

The First Epistle of Peter

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Writing to people passing through a fiery trial of persecution, Peter's purpose in his first epistle was to confirm them in the faith, strengthen them to greater endurance, and to comfort them in the assurance that being partakers of Christ's suffering they would be privileged to rejoice with exceeding joy when Christ returns.

SALUTATION (1:1, 2)

Peter is the author, but he keeps himself in the background. Except possibly for Paul, no apostle is better known than Peter. Of no other do we have so much revealed of the character of the man. In calling himself an apostle he reminds us of his commission. He was sent to serve and proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord of heaven and earth.

He addresses "the elect who are sojourners." Their election to be God's people was by a plan foreknown by God, and brought about by the work of the Spirit of God through the gospel. They are to be obedient to God, and the blood of Jesus will keep them cleansed from sin. He wishes them grace and peace which will be theirs only in Christ.

THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR LIVING HOPE (1:4-12)

Peter immediately lifts their minds in gratitude to God, and then gives the reasons. He describes their hope which came by the mercy of God through the resurrection of Jesus (1:4). In a changing and passing world, the one thing that lasts is the promises of God to His people. Those who are His are guarded (1:5). They are protected by the power of God through their faith in Him and His Son. Thus they have supreme joy even in the midst of the most severe trials which test them like gold in the fire.

The salvation enjoyed by those in Christ was foretold. The prophets foretold much about Christ and the new covenant that they were desirous of understanding, but were told it was not for them but for us. The Holy Spirit who guided the prophets also guided the apostles in their proclamation of the gospel which is so great that angels desire to look into it. Of greater interest should it be to sinful man since it makes salvation richly available to us by faith in Christ. This hope is the basis of Peter's exhortation (1:13-5:11).

CHRISTIAN'S CONDUCT BEFORE GOD (1:13-2:10)

God's purpose for those whom He calls is twofold: first, that they may do His will; and second, that they may become like Him. On account of what God has done for us we are to gird up the loins of our minds and be sober. We must begin to act as those who mean business. To the Christians this means a determined effort to obtain the "grace" that will be ours when Christ returns. We must then be children of obedience.

The demand for obedience to God is enforced by two things: first, the judgment (1:17); and second, redemption (1:18a). We are also to love one another. Loving the brethren is a test of whether we were truly born again. Those in Christ have a warm love for each other (1:22). We must put away all wickedness whatever form it takes. Having been born again, the old life is to be put away like a dirty garment is discarded. There are two reasons for this: first, when we were baptized we were babes in Christ that needed the word to grow. Sin and growth are mutually exclusive. Second, we are God's spiritual house. Each of us is a living stone built upon Christ, the Chief Cornerstone. In God's house we function as priests in making our spiritual offer-

ings to God (2:9). Our lives are to show the excellencies of God. We can do this by showing what He has done for us in bringing us out of the corruption of the world.

CONDUCT OF CHRISTIANS BEFORE THE WORLD (2:11-3:22)

As God's children we must know how to behave ourselves before the world (Col. 4:5). The gospel is intended to be lived before men and to influence others. Included in our daily walk is submission to the ordinances of man's government. We submit for the Lord's sake (1 Pet. 2:13). Christians never rebel against or flout human government or laws.

The world sees us most in our family relationships. It is impressive to note the careful attention given to family life in apostolic writings. Peter begins by teaching that servants must submit in complete obedience to their masters, even if treated unjustly. Christ is their example (2:21).

Submission to their husbands is impressed upon wives. Their submission and lