is focused on presenting examples for its audiences to imitate.93 These examples are presented as demonstrations of “devout reason,” but also—and more poignantly—as demonstrations of resistance against foreign oppression:

I could prove to you from many and various examples that reason is dominant over the emotions, but I can demonstrate it best from the noble bravery of those who died for the sake of virtue, Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother. All of these, by despising sufferings that bring death, demonstrated that reason controls the emotions…. All people, even their torturers, marveled at their courage and endurance, and they became the cause of the downfall of tyranny over their nation. By their endurance they conquered the tyrant, and thus their native land was purified through them. (1:7–11)94

This import of Fourth Maccabees is reiterated in the text’s conclusion:

These, then, who have been consecrated for the sake of God, are honored, not only with this honor, but also by the fact that because of them our enemies did not rule over our nation, the tyrant was punished, and the homeland purified—they having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated. (17:20–22)95

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93 Barclay goes so far as to say that the “philosophical claims of the work appear somewhat pretentious and its achievements limited in scope,” dependent on contemporary “popularizations of philosophy” (1996: 371); Hadas calls the philosophical framework a “mere scaffolding for a spiritual message” (1953: 123). Put more positively, the philosophical tenets championed by Fourth Maccabees are presented favorably in order, again in Barclay’s words, “to bolster the claims of the Jewish people and to confirm their commitment to the Jewish way of life” (1996: 374). This “Jewish way of life” is presented by Fourth Maccabees as a noble and exemplary demonstration of the claim that reason is superior to the emotions; this claim, however, becomes subordinate to (or perhaps functions as evidence of) the ultimate and overarching point of Fourth Maccabees: that obedience to the law and the ancestral traditions is of paramount significance.

94 πολλαχόθεν μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλαχόθεν ἔχοιμ’ ἃν ύμῖν ἐπιδείξῃ ὅτι αὐτοκράτωρ ἐστὶν τῶν παθῶν ὁ λογισμός, πολὺ δὲ πλέον τοῦτο ἀπὸ δεῖξαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνδραγαθίας τῶν ἕως ἑρμῆς ἀποθανόντων, Ἐλεαζαροῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἐπτὰ ἀδελφῶν καὶ τῆς τούτων μητρός. Ἀπαντῶ γάρ οὗτοι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐπεδείχθησαν ὅτι περικρατεῖ τῶν παθῶν ὁ λογισμός…. ἡμειασθήντες γάρ οὐ μόνον ὑπὸ πάντων ἄνθρωπων ἀπὶ τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκειοσκόρους, ἀκούουσαν τὸν καταλύθηνα τὴν κατὰ τὸ βασιλείας τυφλοῦς νυκτήσαντος τὸν ἐρωμένον τῇ ὑπομονῇ ὅστε καθαρισθῆναι διὰ αὐτῶν τὴν πατρίδα. All translations of Fourth Maccabees are taken from the NRSV.

95 καὶ οὗτοι οὖν ἀγαθασθήντες διὰ θεὸν τετιμήνται, οὐ μόνον ταύτη τῇ τιμῇ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ δι’ αὐτοῦ τῷ ἔθνος ἡμῶν τοῖς πολεμίοις μὴ ἐπικρατήσασαι καὶ τὸν τύραννον τιμωρηθῆναι καὶ τὴν πατρίδα καθαρισθῆναι, ὡσπερ
The examples presented by Fourth Maccabees, therefore, are not only intended to demonstrate a philosophical truism; they specifically recall demonstrations of resistance against foreign tyranny: “Because of them the nation gained peace, and by reviving observance of the law in the homeland they ravaged the enemy” (18:4).96 I will return to discuss the implications of this shortly, but first I will examine in more detail how Fourth Maccabees presents the figures of Eleazar and the brothers and their mother as models to be imitated.

It is important to note that the efforts of each character in the face of torture are themselves acts of imitation. Eleazar endures his sufferings “like a true Eleazar” (6:5).97 The ancestral Eleazar stood as an important transitional model of leadership, signaling, in Dennis Olson’s words, “the beginning of a new generation of hope and promise. The continuing of the priesthood through Eleazar demonstrate[d] God’s continuing commitment to Israel and the institutions through which God works for the well-being of God’s people” (1996: 132). Fourth

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96 Καὶ δι’ αὐτῶν εἰρήνευσεν τὸ ἔθνος, καὶ τὴν εὐνομίαν τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἀνανεώσαμεν τοὺς πολεμίους. A supplemental point may be made concerning the portions of Fourth Maccabees that precede the narration of the torments and deaths of Eleazar, the brothers, and the mother. The story of David’s self-control over his thirst (3:6–18), as the first demonstration of the text’s thesis, stands as notable example from the time of Israel’s independence—and thereby as a reminder of that independence. The conflict between Onias and Simon (3:19–4:14; again “at a time when our ancestors were enjoying profound peace,” 3:20), in addition to providing a contrasting scenario for those that follow, provides an example of God’s protection of Israel in response to Israel’s (and its leaders’) obedience to the law and their ancestral traditions.

97 ὡς ἀληθῶς Ελεαζαρος. DeSilva, rightly I think, suggests that the NRSV misrepresents the adverbial construction and further suggests that the phrase communicates that Eleazar “experiences ‘truly’ what his name means, God helping him to bear the torments (‘like one truly helped by God’)” (2006: 143). Still, Eleazar is here portrayed by Fourth Maccabees as living up to the standard set by his name, a standard embodied by the most prominent son and successor of Aaron the high priest (Num 20:28), suggested also by the references to Aaron and “the descendent of Aaron, Eleazar” in the encomium of 4 Macc 7. The ancient Eleazar was also the father of the infamously zealous Phineas, and the presently fatherless brothers of Fourth Maccabees explicitly look back to their contemporary Eleazar as their own “aged instructor” (4 Macc 9:6).
Maccabees indicates constantly that its own Eleazar (and its author) is concerned with that same
divine continuity and commitment (e.g., 9:24; 13:19; 15:3). The seven brothers, likewise, are
imitators in two important ways. They immediately take up the figure of Eleazar as their model.
They provoke Antiochus, saying:

You are trying to terrify us by threatening us with death by torture as though a short time
ago you learned nothing from Eleazar. And if the aged men of the Hebrews because of
their religion lived piously while enduring torture, it would be even more fitting that we
young men should die despising your coercive tortures, which our aged instructor also
overcame. (9:5–6)\(^98\)

Having witnessed the outcome of Eleazar’s obedience to the law, they resolve to behave likewise
in imitation of him. Subsequently the brothers encourage one another repeatedly with appeals to
own fortitude, as well, is described as being “of the same mind as Abraham” (14:20; see 15:28)
and akin to the plight of Noah’s ark (15:31–32). Moreover, as Stephen Moore and Janice
Anderson have argued, the mother’s success is won as she exemplifies the role of a “true man at
heart,” imitating in her female body the contemporary ideals of masculinity and manly self-
mastery (1998: 252, 265). That each character is portrayed as imitating and emulating others
prepares the audiences of Fourth Maccabees to follow their example and to do likewise.

Fourth Maccabees addresses its audiences directly with calls to imitate the models it
presents. In its encomium on Eleazar, for example, Fourth Maccabees refers to Eleazar as “our
father” who established a noble and stalwart pattern for his children to follow (7:5). More
specifically, Fourth Maccabees opines that Eleazar’s character should set the standard for others:

\(^98\) ἐκφοβεῖς δὲ ἡμᾶς τὸν διὰ τῶν βασάνων θάνατον ἢμῖν ἀπειλῶν ὡσπερ οὐχὶ πρὸ βραχέως παρ’ Ελεαζάρου
μαθὼν. εὶ δ’ οἱ γέροντες τῶν Ἑβραίων διὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν καὶ βασανισμοὺς ὑπομείναντες εὐσέβησαν, ἀποθάνομεν
ἀν δικαίωτον ἡμῖς οἱ νέοι τὰς βασάνους τῶν σῶν ἀναγκῶν ὑπεριδόντες, ὃς καὶ ὁ παιδευτὴς ἡμῶν γέρων ἐνίκησαν.
Such should be those who are administrators of the law, shielding it with their own blood and noble sweat in sufferings even to death. You, father, strengthened our loyalty to the law through your glorious endurance, and you did not abandon the holiness that you praised, but by your deeds you made your words of divine philosophy credible. (7:8–9)

Similarly, Fourth Maccabees proposes the commemoration of Eleazar together with the brothers and their mother in writing, “a reminder to the people of our nation” (17:8). The author’s final words to his hearers addresses them as “Israelite children, offspring of the seed of Abraham” and commands them, “obey this law and exercise piety in every way, knowing that devout reason is master of all emotions, not only of suffering from within, but also of those from without” (18:1–2). The audiences have already seen what it looks like to be true descendants of Abraham (15:28; 17:6) in the examples of these brothers, their mother, and Eleazar; if they are indeed to be counted as children of Abraham, the imitation of these figures is a natural place to begin.

How far did the audiences of Fourth Maccabees expect to carry this imitation of Eleazar and the others forward? First-century Mediterranean Jews appear to have had the benefit of tolerance for their ancestral practices under Roman rule, as they had under the administrations of others (see Collins 2000: 113–22); Fourth Maccabees need not be read as envisioning a present and dangerous tyrant in whose presence its audiences must sacrifice their lives. The tolerance afforded by the Roman empire, however, was not without its challenges. The Jews addressed by Fourth Maccabees (like the audiences of Philo and of First Peter) were keenly aware of
differences between themselves and non-Jews and experienced the pressure to conform to their surroundings. As deSilva writes:

> These Jews would have experienced certain tensions within their environment…. On the one hand, there would be the drive to maintain their connection with their heritage and distinctive way of life, to continue to live by the deep-rooted values of their native culture. On the other hand, there would be a drive to be recognized as respectable members of a larger world and to enjoy the advantages that would come from such recognition and enfranchisement, thus to make room for values learned from their non-native environment. (2006: xix)\(^{101}\)

Fourth Maccabees recalls a time in which illicit leaders like Jason “changed the nation’s way of life and altered its form of government in complete violation of the law” (4:19),\(^ {102}\) and imagines that so long as Israel is subject to foreign power, the same danger lurks around the corner.

Fourth Maccabees, therefore, is wary of its audiences’ precarity under the scrutiny of Roman power. It is concerned that its audiences maintain their ancestral traditions in the face of temptations to renounce those traditions and become strangers to themselves (see 8:7–8). Fourth Maccabees, in the light of the history it presents, is determined that its audiences resist any pressure to dilute or renounce their Judaism. Barclay suggests that this “resistance” will certainly “display the power of ‘godly reason’ over the ‘passions’ and prove the philosophical excellence of the Jewish tradition,” but also helpfully observes that more is at stake: “such resistance is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, simply what is required of those who belong to the Jewish community and share in its heritage” (1996: 379), at least in the mind of Fourth Maccabees. Herein lies the import of the text’s presentation of imitable figures: they are exemplifications of

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\(^{101}\) DeSilva also writes, “these were Jews who had a high level of appreciation for the conversation and culture of the Greco-Roman world, who were drawn to what their Gentile neighbors prized, and who sought to carve out a place in the conversation while still maintaining their distinctive voice and identity” (2006: xx).

\(^{102}\) ὃς καὶ ἐξεδιήτησεν τὸ ἔθνος καὶ ἐξεπολίτευσεν ἐπὶ πᾶσαν παρανομίαν.
resistance. Each example is not only about how he or she elevated reason high enough that emotion could not overcome it; Fourth Maccabees insists that each is an example of endurance for the sake of—or in the service of—resistance. Eleazar and the brothers and their mother do not endure for another purpose; they do not endure simply for the sake of being “reasonable” instead of being “emotional.” They suffer and die so that the tyrant knows he has not won; so that he knows his power is not absolute or final:

Because of them the nation gained peace, and by reviving observance of the law in the homeland they ravaged the enemy. The tyrant Antiochus was both punished on earth and is being chastised after his death. Since in no way whatever was he able to compel the Israelites to become pagans and to abandon their ancestral customs, he left Jerusalem and marched against the Persians. (18:4–5) 103

The audiences of Fourth Maccabees are summoned to imitate models that have died for their traditions. If Eleazar and those like him could resist assimilation to the point of death, their examples provide uncompromising models for late first-century Jews who may not face such severe threats (though see Barclay 1996: 379–80), but who maintain allegiance to their distinctive way of life amid the pluralism of Roman societies.

Summary

What I have been describing in the foregoing discussion was not an isolated phenomenon. I have argued here that the imitation commended by Philo and Fourth Maccabees functions (at least in part) as a form of resistance on the part of a minority group (Hellenistic Jews of the diaspora) against a dominant and often oppressive majority power (Rome). 104 It is

103 Καὶ δι’ αὐτούς εἰρήνευσεν τὸ ἔθνος, καὶ τὴν εὐνομίαν τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἀνανεωσάμενοι ἐκπεπόρθηκαν τοὺς πολεμίους, καὶ ὁ τύραννος Ἄντιοχος καὶ ἔπι γῆς τετιμώρηται καὶ ἀποθανὼν κολάζεται· ὡς γὰρ οὐδὲν οὐδαμῶς ἴσχυσεν ἀναγκάσαι τοὺς Ιεροσολυμίτας ἀλλοφυλῆσαι καὶ τῶν πατρίων ἔθων ἐκδιαιτηθῆναι, τότε ἀπάρας ἀπὸ τῶν ἱεροσολύμων ἐστράτευσεν ἐπὶ Πέρσας.

104 This is not to say that this is a paradigmatic or even dominant motif in Hellenistic Jewish texts, but only that it is exhibited in Philo’s De vita Mosis and Fourth Maccabees (and perhaps other Jewish texts not under
helpful to remember (both for the immediate discussion and for the larger goal of this chapter) that imitation was a tool of *paideia* and that education in the ancient Mediterranean was, to quote Whitmarsh’s words again, “the locus for a series of competitions and debates concerning the proper way in which life should be lived” (2001: 5). The Judaisms represented by Fourth Maccabees and Philo were not unusually combative; they were examples of the cultural competition so integral to the interaction between different groups and peoples of their ancient Mediterranean settings.

To follow Whitmarsh’s argument further, we find several instances of imitation similar to what I have observed in Philo and Fourth Maccabees—a transformative reanimation of the past for the purpose of identification in relation to the present. The audiences of Philo’s *De vita Mosis* and of Fourth Maccabees are invited to imitate figures of the past (Moses and heroes of the Maccabean conflict) for the sake of constructing their identity in relation to their multifaceted present (challenging or resisting Roman particularity and dominance while simultaneously strengthening loyalty to Jewish culture and traditions). Whitmarsh explores this same function in

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105 Whitmarsh writes with reference to Greek literary traditions: “Post-Classical Greek culture was heavily burdened by its own cultural past…. To engage in literary practice was necessarily to anchor the present in tradition and to reanimate the past. The dominant notion in the literary aesthetic of Roman Greece was *mimēsis*, a complex term that covers both ‘artistic representation’ and ‘imitation’ of predecessors…. In literary terms, ‘becoming Greek’ meant constructing one’s own self-representation through and against the canonical past…. *Mimēsis* marks not only the traditional temper of Roman Greek culture, but also its modernity: an ‘imitation’ of a literary forebear is not simply a xerographic reproduction but also (and this applies even to the extreme case, literal citation) a transformation” (2001: 26–27).
several Greek texts written in the context of Roman imperial power. In particular he examines the artistry of imitation in Ps.-Longinus’s *De sublimitate*, documenting a “contest for cultural authority” and a “discriminatory approach to the literature of the past” (2001: 61). The nuances and subtleties of *De sublimitate* (thoroughly examined in Whitmarsh 2001: 57–71) reveal the strategic effects to which imitation can be put: to stimulate a reliance on and commitment to ideals of the past; to engender a spirit of discernment toward the ideals of the present; and to provide a mode of operation through which actors may identify themselves in processes of assimilation, acculturation, and even resistance. As Whitmarsh concludes, Ps.-Longinus’s own acts of imitation allow him both to accept the authority of Rome and, at least implicitly, to challenge it: “or, better, [he forces] the reader to bring his or her own interpretive judgment to bear upon the issue.” Ultimately Ps.-Longinus leaves the reader with an ambiguous solution, but his “reactivating the Greek past (and the concomitant language of freedom and anti-barbarism)” may very well stand as “a challenge to Roman dominion” (2001: 71).

The same can be said—with more confidence, I suggest, given my analysis above—about Philo’s *De vita Mosis* and Fourth Maccabees. Each presents past figures worth imitating, but a past that engenders a challenge to Roman dominance. Philo’s hope that by imitating Moses he and his fellow Jews will inherit the whole world stands in stark opposition to Rome’s pride in

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106 Whitmarsh is specifically interested in Ps.-Longinus’s imitation of earlier written texts in his own writing: “The text to be imitated is a ‘father-text’ imbued with generative potency.” In other words, texts of the past are imbued with authority by authors (and their cultures) of the present, but “mimēsis does not construct a simple, self-evidently genetic relationship with the past” (2001: 59). Ps.-Longinus (for example) subjects himself to the authority of the “father-text” which then provides a set of parameters through which he can construct his Greek identity in his contemporary setting. The earlier, authoritative text provides a means of “maintaining the vitality of the past in the present” (2001: 58; see Too 1998: 210). In the case of Philo and Fourth Maccabees, the figures of Moses and the Maccabean heroes function in the same way as these texts, but we may also appeal to Philo’s and the author of Fourth Maccabees’s use of other texts, such as Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Second Maccabees.
assuming it already had. Fourth Maccabees is clear that the Jewish way of life is the
exemplification of “devout reason”; but it is also clear that the best demonstrations of “devout
reason” are the lives of those who resisted the tyranny of foreign rulers. Recalling again that
imitation, as a pedagogical tool, was an expression of a student’s commitment to a particular
teacher and to that teacher’s way of life, each and every act of imitation discussed in this section
had socio-political implications: choosing to imitate Socrates, or Epicurus, or Pythagoras, or
Epictetus—while common ground might surely be found between different schools—was also a
choice not to imitate someone else. Imitating Christ entails the preservation of a particular way
of life becoming of those who are loyal to God and Christ along with the abstention from
widespread practices of Roman culture, including its popular devotion to the emperor and the
institutions of Roman power. The point here is to recognize that discipleship in the first
century—understood apart from our later theological and spiritual interpretations of it—was
potentially (if not inevitably) a political occupation, one that formed the disciple’s identity not
only in relation to his or her teacher, but in relation to society as well.

Imitation: Summary

The foregoing discussion has been important for showcasing some formative and
practical aspects involved in ancient discipleship. Considering that First Peter specifically calls
its audiences to imitate Christ by following in his footsteps, this discussion will prove its worth
for my larger argument as I move forward to examine First Peter’s own vision for discipleship.
Here it is enough to summarize the two aspects of imitation that I have highlighted in this
section. First, imitating one’s teacher (and others) had a formative effect, especially in that it
shaped students and disciples to be more like their teachers. Second, this act of imitation
extended beyond moral formation and had the potential to shape disciples in socio-political ways. A third form of imitation might have been included in this analysis, but I have decided to devote a separate discussion to its significance: by emulating their teachers, students became embodiments of their teachers’ doctrines and ways of life and therefore stood capable of representing them before others.

Obligation 3: Representation

The previous discussion of imitation ended on the specific topic of a disciple’s socio-political formation. The students of a teacher often had a keen awareness of what wider society thought of their teacher (and, consequently, of them), and found themselves in the position of representing their teachers, their doctrines, and their ways of life—and under obligation to do so faithfully. Disciples, therefore, found themselves to be extensions of the teachers from whom they learned. This was a two-way street, insofar as teachers were also held responsible for the actions of their students, and both sides of this relationship are relevant to the present discussion.107 What they have in common, however, is most important: there is a mutual responsibility between teachers and disciples to represent one another to outsiders—and an expectation that they will do so with fidelity. I will treat this obligation of representation under two headings. First, I will focus primarily on the student’s responsibility to represent his or her

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107 David Daube, in a discussion of this theme in the Gospels, writes, “A [teacher] may be performing his office to his disciples by offering himself in their stead to those outside that find fault with them; and his disciples may be doing their duty by him in facing the reproaches levelled against him by those outside” (1972–73: 1). Daube’s essay uses the word “master” instead of “teacher”; this is an unnecessary mixing of metaphors, and one that should be avoided. This was recognized by Dio Chrysostom, who makes a distinction between the ways in which it was “permissible” for teachers (παιδοτρίβης, διδάσκαλος, γραμματιστής) and enslavers (δεσπότης) to discipline their “pupils” (μαθηταί). If they are treated too harshly, the subject resembles an οἰκέται rather than a μαθητής (1 Serv. lib. [Or. 15] 19; I owe thanks to my colleague, Jonathan Hatter, for drawing my attention to this passage). For a larger discussion on the critical and constructive use of language surrounding enslavement, see “Writing About ‘Slavery’? This Might Help,” https://naacpculpeper.org/resources/writing-about-slavery-this-might-help/.
teacher, since First Peter’s exhortation, I am arguing, is to be disciples, not teachers. Second, I will examine the importance of carrying on the legacy of one’s teacher once that teacher had died.

**Representation 1: “I am this man’s student…. Listen to me!”**

While my focus here is on a student’s obligation to represent his or her teacher, it will be helpful to begin with examples of the symbiotic nature of representation. There are many tales of philosophers’ expulsion from Greece and Rome. Athenaeus, for instance, reports that a certain Sophocles “proposed a decree that expelled all philosophers from Attica” and that “the Romans, who do everything right, expelled the sophists from their city on the ground that they were corrupting the young men.” Such “corruption” could take several forms, but suspicion against philosophers was often due to the (supposed) evidence of the students that they produced. In a tirade against the Academy, Athanaeus accuses Plato of being an ill-suited teacher based on the tyrannical and licentious careers of his students: “Many of his students turned out to be tyrants and slanderers,… representatives of the Academy … living in an unholy and disgraceful fashion; because they got money through fraud, by acting impiously and unnaturally, and are now prominent people.” “This,” Athanaeus concludes, “is how [they] benefited from the lovely Republic and the lawless Laws.”

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109 *Dieph.* 11.508F–509B: οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ τυραννικοὶ τινες καὶ διάβολοι γενόμενοι…. τοιοῦτοι δ´ εἰσι καὶ νῦν τῶν Ἀκαδημαϊκῶν τινες, ἀνοσίως καὶ ἀδόξως βιοῦντες· χρημάτων γὰρ ἐξ ἀσεβείας καὶ παρὰ φύσιν κυριεύσαντες διὰ γοητείαν νῦν εἰσίν περιβλεπτοὶ…. ταῦτ´ ὀφεληθεὶς ἐκ τῆς καλῆς Πολιτείας καὶ τῶν παρανόμων Νόμων.
Xenophon was keenly aware of the same suspicions that surrounded Socrates and specifically defends his teacher against the reputation of his infamous students. He counters the same accusation—that Socrates “corrupted the young men” (see *Mem. 1.1.2, 1.2.1*)—first by lauding Socrates’s own character and teacher (1.2.3), but then by confronting at length the specific criticism that “having become associates of Socrates Critias and Alcibiades did a great deal of harm to the state.” Xenophon makes specific arguments in each case, cataloging the ways in which Critias’s and Alcibiades’s characters and motives were ultimately at odds with those of Socrates. More importantly, Xenophon demonstrates that so long as Critias and Alcibiades adhered to what they had learned from Socrates, they remained good students and citizens—even capable rulers. Xenophon characterizes this as adherence to Socrates’s teaching, but also in terms of an association: “So long as they were with Socrates, they found in him an ally who gave them strength to conquer their base passions.” It was “when they parted” from Socrates (ἐκείνου δ’ ἀπαλλαγέντε), Xenophon asserts, that Critias’s and Alcibiades’s vices grew “overbearing.”

My interest in this example of Critias and Alcibiades (in relation to Socrates) is not in what it says about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the charge against Socrates, but in the expectation it reveals concerning the relationship between students and teachers. Socrates is held

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110 *Mem. 1.2.12:* Σωκράτει ὁμιλητὰ γενομένω Κριτίας τε καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης πλείστα κακά τὴν πόλιν ἐποιησάτην.

111 *Mem. 1.2.24:* ἕως μὲν Σωκράτει συνήστην, ἐδυνάσθην ἐκείνῳ χρωμένῳ συμμάχῳ τῶν μὴ καλῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν κρατεῖν.

112 *Mem. 1.2.25:* καὶ ὑγκομένῳ μὲν ἐπί γένει, ἐπηρμένῳ δ’ ἐπὶ πλούτῳ, περισσημένῳ δ’ ἐπὶ δυνάμει, διατεθυμμένῳ δὲ ὑπὸ πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐπὶ δὲ πάσι τούτοις διεφθαρμένῳ καὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἀπὸ Σωκράτους γεγονότει τί θαυμαστὸν εἰ υπερηφάνιον ἐγενέσθην.
as responsible (mistakenly, in Xenophon’s opinion) for the actions of Critias and Alcibiades. The inverse, however, is also true: Critias and Alcibiades, in their capacity as students of Socrates, were held up as representatives of their teacher by the citizens of Athens; what they did reflected, for better or for worse, on Socrates.¹¹³ Thus in another case, when Anaxagoras (fifth century BCE) was on trial (the charges differ according to the one relaying the account), Pericles stood in his defense. According to Diogenes Laertius (possibly relying on Hermippus of Smyrna), Pericles presented his own career as evidence for Anaxagoras’s own piety:

Pericles came forward and asked the people whether they had anything to reproach him with in his own life. And when they replied that they had not, he said, “Well, I am this man’s student (“καὶ μὴν ἐγώ,” ἔφη, “τούτου μαθητής εἰμι”).” Do not be carried away by slanders and put him to death, but listen to me and release him.”¹¹⁴

Pericles’s successful career and virtuous life is evidence enough. He speaks with an expectation that the court will understand his own life to be a faithful representation of Anaxagoras’s. It works: Anaxagoras is released based on the career and virtue of his disciple, understood in his capacity as a faithful representative of his teacher.

Iamblichus’s De vita pythagorica leans heavily into the importance of understanding disciples as extensions of their teachers. Whitney Shiner observes a “homogenization” of the disciples of Pythagoras across Iamblichus’s writing through the construction of one-dimensional

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¹¹³ Xenophon’s defense of Socrates against this (misleading) evidence concludes: “Other cases, at least, are not so judged. For what piper or citharist or any other teacher, after making his pupils proficient, is blamed if they leave him for another teacher and then become less proficient? What father, whose son bears a good character so long as he is with one teacher but goes wrong after he has attached himself to another, throws the blame on the earlier teacher?” (Mem. 1.2.27: οὐ μὴν τά γε ἄλλα οὕτω κρίνεται. 27τίς μὲν γὰρ ἀυλητής, τίς δὲ κιθαριστής, τίς δὲ ἄλλος διδάσκαλος ἰκανοῦς ποιήσας τοὺς μαθητὰς, ἐὰν πρὸς ἄλλους ἔλθοντες χείρος φανότωσι, αἰτίαν ἐχει τούτου; τίς δὲ πατήρ, ἐὰν ὁ παῖς αὐτοῦ συνδιατρίβων τῷ σωφρόνῃ, ὥστερον δὲ ἄλλῳ τῷ συγγενόμενῳ πονηρὸς γένηται, τὸν πρόσθεν αἰτιᾶται). The principle, in other words, is that students should faithfully represent their teachers.

¹¹⁴ Vit. phil. 2.13: Περικλῆς δὲ παρελθὼν εἶπεν εἴ τι ἔχουσιν ἐγκαλεῖν αὐτός κατὰ τὸν βίον· οὐδὲν δὲ εἰπόντων, “καὶ μὴν ἐγώ,” ἔφη, “τούτου μαθητῆς εἰμι· μὴ οὖν διαβολαίς ἐπαρθέντες ἀποκτείνητε τὸν ἀνθρώπον, ἄλλ᾽ ἐμοὶ πεισθέντες ἀφεῖ.”
portrayals of anonymous Pythagoreans, an emphasis on the uniformity of their practices, and the suppression of any individuality among particular Pythagoreans (1995: 87–88). As a result, Shiner writes, “the reader [of Iamblichus] is led to attribute the characteristics of individual Pythagoreans to Pythagoras as well” (1995: 88). Moreover, readers adopting similar practices come to understand themselves and their behaviors in a similar manner—as extensions of Pythagoras or of their own Pythagorean teacher. Pythagoras’s miraculous abilities were “shared” (μεταλαβόντας) by his disciples who “themselves accomplished similar things” (καὶ αὐτοὺς τοιαῦτα τινὰ ἔπιτετελεκένται, De vit. pyth. 28.135). Iamblichus includes this note as a part of a recitation of Pythagoras’s own miracles, “introduced as examples of his [Pythagoras’s] holiness.” Shiner concludes that the disciples’ “miraculous abilities thus serve as further evidence of his [Pythagoras’s] own” (1995: 89).

There are also several occasions in which Iamblichus crafts or links two distinct stories in order to show a correspondence between teacher and student. In a lengthy chapter on “civic affairs” (τὰς πολιτείας πραχθέντων, 27.122–35), Iamblichus states that things were accomplished by Pythagoras’s followers, but actually begins with an example of Pythagoras’s own act of advising others (“the Crotoniates”). Thus, every civic accomplishment of the anonymous Pythagoreans that follow are extensions of the good work begun by Pythagoras. This becomes clear when Iamblichus concludes: “In general, if someone were to relate all dealings the Pythagoreans had with one another, he would exceed in length the size and balance of this treatise.”115 But as Iamblichus goes on to discuss the political acumen of certain Pythagoreans,

115 Vit. pyth. 27.128: ὅλως δὲ πάσας εἰ τις λέγοι τὰς γεγενημένας ὁμιλίας τοῖς Πυθαγορείοις πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ὑπεραίροι ἂν τῷ μήκει τὸν ὄγκον καὶ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ συγγράμματος.
he deftly returns to assert that Pythagoras, singularly, “was the inventor of political education in general,” and the remainder of the chapter (27.130–33) focuses on the political acumen of Pythagoras himself. “All these things,” Iamblichus summarizes, including the successful exploits of his followers, “let us take as examples of the good influence in public affairs which he [Pythagoras] contributed to human beings.” Framed as they are by the specific accomplishments of Pythagoras their teacher, the deeds of anonymous Pythagoreans are to be understood as extensions of Pythagoras’s influence. Disciples were expected to represent their teachers by embodying their teachings and carrying on their work.

These examples have focused on the ways students stood as representatives of their teachers’ conduct or lifestyle. This is entirely relevant to a study of discipleship in First Peter, focused as it is on its audiences’ own “conduct” (ἀναστροφή). Complementary to this, however, was the expectation that students would faithfully represent the “doctrines” that their teachers taught. So, for example, needing to defend himself against the charges that he is a “maker of gods” (ποιητὴν θεῶν) and does not “believe in the old ones” (τοὺς ἀρχαίους οὐ νομίζοντα; Euthyphroph. 3B, trans. Fowler LCL), Plato’s Socrates engages Euthyphro in a discussion to define “piety” and “impiety” (ὁσιὸν and ἀνόσιον): who better to learn from, Socrates reasons, than someone who has expertise in such matters? This can then be his defense against his accusers:

Then the best thing for me, my admirable Euthyphro, is to become your pupil (κράτιστον ἐστι μαθητῇ σῷ γενέσθαι) and, before the suit with Meletus comes on, to challenge him and say that I always thought it very important before to know about divine matters and that now, since he says that I am doing wrong by acting carelessly and making innovations in matters of religion, I have become your pupil (μαθητὴς δὴ γέγονα σός). And “Meletus,” I should say, “if you acknowledge that Euthyphro is wise in such matters? This can then be his defense against his accusers:

116 Vit. pyth. 27.130: ὅλως δὲ εὑρετὴν αὐτὸν γενέσθαι φασὶ καὶ τῆς πολιτικῆς ὅλης παιδείας

117 Vit. pyth. 27.133: ταῦτα δὴ πάντα … δείγματα ποιησόμεθα τῆς εἰς τὰ πολιτικὰ ἀγαθὰ ὑφελείας αὐτοῦ, ἣν συνεβάλλετο τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.
matters, then believe that I also hold correct opinions, and do not bring me to trial; and if you do not acknowledge that, then bring a suit against him, my teacher (ἐκείνῳ τῷ διδάσκάλῳ), rather than against me, and charge him with corrupting the old, namely his father and me, which he does by teaching me (ἐμὲ διδάσκοντι) and by correcting and punishing his father.” (5A–B)

Socrates expects Meletus to take his association with Euthyphro (however temporary) into account and to regard Socrates’s understanding of “piety” and “impiety” to be a faithful representation of Euthyphro’s expert teaching on the subject. While the dialogue ends pessimistically—they do not, in fact, reach a definition of “piety” or “impiety”—Socrates still reiterates this expectation. Lamenting Euthyphro’s departure, Socrates says, “You go away and leave me cast down from the high hope I had that I should learn from you what is holy and what is not, and should get rid of Meletus’s indictment by showing him that I have been made wise by Euthyphro about divine matters” (15C–16A). As a diligent student of Euthyphro, Socrates thinks of himself as having the potential to represent Euthyphro’s teaching faithfully, and that fulfilling this potential would count for something in the eyes of others.

Diogenes Laertius insists, at several points, that there are certain successors (or schools of successors) who properly represent the doctrines of their teachers. Above I referred to the example of “Dionysius the Turncoat,” a follower-then-deserter of Zeno. This Dionysius receives little attention relative to Diogenes’s extended discussion of Zeno (De vit. phil. 7.1–160).

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118 Ἀρ’ οὖν μοι, ὃ θαυμάσιε Εὐθύφρων, κράτιστὸν ἔστι μαθητὴ σῷ γενέσθαι, καὶ πρὸ τῆς γραφῆς τῆς πρὸς Ἔραμον αὐτὰ ταῦτα προκαλεισθαι αὐτῶν, λέγοντα ὅτι ἔγωγε καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐμπροσθεν χρόνῳ τὰ θεία περὶ πολλοῦ ἐποιούμην εἰδέναι, καὶ νῦν ἐπειδῆ με ἐκείνος αὐτοσχεδίαζοντα φησι καὶ καινοτομοῦντα περὶ τῶν θείων ἔξαμαρτάνειν, μαθητής δὲ γέγονα σῶς—“καὶ εἰ μέν, ὃ Μέλητε,” φαίην ἄν, “Εὐθύφρωνα ὁμολογεῖς σοφὸν εἶναι τὰ τοιαῦτα, ὅρθος νομίζει καὶ ἐμὲ ἤγου καὶ μὴ δικάζοιν’ εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἐκεῖνο τῷ διδάσκάλῳ λάχε δίκην πρότερον ἢ ἐμοί, ὡς τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους διαφθείροντι ἐμὲ τέ καὶ τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα, ἐμὲ μὲν διδάσκοντι, ἐκεῖνον δὲ νοθετοῦντι τε καὶ κολάζοντι.” Euthyphro is on the way to bring charges against his own father for murder (see 3E–4E).

119 ἀπ’ ἐλπίδος με καταβαλόν μεγάλης ἀπέρχη ἢν εἶχον, ὡς παρὰ σοῦ μαθὸν τὰ τὰ ὅσα καὶ μὴ καὶ τῆς πρὸς Ἔραμον γραφῆς ἀπαλλάξομαι, ἐνδειξαμένος ἐκείνον ὅτι σοφὸς ἢδη παρ’ Εὐθύφρωνος τὰ θεία γέγονα.
Diogenes’s inclusion of Dionysius alongside Ariston “the Siren” (7.160–164) and Herillus of Chalcedon (7.165–166) is intended to demonstrate “the points on which certain Stoics differed from the rest”\(^\text{120}\) and that they cannot, therefore, be taken as faithful representatives of Zeno, even though they were his pupils (7.161, 166). “These three,” Diogenes concludes, held divergent views. But Zeno’s successor was Cleanthes.”\(^\text{121}\)

Thus, in many ways students were expected to represent their teachers faithfully. In the eyes of (often suspicious) outsiders, teachers could be undone by the conduct of their students; it was incumbent upon those students, therefore, to make sure that, in both word and deed, they were true to the teaching and formation they had received. This final example about Zeno’s proper “successor,” however, leads me to reflect on one further act of representation for which students were responsible: that of carrying on a teacher’s legacy after he or she had died.

**Representation 2: Legacy**

“When Crates died, Arcesilaus took over the school.”\(^\text{122}\) Diogenes’s catalogue of philosophers is full of such simple statements of succession, but they tell an ongoing story of a serious obligation that disciples owed to their teachers: carrying on the legacy of their teaching once that teacher had died. There were no substitute teachers or hiring committees tasked with this responsibility; it was the duty of a teacher’s students to live in the manner they had been taught, and to continue teaching (in word and deed) as their teacher had done before. We see this

\(^{120}\) *Vit. phil.* 7.160: ἢ δὲ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν διηνέχθησαν, ἔστι τάδε.

\(^{121}\) *Vit. phil.* 7.167: Καὶ οὗτοι μὲν οἱ διενεχθέντες, διεδέξατο δὲ τὸν Ζήνωνα Κλεάνθης.

\(^{122}\) *Vit. phil.* 4.32: Κράτητος δὲ ἐκλιπόντος κατέσχε τὴν σχολήν.
constantly throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, but a few examples will suffice to bring this chapter to a close.

In some cases, we are privileged with an account of teachers preparing their students for this impending task. Socrates, according to Xenophon, “took pains to make them [his students] independent in doing the work they were fitted for.” This particular account of Xenophon is focused on Socrates’s attention to his disciples’ “pursuit of independent skills,” but it also contains a warning to commit what they have learned to memory and to practice what he taught them, “lest they lose sight of the system of thought and action” (Robbins 2009: 172; see Mem. 4.7.1–10). Such a warning takes on a special significance when followed by Xenophon’s discussion of Socrates’s impending death (Mem. 4.8), perhaps signaling that such attention to the finer points of a teacher’s doctrine is all the more important for his or her students upon the occasion of the teacher’s death.

The general principle is stated eloquently in Ben Sira’s reflections on his task as a teacher of Wisdom:

I said, “I will water my garden
and drench my flower-beds.”
And lo, my canal became a river,
and my river a sea.
I will make instruction shine forth like the dawn,
and I will make it clear from far away.
I will again pour out teaching like prophecy,
and leave it to all future generations.
Observe that I have not labored for myself alone,
but for all who seek wisdom.124

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123 Mem. 4.7.1: ὅτι δὲ καὶ τοῦ αὐτάρκεις ἐν ταῖς προσηκούσαις πράξεσιν αὐτοὺς εἶναι ἐπεμελεῖτο, νῦν τοῦτο λέξω.

124 Sir 24:30–34: Κἀγὼ ὡς διῷρχη ἀπὸ ποταμῶν καὶ ὡς χθισαγωγὸς ἐξῆλθον εἰς παράδεισον· ἔπει Πατιό μου τὸν κήπον καὶ μεθύσω μου τὴν πρασιάν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγένετο μοι ὁ διῷρχης εἰς ποταμὸν, καὶ ὁ ποταμὸς μου ἐγένετο εἰς θάλασσαν. ἦτι παιδείαν ὡς ῥήθρον φωτιῶ καὶ ἐκφανῶ αὐτὰ ἐως εἰς μακρὰν· ἐτι διδασκαλίαν ὡς προφητείαν
These reflections appear in the context of Wisdom’s own “invitation to her disciples” (Skehan and Di Lella 1987: 335; see Sir 24:19–22), prefaced by self-description and delivered in the first-person. Ben Sira adopts the same mode of speech as Wisdom: just as Wisdom was well-planted and grew strong (Sir 24:3–17), so Ben Sira is well-positioned to offer the fruit of wisdom to his own disciples in the form of his teaching—encapsulated in this text. Here is Ben Sira, as a disciple of Wisdom, carrying on Wisdom’s work and implicitly inviting his own disciples to do the same. As discussed in both sections above, the teaching encapsulated here is to be obeyed; Ben Sira and the figure of Wisdom are to be imitated in “future generations.”

A similar point may be made with reference to the Diatribai or Dissertationes of Epictetus, handed down to us as they are, not by Epictetus himself but by his disciple Arrian. Arrian himself writes, “whatever I used to hear him say I wrote down, word for word, as best I could, as a record for later use of his thought and frank expression.”¹²⁵ A. A. Long remarks that this action on the part of Arrian would have “taken up a great deal of time and effort” and reveals a sense of “devotion” that a disciple could exhibit toward his teacher—a devotion that continued even after the teacher had died. Arrian was not alone, of course: “In the centuries after Plato and his contemporaries memorialized Socrates, there were many other students who wrote up their teachers’ work” (Long 2002: 41). These are acts of students carrying on and furthering the legacy of their teachers after they have died.

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¹²⁵ This is from the letter “to Lucilius Gellius” (Λουκίῳ Γελλίῳ) that prefaces the collection: ὡςα δὲ ἠκούον αὐτὸν ἔφυγον, ταῦτα αὐτὰ ἐπειράθην αὐτοῖς ὧνομαν ὡς οἴον τε ἦν γραφόμενον ὑπομνήματα εἰς ὑστερον ἐμαυτῷ διαφυλάξαι τῆς ἐκείνου διανοίας καὶ παρρησίας.
Finally, returning to a letter cited several times above, Seneca prescribes a similar devotion to the teaching of the philosophers from whom students have learned. Seneca does not envision this task as one of writing, but of acting and furthering what those philosophers have already done.

Everything they collected, everything they labored over, was for me! But let us do what a good head of household does: let us add to our endowment. May it be a larger inheritance when it passes from me to posterity. Much work remains to be done, and always will: nothing prevents those born a thousand generations hence from making their contribution.… Our predecessors achieved a great deal, but their work is still unfinished.₁²⁶

That this is applicable not only to predecessors of previous generations but to one’s immediate teachers is clear from Seneca’s next statement: “The same homage I render to my teachers, I owe also to the teachers of the human race, who are the source of so much good.”₁²⁷ Seneca would so revere ancient teachers (in such a magnitude and in such a manner) because that is how he reveres his own teachers: by carrying on the great work they began and bringing it, so far as he is able, to fruition.

First Peter, as a summons to discipleship, is certainly preoccupied with the reputation of Christ after his death. While First Peter also considers Christ’s resurrection from the dead as a basic point of its “good news” (see 1:3, 21; 3:21), it is still written from the perspective of Christ’s physical absence—its audiences of disciples do not have their flesh-and-blood teacher before them to continue instructing them in how to think and live. They, then, are responsible for

₁²⁶ Ep. 64.7–9: Mihi ista adquisita, mihi laborata sunt. Sed agamus bonum patrem familiae; faciamus ampliora, quae accepimus. Maior ista hereditas a me ad posteros transeat. Multum adhuc restat operis multumque restabit, nec ulli nato post mille saecula praeceditur occasio aliquid adhuc adiciendi… Multum egerunt, qui ante nos fuerunt, sed non peregerunt.

₁²⁷ Ep. 64.9: Quam venerationem praeeceptoribus meis debo, eandem illis praeeceptoribus generis humani, a quibus tanti boni initia fluxerunt.
carrying on Christ’s legacy as living representatives of what he has left behind. A reminder that they are Christ’s disciples is also a reminder that they are his legacy and the need to represent and even hand on that legacy to others—because Christ is not present to do so any longer.

**Conclusion**

As I stated at the outset of this study, one of my tasks here is to identify and describe the pedagogical context of the discipleship to which First Peter summons its audiences. This begins by identifying the kinds of discipleship with which the author and audiences of First Peter would already have been familiar. Common examples of discipleship in the world surrounding First Peter and the Christ-followers to whom it was addressed provided a matrix within which First Peter’s summons to discipleship would have been received and interpreted. I have not sought one specific analogue to following Christ, but a set of widespread motifs, images, and patterns that will provide the foundation for my interpretation of First Peter and its own vision of discipleship in the following chapters.

I began by discussing significant ideas about *paideia* in the ancient Mediterranean world, noting particularly that a person’s education played a foundational role in the formation of his or her identity—whether considered from a personal, moral, cultural, or political perspective. Of the utmost importance to the process of students’ educations were their teachers, superior as they were in both knowledge and experience. An education was widely understood truly to commence once students submitted to the wisdom of their teachers. These elements persisted into advanced forms of education, wherein we also observe widespread expectations of students’ obligations to their teachers. First, I discussed the importance of students’ obedience to their teachers; this was demonstrated through the prevalence of father-figure metaphors for teachers in the ancient world.
and through several instances of teachers persuading students of the latter’s need of them.

Second, I observed the importance of imitation as a formative factor in teacher-student relationships; imitation assisted students to become more like their teachers and to articulate their identity (socially and politically). Third, I noted that students’ representation of their teachers before outsiders was widely expected, and that this representation persisted after their teachers had died.

Along the way, I demonstrated how First Peter itself reflects these expectations about *paideia* and discipleship throughout its rhetoric. Together with the previous chapter’s discussion of loyalty and beneficence, I have laid a foundation for recognizing how First Peter’s audiences would have heard the letter’s exhortations as a summons to discipleship. One factor remains, however, in discerning First Peter’s vision of discipleship: the influence of Jesus of Nazareth’s teaching on the matter. It is to the potential influence of this teaching, and to a proposal for understanding that influence, that I turn in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER THREE

“YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES IF …”:

GRAMMARS AND PARADIGMS OF DISCIPLESHIP

“Truly, truly, I say to you, When you were young, you dressed yourself went where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and others will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” He said this to signify by which kind of death Peter would glorify God. And after saying this, Jesus said to Peter, “Follow me!” Turning, Peter saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following (who had also reclined upon his chest at dinner and said, “Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?”). When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, but what about him?” Jesus said to him, “If I wish him to remain until I come, what concern is it to you? As for you, follow me!”

—John 21:18–22

In the epilogue to the Gospel of John, a technical language of “following” in discipleship is used to describe the supposed future fates of Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Though both “follow” Jesus, one will stretch out his hands and die; the other may “remain” until Jesus returns. Both, according to John, are acceptable forms of “following” Jesus; both are plausible paths of what we typically call “discipleship.” As I mentioned in the Introduction to this project, Richard Longenecker writes that modern practices of Christian discipleship should be better informed by “a firmer rootage in the biblical materials” (1996a: 1), but upon closer examination those materials evince several distinctive patterns of discipleship, ranging from remaining in place and awaiting instructions to marching forward toward martyrdom—and much in between.

1 ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ὅτε ἦς νεώτερος, ἐζώννυες σεαυτὸν καὶ περιεπάτεις ὅπου ἠθελες· ὅταν δὲ γηράσῃς, ἐκτενεῖς τὰς χεῖράς σου, καὶ ἄλλος σε ζώσει καὶ οἴσει ὅπου οὐ θέλεις; τοῦτο δὲ εἶπον σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ δοξάσει τὸν θεόν. καὶ τούτο εἰπὼν λέγει αὐτῷ, Ακολούθει μοι. Ἐπιστραφεῖς ὁ Πέτρος βλέπει τὸν μαθητὴν ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀκολουθοῦντα, ὃς καὶ ἀνέπεσεν ἐν τῷ δείπνῳ ἐπὶ τὸ στῆθος αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν, Κύριε, τίς ἔστιν ὁ παραδίδωσις; τοῦτον οὖν ἰδὼν ὁ Πέτρος λέγει τῷ Ἰησοῦ, Κύριε, οὗτος δὲ τί; λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἐως ἐρχομαι, τί πρὸς σέ; σὺ μοι ἀκολούθει.
We might be accustomed to approach “following Jesus” as a distinctive form of discipleship in the ancient Mediterranean world, but two things must be kept in mind, both of which will occupy the space of the present chapter. First, “following Jesus” did not develop in a vacuum; however distinctive it might have been, it was still conditioned by the social and cultural environments in which it emerged. Second, the gospel tradition itself, as demonstrated by this passage from the Gospel of John quoted above, presupposes and promotes a diversity of appropriate ways one might behave as a disciple of Jesus. Because First Peter itself promotes “following Christ,” it is incumbent upon us not only to ask how the teachings of Jesus on discipleship have been influenced by (or how they have combined with) wider Mediterranean practices, but also what First Peter understands to be a (or the) appropriate way to follow Jesus.

The previous two chapters have laid a foundation for reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship. In Chapter Two, specifically, I explored the world of ancient Mediterranean discipleships and demonstrated that amid a diversity of practices and experiences, there appeared to be some common “standards” to which disciples were held by their teachers (and wider society): they were typically obedient to their teachers, they imitated their teachers, and they sought to represent their teachers (and their “schools”) faithfully before others. I also observed that these obligations permeated the exhortations of First Peter: Anatolian Christ-followers are encouraged to be obedient, to imitate God and Christ, and to represent Christ amid a suspicious and hostile society. I concluded that First Peter’s emphasis on such behaviors and dispositions, given the prevalent patterns of Mediterranean discipleships, would invite the Christ-followers addressed by First Peter to hear its exhortations and testimony as a summons to discipleship.

At the same time, First Peter’s rhetoric of discipleship is not limited to these acts and
dispositions of discipleship; instead, it expands upon and beyond them to focus on its audiences’ present experiences of suffering. As First Peter exhorts its audiences as disciples, it presents suffering as something that they, as disciples, should expect to face—and even invites them to embrace suffering, whether present or potential. While the topic of suffering appears as a pedagogical motif and tool throughout the ancient world (as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four), First Peter’s “well-developed registry for the experience of suffering” (Green 2007: 225) cannot be explained by recourse to this milieu alone. Scholars are quick to suggest that the shape of primo-Petrine discipleship, including its emphasis on suffering, is due to its indebtedness to early Christian tradition and, specifically, gospel traditions on the matter. However, given the multifaceted nature discipleship in the gospel tradition—and continued debate on the relationship of First Peter to that gospel tradition—it is necessary to understand first how the gospel tradition functions in preserving Jesus’s teaching on the matter and how First Peter might then relate to it.

This chapter, therefore, functions as a proposal for understanding the influence of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship on First Peter’s summons to discipleship. Here I will explore Jesus’s teaching on discipleship, as far as we may be able to reconstruct it. More specifically, I will examine how the contours of Jesus’s ministry, his teachings about discipleship, and his relationship with his disciples have been remembered by the gospel tradition, and suggest that these remembrances commemorate a “grammar of discipleship” that is then embodied and adapted by the canonical Gospels’ presentations of discipleship (what I will call “paradigms”).

This will then enable me to propose that First Peter, too, represents a distinctive remembrance or

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2 I am adapting the language of a “grammar of discipleship” from Matthew Novenson’s work in ancient Jewish messianism (2017), which I will describe presently.
commemoration of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship.

This chapter will proceed in two parts. In the first, I will propose the concept of a “grammar of discipleship” through the combination of two recent methodological innovations within biblical studies: (1) Matthew Novenson’s study of ancient Jewish messianism and (2) the application of social memory studies to the gospel traditions and historical Jesus research. In light of this work, the second part of this chapter will then identify a basic grammar of discipleship present throughout the gospel tradition as inscribed in the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I will argue that across these Gospels we find “discipleship” consisting of three principle facets: (1) reorientation around the will or “reign” of God; (2) resocialization into the family of God; and (3) a consequent preparation for the likelihood of suffering. I will conclude this chapter with a demonstration of how the Gospels of John and Mark have employed the grammar to depict discipleship as relevant for their respective audiences. This will prepare the way to explore First Peter’s indebtedness to the same grammar of discipleship, especially as it relates to the letter’s emphasis—if not insistence—on suffering.

**Proposing a Grammar of Discipleship**

As noted above, by introducing the language of a “grammar of discipleship,” I am consciously adapting the language of Matthew Novenson’s *The Grammar of Messianism* (2017). Since the topic of my study is quite different in both its scope and sources, I will summarize Novenson’s study and its relevance here. After noting the distinctives of my own approach to recognizing a

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3 My focus is intentionally limited to the canonical Gospels. These gospels, as I will argue below, are each concerned with presenting models or paradigms of discipleship (in addition to their presentation of the life of Jesus). Gnostic and other apocryphal Gospels may also represent important commemorations and adaptations of the “grammar” I am proposing, but the scope of this project limits my ability to engage beyond the canonical Gospels. See the Conclusion for a brief discussion of how questions of “Gnostic” texts might contribute to this proposal.
“grammar of discipleship,” I will be in a position to identify three key features of this grammar (reorientation, resocialization, and suffering) as they relate to the present investigation. I will then demonstrate these in more detail as I proceed through this chapter and the next.

The Idea of a Grammar

In response to a long-standing “history-of-ideas” (Ideengeschichte or Geistesgeschichte) approach to studying ancient messianism, Novenson proposes “an alternative model” of “the way that all ancient messiah texts, both Jewish and Christian, typically work” (2017: 2; on “the messianic idea,” see 3–11) and “a more satisfactory reading strategy for the pertinent literary texts” (21). In the interest of this model, Novenson cites ongoing appeals to and adaptations of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations (1953; on such appeals, adaptations, and appropriations, see Kerr 2005; Dalferth 2005) and his theory “that human language is best conceived not as a set of symbols corresponding to things in the world, but rather as a set of rules for participation in various kinds of discourse” (Novenson 2017: 12).

In this light, Novenson proposes and demonstrates that

what we call messianism is most basically a way of talking about the world, a set of linguistic resources—and, equally important, linguistic constraints—inherited from the Jewish scriptures…. If messianism is a language game, then what I am calling “the grammar of messianism” is the rules of the game: the way messiah language worked for the ancient authors who chose to use it, the discursive possibilities it opened up, as well as the discursive constraints it entailed. (2017: 14)

The basic “rule” Novenson articulates from the start necessitates that any text under discussion “uses the Hebrew word מְשִיחַ (transliterated ‘messiah,’ translated ‘anointed one,’) and its translation equivalencies” (29–30). 4 Novenson’s project is thus not one of definition but of

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4 Elsewhere Novenson summarizes this point: “Rather than take as my subject ‘the messianic idea’ (defined in advance by me) and then go looking for evidence of it in the sources, I take as my subject the actual discourse of
description, charting “fresh expeditions into the primary sources to trace the way the words run” (276). What emerges is an understanding of messianism as a “scripturally funded discourse” (262), a discourse by which contemporary “messianic figures” are portrayed through the adaptation of a particular reservoir of scriptural imagery (e.g., anointing, the figure of David).5

Here I am proposing that a discourse of discipleship throughout early Christianity functioned analogously to what Novenson describes as a “discourse of messianism.” When early Christians spoke of “discipleship” (in various forms and by various names), they did so by employing a familiar “grammar of discipleship.” This grammar emerges out of memories of Jesus’s teachings on discipleship, which provide the “discursive possibilities and constraints” for later articulations, adaptations, and reinterpretations of what it means to follow Jesus in discipleship. The grammar, in other words, provides the reservoir of terms, tones, and themes through which texts like the canonical Gospels (and First Peter) articulate their understanding of and vision for discipleship. As they inscribe memories of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship, these texts create “paradigms” of discipleship—programs, models, or curricula (to maintain the pedagogical imagery) of what “following Jesus” might look like for their respective audiences.

5 Novenson summarizes this at several points: “All ancient messiah texts, Jewish or Christian, are the product of the reinterpretation of scriptural oracles in the light of the experience of their respective authors…. Early Christian messiah texts yield the particular combination of features they do not because they are unique, but because they do, in their particular way, what all messiah texts do—namely, reinterpret scripture in the light of their own historical circumstances” (2017: 184–85). “All ancient messiah texts, Jewish as well as Christian, find themselves having to manage ideal biblical traditions on the one hand and empirical historical circumstances on the other. In this respect, messianism is just another instance of the vast ancient Jewish and Christian enterprise of biblical interpretation” (213). “There is no messianic idea in the old Idealist sense, but there is messiah Haggadah, a mass of legend spun from scriptural source material by ancient Jewish and Christian authors in their various historical contexts” (275; see Hengel 1995: 33).
These various paradigms bear a family resemblance to one another,6 indebted as they are to a common grammar and discourse of discipleship stemming from Jesus’s own teaching; yet they are also distinctive from one another through their strategic adaptations of that grammar and discourse to their own social and rhetorical circumstances.

Two methodological features distinguish my approach to a grammar from Novenson’s. First, as mentioned, Novenson develops his “grammar of messianism” with attention to the use or appearance of specific vocabulary: נביש, “messiah,” “anointed one.” Instead of focusing on the occurrence of a specific word, I will identify a cluster of concepts and practices present within the canonical Gospels as constitutive of the “grammar of discipleship.” While the occurrence of a specific word like μαθητής or ἀκολουθέω may plausibly prove relevant, I do not find the specific use of these words necessary for identifying “discipleship” as I am defining it here.7 Second, Novenson’s study of messianism is heavily rooted in scriptural texts and the dynamic interplay of how “messiah texts” were received and adapted to authors’ contemporary circumstances (see above, n. 4). I certainly agree with the latter part of this presupposition: the grammar of discipleship was also adaptable to emerging Christian groups’ evolving...

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6 The language of “family resemblances” (Familienähnlichkeiten) is a hallmark of Wittgenstein’s linguistic philosophy (1953: §65–67).

7 This specific and worthwhile interest in the “vocabulary” of discipleship is exemplified in the excellent study of Michael Wilkins (1995). Wilkins analyzes the use of the title μαθητής in the Gospel of Matthew in light of its wider literary and cultural environments. In addition to providing an important corrective to older assumptions of a “fixed” meaning of μαθητής (11–31, passim), Wilkins concludes that Matthew’s redactional use of the title reveals the Gospel’s “special interest in the disciples as a literary figure,” both for the sake of accentuating the Gospel’s Christology and to provide examples of discipleship for the Gospel’s audiences (171–72, 221–24). My interest, in contrast, is in First Peter, a text that uses neither the word μαθητής nor the most common verb for “following” in the gospel tradition (ἀκολουθέω), leading me to a conceptual approach to discipleship, rather than one based on the appearance and use of specific words. Paul Trebilco, in a chapter on the term μαθητής in early Christian writings, notes the importance of this conceptual approach, since discipleship is “expressed in a variety of different ways and with a range of language and a range of nuances” by other authors of the New Testament (2012: 229). Broader, conceptual approaches are also exemplified in the volumes edited by Segovia (1985a) and Longenecker (1996b). See the prefatory discussions concerning such approaches in Segovia 1985b: 2–3, 4–5; Longenecker 1996a: 5–6.
circumstances. But while I acknowledge that there are scriptural precedents for following Jesus in discipleship (e.g., Elisha following Elijah), I will show below that forms of early Christian discipleship are more directly indebted to the grammar of discipleship that they inherited from memories of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship. It may be said that these memories themselves function analogously to “scripture” in Novenson’s model of messianic discourse, but I am not here suggesting that any written text (such as the Gospel of Mark) was yet understood to possess a “canonical” status in the development of the discourse surrounding discipleship.8

The grammar of discipleship that I am proposing consists of a cluster of concepts found in the gospel traditions’ memories of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship. Some we have already encountered as widespread expectations for any form of discipleship in the ancient Mediterranean world—obedience, imitation, and representation; each of these is well illustrated across the gospel tradition. Additionally, I will demonstrate that following Jesus in discipleship, as remembered throughout the gospel tradition, emphasizes the dual necessity of the disciple’s reorientation and resocialization, as well as the likelihood that he or she will face some form of suffering as a result of both.9 In order to demonstrate the significance of each of these as

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8 More specifically, with regard to my larger project: while I will suggest that memories of Jesus held an authoritative status in the construction of a grammar of discipleship, my argument concerning First Peter’s implementation of this grammar will not assume that it depended on (or even knew) a specific written text. This is not to say that we cannot identify important similarities between First Peter and, e.g., the Gospel of Mark, especially regarding their understandings of discipleship. The point is to recognize that, in my opinion, it is difficult to posit a strict, direct literary relationship between the two—i.e., whether the author of First Peter had access to the (written) Gospel of Mark. I find it more responsible, therefore, to speak of First Peter and the Gospel of Mark as utilizing a common grammar of discipleship, even if I may conclude that they employ this grammar in similar manners. I will return to this question of First Peter’s relationship to the gospel tradition and the written Gospels in Chapter Four. For a discussion of First Peter’s place among early Christian texts and traditions, see Horrell 2002; 2013: 7–44.

9 Other aspects of “following Jesus in discipleship” might be mentioned. In particular, “itinerancy” is often cited as a “striking trait of discipleship in the Gospels” (Meier 2001: 54–55; Trebilco 2012: 218–20, 229–30; Theissen 1992: 33–93). This interest in itinerant discipleship, however, is often part of a larger question concerning Jesus’s “original” or “historical” message of discipleship. Thus Trebilco: “μαθηταί, as used by the historical Jesus, is quite a narrow and restricted concept, particularly associated with or defined by a costly break with family and
constitutive aspects of the grammar of discipleship, I first turn to explicate the nature of the
gospel tradition and its relevance for understanding the character of early Christian discipleship.

James Dunn helpfully articulates the "challenge" of mining the gospel tradition in search
of "Jesus’ call to discipleship": “Jesus himself left no manual of discipleship behind him,” and
the (canonical) Gospels—at least on the surface—“do not set out to provide manuals of
discipleship either” (1992: 3). Yet the gospel traditions do contain teachings about discipleship,
as well as several episodes depicting the actions of Jesus’s disciples. I suggest that we may
plausibly regard these traditions as witnesses to what I would call Jesus’s vision for discipleship.

Jesus’s “Vision” for Discipleship?

When I speak of Jesus’s vision for discipleship, I do not intend to imply that we have
unfiltered access to the mind or historical intent of Jesus of Nazareth. As I will discuss presently,
what we do have are various receptions of Jesus’s vision for discipleship, preserved in sayings
and narratives which are then adapted to the needs of the evangelists (and their communities)

livelihood and literal itinerancy” (2012: 219, emphasis mine). Trebilco, therefore, assumes Jesus to have made a
sharp distinction between his μαθηταί (“disciples” who literally followed him) and other “adherents” or
“supporters.” Dunn and Meier similarly discuss “circles of discipleship” (Dunn 2003: 539–41; Meier 2001: 19–21).
Given the nature of our evidence, I am not enthusiastic about drawing bold lines between different levels of
discipleship for three reasons in particular. First, I do not find the specific use of a word “by the historical Jesus” to
be accessible to us; consequently, I do not find it applicable for advancing my argument. Even if a “historical Jesus”
expected his disciples to join him “on the way,” the evidence left to us clearly does not envision this as an ongoing
requirement for subsequent generations of disciples—not least because Jesus is no longer physically present to lead
them anywhere. As I will show below, memories of Jesus’s call to leave families and livelihoods behind are left as
illustrations of discipleship, not blueprints. Second, and related, the canonical Gospels themselves indicate that the
title of “disciple,” however it may have been used by Jesus during his ministry, should not be limited to itinerants,
but extends to others as well. Trebilco acknowledge this, though he defines the evangelists’ activity as a
“modification” or “redefining” of Jesus’s original intention (2012: 232–42). Aside from the fact that such an
intention is inaccessible to us, but in keeping with the “constraining” function of a grammar, I understand the
evangelists’ adoption of this language to be in continuity with Jesus’s, as they received and understood it. Third, and
as already noted, it is the concept or conception of discipleship in which I am interested, not the (supposed,
reconstructed) technical use of the word μαθητής.
through their respective Gospels. Together these receptions echo, reflect, and commemorate Jesus’s teachings on discipleship and the nature of his relationship with his disciples; together they constitute the basic materials of a vision for discipleship that we may plausibly attribute to Jesus as the “catalyst” for that discipleship.\(^\text{10}\) In Dale Allison’s words,

\[\text{[T]he principle of the disciple being like the [teacher] (Matt 10:24–25; Luke 6:40; John 13:16; 15:20) must have been in effect, so that, just as the Synoptic missionary discourses report, to join in Jesus’s ministry was to repeat to some extent what he proclaimed. As Luke 10:16 has it, “Whoever listens to you listens to me.” Nothing else makes sense. What else were they to say? So then, if their message was his message, his speech must have entered their speech. (2010: 26)\] \(^\text{11}\)

Considering the traditions’ widespread concern for the disciples’ fidelity to their teacher, Allison suggests, we have reason to be confident that there is continuity between Jesus’s teaching and his disciples’ commemoration of that teaching.

Furthermore, by speaking of Jesus’s vision for discipleship, I am not arguing for the historicity or “authenticity” of any particular sayings or narratives about discipleship, as though the traditions were relating the \textit{verba Christi} or \textit{acta Christi}. What I am suggesting, instead, is that Jesus’s vision for discipleship—however it was spoken about and enacted—provides the foundation for later acts of discipleship and the grammar for traditions about discipleship, as well as for the evangelists’ portrayals of discipleship. As to the traditions’ “historicity,” I am rather in agreement with Allison’s assessment of the situation, which is to say that such history “will always fall woefully short of demonstration” (2010: 22).\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{10}\) I adapt the language of Jesus as a “catalyst” from Leander Keck: “The perception of Jesus that he catalyzed is part of who Jesus was” (2000: 20; quoted in Dunn 2003: 131).

\(^\text{11}\) The original quote from Allison uses the word “master” instead of “teacher.” See my discussion on the need to avoid mixing these metaphors in Chapter Two (p. 170 n. 107).

\(^\text{12}\) Allison continues, “We see him as in a mirror darkly. The attempt to espy more, which is the quest of the historical Jesus, can deliver only this or that scholar’s reconstruction, which is always an inadequate cipher,
**Remembering Jesus’s Vision for Discipleship**

Jesus research has benefited from a recent shift toward newer approaches informed by the study of human memory, both individual and collective. “Memory” now stands as a prominent “historical-hermeneutical perspective for the Jesus tradition” (Schröter 2015: 278). From this perspective, in Dunn’s words, the Gospels and the traditions they inscribe provide evidence of “what Jesus was remembered as doing or saying” and of “the impact of what he said and did” upon those who followed him (2003: 130; see Keith and Hurtado 2011: 284–87). According to Dunn, this is simply “the nature of the evidence”:

> For narratives about Jesus never began with Jesus; at best they began with eyewitnesses. From the first we are confronted not so much with Jesus but with how he was perceived. And the same is actually true of the sayings tradition: at best what we have are the teachings of Jesus as they impacted on the individuals who stored them in their memories and began the process of oral transmission. (2003: 131)

The precise nature of the “process of transmission” and of the role played by “eyewitnesses” is tangential to my immediate purpose, which is to suggest this: Jesus is remembered in and by the gospel tradition as, among other things, a charismatic teacher concerned with the formation of those who followed him; the “impact” of Jesus, in other words, included an impression (or a series of impressions) of his vision for discipleship.

I am proposing that Jesus’s vision for discipleship forms a prominent element of the gospel tradition supported by what Allison calls “recurrent attestation” (2010: 20). In his words, constructed by inference, out of indirect knowledge. Usually, the best we can do, in my judgment, is to set our general impressions within the framework of the facts that we can reasonably establish” (2010: 22).

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13 German original: “der Erinnerungsbegriff in geschichtshermeneutischer Perspektive für die Jesusüberlieferung.” Schröter clarifies that “in the English-speaking world” this is “known under the heading of the memory approach” (“im englischsprachigen Bereich unter dem Stichwort memory approach bekannt”). For a summary of “Memory as a Historiographical-Hermeneutical Paradigm of Research on Jesus,” see Schröter 2022; for Schröter’s own application of the approach, see Schröter 1996; 1997.
The first-century traditions about Jesus are not an amorphous mess. On the contrary, certain themes, motifs, and rhetorical strategies recur again and again throughout the primary sources; and it must be in those themes and motifs and rhetorical strategies—which, taken together, leave some distinct impression—if it is anywhere, that we will find memory. (2010: 15)

Allison, as noted above, is not suggesting that the recurrence of a particular saying or action of Jesus is evidence of its historicity. “What matters is the larger pattern…. What matters is replication” (2010: 18–19). As he writes elsewhere, “What matters is not whether we can establish the authenticity of any of the relevant traditions or what the criteria of authenticity say about them, but rather the pattern that they, in concert, create” (2009: 63). Given the predominance of such patterns, I suggest, we can assume that they reflect the contours of Jesus’s ministry as it impressed itself upon those affected by it.

This is to say that as they received his words, witnessed his actions, and participated in his mission, Jesus’s followers “would presumably, at some point, have gained a decent grasp of what he was about” (Allison 2010: 25). Among the recurrent “themes, motifs, and rhetorical strategies” of Jesus’s ministry, I contend, are teachings and examples that embody a cohesive grammar of discipleship—a grammar that undergirds each evangelist’s presentation or paradigm of discipleship, as well as the summons to discipleship found in First Peter.

I suggest, therefore, that we approach the traditions preserved in the Gospels as salient (albeit modified and adapted) illustrations of Jesus’s vision for discipleship. This can be demonstrated easily with reference to the three obligations of disciples explored in Chapter Two (obedience, imitation, and representation) to show how Jesus’s own vision for discipleship did not emerge out of a vacuum but participated in the larger and widespread patterns of discipleship common to his and his followers’ sociocultural settings. In terms of a “grammar,” we may say that Jesus and the evangelists spoke of discipleship in terms that their audiences could recognize.
and understand. With this in mind, I will be able to move beyond these grammatical 
“fundamentals” to explore the expansive (yet similarly recurrent) motifs of reorientation, 
resocialization, and suffering throughout Jesus’s teaching on discipleship. Before doing so, I will 
make two further points in support of my approach.

First, and to return to the observations of Dunn above, we have reason to be confident 
about the preservation of Jesus’s vision for discipleship within and among our received 
traditions, since it is largely on the basis of such teachings that early Christian communities 
formed and grew. Scholars of collective memory (whether “social” or “cultural”) have 
demonstrated how “constitutive events of origin”—such as Jesus’s call to discipleship—“possess 
an exemplary, monetary character” upon both the collective memory of those events and the 
community or communities who strive to remember those events (Kirk 2005: 17). Alan Kirk 
explains that “social memory has an indelible ethical coloring; its image of archetypal persons 
and events embody a group’s moral order”; therefore, it is “by virtue of its normativity that the 
past makes programmatic, urgent moral claims upon a community” (18; here appealing to the 
work of Jan Assmann). In the words of Barry Schwartz, “Collective memory … shapes reality by 
providing people with a program in terms of which their present lines of conduct can be 
formulated and enacted” (2000: 18).

The Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus’s command to “make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε) 
by, at least in part, teaching others to abide by what he has commanded them (28:19–20). While 
this particular passage is certainly colored by Matthean interests (if not a Matthean creation out 
of whole cloth), it does speak to a broader concern to preserve and hand on Jesus’s teaching to 
new “disciples” in line with the conclusions of social memory theory: “Remembering together
common *commemoranda* … serves to incorporate new members through communication of a group’s constitutive memories and socialization into the corollary norms” (Kirk 2005: 7). This is what Maurice Halbwachs refers to as social memory’s “pedagogical character.” Kirk explains: “It is through inculcation of its distinctive norms that a community incorporates its members and forms, or as the case may be, transforms their identities” (2005: 18–19). I approach the gospel traditions in search of a grammar of discipleship, therefore, with confidence. As Dunn writes,

> [T]he events and sayings of Jesus’s ministry which called them to discipleship, which shaped the character of their discipleship, or which provided the model for their discipleship will have been among the Jesus traditions which the first disciples were most eager to preserve and pass on. What had called them to discipleship they would hope would work in the same way with others. What had been the greatest stimulus and challenge to their discipleship they would want to keep for their own continuing use and benefit, as well as for others’. (1992: 4)

These “stimuli and challenges” for disciples of Jesus, as we will see, were in keeping with broader trends in ancient practices of discipleship but were also distinctive enough to create a “grammar” with its own characteristic cadence and lilt.

Second, the coalescence of the gospel tradition into its eventual written forms also leads me to approach it as preserving and presenting paradigms of discipleship based on the grammar I am describing. Assuming the canonical Gospels to stand in the tradition of Greco-Roman *bioi* (even if they might better be said to occupy a “subgenre” of the larger type), we may readily appreciate the intent of this generic form to present its subject as a model for imitation (i.e., in this case, discipleship).\(^{14}\) Such purpose is widely reflected in biographical literature throughout

\(^{14}\) I assume that the choice (on the part of an author) and the identification or recognition (on the part of an audience) of a particular genre makes a difference to the acts of communication, reception, and interpretation. “Genres … are not arbitrary or accidental; material cannot simply be transposed from one genre to another without loss of meaning. In the careful selection of a particular genre, authors choose specific ways to organize their thoughts, to create connections and patterns of causality between events, and actively to shape the worlds they present” (Bond 2020: 4).
antiquity. Lucian (second century CE) states that his account of Demonax is intended, in part, to provide a model for nascent philosophers to copy (Demonax 1–2). Isocrates (fifth and fourth centuries BCE) expresses the same intent to Nicocles: “We exhort others to the study of philosophy by praising others in order that they, emulating those who are eulogized, may desire to adopt the same pursuits.” Helen Bond summarizes this tendency:

Within the biographical tradition, there was always a strong sense of learning through observing the lives of others. Biographies, in a sense, were exempla writ large.... Naturally enough, most biographies of philosophers were written by their followers, with the clear intention of setting out the life and teaching of their leader and encouraging others to follow his example. (2020: 47, 49)

As “a very specific reception of the Jesus tradition” (2020: 5), the Gospels present the ongoing relevance of Jesus’s vision for discipleship and its applicability in the formation of new disciples. In addition to the generic form itself, each Gospel also describes the activity and teaching of Jesus himself as paradigmatic for discipleship, though each does so with its own particular nuance. This will be explored briefly below (since the imitation of one’s teacher is a standard expectation of ancient students), but here, in light of the foregoing discussion, it should be stated that it is not the disciples themselves (as narrative characters) who necessarily provide models to be imitated. In regard to Mark’s Gospel, Larry Hurtado concludes that “Jesus is both the basis for and the pattern of discipleship,” and even that “Jesus is the only adequate model of discipleship” (1996: 25). Episodes from the Gospels that feature the disciples’ misunderstandings and that treat them “critically” can therefore be understood, to borrow Bond’s words, “as a Christian paideia”

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16 Bond’s study is of Mark’s Gospel, but at least this particular insight seems, in my opinion, to be applicable to all four canonical Gospels.
Identifying a Grammar of Discipleship

Given the assumptions of the foregoing discussion, I now propose to approach the canonical Gospels as preserving traces of and reflections on Jesus’s vision for discipleship. Together, these traces and reflections utilize a grammar of discipleship; each evangelist’s variation on and presentation of that grammar for his own setting and in the form of his own written Gospel then constitutes a “paradigm” of discipleship—a model of or vision for discipleship that both coheres with and adapts Jesus’s teachings about discipleship in the face of new and evolving circumstances. As mentioned briefly above, I am not concerned with the “historical accuracy” of any given saying or episode, as though that were something we could determine with any accuracy or confidence; rather, I understand these sayings and episodes to be illustrations of discipleship—models, archetypes, and demonstrations of the grammar. To communicate the nature of discipleship, in other words, was to illustrate it by means of stories, scenarios, and statements of obligation and expectation. Some stories and sayings may indeed have been recalled from (collective) memory, while others may have been created in fidelity to the inherited grammar; in each case, however, it was not the (historical, verifiable) detail that mattered, but the impression of discipleship’s commitment and cost.

Excursus: Jesus the Disciple-Gathering Teacher

A brief account of Jesus as a teacher surrounded by disciples will prove worthwhile.

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17 For the ways in which the audiences’ attention would be drawn to focus on Jesus through the disciples, see Shiner 1995: 28–31; Bond 2020: 190–209. There are, of course, other ways to envision Mark’s (and the other evangelists’) use of the disciples (political, polemical, etc.); see, e.g., Black 2012; Luz 1971.
Several scholars take Jesus’s effort to garner a following of disciples for granted. For example, E. P. Sanders includes Jesus’s gathering of disciples (including “the Twelve”) among the “key facts” of his career (1985: 326), and Dunn calls it “one of the securest historical facts” of Jesus’s ministry (2003: 555 n. 57). John Meier, on the other hand, puts forward several arguments to promote the historicity of Jesus’s gathering of disciples, beginning with his sociocultural context.

It is almost inconceivable that a 1st-century Palestinian Jew could have functioned for any length of time as a prophet-and-teacher combined without having some disciples who heard and absorbed his prophecies and/or teaching. All this simply states the obvious: prophesying and teaching are exercises in social communication. A prophet or teacher who had absolutely no receptive audience would have a slim chance of even being remembered as a prophet or teacher by subsequent history—to say nothing of having a significant impact on that history. (2001: 46–47)\(^\text{18}\)

The most “receptive audience” would be those whom Jesus called to follow him and, consequently, to whom he entrusted himself. “Having disciples simply jibes with Jesus’s job description in 1st-century Jewish Palestine” (47).

At its core, in Dunn’s words, “the relationship between Jesus and his disciples was remembered as one between teacher and taught” (2003: 177). The outset of Jesus’s public ministry is presented as that of an impressive and powerful teacher (Matt 4:23–25; Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:14–28; John 2:1–22). Teaching is a habitual practice of Jesus; the appearance of crowds often becomes an explicit occasion for Jesus to teach.\(^\text{19}\) “Teacher” is the most common

\(^{18}\) I note here that the approaches of Sanders and Meier toward the Jesus traditions is often concerned more with the “historicity” of those traditions than I am, and that their conclusions are based not on the “memory approach” described above but upon the “criteria approach” popular throughout the second half of the twentieth century (perhaps exemplified by Meier; see 1991: 167–95). Nonetheless, with regard to the historical reality of Jesus’s career as a “disciple-gathering teacher,” I find these particular insights helpful to highlight here.

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title applied to Jesus by others across the Gospels; Jesus is called διδάσκαλος and ῥαββί (or ῥαββουνί) both by those outside his inner circle and by his closest associates.20

As a testament to the other side of the “teacher-taught” relationship, Jesus is constantly remembered as surrounded by “disciples.” This terminology, so common throughout the canonical Gospels, represents the followers of Jesus as, in Dunn’s words, “a learning community”: “As disciples (mathētēs), they were learners (from manthanō, ‘to learn’), with Jesus as their teacher” (2003: 556; see Wilkins 1995; Trebilco 2012: 208–46).21 The disciples throughout the Gospels often receive private instruction from Jesus with special insight unavailable to others (e.g., Mark 4:33–34; 8:31; and parr.); they question Jesus about his actions and parables, but also about the teachings of other teachers (e.g., Mark 9:11–13 par.; John 9:1–2) and about their own role as participants in his ministry (e.g., Mark 9:28). John’s Gospel portrays the disciples engaging Jesus in dialogue for the sake of understanding his teaching (e.g., 14:5, 8; 16:17–18, 29–30). In these and other ways, we may easily observe that Jesus engaged regularly with a group of students who learned from a charismatic and authoritative teacher.

20 For “outsiders,” we find these titles on the lips of the Jerusalem authorities (Mark 12:14, 19, 32; and parr.); the individual(s) asking about eternal life and would-be followers of Jesus (Mark 10:17 par.; Luke 10:25; Matt 8:19); Pharisees (Matt 9:11; 12:38; Luke 19:39; John 3:2; 8:4); those who seek healing (Mark 5:35 9:17; and parr.); and other bystanders (Matt 18:24; Luke 11:45). For “insiders,” we find the disciples most of all (Matt. 26:25, 49; Mark 4:38; 9:5; 10:35; 11:21; 13:1; 14:45; Luke 7:40; 21:7; John 1:38, 49; 4:31; 9:2; 11:8); but others as well (Mark 10:51; John 6:25; 11:28; 20:16). We may also note that the impression Jesus left upon later, non-Christian writers was as a teacher (Josephus, Ant. 18.63; Lucian, Peregr. 13).

21 Most often throughout the Gospels, “disciples” refers to those whom Jesus “called” and “appointed” to particular purposes (Mark 3:13–20 par.) and who would eventually appear as leaders in the nascent Jesus movement (Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5). At times it also refers to a wider circle of those who “followed” Jesus and sought to adhere to his teaching to one degree or another. On the “concentric circles” of discipleship surrounding Jesus, see my discussion of Trebilco’s study above (p. 189 n. 7) and those cited there. On the historicity and significance of “the Twelve,” see Meier 2001: 125–97; Carter 2011; Allison 2010: 21, 67–70; Meye 1968: 192–209.
Speaking the Same Language: Obedience, Imitation, and Representation

We can observe several ways in which Jesus’s vision for discipleship coheres with the practices of and expectations for ancient forms of discipleship explored in the previous chapter. In addition to any distinctive elements of Jesus’s call to discipleship, becoming a follower of Jesus brought with it the same obligations that would be expected of any other disciple throughout the ancient Mediterranean world: to be obedient to one’s teacher, to imitate his or her lifestyle, and to represent him or her faithfully before others. That said, their obedience, imitation, and representation took on distinctive aspects insofar as they were practiced in relation to Jesus—since the character of one’s discipleship was dependent to some extent on the teacher to whom one was devoted. For example, disciples of Jesus were not obedient simply for the sake of being obedient: their obedience was characterized by the one to whom they were obedient. Each obligation is remembered as part and parcel of following Jesus across the gospel tradition and can be documented briefly.

New disciples began following Jesus through an act of obedience, and would-be disciples reject Jesus’s call by failing to be obedient. Jesus’s summons is often direct and expects an immediate response; a person’s willingness to enter into a relationship of discipleship is signaled by his or her positive response to that summons. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Levi (or Matthew), Philip, and another unnamed disciple in John’s Gospel are examples of this positive response (Mark 1:16–20; 2:13–14; and parr.; John 1:35–43). More illuminating are the instances when would-be disciples refuse to follow Jesus, often because they are unable to answer his command with obedience. A man who has “many possessions” is grieved by Jesus’s requirement to sell all
that he owns and give to the poor; he departs unable to become Jesus’s disciple (Mark 10:22). Jesus’s blunt response to those who would not forsake familial duties and relationships to follow him immediately illustrates the obedience expected of his disciples (Matt 8:18–22; Luke 9:57–62). Matthew’s Gospel, especially, emphasizes the importance of obedience to Jesus (e.g., Matt 7:24–27) and, as already noted, makes obedience to Jesus’s teaching a key aspect to “making disciples” (28:19–20). A parable preserved in the Gospel of Luke compares Jesus’s disciples to enslaved persons whose modus operandi is obedience (Luke 17:7–10). The relationship between Jesus and his disciples (“friends”) in John’s Gospel is constituted by their commitment to do what Jesus commands (John 14:15, 21; 15:10, 14).

More broadly speaking, Jesus encourages his disciples (and others who would seek the kingdom of God) to become like children (Mark 10:13–15; and parr.). In Dunn’s words, “To become a disciple … is to become like a child, that is, to revert to a position of dependence” (2003: 551). While only God is ultimately to be understood as their “Father” (Matt 6:9; 23:9), this disposition of dependence is precisely what we observed in the previous chapter as a clear sign of a student’s ability to obey his or her teacher. The Gospels portray this obedience rightly owed to God as naturally transferrable to Jesus by those whom he calls to follow him.

22 Note the contrast with Jesus’s disciples that follows: “Peter began to say to him [Jesus], ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you’” (Ἡρῴδατο λέγειν ὁ Πέτρος αὐτῷ· ἰδοὺ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήκαμέν σοι, Mark 10:28).

23 On the “offensiveness” of Jesus’s demand in these passages, see Hengel 1968: 3–15 and the summary of Dunn: “Jesus saw the response of [these potential disciples] as an attempt to diminish the importance of the call to discipleship, as an excuse to lessen the urgency of its claim upon [them]” (1992: 15). For an analysis of Matt 8:18–22 in light of the Matthean emphasis on obedience, see Barton 1994: 140–55.

The Gospels also remember Jesus as a teacher worthy of his students’ imitation and emulation. As an example related to the foregoing discussion, Jesus is constantly remembered as “obedient” toward God. As a “son” with whom God is “well pleased” (Mark 1:11 par.), the Gospels position their audiences to recognize Jesus as an embodiment of the obedience to which they, too, are called. In David Garland’s words, Jesus “alone embodies the true model of what discipleship entails, and following him means following his example and obeying all his commands” (2015: 440; see Hurtado 1996: 25–27). In John’s Gospel, Jesus explicitly sets before his disciples an example that they are to follow. Not only are they to obey his commandments; they are to imitate him in service to one another: “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). As the discourses that follow make clear, their imitation of their teacher is to extend beyond foot-washing to greater acts of service and love toward others, as well as to the experience of suffering (e.g., 13:34, 36; 14:12; 15:8–10, 12–13).

Broadening the scope once again, “it requires no stretch of the imagination to deduce that Jesus himself intended his preaching to provide the structure of the discipleship to which he made summons” (Dunn 2003: 557) and that, like any worthy teacher, Jesus embodied those teachings himself. The disciples whom Jesus “appointed” (Mark 3:13) were to engage in mission work by the same means and with the same authority as their teacher. Jesus’s exhortations to

25 “One thing that the idea of this special relationship would certainly have conveyed in the first century AD was the necessity for a son to be obedient to his father; and since Jesus is well-pleasing to God, we know that he is in fact obedient to him” Hooker 1997: 16). The image of Jesus as an obedient son (that his followers may then imitate) is also a hallmark of the Gospel of John (5:19, 36; 8:28, 45; 10:32, 37–38; 12:49–50).

26 ὑπόδειγμα γὰρ ἔδοκα ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιήτε.

27 On this interpretation of the Johannine footwashing, see Culpepper 1991; Skinner 2017.
pray (Matt 5:44 par.; Luke 18:1) are accompanied by Jesus’s own preoccupation with prayer, especially in the Gospel of Luke (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1). Perhaps the most programmatic exhortation to discipleship in the Gospels (Mark 8:34–38 parr.; see also Luke 13:25–33) warns—or reminds—followers of Jesus that their own fate is to be understood in the light of their teacher’s and that they, too, could expect to suffer: “Disciples could not assume that the path of discipleship would be other than that trodden by Jesus himself” (Dunn 2003: 562). I will return to this theme of suffering below. For now, as Dunn summarizes,

Learning, missioning, serving, praying, and suffering hardly provide a complete description of discipleship and could hardly be regarded as a blueprint for all (though Jesus presumably expected all to both learn and pray). But they were evidently characteristics of the discipleship to which Jesus called, not least as following in his own footsteps. (2003: 562)

Again, the imitation of Jesus (like obedience to Jesus) took on its own distinctive features (not least in the potential to suffer); here it is simply “enough,” as it were, “for the disciple to be like the teacher” (Matt 10:21)\(^28\)—to see that discipleship of Jesus brought with it an expectation that disciples would seek to imitate and emulate their teacher.

Finally, following Jesus in discipleship also appears to have carried the obligation to represent Jesus to others. This is remembered quite simply at several points throughout the tradition as disciples provide interlocutors from whom others may ask questions about their teacher. Jesus’s disciples can, presumably, provide explanations for things like Jesus’s tax-paying practice (Matt 17:24–25) and his policy of table fellowship (Mark 2:15–17 parr.), illustrating their fulfillment of this obligation. Deeds done and words spoken in Jesus’s “name” (Matt 18:20; 19:29; Mark 9:37, 38–41 par.; see also 1 Pet 4:14) are to be understood as

\(^{28}\) ἀρκετὸν τῷ μαθητῇ ἵνα γίνηται ὡς ὁ διδάσκαλος ἁυτοῦ.
representations of Jesus’s deeds and words. In their capacity as missionaries, disciples represent their teacher by their presence and speech (Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16; see also John 13:20). Such representations will not always be favorably received, but such is the consequence of representing such a teacher: “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you” (John 5:18). Disciples will be held accountable for the teachings and legacy of Jesus and expected to remain loyal to him in the face of suspicion and suffering (Matt 10:32–33; Luke 12:8–12). Once again, following Jesus in discipleship carries with it the common expectation of representing him as one’s teacher and carrying on his legacy.

There are, therefore, plenty of indications that following Jesus in discipleship conformed easily to ancient practices of discipleship throughout the ancient Mediterranean world we observed throughout the previous chapter. Jesus’s vision for discipleship, therefore, draws upon this wider grammar of discipleship active throughout the ancient world, as do the evangelists’ adaptations of that vision. We have already seen in Chapter Two how First Peter contains exhortations to obedience, imitation, and representation, and there I suggested that these exhortations would be easily understood in the wider Mediterranean milieu of discipleship. While it might be tempting, in light of the discussion so far, to conclude that First Peter’s exhortations to the same attitudes and behaviors are enough to connect it with Jesus’s vision for discipleship, it is also clear that those practices are simply too widespread to offer any conclusive proof that First Peter’s vision for discipleship derives from Jesus’s. Instead, it must be left to the

29 Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν.

30 This legacy is also carried forward in epistolary salutations wherein apostolic authors appeal to their offices as deriving their authority from Christ: Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; Jud 1. Paul’s description of himself and his communities as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20) might also reflect or echo this specific sense of obligation.
more distinguishing elements of following Jesus to determine whether First Peter speaks in a manner similar to Jesus (as remembered in and by the Gospels). It is to three particular and related features of Jesus’s vision for discipleship that I now turn—namely, to the aspects of reorientation around the will or reign of God, resocialization into the family of God, and the likelihood of suffering.

Expanding the Grammar: Reorientation, Resocialization, and Suffering

There are various ways we might approach the distinctive features of Jesus’s vision for discipleship; my argument (especially as it relates to First Peter) does not necessitate a detailed exploration of them all.31 A helpful way forward, however, is to continue locating the practices of following Jesus among other forms of discipleship throughout the ancient Mediterranean and asking how it looked distinctive or different from those other forms. Following Jesus could not be called “unique” or even “distinctive” for its insistence on a change in lifestyle, the acceptance of specific teachings or doctrines, or even its assertion that disciples would do well to reassociate with one another.32 It will be in the specifics of following Jesus (and Jesus’s teachings on the matter) that we may find its distinctive features. As several teachers called disciples to reorient their lives, so did Jesus; his call was to do so around his proclamation of God’s will under the language of the kingdom or reign of God. As several teachers called disciples to reassociate themselves into a new community around their teacher, so did Jesus; this community went by many different names, but prominent among them was the understanding that they constituted a new family in and of God. The consequences of this reorientation and this resocialization, as

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31 For overviews of potential distinctives, see Meier 2001: 40–124; Dunn 2003: 543–611.

32 Epictetus, for instance, reflects on the changes to lifestyle and association that accompany philosophical “conversion” (Diatr. 4.2); see Crook 2004: 100–107, 124–28, 186–92, 234–43.
depicted throughout the gospel tradition, included the possibility of suffering. Each of these facets, I contend, constitutes an essential feature of the “grammar of discipleship” that is commemorated through the gospel tradition and inscribed paradigmatically in the canonical Gospels and First Peter. I will treat each one in turn.

**Reorientation around the Will of God**

Of particular interest here is Jesus’s proclamation of the kingdom of God as a reorienting influence in the lives of those who followed him and the consequences of that reorientation. Plenty has been written on Jesus’s proclamation of the kingdom; it is only necessary, therefore, to summarize the central point of its import and to emphasize its significance for discipleship.

“The kingdom of God,” in Klyne Snodgrass’s words, “is the central feature of Jesus’s gospel.” Whatever else Jesus taught, “its foundation and driving force” was the idea of God’s kingdom (Snodgrass 2005: 40). Scholars have regularly demonstrated that the import of such “kingdom-language” should not be limited to a geographic or spatial idea, but connotes “God’s dynamic rule” or “God’s activity in the world” (Chilton 1994: 265; 1996: 10). The “kingdom of God” refers not to a specific territory, but functions as a “tensive symbol” that evokes “a whole complex of ideas, even of emotions, relating to the deeply rooted belief that God is king.” Jesus’s proclamation of “God’s rule,” therefore, provides “a context of meaning which can comfortably embrace the fulfilment of God’s sovereign purpose” (France 1984: 37–38).34

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33 For a list of similar views, see Allison 2010: 168–67 n. 597.

34 Cf. Dale Allison, however, who has argued that “‘kingship’ or ‘royal rule of God’ is probably not the exclusive or perhaps even chief meaning of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in the Jesus tradition.” This is to say that we should not aim to exclude the geographic or spatial connotation of the term “kingdom” from our interpretation of Jesus’s proclamation. Allison, I think rightly, points out, “as often as not the expression seems instead to be shorthand for the state of affairs that will come to pass when the divine kingship becomes fully effective over the world and its peoples. In such instances, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ denotes not God’s rule but rather the result or goal of that rule. Or perhaps it denotes both ‘rule’ and ‘realm’ at the same time, for the two meanings are very hard to disentangle. An
Jesus’s message of the kingdom was an announcement that God’s dynamic power—God’s “kingly rule”—was being made manifest in his own words and actions (Matt 12:28 || Luke 11:20; Luke 17:21), and that it demanded a response. To follow Jesus was to live in the light of the reality that God was drawing near, and that God was now accomplishing his will “on earth, as in heaven.”

For those who answered Jesus’s call to discipleship, following him demanded “a radical break with everyday life” (Perkins 1990: 27). Even for those who did not accompany Jesus in his itinerant ministry, his message necessitated a reorientation. Jesus encouraged

an attitude, an orientation of life, a worldview or mind-set rooted in their innermost being, a base-rock conviction; and not an attitude or conviction which could be cherished inwardly or privately without making any discernable difference to the rest of life, but an attitude which informed and infused everything else, every other attitude and action, a fundamental conviction that motivated and gave character to the whole range of daily living and relationships. (Dunn 1992: 29–30)

Jesus called his followers “to make God’s will central in motivation and action” (30).

We cannot assume that such a reorientation was either easy for the disciples or for others affected by it. As Pheme Perkins points out, “Someone like Jesus who breaks the established patterns of life would have a very difficult time persuading others that he is right to do so” (1990: 29); any act of following in Jesus’s footsteps would necessitate a similar act of breaking one’s own “established patterns.” We see this most clearly in the repeated teachings and stories about family ties throughout the Gospels. “In a culture emphatic about familial respect, Jesus taught his disciples that following him took precedence over the approval of even civility of one’s family” (Keener 2009: 204).
Passages already cited demonstrate this clearly. New disciples leave their occupations (Mark 1:18; 2:14; and parr.) and families (Mark 1:20 par.) to follow Jesus. Peter affirms, “We have left everything and followed you” (Mark 10:28), and Jesus’s response confirms that “everything” stands to include “house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields” (10:29). Jesus’s more programmatic teachings on a disciple’s need to “love” him more than family (Mat 10:37)—or even to “hate” them (Luke 14:26)!—hyperbolic as they may be, would provoke strong reactions among his contemporaries. His refusal to allow potential disciples to bury a father or say goodbye to their parents, in Martin Hengel’s words,

\[\text{ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν πάντα καὶ ἠκολουθήκαμέν σοι.}\]

_derivates its unique sharpness from the fact that it could be understood not only as an attack on the respect for parents which is demanded in the fourth commandment but also because at the same time it disregards something which was at the heart of Jewish piety: works of love. (1968: 8)\]

There is a demonstrable tradition of “deprioritizing” family and kin for the sake of a “higher loyalty” to philosophy and to God in Greek, Roman, and Jewish contexts (Osiek 1996: 7; see Barton 1994: 23–56). Such traditions, however, need not prevent us from recognizing the cost of such a reorientation.

In addition to the paradigmatic stories and programmatic teachings about disciples’ relationship with their families, there is also the example of Jesus himself. As the model

\[\text{Matthew 10:37}\]

\[\text{Luke 14:26}\]

\[\text{John 1:35–37}\]

\[\text{Carolyn Osiek refers to Jesus’s response to Peter as an “encouragement” to renunciation (Osiek 1996: 6).}\]
presented for imitation, Jesus demonstrates apathy toward or even a rejection of his own family members (e.g., Mark 3:31–35; Luke 11:27–28). As his mother and brothers attempt to bring him home, Jesus, in Carolyn Osiek’s words, responds with “a rejection of the demands of blood ties: ‘Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother.’ This is enough to drive the family away, for in the Synoptics they never appear again” (1996: 3). Reflecting on the larger scope of Jesus’s teaching on the matter, Osiek concludes: “To be a disciple includes imitation of this pattern of Jesus to separate from family” (6).

While several disciples—“the Twelve,” in particular—literally followed Jesus from place to place, it is likely that most others did not; many would remain with their families and lived out a form of discipleship closer to home. In either case, the radically reorienting power of Jesus’s proclamation could be manifest. As Gerhard Lohfink summarizes,

> [O]nly relatively few of those in Israel who accepted Jesus’ message left their home and joined Jesus’ nomadic life of wandering through Palestine. The majority remained with their families. But the families of those who remained at home were transformed…. They no longer revolved merely around themselves. They offered hospitality to Jesus and his messengers. They entered relationships with one another. (1984: 44)

Whether or not a disciple of Jesus left home, the summons of Jesus was such that the disciple’s life was reoriented to some degree. Disciples could find everyday ways to concretize the hyperbolic exhortations to love Jesus more than family members and leave everything behind even as they remained at home and maintained their possessions.  

**Resocialization into the Family of God**

This reorientation was not aimless or directionless; it resocialized Jesus’s disciples into a new fellowship with less regard for strict “blood relations” than with accomplishing “the will of
God.” This is exemplified in Jesus’s teaching about his family: “Whoever does the will of God—this one is my brother and my sister and my mother” (Mark 3:35).⁳⁸ Lohfink explains:

The ones who do the will of God are those who believe Jesus’ message of the nearby reign of God and let themselves be gathered into God’s eschatological people.… The reign of God breaks its own trail with force (Matt. 11:12). Jesus casts his message like fire on the earth and seeks to set everything ablaze (Luke 12:49). The message of the reign of God causes division and discord in Israel (Luke 12:52–53)…. There are people everywhere who commit themselves to the reign of God and are forced to accept conflict with their own family, with their own clan, as part of the package. They form, in the midst of Israel and in the midst of the old families and clans, the new family of Jesus. (1984: 43–44)

Barton writes that teachings like these “legitimate a change in self-understanding” from natural to fictive kinship and create “the potential for a new, family-like community of God’s people” (1994: 82).⁴⁰ This resocialization on the part of individuals (those who “convert” apart from the rest of their family) is likely to result in specific forms of division and discord (Luke 12:52–53), but Jesus also teaches that his disciples—members of his new “family”—could expect to suffer in other ways as well. I will return to this below.

The gospel tradition is not itself replete with explicit illustrations of this resocialization; the New Testament’s epistolary literature stands to illustrate this best, as I will demonstrate with First Peter in the next chapter.⁴⁰ Still, the gospel tradition does envision the conduct that emerges in the life of Jesus’s followers to develop in association with their fellow disciples. Jesus’s assurance that his disciples will receive back what they have left behind to follow Jesus “a

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⁳⁸ ὃς ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτος ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.

⁴⁰ Craig Keener specifically notes that while philosophers almost universally promoted “loyalty to philosophy,” there were few instances in which “teachers demanded such loyalty to themselves” (2009: 204).

⁴⁰ In Leonhard Goppelt’s words, “it was not the Jesus tradition of the Gospels that reported about the realization of the new conduct, but the New Testament references to the Christian community” (1981: 119).
hundredfold” not only in the age to come but also “in this age” (ἐκατονταπολασίονα νῦν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ, Mark 10:30; see Luke 18:30) implies that this resocialization was understood to be taking place in the here-and-now. This understanding is further supported by Mark’s inclusion of “persecutions” (διωγμοί) among what disciples will receive “in this age,” since this is what they are presently experiencing (see below). The beginning of Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” portrays the community gathered around Jesus as a distinctive community that “salts” and “enlightens” the world (5:13–16). John’s Gospel envisions this as well, prioritizing the disciples’ love for “one another” that identifies them and distinguishes them from others (13:34–35).

Similarly, the Synoptic tradition states that the fellowship among Jesus’s followers is to be utterly distinct from that of “the gentiles”: “it is not so among you” (Mark 10:42–45 parr.). In Leonhard Goppelt’s words, “Among disciples, among those who had been embraced by the reign of God, standards of measure fundamentally different from those of the sphere of political sovereignty were to be operative” (1981: 110).

The Consequence of Suffering

As Jesus’s call to follow him fell upon attentive ears, families and communities were divided; the distinctive community or “family” that formed around Jesus drew suspicion and hostility. The gospel traditions preserve several teachings on suffering and hardship. Perhaps most programmatic is Jesus’s teaching on saving and losing one’s own life, preserved in various forms. Jesus declares, quite paradoxically, that his followers must resolve to surrender themselves, in some form or another, to Jesus and his message. The natural, human inclination to self-preservation is thereby relativized in the process of the disciple’s reorientation and

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resocialization, so that the general impulse to protect oneself from danger and hostility is to be understood in the light of his or her new-found commitment to Jesus. Meier puts this quite well: discipleship, in this context, “means a surrender of one’s old life, with all its ties, securities, and expectations, if one is to find or preserve the new form of life made possible by the coming of God’s kingdom” (2001: 63; see Schweizer 1960: 15–18). New disciples could imagine—and in several instances might not have had to imagine, but experienced—instances in which their resocialization had propelled them into situations wherein their natural desire to preserve themselves from hardship, harm, or humiliation would be in conflict with their radical commitment to Jesus that often gave rise to such forms of suffering (e.g., Matt 10:32–33 || Luke 12:8–9; Matt 10:17–20; Mark 13:9–13 parr.).

Closely related to the general saying about the tension between saving and losing one’s life are memories of Jesus’s teaching that preserve a specific pair of images: self-denial and cross-bearing. The command to deny oneself is somewhat open-ended, but perhaps intentionally so. It is applicable to a wide variety of scenarios, from desires to preserve kinship ties or sources of one’s livelihood to decision to lose one’s life. Together with the grotesque image of crucifixion, however, it stood as a poignant metaphor of what was at stake in following Jesus. As Meier puts it,

No more horrific and disgusting symbol of having to bid farewell to one’s whole life (including one’s property and means of support), to one’s whole past (with all of one’s

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42 This is not to suggest that such a commitment automatically brought with it a disregard for human life or the assumption that the new disciple’s life was worth any less than it was before—though sayings like this have been misused to promote such teachings. The gospel tradition also preserves other teachings about the value of human life in the eyes of God (e.g., Matt 6:26, 30, 32 || Luke 12:24, 28, 30; Matt 10:31 || Luke 12:2). The presence within the corpus of gospel traditions of specific teachings both on the value of human life and on the requirement of self-denial should prevent us from emphasizing the latter to the exclusion of the former.

family ties), and to one’s whole future (with all its plans and projects), could be imagined by a 1st-century Palestinian Jew, who was all too familiar with this type of execution…

No symbol could be more shocking than this. (2001: 64)

Meier refers to self-denial and cross-bearing as “means to discipleship,” paraphrasing Jesus’s exhortation thus: “If anyone wishes to follow me [i.e., become my disciple], let him first say no to his whole life and [metaphorically] lug his cross to his shameful public execution, and [thus, by going through this death to his whole former life] let him follow me [as my disciple]” (2001: 65).44 Telling disciples to take up a cross of their own would be a powerful metaphor in and of itself, as we may infer from its use by other teachers in antiquity (e.g., Plutarch, Sera 9; see Hengel 1977: 64–83); given the widespread commemorations of Jesus’s own crucifixion and death, such a saying would provide a particularly poignant perspective on later disciples’ experiences of hardship and suffering.

The list could go on. I have already noted several ways in which disciples’ resocialization affected ties to their own families. Allison lists eighteen traditions contained in the canonical Gospels (and the Gospel of Thomas), some specific and some general, that illustrate these and other complications that would arise from following Jesus. He infers “from this collection of materials that Jesus made uncommonly difficult demands on at least some people. Whatever he might have taught about compassion,… he insisted on self-sacrifice” (2009: 62–63). Alan Culpepper writes that the “personal commitment to Jesus, which involved the acceptance of suffering” is itself quite distinct in other teacher-student relationships known to us from antiquity (1975: 225).45 Such an “acceptance” may indeed seem bold (or even irresponsible) to us today.

44 The phrases in brackets are Meier’s.

45 Culpepper specifically writes that Jesus’s “absolute demand … for commitment” is nowhere “raised to a comparable level,” making it “unique” (1975: 225). While there are parallels for such exclusivity and for the
In the light of Jesus’s and his disciples’ settings amid suspicious and hostile onlookers, however, it may assist us to remember that their suffering was in many cases a “given”: these were individuals and groups who already suffered as a result of their commitment to follow Jesus. Exhortations to expect and to endure suffering may therefore be understood as commemorations of how the earliest followers experienced their reorientation and resocialization to be manifested: not as timeless truths to be obeyed without question or qualification two-thousand years later, but as illustrations of how followers of Jesus wrestled with their circumstances and employed the grammar of discipleship to better understand and cope with their present suffering. This form of reflection (on Jesus’s experiences, on Jesus’s teaching that followers would likely face similar experiences, and on their present circumstances) produced illustrations with which they could resonate and that assisted them in articulating their own present experiences.

Below, with one final section of this chapter, I will turn briefly to examine one example of this dynamic implementation of the grammar of discipleship (the Gospel of Mark). Before doing so, however, it may be worth pausing to summarize the points I have made so far.

Summary

My goal with the foregoing discussions has been to survey the gospel traditions inscribed in the canonical Gospels in search of a “grammar of discipleship.” I have found that following Jesus in discipleship demanded what would be expected of almost any student throughout the ancient Mediterranean world—obedience, imitation, and representation. These elements of discipleship, however, do not seem to have been defining characteristics of following Jesus. possibility of suffering as a consequence (see, e.g., Musonius Rufus, Frag. 16), its pervasive presence in the teaching of Jesus is worthy of note.
Following Jesus obediently, imitating him, and representing him were aspects of the larger scope of Jesus’s vision for discipleship, which consisted of (1) the reorientation of the disciples’ way of life in the light of the announced arrival of God’s kingdom, (2) the resocialization of those disciples into a new “family of God,” committed to God’s will, and (3) an openness to the possibility of suffering as a consequence of this reorientation and resocialization.

Jesus’s vision for discipleship is widely commemorated in sayings and stories across the gospel tradition as an invitation to a life-changing commitment that radically reoriented and resocialized disciples in relation to their surroundings, both personal and public (if such lines could be clearly drawn); this commitment was to Jesus and to God’s kingdom, to God’s will being done “on earth, as in heaven.” Even as these disciples sought to live by doing “the will of God” and learned from a teacher described as “compassionate” toward them and toward others, following Jesus also set them on a path along which they might—and often did—experience suffering. In order to understand this feature of the grammar of discipleship, it will be helpful to conclude this chapter with an examination of one evangelist’s careful deployment of suffering across his Gospel. In this way, we will be able to see how the grammar of discipleship may be employed to present a paradigm of discipleship.

Employing the Grammar of Discipleship

As I suggested above, in commemorating and adapting the grammar of discipleship, each evangelist presents Jesus’s vision for discipleship as applicable for his own respective audience(s), thereby creating a paradigm of discipleship that emerges from the dynamic interaction between the preexisting grammar and the community or communities’ evolving lives of faith—very often in light of their present circumstances. As a simple example of this, I return
to the Johannine “paths of discipleship” with which I began this chapter. Why might the Gospel of John end by portraying two ostensibly different ways of following Jesus—a martyr’s death and a living witness’s steadfast endurance? In the light of my proposal, I suggest that both embody the larger, versatile “grammar of discipleship”—which the Johannine evangelist may adopt and adapt to suit the needs of his audiences. Each fate—Peter’s and that of the disciple whom Jesus loved—utilizes the grammar in a different way. Peter’s death reflects the reality of Johannine Christians’ suffering, whatever its immediate cause might be; the other disciple’s path is described as “remaining” or “abiding,” therefore drawing on the language that John has used consistently to characterize the disciples’ resocialization as those who “remain” or “aid” in Jesus (or in his word, or in his commandments, etc.). Each may be an important “take” on discipleship, depending on our determination of the situation(s) influencing the composition of John’s Gospel, and may assist in guiding our attention to the gospels’ formative function as well.

First Peter, I will show, is no different: its author has adapted the grammar of discipleship into a paradigm of discipleship (what I have been calling a “summons” to discipleship) for its own audiences’ life of faith in the light of their circumstances—most notably the suffering they are presently experiencing. It will be most productive to treat First Peter’s commemoration of the grammar in light of a fuller discussion of the letter’s emphasis on suffering, but here it will be worthwhile to provide a demonstration of how another text—the Gospel of Mark—adapts and employs the grammar of discipleship, especially in regard to the facet of the disciples’ expectation of suffering.

Mark’s paradigm of discipleship is worth a close examination for several reasons, not least because of its similarities to First Peter’s (as will become clear by the end of the next
I do not suppose that there is any literary relationship between the two texts, but they do have much in common, and a brief examination of Mark’s presentation of discipleship, especially as it treats suffering, may set the tone for a reading of First Peter’s. 46 I understand the Gospel of Mark, like First Peter, to be written for the benefit of Christ-followers facing some form of “persecution” (see Iersel 1980; Marcus 2000: 28–29); therefore, I regard Mark’s audiences to be suffering. 47 As such, I think it is worth exploring whether we might find some analogy for understanding First Peter’s exhortations about suffering in Mark. This is not meant to predetermine how to read First Peter’s emphasis on suffering, but to provide an example of another text that employs the grammar of discipleship in order to grapple with the reality of suffering. In this way, I will be able to demonstrate how First Peter’s approach to suffering is both distinctive and yet in keeping with a wider trend throughout early Christianity.

Only one character beside Jesus is described by the Gospel of Mark with a technical vocabulary of suffering: a woman who “had suffered much under many physicians” (5:26). 48 Additionally, her disease is called a μάστιξ (5:29, 34), similar to the description of Jesus’s flogging in the third passion prediction (μαστιγῶ, 10:34). 49 Mark positions this woman and other characters acquainted with forms of suffering to make remarkable declarations of faith.

46 I regard this to be beyond the possibility of demonstration, though it may be demonstrated that there are several similarities between the texts. For detailed analyses of the possible relationship between Mark and First Peter, see Elliott 1983; Le Roux 2018; for a summary of the similarities between the texts, see Elliott 1985: 195–98.

47 The difference between Mark’s audiences’ suffering and First Peter’s audiences’ suffering is a matter of degrees. That they are experiencing hardship as a result of their “conversion,” however, is assumed.

48 πολλὰ παθοῦσα ὑπὸ πολλῶν ἰατρῶν. Jesus speaks of the necessity of his own suffering with the same verb at Mark 8:31 and 9:12.

49 I owe this insight to an essay by Blaine Charette (2021: 34), cited more extensively below; I also owe thanks to J. Richard Middleton for pointing me to Charette’s original presentation on this topic.
throughout its narrative. The woman is healed and commended for her faith (5:34). Bartimaeus, while blind and begging alongside the road, calls upon Jesus as “Son of David”; Jesus restores his sight and explains that his faith has made him well (10:52). Blaine Charette suggests that these characters are distinctive in Mark (especially as compared to the disciples) for their ability to perceive Jesus’s power and identity amid suffering; each receives the same commendation: “Your faith has saved you” (ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε; see Charette 2021: 34–35).

The connection between suffering and insight appears to be far more widespread and makes for a convincing pattern. Other “marginal” characters who suffer or exist in close proximity to suffering are consistently said to approach Jesus with confidence and high expectations. The man with a skin disease, relegated to the outskirts of town, boldly approaches Jesus and asserts that Jesus is able to make him clean (1:40–45). The Syrophoenician woman persists in her pleas for Jesus to cast a spirit out of her daughter and is rewarded for her perseverance (7:24–30). The father of a boy with a violent spirit declares his own faith (and his need for more), leading Jesus to cast out the spirit (9:14–29).

Others possessed by unclean spirits make insightful declarations into the identity and character of Jesus. This is clearest of the individuals in 1:21–28 and 5:1–20, each described as “having an unclean spirit” (ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, 1:23; 5:2). These men, “engulfed in the demonic power of evil” (Boring 2006: 62 n. b), rightly declare Jesus to be “the Holy One of God” (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ, 1:24) and “Son of the Most High God” (υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ υψίστου, 5:7). In Charette’s words, “One of the ironies of Mark, a Gospel so focused on investigating the identity of Jesus, is that those possessed by unclean spirits are the earliest and most consistent in making truthful confessions regarding Jesus” (2021: 27).
These narrative and declarative insights into the identity and character of Jesus are especially remarkable when placed in contrast with the attitudes and actions of the disciples. Mark consistently draws attention to the lack of insight on their part, both regarding Jesus’s teaching and his identity (4:13, 41; 6:51–52; 7:18; 8:14–21; 10:10, 13, 38) and for their meager faith (4:40; 9:19; 11:21–23). The disciples, occupying a role that audiences may reasonably expect to function positively as obedient to and imitative of their teacher, end up becoming a regular foil of misunderstanding.\(^{50}\) This is seen, above all, in their specific misunderstanding and rejection of Jesus’s teaching about his own suffering—a suffering that they, as his disciples, will need to be prepared to imitate. Even though Peter declares Jesus to be “the Christ,” he quickly rejects any notion that Jesus “must suffer many things” (δεῖ … πολλὰ παθεῖν), taking Jesus aside to rebuke him (8:31–32). The second passion prediction (9:30–32) reveals the disciples’ embarrassment at “their preoccupation with status and dignity” (Charette 2021: 33) at a time when Jesus is attempting to instill in them an appreciation for the suffering he is about to experience. The third (10:32–34) is addressed to fearful disciples and is immediately followed by the sons of Zebedee’s impertinent question revealing a similar preoccupation. Hearing that Jesus is to suffer, James and John ask for positions of power. Charette puts a fine point on this:

What gives a poignant dimension to these passion predictions is their juxtaposition with scenes that reveal the ignorance, self-regard, and ambition of the disciples. They are insensible to what Jesus seeks to communicate, preferring instead to indulge in a mistaken understanding of what his messiahship entails and what that might mean for their own status and position. (2021: 32)

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\(^{50}\) “The disciples, although continuing to witness multiple instances of Jesus’s authority and power and although receiving the benefit of his personal attention and instruction, do not see with perception or hear with understanding. They continue to respond to situations in ways more consistent with ‘outsiders’ than ‘insiders.’ The disciples fail to understand Jesus both with respect to his teaching and his power. As such, they show far less understanding than certain marginal characters of the narrative. Although the disciples follow Jesus, they do so without proper knowledge. They lack the perception needed to truly ‘follow’ Jesus” (Charette 2021: 32).
This is all the more sharply communicated by the declaration of Jesus’s identity by the centurion at the cross: “Truly, this man was the son of God” (ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν, 15:39). This declaration is made not by one who is himself suffering, but by one who beholds Jesus in the very depths of suffering and identifies him accordingly. Thus, Mark’s Gospel portrays suffering as a means of insight and demonstrates the relative merits of his characters’ ability to comprehend it, both in their own lives and in the life (and death) of Jesus.

My point here has been to demonstrate how an integral aspect of the grammar and discourse of early Christian discipleship—suffering—has been deployed strategically by the Gospel of Mark. Mark, aware that its audiences are suffering, finds a way to place that suffering in a positive light and to demonstrate its merits. Mark portrays suffering as somehow epiphanic or revelatory: through suffering, Mark says, one may gain insight into Jesus’s identity and mission; a disciple’s own sufferings—which Mark knows its audiences to be facing—are not to be understood as punishments for following Jesus, but as a means of understanding and relating to their teacher who suffered and died. Suffering, in the context of Mark’s narrative, is a means of understanding the life of discipleship: disciples addressed by Mark’s Gospel can make sense of the sufferings they face by finding in their sufferings solidarity with Jesus; they can hope that their suffering is not meaningless but will have some redemptive or revelatory purpose.52 They

51 “Whereas Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ is declared without full understanding and thus necessitates Jesus’ teachings on his passion, the centurion’s confession is given in the context of the passion and thus reflects greater understanding of Jesus’ identity which can be known only through his suffering and death” (Charette 2021: 37). It should also be recognized that the centurion participates in and contributes to Jesus’s suffering.

52 This may or may not appeal to us as an applicable interpretation of suffering in Mark. I am not recommending it here as such, though there may be some situations in which—speaking for a moment from the perspective of a pastor—an interpretation like this may stand able to provide comfort. Some may find “solidarity with Jesus” quite comforting and able to inspire confidence and faith in God (Hebrews?); it may help others to
can trust that, just as Jesus was brought out of suffering by God’s act of raising him from the dead, they too will see the other side of their trials and tribulations.
CHAPTER FOUR

“DO NOT BE SURPRISED BY THE FIERY ORDEAL AMONG YOU”:

DISCIPLESHIP AND SUFFERING IN FIRST PETER

All this we ought to remember when we are summoned to meet some difficulty: we ought to know that the time has come to show whether we are educated.

—Epictetus

Epictetus (ca. 50–135 CE) entertains a wide range of questions throughout his *Discourses*, from the seemingly banal (e.g., “What if I want to take a walk, but someone won’t let me?” 4.1.72) to the morally complicated (e.g., “How can I control another person’s judgments?” 1.29.11).

Common to many questions is the assumption that a difficulty or hardship might impede and compromise a person’s freedom (ἐλευθερία) and volition (προαίρεισις). Epictetus customarily responds by calling his students’ attention to what they have learned. The disciples of Epictetus have studied (or are still learning) to discern what is truly under their control and what properly belongs to them, and it is in light of this discernment that they are able to act: “We must make the best of what is under our control, and take the rest as its nature is.”

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1 *Diatr.* 1.29.33 (trans. Oldfather LCL, mod.): Τούτων δεῖ μεμνῆσθαι καὶ κληθέντα εἰς τινα τουιώτην περίστασιν εἰδέναι, ὅτι ἐλήλυθον ὅ καιρός τοῦ ἀποδείξαι, εἰ πεπαιδεύμεθα.

2 On the importance of these concepts in Epictetus, see Long 2002: 207–20; Eastman 2017: 34–37.

3 Elsewhere he asks, “What is philosophy? Does it not mean making preparation to meet the things that come upon us? … What, then, are we to say to ourselves at each hardship that befalls us? ‘It was for this that I kept training; it was to meet this that I used to practice’ (*Diatr.* 2.10.6–8; trans. mod.: τὸ δὲ φιλοσοφήσαι τί ἔστιν; οὐχὶ παρασκευάσασθαι πρὸς τὰ συμβαίνοντα;… τί οὖν δεῖ λέγειν πρὸς αὐτόν ἐφ’ ἐκάστου τῶν τραχέων; ὁτι “ἔνεκα τούτου ἐγυμναζόμην, ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἠκουσοῦν”).

4 *Diatr.* 1.1.17: δεῖ τὰ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν βέλτιστα κατασκευάζειν, τοῖς δ’ ἄλλοις χρῆσθαι ὡς πέρουκεν.
in other words, forms the habits and dispositions by which that disciple will face the vicissitudes of daily life. Epictetus insists that inattention to one’s education will prove disastrous when undisciplined disciples have left the protection of their teachers: “When crisis calls, the student has to weep and say, ‘I wanted to keep on learning.’ Learning what? If you do not learn these things *so as to be able to manifest them in action*, what did you learn them for?”

Discipleship—whether of Epictetus or of Christ—is meant to be “put into practice.” As I observed throughout Chapter Two, ancient discipulships were advanced manifestations of Hellenistic *paideia* and therefore sought to cultivate students’ human nature, transforming them from untilled soil into tillers of the soil themselves. Their education—their discipleship—thereby became a context and perspective through which they better understood themselves, others, and their world. As Christ-followers habituated Jesus’s teachings on discipleship, they found new ways to commit to their teacher and his mission, both privately and publicly. As they embodied lives reoriented around the will of God, they asked how the principles of their discipleship could address the challenges that arose because of their consequent resocialization into the family of God. This, I contend, is how we may understand and appreciate First Peter as a summons to discipleship: through its distinctive commemoration, adaptation, and application of Jesus’s vision for discipleship, First Peter provides a means by which its audiences can make sense of their present circumstances and find strength to persevere amid suffering.

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5 *Diatr.* 1.29.35 (emphasis mine): καλέσαντος τοῦ καιροῦ κλάειν δεῖ καὶ λέγειν “ἤθελον ἐπί μανθάνειν.” τίνα; εἶ ταῦτα οὐκ ἐμαθῆς ὡστ’ ἐργο δείξα, πρὸς τί αὐτά ἐμαθῆς; Epictetus then goads his students with the example of his favorite gladiators who desire only to accomplish the task for which they have been trained: “Will no one of you display a like spirit? I wanted to sail to Rome for this very purpose and to see what my athlete is doing, what practice he is following in his task” (1.29.36–37: ἐξ ὑμῶν δ᾿ οὐδεὶς φανήσεται τοιοῦτος; ἤθελον πλεῦσαι ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τοῦτο καὶ ἰδεῖν, τί μου ποιεῖ ὁ ἀθλητής, πός μελετᾷ τὴν ὑπόθεσιν).
This chapter, therefore, is a demonstration of the efficacy of reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship. Specifically, I propose that approaching First Peter as a summons to discipleship enables us to understand its persistent exhortations to endure suffering with sensitivity to the letter’s larger social strategy—its concerted effort to strengthen its audiences’ “loyalty toward God” (πίστις εἰς θεόν, 1:21) despite the negative consequences (“suffering”) that they face because of such loyalty. By commemorating, adapting, and applying the “grammar of discipleship” (as discussed in Chapter Three), First Peter provides a context—discipleship—through which its audiences, as disciples, can make sense of and endure their suffering. Since it cannot hope to relieve them of what grieves them (1:6), First Peter presents their suffering as constituent aspects of their reorientation around God’s will and resocialization into the family of God. Moreover, as I will explore in Chapter Five, this approach to suffering assists First Peter to construct its audiences’ social identity as disciples of Christ, further strengthening their resolve to remain steadfast to their teacher amid suspicion and hostility.

This chapter will proceed in two main parts. The first is a descriptive account of First Peter’s emphasis on suffering. I begin with a brief justification for focusing on the theme of suffering in First Peter by demonstrating that First Peter itself chooses to focus on its audiences’ suffering. I will then pause to consider briefly the ethical implications of attending to First Peter’s emphasis on suffering, especially in the light of the letter’s reception history. I conclude with an outline and overview of First Peter’s construction and presentation of its audiences’

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6 I undertook this task briefly in Chapter One (see pp. 62–64). The present demonstration assumes and elaborates on the earlier discussion.

7 I discuss a representative history of First Peter’s “effects” (Wirkungsgeschichte) in relation to suffering in Appendix B.
suffering. The second part of this chapter is constructive. Here I will argue that reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship provides a cohesive interpretation of the letter’s approach to suffering. To place my proposal in context, I will briefly describe the prominent _christological_ interpretation of First Peter’s approach to suffering (i.e., First Peter’s approach to suffering is a function of its Christology). I will suggest that this interpretation, on its own, is insufficient to account for the larger social strategy of First Peter. I will argue instead that a _pedagogical_ interpretation—reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship—is more capable of illuminating the letter’s approach to suffering, especially when we consider First Peter’s commemoration and adaptation of the “grammar of discipleship.” It is my hope that this considered and responsible attention to First Peter’s distinctive emphasis on suffering will demonstrate the value of this comprehensive reading of the letter.

**First Peter: An “Epistle of Suffering”**

First Peter’s Central Focus

Alongside the abundant references to specific forms of its audiences’ suffering I examined in Chapter One, First Peter employs the general language of “suffering” (πάσχω, πάθημα) sixteen times across its “brief” series of exhortations, giving this letter the highest

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8 I borrow the phrase “Epistle of Suffering” from Candida Moss (2012: 49), though she is not the only scholar to describe First Peter this way. While I think Moss is correct in this characterization, and I will have occasion to refer to her work below, I note here that I do disagree with her contention that “there is a general sense among scholars that early Christians such as the author of I Peter and Revelation may in historical reality have suffered more from paranoia than from actual persecution” (2012: 13; in an endnote to this statement, Moss does not refer to any scholarship representing such a “general sense” regarding First Peter). While there is plenty to commend Moss’s work (both academically and practically), her approach to First Peter assumes that the “persecution” to which she assumes First Peter purports to refer is state-sanctioned and lethal, thereby reinforcing a dichotomy between “official” and “unofficial” persecution that need not be maintained (see, e.g., Williams 2012b). As I have sought to make clear in Chapter One, the suffering to which First Peter addresses itself is local, sporadic, and not necessarily lethal, though it is possible that Christ-followers’ detractors may have taken Nero’s actions against Christians in Rome as license for their own suspicions and as precedence for exercising their own forms of hostility (see Horrell 2007; 2013: 164–210; Williams 2012a: 179–236, Holloway 2009: 40–73).
quantity and concentration of suffering-language among the literature of the New Testament.\footnote{πάσχω: 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:1 (twice), 15, 19; 5:10; πάθημα: 1:11; 4:13; 5:1, 9.}

Twice it also refers to its audiences’ circumstances with the language of “trials” (πειρασμός, 1:6; 4:12) by which they are “grieved” (λυπέω, 1:6) and through which they “share in the sufferings of Christ” (κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν, 4:13). Together with specific indications of the verbal harassment (invective) that they face from outsiders, the language and concept of suffering pervades and saturates First Peter, arguably making it the letter’s central focus (see, e.g., Elliott 2000: 525). Two features of First Peter are worth highlighting in this regard.

**Suffering through First Peter**

First, the movement of thought across First Peter is indicative of an effort to develop a logical and therapeutic account of its audiences’ suffering.\footnote{In Goppelt’s words, First Peter’s “encouraging and exhorting address with respect to the conflict situation is developed progressively” (1993: 37). Goppelt’s ultimate account of First Peter’s structure in this regard remains, in my opinion, underdeveloped. What follows is therefore indebted to his suggestion of such a “progressive” development, but this brief analysis of the structure and movement regarding suffering in the letter’s thought is my own. On the letter’s structure and movement, Appendix A.}

The letter proem (1:3–12) mentions the audiences’ suffering only at 1:6–9, but gives it an air of theological dignity by labeling it a period of (necessary) “trials” (εἰ δέον ἐστιν, λυπηθέντας ἐν ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς, 1:6) that will refine or prove the genuineness of their loyalty (1:7).\footnote{I will discuss the “necessary” aspect of suffering below, but here I note that I take εἰ δέον to refer to events (suffering) that are actually the case (i.e., a first-class conditional); i.e., First Peter accepts the reality of its audiences’ sufferings and therefore characterizes them as what “must” take place (Michaels 1988: 28–29; see also Achtemeier 1996: 101), thereby engaging in a strategy of “making sense” of their suffering. On the possibility of understanding these “trials” as a form of divinely ordained testing in the contexts of Second Temple Judaisms and Greek and Roman philosophies, see the excursus in Keener 2021: 29–41. This interpretation was especially popular among Patristic and Medieval Christian writers who distinguished between temptations (which do not come from God) and testing (which may come from God); see Augustine, *Serm. 57.9*; Andreas, *Catena* (CEC 5); Theophylact, *Exposito in Epist. I S. Petri* §377 (PG 125:1241–44).}

In this way First Peter begins by dictating
how Christ-followers should understand their suffering: as divinely-wrought trials, both necessary and temporary, that they presently endure as a result of their loyalty toward God.

I divide the letter body of First Peter into three “movements” corresponding to various features, among them a description of the audiences’ suffering (1:14–2:10; 2:11–4:11; 4:12–5:11; see Appendix A for the formal features that complement this analysis). The first movement (1:14–2:10) contains no explicit reference to the audiences’ suffering but focuses on recognizing and affirming their reoriented and resocialized identity as those who are loyal to God (1:21; 2:6, 7); this movement, therefore, describes the conversion that has precipitated Christ-followers’ suffering, as discussed at length in Chapter One. The second movement (2:11–4:11) then illustrates how suffering has become a part of Christ-followers’ resocialized existence, especially in relation to outsiders (“gentiles,” 2:12; 4:3). First Peter utilizes particular situations of conflict (Christ-followers in relation to the governing structures of society; Christ-following women married to husbands who do not follow Christ, etc.) to offer advice on how all Christ-followers may navigate and embody their resocialized existence as Christ-followers. First Peter brings these scenarios into sharper focus with the rhetorical question of 3:13, but moves on to a final set of exhortations directed at “the household of God” (ὁ οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ) in the third and final

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12 Bechtler suggests that the letter’s focus on specific forms of conduct it expects of its audiences in this section and its rhetorical contrasts between that conduct and “former” conduct (e.g., 1:14, 17–18, 22) “clearly presupposes that the addressees were being pressured to resume participation in those societal activities they had forsaken at their conversion to Christianity” (1998: 184). With these references to their conversion, therefore, we might expect the audiences of First Peter to be reminded of their suffering as the cause of that suffering was rehearsed. My point is that the letter body only turns to address their suffering explicitly at 2:11–12, the heading of its second movement—a point which Bechtler also grants (1998: 188).

13 Holloway puts this particularly well regarding the whole of First Peter, though I think it applies best to 2:11–4:11: we may “imagine the author of 1 Peter picturing several possible scenarios and saying in effect, ‘If you find yourself in this type of a situation, do this. If, however, you find yourself in this type of situation, do that’” (2009: 13).
movement of the letter body (4:12–5:11). Here First Peter puts a fine point on its audiences’ suffering by naming its form and cause together: they are “reproached” and “suffer” (ὀνειδίζω, 4:14; πάσχω, 4:16) for their association with Christ (ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ, 4:14; ὡς χριστιανός, 4:16). Following this dual affirmation are exhortations that encourage internal order, solidarity, steadfastness, and loyalty toward both God and one another in the face of their suffering.

My point here is to suggest that First Peter seems to be strategic in choosing how it appeals to its audiences’ circumstances of suffering. It begins by characterizing their suffering as a necessary but short period of divinely appointed trials through which they are already proving their loyalty (1:6–9); it expands on their newfound identity that has precipitated their suffering (1:14–2:10); it then illustrates their circumstances with reference to both specific and general scenarios in which they find themselves suffering (2:11–4:11); and it concludes with an appeal to fidelity and solidarity by naming their suffering and detailing appropriate responses to it (4:12–5:11). This arrangement and movement demonstrate, in my opinion, the letter’s preoccupation with its audiences’ suffering not only thematically, but also rhetorically.

The “Sufferings” of Christ

First Peter also prioritizes its audiences’ suffering with a specific and distinctive choice in vocabulary. Several of First Peter’s uses of πάσχω and πάθημα occur in its references to “the sufferings of Christ” (1:11; 4:13; 5:1) and its affirmation that “Christ suffered on your behalf” (Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, 2:21; see 2:23; 3:18; 4:1). On its own this phrase might not

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14 I understand ὑπὲρ to connote the sense of Christ’s vicarious suffering, though the immediate emphasis of 1 Pet 2:21 might appear to be on Christ’s suffering as an example (ὑπογραμμός) for enslaved Christ-followers (and, through them, for all Christ-followers), as though Christ suffered “For your benefit—namely, to benefit you with this example of suffering.” I will show presently that First Peter’s intent is to utilize the vocabulary of “suffering” instead of “death,” but this does not imply that the letter distinguishes Christ’s suffering from his death; both are vicarious, since Christ’s suffering obviously includes his death (see 2:24; 3:18). That First Peter understands Christ’s suffering and death to be vicarious in nature is indicated in the following ways: (1) First Peter proceeds to elaborate
appear remarkable: memories of and allusions to Christ’s sufferings are frequent enough in other New Testament texts. The importance of this phrase—and of such a concentrated emphasis on Christ’s sufferings—is revealed by the way it contrasts with the more common reference to Christ’s death on behalf of others (Rom 5:6, 8; 14:15; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:14, 15; 1 Thess 5:10; see also John 11:50, 51). It is widely recognized that this way of describing Christ’s death for others was an “established credal formulation” (Horrell 2014: 131), especially by its introduction in 1 Cor 15:3 with a formal vocabulary of handing on and receiving tradition (παραδίδωμι, παραλαμβάνω) and the lack of any explanation for the phrase in 1 Thess 5:10.

First Peter’s familiarity with a wide range of early Christian traditions (see Horrell 2002; 2013: 7–44) would likely have included the common affirmation of Christ’s vicarious death. The

on the ongoing effects of Christ’s suffering and death: “who himself bore our sins in his body on the wood, so that we, dying to sin, would live in righteousness; ‘by whose wounds you were healed’” (ὁς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον, ἵνα ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ἱκάθητε, 2:24). (2) First Peter also implies a vicarious understanding of Christ’s suffering and death at 3:18: “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous” (καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων) after which it clarifies that this was for the purpose of leading his followers “to God” (ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ). (3) The more common phrase, upon which “Christ suffered for you” is a variation, is typically followed by a context that underscores a vicarious understanding of Christ’s death.

15 E.g., using similar language, other texts refer to “the sufferings of Christ” (τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 2 Cor 1:15) and “the afflictions of Christ” (αἱ θλίψεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Col 1:24); this theme emerges as an important part of early Christian preaching in the scope of Luke–Acts (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:18; 17:3).

16 Rom 5:6: “Christ died for the ungodly” (Χριστὸς … ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν); 5:8: “Christ died for us” (Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν); 14:15: “the one for whom Christ died” (ὑπὲρ οὗ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν); 1 Cor 15:3: “Christ died for our sins” (Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν); 2 Cor 5:14: “one died for all” (εἷς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν); 5:15: “he died for all” (ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν); 1 Thess 5:10: “who died for us” (τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν; some manuscripts [K* B 33] have περὶ instead of ὑπέρ); John 11:50: “one man should die for the people” (εἷς ἀνθρώπου ἀποθάνῃ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ; see 18:14); 11:51: “Jesus would die for the nation” (Ἰησοῦς ἀποθάνῃ ὑπὲρ τοῦ Εβραίων). These Johannine passages clearly understand Jesus’s death to be vicarious in that he dies “instead” of others. It is also worth noting that later receptions of First Peter testify to the popularity of this formulation. At 1 Pet 2:21, several manuscripts substitute ἀπέθανεν for ἀπέθανεν (𝔓𝔓 81 Ψ 5. 307 syg; Cyr). The same trend can be found at 3:18 (𝔓27 Ψ6 A C2 Ψ; several minuscules). In Elliott’s words, “The reading epathed was replaced by apethanen … probably under the influence of the more common formulation” (2000: 524).

language of Christ’s exemplary and vicarious suffering in First Peter, therefore, leads me to conclude (with several scholars) that the pervasive emphasis on suffering is First Peter’s choice. By underscoring Christ’s suffering and placing it starkly before its audiences’ eyes and in their ears, First Peter invites Christ-followers to consider their present experiences (which certainly includes suffering but may not yet include death) in the context of Christ’s experience. As I will show below, however, this is only part of First Peter’s strategy for assisting its audiences to cope with the reality of their suffering.

Summary

In light of these observations (along with those amassed in Chapter One), it seems clear to me that First Peter is intently concerned with its audiences’ suffering. I will explore the nuances of its strategy for doing so below, but we should understand from the outset that the letter is focused on enabling its audiences to understand and endure their present circumstances. David Hill, in a helpful deconstruction of the “widely-cherished opinion” of First Peter’s baptismal imagery, asserts that the “chief concern of the letter is with the conduct of Christians undergoing affliction” (1976: 185). Hill seeks to account for “the link between baptism and suffering” in First Peter, a question that he determines previous studies to have left unanswered. Hill concludes, I think rightly:

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18 See the studies cited above (p. 62 n. 38).

19 For arguments that First Peter’s audiences are the targets of legal action and even execution, see Holloway 2009: 40–73; Williams 2012a: 179–236, 299–326, passim; Williams 2012b; Horrell 2007; 2013: 164–210.

20 The “widely-cherished opinion” that Hill critiques is actually a series of opinions about the genre and composition of First Peter, including theories that First Peter represents a baptismal address (e.g., Perdelwitz 1911), a baptismal liturgy (Preisker 1951), or even “the celebrant’s part in the Baptismal Eucharist of the Paschal Vigil” (Cross 1954; the quote is from Hill 1976: 182). For an overview of these theories and several representative scholars, see T. Martin 1992a: 17–21, 32–38.
The link between baptism and suffering (such as would befall Christians in a hostile environment) may be accounted for simply and adequately by assuming that, since baptism was the occasion and the sign of voluntary self-commitment to the Christian way, those who offered themselves for the rite were aware, through their knowledge of what Christians endured, that this way on which they were embarking would inevitably involve suffering. (184–85)²¹

If First Peter presents suffering as part and parcel of its audiences’ loyalty to Christ—as I think it does—then it seems reasonable to me that we approach the letter as an attempt to contextualize that suffering. Given the reality of their suffering, in other words, the Christ-followers addressed by First Peter “must be taught how to suffer” (Schlatter 1932: 13)²² so that they may make sense of that suffering and endure it. I propose that for First Peter, this is a function of discipleship.

First Peter’s emphasis on suffering is, therefore, a (re)presentation of its audiences’ suffering. This is to say that in teaching its audiences “how to suffer,” First Peter does not simply document or replicate their suffering in the form of writing; it characterizes the conflict they face with their “gentile” neighbors and with society-at-large in order to reframe that conflict, to make sense of it, and to endow it with meaning. First Peter thereby constructs a representative understanding of and perspective on its audiences’ suffering that should (it hopes) lead those who suffer to (re)commit themselves to that suffering as disciples of Christ. Below, therefore, I will outline and examine First Peter’s construction of suffering through the lens of discipleship.

First, however, having acknowledged how important “suffering” is to First Peter’s rhetoric and

²¹ Hill concludes his essay: “To say that the letter, or most of it, is a baptismal homily or liturgy is to treat as explicit, direct, and prominent what is only implicit, presupposed and subsidiary. I Peter is paraenetical, not catechetical; and its main theme is the conduct of Christians in a situation of testing and adversity” (1976: 189).

²² My translation. In context, Schlatter contends that First Peter was not written out of a desire to make its audiences more effective in their faith (as though they were failing to live up to its demands) or to change the nature of their sociopolitical environments: “He [Peter] was moved to write his letter precisely by the fact that the Church must be taught how to suffer” (Er war vielmehr zu seinem Brief gerade dadurch bewogen, daß die Kirche zum Leiden angeleitet warden muß).
social strategy, I will turn to consider the equally important implications of interpreting this rhetoric and strategy responsibly and with an awareness of the history of its impact or effects (its *Wirkungsgeschichte*) on Christ-followers beyond those it originally addressed—and especially upon those who suffer.

The Ethics of Suffering

It is easy enough to acknowledge that First Peter evinces a thematic, rhetorical, and strategic emphasis on suffering; I will demonstrate below that it is also easy to recognize the nuanced ways in which First Peter articulates its own understanding and construction of suffering. In some studies, such an endeavor would be enough, and I might proceed (naturally enough) to explain what has influenced First Peter to depict and discuss suffering in the way that it does. Three factors, however, convince me that it is worth pausing to reflect on the interpretive implications of what I am about to propose—i.e., that First Peter envisions suffering as a foundational part of following Christ in discipleship for its readers.

First, my interest is in First Peter’s social strategy—its rhetorical effort to motivate its audiences toward a way of being and acting as a result of receiving this letter. My interest, therefore, is in the implications of what First Peter has to say about suffering. Second, I will conclude below that First Peter’s construction of suffering ultimately coalesces into an encouragement to suffer, presenting suffering as an expected and necessary part of its audiences’ existence as Christ-followers—and that these audiences need to be convinced that this was so. To assume that the letter’s exhortations to suffer would be received without any trepidation at this prospect would be to ignore the natural human impulse toward self-preservation and fear,
not to mention the letter’s own encouragements not to be afraid (3:6, 14). These two points will resurface as a part of my detailed discussion below.

To introduce a third factor, I return to the essay of David Hill quoted above and his contention that First Peter’s “chief concern” is with “the conduct of Christians undergoing affliction” (1976: 185, emphasis mine). This may ultimately amount to a matter of rhetoric, but would it not be more accurate to say that First Peter’s concern is with the conduct of its intended Christ-following audiences of first-century northern Anatolia undergoing affliction? I contend that this is not only a more accurate statement, but also a more responsible one for the following reason. The social strategy of First Peter, including its construction of suffering, inscribed as it is in a canonical text—both ecclesial and academic—has stood as a resource for two-thousand years of study in communities that have recontextualized it for their own purposes (and may continue to do so); this process of recontextualization has not always been done with positive intent or to life-giving effect. James Aageson asks,

What does the contemporary reader hear as the purpose of these words? As a good portion of these texts’ interpretive history illustrates, the purpose is not simply a matter of what 1 Peter says but what readers hear it to say and for what purposes they intend to use what they hear. (2004: 36)

It not only matters what First Peter says, but what the interpreter presents First Peter to say and how the interpreter puts his or her interpretation to use (if at all). Kathleen Corley begins her short commentary on First Peter by asserting that this letter has “encouraged many Christians

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23 I do not intend to undermine Hill’s argument concerning the relationship between baptism and suffering (or his critique of previous scholarship on the question of First Peter’s genre), but to suggest that Hill’s rhetoric is entirely “general” apart from a reference to “the Asian Christians addressed” (1976: 181) and his description of their suffering as resulting from “an intensification of the virtually continuous harrying of Christians by local opponents which could lead to suspicion, denial of civil rights, arrest, imprisonment and even death” (182); even this latter statement, however, is prone to decontextualization.
throughout history to submit quietly to the yoke of various unjust social institutions” and been used “to support a divine mandate for continuing institutions such as slavery or abusive marriages” (1994: 349; see also C. Martin 1991). First Peter and the history of its reception, therefore, bring us “face to face with our own ethics—indeed, the ethics of reading and using biblical material” (Aageson 2004: 34; see also Schüssler Fiorenza 1999).

Given the constraints of space on the present study, a complete account of First Peter’s role in Christian theologies of suffering and subjugation cannot be included here. I have included a representative survey of First Peter’s Wirkungsgeschichte in this regard, however, in Appendix B. As I proceed with my argument through the remainder of this chapter, however, I wish to recognize the charged nature of interpreting (and applying) First Peter’s exhortations to suffer, especially in the light of its utilization of a household code form (2:13–3:7) and the history of its impact in the service of oppression and marginalization. I want to attend to the words of Julia Foote, who noted how well a scriptural text could be quoted but still wrongly applied. If First Peter is to remain a resource today—if it is to remain applicable or even readable—I think it is important to take the implications of its exhortations on suffering seriously and to reckon with the history of its implementation to encourage suffering, for good and for ill.

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24 Corley concludes her commentary in the same way: “Given the sacrificial model of 1 Peter, which serves to reinforce oppressive social institutions, there is little in the letter that may be appropriated by women, and little that may be appropriated by other individuals suffering under unjust social institutions” (1994: 356).

25 “Be not kept in bondage by those who say, ‘We suffer not a woman to teach,’ thus quoting Paul’s words, but not rightly applying them” (from A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch [1879] in Andrews 1986: 161–234, here 227). The chapter in which these words appear is titled “A Word to My Christian Sisters,” and is an encouragement to black women of the nineteenth century “to be faithful to their ministry” (C. Martin 1991: 222).
Suffering according to First Peter

I have already demonstrated ways in which First Peter strategically highlights its audiences’ suffering. More curious (and distinctive to the letter) is how First Peter highlights and discusses that suffering—how First Peter constructs and presents its audiences’ suffering as a significant piece of its overarching social strategy. In this section, I will survey the ways in which First Peter articulates this construction. As I begin, it is worth affirming again that even as I discuss First Peter’s construction or presentation of suffering, I do not intend to imply that First Peter is “creating” suffering out of thin air. Rather, I assume that First Peter is addressing the reality of its audiences’ hardships, but doing so in such a way as to provide a particular perspective through which its audiences can understand their circumstances differently. First Peter characterizes suffering in strategic ways in the interest of establishing that perspective.

It is also important to recall the nature of these Christ-followers’ suffering once more (discussed at length in Chapter One). Doing so will prevent my discussion below from generalizing First Peter’s exhortations to embrace suffering and will assist me to identify the letter’s social strategy in relation to its intended audiences. First Peter contains several specific descriptions of its audiences’ suffering with synonyms that convey forms of verbal abuse leveled against them. In Elliott’s words, these Christ-followers are victims of “verbal abuse, disparagement, denigration, maligning, insult, contemptuous reproach, public defamation of character and public shaming on the suspicion of their ‘doing what is wrong’” (2000: 467). In Chapter One I categorized this under the larger umbrella of “vitriol” and “invective.” To these we must add the physical abuse that enslaved Christ-followers experience at the hands of harsh
enslavers (2:18–20) and the likelihood that female Christ-followers face similar physical pain at the hands of their husbands who do not follow Christ.

As noted above, First Peter also contains a general vocabulary of “suffering” (πάσχω, πάθημα). Behind these general references certainly lies the invective identified above, but it need not be limited to this. I suggest that “suffering” in First Peter extends to include three other elements. First, we should keep in mind the effects of the invective that would be experienced by Christ-followers as the targets of such harsh language, slander, and name-calling. These were challenges to their honor (in the eyes of wider society). While First Peter does attempt to redefine the source of their honor (2:4–10; 4:14–16), the fact that it attempts to do so constitutes evidence that these Christ-followers’ “suffering” included an experience of shame and embarrassment at the consequences of their conversion. Second, and closely related to this point, are the effects of their conversion’s demand to withdraw from society to some degree, be it large or small. Because of Christ-followers’ exclusive commitment to God (through Christ), their withdrawal from various social systems and institutions would have had the effect of segregating and isolating them from their neighbors. As with the effects of invective, while First Peter does attempt to foster its audiences’ sense of a new-found “household” and fellowship with one another, its emphasis on such fellowship testifies to the present isolation they are experiencing. Third, the letter exhorts its readers not to “fear” those who harm (or seek to harm) them (3:6, 14;

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26 Honor and shame have been the topic of other studies, notably those of Barth Campbell (1998) from a (classical) rhetorical perspective; and by John Elliott (1995; 2007: 51–86), Katherine Hockey (2019: 226–50), Elritia Le Roux (2019), and John Wright (2023) from a social-scientific perspective.

27 See my discussion of this withdrawal in Chapter One (pp. 82–84). On the potential ways in which this withdrawal would have manifested itself (withdrawal from civic, occupational, or cultic associations; withdrawal from activities associated with the imperial cult, and withdrawal from the ethic of the traditional cults), see Williams 2012a: 240–58.
see also 3:13; 4:12; 5:7). First Peter presumes that its audiences are experiencing pressure from outsiders to (re)conform to societal standards, and the stress of this pressure results in anxiety and fear. There is, therefore, a foundational discomfort, stress, embarrassment, pressure, and fear that these audiences are experiencing as a result of their loyalty to Christ, and these concrete realities (in addition to the verbal and physical abuses themselves) will be kept in mind as I continue to employ First Peter’s preference for the general vocabulary of “suffering.” With this in mind, therefore, I now turn to consider the distinctive construction or presentation of suffering achieved by First Peter.

First Peter characterizes its audiences’ suffering in relation to three significant concepts. The first (somewhat predictably and hinted at above) is the suffering of Christ (e.g., 2:21; 4:1, 13). Christ’s suffering is typically taken by scholars as a (or the) key to understanding First Peter’s approach to suffering, and for that reason I will discuss this in more detail below. Second, and in my opinion even more significantly, First Peter portrays its audiences’ suffering as intimately related to their performance of “good works” (καλὰ ἔργα, 2:12), their acts of “doing good” (ἀγαθοποιέω, 2:15, 20; 3:17), and their “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, 3:14). At 3:16 First Peter specifically labels the audiences’ detractors as “those who disparage your good conduct in Christ” (καταλαλεῖσθε … οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τῆν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν; see also 2:12). Likewise, they suffer because of their abstention from “wrongdoing” and “sin” (2:11–12, 16, 19, 24; 3:9, 10–12, 16–17; 4:1, 3–4). Third, and closely related to the language of good works, the audiences’ suffering is twice connected to “the will of God” (τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:17; 4:19), and those who suffer in accordance with that will are called “blessed” (μακάριοι, 3:14; 4:14), presumably by God. To these major features may be added two further
characterizations, already noted: this suffering is called “necessary” and is denoted as a period of “trials” through which the loyalty of the audiences is tested and proved (1:6; 4:12).

In light of all this, I suggest that First Peter presents its audiences with a “right way” to suffer; First Peter exhorts Christ-followers to suffer “for the right reasons.” Given First Peter’s early concession that a period of suffering is “necessary” (1:6), the letter “makes do,” as it were, and encourages its audiences to suffer “properly.” Enslaved Christ-followers, for example, given the reality of their suffering at the hands of harsh enslavers, are exhorted to continue “doing good” (ἀγαθοποιέω) and thereby ensure that their suffering may be reckoned as “unjustly” deserved (ἀδίκως). This is explicitly contrasted with suffering for “doing wrong” or “sinning” (ἀμαρτάνω), which First Peter does not commend (2:19–20). All Christ-followers are then exhorted likewise: “It is better to suffer while doing good, if it should be the will of God, than for doing evil” (κρεῖττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιοῦντας, εἰ θέλει τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πασχεῖν ἢ κακοποιοῦντας, 3:17). Finally, each is to suffer “not as a murderer, a thief, a wrongdoer, or as a meddler” (μὴ γάρ τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω ὡς φονεὺς ἢ κλέπτης ἢ κακοποιὸς ἢ ὡς ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος, 4:15); rather, it is by suffering “as a Christian” (ὁς χριστιανός) that they will find honor and have opportunity to glorify God (4:16).

Additionally, First Peter dictates that Christ-followers are to remain “good” in response to suffering—even as they suffer. Christ’s nonretaliatory conduct in the face of his own suffering is cited (2:21–25) as the example that enslaved Christ-followers are to emulate. This advice is then repeated for the sake of all Christ-followers (3:9). They are not to do “evil” (κακός, 3:9), not

28 I take “doing good” to be synonymous with or at least a part of “the will of God,” so that this verse might be paraphrased: “It is better to suffer for doing good, since that is the will of God, than to do evil.” I will return to this point below.
to commit “sin” (ἁμαρτία, 2:22), neither are they to threaten (ἀπειλέω, 2:23) nor to repay their detractors with insults (ἀντιλοιδορέω, 2:23; λοιδορία, 3:9). Instead, they are to be silent (2:23), to bless (εὐλογέω, 3:9), and to entrust themselves to God (2:23). They are to follow the counsel of Psalm 34 (LXX 33; 1 Pet 3:10–12), to “turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (ἐκκλινάτω δὲ ἀπὸ κακοῦ καὶ ποιησάτω ἀγαθόν, ζητησάτω εἰρήνην καὶ διωξάτω αὐτήν, 3:11). They suffer, in first Peter’s words, “while continuing to do good” (ἐν ἀγαθοποιΐα, 4:19).

How may we cohesively account for this constellation of elements in First Peter’s construction of suffering? What unites First Peter’s emphasis on suffering in relation to Christ, good works, and God’s will? These are the questions I will seek to answer with the remainder of this chapter. I will propose that First Peter’s approach to suffering is governed by its social strategy of addressing its audiences as “disciples of Christ.” In other words, I am suggesting that First Peter approaches suffering through the lens of the “grammar of discipleship” as outlined in Chapter Three, and that the letter’s overarching summons to discipleship provides a necessary context through which its audiences can understand, accept, and even embrace their suffering. First Peter is able to focus on suffering as it does because of its audiences’ identity as “disciples of Christ.” I will begin by discussing an alternative account of First Peter’s approach to suffering, by which many scholars propose that First Peter views suffering through the lens of (or as a function of) its Christology. This approach deserves comment because of its popularity within Petrine scholarship, but I will suggest that in the end, it only illumines part of First Peter’s strategy; it does not account for the close connection between good works, God’s will, and suffering. Reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship, I will demonstrate, has the benefit of recognizing the pedagogical milieu that I have already sought to emphasize, and incorporating
the figure of Christ within its larger purpose of assisting its readers to understand and meet the
challenge of their suffering.

**First Peter’s Approach to Suffering**

I am suggesting that reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship helps us account for the
letter’s presentation of its audiences’ suffering. Written to Christ-followers who are presently
suffering, First Peter strategically addresses them as disciples and thereby enables them both to
understand and to endure their present circumstances. Before describing the plausibility of this
proposal, I will place it in the context of another, christological approach. This approach has its
merits, but in my opinion lacks the ability to provide a comprehensive picture of First Peter’s
account of suffering. Reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship provides a cohesive
overarching strategy in its encouragement to Christ-followers to endure their present suffering.

**A Christological Approach: The Pattern of Christ’s Suffering**

There is a widespread and longstanding opinion among scholars that the Christology
behind First Peter dictates its approach to suffering—and this opinion has much to recommend it.
In response to the suffering of enslaved Christ-followers, First Peter directly appeals to the
suffering of Christ (2:21–25). It is then explicitly in the light of Christ’s own suffering that all
Christ-followers are exhorted to prepare themselves to suffer “with the same intent” (4:1).
Statements like these lead Eugene Boring, among others, to conclude that First Peter’s
exhortations are “grounded” in a christological perspective “that constitutes the theological
center and fulcrum of the letter” (1999: 120). Steven Kraftchick identifies four interconnected
approaches to suffering employed by First Peter, but singles out one as “most important”:

[T]he author identifies suffering as an essential part of Christian existence and defines it
as “following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ” (2:21). Because Christ has suffered in the
flesh (4:1) at the hands of those who did not understand him, Christians are to accept that this could be their fate.… The Christ model allows the audiences to understand its own experiences of suffering. (2014: 86–87)

With claims like these, scholars suggest that First Peter constructs suffering as an implication or consequence of its (and, supposedly, its audiences’) Christology. Because of their allegiance to a person who suffered, in other words, the audiences of First Peter should expect to suffer likewise.

The Christology of First Peter is often understood “schematically” as tracing a progression from Christ’s (innocent or unjust) suffering to his vindication by God. This is most explicit in two places. At the end of the letter’s proem (1:3–12), as discussed briefly in Chapter One, First Peter identifies the content of prophetic “seeking and searching” (ἐξεζήτησαν καὶ ἐξηράνησαν, 1:10) as providing insight into “the sufferings destined for Christ and the glories that would follow” (τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα καὶ τὰς μετὰ ταῦτα δόξας, 1:11). Since the prophets were, First Peter insists, “serving not themselves but you” (οὐχ ἑαυτοῖς, ὑμῖν δὲ διηκόνουν, 1:12a) in their activity, it makes most sense to understand this scheme of sufferings-followed-by-vindication as a pattern provided for the benefit of First Peter’s audiences. The following identification of “these things” (αὐτὰ) that the prophets discovered with the things that were also proclaimed to the audiences “by those who preached the gospel to you” (ἂ νῦν

29 The language of “glorification” is typically used; I have chosen to use “vindication” to encompass the variety of terms used by First Peter to describe the conclusion to this scheme (glory, resurrection, subjection of powers).

30 In Chapter One (pp. 102–10) I argued that First Peter’s syntax intends to clarify its introduction of the language of χάρις (1:10) and that this presents a lens through which its audiences are to understand the implications and consequences of the “grace destined for you” (τῆς εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος). This does not preclude the interpretation of other scholars that I am presenting here, but I will suggest below that the present interpretation is unable to account for First Peter’s approach to suffering comprehensively.
ἀνηγγέλη ὑμῖν διὰ τῶν εὐαγγελισμένων ὑμᾶς, 1:12b) indicates that the same christological scheme was integral to “the gospel recently proclaimed in Asia Minor to Peter’s readers” (Michaels 1988: 46).

The second significant presentation of this scheme occurs at 1 Pet 3:18–22, framing a short digression on the significance of baptism. First Peter asserts that “Christ suffered” (Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν) and “was put to death in the flesh” (θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκί), but also “made alive in the Spirit” (ζῳοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι, 3:18). The scheme is nearly complete, describing Christ’s transformation from death to life, but First Peter returns to describe Christ’s vindication in more detail in 3:22: Christ “is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven with angels and authorities and powers subject to him” (ὁς ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ύποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων). This provides a motivation for the audiences in their resolve to suffer: “Therefore, since Christ also suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same intention” (Χριστοῦ οὖν παθόντος σαρκὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν ὀπλίσασθε, 4:1).

This scheme of suffering-followed-by-vindication appears to be present elsewhere throughout First Peter.31 There is reason, in my opinion, to be cautious about how far we can

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31 The scheme also seems to be expressed at 1 Pet 1:21: God “raised him from the dead and gave him glory” (τὸν ἐγείραντα αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ δόξαν αὐτῷ δόντα), together with the earlier reference to Christ’s blood to signify his death (1:19). The scheme also provides a thematic context for understanding several other passages. At 1 Pet 2:4, Christ the “living stone” was “rejected by people but chosen and precious in God’s sight” (ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδεδοκιμασμένον, παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτόν), and if this scheme is assumed to lie behind this contrast, Christ’s “rejection” would refer to his suffering and death and God’s favor could be taken to refer to God’s act of raising Christ from the dead. In other cases, sufferings-followed-by-vindication provide context for various aspects of Christ-followers’ existence. At 5:1 the author identifies himself as both a “witness of the sufferings of Christ” and “one who shares in the glory to be revealed” (μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων, ὁ καὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἀποκαλύψεως δόξης κοινωνός); shortly after the audiences are assured that they “will win the crown of glory” as well (κομιεῖσθε τὸν ἁμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον, 5:4). Most explicit as to the parallel between Christ’s experience and the experience of the audiences is 4:13: “Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed” (καθὸ κοινωνεῖτε τοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν, χαίρετε, ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ χαρῆτε ἀγαλλιώμενοι), since this glory will also be
understand First Peter to actively apply this christological scheme to the situation of its audiences. For now, however, it is enough to have it in our minds so that we may recognize its ubiquity and influence in discussions of First Peter’s approach to suffering.

Earl Richard describes First Peter’s Christology as “functional”: “the author employs a well-defined and particular Christology in his effort to foster perseverance among the Christians of Asia Minor” (1986: 121). Christ’s death and resurrection are “put at the service of the author’s needs” (133):

From the outset the author puts the traditional Jesus material at the service of his ecclesiological task: by means of the death and resurrection of Jesus, whether employing the imagery of ransom, washing, conversion, or dying/rising of seeds, he is able to establish the basis for the community’s unity, strength, and source of life…. The pattern of suffering and glory indicates the parameters of the Christian’s concerns. (1986: 135–36, emphasis mine)

In his later commentary Richard describes this christological pattern as “key” to its strategy and “a doctrinal basis” for the letter’s “major thesis”: “Jesus is the Christian’s model of suffering and glory” (2000: 19–20). First Peter’s Christology is “functional,” therefore, insofar as it provides its audiences with a scheme through which they are to understand their suffering: they suffer (because Christ suffered) but also hope for a future vindication (because Christ was vindicated).

Steven Bechtler also argues that “Christ … is the key to the letter’s response to the suffering of its addressees” and specifically for unlocking the epiphany that “their suffering will not last indefinitely” (1998: 179). “The letter,” Bechtler contends, “superimposes Christ’s something that they share (see 1:8; 5:4). Finally, the scheme may provide context for understanding 2:23 and 4:19, wherein Christ is remembered as “entrusting himself” (παραδίδομι) to God while suffering (πάσχω) and Christ-followers are exhorted to “entrust themselves” (παρατίθημι) to God while both “suffering” (πάσχω) and “doing good” (ἀγαθοποιώ). In these two cases, scholars typically interpret the act of “entrusting” as done in the light of the vindication that could be expected subsequent to suffering (in keeping with the scheme), signaled by references to God as “one who judges justly” (τῷ κρίνοντι δικαίως, 2:23) and “a faithful creator” (τοῦ θεοῦ πιστῶ κτίστῃ, 4:19).
experience onto that of his followers so that Christ’s experience becomes the interpretive lens through which Christian experience is viewed and the template that describes the shape of Christian life” (180). Central to Bechtler’s argument is the letter’s concern to address its audiences’ perceived loss of “honor” (noted above). In light of this concern, the letter reconfigures the relationship of suffering to honor and thereby offers its readers a means of enduring reproach without losing honor. First Peter’s identification of its addressees’ experience with Christ’s, in other words, is the essence of the letter’s response to the threat to honor routinely faced by the addressees in their daily interactions with non-Christians. (180)

God’s vindication of Christ becomes a sign of what suffering Christ-followers can expect to receive from God as well.

Achtermeier notes that “suffering, potential and actual, has often been recognized as playing a central role in the letter’s discussions.” He also mentions “hope” as another plausibly central theme, but concludes that behind both of these themes “is the figure of Christ,” who holds the “key role in the theological thought of the letter” (1996: 64–65). As with Bechtel and Richard, Achtermeier contends that Christ’s “passion, death, and subsequent resurrection show the way present suffering is related to future glory, and thus provide Christians with a model for the way they are to live a faithful life in the midst of a hostile society” (65). Agreeing with Achtermeier, Schreiner invokes the same scheme: Christ-followers “are encouraged to persevere, knowing that a great reward will be theirs on the day of salvation…. Since the end is coming soon, believers should imitate Jesus Christ and follow his example of suffering because all those who suffer will experience a great reward” (2020: 37–38).  

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32 See also Michaels 1988: “The path of Christ from suffering to resurrection to heaven is the path intended for Christians as well” (lxx); and, more recently, Keener 2020: “Like Christ, believers submit themselves to unjust sufferings when they cannot avoid them, depending on God’s vindication” (38); Reese 2021: “The Christology of 1 Peter forms the foundation for the life of the household of God as it experiences suffering” (37); “Ultimately, the
None of the scholars discussed here are wrong to highlight First Peter’s emphasis on this obvious christological scheme. Its presence as a motivational factor in the letter’s rhetoric is indisputable. It is also an optimistic approach to suffering and is therefore attractive: Christ-follower’s present suffering is not only going to come to an end; it is going to be overcome and even rewarded by a miraculous act of God. Their imitation of Christ is not limited to suffering, but encompasses his vindication as well. Therefore their “hope in God” (1:21) is most certainly “living” (1:3); it is active and sustained by the prospect of what comes after suffering. They know that they have allied themselves to someone whom God has favored (2:4) and vindicated (1:11; 3:22). If they remain loyal to God through their imitation of Christ, they may look forward to their own future vindication beyond their present trials.

I wish to suggest, however, that this christological perspective is too limited to provide a comprehensive account of First Peter’s approach to suffering, especially in light of the observations I have been making in this study. In my opinion, First Peter’s Christology—as important as it is—does not account for the letter’s effort to connect suffering with good works and the will of God. I will deal with these details below, but a few observations on this christological approach to suffering in First Peter will move the discussion forward.

First, as First Peter focuses in on its audiences’ suffering, the scheme of Christ’s suffering-followed-by-vindication is often left unstated (though this does not mean that it is unassumed). I argued in Chapter One that the first occurrence of this scheme at 1:11 is intended whole letter with its focus on suffering must be read in light of Christ’s ultimate triumph over his enemies. Even if the followers of Christ may suffer now, that cannot be the end of the narrative, since Christ has triumphed over death and rules over his enemies” (40); and, after quoting Richard’s 1986 study, Jobes 2022: “Christ obeyed, suffered, died, was resurrected, and ascended to eternal glory with the Father. Following in Christ’s footsteps, the Christian lives a life shaped by the same pattern” (52).
primarily to signal how Christ-followers should understand their “salvation” under the category of χάρις and ancient systems of benefaction. The second, full explication of the scheme at 3:18–22 does occur amid a discussion of suffering and provides motivation for Christ-followers to prepare themselves to suffer (4:1); at the same time, as First Peter exhorts them to make such preparations, it only highlights Christ’s “suffering in the flesh” (παθόντος σαρκί) and immediately proceeds to describe the circumstances that have given rise to these Christ-followers’ suffering. The only “hope” that is then provided explicitly for these Christ-followers is the assurance that their detractors will have to appear before God for judgment (4:5). Further, at 2:21, where enslaved Christ-followers are explicitly told to imitate Christ, the scheme of suffering-followed-by-vindication is not presented; rather, it is Christ’s non-retaliatory conduct that is placed before their eyes for emulation. That Christ “entrusted himself” to God (παραδίδου 2:23) might hint at or presuppose an impending vindication, but the immediate context refers specifically to non-retaliatory conduct: rather than threatening those who caused his suffering, Christ maintained a guileless course of conduct.

First Peter 4:13 appears to be more explicit: “Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.”

33 See above, pp. 54–60, 102–10.

34 God’s role as “one who judges” may imply that First Peter has Christ’s vindication in mind here: God’s “judgment” of Christ will reveal that he has suffered unjustly and vindicates him. The use of δέ in 2:23b links the act of “entrusting” closely, however, with the non-retaliatory conduct of 2:23a. The language of “entrusting” is also present at 4:19, but here God is characterized as a “creator” (not a “judge”), and First Peter does not include an explicit reference to any form of vindication; instead, it continues to encourage the audiences to commit themselves to “do good,” which is precisely that which has given rise to Christ-followers’ suffering. I will treat this below in connection with a discussion of “good works” and suffering.

35 καθό κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν, χαίρετε, ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀποκάλυψιν τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ χαρῆτε ἀγαλλιώμενοι.
should be seen in close connection to the preceding exhortation that they not be “surprised” at their suffering, the “fiery trial occurring among” them (τῇ ἐν ὑμῖν πυρώσει, 4:12). As Holloway has argued, this exhortation represents a wider, Cyrenaic consolatory topos: “nothing unexpected has happened” (see Holloway 2009: 215–32); the scheme of suffering-followed-by-vindication thereby calls attention to what the audiences are already expected to know and to which they already hold fast. In other words, the christological scheme’s presence at 4:13—and, by implication, elsewhere throughout First Peter—may function more as a “reminder” or as a presupposition than as a prescription, something that these audiences are already expected to be aware of and not the driving force of First Peter’s strategy. Rather, as I will demonstrate at length below, First Peter’s employment of this christological scheme can easily fit within its larger strategy of summoning its audiences to discipleship: since imitation, as I have discussed in Chapter Two, was part and parcel of ancient discipleship, this scheme is simply a way of expressing part of these Christ-followers’ responsibility as disciples of Christ.

Second, and closely related to what I have just described, it is not entirely clear that Christ’s exemplary role (his provision of a model to follow) would necessarily be understood as the driving force of First Peter’s exhortations. Aristotle holds παραδείγματα as potential means of persuasion, but, practically speaking, he “implies that examples should have a subordinate role” (Croy 1998: 71; see Aristotle, Rhet. 1.2.8; 2.20.9). The Rhetorica ad Herennium is somewhat more dismissive: “By example, the nature of what we are discussing is clarified” (exemplo demonstratur id quod dicimus cuiusmodi sit, 4.3.5). In Clayton Croy’s words, there existed “a common preference for the use of exempla as supportive rather than as the foundation of one’s argument” (1998: 72). While exempla may have played a larger or more foundational
role in paraenetic literature, it is worth considering that their role functioned in subordination to a
text’s or author’s larger purposes (to encourage a virtuous lifestyle or endurance in suffering).

Third, and along a different “train of thought,” there is a risk—perhaps it is slight, but it
remains a risk nonetheless—that highlighting a christological scheme as the basis for First
Peter’s approach to suffering neglects the paraenetic, epistolary, and occasional nature of First
Peter. Richard’s suggestion that First Peter’s Christology is “put at the service of” its practical
needs (1986: 133) is, I think, correct. But this also results in his characterization of First Peter as
a “theological statement” (133). Donald Senior also emphasizes the importance of First Peter’s
“theological vision” (2008) as the foundation of its pastoral advice. Neither of these statements is
necessarily wrong. I have stated above, however, that First Peter is first and foremost concerned
with its audiences’ present experiences of suffering; therefore I think it is important to maintain
focus on what First Peter positions itself to do: not to promulgate a timeless set of theological
truths or to dictate precise instructions as interminable norms for all times, but to “teach its
audiences how to suffer.” First Peter’s “theological vision” certainly informs (and may even
dictate) how it does this, but we should be cautious about systematizing that vision or making it
the sole lens through which we understand the letter’s approach to practical matters.

Fourth, and finally, First Peter need not be limited to its (presupposed) Christology to
assist its audiences in making sense of their suffering. Ancient consolation took several shapes
and could be theoretically categorized into different “schools” of consolation (associated with
particular philosophical outlooks; see Cicero, Tusc. 3.31.76; Holloway 2009: 77–86), but in
practice “consolation was almost always eclectic” (Holloway 2009: 82). In Cicero’s words,

There are some too in favour of concentrating all these ways of administering comfort
(for one man is influenced in one way, one in another) pretty nearly as in my Consolation
I threw them all into one attempt at consolation; for my soul was in a feverish state and I attempted every means of curing its condition.\textsuperscript{36}

Holloway cites several studies of modern stress and coping theories to argue “that persons in stressful situations ‘often use more than one strategy at a time,’ and that coping strategies are ‘dynamic, multifaceted, and interdependent’ practical exercises” (2009: 116).\textsuperscript{37} First Peter’s Christology is doubtless a part of its approach to suffering, but it need not be regarded as its only approach to suffering. My contention, by contrast, is that First Peter’s Christology is a piece of its larger strategy to locate suffering along the path of its audiences’ discipleship.

A Pedagogical Approach: First Peter’s Summons to Discipleship

As I demonstrated at length in Chapter Two, it is important to remember that ancient “discipleship” is to be understood as a pedagogical enterprise. As such, it makes sense for us to ask whether and how “suffering” could play a role in pedagogical curricula of the ancient world. A closer look at this pedagogical context of ancient discipleship reveals that “suffering” was a theme or \textit{topos} that First Peter, as a summons to discipleship, could be expected to treat. Two scholars, especially, have drawn significant attention to the theme of suffering throughout ancient pedagogy: Charles Talbert (2018, orig. 1991) and Clayton Croy (1998). I will begin by discussing their work and its benefits, but also pointing out the ways in which my approach to First Peter as discipleship both utilizes and goes beyond what Talbert and Croy have proposed.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Tusc.} 3.31.76: \textit{Sunt etiam qui haec omnia genera consolandi colligant—alius enim alio modo movetur—ut fere nos in Consolatione omnia in consolationem unam coniecimus; erat enim in tumore animus et omnis in eo temptabatur curatio.}

\textsuperscript{37} See the studies cited at Holloway 2009: 116 nn. 21–23. Holloway is specifically setting up his argument that different portions of First Peter employ different coping strategies (see 2009: 116 n. 24; 137–232).
The Educational Value of Suffering

Charles Talbert’s study was originally published in 1991 under the auspices of the Zacchaeus Studies series.38 I offer the following discussion not because Talbert’s study has proved widely influential, but because Talbert assists me to demonstrate how experiences of suffering could be presented within a pedagogical framework and thereby transformed into meaningful opportunities for refinement, growth, and creativity. The brevity of Talbert’s study also presents some significant limitations, so the work of Croy will be of some assistance. I will begin by summarizing Talbert’s general thesis along with his specific conclusions regarding First Peter. Then I will note the limitations of Talbert’s study, but contend that those limitations need not deter us from appreciating the importance of the pedagogical context for reading First Peter. I will then conclude by noting the specific ways that this pedagogical context can inform our reading of First Peter as a summons to discipleship.

Talbert asserts that various streams of thought within both “Ancient Judaism” and “Greco-Roman Antiquity” understood that suffering and hardships could be “educational”: “there is an educational value to suffering … for Christian, as well as Jew and pagan, in Mediterranean antiquity” (2018: 23). On the one hand, he demonstrates that ancient Jewish texts often understood suffering to be “divine” (insofar as it finds its source in God) and punitive (insofar as it occurs as a form of punishment). After a survey of several texts, Talbert concludes,

Within ancient Judaism it is only when suffering is understood as motivated by God’s love and designed for the sufferer’s benefit that it is regarded as divine discipline or education. Presupposed in the particular Jewish view is usually the assumption that the sufferer has strayed from the right path either consciously or unconsciously, knowingly

38 In Croy’s words, this series “aims at concise, readable scholarship.” This is by no means a critique: it is “well-written … with surprising breadth and insight”; furthermore, “it succeeds” (Croy 1998: 33). My citations of Talbert are from the 2018 (unrevised) reprint by Baylor University Press, whose pagination may differ.
or unwittingly. The pain is the discipline necessary to correct this misdirection. Usually in Judaism divine discipline/education through suffering presupposed some flaw on the part of the sufferer that needed correction or repair. (2018: 16–17)

The word “usually” is key here; but while it seems emphasized, Talbert assumes that the expectation across Jewish texts and traditions was that suffering was somehow punitive. On the other hand, when it comes to Greek and Roman traditions, Talbert demonstrates that suffering was also “intended by Providence to educate and improve the sufferer” (17). At the same time, Talbert concludes that the punitive aspect he deems present across Jewish texts is, for the most part, missing:

In the Greco-Roman world one was believed to be educated through suffering viewed as a struggle that results in increased strength. Suffering in this view is not so much correction of one’s misdirection, as in the mainstream of Jewish thought, but rather conditioning that builds one up for greater virtue. (2018: 20)

We will see below that this binary is less pronounced than Talbert takes it to be. For now, given this basic background, we may ask how this informs Talbert’s reading of First Peter.

In his approach to First Peter, Talbert asks whether this letter “makes any contribution to the discussion of suffering as divine education” and discerns his answer by examining “seven passages that deal explicitly with the matter of suffering” (2018: 42).39 He decides that three passages (1:6–7; 4:1–6; 4:12–19) portray suffering as a “divine education.” Widespread portrayals of suffering as a series of “trials” intended for a person or group’s “purification” leads Talbert to read First Peter’s use of πειρασμός in this light (1:6–7; 4:12).40 “The analogy … leads one to interpret the function of the trials as an education by God which separates the pure from

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40 Talbert cites LXX Ps 11:6; Prov 17:3; Sir 2:5; Wis 3:5–6; Plato, Resp. 413D–E; 503A; Seneca, Prov. 5.9 [Dial. 1.5.9]; Herm. Vis. 4.3.4; Jas 1:2, 12.
the dross in the Christian’s life, leaving behind the genuine part.” Talbert identifies “the old Jewish view of suffering as God’s disciple of the child for his/her good” (i.e., punitive; 2018: 45).41 A somewhat complicated exegesis of 4:1–6 similarly leads Talbert to interpret 4:1b (“since the one who suffers in the flesh has ceased from sin”) as an indication that “suffering purifies from sin” and that First Peter, again, therefore presents suffering as both punitive and purgative (2018: 52).42

While Talbert’s study has demonstrated the plausibility of reading First Peter’s account of suffering through a pedagogical lens, there are two ways in which, in my opinion, it falls short. First, Talbert is solely interested in suffering as a “divine education,” and this interest severely narrows the scope of what Talbert finds worth commenting upon. Regarding 1 Pet 2:18–25 he concludes, “There is nothing about suffering as divine education in this text” (2018: 47); and on 3:13–14a he writes, “Once again we meet a passage that has nothing to do with the

41 I find Talbert’s interpretation implausible. The immediate literary and rhetorical contexts of “trial” language in First Peter do not imply that there is any sin, wrongdoing, or impurity that needs to be “separated” from the “pure” lives of Christ-followers—“sifting” is not the metaphor that the letter is employing. Rather, it is the strength and resiliency of their πίστις (“loyalty”) that is under scrutiny (1:7); moreover, First Peter insists that the “trial” faced by Christ-followers is not to arise because of any form of wrongdoing on their part, but because of their commitment to Christ (4:14–16). The letter assumes that its audiences have already purified themselves “by obedience to the truth” (τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν ἡγνικότες ἐν τῇ ὑπακοῇ τῆς ἀληθείας, 1:22) and encourages them to continue behaving as such. More generally, First Peter’s insistence on suffering “properly” (as described above), apart from the metaphor of “trials,” assumes that suffering occurs only for “doing what is right” and in connection with “good works.”

42 Talbert’s exegesis here depends on his outline of First Peter (see Talbert 1986), which itself has not found wide acceptance (though see Schreiner 2020: 40–41). Talbert proposes a chiastic reading of 1 Pet 4:1–6 that is rather unbalanced and even dissectes vv. 1–2 into a smaller chiasm without explanation, yet he writes: “Sensing this arrangement permits a correct reading of the text” (2018: 50). Beside this rhetorical argument, as in the passages utilizing the “trial” metaphor (see above, n. 39), 4:1–6 does not envision any “sin” that must be overcome or purified in the lives of Christ-followers. In fact, the opposite is the case: First Peter proceeds to narrate how its audiences have indeed “ceased from sinning” in vv. 2–3, and that this is what gives rise to their suffering (v. 4). It is in this context that the phrase ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ πέπαυται ἁμαρτίας should be read. Christ-followers, in Achtemeier’s words, are “to be prepared to undergo suffering, a suffering that demonstrates that the one who suffers no longer acts in a way contrary to God’s will, that is, by sinning. … The suffering Christians undergo at the hands of their ungodly opponents demonstrates that such sufferers no longer live in ways opposed to God’s will” (1996: 280).
educational role of suffering but works within an entirely different frame of reference” (48). Talbert seems to dismiss passages like these simply because they do not identify (or implicate) God as an author or overseer of suffering. Two things are clear from the abundance of literary evidence we have from antiquity, however. First, there were varieties of opinions (among Jews, Greeks, and Romans) as to the level of divine involvement in a person’s or group’s suffering; First Peter’s sensitivity to God’s “presence” or “initiative” in their suffering must first be read on its own terms. Second, suffering could easily be reckoned or portrayed as “educational” and formative with and without divine involvement. To say that 1 Pet 3:13–14a “works within an entirely different frame of reference” simply because it does not appear to be a “divine education” mistakes the trees for the forest. This is to say: widening our perspective to appreciate both the complexity of describing suffering and the range of ways in which learning, education, and formation took place—together with First Peter’s own nuances for doing so—will assist us in appreciating the pedagogical context of suffering in First Peter.

Second, and closely related, Talbert approaches First Peter and its account of suffering in an atomistic fashion: he identifies passages as relevant by the presence of specific (and therefore limited) vocabulary (πειρασμός, πάθημα) and then treats them in isolation, both from one another and from the larger rhetorical shape of the letter. At times Talbert harks back to his discussion of an earlier passage (e.g., “remember 1:6–7,” 2018: 53), but he does not account for how these passages relate to one another or how the letter’s thought develops in between.

43 “The view that suffering was salutary or educational was widespread among Greek writers from the mid-fifth century on…. The element of divine intentionality in human suffering was rarely present, however” (Croy 1998: 139, 144). An obvious example of “divine” involvement (or provision) in suffering is Seneca’s De Providentia, cited at length by Talbert (2018: 17–18). For Musonius Rufus, on the other hand, suffering remains an educational force in the life of any person willing to endure it, but “God is absent from his reflection on hardships” (Croy 1998: 153). Plato and Hierocles also refused to attribute divine causality to suffering (156–57).
Meanwhile, he treats 3:13–14a and 3:14b–22 as separate passages with distinct approaches to suffering, even though these passages are typically regarded as forming a united series of exhortations. At the same time, Talbert leaves too much out of the discussion: he mentions nothing of the likely suffering borne by Christ-following women in mixed marriages (3:1–7), the several indications of vitriol and the role it plays in accounting for the audiences’ suffering (e.g., 2:11–12), or the potential of 1:14–2:10 (saturated as it is with pedagogical imagery) to ground an understanding of the audiences’ suffering.

Clayton Croy’s 1998 study of Hebrews 12 expands Talbert’s study in two ways that I wish to highlight here. First, Croy identifies the unnecessary binary that Talbert has drawn between “Jewish” and “Greco-Roman” understandings and depictions of suffering. Although Talbert stipulates that Jewish texts “usually” depict suffering as punitive (and that Greco-Roman texts do not), Croy points out that the brevity of the earlier study provided little room for nuance. Croy, therefore, rightly provides this nuance by demonstrating the “variety of Jewish explanations of suffering” in light of “the complexity of ancient Judaism” (1998: 131). Croy concludes that “while the punitive view of suffering was dominant [among ancient Judaisms], it nonetheless shared the field with several, sometimes significant, counter-currents” (132).44 Likewise, and despite Talbert’s claim that Greeks and Romans attributed suffering to “Providence,” Croy also demonstrates that, apart from some forms of popular piety and a few influential authors like Seneca, “Greek and Roman writers generally seemed less prone to

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44 Croy concludes more comprehensively: “It seems to be the case that among Jewish authors the strongest representatives of the non-punitive view of suffering have this in common: evidence of non-Jewish influences and, in some cases, non-Palestinian origin…. Conversely, writings that stem from or seem closely linked to Palestine … more often expound the punitive view” (1998: 132–33).
attribute punitive motives to deity \textit{[sic]} than did Jewish writers.” In the light of other writers like Plato, Musonius Rufus, and Hierocles, Croy concludes that “the views of Greco-Roman authors likewise were not monolithic, but varied and even contradictory” (157).

Second, Croy proposes that a more fruitful investigation would proceed from the question of “whether wrongdoing is presupposed” in an account of suffering (1998: 77). \textit{Paideia}, both as a term and as a concept, “can refer to corrective punishment, rigorous training, or the end result of training, i.e., education or culture” (77). The point here is to recognize that any form of suffering in the ancient world could carry with it the opportunity for growth, formation, and education. With regard to First Peter, specifically, Talbert’s insistence on finding a connection between suffering and “\textit{divine} education” severely limits his ability to view the abundant references to suffering in First Peter as educational and formative. By allowing the pedagogical perspective on suffering to inform our reading of First Peter as an “epistle of suffering,” this broader milieu is equipped to inform us as to why First Peter attempts to put a positive, productive spin on its audiences’ circumstances.

This pedagogical perspective fits neatly into my proposed reading of First Peter as a summons to discipleship. First Peter exhorts its audiences to inhabit a way of life as “disciples” who learn the way of their teacher. Given the reality of their suffering, First Peter can naturally utilize their present experiences and portray them as a series of pedagogical exercises. First Peter can confidently embody the advice of Pseudo-Theano (Pythagoras’s alleged wife), in a letter to Eubule (ca. 35 CE):

\begin{quote}
Hardships, my friend, are a kind of preparatory astringent to the children with a view to the virtue that will come to full maturity; when the children have been sufficiently steeped in them they hold the dye of virtue more properly. Watch out, then, my friend,
lest, just as badly tended grapevines bear no fruit, so also your children because of your pampering produce the evil of lewdness and worthlessness.45

First Peter encourages its audiences to embrace their suffering as part and parcel of their reoriented and resocialized way of life—a result of following Christ in discipleship. Their “trials” are not purgative or punitive, but that which may be expected by those who entrust themselves to God, as expressed in the Wisdom of Ben Sira:

My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing (ἕτοίμασον τὴν ψυχήν σου εἰς πειρασμόν). Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity. Cling to him and do not depart, so that your days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire (ὅτι ἐν πυρὶ δοκιμάζεται χρυσός), and those found acceptable in the furnace of humiliation. Be loyal to him (πίστευσον αὐτῷ), and he will help you; make your ways straight and hope in him (ἔλπισον ἐπ’ αὐτόν). (Sir 2:1–6)46

Discipleship provides an ideal metaphor through which First Peter can account for its audiences’ suffering, combining philosophical and religious devotion with the pedagogical emphasis on the benefit(s) to be found amid periods of suffering and hardship.

Suffering in the Context of Discipleship

With the remainder of this chapter, I will propose that First Peter’s summons to discipleship functions as a “remembrance” of Jesus’s teachings on discipleship, and that this function makes sense of First Peter’s construction of its audiences’ suffering. I will begin by defining my understanding of First Peter as a “commemoration” of Jesus, followed by a brief

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46 Trans. NRSV, mod.: Τέκνον, εἰ προσέρχῃ δουλεύειν κυρίῳ, ἐτοίμασον τὴν ψυχήν σου εἰς πειρασμόν· εὐθυνον τὴν καρδίαν σου καὶ καρτέρησον καὶ μὴ σπεύδῃς ἐν καρδίᾳ ἐπαγωγῆς· κολλήθητι αὐτῷ καὶ μὴ ἀποστῇς, ἵνα αὐξηθῆς ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων σου. πάντες, δὲ ἐὰν ἐπαρχηθῆ σοι, δέξας καὶ ἐν ἀλλάξασθι ταπεινώσεις σου μακροθύμησον· ὅτι ἐν πυρὶ δοκιμάζεται χρυσός καὶ ἀνθρωποί δεκτοὶ ἐν καμίνῳ ταπεινώσεως, πίστευσον αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀντιλήμψεται σου· εὐθυνον τὰς ὀδούς σου καὶ ἔλπισον ἐπ’ αὐτόν.
overview of how First Peter embodies the “grammar of discipleship” outlined in Chapter Three. I will then reengage First Peter’s construction of its audiences’ suffering summarized above and seek to demonstrate how the “lens” of discipleship may shed light on it.

*Remembering Jesus with First Peter*

Older studies of the relationship between gospel traditions and First Peter, in David Horrell’s words, “have tended to focus on the sayings, attempting to establish whether parallels of wording are sufficient to demonstrate knowledge and use of *verba Christi* on the part of the author of 1 Peter” (2014: 127). For example, Leonhard Goppelt suggests that the language of “following” at 1 Pet 2:21 (ἐπακολουθέω) directly reflects or even depends on gospel tradition (1993: 205–6, 206 n. 24). Recent studies of the form-critical assumptions behind many of these approaches to the words and deeds of Jesus have reduced the confidence of several scholars to “ascertain the historicity of recorded sayings or actions of Jesus” (Horrell 2014: 124) and, by implication, to find *verba Christi* in First Peter.49

Without underestimating the value of previous studies, Horrell proposes a different way forward with attention to the insights of memory-oriented approaches to the gospel tradition, as discussed in Chapter Three. At the risk of reiteration, our primary sources contain “records, impressions, of the *impact* Jesus made, which represent the way he was remembered” (Horrell

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47 Horrell provides a catalogue of such specialized studies (2014: 127 n. 14). Several commentaries include summaries of the primary data: Michaels 1988: xli–xlii; Achtemeier 1996: 9–12; Davids 1990: 26–27, which also includes a helpful table of the data.

48 For similar suggestions, see Achtemeier 1996: 199 nn. 147–48 (citing Goppelt); Michaels 1996: 252–53.

49 Not every assumption underlying these studies, of course, is form-critical, though many are. For critiques of the form-critical assumptions underlying attempts to identify “authentic” sayings and actions of Jesus, see Keith 2012 and the earlier essays of Morna Hooker (1970; 1972).
While this approach is typically applied to the gospel tradition, Horrell demonstrates how it may readily be applied to the New Testament’s epistolary literature as well. Regarding First Peter, Horrell asks, “What kind of image of Jesus is presented in 1 Peter? Do we find any kind of character sketch, and if so, how is this presented and how does it correlate with the impression we find in the gospel traditions?” (2014: 127–28).

The importance of Horrell’s study lies in its determination that First Peter itself embodies “an historically informed sense of both the character of Jesus and the events of the Passion” (2014: 144). This “historically informed sense” does not necessitate direct reliance on eyewitness testimony or literary dependence on written gospel traditions; rather, insofar as it presents the person of Jesus for its audiences’ consideration, First Peter functions (in part) as a distinct commemoration of Jesus. This is suggested above all for Horrell by First Peter’s distinctive (perhaps unique) “scripturalization” of Jesus’s passion through the language of Isa 52–53 (1 Pet 2:21–25), reflecting “significant (possibly early, even to some degree independent) awareness of key traditions concerning the character and conduct of Jesus during the events of the Passion” (2014: 150).

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50 For an earlier example of this approach, see Keightley 1987. Keightley writes that each New Testament text “provides an original perspective on Christian reality, one that is expressive of the specific social reality with which the text has been identified” (149) and that the epistles, perhaps even more than the gospels, “reveal the extent to which the memory of Jesus was constitutive and influential in shaping both corporate and personal identity for the individual communities of which these texts give us an inward look” (150). More specifically, Keightley applies these insights to First Thessalonians and argues that “the memory of Jesus” performs this formative function for the Thessalonians: “I want to show how much as well as how the text reveals the memory of Jesus as a primary force shaping the life of the Thessalonian Christians.… I propose to highlight the extent to which the memory of Jesus is constitutive of Christian corporate life and is determinative of ecclesial identity” (152).

First Peter’s commemoration of Jesus, I suggest, extends beyond the events surrounding Jesus’s death to memories of Jesus’s vision for discipleship and the grammar of discipleship that emerged from that vision, as described in Chapter Three. This may already appear clear from numerous echoes of Jesus’s teachings throughout First Peter, but my point here is to emphasize that we need not posit a specific literary relationship between First Peter and the written Gospels themselves. Instead, we may approach First Peter as drawing upon the same grammar of discipleship preserved and illustrated by the gospel tradition. First Peter uses and adapts that grammar to present its own paradigm of and summons to discipleship for the sake of its own audiences of Christ-followers in first-century Asia Minor.52

First Peter and the Grammar of Discipleship

In Chapter Two I proposed that First Peter’s exhortations would resonate with the letter’s audiences by drawing upon common expectations that teachers had of their students throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. There I demonstrated that First Peter itself emphasizes the obligations of obedience, imitation, and representation, just as any reputable teacher of the ancient Mediterranean would expect of their students. In Chapter Three I outlined key factors

52 It may prove useful to return to the claims of Goppelt that “following” (ἐπακολουθέω, 2:21) represents the “technical language” of discipleship (Goppelt 1993: 205). Achtemeier’s version of this claim—that “it is based in Jesus’ own words in Mark 8:324 par.” and that ἐπακολουθέω is “a Christian technical term for being a follower of Jesus” (1996: nn. 147–48)—fails to account for the different in wording between First Peter and the vast majority of the gospel tradition, which vastly prefers ἀκολουθέω to any compound or prefixed verb to denote the act of “following” Jesus in discipleship. Elliott suggests that the verbs are simply “paronyms” (1985: 195), but this still falls short of an explanation for the difference in actual vocabulary if one is to claim any form of “dependence” of First Peter upon traditions or texts (as do Goppelt, Achtemeier, and Elliott). Ultimately, among those who do suggest that 1 Pet 2:21 depends on a particular gospel text or tradition, no explanation of First Peter’s choice of ἐπακολουθέω is offered. In my opinion, we cannot divine the reason for this specific choice in vocabulary. If, however, we approach First Peter as a distinct commemoration of Jesus and of his vision for discipleship, its choice of ἐπακολουθέω can simply be regarded as a part of First Peter’s own way of remembering Jesus’s summons to follow him. Regardless of the term used (ἀκολουθέω or ἐπακολουθέω), Jesus’s call to follow after him is remembered by First Peter. In this and in more significant ways, First Peter embodies and adapts the grammar of Jesus’s vision for discipleship.
that contribute to a “grammar of discipleship”: reorientation according to the will of God; resocialization into the family of God; and the suffering that may (and often does) result from that reorientation and resocialization. Each of these is also remembered and adapted by First Peter, and it will be the burden of the following discussion to demonstrate this.

**Reorientation around the Will of God.** The gospel traditions depict a disciple’s reorientation around the will of God in relation to Jesus’s proclamation of the kingdom of God, as I discussed in Chapter Three. Those who follow Jesus devote themselves to God’s will by entering, anticipating, and otherwise encountering God’s reign, especially as manifested in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. First Peter contains no reference to the kingdom of God by name; it depicts its audiences’ reorientation in different terms. Like the gospel tradition, it mentions God’s will as a reorienting factor in the lives of its audiences (4:2); more commonly, however, First Peter depicts Christ-followers’ reorientation in terms of their performance of “good works” and “doing what is good”—often closely connected with God’s will (2:15; 3:17; 4:19). As a summons to discipleship, in other words, First Peter presents the performance of “good works” as a prominent manifestation of disciples’ reorientation. Attention to this prominent motif throughout First Peter also reveals its close connection to their suffering.

The “good works” motif is a part of the larger image of reorientation that has taken place in the lives of Christ-followers. They have been “begotten anew” (ἀναγεννάω, 1:3, 23),

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53 In terms of language that might be reminiscent of the “kingdom of God,” First Peter refers to the Roman emperor as a βασιλεύς (2:13, 17) and uses the phrase βασιλείαν ἱεράτευμα to designate the corporate body of its audiences (2:9). My suspicion is that First Peter may avoid referring to the “kingdom of God” either (1) because its audiences would not have found it understandable, relevant, or applicable; or (2) it sought to avoid further alienating its already ostracized audiences by blatantly portraying them as members of an alternative and rival “kingdom.” These possible motives are not mutually exclusive.

54 Being “begotten anew” is also key to the audiences’ resocialization; see below.
specifically “for a living hope” (ἐἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν, 1:3). 55 No explicit contrast is made with the audiences’ former hope, but the immediate context and the specific characterization of their hope as “living” implies that First Peter envisions it to be opposed to a former “dead” or “lifeless” hope—or even a lack of any hope at all (see Michaels 1988: 19; Achtemeier 1996: 95). This hope, significantly, is itself an orienting factor in the lives of Christ-followers: they are to set their hope on God’s impending beneficence and, therefore, ready themselves for action (1:13); their “hope” complements their behavior-altering “loyalty” (πίστις) toward God (1:21); and it is “hope” that inspires the “good conduct in Christ” (ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν) that outsiders revile and slander (3:15–16). Hope is “active, flowing into present action” (Parsons 1989: 99–100); hope forms “the basis of moral conduct” (Marcar 2022: 107).

I discussed this transformation of the audiences’ “moral conduct” at length in Chapter One: Christ-followers’ “former ignorance” has given way to “holiness” (1 Pet 1:14–15); “futile ancestral ways” have turned to “reverence” (1:17–18). Christ-followers’ conduct reflects their “obedience” to God (1:2, 14, 22). Beginning with 2:11–12, First Peter formalizes the way it describes Christ-followers’ conduct with the language of “good works” and “doing good.” Travis Williams summarizes the data thus:

On two separate occasions, the audience is told to maintain “good conduct” among the Gentiles (2.12 [τὴν ἀναστροφήν … καλῆν]; 3.16 [τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἀναστροφήν]). They are similarly enjoined to practice “good works” (καλῶν ἔργων [2.12]) and to “do good” (ποιησάτω ἀγαθόν [3.11]). Throughout 1 Peter, the author repeatedly draws from the ἀγαθο- word group (ἀγαθοποιός [2.14]; ἀγαθοποιέω [2.15, 20; 3.6, 17]; ἀγαθοποιΐα [4.19]). The letter makes reference to this idea no less than eleven times in just five brief chapters. (2014: 3)

55 The preposition εἰς could indicate purpose (“telic”), result (“ecbatic”), or even both (see Harris 2012: 101). Marcar helpfully notes that “the difference between the telic and ecbatic meaning is slight…. Divine regeneration looks forward but is also presently realized” (2022: 106).
Most significantly, First Peter connects these acts of “doing good” and “the will of God” (2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19), and it is here, I suggest, that we find First Peter’s poignant adoption and adaptation of the grammar of discipleship. Understanding what First Peter denotes by its use of this “good works” motif, therefore, is essential.

There has been a “broad agreement” among Petrine scholars that the “good works” to which First Peter refers are to be understood as acts that accord with the standards and ethical norms of Christ-followers’ Hellenistic and Roman surroundings. The strategy of First Peter, according to this understanding, is to align Christ-followers’ behavior “with popular codes of conduct” so that “Christians would gain the approval of outsiders and thus curtail the animosity shown towards the group” (Williams and Horrell 2023: 712–13). Yet, as Travis Williams has demonstrated, First Peter clearly indicates that Christ-followers’ “good works” are actually a cause of conflict between Christ-followers and outsiders. At 3:16, for example, it is their “good conduct in Christ” that is “reviled” (οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν). Enslaved Christ-followers are explicitly told to endure suffering that arises while they “do good” (2:20). Women in mixed marriages are exhorted to continue doing good and not to be afraid of the consequences (3:6). In Williams’s words, First Peter “clearly states that the good deeds of Christians will be met with a negative response from their present detractors” (2014: 168).

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56 Travis Williams labels this the “modern consensus” (2014: 3; see 3–9; and Williams and Horrell 2023: 712–14; each contains references to several studies that represent and promote this position).


58 For critiques of the “optimistic outlook” on good works in First Peter, including helpful analyses of passages that might appear to promote the “modern consensus” (1 Pet 2:11–12; 2:14–15; 3:13–14), see Williams 2014: 167–84.
First Peter’s deployment of “good works” and “doing good” should, therefore, be understood to denote the conduct of Christ-followers that develops out of their reorientation around the will of God. By the first century CE, the language of “good works” was readily associated with acts of civic benefaction (see Winter 1994). Williams argues that this provides a “conceptual referent” for First Peter and its audiences, but need not be so narrowly defined. When First Peter’s audiences are told to “do good,” in other words, they would naturally associate this with acts that reflected a certain standard of acceptable conduct and contributed to the honor and well-being of a community. Philosophical literature of the Hellenistic and imperial periods, along with much Second Temple Jewish and early Christian literature, adopt this terminology in order to adapt it, “redefining the traditional language of good works.” Williams explains:

[T]he terminology was taken over by Hellenistic moralists and by Jewish authors of the Second Temple period in an effort to legitimize their prescribed conduct. What we find in the New Testament is that this same practice was prevalent among early Jesus-followers as well…. The one new dimension which they added to the good works language was the paradigmatic feature of the life of Christ. For many Christ-followers, the standard of good deeds tended to be defined according to their [teacher’s] example. (2014: 138)

The average Greek or Roman person would hear a call to “do good” as a command to conduct themselves in accord with the prevailing standards of Greek or Roman societies. The exact activities and behaviors in which they choose to engage depends on their specific social contexts, but would generally be in accord with the wider expectations of Greek and Roman sensibilities. The “good works of early Christians,” however, operated under a new frame of reference. They

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59 Winter proposes that First Peter exhorts its audiences to engage in concrete acts of civic benefaction, though this proposal has not swayed many. See Williams 2014: 68–104 for a thorough critique.

60 Williams’ original text uses the word “master” instead of “teacher.” See my discussion on the need to avoid mixing these metaphors in Chapter Two (p. 170 n. 107).
maintained “good conduct in Christ” (3:16), and such conduct “extended across a wide spectrum, with reference including everything from Torah-observance to a more general Christ-centered moral virtue” (Williams 2014: 144). Thus, they can no longer behave in accordance with “human desires” or “the will of the gentiles”—rather, they are to live “according to God’s will” (4:2–3).

In accordance with the grammar of discipleship, First Peter presents and addresses its audiences as disciples who have been reoriented around the will of God; First Peter accomplishes this strategically through its use and adaptation of a preexisting and salient motif of “good works.” While its audiences would naturally associate this language with projects of civic benefaction and actions that would find approval in the eyes of society, First Peter presents “good conduct” as behavior in keeping with God’s will. Their “good conduct” is “in Christ” (3:16); they are to be “as free people … but as enslaved by God” (2:16); they are “to live … according to the will of God” by avoiding “human desires” characterized by excess and idolatry (4:2–3). The “will of God” is that Christ-followers “do good” (3:17). By doing good and avoiding evil, Christ-followers will demonstrate their loyalty toward God, but this reoriented behavior has other potential functions as well: good works will eventually cause Christ-followers’ detractors to “glorify God” (2:12) and to cease their invective rhetoric (2:15); good works will put their detractors to shame (3:16); they may even be a means by which others are converted (3:1–2). Unfortunately, Christ-followers’ commitment to “doing good” as the “will of God” is also at the root of their suffering (2:12; 3:16, 17; 4:4, 19): as long as they continue to “do good” and live according to God’s will, First Peter admits that suffering will be their lot. I will
return to this below after discussing First Peter’s adoption and adaptation of the second aspect of
the grammar of discipleship: *resocialization into the family of God*.

**Resocialization into the Family of God.** The gospel traditions are less explicit about the
resocialization of followers of Christ, though there are several depictions of this resocialization
from which I have made inferences in Chapter Three.\(^{61}\) Foundationally, followers of Christ are
resocialized into a new group or community that is often depicted in familial terms: they are
“brothers and sisters” to one another. God is their “father” and they are God’s “children”—this is
ture whether they reject (or are rejected by) their biological “blood ties” or not. This is reflected
widely throughout the New Testament’s epistolary literature (especially in James and in the
authentic letters of Paul).\(^{62}\) First Peter likewise refers to the corporate body of Christ-followers
as a “brotherhood” (ἀδελφότης, 2:17; 5:9) and urges its audiences to foster a “brotherly” love
among themselves (φιλαδελφία, 1:22; φιλάδελφος, 3:8). They are a part of a new family because
they have been “begotten anew” (ἀναγεννάω, 1:3, 23), making them “children” (τέκνα, 1:14) of

\(^{61}\) In Goppelt’s words, “it was not the Jesus tradition of the Gospels that reported about the realization of
the new conduct, but the New Testament references to the Christian community” (1981: 119). As in the work of
Lohfink cited in Chapter Three, Goppelt maintains an emphasis on the role of the “Christian community” in the
formation and habituation of “Christian conduct.”

\(^{62}\) On the language of “brothers (and sisters)” in Paul, see Aasgaard 2004. Paul frequently addresses his
audiences as “brothers (and sisters)” (ἀδελφοί) 71 times throughout his letters, the exceptions being Col, Eph, 1–2
Tim and Titus. The address ἀδέλφοι also occurs four times in Hebrews, 15 times in James, once in 2 Peter, and once
in 1 John (and this does not include times when other “brothers (and sisters)” are referred to as such by authors. 1
John also addresses his audience as “children” (τέκνα) six times. Others are addressed as τέκνοι at Gal 4:19; 1 Tim
1:18; and 2 Tim 2:1. “Saints” or “holy ones” is another common title for Christians in Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom 1:7; 1
Cor 1:1; 15, 18; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2). “Beloved” (ἀγαπητοί) also occurs as a title in Paul’s letters (e.g., Rom
12:19; 2 Cor 7:1), once in Hebrews (6:9) and especially in the Catholic Epistles (Gal 1:16, 19; 1 Pet 2:1; 4:12; 2 Pet
of data. In Luke, Jesus’s followers are called μαθηταί 32 times (perhaps 33 if the adage of Luke 6:40 is included).
Only three times does the label ἀδελφοί refer to Jesus’s followers (8:21; 17:3; 22:32)—and each may plausibly
reflect the influence of a later context. In Acts, on the other hand, where μαθητής still occurs as a regular title (28
times) for Christians, ἀδελφοί appears just as often (28 times) as a title for Christians (often translated “believers” or
“friends” to avoid gendered language) and is more evenly distributed across the narrative.
God, whom they call upon as “father” (πατήρ, 1:17). Similar to the discussion of reorientation above, however, First Peter also adapts the grammar of discipleship to reinterpret and re-present its audiences’ resocialization. It adapts the grammar in three important ways: (1) by adding the lens of “diaspora” to its depiction of Christ-followers’ (fictive) kinship; (2) by moving beyond the language of family or kinship to the language of a “household”; and (3) by depicting “Christian” identity in ethnoracial terms. Recent studies have treated these important “steps” taken by First Peter in detail; space here only permits a brief summary of each and a discussion of how they may relate to First Peter’s summons to discipleship and suffering.

“Diaspora,” in Shively Smith’s words, “clarifies the identity and location of the addressees” of First Peter.” More strategically, First Peter utilizes “the proper noun form of diaspora” in the initial characterization of its addressees “to heighten its readers’ awareness of their larger kinship and collective consciousness” (2016: 21). Because of their reorientation, Christ-followers find themselves “strangers” to their neighbors and society at large; “diaspora” provides a common context in which the dispersed (and therefore wide-reaching) family of God can recognize themselves with honor and dignity. Smith writes that First Peter

depicts readers as actively moving toward being established as their own social community in their own land (1 Pet 1:13–15; 3:18–12). They are actually seeking and embracing a new peoplehood and family that transgress conventional territorial borders…. [T]he letter depicts the readers as actively moving toward establishment of their own social community in their own land (1 Pet 1:4; 3:22; 5:10) with a global and celestial reach and kinship. (25)

In relation to their immediate surroundings, they may appear like foreigners or strangers, but “within the body of people who embrace the identity of ‘Christian,’ the diverse membership has transformed itself from being a group of strangers to being a family” (34). The category of
“diaspora” therefore occupies a “legitimating” function (42), wherein the family of God can provide a context of honor, dignity, and respectability.

At the same time, First Peter is not content to limit itself to “familial” imagery; it is replete with “household” imagery and seems to prefer this language for describing its audiences’ resocialization as the “household of God.” To some readers, “familial” and “household” language might appear to be synonymous. While they are “closely related and overlap in terms of what they generally describe,” however, “they should not simply be treated together as varied forms of familial terminology” (Horrell 2001: 295). The different vocabularies “reflect different ideals with regard to the construction of social relationships in the Christian communities” (296), and the implications of such a variation in construction may inform our understanding of First Peter’s preference for the “household” metaphor.

First Peter presents its audiences as a “spiritual house” (οἶκος πνευματικός, 2:5) and “the household of God” (τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:17). In one sense the household imagery serves the same function as the familial imagery described by Smith above: Christ-followers are given another corporate image in which they may find the comfort of belonging and solidarity, underwritten by God’s provision—since it is God who has built them up, as indicated by the passive οἴκοδομεῖσθε of 2:5. John Elliott, however, identifies this corporate imagery as First Peter’s most “comprehensive means … for integrating the kerygmatic and paraenetic elements of the letter” (1990: 228). Elliott concludes that labeling Christ-followers corporately as a “household of God” is a “major feature” of First Peter’s social strategy for “affirming their

63 On the intention and preference of “household” imagery in First Peter, see Elliott 1990: 201–8.

64 Elliott’s classic study of the strategy of First Peter, for instance, takes the familial imagery present in First Peter as further evidence of letter’s interest in the “household” metaphor (1990: 200–33).
distinctive communal identity and socioreligious identity” (227). It incorporates Christ-followers “in a house or home” while simultaneously creating a division “between inside and outside, between the members within and the nonmembers without” (230).65

At a more basic level, however, the use of household vocabulary and imagery throughout First Peter may alert us to the letter’s own preoccupation with the Christian community’s place in wider society. “Brotherhood terms,” in Karl Sandnes’s words, “apply only to the relationship between siblings.” Households, on the other hand “cover relationships between different members of a family, including the relationships between superior and subordinate, between genders, and the roles within the household” (1997: 150). Sibling terminology (ἀδελφός, ἀδελφή, ἀδελφότης) “itself conveys no sense of hierarchy or superiority” (Horrell 2001: 297), while relationships within a household do. Horrell writes, “it would seem fair to say that when οἶκος is used to describe the human household it often denotes some kind of structured and stratified group” with “distinctions between husbands and wives, parents and children, owners and slaves” (2001: 298); when First Peter describes the community of Christ-followers as an οἶκος, therefore, we may assume that the hierarchical and hegemonic image of a first-century Greek or Roman household would remain salient in the minds of First Peter’s audiences.

First Peter, I suggest, takes the hierarchical household for granted; the letter’s articulation of Christ-followers’ resocialization accepts the household structure that its audiences are already a part of and that likely provided the context for the formation of their meetings and associations with one another (“house churches”). Yet along the way, we may also recognize ways that First

65 While I think Elliott is ultimately correct here, his reading of First Peter depends on a “sectarian” understanding of early Christian dynamics; see my critique of this in Chapter One (pp. 86 n. 75).
Peter attempts—however subtly—to transform their understanding of the hierarchical household for the sake of introducing more “egalitarian” tendencies; First Peter, in other words, “nods” to the egalitarian ideal of the “brotherhood,” by its use of the label and in other ways. 66 Fundamentally, First Peter reminds its audiences that they are to “fit in” among outsiders as far as they can without compromising their loyalty toward God (2:12–3:7; see Martin 2022: 68). First Peter exhorts enslaved and female Christ-followers as having their own agency, and the majority of the letter’s exhortations address each audience member equally: all are addressed as “children” of the same “father” and as “begotten anew” of the same “imperishable seed” (1:3, 14, 17, 22–23); all are addressed as both “free” and “enslaved” (2:16). Husbands are to remember that their wives—typically understood as subordinate to husbands—are “coheirs” with them of God’s “beneficence” (3:7). Within the hierarchical, hegemonic, and patriarchal structures of Greek and Roman households, therefore, First Peter can attempt to introduce egalitarian tendencies for understanding how the household is to operate without exhorting its audiences to completely overturn the structure held in such high esteem by Greek and Roman societies. For First Peter, the “household” is primary, but it can be an “alternative household” where circumstances permit egalitarian sensibilities.

“The household of God” is, in Smith’s words, an “alternative” household (2016: 80); but it is also a divergent and subversive one—a household that undermines the typical expectations

66 “At no point is it the goal of 1 Peter to overthrow the social system of the first-century world. That system is generally assumed and endorsed in order that the Christian hope might be vindicated (2:11–12, 15; 3:1). As I have already argued, however, the seeds of change are sown in the exhortation to Christian husbands. In addition, such seeds are sown precisely at the tension point between the specific commendation to Christian wives at 3:1 and the exhortation to verbal witness for the whole Christian community at 3:15. Full witness, including both verbal and nonverbal elements, is the ultimate task for the Christian community as it engages its social environment in challenge and testimony” (Brown 2004: 402).
of Greek and Roman sensibilities. A *paterfamilias* whose οἰκέται or wife had begun following Christ apart from him would instantly be scandalized by what he could perceive as their disobedient conduct. Onlookers would witness Christ-followers gathering without regard for class, sex, gender, ethnicity, or race and question its motives and suitability for “decent” Roman society. If the ordering of the cosmos, of the empire, and of the city was to be modeled in the household unit, the egalitarian ideal of “the household of God” could naturally be seen as a subversion of socio-political significance. So while First Peter continues to encourage Christ-followers to “fit in” as best they can, their loyalty to God resocializes them into an alternative and inevitably subversive “household of God,” raising the suspicion and eliciting the hostility of outsiders—thereby increasing the chances that Christ-followers would suffer as a result.

Finally, in addition to describing its audiences as a “brotherhood” (ἀδελφότης) and “household” (οἶκος), First Peter also presents their resocialization in ethnoracial terms: they are a “race” (γένος), a “nation” (ἔθνος), and a “people” (λαός, 2:9). Horrell demonstrates that 1 Pet 2:9 represents “a uniquely dense collocation of ethnic identity language” and “a crucial early step in the construction of Christian identity in ethnoracial terms” (2011: 125). Two recent studies by Janette Ok (2021) and Katie Marcar (2022) have devoted sustained attention to First Peter’s construction of “ethnic identity.” Marcar’s study is a thorough analysis of family, household, and ethnic metaphors applied by First Peter to its audiences. More specifically, she determines that First Peter employs ethnic imagery and vocabulary as “systematic metaphors” or metaphors which “reveal the concepts which structure the author’s thinking, concepts with which the author

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67 Marcar includes “household” imagery and vocabulary within the category of “family” metaphors; see Marcar 2022: 198–253, 261.
seeks to realign the way that believers see themselves and their world” (2022: 255). These include “belonging to a sojourning *nation*” and the recognition that “God’s family is an *ethnic group*” (260–63, emphasis mine). These metaphors, among others, “reveal the letter’s theological agenda: to reshape Christian identity as a thing of value in the face of opposition and to forge a deeper sense of solidarity among Christian believers” (263).

Janette Ok’s study is specifically focused on First Peter’s construction of an “ethnic” identity for its readers. For First Peter, according to Ok, an ethnic identity becomes an effective tool by which the letter’s audiences may both distance themselves from their former identities and grow closer in solidarity with one another:

Peter constructs Christian identity in ethnic terms, so that his primarily Gentile readers find the means to *disidentify* from their past … and *reidentify* as an entirely new people with a new history, present, and future. Peter believes that the better the people of God understand who they are no longer, the better they can live as the people they are, especially in the face of suffering that results from their new identity as Christians. (Ok 2021: 71)

A new *ethnoracial* identity, in other words, provides a completely new context in and through which Christ-followers may identify themselves; they are no longer a “family” or a “household” within and subject to the standards of Roman society or Greek society: they are themselves no longer Greek, Roman, gentile, or pagan—they are “Christian,” and it is in the light of “Christian” standards, “Christian” culture, and a “Christian” *eth(n)os* that their actions and associations are judged. Ok draws attention to the implications of this for understanding First Peter’s strategy: “Peter uses the strategy of creating an ethnic identity for his addressees in order to help his addressees cope with anti-Christian prejudice and contest the stigma associated with being
Christian” (62). As members of “God’s people” (λαὸς θεοῦ), they need not accept the judgment that the label “Christian” is, in fact, a stigma, or that they have done anything wrong; they simply live lives that reflect the values and norms of the “nation” to which they now belong.

In sum, First Peter’s presentation of its audiences’ resocialization is a formidable adaptation of the grammar of discipleship: Christ-followers are still resocialized into the family of God, but First Peter contextualizes this with household and ethnic metaphors. The emphasis on the communities as “households” may reflect the venues in which Christ-followers actually gathered, but it also reveals First Peter’s construction of an alternative or even subversive “household of God” in contrast to Greek and Roman standards. The ethnic metaphors go further to construct Christian identity as entirely set apart and different from those who ridicule and slander them. As a “holy nation,” Christ-followers live by different standards and are judged only by God. Because they live as a different kind of household and as a separate nation, Christ-followers inevitably look suspicious to their neighbors; they suffer the ire of society at large as they refuse to conform to their “ancestral ways” in favor of the standards, values, and norms of their new nation.

Most significant in this regard is the process by which those standards, values, and norms are learned and habituated. In Marcar’s words,

> When a person is physically born, they are brought into a network of familial relationships, social customs, ethnic and national membership, and accepted value systems. Birth itself is only the first step—it must be accompanied by formation and socialization into the values, traditions, and structures of the ethnic group. (2022: 254)

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68 “Through the idea that Christians are foreigners in a land in which they are no longer to feel at home and coupled with the idea that they are, in effect, an ethnic group with a common heavenly father, birth narrative, bloodline, and way of life, Peter seeks to equip believers with the theological and sociological lenses to interpret their suffering and better endure it” (Ok 2021: 58).
This process of “formation and socialization” is precisely what we observed as the function of ancient education: a student did not only learn about Greek heroes or Roman history; they learned how to be Greek and what it meant to be Roman. When we remember that ancient discipleship is fundamentally a pedagogical enterprise, First Peter’s summons to discipleship becomes even more relevant here. First Peter not only constructs an alternative and subversive network of familial, domestic, and ethnic identities: it also teaches Christ-followers about the standards, values, and norms by which they are to live into those identities. By forming and habituating those norms, First Peter’s summons to discipleship strengthens its audiences’ resolve to endure suffering, equipping them with confidence in their ability to maintain their loyalty to God, to conduct themselves with holiness, reverence, and obedience, and to associate readily with those who do the same. As a summons to discipleship, First Peter educates its audiences not only for the sake of making them better students, but to make them strong and stalwart representatives of their new way of life.

**Suffering as Disciples of Christ.** First Peter’s distinctive emphasis on suffering can now be understood as a part of its strategy of summoning its audiences to discipleship. This is clear from (1) First Peter’s utilization and adaptation of the grammar of discipleship; and (2) the educational value attributed to suffering throughout the ancient world. I will summarize each of these briefly.

Throughout the foregoing discussion of First Peter’s adoption and implementation of the grammar of discipleship, I have been able to demonstrate how each of First Peter’s adaptations of the grammar would contribute to its audiences’ understanding of their suffering. By presenting
suffering as part of the process of their discipleship—as part and parcel of being disciples of Christ—First Peter is able to strengthen their resolve to endure their suffering.

Their reorientation around the will of God is manifested, First Peter says, in their “good conduct in Christ”—behavior that reflects their loyalty to God and thereby puts them at odds with their neighbors; they conduct themselves differently. Because it is the will of God that they “do good,” however, and because Christ-followers are loyal to God and God’s will, they will understand that the suffering they face, the invective hurled at them, is worth enduring, since their allegiance to God leads them to believe that their “good conduct in Christ” remains the proper and virtuous means of manifesting that loyalty. This is the kind of conduct that finds favor in the eyes of God “who stands ready to judge the living and the dead” (4:5), the only one who has promised to “restore, support, strengthen, and establish” them (5:10).

Their resocialization into the family of God has set Christ-followers apart from their neighbors and made them strangers to society at large. They are not only a family but a firmly established “household” and even an entire “nation,” “race,” and “people.” As a household with egalitarian values (even if its ideals cannot be fully realized) that remains within the structures of Roman society, Christ-followers’ associations manifest (in the eyes of onlookers) cracks in the foundation of the polis, the imperium, and even the cosmos itself. As a separate nation, Christ-followers have become (again in the eyes of society) rivals with a competitive system of values and norms. It should be no wonder, in either case, that Christ-followers’ resocialization has invited the suspicion and hostility of outsiders. Nevertheless, First Peter presents this resocialization in such a way that those who suffer can take solace in the solidarity they find with fellow dispersed and suffering Christ-followers “throughout the world” (5:9). It is within this
nation that they find honor; it is within \textit{this} household that they find love and acceptance. It is as disciples of Christ that they find the resolve to “discipline” themselves (5:8) and remain loyal to the “one who called them” (5:10)—and to one another.

Finally, as we remember that ancient discipleship was a \textit{pedagogical} enterprise, we can better appreciate why First Peter has emphasized and even encouraged the suffering that its audiences are facing. If we hear First Peter as a summons to discipleship—as I have argued its first-century Anatolian audiences would have—we may recognize that they understood that suffering could be formative, educational, and productive. First Peter began by calling their sufferings “trials,” implying that there was some \textit{probative} goal that they might achieve. Christ-followers, \textit{given the reality of their present suffering}, can now approach that suffering as \textit{disciples who are still “learning the ropes” of their new way of life}. This is not to say that God has \textit{sent} or \textit{ordained} this suffering; this is First Peter’s means of \textit{making sense} of the suffering that already exists. Yes, it is unfortunate—but it is happening, and First Peter does not appear to see a way to bring it to an end; this will only happen, it says, “at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” How are they to make the most of it? What can they do with this suffering, if they cannot overcome it or get rid of it? They can, First Peter says, accept it as a part of the process of their formation into the household, the nation, or even the “school” of Christ.
CHAPTER FIVE

“TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED”:

DISCIPLESHIP AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN FIRST PETER

For Christians are no different from other people in terms of their country, language, or customs. Nowhere do they inhabit cities of their own, use a strange dialect, or live life out of the ordinary. And they show forth the character of their own citizenship in a marvelous and admittedly paradoxical way by following local customs in what they wear and what they eat and in the rest of their lives. They live in their respective countries, but only as resident aliens; they participate in all things as citizens, and they endure all things as foreigners.

—Epistle to Diognetus

This second-century epistle portrays Christian existence as a process of negotiation. While Christians live as neighbors to non-Christians—in the same country, speaking the same language, adopting the same customs—distinctives remain. The closer we look, the easier it is to discover how different these Christians really are. For example, they marry and have children “like everyone else,” but “they do not expose” those children once born; they “share their tables but not their beds.” These are illustrations of the “paradoxical way” Christians navigate their existence, caught between two spheres of influence. The Epistle itself summarizes: “They are found in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth but participate in the

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1 Diogn. 5.1–5 (trans. Ehrman LCL): Χριστιανοὶ γὰρ οὔτε γῇ οὔτε φωνῇ οὔτε ἐθεὶ διακεκριμένοι τῶν λοιπῶν εἰσὶν ἀνθρώπων. οὔτε γάρ που πόλεις ἰδίας κατοικοῦσιν οὔτε διαλέκτῳ τινὶ παρηλλαγμένῃ χρῶνται οὔτε βίον παράσημον ἀσκοῦσιν. ἐκείστιν δὲ πόλεις ἐλληνίδας τε καὶ βαρβάρους, ὡς ἐκαστὸς ἐκληρώθη, καὶ τοῖς ἐξορίοις ἐθεὶς ἀκολουθοῦντες ἐν τῇ ἐσθήτῃ καὶ διάτῃ καὶ τῷ λοιπῷ βίῳ θεωμασίαν καὶ ὁμολογομένῳ παράδοξον ἐνδείκνυνται τῇ κατάστασιν τῆς ἑαυτῶν πολιτείας. πατρίδας οἰκοῦσιν ἱδίας, ἀλλ’ ὡς πάροικοι μετέχουσι πάντων ὡς πολίται, καὶ πανθ’ ὑπομένουσιν ὡς ξένοι.

2 Diogn. 5.6–7 (trans. mod.): γαμοῦσιν ὡς πάντες, τεκνογονοῦσιν ἀλλ’ οὐ ῥίπτουσι τὰ γεννώμενα. τράπεζαν κοινὴν παρατίθενται, ἀλλ’ οὖ κοίτην.
life of heaven.”

As an early apology for the Christian faith, the Epistle to Diognetus paints an ideal portrait of Christian resolve in the face of opportunities for (re)assimilation to wider society. While they may constitute a corporate “new race” (καινὸν τοῦτο γένος, 1.1), it was often the burden of individual Christians to make choices about how this new faith would affect their day-to-day lives and their ongoing relationships with others; they habitually navigated between entities (often opposed to one another) vying for their loyalty. Some, perhaps, were able to exert immediate discernment and chart a course of Christian conduct for any given scenario where commitments conflicted. Many, however, including those who received the exhortations and testimony contained in First Peter, seem to have required assistance in negotiating how they could relate to society and the rest of the world in light of their newfound “loyalty toward God.”

First Peter, I have argued, addresses a situation of suffering caused by such a shift in loyalty and, more specifically, counsels its audiences to adopt the posture of disciples in order to better understand their suffering and to position themselves to endure it. The task of this final chapter is to ask whether this social strategy makes sense. Does First Peter have good reason to think that a summons to discipleship—addressing its audiences as disciples—would be an effective means of exhorting them to understand, confront, and endure their suffering? An

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3 Diogn. 5.8-9: ἐν σαρκὶ τυγχάνουσιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ κατὰ σάρκα ζῶσιν. ἐπὶ γῆς διατρίβουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐν οὐρανῷ πολιτεύονται.

4 Diogn. 5.11: ἀγαπῶσι πάντας, καὶ ὑπὸ πάντων διώκονται.

5 Diogn. 6.10: εἰς τοσαύτην αὐτοὺς τάξιν ἔθετο ὁ θεός, ήν οὐ θεμιτὸν αὐτοῖς παραιτήσασθαι.
affirmative answer lies in discovering how First Peter’s summons to discipleship in fact constitutes an effort to construct and solidify its audiences’ “social identity,” thereby equipping them to embrace and maintain their loyalty to God amid a suspicious and hostile society.

With this chapter, therefore, I adopt a social identity approach to First Peter and its summons to discipleship, utilizing the insights of modern social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT) as heuristic tools for further illuminating First Peter’s social strategy. The chapter will be divided into two parts, the first setting the stage for the second. In the first part, I will deal with preliminary questions and issues raised by the study of identity, including (1) what I mean when I employ the term “identity” itself; and (2) the feasibility of asking an approach of modern social psychology (i.e., a social identity approach) to take root in ancient minds and motives made known to us through ancient texts. The second part will then employ a social identity approach by outlining key features of both SIT and SCT relevant to the study of First Peter and ancient discipleship. Because this second part will contain technical discussions of the presuppositions and methods of a social identity approach, I will demonstrate its relevance immediately, step by step, asking how each particular aspect of SIT and SCT I explore illumines First Peter’s summons to discipleship. As a means of contextualizing this chapter, however, I will preface these larger discussions with a brief survey of other social identity approaches to First Peter.

**Previous Social Identity Approaches to First Peter**

Social identity approaches have been employed to illumine aspects of First Peter’s social strategy for several years now. A brief survey of these studies will help place mine in context. Some of these approaches to First Peter rely on specific aspects of SIT or SCT; I will limit my
explanations to the information needed to understand the scholars’ theses, but even these brief glimpses of previous SIAs will demonstrate how scholars have already found SIT and SCT to be useful heuristic tools for engaging the substance and strategy of First Peter. It will also be helpful to state that most of these approaches utilize the insights of SIT specifically, which focuses on intergroup relations—how different groups relate to and interact with one another.

In 2007 David Horrell published an essay on First Peter’s adoption of the “stigmatizing label” χριστιανός (4:16) (Horrell 2007b; 2013: 164–210). Drawing on the work of SIT, Horrell concludes that “Χριστιανός is a stigmatizing label associated not with a facet of personal identity—such as disability or disfigurement—but with a feature of social identity deriving from group membership” (2007b: 377). This means that being labeled with the derogatory label “Christian” is a result of a person’s association with other “Christians.” According to SIT this qualifies as an example of intergroup conflict, whereby one group (non-Christians) exhibits a

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6 It is also worth noting that not all “social identity approaches” are created equal. Some studies that employ the term “social identity” are seemingly uninformed by the work of SIT or SCT (or social psychology more broadly). An example of this is Paul Himes’s 2014 study Foreknowledge and Social Identity in 1 Peter. Himes locates his study under the auspices of social-scientific criticism (and lexical semantics) and focuses on “the theme of displacement and how 1 Peter offers a word of comfort to all displaced believers” (2014: 4). One means of comfort is what Himes refers to as the construction of a social identity, defined by Himes as “how a person or group views themselves in light of their surrounding society and culture, and how one fits or fails to fit into the social, ethnic, economic, and religious groups that make up that society” (7). Without intending to detract from the goals of Himes’s study, it should be stated that this does not constitute a social identity approach to First Peter in the strict sense of the term, since it neither focuses on intergroup relations (or intragroup relations in light of group membership) nor interacts with any scholars or works of SIT or SCT. An earlier and broader study of E. A. Judge, “The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History” (1980) faces a similar caution. Judge seems to take “social identity” as synonymous with “social existence,” and uses the term to promote the study of early Christianity as a social phenomenon (along with the study of early Christianity’s social environments). I draw attention to these two studies to demonstrate, again, that the term “social identity” in the title of a work does not imply that the work comprises a SIA. This survey of social identity approaches to First Peter will only include those that interact directly with SIT, SCT, and their practitioners.

7 I will discuss the difference between personal and social identities, a feature of SCT, below.

8 That χριστιανός originated as a “derogatory” label and a term of derision used by outsiders is held by most scholars (see Elliott 2000: 790, n. 609).
bias against another (Christians); the comparative label “Christian” is used by the former “to maintain or achieve superiority” over the latter (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 41). In the face of such differentiation (which could include bias, discrimination, derision, or stigmatization), a group will “strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity”—they will seek ways of improving their status. Horrell identifies in 1 Pet 4:16 an instance of “social creativity,” defined by SIT as an act whereby “group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation” (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 43). More specifically, First Peter 4:16 is an act of creatively “changing the value” of the label “Christian,” “so that comparisons which were previously negative are now perceived as positive” (43). First Peter attempts to accomplish this by exhorting its audiences not to be ashamed that they suffer “ὡς χριστιανός,” but to glorify God in or with this name (ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι τούτῳ)—effectively changing the value of the term “Christian” in the minds of insiders. Horrell writes,

Thus, 1 Peter 4 provides a brief but unique illuminating insight into the beginnings of the process whereby the label applied as a term of disdain by outsiders comes first to be one that insiders accept—but as a source of honor, not shame—and then one that they later claim and use themselves as their basic designation of group belonging…. In terms of social identity theory, then, we see the author of 1 Peter here engaging in a strategy of social creativity, attempting to give a positive value to what outsiders perceive as a cause of shame, to the term Χριστιανός, insisting that the “true” value of suffering ὡς Χριστιανός is a way of bringing glory to God. (2007b: 380)

9 The label is “comparative” insofar as one group is “Christian” and the other is not.

10 On the final clause of 4:16 (ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι τούτῳ), the reading ὄνοματι is supported by several important manuscripts and versions (preferred by SBLGNT, following Β² Π A B Ψ 5. 33. 81. 436. 442. 1175. 1243. 1611. 1739. 1852. 2344. 2492 latt sy co; Cyr). While Michaels has made a case for reading ἐν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ (preferred by NA²⁸ and USB³, following P 307. 642. 1448. 1735 Byz) on the grounds that it is the more difficult reading (Michaels 1988: 257), others rightly favor the support of the manuscript tradition. Kelly has suggested that the later change from ὄνοματι to μέρει is plausibly explained as the substitution of “an undoubted gloss but one which reveals both that Greek-speaking copyists did not find the meaning so obvious as many modern scholars do, and how in fact they understood it” (Kelly 1969: 191). Most studies and commentaries concur by citing Kelly; see, e.g., Horrell 2013: 179–81; Williams 2012a: 282–83.
Thus SIT’s “strategy” of social creativity illumines 1 Pet 4:16’s by offering a way to understand its exhortation to suffer “as a Christian” (and to “glorify God”) in light of the intergroup dynamics of First Peter’s context.

In a subsequent study, Horrell suggests that First Peter’s efforts at “ethnic identity-construction” (2:9) is another instance of “social creativity” at work (2011; 2013: 133–63). Noting that “1 Peter’s use of γένος language, and the rich depictions of Christian identity in the passage in which it appears, comes in a context of evident hostility and suffering” (2011: 141), Horrell proposes SIT as a helpful perspective to adopt:

The letter’s overall strategy, in which the identity-descriptions of 2.9 play an important role, is—put in terms of social identity theory—to develop a positive sense of in-group identity, of the status and honour that accrue to membership of the community, in the face of negative evaluation and stigmatization on the part of outsiders. The adoption of ethnic-identity language, along with the honorific and highlight valued designations of Israel’s special identity, represents a strategy of “social creativity.”… Despite the shame which their accusers seek to bring upon them, the readers of the letter are assured of their special status and ineradicable bonds, as members of God’s γένος ἐκλεκτόν. (2011: 142)

Unlike with Horrell’s argument concerning the label χριστιανός, above, however, the label γένος does not appear to have been a derogatory or stigmatizing label used against Christians by outsiders, so it is not clear how 1 Pet 2:9 is assigning a “new value” to a previously negative label. Nonetheless, Horrell demonstrates the benefit of tending to intergroup dynamics—as understood by SIT—for appreciating the rhetorical dynamics at work in First Peter.

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11 At the same time, this language is being appropriated from Jewish traditions (Exod 19:5–6; Isa 43:20), so a creative effort is being made at 1 Pet 2:9 to “seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation,” the hallmark of social creativity (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 43). I might suggest, however, that a different strategy is at work: that of “social competition”; “The group members may seek positive distinctiveness through direct competition with the out-group” (44). First Peter, by calling its audiences a “race,” “nation,” and “people”—when formerly they were not a “race,” “nation,” or “people” (2:10)—could effectually distinguish them from the “nations” or “gentiles” among whom they are currently living and “conducting” themselves honorably (1:17; 2:11–12) and thereby present them as competitors. Alternatively, this could qualify as social creativity via “comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension” (43).
Two comprehensive studies of First Peter have implemented the perspective of SIT as part of their larger goals. Paul Holloway (2009) argues that the situation of First Peter stems from social prejudice on the part of Roman society; he demonstrates how First Peter functions to offer consolation and coping strategies. Travis Williams (2012a) investigates the forms of suffering faced by the audiences of First Peter including (contrary to the opinion of many primo-Petrine scholars) legal proceedings and capital punishment. In each of these studies, SIT is used to illumine First Peter’s presentations of the actions taken against Christ-followers. Holloway and Williams each accept Horrell’s earlier argument concerning the letter’s deployment of “social creativity” (2007b) and add more to the picture of First Peter’s audiences. Specifically, both Williams and Holloway describe how SIT illumines the escalation of conflict between First Peter’s audiences and their detractors:

Social Identity Theory predicts that a higher status group will feel “socially threatened” by a lower status group when the status differentials distinguishing the two groups are challenged. This can be caused by a variety of means, such as the increased importance of a subordinate group due to shifting circumstances within a society, or the increased prominence of a group due simply to an increase in its numbers. Both of these factors will have contributed to hostility toward early Christians who by the end of the first century were growing rapidly both in terms of numbers and social status. (Holloway 2009: 33)

For what researchers have discovered is that high-status groups show more intergroup bias than low-status groups. So the dominated position of Christians would not serve as a reprieve. More likely, it would have served to fuel the conflict: as membership in this minority group began to increase, more dominant groups may have begun to perceive the group as a legitimate social threat. (Williams 2012a: 45)

Thus, SIT provides further insight not only into the text of First Peter but proposes a plausible reading of the conflict and the audiences it presupposes and presents.

Finally, two briefer studies survey the whole text of First Peter through the lens of social identity approaches. A co-authored essay by Todd Still and Natalie Webb (2014) examines First
Peter’s “attempt to construct a Christian identity among the letter’s auditors” with an eye to what Henri Tajfel identifies as the three “facets” or “components” constituting group membership and, therefore, social identity.¹² Group membership, according to Tajfel, consists of the following:

[1] a cognitive component, in the sense of the knowledge that one belongs to a group; [2] an evaluative component, in the sense that the notion of the group and/or of one’s group membership of it may have a positive or a negative value connotation; and [3] an emotional component in the sense that the cognitive and evaluative aspects of the group and one’s membership of it may be accompanied by emotions (such as love or hatred, like or dislike) directed toward one’s own group and towards others which stand in certain relations to it. (1982: 229)

Still and Webb conclude that the “Christian identity” that First Peter attempts to construct or shape is a social identity, according to these standards. Much of their analysis, however, is dedicated to “the author’s strategy of calling Anatolian Christians to look backward and forward even as they live as aliens among pagans and exiles among Gentiles” (2014: 471).¹³

Laura Hunt’s contribution to the one-volume Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament (2018) begins by outlining and adopting J. Brian Tucker’s proposed “six criteria for identifying a text that seeks to form the hearers’ social identity” (527).¹⁴ Hunt demonstrates

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¹² I will discuss these terms at some length below.

¹³ Still’s and Webb’s interaction with the tenets of SIT and SCT are, in fact, somewhat minimal throughout the essay. Still and Webb describe the components of group membership, quoted above, as “three particular facets of SIT” or “three primary aspects of SIT” itself, but it should be recognized that these are specifically part of Tajfel’s discussion of how an individual could determine whether he or she belongs to a group. Still’s and Webb’s approach also appears to be combined with an (unstated) narratological lens by which they divide their analysis between “Looking backward…,” “Looking forward…,” and “In the meantime….” In my opinion, this hampers their SIA to First Peter, evidenced by the way that the analysis of the “cognitive” and “evaluative” facets of group membership (the “emotional” facet does not reappear for analysis) are relegated to concluding paragraphs to two sections of the essay (463, 465). SIT is employed “along the way” (470–71) of their analysis.

¹⁴ See Tucker 2011: 51–57. As summarized by Hunt, these are: “(1) the text offers a narrative that rivals those of the surrounding culture; (2) the text renames its audience; (3) the text relates new markers of identity to old markers in a way that recognizes the intersectional nature of identity; (4) the text addresses the implications of the new identity in areas of ethics and ethos; (5) the text suggests performances that will embody the new identity; and (6) the text uses discursive practices from the environment to negotiate the new identity.”
throughout her commentary that “First Peter fits all of these criteria,” and uses these criteria to “provide the main focus” of her analysis (527–28). Throughout her commentary, however, Hunt also interacts at length with the work of SIT and, in contrast to those studies discussed above, the work of SCT—notably through the work of Hogg and Abrams (1988). This enables her to address the “intersectionality” that constitutes a major factor among First Peter’s audiences:

the addressees are not only Christians (1:1–2), but household slaves (2:18–20); wives (3:1–6), some of whom had wealth (3:3); husbands (3:7); and perhaps heads of households…. As such, they had group norms and role expectations from the local culture that conflicted with their Christian calling. First Peter offers them guidance for navigating these intersections. (Hunt 2018: 527)

Furthermore, Hunt’s approach, with specific attention to the insights of SCT, enables her to provide a nuanced reading of what, for First Peter, constitutes sufficient “identity markers” for Christ-followers. For example, though First Peter has been interpreted to suggest that suffering constitutes an essential mark of Christian identity, Hunt demonstrates that First Peter’s presentation of suffering “is itself nuanced so that merely having suffered for any reason is not a sufficient ingroup marker (4:15–16), only non-retaliatory suffering in obedience to God” (541). Thus, a social identity approach once again provides a productive reading of First Peter.

To my knowledge, the studies I have discussed here constitute the extent of social identity approaches to First Peter to date. The large number of social identity approaches to biblical texts beside First Peter will be mentioned below. Suffice it to say here that even this

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15 My research has as yet uncovered no social identity approaches to First Peter outside of English-speaking scholarship, and this may be reflective of a larger trend in social identity approaches to social psychology itself. Although one of Tajfel’s initial essays explicating SIT was published in French (Tajfel 1972), the vast majority of social identity scholarship has been written in English; see the bibliographies throughout Postmes and Branscombe 2010a. The “Writing Social-Scientific Commentaries on the New Testament” Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, however, which has recently focused on social identity approaches, does include scholars from a range of geographic and ethnic backgrounds.
handful of studies demonstrates the value of such approaches to early Christian literature. In this section, it remains only for me to articulate how my own social identity approach to First Peter relates to those that I have now summarized. First, with all those who have implemented a social identity approach to First Peter, I assume that SIT and SCT are applicable for studying ancient modes of identity formation, though I will address specific questions related to its applicability in an ancient context below. Second, with Horrell, Williams, and Holloway, I am convinced that a social identity approach stands ready to illumine certain aspects of First Peter’s rhetoric (e.g., its creative recasting of the label \(\chiριστιανός\), 4:16) and specific contexts of (or motivations behind) the suffering its audiences are facing. My ultimate interest, however, is in the larger picture of First Peter’s holistic social strategy in summoning its audiences to discipleship and how this might be illumined by SIT and, especially, SCT. Third, I agree with Still and Webb that “Christian” constitutes a “social identity.” My focus, however, is not on First Peter’s construction of “Christian” identity generally, but of the identity of “disciple” specifically (though for First Peter they are, of course, “disciples of Christ”). Fourth, and finally, my project is wholly in agreement with Hunt’s on the importance of tending to the intersectionality present within the audiences of First Peter (and within each individual within those audiences as well). With these in mind, and having given some “previews” of both SIT and SCT already, I will move forward to introduce and implement my own social identity approach to First Peter.

Prolegomena to a Social Identity Approach

A few questions must be answered by way of introduction. Before we qualify the basic term with the descriptor “social,” what do we mean by “identity,” and how should we talk about it? Given that the language of “identity” is itself relatively modern, in what ways is it appropriate to speak
of “identity” and “identity construction” in the ancient Mediterranean world? Moreover, taking account of some important presuppositions inherent to a social identity approach, how applicable is such an approach to ancient ideas and descriptions of “selves” and “personalities”? These are the questions I seek to answer in the present section of this chapter, and each will assist in laying groundwork for the social identity approach to First Peter that follows.

Understanding Identity

In their introduction to “identity theory,” Peter Burke and Jan Stets define “identity” as the answer to the question: “What does it mean to be who you are?” More to the point, “An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (2009: 3). In the minds of some, however, the term “has now become so ubiquitous … that it risks trivialization” (Lieu 2004: 12). “Identity,” in David Horrell’s words, “has become something of a buzzword in recent social science and in studies of early Christianity,” one that proves particularly “slippery to define and use” (2002a: 311).

More important than a clear or precise definition of “identity,” perhaps, is what Burke and Stets underscore by referring to identity as a “set of meanings” contingent upon other factors, both external and internal. Horrell, too, calls attention to the “multiplicity of factors” that make up a person’s identity “or even a multiplicity of identities” (2002a). Factors (again, external and internal) combine in different ways to produce “multiple identities” because people “occupy multiple roles, are members of multiple groups, and claim multiple personal characteristics” (Burke and Stets 2009: 3). Most people would readily affirm that they do not actively struggle to manage a cacophony of competing identities, however; most would rather
assert that they are relatively well-integrated and adjust or adapt their identity (singular) as particular settings necessitate.

Something distinct from (but related to) an individual’s “multiple identities” assists him or her to integrate or mediate between those identities; we will see below that SIT and SCT typically call this the “self-concept.” Sociologist Anthony Blasi depicts identity as emerging from an “interactional field” of commitments and expectations, all of which then constitute the “self”:

Identity … may be seen as a preferred role, a subjective dominance of one status, or a program that is regulatory vis-à-vis other programs, something despite negative sanctions against it because of side bets. The interactional field involving the commitments of the identities of actors and various expectations is the field of power relations. (1972: 459, emphasis mine)\(^\text{16}\)

The “self” should be understood to comprise several roles and to be pervaded by multiple (sometimes conflicting) nuances (458).\(^\text{17}\) Individuals exert effort into “the maintenance of identities” competing with one another for dominance and salience, but this exertion normally leads to an “agreed upon meaning” (Blasi 1972: 459, see 456).

One set of “nuances” that must be accounted for in the estimation of a person’s identity is his or her social embeddedness. General identity theory acknowledges that, to some extent, “the nature of the individual depends upon the society in which he or she lives” (Burke and Stets

\(^\text{16}\) The term “side bets” refers to conscious or unconscious systems of value adopted by a person that then determine his or her commitments and courses of consistent actions, as discussed by Howard Becker (1960). Becker himself argues that “involvement in social organizations,” especially, produces “side bets … and thus constrain[s] … future activity” (1960: 36).

\(^\text{17}\) “Each person has many identities, for example, friend, parent, worker, church member, and club member; and each of these identities is an agent…. [D]ifferent identities within persons engage in transactions (… Mary who is a teacher and a mother) as well as different identities between persons (for example, between Mary the teacher and Veronica the mother of one of Mary’s sixth-grade students)” (Burke and Stets 2009: 8).
2009: 4). SIT and SCT, we will see, focus intently on the influence of groups (including society-at-large and social roles) on the construction of an individual’s identity and are therefore well positioned to carry this discussion forward as I seek to describe the significance of First Peter’s summons to discipleship. First, however, it is necessary to pause to consider a “significant debate” currently alive among those who study identities and selves in the ancient world.

Studying Ancient Identities

Burke, Stets, Blasi, and Horrell (along with the practitioners of SIT and SCT) each write on identity from their (well-informed) twentieth-century locations and perspectives. Is “identity” itself too modern of a concept to ask ancient texts to speak of? Judith Lieu, quoted above, offers the following diagnosis:

When speaking of a first- and second-century context, [identity construction] is obviously an anachronism, and one that reflects the particular intellectual and ideological preoccupations of the contemporary world. It has become a commonplace to observe both that the term “identity” is comparatively recent, and that, although as a significant concept it only really entered scholarly discourse in the 1950s, it has now become so ubiquitous there, as well as in the popular and political imaginations, that it risks trivialization. (2004: 11–12)

Lieu does not intend to disparage the task of reading ancient texts in search of “identity construction”—her own study is devoted to such a search—but to remind those who embark upon it to be clear about what they are looking for. If, for example, we discern that First Peter

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18 “This is a particularly important question when addressing the ancient world where, it is often argued, the individual’s sense of the self cannot be compared to a post-Enlightenment concern for self-determination. However, if we are not presuming to inhabit the self-consciousness of a Polycarp, but are looking at the mechanisms of (implicit) labeling and so of identification of groups, this becomes a less pressing objection” (Lieu 2004: 12). Lieu is particularly interested in “textually-constructed identities” and her work traces “in different texts the way a new Christian identity is being constructed; that is, the creation through literature of a sense of what it is to be ‘a Christian’ or what ‘Christianity’ means” (17). Lieu’s approach is representative of the same “eclecticism” that is the hallmark of social scientific criticism noted in the Introduction.
addresses its audiences as *disciples* (a social role), we thereby acknowledge that (at least in our own terms) First Peter is constructing an identity as nuanced or impacted by discipleship.

Carol Newsom documents that a “common” mode for classifying ideas and conceptions of the self “is according to the extent to which the self is conceptualized as an individual or in strongly social or relational terms” (2022: 9). Perhaps (in part) out of an abundance of caution to respect the integrity of ancient modes of identity construction and our chronological distance from them, it became popular throughout the twentieth century to equate ancient understandings of “self” and “identity” with a “sociocentric” or “collectivist” presumption concerning the constitution of ancient Mediterranean societies.19 Beginning with an understanding of the ancient Mediterranean world as highly “sociocentric” or “collectivist,” in other words, leads scholars to assume that they understood identity and selfhood in similar (if not exclusively similar) ways.20 Newsom demonstrates, however, that the activation of this dichotomy over the last century of scholarship on Israelite and Second Temple Jewish literature leaves little room for the “nuanced” understanding of identity that many texts actually evince.21 Citing Dorothy Holland’s and others’ “practice theory” of self and identity, Newsom writes,

19 This tendency was not based only on an abundance of caution: it also depends on an “older cultural evolutionary perspective current in the first half of the twentieth century” that argued “ancient and ‘primitive’ societies possessed minds that were not fully developed and so did not grasp realities in the same way as modern minds, including the nature of the self and its relation to the social group” (Newsom 2022: 9).

20 Geert Hofstede popularized the language of “individualist” and “collectivist” as a pair of labels for two ends of a spectrum classifying cultures according to the significance they afford to individuals and groups. This was one variable among five: “‘individualism’ refers to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose and ‘collectivism’ is the opposite and pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which provide protection in exchange for loyalty” (Esler 1998a: 11; see Hofstede 1980, 1994; Smith and Bond 1993).

21 “The critiques can be grouped under several headings: (1) conceptual confusion about the category of the ‘self’ or ‘person,’ so that the distinction between cultural models, self-presentation, self-representation, and subjective experience is overlooked; (2) caricature and reductionism in describing cultural models, especially the ‘western’ model, which overlooks extensive evidence for the social embeddedness and other-directedness of many cultural norms for selfhood in modern western countries; (3) the tendency toward reification of the types such that
Culturally normative models of the self are certainly one important influence on the development of self-identities, Holland argues. These are only some of the “living tools of the self,” however, and one must recognize that “the loci of self-production or self-process” are plural. Thus a person is always negotiating and codeveloping a sense of self and identity in a dynamic fashion. It would be a mistake to assume that culturally normative models are themselves static or that they are simply replicated in individuals. (2022: 11–12)

While, again, a given societal structure will impact the development of those who inhabit it, that structure need not be reified absolutely. A society rightly labeled as “collectivist” does not necessarily produce persons with no sense of the personal, individual self (and vice versa). Key here are the tools of “negotiation” and “codevelopment.” As Newsom demonstrates with her own range of texts and as I will show presently, even within “collectivist-oriented” cultures like Second Temple Judaism and the ancient Mediterranean at large, the development and maintenance of a person’s identity can still be understood as a dialectic process; it was still a process of negotiation.

The Ancient Reflective Self

Despite the appearance of more critiques and rejections of the “sociocentric-egocentric” dichotomy in biblical studies (and in anthropological, sociological, and cultural studies more broadly), the idea still holds sway. One of the consequences of its influence is that “the cultivation of what one might call inner experience would be more characteristic of the independent [egocentric] rather than the interdependent [sociocentric] self” (Newsom 2022: 10). A question remains, therefore, as to whether ancient Mediterranean persons (and texts)
conceived of the “self” as having interiority, the capacity for self-reflection, and the ability to “negotiate between multiple identities,” as discussed above.

Answering this question has relevance for the implementation of a social identity approach to ancient texts since SCT, especially, assumes that individuals possess a “self-concept” that is able both to integrate and negotiate between multiple identities (what SCT calls “self-identifications”) and to activate particular identities in response to relevant stimuli. At present the point is this: if we were to assume that ancient persons had no capacity (or did not regularly exercise a capacity) for self-reflection and negotiation, our application of a social identity approach might be suspect. Since I am exploring whether First Peter’s summons to discipleship (a social self-identification) could prove useful to its first-century Anatolian audiences, it is also worth asking whether we should assume that ancient Christ-followers had a self-concept that included such self-reflection.

In a recent essay on the “formation of the subject in ancient Judaism,” Hindy Najman traces various ways in which the “self” became “defined” in relation to the God of Israel: “through prayer, through submission to the work of the self, through adherence to the law, as well as practices associated with מָשֶׁר (“correction”) or even ascesis, and finally through aspiration to approximate divine-like activity by praying with divine beings … and imitation.”

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22 Both of these tenets of SCT will be explained below.

23 Defenses of social identity approaches to biblical texts, to my knowledge, do not often take this approach. More often, efforts are made to demonstrate the applicability of these approaches writ large, based on the “collective” nature of ancient societies. An oft-cited study by Steve Hinkle and Rupert Brown (1990) concludes that when the group or groups under examination are located in cultures that (1) are largely “collectivist” and (2) evince widespread engagement in social comparison, as is assumed of the ancient Mediterranean (again, at large), a SIA is appropriate. For a summary of SIT’s applicability according to this argument, see Esler 1998a: 45–49. I intend the discussion I offer here to go beyond this typical defense of applying a social identity approach to biblical texts.
Much of this “defining” and “emergence of the self” takes place “in dialogue with Greek thinking on the subject” (322). Najman’s essay is specifically interested in the relationship between the formation of the self-subject and the imitation of God, but one of its effects is to demonstrate that our modern (Lockean) understanding of the “self” as “reflexively responsible for itself and interested in itself” (311) has its precursors in ancient thinking as well.

Susan Eastman’s discussion of Epictetus’s anthropology (in the light of other Stoic thinkers) is particularly informative here. Pointing out the “singularly human” capacity for self-perception, according to Epictetus, Eastman writes,

> Simply by virtue of being human we thus are endowed with a rational capacity to study ourselves, to be students of our own impulses and actions, and to take responsibility for them. Such rational self-study then, in turn, divides the rational “subject” from the object of study, including the body…. We can and do watch ourselves. (2017: 41)

“Self-study” is the prerogative, for Epictetus, of a person’s *proairesis*, which A. A. Long calls “Epictetus’s favorite name for the purposive and self-conscious center of a person” (2002: 207).

Of particular interest here are the capacity and ability of the self to discern and distinguish between external stimuli, as Eastman writes, “for it [*proairesis*] supplies and requires self-understanding in relationship to the order of the cosmos, thus consciously choosing to think and therefore to act in accordance with what is reasonable in an objective, ordered sense” (2017: 44). Following Christopher Gill’s prodigious study of the ancient “structured self,” Eastman proceeds to demonstrate that, especially for Epictetus, “human beings do not exist in isolation from their environment but are deeply embedded in it,” in relation to the cosmos and society.
(48). It is essential, therefore, that people understand (and accept) the roles that they inhabit, as Epictetus reminds his students:

Remember that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the Playwright: if He wishes the play to be short, it is short; if long, it is long; if He wishes you to play the part of a beggar, remember to act even this role adroitly; and so if your rôle be that of a cripple, an official, or a layman. For this is your business, to play admirably the rôle assigned to you. But the selection of that rôle is Another’s.25

Epictetus illustrates this with a particular appeal to “the dutiful fulfillment of social obligations that go with particular roles” (Eastman 2017: 52) by merit of those roles’ social nature.

According to Epictetus,

Our duties are in general measured by our social relationships. He is a father. One is called upon to take care of him, to give way to him in all things, to submit when he reviles or strikes you. “But he is a bad father.” Did nature, then, bring you into relationship with a good father? No, but simply with a father. “My brother does me wrong.” Very well, then, maintain the relation that you have toward him; and do not consider what he is doing, but what you will have to do, if your moral purpose is to be in harmony with nature…. In this way, therefore, you will discover what duty to expect of your neighbour, your citizen, your commanding officer, if you acquire the habit of looking at your social relations with them.26

With statements like these Epictetus counsels his followers to habituate detachment—not in the sense that we distance ourselves from others who may “wrong” or harm us, but in discerning that we may relate to them in a specific way. This is an act of discernment and negotiation as to how—in what mode—we can best relate to others.

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25 Ench. 17 (trans. Oldfather LCL): Μέμνησο, ὅτι ὑποκριτὴς εἶ δράματος, οἷον ἂν θέλῃ ὁ διδάσκαλος· ἂν βραχύ, βραχέος· ἂν μακρόν, μακροῦ· ἂν πτωχόν ὑποκρίνασθαι σε θέλη, ὡς καὶ τοῦτον εὐφυὸς ὑποκρίνῃ· ἂν χωλόν, ἂν ἄρχοντα, ἂν ἰδιώτην. σὸν γὰρ τοῦτ’ ἔστι, τὸ δοθὲν ὑποκρίνασθαι πρόσωπον καλῶς· ἐκλέξασθαι δ’ αὐτὸ ἀλλού.

26 Ench. 30: Τὰ καθήκοντα ώς ἐπίσην τὰς σχέσεις παραμετρεῖται, πατήρ ἐστίν· ὑπαγορεύεται ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, παραχωρεῖν ἀπάντων, ἀνέχεσθαι λοιδοροῦντος, παίοντος. “ἄλλα πατήρ κακός ἐστι,” μὴ τι οὖν πρὸς ἄγαθον πατέρα φύει ωκειώθης; ἄλλα πρὸς πατέρα. “ὁ ἀδέλφος ἀδίκει.” τήρει τοιγαροῦν τὴν τάξιν τὴν σεαυτοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν· μηδε σκόπει, τί ἐκεῖνος ποιεῖ, ἄλλα τι σοὶ ποιήσαντες κατὰ φύσιν ἢ στὶ σῆ προαίρεσις, σὲ γὰρ ἄλλος οὐ βλάψει, ἂν μὴ σῦ θέλῃς· τότε δὲ ἔσῃ βεβλαμένος, ὡτιν ὑπολάβῃς βλάπτεσθαι, σοὶ τοῖς οὖν ἀπὸ τοῦ γείτονος, ἀπὸ τοῦ πολίτου, ἀπὸ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ τὸ καθήκον εὐρήσεις, ἐὰν τὰς σχέσεις ἑβίζῃς θεωρεῖν.
Everything has two handles, by one of which it ought to be carried and by the other not. If your brother wrongs you, do not lay hold of the matter by the handle of the wrong that he is doing, because this is the handle by which the matter ought not to be carried; but rather by the other handle—that he is your brother, that you were brought up together, and then you will be laying hold of the matter by the handle by which it ought to be carried.\footnote{\textit{Ench.} 43 (emphasis mine): Πᾶν πρᾶγμα δύο ἔχει λαβάς, τὴν μὲν φορητὴν, τὴν δὲ ἀφόρητον. ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἦν ἀδική, ἐντεῦθεν αὐτὸ μὴ λάμβανε, ὅτι ἀδικεῖ (ἀὕτη γὰρ ἡ λαβὴ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ οὐ φορητή), ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖθεν μᾶλλον, ὅτι ἀδελφὸς, ὅτι σύντροφος, καὶ λήψῃ αὐτὸ καθ’ ὁ φορητὸν.}

The faults of our social relations, for Epictetus, do not void the reality of those social relations or our obligations within them. Epictetus, in fact, holds these social relations up as sort of laboratory, a “training ground for \textit{proairesis}” (Eastman 2017: 59) in which the fulfillment of recognizable social obligations—often in conflict with other (perhaps “personal”) preferences and judgments—is essential to one’s moral identity and formation. Learning to relate to others by merit of their social relationships with and obligations to them (and not, for instance, on the basis of personal wrongs we might experience at their hands) is the act of a discerning and reflective self.

To the insights of Najman and Eastman may be added the study of Éric Rebillard (2012) concerning the “multiple identities” of Christians in Carthage during the third, fourth, and fifth centuries CE. Rebillard’s work depends on a distinction proposed by Don Handelman between lateral and hierarchical “arrangements of category membership.” In Handelman’s own words,

Given a lateral arrangement, the assumption is that various category sets (i.e. ethic, occupational, religious, educational, etc.) are interchangeable to a certain extent in an occasion of interaction; and therefore, that the same person can be categorized according to different criteria of relevance in different situations. But if the arrangement of membership sets tends more to the hierarchical, then all categorizations about a person may be allocated according to, and interpreted in terms of, membership in a given category set. (Handelman 1977: 192–93)
The task of Rebillard’s study is to demonstrate how Christians-at-large understood the arrangement of their “many identities” laterally, even while their bishops and other leaders (e.g., Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine) encouraged them to understand those same identities hierarchically.

Whether Christians arranged their identities laterally or hierarchically, Rebillard’s study demonstrates that ancient persons were able to negotiate between different social identifications (“memberships”), even if they did not see them in conflict with one another. Rebillard specifically concludes, “not only did Christians share a number of memberships with non-Christians, but Christians and non-Christians alike did not necessarily or consistently regard their religious allegiance as more significant than other memberships” (2012: 60). More importantly, however, it was in the paired contexts of such “lateral arrangements” of their memberships or social identifications and the larger (if intermittent) threats of suspicion and animosity on the part of non-Christians that leaders like Cyprian and Tertullian sought to “activate” their audiences’ “Christianness.”

This latter point regarding Rebillard’s study is a helpful segue back to First Peter, since each of these contexts (external threats of suspicion and animosity on the part of non-Christians; a leader attempting to activate a social identity) is present throughout its rhetoric, too. First Peter itself, I suggest, assumes that its audiences are reflective, discerning selves capable of negotiating between the spheres of influence that would claim their loyalty (as in the Epistle of Diognetus quoted at the beginning of this chapter). As Laura Hunt, cited above, has shown, the Christ-followers addressed by First Peter occupy multiple positions of “cross-categorization” (2018: 534). Developing insights from the earlier work of Horrell, Hunt writes,
Thus, while Christians are to “accept the authority of every human institution” (2:13),
“do right” according to the governors (2:14–15), and honor “everyone” including the
“emperor” (2:17), their Christian identity is made salient even with regard to those
authorities by the reminders that they belong to God, are “free people” with respect to the
human authorities. (534)

First Peter expects its audiences to be able to distinguish between their “honor” for an emperor
(among all people) and their “reverence” for God (2:17). This is underscored in the exhortations
to enslaved and married believers who are exhorted to “fit in” to their existing household
structures, but to do so while maintaining their “reverence” for God (2:18; 3:2; see also 3:14–
16). First Peter addresses its audiences as capable of negotiating their social existence both
inwardly and outwardly.

Adapting A. Sue Russell’s words on the matter, “The ancient self is not as different from
the modern self as many think” (2018: 19)—at least with regard to its reflective and discerning
capacities.28 I have sought to suggest both (1) that ideas of sociocentric societies or cultures need
not be reified absolutely onto the individuals of those societies, and (2) that the ancient persons
addressed by First Peter can reasonably be regarded to have possessed self-concepts similar to
what is presupposed by a typical social identity approach: reflective, mediating, and negotiating
selves. This latter point will be explored in more detail below.

Summary

In order to bring this discussion to a close, I return to Horrell’s discussion of identity.
Horrell suggests that we should not “simply speak of someone’s ‘identity’ but must rather
consider what aspects of identity are being considered and why these are relevant in a particular

28 Russell writes, “The modern world is not as different from the ancient world as many think,” seeking to
demonstrate how SIA to New Testament texts can fuel modern applications of those texts.
context. Moreover, one must consider how any particular identity affects or defines other aspects of a person’s identity and social conduct” (2002a: 311). This is the task that remains before me with respect to the identity of “disciple,” a social role or position which the audiences of First Peter are summoned to embody. As these Christ-followers inhabit this role, their larger identities become nuanced in ways that equip them to understand, confront, and endure their suffering. As such, this “disciple” identity (and specifically, their identity as a disciple in relation to a teacher) constitutes a part or nuance of their social identity, and it is to the relevance of SIT and SCT for exploring the significance of this that I now turn.

A Social Identity Approach to First Peter’s Summons to Discipleship

“Disciple” constitutes a part of one’s social identity. Examining First Peter’s construction of its audiences’ “discipleship,” therefore, will benefit from the application of a social identity approach. The “social identity approach,” to define it precisely, “is a branch of social psychology” (Esler 2021: 5), but the label has come to be applied much more widely in a variety of fields of research (see Postmes and Branscombe 2010: 3–6), and in biblical studies social identity approaches continue to emerge through nuanced and productive studies of biblical literature. More specifically, the social identity approach

29 Esler also notes that the “social identity approach” is “probably the most influential branch of social psychology today, not least because of the number of its practitioners,” including over 700 who can trace their academic lineage back to Henri Tajfel (see below) and “many more social psychologists around the world who apply the social identity approach who are not in this line of academic descent” (2021: 6; see R. Brown 2020).

30 The most recent survey of social identity approaches in New Testament studies, to my knowledge, is Porter and Rosner 2021: 287–93. The abundant and growing interest in social identity approaches may be witnessed by the relatively recent publication of both the T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament (Tucker and Baker 2014) and the one-volume T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary on the New Testament (Tucker and Kuecker 2018), along with the commencement of the T&T Clark Social Identity Commentary series (Brawley 2020; Esler 2021; Campbell 2023); see Esler’s catalogue of the “boom of interest among biblical researches in the social identity approach” since 2012 (Esler 2022: 28–29). “[T]here is no sign of biblical research
comprises social identity theory, which focuses on intergroup relations, and was articulated by Henri Tajfel and others at Bristol University in the 1970s, and the closely related self-categorization theory, which is a fundamental theory of how groups form and exist and was developed by John Turner (a doctoral student and then colleague of Tajfel at Bristol) and others in the 1980s. (Esler 2021: 5–6)

Here I will proceed in the following manner. I will discuss SIT and SCT in turn, presenting a brief account of the origin of each. My focus, however, will be on the tenets of each that have the most relevance for understanding and illumining First Peter’s summons to discipleship. As I describe each tenet or aspect of the social identity approach, I will immediately demonstrate its significance for evaluating First Peter’s social strategy.

“The Group in the Individual”: Social Identity Theory

*Overview*

SIT is a theory within the larger field of social behavioral psychology developed by Henri Tajfel (1919–1982) and his students in relation to the “master problem” of social psychology (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 6): what is the relationship between the thoughts and behaviors of a group and the thoughts and behaviors of the individuals that constitute that group? By the 1950s this “problem” or question had been answered by a longstanding and prominent “doctrine” of “Individualism,” classically expressed by Floyd Allport earlier in the twentieth century: “There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals. Social psychology … is a part of the psychology of the individual” (1924: 4); and “To answer the question of where this mental structure of the group exists, we must refer … to the individual” (9).31 In the 1980s John Turner and Penelope Oakes could call this approach “the

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31 These are both quoted in Hogg and Abrams 1988: 6.
intellectually dominant metatheory of the mainstream” (1986: 237–38), a theory that became an effective foil for the development of SIT and SCT.

Tajfel’s work originally focused on the dynamics of intergroup relations (as opposed to interpersonal relations; see Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel 1972; Turner and Reynolds 2010: 14–16). From this work Tajfel and his colleagues observed how an individual’s group membership provided him or her with a sense of “positive distinctiveness”: simply by being categorized as a part of one group along with others while simultaneously being categorized apart from another group of others, individuals band together by comparing themselves collectively and positively in distinction to the other group(s). Tajfel called this “positive social identity”: membership in a group (among at least two groups) is enough, he concluded, to add value to a person’s estimation of him- or herself. A “social identity,” therefore, is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981: 255).

Tajfel’s focus on the influence of group membership and categorization led him and his colleagues to offer a formidable “attack on individualism in social psychology” (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 13), at that time still understood as the field’s “traditional” approach.

In so far as traditional approaches in social psychology tend to focus upon the individual in the group, the social identity approach can be considered to be much more closely linked to sociological perspectives. It turns the traditional social psychological approach on its head, to use a familiar phrase, and examines the group in the individual. By redefining the fundamental problematic of social psychology in this way it “socializes” (or resocializes) psychology. (17)

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32 From the original experiments, Tajfel (et al.) concluded that subjects’ “actions were unambiguously directed at favoring the members of their ingroup as against the members of the outgroup,” even when “alternative strategies,” such as acting in terms of the “common good,” were available, or when an individual’s benefits remained unaffected (1971: 172).
Group membership—conscious or unconscious, given or chosen—provides nuance to a person’s identity; SIT argues that this nuance is significant. While a person’s identity cannot be limited to or explained by group membership alone, the idea of simply demarcating a person’s “social identity” has merit. In Tajfel’s words, “however rich and complex may be the individuals’ view of themselves in relation to the surrounding world, social and physical, some aspects of that view are contributed by the membership of certain social groups or categories” (1981: 255). Because of how pervasive social groups and networks are, SIT considers it likely that the number of those “aspects” are not few:

People derive their identity (their sense of self, their self-concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong. The group is thus in the individual, and the psychological processes responsible for this are also responsible for the form that group behaviour takes (e.g. ethnocentric). Individuals belong to many different social categories and thus potentially have a repertoire of many different identities to draw upon (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 19).

A social identity approach, therefore, reflects and embodies the observations of Blasi, Horrell, and Newsom cited above: “identity” is a multifaced and nuanced concept. As distinct individuals, every person constitutes “a system of coordinates, as it were, such that each new group with which he becomes affiliated circumscribes him more exactly and more unambiguously” (Simmel 1955). According to SIT, the more we attend to the social groups to which a person belongs—and to the ways these “groups in the individual” interact (or are forced to coexist)—the clearer we can be about who that person is and why they act the way they do—that is, the closer we are to understanding their “identity.”

**Social Identity Theory and First Peter**

SIT, therefore, offers a helpful perspective and set of questions for investigating how membership in a group (e.g., a first-century CE Christ-following group) might affect the
thoughts and behaviors of the individuals within that group. This is the interest and focus of those studies (or the parts of those studies) that employ a social identity approach cited above. First Peter presents its audiences of Christ-followers as one group over against another (i.e., all those who do not follow Christ). We see this described most poignantly in the contrast First Peter makes between its audiences, “who are loyal” (ὑμῖν … τοῖς πιστεύοντα), and outsiders, “who are not loyal” (ἀπιστοῦσι δὲ, 2:7). Here the audiences of First Peter are reminded that their loyalty to God results in their honor (see also 1:7; 4:16), while outsiders are left without honor and will even be ashamed (in various ways; see 27–8, 15; 3:16; 4:5, 17–18). This is an act of intergroup comparison: by assuring its audiences of the “praise and glory and honor” (1:7) that await them by merit of their loyalty—and that does not await those who are not loyal—First Peter bolsters the “positive social distinctiveness” of its audiences, thereby producing for them a “positive social identity.” First Peter, therefore, affirms that its audiences are right to be a part of this Christ-following group, united to others locally (1:1) and worldwide (5:9, 13).

Another strategy for enhancing Christ-followers’ “positive social distinctiveness” may be mentioned briefly. At 1 Pet 2:11–12 and 4:2–4, the conduct and associations of Christ-followers are also contrasted with those of outsiders. Christ-followers conduct themselves honorably “among the gentiles” (2:12); they no longer participate in the “will of the gentiles” (4:3). As I argued in Chapter One, this “conversion” of the audiences’ conduct and association constitutes the cause of Christ-followers’ sufferings. As First Peter heightens this contrast between its audiences and the outsiders who “slander” and “defame” them, it simultaneously assures them—by its very act of distinguishing them—that their membership in this group is worthwhile and of benefit to them, even amid their suffering: as Christ-followers they not only conduct themselves
honorably, but offer outsiders an opportunity to glorify God (2:12); by disassociating from “the will of the gentiles,” they are now able to live “according to the will of God” (4:2).

Thus, SIT assists us to understand First Peter’s interest in constructing its audiences’ “Christ-following” identity over and against “outsiders.” It is SCT, however, that offers an even more nuanced perspective for understanding the possible motivation behind First Peter’s summons, specifically, to discipleship. The specifics of SIT and its emphasis on “positive social distinctiveness” or “positive social identity” also remain relevant when we recognize (as we will see presently) that “disciple,” as a social role or position, also constitutes a social group. I will return to his feature of SIT in more detail in the conclusion to this chapter. For now, an exploration of some specific features of SCT will help illumine more aspects of First Peter’s summons to discipleship.

“Salient Social Identities”: Self-Categorization Theory

There is some disagreement as to how the relationship between SIT and SCT should be construed. Many represent John Turner as acknowledging that SCT “developed out of the earlier work done by Tajfel (and himself)” (Esler 2014: 23), while Turner himself insists that “SCT is a different theory from SIT. It is not an extension or derivation, but in fact is a more general account of the self and group processes than SIT was ever intended to be” (Turner and Reynolds 2010: 19). While these statements are not necessarily contradictory, it is worth noting that Turner’s work developed by treating key questions that Tajfel’s left unanswered (or even unasked). Tajfel is not to be faulted for this, of course. His focus remained intergroup relations

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33 Elsewhere Turner writes that SCT “grew out of the body of research on social categorization … and the related theoretical concept of ‘social identity,’” citing multiple studies of Tajfel et al. (Turner 1985: 94).
and had little to say about *intragroup* dynamics (see Esler 2010: 22). As later proponents of SIT summarize,

> [D]espite SIT’s richness, there are certain core questions concerning the nature, operation, and purpose of social identity that it does not address. What makes social identity salient? What are its consequences? And how do individuals differ in the strength of their social identity and their capacity to embody it? It was partly to answer such questions that *self-categorization theory* was developed by Turner and his colleagues in the 1980s…. The primary contribution of this was to present a new theory of the psychological group—one that argued that people become a group to the extent that they internalize a sense of shared social identity and that this process fundamentally changes and transforms both their psychology and their behavior. (Haslam et al. 2010: 346)

I am arguing here that First Peter’s construction of its audiences’ identity as disciples is an effort to “internalize a sense of shared social identity and that this process fundamentally changes and transforms” them for the sake of facing their present circumstances. Rather than provide a broad overview of SCT (as with SIT above), I will move the remainder of this discussion forward by engaging a selection of three questions asked and answered by SCT—each selected for its relevance to reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship.

**What is a Group?**

First, is it possible to be clearer as to what we mean by “group”? Answers to this question do not necessarily distinguish between SIT and SCT, but the “more general account of the self” provided by SCT does offer more explicit avenues for examining intragroup dynamics alongside intergroup relations than SIT did at first. Tajfel was content to define a group as “a body of people who feel that they are a group” (see Tajfel 1981: 229). As cited above, Tajfel did describe what would constitute group membership: it was in part cognitive (knowing one was in

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34 This is adapted from his citation of R. Emerson’s *From Empire to Nation*. Tajfel writes, “We shall adopt a concept of ‘group’ identical to the definition of ‘nation’ proposed by the historian Emerson (1960) when he wrote, ‘The simplest statement that can be made about a nation is that it is a body of people who feel that they are a nation.’”
a group); in part evaluative (gaining some form of value from being in a group); and in part emotional (having feelings toward other members of the group or toward members of other groups). Yet the vocabulary of “group” tends, for many, to connote physical entities in which they participate by means of some manifestation of presence or locality.\(^35\) While SIT does not insist on any particular limitations to what constitutes a “group” differently than SCT, Turner introduces additional terminology ("identifications") by which more than one person could be considered a “group”:

[A] social group can be defined as two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or, which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category. This definition stresses that members of a social group seem often to share no more than a collective perception of their own social unity and yet this seems to be sufficient for them to act as a group. (Turner 1982: 15)

The significance of these “identifications” will be explored in more detail below. Here it is enough to note that, based on this definition, “roles” and “positions” (such as “disciple” or “student”) naturally count as—and are often utilized as examples of—groups.

“For the early identity theorists,” according to Burke and Stets, “identities based on roles were the identities of central importance” (2009: 113). They explain:

Roles provide structure, organization, and meaning to selves and to situations…. A role is the set of expectations tied to a social position that guide people’s attitudes and behavior…. A role identity is the internalized meanings of a role that individuals apply to themselves. (113–14)

Burke and Stets use students and teachers to illustrate these concepts. “Student” represents a typical “social position” occupied by most people at some point in life. Students occupy their

\(^35\) Tajfel recognized this in an early essay on the subject: “In our discussion the term ‘group’ denotes a cognitive entity that is meaningful to the subject at a particular point in time and must be distinguished from the way in which the term ‘group’ is used in much of the social psychological literature where it denotes an ‘objective’ (most often face-to-face) relationship between a number of people” (1974: 69).
present position through various tasks (what Burke and Stets call “roles,” as distinguishable from “role identities”) such as learning, studying, doing homework, passing classes, earning a degree, and more. These, of course, are the tasks expected of students in a particular time and place (though the parameters may be wide). For instance, a student who is also a cousin may visit extended family in another state. One cousin can often commiserate with another over the burden of homework because both have similar experiences of what it means to be a student in twenty-first century North America. “Individuals are socialized into what it means to be a student, friend, or worker” (2009: 114).

The relevance of this may already be clear. As I demonstrated at length in Chapter Two, to be a disciple in the ancient Mediterranean was to be a part of a social relationship with a teacher (and with other disciples) that consisted of certain expectations and obligations. The Christ-followers addressed by First Peter know of these expectations, not least because First Peter itself reminds them of their obligations to be obedient, to imitate their teacher, and to represent him faithfully to others. In addition to this, as described in Chapters Three and Four, First Peter is also commemorating Jesus’s teaching on discipleship, including its emphasis on the potential for suffering as a result of a disciple’s reorientation and resocialization. The point here is to acknowledge that if First Peter’s audiences answer the letter’s summons to discipleship positively, they would do so by embodying the obligations and expectations that “being a disciple” means. The consequence of this insight will become clearer as we proceed through the following two questions, but it may be stated summarily here: First Peter’s identification of its audiences as disciples brings with it the expectation that they will act accordingly. From a social identity perspective, First Peter may be understood to say, “You are disciples; act like it.”
**What is the Significance of a Social Identity?**

Second, Tajfel defined social identity as “that part of” a person’s identity that derives from belonging to one or more groups—but what makes up the other part(s) of a person’s identity, and how do these parts coexist and relate to one another? The answer to these questions, according to SCT, is found in a careful delineation of the “self-concept,” which constitutes a “cognitive structure” enabling the individual to mediate, negotiate, and codevelop “multiple identities” or “nuances” to their identity. SIT’s focus on intergroup behavior, intergroup conflict, and intergroup relationships did not provide an answer to this question. “Self-categorization theory is in a sense the theory of the self-concept that social identity theory required but did not itself provide” (Turner and Onorato 1999: 12). SCT assumes that “self is both object and subject, that there is a ‘me’ for the ‘I’ to reflect upon.” This “me” upon which “I” reflect is the “self-concept.”

The self-concept comprises the totality of self-descriptions and self-evaluations subjectively available to the individual. It is not just a catalogue of evaluative self-descriptions, it is textured and structured into circumscribed and relatively distinct constellations called *self-identifications*. (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 24)

The self-concept is “the cognitive component of the psychological system or process referred to as the ‘self’” and “comprises many different elements” (Turner 1985: 94).

The “elements” of the self-concept exist hierarchically: the self-concept contains *identities*, which contain *identifications*, which contain *descriptions*; each of these falls into two categories: social and personal. Therefore, a person’s *social* identity, which for Tajfel represents “a part of” a person’s identity, is more clearly delineated by Turner and SCT as representing “one of the two major subsystems of the self-concept” (Turner 1982: 18). More significantly, Social identity contains *social identifications*: identity-contingent self-descriptions deriving from membership in social categories (nationality, sex, race, occupation, sports
teams, and more short-lived and transient group memberships). Personal identity contains personal identifications: self-descriptions which are “more personal in nature and that usually denote specific attributes of the individual (Gergen 1971: 62) (e.g. idiosyncratic descriptions of self which are essentially tied to and emerge from close and enduring interpersonal relationships). (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 25)\(^{36}\)

This has important implications moving forward, but it is worth pausing here to summarize. SCT understands the “self” or “self-concept” to be a cognitive structure comprising one’s social and personal identities; it is the “repertoire” of identities made up of several self-identifications (and combinations thereof). As this relates to First Peter, we may readily recognize, as do the social identity approaches to First Peter discussed above, that First Peter’s identity-construction efforts are wholly focused on the construction of a social identity; my contention is that this is taking place strategically through the appeal to the social self-identification of “disciple.”

Ultimately, the benefit of tending to this aspect of SCT is for what it has to say about social identity salience, which will provide the topic of my third and final question. Here, however, it is important to note that First Peter has good reason to appeal to a social identification: these audiences have no “personal” relationship with Christ, since they represent a second generation (at least) of the early Christian movements made up of those who had no direct or personal contact with Jesus of Nazareth. These are those who “have not seen him” and yet “love him”; they still “do not see him now,” but will, and in the meantime they “are loyal to him” and can expect to rejoice (1 Pet 1:8). The audiences’ “discipleship practices” (obedience, imitation, and representation; their reorientation, resocialization, and even their suffering) are contextualized within a social relationship, not a personal one, and in this way a social identity

\(^{36}\) See also Turner et al. 1994: “Personal identity refers to self-categories that define the individual as a unique person in terms of his or her individual differences from other (in-group) persons. Social identity refers to social categorizations of self and others, self-categories that define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories” (288).
approach not only makes sense to apply to First Peter but makes sense of the letter’s strategy itself. In the absence of personal qualities and relationships to which First Peter can readily appeal (especially considering how widely this letter was to be distributed, 1:1), it constructs a social identity based in well-known sociocultural patterns of discipleship and its commemoration of Jesus’s teaching on the matter.

**What Makes a Social Identity Salient?**

Third, and finally, SCT asks how different *self-identifications* (both social and personal) within the self-concept actually negotiate, vie for prominence, and integrate with one another. SCT proposes that “the functioning of the self-concept is situation-specific: particular self-concepts tend to be activated (‘switched on’) in specific situations producing specific self-images” (Turner 1985: 94). This is what we refer to as “salience,” the likelihood that a particular identity will be activated and will take precedence over other identities (see Burke and Stets 2009: 113). In Turner’s words,

> In appropriate circumstances [the self-concept] processes incoming information from the environment and regulates behavior on the basis of the corresponding cognitive output. The evidence for the situational specificity of self-images, therefore, suggests the interesting conclusion that people have learnt to regulate their social behaviour in terms of different self-conceptions in different situations. Different situations tend to “switch on” different conceptions of the self so that social stimuli are construed and social behaviour constructed in the appropriately adaptive manner. (1982: 20)

Of particular interest to SIT and SCT are those instances where a person’s social identity becomes “more salient than personal identity in self-conception,” especially when those

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37 Here the technical vocabulary becomes somewhat muddled: at times the term “self-concept” is used technically to refer to the cognitive structure of the “self.” At other times, as here, the term “self-concept” is used to describe a process of mediation or negotiation that produces a “specific self-image.”
instances occur apart from the physical presence of other group members (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 25).

The situation addressed by First Peter—both its cause and its form—make excellent sense of First Peter’s appeal to discipleship. In Chapter One I argued that First Peter’s “presentation” of its audiences’ suffering is conditioned in some ways by its desire to address its audiences as disciples. The perspective of a social identity approach suggests that First Peter’s appeal to discipleship may itself be inspired or necessitated by the circumstances it seeks to address: their suffering itself has “activated” or “switched on” the social identity of a disciple. First Peter’s exhortations, therefore, assist its audiences to embody, live into, and habituate the “norms” of their discipleship for the sake of facing their present circumstances.

If we keep in mind the form of suffering highlighted by First Peter as discussed in Chapter One—invective—we are in a position to appreciate the dynamics of First Peter’s rhetoric together with its specific summons to discipleship. Invective, it should be remembered, was often leveled against philosophers and their disciples and was specifically intended to dissuade others from following in a particular way of life. The effect of this invective upon Christ-followers would, presumably, have been to convince them to stop following Christ and to abandon their loyalty to God. The counter-effect of First Peter’s own rhetoric, in light of SIT and our regard for the letter as a summons to discipleship, is to enhance that “positive social distinctiveness” and “positive social identity,” to assure them that their membership in this group is worthwhile, and, thereby, to keep them in the group. Who would be better equipped to face, endure, and even counter the ridicule of such invective speech than the faithful and well-educated disciples of a teacher?
By addressing its audiences as *disciples*, First Peter summons them to fulfill the obligations that were incumbent upon loyal, socially responsive, and dependable disciples. Each of these obligations, as underscored by First Peter itself, is a tool with which Christ-followers are able to better understand and endure their present circumstances. Stepping into and fulfilling the *role or position* of a disciple, in other words, equips Christ-followers with the resources for enduring their suffering. Their obedience to their teacher (to Christ or to God) reminds them of their loyalty toward God and commitment to God’s will through “good works in Christ” (see Chapter Four); as disciples, they can understand that the temporary trials they face are the outcome they can expect for being loyal disciples. Their imitation of their teacher places before them the example of Christ, who not only endured suffering, but was subsequently vindicated and glorified (1:10–11; 3:18–22). Their commitment to imitate Christ assures them that they, too, will share in the same glories (4:13; 5:1, 10). As disciples, they are also charged with representing their teacher faithfully and carrying on his legacy: their steadfast endurance even under the pain of suffering, First Peter assures them, will be opportunity for others to glorify God (2:12) and “be won” for the gospel (3:1–2); their patience, steadfastness, and forbearance will give them an opportunity to present a “defense” of the hope that is within them (3:15). Finally, their resocialization as disciples, as well, provides them with solidarity that is not only local, but worldwide (5:9, 13); these disciples are not alone in their trials, but are a part of a network of fellow disciples who may band together and sustain one another.

Just as Epictetus counsels a son to relate to a father as a *son to a father*, without regard for how that father has wronged him *personally*, First Peter tells its audiences to relate to their circumstances as *disciples* would. The resources of their discipleship—the habituation of virtues
like their obedience, their imitation of Christ, and their representation of him—are at their disposal. They “know what they signed up for,” as it were, and what to expect as Christ’s disciples. They can approach these trials without personal shame and without being “surprised,” as though something strange were happening to them (4:12)—knowing that as disciples they are “up to the task” and that their teacher will see them through as well.

Reflection

The foregoing discussion has, I hope, demonstrated the viability and benefit of a social identity approach to First Peter’s summons to discipleship. To conclude this chapter, I do not wish to summarize each point again; suffice it to say here that, in my opinion, social identity approaches continue to prove heuristically valuable for understanding not only the intergroup dynamics at work between Christ-followers and “outsiders,” but also for recognizing and appreciating the strategies at work in the texts that reveal those earliest Christ-followers to us—First Peter chief among them. In the space that remains, therefore, I will offer a concluding reflection on the implications of recontextualizing what I have proposed here.

It is important to acknowledge that the implications of this interpretation, as they have been applied historically, are complicated. Texts like First Peter (especially 2:13–3:7) have been employed to substantiate the abuse and degradation of women, persons of color, and others for centuries, and some have reasonably asked whether these texts can justifiably be proclaimed as the word of God or even studied in an edifying manner. I certainly do not advocate my present reading of First Peter as justification to legitimize or excuse such applications. Rather, I hope that we may see here an entextualized attempt to make sense of early Christ-followers’ suffering and to give it a salient context in which “bearing up” and “endurance” can be seen as viable and
even noble options. First Peter understands discipleship as the appropriate model to make sense of its audiences’ suffering because of the way that students and disciples could often interpret their own experience in the light of their teachers’. A social identity approach, therefore, assists us to recognize why authors or audiences may have found a particular rhetoric or strategy appealing or affecting without necessitating that we adopt the same strategy in our application of the text today.

This latter point is important for understanding how First Peter may be positioned to construct its audiences’ “positive social identity.” Although J. N. D. Kelly calls First Peter “one of the most pastorally attractive … documents of the NT” (1969), its pervasive emphasis on suffering for “belonging to Christ” (e.g., 4:14–16) may lead some to conclude quite the opposite. Social identity approaches have concluded that sustained group membership depends on that membership’s “self-evaluative consequences.” As I discussed above, group membership, in Tajfel’s words, satisfies a “fundamental motivation for self-esteem” or “positive social identity” (see Hogg and Abrams 1988: 7). Continued membership in a group, in other words, will be determined in part by the results of being a member. If one’s social identity is unsatisfactory, he or she may leave the group for one that offers a more positive experience and enhances his or her well-being; or group members may do something to make the group to which they belong more capable of contributing to their well-being.

Why would Christ-followers, suffering as they do, continue following Christ? How could this continued suffering convince them to “be built up” (1 Pet 2:5) and to endure the burden of the suffering that is precipitated by their reorientation and resocialization? What kind of
“positive self-esteem” could they find in such circumstances? Through a social identity approach, I suggest, we can recognize that many find “positive social distinctiveness” through the fulfillment of their social obligations, insofar as it associates them with a group and enables them to feel as though they “belong.” As disciples who obediently imitate and represent their teacher, First Peter reminds them that this suffering—itself described as “trials” and temporary (1:6; 4:12)—is something they should expect to face simply by merit of being disciples, and that they face these challenges along with other Christ-followers throughout the world (5:9). While their circumstances may still be challenging, painful, and precarious, their social position as disciples can assist them to fortify their resolve to press forward through the present trials as they await the restoration, support, and strength that God provides (5:10). First Peter’s strategy, therefore, should be read as an attempt to wrestle with the reality of their Christian suffering by summoning early Christ-followers to fulfill their duty to be disciples and to approach their present trials accordingly—an attempt to place their suffering in context, to give it meaning, and to provide a means of endurance. It is not a prescription for embracing suffering for all time, but a strategy for understanding and enduring their suffering in the present.

38 First Peter has plenty of indications that Christ-followers will receive more than sufferings for their loyalty to God, including, e.g., salvation (1:9; 2:2); blessing (3:9); a good conscience (3:21); and the revelation of Christ’s glory (4:13).
CONCLUSION

PRIMO-PETRINE DISCIPLESHIP: SUMMARY AND TRAJECTORIES

Discipleship may literally mean ‘being a student,’ in the Greek sense of the word, but it doesn’t mean turning up once a week for a course (or even a sermon). It’s not an intermittent state; it’s a relationship that continues. The truth is that, in the ancient world, being a ‘student’ was rather more like that than it is these days. If you said to a modern prospective student that the essence of being a student was to hang on to your teacher’s every word, to follow in his or her steps, to sleep outside their door in order not to miss any pearls of wisdom falling from their lips, to watch how they conduct themselves at the table, how they conduct themselves in the street, you might not get a very warm response. But in the ancient world, it was rather more like that. To be the student of a teacher was to commit yourself to living in the same atmosphere and breathing the same air; there was nothing intermittent about it.

—Rowan Williams (2016: 2)

With his characteristic flourish and penchant for words, Rowan Williams here captures the difficulty that many modern Christians face when they attempt to place “New Testament discipleship” into twenty-first century practice. As I have sought to demonstrate throughout this project, ancient discipleship (Christian or otherwise) was a multifaceted sociocultural phenomenon thoroughly characterized by the pervasive tenets of Hellenistic paideia. Whatever else disciples were, they began and grew as students who devoted themselves to learn from the words and deeds of teachers. With this study, I have contended that First Peter itself presents a series of exhortations inviting Christ-followers to embody the social role of disciples in relation to God and Christ as their teacher(s). In doing so, First Peter adopts a pedagogical strategy for addressing its audiences’ circumstances, enabling them to understand and endure their present suffering. First Peter, in other words, constructs or construes a social identity for its audiences—“disciples”—so that they may be equipped to confront, and perhaps overcome, their suffering.
This, therefore, has been a study of First Peter’s “social strategy,” an investigation of how First Peter accomplishes its purpose of strengthening the resolve of its Christ-following audiences to remain loyal to God and Christ even as they encounter pressure to (re)conform to the norms of their surroundings.

I will use this Conclusion to accomplish two things. First, I will summarize the main arguments of my study briefly. Second, I will suggest ways in which this study might be expanded and placed in conversation with the larger fields of both New Testament and primo-Petrine studies.

Reading First Peter as a Summons to Discipleship

This study consisted of two main parts: arguments for the plausibility of reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship and demonstrations of the efficacy of such a reading. I will summarize each part in turn.

After initial methodological and terminological discussions, the Introduction proposes that any understanding of ancient Christian discipleship should begin by locating it within its pedagogical context. The task of locating “discipleship” within a New Testament text like First Peter, therefore, becomes one of asking whether that text also reflects the pedagogical milieu of ancient discipleship. Reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship, I contend, requires attention to this context and evidence of its influence throughout the rhetoric of the letter.¹

With Chapters One and Two I set out to demonstrate that this pedagogical context may plausibly be found within the rhetoric of First Peter. An anecdote concerning Socrates and

¹ Two additional discussions within the Introduction provided initial evidence that First Peter might be intending to address its audiences as disciples: (1) the letter’s paraenetic style, form, and purpose; and (2) the use of the pseudonym “Peter.”
Aeschines, preserved by both Seneca and Diogenes Laertius, will help illustrate the chief themes of these chapters. Seneca’s version reads thus:

Everyone used to offer Socrates gifts, each according to his own resources. Aeschines, who was poor and a student of Socrates, said, “I cannot find anything worthy of you which I could give you; it is only in this respect that I feel poor. And so I give you the only thing I have: myself.” … Socrates replied, “Of course you have given me a great gift—unless, that is, you set a low value on yourself. So I will be sure to return you to yourself in better condition than I received you.”²

Aeschines is a student of Socrates—but his education here begins with two significant actions: (1) he approaches Socrates as a benefactor from whom he can gain much in knowledge, wisdom, and character; and (2) he devotes himself completely to Socrates, demonstrating a profound sense of loyalty toward his teacher. These are not unique to Aeschines but reflect widespread dispositions at work in the relationships between teachers and students throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Alongside this, Aeschines also demonstrates that students and teachers existed in relationships of social obligation to one another; the details of these “obligations” are not spelled out in such a short anecdote, but Aeschines’s cleverness in deciding what to give Socrates depends on the existence of the obligation which he owed Socrates in the first place.

My work in Chapters One and Two focused on demonstrating that First Peter’s exhortations exhibit these three things: (1) an emphasis on the loyalty (πίστις) of its audiences toward God and Christ; (2) a characterization of their relationship with God with the language of reciprocity (χάρις), wherein God is a benefactor and they are his clients; and (3) the presence of specific but widespread practices, behaviors, and dispositions that were expected of students by

their teachers: obedience, imitation, and representation. The emphatic presence of each of these features in First Peter, as I demonstrate, suggests that First Peter’s audiences would readily hear themselves addressed by this letter as disciples.

Having explored for the pedagogical context of ancient discipleship, and having demonstrated how First Peter reflects that context, Chapter Three then asked how we might account for the distinctive features of primo-Petrine discipleship as informed by the teaching of Jesus on the matter. Since First Peter exhorts its audiences to follow Christ and to be loyal to God through Christ, their discipleship is necessarily christocentric. In order to account for how First Peter’s vision for discipleship reflects the teachings of Jesus, I proposed that we may identify a “grammar of discipleship” consisting of the disciples’ reorientation around the “will” or “reign” of God, their resocialization into the family of God, and the consequent potential that they may suffer. This grammar, I argued, becomes commemorated, adapted, and inscribed within the gospel tradition, the written Gospels, and First Peter.

In the light of the preceding arguments and proposals, Chapters Four and Five demonstrate the efficacy of reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship combining the pervasive pedagogical milieu discussed in Chapters One and Two with the influence of Jesus’s teaching on discipleship discussed in Chapter Three. Specifically, I apply First Peter’s vision for discipleship to the letter’s emphasis on suffering. I argue that the prevailing opinion deeming First Peter’s approach to suffering “christological,” while not wrong, is better seen as a part of a larger, pedagogical approach to suffering. First Peter, I contend, uses the pedagogical context of ancient discipleship, combined with Jesus’s vision for discipleship, to assist its audiences in understanding their present suffering. As “disciples,” they can accept their circumstances as both
“natural” or “expected” (since this is what happens to “disciples” of Jesus) and as a part of their education (since hardships were often regarded as “teaching tools” for the formation of students).

With Chapter Five I asked a larger question regarding the possible motivation behind First Peter’s summons to discipleship and utilized the insights of a modern social identity approach to propose an answer. Specifically, in light of (1) the emphasis of Social Identity Theory on “positive social distinctiveness” and (2) the comprehensive understanding of social identity salience afforded by Self-Categorization Theory, I argued that First Peter’s strategy of addressing its audiences as disciples has good reason to expect a favorable result. The situation of First Peter, I argued, provides a context easily suited to “switch on” or “activate” the social role of “disciple.” First Peter’s summons to discipleship, therefore, takes the particular context of its audiences’ suffering seriously and addresses its audiences appropriately: as disciples confronted with the challenge of maintaining their obligations toward their teacher. First Peter, therefore, works in tandem with the situation of its audiences to affirm and encourage its audiences to “be disciples”—and to act accordingly.

Avenues for Expansion and Further Conversation

There is always more that can be said and more stones to turn over—though I hope none will become “stumbling stones” to the main argument I have presented here (1 Pet 2:8). Here I would like to conclude this project by highlighting three ways that it might be expanded and put into conversation with the larger fields of New Testament and primo-Petrine studies.

Avenues for Expansion

My focus on First Peter has been intentional and rewarding, but I think there are ways in which this specific project may benefit from further analysis and conversation with other texts.
First, I have not placed First Peter in direct comparison with other New Testament documents. Notably, an analysis of “Pauline discipleship” alongside “primo-Petrine discipleship” would provide yet another point of comparison for ongoing conversations of First Peter’s relationship to the Pauline corpus. More immediately, bringing Paul’s letters, the other Catholic Epistles, and the rest of the New Testament into the conversation might also assist in further evaluating First Peter’s own contribution to the diversity of early Christian experience and practice.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, there is also room for exploring the commemoration of my proposed “grammar of discipleship” within Gnostic and other apocryphal Gospels, Letters, and Acts (not to mention other New Testament epistles as well). Not only would this provide more points of comparison and potential demonstrations of the grammar’s adaptability, but it would provide further opportunities to explore the feasibility of my proposal regarding the existence and implementation of this grammar.

Finally, it is worth noting that my examples of relationships between students and teachers discussed in Chapter Two are relationships between two human beings (no matter how illustrious a student might consider his or her teacher to be). While I am convinced that First Peter does address its audiences as disciples and expects them to act as such, it is not entirely clear that First Peter has a specific teacher in mind. Peter, as the implied author of the letter, may be a teacher, but the letter evinces little to no expectations of how the audiences are to relate to him specifically. Christ is certainly a plausible teacher, given the historical reality of his teaching and following. First Peter does exhort its audiences to “follow in his footsteps,” but this

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3 It is possible that summoning its audiences to occupy the social role of student may be enough, and that First Peter did not have a specific teacher in mind. At the same time, asking the following questions would, I think, only provide more insight into the present study.
may simply be a common paraenetic device of providing a model (like Sarah, 3:5–6) for audiences to emulate. First Peter, in my opinion, seems to portray its audiences as disciples most in relation to God, and this presents two larger questions. The first is theologically oriented: if First Peter is aware, as I think it is, that it was Jesus of Nazareth who first garnered the following, and if he does intend to represent Christ as a teacher at 2:21, how does First Peter envision the relationship between God and Christ? Related questions include: Are both God and Christ teachers? Is God their teacher? As in many relationships of ancient benefaction, does Christ occupy the role of a “mediator”? The second, larger, question that project will benefit from asking, especially if First Peter understands God as its audiences’ teacher, is how other ancient sources portray gods and divine beings as teachers. How could this dictate or change the nature of students’ obligations toward their teacher(s)? Given the pluralistic environment of ancient Rome, would loyalty toward a divine teacher look different than toward a specific philosopher? How would a student relate to a god as both teacher and as worshipper? Each of these questions may help us place First Peter more firmly in its ancient Mediterranean contexts.

Social-Scientific Studies of First Peter and Early Christianity

As I noted in the Introduction, First Peter has received ample attention from social-scientific critics. Since this study has also adopted a social-scientific approach to First Peter, I am interested in exploring how it might relate to those other studies. Perhaps most notable among those studies are those invested in the “Balch-Elliott Debate” and its permutations: what kind of conformity, resistance, or combination of the two does First Peter encourage among its

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4 Some seeds are also planted in the Introduction for further interaction with the tenets of socio-rhetorical criticism and the rhetorical and literary theory of Kenneth Burke.

audiences? Would understanding First Peter as a summons to discipleship, as I have explored in this study, add anything to one position or the other? Given the continued appeal to the work of Elliott and Balch, along with continued interest in the position of Christ-followers vis-à-vis Roman society, the influence of a pedagogical context upon First Peter’s exhortations may add to the conversation.

I have also described in some detail my understanding of the situation that First Peter seeks to address. Along the way I have noted the position (gaining some popularity among primo-Petrine scholars) that First Peter might envision its audiences as subject to legal proceedings and capital punishment. I am not opposed to this position, but my approach has been to focus on what First Peter itself appears to emphasize: the verbal harassment of Christ-followers and its social consequences. It may be worth asking if reading First Peter as a summons to discipleship supports this position at all. If First Peter exhorts its audiences to be the “disciples” of someone who was crucified and killed by the Roman government (though, the actual identification of their teacher, discussed above, is potentially ambiguous), does this imply that Christ-followers were already susceptible to similar punishments? On the other hand, rather than providing evidence in favor of this position, First Peter’s summons to discipleship could be read in light of it: How might the threat of death contextualize primo-Petrine discipleship? Are there other analogies to facing death as disciples that might shed light on First Peter’s rhetoric?

Finally, studies of First Peter’s construction of an ethnic social identity continue to emerge. If First Peter does function as a summons to discipleship, how might the role of

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6 This position is set out most fully by Travis Williams (2012a) and is also argued in Horrell 2007b; Holloway 2009.

7 See Horrell 2011; Ok 2021; Marcar 2022.
“disciple” merge with or influence a person’s ethnic identity? How does a person’s identity as a disciple be affected by their position as παροικός and παρεπίδημος?

Recontextualizing First Peter’s Summons to Discipleship

At the turn of the third century CE Tertullian makes a defense of his Christian faith, presenting himself and his fellow Christians as sincere adherents of an expanding religious movement that poses no threat to the status quo of Roman imperial power. He outlines key tenets of the Christian faith and important Christian practices (as known to him) in need of explanation, since they are often misinterpreted by outsiders. Tertullian presents a noble appraisal of Christianity but concedes that it might sound odd—if not ridiculous—to his audiences’ ears. He goes so far as to admit: “Yes! we, too, in our day laughed at this. We are from among yourselves.” He admits that the faith he professes is remarkable, even fantastic, to the uninitiated. Yet it is one worth becoming acquainted with, though the effort to do so is not easily undertaken: “Christians are made,” he declares, “not born.”

Tertullian here defends his understanding of what it means to be a “Christian,” and in doing so acknowledges the complexity of Christian faith and practice. In saying that Christians are “made,” he refers to what Christians today commonly call “discipleship,” a process by which the beliefs and practices of Christianity become a worldview and way of life. It is quite natural, I have demonstrated, for Christians to look to the New Testament for “patterns” that might inspire or affirm their own forms of discipleship. What I have sought to underscore with this project, however, is that the path forward needs straightening. Too often we decontextualize a text for the

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sake of recontextualizing it within a different context. In the case of First Peter, contemporary patterns of discipleship emerge without consideration for the rich and dynamic pedagogical context influencing First Peter’s own vision for discipleship. At times this has resulted in poor and even harmful recontextualizations of First Peter’s exhortations (see Appendix B); at other times we have neglected the nuances of First Peter’s strategy, informed as it is by the pedagogical context out of which it emerged. These are nuances capable of improving our recontextualizations of First Peter by, e.g., teaching us about the meaning of healthy displays of loyalty, or the necessity of habit-forming behaviors for creating enduring forms of discipleship.

This is not the place to offer a detailed recontextualization of First Peter’s summons to discipleship; this may be left for a subsequent and more pastorally or devotionally oriented study. Here I wish to close by suggesting that efforts at recontextualizing biblical texts might do well to pay more attention to the strategies at work in the texts themselves. As I have sought to show, attention to such a strategy does much to illumine the purpose, motivation, and nuance of a text’s rhetoric and sociocultural contexts—and therefore enables us to attend to its meaning more fully. Understanding what has inspired and conditioned the composition and distribution of First Peter, in other words, ties us to the text as responsible readers and interpreters of First Peter, and potentially creates within us a disposition and hermeneutic of responsibility for how we employ First Peter in new contexts.
APPENDIX A

STRUCTURE AND MOVEMENT IN FIRST PETER
Peter surely did not write with an outline before him. He feels free to merge ideas together through gradual transition rather than through careful distinction. However, he does have a structure.… [W]hile all outlines have a degree of arbitrariness in them, they are necessary for the intelligent discussion of the literature.
—Peter Davids (1990: 28)

Despite continued disagreement surrounding First Peter’s structure, the following brief formal analysis will assist in supporting the larger contention of this project. Nothing that follows here is essential to my argument, though certain elements discussed here may enhance the ability of my argument to convince.

Compositional devices permeate First Peter, but in ways that produce a “smoothly flowing continuity of thought” (Elliott 2000: 80). Donelson is correct when he writes,

The rhetoric of 1 Peter works by way of repetition and accumulation, with the various passages reinforcing one another…. First Peter reads as a gathering of passages and images that build upon one another. Each passage echoes other passages. Each image intertwines with other images…. No matter how the letter is divided, each section is interconnected with the others. (2010: 18–19)

I am unconvinced, however, that this leads to Donelson’s conclusion that First Peter is “loosely organized at best” or that “manufacturing” an outline to the letter is “beside the point or misleading” (18).

Here I offer an account of First Peter’s structure as I understand it and some basic justification for following this outline throughout this study. Throughout this discussion, however, I prefer to use the term “movement,” rather than structure, in order to emphasize my conviction that what is of most importance in our reading of First Peter is ultimately, in Michael Gorman’s words, “the relationship among the parts and especially how that relationship unfolds step by step” (2020: 104). Nonetheless, an outline of the text’s larger structure is helpful (if not necessary) for “the intelligent discussion of the literature” (Davids 1990: 28), even if Donelson is
correct to observe that “most outlines of 1 Peter are effectively identical” (2010: 18). As I hope to show, this discussion creates plenty of space for appreciating the text’s structural nuances.

**First Peter’s Epistolary Structure**

As I stated in my introduction, I take First Peter to be a genuine letter. In Elliott’s words, “The consistency and coherence of its language, style, themes, arrangement, and line of argumentation indicate that 1 Peter from the outset was conceived, composed, and dispatched as an integral, genuine letter” (2000: 11). An account of First Peter’s structure and movement, therefore, does well to begin with its epistolary features, which conform easily to the practices of letter-writing in antiquity.

**The Epistolary Framework (1 Pet 1:1–2 and 5:13–14)**

First Peter begins with an easily identifiable prescript at 1:1–2. There is no debate over the extent of this prescript, but it is worth noting that the length and complexity of the prescript’s *adscriptio* is remarkable, comprising one of the longest descriptions of a New Testament audience without wasting a word. From the very beginning, First Peter is wholeheartedly focused on its audiences.

More in need of explanation is my demarcation of First Peter’s postscript to 5:13–14. Many (if not most) scholars include 5:12 with the postscript by merit of the verse’s

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1 Elliot’s conclusion (and the similar conclusion of “the vast majority” of primo-Petrine scholars) is made in the light of twentieth-century studies of First Peter that emphasized the baptismal imagery of First Peter in various ways; see Hill 1976 and the brief discussion in Chapters One and Four (pp. 78–79, 231–232)

2 1 Pet 1:1b–2c (23 words) takes third place to 2 John 1–2 (36 words) and 1 Cor 1:2 (32 words). The Elder’s *adscriptio* mentions “truth” (ἀλήθεια) three times and focuses on the recipients’ relation to both himself (οὓς ἐγὼ ἀγαπώ) and others (ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδικοῦντων) along with the truth’s abiding presence (καὶ μεθ’ ἡμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). Paul twice emphasizes the Corinthians’ holiness (ἡγιασμένοις, κλήθοις ἁγίοις) and their relation to Christ. First Peter, on the other hand, repeats only a καὶ.
commendation of Silvanus. Such commendations are often found in the postscripts of ancient letters, but they are not necessarily found there.\(^3\) Instead, I allocate 5:12 to the letter body where it functions primarily as its closing.\(^4\) With 5:13–14 the letter provides a pair of greetings typical of ancient letters, including salutations from others (5:13). The parallels that form a “grand inclusion” with the prescript (1:1–2) are found primarily in 5:13–14 (see Elliott 2000: 69–70).

**The Letter Proem (1 Pet 1:3–12)**

Somewhat unresolved in ongoing discussions of First Peter’s structure is the relationship between the letter’s opening period (1:3–12) and what follows (1:13–5:12). Virtually all scholars recognize that 1:3–12 forms a distinct pericope, but disagreement persists as to whether it belongs to the letter body or should be considered separate from it. Curious, for example, is

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\(^3\) It is important to remember that the letter of recommendation was recognized as a distinct “epistolary type” in antiquity (see Klauck 2016: 72–77; Ps.-Demetrius 2 and Ps.-Libanius 8 [in Malherbe 1988]). Nevertheless, recommendations could “also be interspersed in letters with different purposes” (Klauck 2016: 76) and “may frequently be found within the conclusions of lengthy ancient letters especially devoted to concerns other than recommendations” (Gamble 1977: 85; see 84–85 for several examples from letters outside the New Testament). In early Christian correspondence, concluding commendations are included in Rom 16:1–2; 1 Cor 16:10–11; Eph 6:21; Ign. Rom. 10.1–2; Ign. Smyrn. 12.1; and Pol. Phil. 14.1. Commendations are also found in letter bodies at 2 Cor 8:16–17, 22–24 and Phil 2:19–30, and as part of a letter proem at Col 1:7.

\(^4\) Even if we maintain that the recommendation of a letter bearer was “readily understandable as a closing convention” (Weima 1994: 151), a summative restatement of a letter’s purpose or contents was not (see Michaels 1988: 306; cf. Achtemeier 1996: 349; Elliott 2000: 892–93, which list only New Testament letters with no references to a larger epistolary convention). First Peter 5:12 provides an excellent example of the way the letter’s “sections” are woven together to provide “a smoothly flowing continuity of thought”: the message (1:3–5:11) draws to a close with the abrupt mention of Silvanus (5:12a), but then returns to summarize the contents of the letter (5:12b); the letter then concludes with the standard greetings of a postscript (5:13–14) (illustrated in Figure 5).

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**Figure 5. The Movement of 1 Pet 5:12–14**


The presence of both elements demonstrates the verse’s versatility: at once it functions to introduce the letter’s postscript and conclude the letter body. This simple back-and-forth movement between elements produces an artful movement between the sections that also succeeds in tying them together. The greetings extend the letter’s message: those in 5:13 reinforce the assurances that the audiences are united to others “throughout the world” (5:9), while the command to “greet one another” and the blessing of peace (5:14) reinforce the letter’s pervasive concerns for love, peace, and unity (e.g., 1:2, 22; 2:7; 3:8, 11; 4:8).
Elliott, who holds that 1:3–12 “serves … to announce themes receiving accentuation in the remainder of the writing” (2000: 330), but also relegates these verses to a subsection of his first major division of the letter body (1:3–2:10). Here I will suggest that these verses are best understood as distinct from the letter body.

First Peter 1:3–12 occupy the space of a “letter proem,” separate from the letter body but related to it in an important way. In his discussion of “Standard Letter Components” Hans-Josef Klauck includes the letter proem as a part of the letter’s opening: “Between the letter prescript and the main body of the letter containing the actual content for which it was written, we frequently find stereotypical, longer or shorter transitional expressions which we can classify as the letter proem” (2006: 21).

Excursus: The Function of the Letter Proem

A letter proem could perform several functions, but at the beginning of a letter these words would set the tone through which the rest of the letter would be read or heard. In this sense 1 Pet 1:3–12 functions akin to a rhetorical prooemium (Achtemeier 1996: 90–91) or exordium (Green 2007: 22). Quintilian describes a prooemium as the part of a speech “which precedes the introduction of the subject to be treated”; its purpose is “to prepare the hearer to be more
favourably inclined towards us.” First Peter’s introductory verses have a similarly preparatory purpose: they “create a good atmosphere, preparing the audience to receive the instruction that will follow and introduce the main elements of the letter” (Green 2007: 22).

David Kendall and Troy Martin, among others, have rightly insisted that these verses actually do more: they “serve as the foundation for the exhortations that comprise the bulk of the epistle” (Kendall 1986: 104) and provide “the context in which the letter is to be understood” (Martin 1992a: 51). These contentions fit well with the paraenetic function of First Peter, since “moral exhortation is always relative to some form of human flourishing” (Stowers 1986: 92).

A text’s “view of human flourishing” may remain implicit, but it may also state its perspective quite explicitly before offering exhortations or as a conclusion to them. A letter from Aquila to Sarapion (late 3rd–4th century CE), for instance, begins with Aquila’s approval of “the way of life you follow … especially in your not abandoning your austerities.” He then exhorts Sarapion to “carry through,” warning him about the distractions of wealth, beauty, “nor anything else of the same kind.” Here Aquila explicitly highlights Sarapion’s “austerities,” implying that he deems Sarapion’s “austere” lifestyle to be appropriate, and then proceeds to warn him against the dangers of distracting excess.

Pliny’s letters provide similar examples. In a letter to Maximus (c. 100 CE), Pliny offers advice to one who has “been sent to order the condition of free states” and quickly emphasizes

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6 *Inst.* 4.1.1., 5 (trans. Russell LCL). In context, Quintilian is declaring his preference for the Greek word “prohoemium”: *Quod principium Latine vel exordium dicitur, maiore quadam ratione Graeci videntur prohoemium nominasse, quia a nostris initium modo significator, illi satis clare partem hanc esse ante ingressum rei de qua dicendum sit ostendat…. Causa principii nulla alia est quam ut auditorem quo sit nobis in ceteris partibus accommodatior praeparemus.*

7 *P. Oxy.* 3069, quoted from Stowers 1986: 99.
the “free” status of those whom he will govern: “free citizens, free in the highest sense, who have maintained the rights which nature bestowed on them.”

After offering several pieces of specific advice, Pliny grounds them all in one important and foregone conviction:

Again and again you must remember (for I shall re-emphasize this) the title which your office bears, and you must clarify in your mind the nature and importance of the task of ordering the condition of free cities; for what is more fitting for cities than due order, and what is more precious than freedom? And further, what is more demeaning than if that order should be overthrown, and freedom transformed into slavery?

Order (Maximus’s goal in Achaia) and freedom (nature’s gift) are, according to Pliny, beacons to guide Maximus in carrying out his task: whatever he does is subservient to the maintenance of order and freedom. Elsewhere Pliny focuses on desirable moral qualities, such as in a letter to Avitus (c. 97–98 CE). The bulk of his letter recounts Pliny’s experience at a lavish dinner party. “Why do I recount this?” Pliny asks. Ostensibly he offers advice for how Avitus should host his own parties, but the wisdom goes deeper:

It befits my affection for you, whenever such an incident occurs, to exploit it as an example to warn you what you should avoid. So bear in mind that there is nothing you should avoid more than the novel alliance of extravagance and meanness, traits most demeaning when distinct and separate from each other, but still more so when they are merged.

Again, advice is proffered not only for a specific occasion (e.g., a dinner party), but as a means for attaining and embodying virtue.

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8 Ep. 8.24.2 (trans. Walsh OWC). Cogita te ... missum ad ordinandum statum liberarum civitatum, id est ad homines maxime homines, ad liberos maxime liberos.

9 Ep. 8.24.7–8. Te vero etiam atque etiam (repetam enim) meminisse oportet officii tui titulum ac tibi ipsum interpretari, quale quantumque sit ordinare statum liberarum civitatum. Nam quid ordinatione civilius, quid libertate pretiosius? Porro quam turpe, si ordinatio eversione, libertas servitute mutetur!

10 Ep. 2.6.6–7: Quorsus haec? ... Convenit autem amori in te meo. quotiens tale aliquid incident, sub exemplo praemonere, quid debes fugere. Igitur memento nihil magis esse vitandum quam istam luxuriae et sordium novam societatem; quae cum sint turpissima discreta ac separata, turpius iunguntur.
Examples could be multiplied several times over, but my point has been to demonstrate here that paraenesis is often grounded in a particular conviction about or perspective on life; this conviction or perspective is often stated explicitly, though it may also appear more subtly. Either way, this perspective (or “worldview”) grounds and governs the text’s exhortations. First Peter 1:3–12 suits this purpose admirably: it stands at the front of the epistle to ground and govern the exhortations that follow. In J. de Waal Dryden’s words, here the text’s “chief concern is with laying the foundation of the narrative worldview of the letter” (2009: 69).  

The Parameters of the Proem

First Peter’s proem is easily delineated. First Peter 1:3–12 comprises one long and complex sentence separated from the remainder of the letter in two ways. First, the letter as a whole is permeated by a preference for grammatically imperatival (over indicative) constructions (see Elliott 2000: 67–68). This preference, however, is absent from 1:3–12; the tone here is affirming, not commanding. Second, this sentence is logically separated from what follows by the inferential conjunction διό, occurring in First Peter only at 1:13. Assuming that 1:13 functions as the heading to the letter body (see below), this implies that the paraenesis that follows throughout 1:13–5:12 depends on what the author states in 1:3–12.

As described in more detail in Chapter One, First Peter 1:3–12 progresses through three movements punctuated by two structurally significant relative pronouns (1:3–5, 6–9, 10–12). The

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11 I disagree with several points of Dryden’s detailed analysis of 1 Pet 1:3–12, but he rightly draws attention to the text’s effort to tell “a single story that is made up of two interconnected stories, one is the grand narrative of God’s saving work (with a particular emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus) and the other is the story of the readers (with a particular emphasis on their conversion and present suffering)” (2009: 69). For the importance of the (narrative) worldview of First Peter, see Boring 1999: 183–201; 2007; Joseph 2012: 33–68. On the importance of “worldviews” in Greco-Roman paraenetic literature, see Dryden 2009: 56–64.
text begins by declaring the author’s and its audiences’ “living hope” (ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν, 1:3) for salvation amid challenging circumstances (1:6–7). The thought of the entire passage hangs together to (re)categorize this salvation climactically under the label of χάρις (1:10). These key ideas of hope and χάρις provide an important connection between the proem and the heading of the letter body (1:13), to which I now turn.

The Letter Body (1 Pet 1:13–5:12)

Having already relegated portions of First Peter to the epistolary categories of prescript (1:1–2), postscript (5:13–14), and proem (1:3–12), it seems that what is “left over” belongs to the letter body by default (Martin 2010, 187). The parameters and structure of First Peter’s letter body, however, have more to recommend themselves than by not being something else.

The letter body opens by highlighting two key components of the letter proem—hope (1:3) and χάρις (1:10)—and presenting them together as the foundation upon which the following paraenesis will depend: “Therefore … set your hope upon the beneficence that will be brought to you” (διό … ἐλπίσατε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν, 1:13). First Peter 1:13 then transitions tidily into a series of exhortations advocating for ways that those who follow Christ should prepare themselves in mind and body for the sake of nurturing their hope.12 While this verse is typically treated as a part of a larger unity (e.g., 1:13–16 in Achtemeier 1996: 117–22; or 1:13–21 in Elliott 2000: 354–81), it is better understood, I suggest, as an independent and thematic imperative characterizing the patterned paraenesis that follows together with the

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12 Andreas du Toit rightly refers to 1 Pet 1:13, therefore, as a “bridge or hinge” moving the author’s thought along from the proem to the letter body (though du Toit’s discourse analysis does not feature these epistolary terms). See Toit 1974: 60, 77 n. 26c; Combrink 1975: 37.
substance of the letter’s message. First Peter 1:13, therefore, stands at the beginning of the letter body as its “heading.”

As discussed in Chapter One, First Peter 1:13 finds a complement at 5:12, and together these verses form “an inclusio or ring structure around the body of the letter” (Martin 1992a: 58–59). Each verse contains the key word χάρις, and while this term appears several times across First Peter (2:19, 20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10), the instances of χάρις at 1:13 and 5:12 are distinguished from the others by being the objects of imperatives (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Χάρις as the Object of Infinitives at First Peter 1:13 and 5:12 (duplicate)

\[\text{ἐλπίσατε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην υμῶν χάριν} \ (1:13)\]
\[\text{ταύτην εἶναι ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ἣν στῆτε} \ (5:12)\]

At the beginning of the letter body the audiences are commanded to “hope” for the grace that is coming to them; at the end, having testified to the truth of this grace, First Peter tells them to “stand” for (or in) it. These instances of χάρις as the object of imperatives frame the letter body.

While the primary function of an inclusio may be to mark the boundaries of a literary unit (Weima 2016: 159), this frame around the contents of First Peter also functions to signal the author’s preoccupation with the category of χάρις as a lens for understanding the audiences’ relationship with God and their salvation. I take up these points in detail in Chapter One.

The frame I have described stands around the letter body as its heading (1 Pet 1:13) and closing (5:12); the remainder (1:14–5:11) stands as the “body middle” (see Martin 1992a: 70–

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13 On this “patterned paraenesis,” see Chapter One (pp. 69, 77 n. 63).

14 I leave aside the occurrence of χάρις in 1:2 as an already-standard greeting in early Christian letters (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phlm 3; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 John 3; Rev 1:4). This is likely a “Christianized” form of “the expected secular or Greek greeting chairein” as described in Weima 2016: 42. See also Klauck 2006: 18, 30–31; Tite 1996: 51–53; White 1983: 437–38, 442–44.
Here I will highlight the stylistic grounds on which I base my understanding of the movement of thought across the body middle. More detailed analysis regarding the contents of the body middle is provided in Chapter Four.

Like the letter proem, the letter’s body middle divides into three movements (1 Pet 1:14–2:10; 2:11–4:11; 4:12–5:11). The parameters of the first movement (1:14–2:10) are determined first by the conclusion of the letter body’s heading, which itself occupies only 1:13 (Martin 1992a: 70). It extends as far as 2:10, where the second movement begins. The transition between each movement is then marked by the author’s use of direct address with the vocative ἀγαπητοί together with an imperatival construction (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Ἀγαπητοί and Imperatival Constructions at 1 Pet 2:11 and 4:12

Ἀγαπητοί, παρακαλῶ... ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν (2:11)
Ἀγαπητοί, μὴ ἐξενίζεσθε τῇ ἐν ὑμῖν πυρώσει πρὸς πειρασμὸν ὑμῖν γινομένη (4:12).

These latter sections also conclude with benedictions that bear striking similarities (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Concluding Benedictions at 1 Pet 4:11 and 5:11

ᾧ ἐστιν ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν. (4:11)
αὐτῷ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν. (5:11)

These features divide the letter’s body middle into two sections beyond the first: 1 Pet 2:11–4:11 and 4:12–5:11, each of which begins with a direct address and concludes with a benediction. I

15 Several studies discern major breaks in the letter body at 2:10/2:11 and 4:11/4:12; see Goppelt 1993: 20–21; Michaels 1988: xxxiv–xxxvii; Davids 1990: 28–29; McKnight 1996: 33–34; Achtemeier 1996: 73–74; Green 2007: 64; Watson 2012: 11; Edwards 2017: 24–25; Schreiner 2020: 38–41; Jobes 2022: 59–61; Williams and Horrell 2023: 36–37. These scholars’ arguments are based primarily on formal features. Others find the second major break in the letter at 3:12/3:13 (e.g., Martin 1992a; Boring 1999: 46–47) or add an additional major break there (e.g., Elliott 2000: 80–83; Holloway 2009). Scholars in these last two categories typically approach the structure of First Peter thematically; others approach it in accord with presuppositions about First Peter’s adherence to the standards of classical rhetoric (e.g., Thurén 1990; 1995; Campbell 1998; Witherington 2007). In Chapter Four I demonstrate that thematic and conceptual considerations are able to complement the formal features that lead me to find the major breaks in the letter body at 2:10/2:11 and 4:11/4:12.

16 While 1 Pet 1:13 serves as a heading to the letter body as a whole, it may also maintain special relevance for the first movement of 1:14–2:10.
understand these formal features to define the limits of the second and third sections or movements of the letter body.\(^\text{17}\)

**Summary**

The preceding discussion has produced the following epistolary outline of First Peter (see Figure 9):\(^\text{18}\)

Figure 9. An Epistolary Outline of First Peter

I. Prescript (1:1–2)
II. Proem (1:3–12)
III. Body (1:13–5:12)
   A. Body Heading (1:13)
   B. First Movement (1:14–2:10)
   C. Second Movement (2:11–4:11)
   D. Third Movement (4:12–5:11)
   E. Body Closing (5:12)
IV. Postscript (5:13–14)

\(^\text{17}\) Furthermore, several features suggest that 1 Pet 2:11 and 4:1–11 form an *inclusio* or framework governing 1 Pet 1:11–4:11. First, the term ἔθνος is used in both passages (2:12; 4:3) to designate outsiders (“gentiles”). Second, each passage makes explicit mention of the form of the audiences’ suffering (καταλαλέω, 2:12; βλασφημέω, 4:4). Third, the double prohibition against “desires” (ἐπιθυμίᾳ) in 4:2–3 recalls the command to abstain from “fleshly desires” (τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν) in 2:11. Fourth, the “military metaphor” in 4:1 (οπλίζομαι) may also stand parallel to στρατεύομαι in 2:11 (Elliott 2000: 721). Finally, the reference to the day of God’s “visitation” (ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς, 2:12), at which time the audiences’ detractors will glorify God, finds a complement in the reference to God’s acts of judgment in 4:5–6. These links lead me to suggest that the “heading” of 2:11–12 is significantly complemented—and expanded—by an extended “conclusion” of 4:1–11. The similarities I have highlighted are limited, in the latter case, to 4:1–6, though Thurén also suggests that “the teleological motivation in 4.10–11 resembles the general reasoning in 2.11–12” (1995: 170). While I do understand 4:7–11 to extend this conclusion of 4:1–6 and provide a doxological conclusion to the whole of this second movement, I also suggest that they serve a transitionary function, moving the letter’s train of thought between movements two and three. First Peter 4:7–11 seizes on the apocalyptic language of judgment (4:6) and introduces an eschatological tenor, describing the immanent “end of all things” (πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν), the consequent need for discipline (4:7), and the necessity of an inwardly-focused attention (4:8–11a). These apocalyptic and eschatological emphases will emerge again throughout the third movement of the letter body (e.g., the “fiery ordeal” in 4:12; the warning to the “household of God” in 4:17; and the appearance of the “chief shepherd” in 5:4).

\(^\text{18}\) Detailed analyses of the movement of thought through the letter proem can be found in Chapter One (pp. 102–10); a similar analysis of the movement of thought throughout the letter body can be found in Chapter Four (pp. 227–29).
APPENDIX B

WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTE OF SUFFERING IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT
But this is of fundamental importance. Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well.


First Peter has much to say about its audiences’ suffering. I have proposed that First Peter, as a summons to discipleship, intends to teach its audiences how to suffer. More specifically, I have argued that First Peter constructs suffering as a part of its audiences’ discipleship so that their present and undesirable circumstances might seem natural, endurable, and even honorable in the context of their allegiance to God through Christ.

For better or for worse, First Peter’s preoccupation with suffering became a creative force in the history of its reception: later Christian writers found in this “epistle of suffering” not only advice for the suffering of first-century Anatolian Christians, but for themselves and for subsequent generations of Christians as well. First Peter’s invitation and encouragement to suffer “in accordance with God’s will” (1 Pet 4:19) has become a resource for addressing new hardships, persecutions, and questions of Christian existence—and not always to positive effect. Here, I wish to present a brief overview of how First Peter’s exhortations to suffer (and other New Testament exhortations like them) have been employed in later settings.

I do not intend this to be an apology either for First Peter’s exhortations on suffering or for later (mis/ab)uses of those exhortations. Rather, as indicated in Chapter Four, I am convinced that a survey of First Peter’s Wirkungsgeschichte—a history of its “effects”—presents us with an important series of practical questions that should not be avoided by a public and scrupulous examination of this biblical text (and others). By way of clarification, my adoption of the term Wirkungsgeschichte is informed by Ulrich Luz’s use of the same term in his work on the Gospel of Matthew (as influenced by the prior work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss).
For Luz, this refers to understanding “how the text is received and actualized,” along with “the effective power of the texts themselves” (2007: 61).

The experience detailed by Greg Carey may assist in demonstrating this. Carey discusses the many jobs he took on while in graduate school, including teaching courses for convicted domestic violence offenders, many of whom “would appeal to the Bible” to support their egregious behaviors. Carey summarizes: “Few of them indicated that they were particularly religious, though some did. But somehow word gets around among abusers that the Bible commands women to offer their bodies to men. One shudders to imagine the effect” (2020: 1–2). Carey cites 1 Cor 7 as a principle text used to “back up” such claims, but others may come to mind, including 1 Pet 3:1–6. Kathleen Corley suggests that among New Testament texts “the message of 1 Peter is the most harmful in the context of women’s lives” (1994: 355). Moreover, First Peter’s exhortations to enslaved Christ-followers (2:18–25) and to all Christ-followers vis-à-vis imperial authorities (2:13–17) put us in a position to recognize how interpretations of First Peter have “encouraged many Christians … to submit to the yoke of various unjust social institutions” (Corley 1994: 349). First Peter and the “history of its effects,” therefore, puts us “face to face with our own ethics—indeed, the ethics of reading and using biblical materials” (Aageson 2004: 34; see Schüssler Fiorenza 1999).

What follows does not intend to imply that all uses and recontextualizations of First Peter (and similar texts) are misuses or abuses of the text; at times we may recognize that its

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1 Luz’s discussion is slightly complicated insofar as it discusses Wirkungsgeschichte in both a “broad” sense and a “narrow” sense; it works both in concert with and as achieving different aims than Auslegungsgeschichte (“history of interpretation”) and Rezeptionsgeschichte (“history of reception”). At times Wirkungsgeschichte contains the others, at other times it is distinguishable. See also Joynes 2017: 156–60; Joynes remarks that exponents of biblical reception history “have widely differing views of what it involves” (160).
exhortations are recontextualized appropriately and with discernment, and at other times we may determine how later contexts reasonably lead interpreters to understand the texts in the ways they did. Nor do I intend what follows to offer a “solution” to how First Peter’s exhortations on suffering have been misused or abused in the past; this survey cannot ask for one, nor does it necessarily require one. What it requires is acknowledgement for the sake of improving our interpretation and recontextualization of First Peter moving forward.

Suffering as a Christian Responsibility and as a Means to an End

First Peter functions in tandem with several other New Testament texts to exhort Christians to endure suffering. Here I begin with a few examples of how First Peter and this wider body of New Testament literature have been interpreted and recontextualized throughout various streams of Christian traditions. I am to show that there has been a widespread expectation of suffering inherent to “being a Christian,” and that such suffering was often understood as a means to some further end.

Suffering as a Christian expectation and responsibility can be seen throughout ancient hagiographical literature, whose popularity demonstrates, according to Candida Moss, how “the idea that suffering for Christ could be valuable and meaningful was a pervasive one in antiquity and continues to be influential today” (2013: 260). First Peter ostensibly invites Christ-followers to “share” in Christ’s sufferings (4:13), and early Christians continued to understand their sufferings not only as suffering for Christ (i.e., as a result of their commitment to Christ) but as an imitation of Christ (i.e., as an imitation of his suffering) and as a means of union with Christ. Ignatius of Antioch (d. early second century) writes to the Romans that he will only “truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ” (ἐσομαι μαθητῆς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) once he has suffered and died.
(Ign. *Rom.* 4.1–3). Commenting on 1 Pet 4:12–13, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) writes that those who are righteous like Christ should expect to suffer like Christ (*Adumbr.* 1.1).² Hilary of Arles (ca. 400–50) comments on the same passage: “Nothing is waiting for us which he himself has not also suffered.”³ Suffering should not surprise or even dismay Christians, these authors assert, since suffering is a Christian’s lot as a follower of Christ—in times of both persecution and peace.

Later ascetics and mystical writers came to regard the suffering of ordinary Christians as redemptive and, further, to regard such “redemptive suffering” as an expected way of life.⁴ Bodily suffering, especially, was not only understood to be a consequence of Christian faith but also as a means of union with Christ and knowledge of God. Henry Suso (ca. 1300–66) contemplates God’s revelation of such a “path” to him:

> My humanity is the path one takes; my suffering is the gate through which one must pass who will come to what you are seeking…. You shall constantly carry my torment in your heart with the intense love of a mother. You will have many an evil judge of your religious life. Your divinely motivated way of life will often be scorned as foolish by the all-too-human. Your untried body will be scourged by a harsh and severe way of life. You shall be derisively crowned by the suppression of your spiritual life. After this you shall be led out with me along the desolate way of the cross, as you withdraw from your own willing, give up yourself and all creatures, and become as truly free of all creatures in things that can interfere with your eternal salvation as a dying person when he is about to leave and has nothing more to do with the world. (1989: 214–15)⁵

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² *ANF* 2.572.

³ *Expositio in Epistolas Catholicas* §239 (PL Supp 3:102). *Ne a nobis expeteret, quod et ipse non passus est.* I am grateful to my colleague Jon Hatter for assistance with this translation, and to Jake Schlossberg for helping me gain access to the Latin text.

⁴ These authors are not, necessarily, to be understood as “mainstream” or representative of the majority of Christian thought but do represent prominent and influential streams in the course of Christian tradition.

⁵ From Suso’s *Büchlein der Weisheit*, the second book of what is commonly known as *The Exemplar* (2.2; trans. Frank Tobin, CWS). The German text of this quote reads: Meine Menschheit ist der Weg, den man geht, meine Leiden ist das Thor, durch das man gehen muß, der zu dem will kommen das du da suchest. … Meine Marter sollst du emsiglich in deinem Herzen mit mütterlicher herzlicher Minne tragen. Du gewinnest manch’ argen Richter
Frank Tobin writes that Suso’s intent in the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, of which this reflection is a part, is wholly “devotional”: it “makes no attempt at intellectual speculation and can be termed a manual of devotion whose purpose is edification rather than instruction” (1989: 33). It is worth considering—even if we were to agree with it—how the experience of ridicule and the analogy of a mother’s grief is to be considered “edifying”; at the same time, Suso is not alone in portraying suffering and death as important lenses for interpreting faith and piety.

Two seventeenth-century ascetical writers studied by Bo Karen Lee are similarly informative. Anna Marie van Schurman (1607–1678), a Dutch Calvinist, and Madame Jeane Guyon (1648–1717) a French Roman Catholic, write at length about achieving union with God and the “enjoyment of God” (*frui Dei*) as humanity’s “highest good” (*sunnum bonum*), and each reaches the conclusion (separately) that, in Lee’s words, such union and enjoyment is “impossible apart from suffering and death.” For Schurman and Guyon, “a thoroughgoing denial, or annihilation, of the self was required for the greatest pleasure in God to be experienced” (Lee 2009: 210). In a letter to Johannes Jacob Schütz, a founder of the Lutheran pietistic movement, Schurman presents self-denial as a prerequisite for a life of faith, “without which true Christianity cannot exist, ‘except one that is counterfeit’” (Lee 2009: 218).⁶

While Schurman invites her readers to consider God’s ability to “overthrow” the self
(eversio), Guyon uses a plethora of vivid (often shocking) imagery to depict God’s actions toward the soul:

A simple listing of Guyon’s terminology reveals verbal constructions as vivid as detruite (destroyed), abattre (to demolish, pull down, slaughter, or overthrow), terrasser (to knock down), and arracher (to dig up, uproot, tear out, or snatch). In addition to these images that evoke the violent action of divine love, Guyon makes lavish use of other phrases to describe the soul, both during and after its annihilation: the soul is said to be “stripped” by this process (dénueé) and “skinned” or “pillaged” (dépouillée). On a “softer” note, the soul finds itself “lost” (perdue), “melted” (fondue), and “sunk” or “submerged” (abîmée) into the “ocean of divinity.” (Lee 2009: 230)

In her commentary on the Song of Songs, Guyon depicts the “beloved” as a “dead” or “annihilated bride” seeking union with a “bridegroom of death.” The imagery was important to Guyon since, in her own words, “all the graces of the Christian spring from death of self” (1982: 54; see Lee 2009: 230). The potency of her imagery, again, demonstrates how the language and motif of suffering could be expected to resonate with her audiences.

Two more well-known Christian theologians are worth engaging in this regard. Martin Luther (1483–1546) regarded First Peter as “one of the noblest books in the New Testament” and to be “genuine and pure Gospel.” For Luther, this extended to the letter’s teachings on suffering. Reflecting on 1 Pet 1:6 Luther warns, “Do not think that you will be rid of misfortune.” In the light of humanity’s universal plight of misfortunes, Luther reads 1 Pet 3:17–18 to assert a Christian’s responsibility “to bear the cross! For this reason St. Peter says that

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7 Trans. Bertram LW 30.4 = WA 12.260: der edlisten bucher eyns ym newen Testament; das rechte lauttere Evangelion. The quotations from Luther are taken from his *Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter (Epistle Sanct Petri gepredigt und ausgelegt).*

8 *LW* 30.16 = *WA* 12.272: dencket nicht, wie yhr des unglucks loß werdet.
because God wants it this way, it is better for you to suffer for doing right.”9 In Luther’s own exhortations, however, he does not encourage his audiences to “seek out suffering.” Instead, he insists:

God does not want us to search for misfortune and to choose it ourselves. Walk in faith and love. If the cross comes, accept it. If it does not come, do not search for it. Therefore those hotheaded spirits do wrong by scourging and beating themselves or by killing themselves and trying in this way to take heaven by storm.10

Luther may be reacting to specific ascetical practices of his own time that he felt went too far; still, his caution against excessive enthusiasm for pain, suffering, and martyrdom is important to note. In the end, however, Luther holds suffering in imitation of Christ as a high and necessary ideal for which Christians should aim. Commenting on 1 Pet 4:12–13 he writes,

The holy Gospel is a powerful Word. Therefore it cannot do its work without trials, and only he who tastes it is aware that it has such power. Where suffering and the cross are found, there the Gospel can show and exercise its power. It is a Word of life. Therefore it must exercise all its power in death. In the absence of dying and death it can do nothing…. God lays a cross on all believers in order that they may taste and prove the power of God—the power which they have taken hold of through faith.11

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9 LW 30.109 = WA 12.364: Wehl nu uns allen das ungluck ynn gemeyn ist auff gelegt, wie vie mehr mussen die das Creuß tragen, so da ynns ewig leben wollen kommen. Darumb sagt er: weyl es Gott also haben will, so ists besser, das yhr umb wolthat willen leydet.

10 LW 30.109–10 = WA 12.364: Got will nicht, das wyr das ungluck suchen und selbs erwelen, gehe du hyn ynn glawben und liebe, kompt das Creuß, so nym es an, kompt es nicht, so such es nicht. Darumb thun die hyßigen geyster unrecht, das sies ich selbs geyseln und schlagen odder sich selbs wurgen, und damit den hymel willen ersturmen.

Thereafter Luther appeals to the joy of the apostles (Acts 5:41) and martyrs (e.g., Agatha) amid suffering. Luther’s words reflect, to some degree, his ongoing and developing struggles with the Roman Church, but his understanding and articulation of suffering’s importance would influence his developing “theology of the cross” which would then profoundly influence later theologies of suffering—including those found in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45).

Kierkegaard provides a poignant and emphatic example of an encouragement to suffer as a Christian. At the end of his life, he published a series of public appeals to his Danish compatriots through the Fædrelandet newspaper and a series of pamphlets titled The Moment (Øieblikket, 1845–55). These articles and essays functioned as critiques of what Kierkegaard regarded as acquiescence on the part of the Lutheran Church in Denmark to a standard too short of “the New Testament and of all true Christians in accordance with the New Testament—that suffering for the doctrine is part of being a true Christian” (1990: 190). In The Moment, under the heading, “Fear Most of All to Be in Error!” Kierkegaard makes the following appeal:

What does it mean, according to the New Testament, to become a Christian, why the repeated admonition against being offended, and why the frightful collisions (to hate father, mother, wife, child, etc.), in which the New Testament breathes? I wonder if both are not because Christianity knows very well that to become a Christian is to become,

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12 Luther’s sermons on First Peter date to 1522 (if not 1523), at least a year after the Diet of Worms (1521) and at least two years after Leo X published Exsurge Domine, labeling Luther “the wild boar from the forest” whose fiery tongue could set that forest ablaze (see Noll 2022: 128–51).

13 This particular quote is part of an earlier (1851/1852) critique of Bishop Jakob Mynster, entitled Judge for Yourself! (Dommer selv!), which Kierkegaard declined to publish out of respect for the bishop. To suffer “for the doctrine” should not be understood to connote suffering for a specific “creed” or “dogma,” but for what Kierkegaard understands to be the core tenet of Christianity, which is to imitate Christ. From the same unpublished essay: “Therefore it must be done. Imitation, which corresponds to Christ as the prototype, must—if there is to be any meaning in Christendom—must be affirmed again” (Kierkegaard 1990: 190). At the beginning of the Fædrelandet Articles Kierkegaard announces, “now that Bishop Mynster is dead I am able and willing to speak … about what made me decide to take the position that I have taken in relation to him” (1998: 3).
humanly speaking, unhappy in this life, yet blessedly awaiting an eternal happiness. According to the New Testament, what does it mean to become loved by God? It is to become, humanly speaking, unhappy in this life, yet blessedly expecting an eternal happiness—according to the New Testament, God, who is spirit, cannot love a human being in another way. He makes you unhappy, but he does it out of love; blessed is the one who is not offended! (1998: 213)

Kierkegaard concludes two things: first, that one cannot love God (or be loved by God) except by being willing to suffer unhappiness through this present life; second, that the “Christianity of the New Testament does not exist at all” in the guise of Christendom (1998: 213). True Christians, therefore, must seek it out: “the point is therefore not to slip happily and well through this life, but rightly to relate oneself to eternity through suffering” (1998: 294). His earlier Works of Love (Kjerlighedens Gjerninger, written in 1847), concerning the responsibilities and costs of acting in (Christian) love, may seem to put healthy limits on suffering and self-sacrifice (see Green 2013), but these later affirmations on the necessity of suffering also stand the test of time—and may be considered representative of a wider tendency in Christian thought as well.

It was this tendency toward self-sacrifice and other forms of suffering that formed a large part of Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity later in the nineteenth century. Nietzsche never read Kierkegaard (see Kaufmann 2013: 125), but he critiqued a long history of what he perceived as Christians’ abnegation of human progress and the true potential of human nature for the sake of suffering, instilled in them by the example of Christ:

He whom they call Redeemer has put them in fetters: in fetters of false values and delusive words. Would that someone would yet redeem them from their Redeemer! … They have called “God” what was contrary to them and gave them pain; and verily, there was much of the heroic in their education. And they did not know how to love their god except by crucifying man.

14 This contention occurs frequently throughout Kierkegaard’s publication The Moment (Øieblikket). Kierkegaard says of himself, “I actually cannot endure the thought and therefore merely investigatingly scrutinize this true Christian definition of being a Christian” (1998: 212).
As corpses they meant to live; in black they decked out their corpses; out of their speech, too, I still smell the bad odor of death chambers. And whoever lives near them lives near black ponds out of which an ominous frog sings its song with sweet melancholy. They would have to sing better songs for me to learn to have faith in their Redeemer.: and his disciples would have to look more redeemed! (1978: 91–92)

In J. Warren Smith’s words, Nietzsche believes that “a fundamental impulse of life is not merely to eke out a living; it is the will to power: a will ‘to be more,’ a will for ‘increase, self-enhancement, and maximum effect on the rest of the world’” (2006: 170). Nietzsche suspects, therefore, that Christian motivations toward martyrdom and other forms of self-sacrifice are “duplicitious,” “manipulative,” and ultimately not a Christian’s expression of humility but a “means for self-enhancement and exaltation” (Smith 2006: 170–71). Nietzsche understands Christian martyrs, in Kaufmann’s words, “to crave neither the preservation of their lives, nor merely freedom from something nor even power as a means to accomplish some specific end: what they desire is power itself; another life, as it were, richer, and stronger; a rebirth in beauty and perfection (2013: 255). In Nietzsche’s view, this could be achieved properly and responsibly in the present life, apart from a supposed need to suffer.

My purpose with the preceding discussion has been to document a long-standing and ongoing use of suffering as a “benchmark” or “litmus test” of Christian faith and experience. Nietzsche’s critique of Christian suffering demonstrates the impact he (and presumably others) understood this emphasis on suffering to have. Despite such critiques, appeals for Christians to embrace suffering have not waned, as may be seen from a few twentieth-century examples. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, mentioned above, tied suffering intimately to discipleship: “Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering, and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord’s suffering and rejection and crucifixion” (1959: 87). Suffering “is not a
tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ” (88). All Christians bear a cross, and “suffering … is the badge of true discipleship” (91). Moreover, “suffering has to be endured in order that it may pass away” (92). For Bonhoeffer, in theory as in life, there seemed to be no escape. In a different vein, Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed that suffering could be “a most creative and powerful social force”:

The nonviolent say that suffering becomes a powerful social force when you willingly accept that violence on yourself, so that the self-suffering stands at the center of the nonviolent movement and the individuals involved are able to suffer in a creative manner, feeling that unearned suffering is redemptive, and that suffering may serve to transform a social situation. (1986: 47)  

Oscar Romero, in the year before his assassination, counseled his congregations to a similar disposition of nonviolence:

To each one of us Christ is saying: If you want your life and mission to be fruitful like mine, do like me. Be converted into a seed that lets itself be buried. Let yourself be killed. Do not be afraid. Those who shun suffering will remain alone…. But if you give your life out of love for others, as I give mine for all, you will reap a great harvest. You will have the deepest satisfactions. Do not fear death or threats. The Lord goes with you. (1984: 69)

Bonhoeffer, King, and Romero each made these comments in the face of present and persistent danger—danger not only to themselves but to those whom they represented. As Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker write (regarding King and Romero), “Instead of making the straightforward observation that those in power resist change by using violence to silence and terror to intimidate any who question an unjust status quo, these theologians are saying that

15 These words were spoken to an assembly of the “Fellowship of the Concerned” in 1961. A year earlier the Christian Century invited King to respond to recent lethal threats to his life. King responded by admitting that there were times he was “tempted to retreat to a more quiet and serene life.” Instead, he embraced the burden of “unmerited suffering” and determined to react by transforming that suffering “into a creative force” (rather than to react “with bitterness”): “Recognizing the necessity for suffering I have tried to make of it a virtue…. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive” (1986: 41).
suffering is a positive and necessary part of social transformation” (1989: 21). Thus, we see “suffering” utilized as a tool of reflection and motivation across a wide range of traditions and circumstances throughout the history of Christian thought, but also critiqued—as we will see in more detail below.

**Suffering, Oppression, and Marginalization**

First Peter’s role (whether direct or indirect) in the history of encouragements to suffer can be witnessed more tangibly if we narrow our focus to groups that have borne the burden of these exhortations more than others—specifically with reference to the letter’s “household code” (1 Pet 2:13–3:7). First Peter’s exhortations to enslaved Christ-followers are explicit about the physical suffering they experience (2:18–20) and, as noted in Chapter One, it may be inferred that Christ-following women in mixed marriages were vulnerable to physical as well as verbal and emotional abuse from their husbands. These groups often become models or prototypes upon which marginalized and oppressed groups and individuals are encouraged to pattern themselves in their own suffering. Rebecca Skaggs writes that 1 Pet 2:18–25, for instance, “was a major text during the time of American slavery and was used by both ‘sides’ as a support for their position” (2020: 67); 1 Pet 3:1–7, likewise, “has created considerable controversy in regard to the meaning of ‘subjection’ of wives” (76) so that some commentators have gone so far as to conclude that wives are expected to submit to husbands as enslaved persons are to those who enslave them (e.g., Bigg 1902: 150). In what follows, I seek to demonstrate how First Peter and texts like it have been used to endorse and prolong the suffering of enslaved, oppressed, and marginalized persons and groups; this discussion is aimed at helping us become attuned to the importance of responsible and ethical interpretations of the letter’s emphasis on suffering.
A few additional caveats are necessary. First, scholars have not isolated First Peter’s exhortations regarding enslaved persons and women as much as they have studied the various Pauline passages that treat the same topics, perhaps because of the relative abundance of Pauline material. While I aim to cite appeals to and recontextualizations of First Peter itself, it should be noted that First Peter is often “lumped together” with Pauline passages, especially when dealing with the “household codes.” Second, my focus on improper recontextualizations of First Peter is not intended to suggest that we should ignore First Peter’s exhortations to enslaved persons and women; *abusus non tollit usum*. I am suggesting that the use to which we put First Peter (if we are to put it to some use)—whether for recontextualization or for insight into the social dynamics of early Christ-following groups (or something else)—should be properly discerned and responsibly conducted.16 Third, the texts cited below will touch upon the topic of domestic violence; this is not meant to shock or alarm, but to assist us in recognizing the seriousness with which we must take the “history of effects” that First Peter has, unfortunately, had.

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16 Two good examples of this, in my opinion, are the following. Betsy Bauman-Martin condemns “misappropriations of NT ideas” that neglect to acknowledge that “the network of discourses that promoted the original advice is no longer in place.” At the same time, she suggests that “the women addressed in the Petrine *Haustafel* deserve closer analysis; because the exhortations have received so much attention, the women themselves have rarely been discussed. As women negotiating problematic familial and social boundaries, they offer a valuable example of an ancient hermeneutic of resistance” (2004: 254). With this goal in mind (rather than recontextualization or application), Bauman-Martin can agree with most feminist scholars that while First Peter “is not a liberating text” and that it need not be understood as promoting women’s suffering, focusing on the original “networks of discourse” at work in and around First Peter allows us “to give [the women addressed by First Peter] the recognition they deserve while preserving the safety and sanity of their modern counterparts” (277). Peter Davids, on the other hand, does ask how First Peter’s exhortations to wives might be recontextualized today. After an examination of the sociocultural setting of First Peter’s exhortations, he suggests that any application of them actually requires a kind of decontextualization: “[U]nless we assume that first-century Greco-Roman society is the only form of society uphold[ing] virtues approved by God, we may find that a unilateral application of Peter’s teaching in modern and postmodern societies would subvert his original intentions” (2021: 240). Rather, “interpretations that focus on the unilateral obedience or submission of wives to husbands, regardless of cultural context, achieve the opposite of Peter’s intention” (242). Davids’s recontextualization is still conditioned by his (evangelical) theological commitments, with which some (including myself) may still argue, but I do think that his approach to recontextualization, given his own context, is helpful in several ways.
Exhortations to Enslaved Persons (1 Pet 2:18–25)

First Peter’s exhortations to enslaved persons occupy a prominent place at the center of the letter. They also contain a particularly distinctive christological use of Isaiah 52–53 as a means of interpreting Jesus’s passion and death. For these and other reasons, 1 Pet 2:18–25 have been upheld, perhaps more than any other primo-Petrine passage, as applicable to Christians of all walks of life. This seems to be suggested by the letter’s own rhetoric: “Peter points to the slave, who was most vulnerable in Greco-Roman society, as a paradigm for the Christian believer who follows Jesus Christ” (Jobes 2022: 180; see Achtemeier 1996: 190–92). Scholars typically recognize that First Peter presents no challenge to the status quo of enslavement in its Roman milieu, but accepts the institution as given. It is in this light that these verses have been utilized in the service of pro-enslavement arguments.

Charles Hodge’s (1797–1878) appeal to the New Testament’s “household codes” was indirect, but nevertheless clear:

The obedience which slaves owe their masters, children their parents, wives their husbands, people their rulers, is always made to rest on the divine will as its ultimate foundation…. [W]e are appealing to the infinite intelligence of a personal God, whose will, because of his infinite excellence, is necessarily the ultimate ground and rule of all moral obligation. (1860: 819–20)

First Peter’s influence on Hodge’s rhetoric may be indicated by the appeal to the relation between “people” and “their rulers,” a feature distinctive of First Peter’s own “household code” (2:13–17). George Dod Armstrong (1813–1899), as well, argued in favor of enslavement during the nineteenth century by appealing to Paul’s letter to Philemon. In the course of his argument, however, he cites not only Paul but “the Apostles” who “frequently enjoin the relative duties of master and slave, and enforce their injunctions upon both alike” (1858: 4–5). Scripture was
frequently woven “into the fabric of … legal statutes to reinforce the master-slave system in general, and to legitimate the dehumanization of blacks as ‘property’ without civil and legal rights in particular” (Martin 1991: 214).

Pheme Perkins, Eloise Rosenblatt, and Patricia McDonald summarize the “dark side” of First Peter in the history of enslavement and beyond:

Christians cannot … overlook the dark side of this passage in the long history of Christian slaveholding. Not only did it appear to permit or even condone slavery, it created patterns of false consciousness that persist in struggles for liberation or equal rights today. (2022: 51)

Many interpreters, in attempts to redeem this passage (and others like it) for application, tend to focus on the endurance of enslaved persons as “heroes” of persistence amid suffering. While this strategy is not in itself wrong, inasmuch as it recognizes the reality of suffering faced by many today, it need not provide a long-term solution.

[T]he “heroes” who made it despite their slave origins, like the second-century philosopher Epictetus, or the heroes every child hears about in school like Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Howard Thurman, or even Martin Luther King Jr., can reinforce a society’s conviction that success or failure is determined by the character of the oppressed, not the injustices of a social system. (51)

Womanist interpretations of texts like these highlight similar issues at stake, as we will see further below. Here it is worth recognizing that exhortations like those in First Peter have been harmfully recontextualized in two ways. (1) They have been used as a biblical justification for institutions of enslavement. (2) They have been used to justify the suffering of those who have been forced to occupy the positions of the enslaved. This latter justification has also been utilized to perpetuate the suffering of persons of color outside formal institutions of enslavement.
Exhortations to Wives in Mixed Marriages (1 Pet 3:1–6)

Betsy Bauman-Martin begins her study of 1 Pet 3:1–6 by citing a Los Angeles Times article titled “Domestic Violence a Thorny Issue for Churches.” As in Creg Carey’s illustration above, the journalists writing for the LA Times found that the Bible was ready at hand for several perpetrators of domestic abuse. As Bauman-Martin summarizes,

In one story, a woman told her pastor that her husband woke her up at two in the morning and started beating her with a metal tricycle. She was advised to “go back, be a kinder wife; then you will win him to Christ because that’s what the Bible says.” That pastor clearly was referring to 1 Pet 3:1–2, where the author explains to Christian wives that their unbelieving husbands “may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” (2004b: 253)

“That pastor” was not alone. Protestant megachurch leader and author John MacArthur, for instance, commends “submission” as a “welcome response” of Christian women to their husbands, citing First Peter as an authority on the matter. Regardless of a husband’s commitment to Christ, MacArthur counsels wives to “submit—submit anyway” (1982: 31). James and Phyllis Alsdurf discuss the influence of Bill Gothard, a “popular conference speaker”:

He too sees abuse as providing a woman with a special opportunity to suffer for Jesus. When asked, “What if a wife is a victim of her husband’s hostility?” Gothard replies, “There is no ‘victim’ if we understand that we are called to suffer for righteousness. ‘For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps’ (1 Peter 2:21). Christ was not a victim! He gave his life for us.”… For Gothard, “suffering for righteousness’ sake” is not a mutual call to husbands and wives. The rights of women are rejected in order that the airtight system of male domination not be disturbed.” (1989: 88)

Wayne Grudem concludes that the similarities between 1 Pet 2:18–20 and 3:1–6 should imply that wives are to submit to husbands, whether “good or harsh” (1988: 143); James Hurley does not seem to make an exception for abusive husbands (1981: 154).
Given such harmful applications of First Peter in the lives of women, it is no wonder that “no text is so charged for Christian feminists as 1 Peter” (Bauman-Martin 2004a: 65). Two further interpretations along these lines are worth discussing for their ability to highlight the negative effect this text continues to have in the hands of many readers and authorities. Both are also effective at underscoring the importance of attending to the intersectionality of those individuals addressed by First Peter: just as many of the enslaved Christ-followers were also women, so too do women, and especially women of color, become the objects of First Peter’s exhortations to both enslaved and married Christ-followers.

Clarice Martin discusses the uses to which both 1 Pet 2:18–25 and 3:1–6 have been put and suggests that the contrast between these recontextualizations is particularly revealing. Regarding 2:18–25, Martin notes the “diametrical opposition” between “white, Western, Christian proslavery” interpretations and “the more liberatory hermeneutic of African Americans.” (1991: 217) She summarizes,

African American insistence on freedom from the hierarchical subordination implicit in the Haustafeln master-slave regulation, and from all forms of tyranny and oppression, was unequivocal. The utilization of a hermeneutic that nurtured this liberatory vision has remained a central tenet of African American biblical hermeneutical theory and praxis. (218)

However, women within African American churches, Martin writes, have often found the same “liberatory vision” wanting. “Black women are no strangers to arguments that the Bible sanctions their submission as wives and women in the domestic and socio-political spheres” (222). What seems surprising, Martin demonstrates, is how these arguments continue to be perpetuated and normalized within African American churches and communities despite the larger “liberatory vision” that governs African American biblical interpretation. Martin asks,
Why is the African American interpretive tradition marked by a forceful critique and rejection of a literalist interpretation of the slave regulations in the *Haustafeln*, but not marked by an equally passionate critique and rejection of a literalist interpretation regarding the subordination of women to men in the *Haustafeln*?… If liberating biblical traditions regarding the kinship of humankind under God have comprised a treasury of antislavery apologia in the struggle for African American emancipation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, why have we not witnessed the creation of a treasury of pro-women apologia to insure the full empowerment of African American women in the religious and socio-political spheres of African American culture and American national history?… [I]f African Americans believed that the slave regulations did not exemplify the whole gospel with regard to slavery, that it was not an institution that should exist *in perpetuum*, why continue to believe that the regulations regarding women’s subordination exemplify the gospel *in perpetuum*? (225)

These are important questions that certainly cannot be answered here. Drawing attention to them, however, reminds us of the power that a text like First Peter can (and has) had to function as a tool of liberation—even while there remains work to do.

Kathleen Corley’s contribution to *Searching the Scriptures*, cited above, underscores the harmful effects that First Peter has had in encouraging the “vicarious suffering” of women, and in this she echoes a wider concern raised by feminist and womanist theologians (see Williams 1993; St. Clair 2008). As mentioned above, First Peter positions enslaved Christ-followers as paradigms of the community at large; what is said in 2:18–25 is ultimately applicable to all of those addressed by First Peter, but it becomes the responsibility of the enslaved Christ-followers (including women) to model endurance through harsh treatment and Christ’s nonretaliatory conduct. In several ways, the wives addressed in 3:1–6 are similarly positioned to model an appropriate standard of conduct for the rest of the Christ-following community (see Brown 2004).¹⁷ In its first-century Roman context, the effect of enslaved and female Christ-followers’

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¹⁷ One of the chief differences between the exhortations to wives and Christ-followers at large, however, is in the use of speech. While Christ-followers are told to have a “defense” prepared (presumably, to speak aloud, 3:15), wives are exhorted to remain silent at home before their husbands (3:1–2). Brown, in another helpful example of recontextualization, writes, “it seems clear that the exhortation for wives to present a silent Christian witness to
endurance is typically understood to be both missional and appeasement: by submitting to harsh treatment and suffering, the argument goes, these most vulnerable members of the “God’s household” are positioned to alleviate tension between Christ-followers and outsiders.  

Enslaved and female Christ-followers, therefore, do more than provide a model of “good conduct.” As Corley writes,

> Male and female slaves are thus being told to suffer even physical punishment or rape in order to quiet anti-Christian rumors that Christians are a seditious threat to the security of the household. The address to wives hints that they too should submit to sexual abuse, and the example of Sarah recalls the giving over of Sarah by her husband to the household of Pharaoh on account of her beauty…. Thus, the burden of alleviating tension between the Christian community and the Greco-Roman household and the state falls squarely on Christian wives and slaves. (1994: 353)

Interpretations of First Peter that uphold the “vicarious suffering” of women and enslaved persons, therefore, risk perpetuating “a cycle of victimization, violence, and abuse in domestic situations” (354). In several womanist theologies of suffering, this has been labeled “surrogacy,” which particularly “gives black women’s oppression its unique character” (Williams 1991: 1). In Raquel St. Clair’s words, “Surrogacy is characterized by being either forced or coerced to perform roles that normally belong to others” (2008: 24). Interpretations of First Peter that emphasize the paradigmatic role of enslaved and female Christ-followers to the neglect of First Peter’s larger exhortations to “all,” and interpretations that neglect the sociocultural context of their husbands is not the ultimate ethical norm in relation to unbelievers” (2004: 402), despite the ways in which 1 Pet 3:1–6 has, in fact, been used to promote the opposite.

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18 Corley writes, “The high rate of manumissions and the social emancipation of Roman women were seen as threatening the political stability of the empire… Thus, during the first and second centuries, the behavior of both Christian slaves and Christian women was a source of great anxiety in the Hellenistic period” (1994: 352–53).
First Peter’s strategy, would benefit from recognizing the effects they have in prolonging and encouraging unnecessary and unqualified suffering.

**Summary**

This appendix cannot profess to have been comprehensive, but I do hope that it has provided some representative examples of the “effects” that First Peter’s (and other biblical texts’) exhortations to suffering have had in the lives of Christians—and especially in the lives of those Christians who have found themselves to be targets of oppression and marginalization on the (misguided) basis of such texts. Our attention to First Peter’s original social and rhetorical contexts, as well as to its paraenetic and epistolary nature, will benefit our recontextualizations of the letter and the other uses to which we put it. Our awareness of the history of its effects, I hope, will lead us to handle First Peter and the wider theme of “Christian suffering” with better discernment, both in our study of this text and our teaching of it to others.
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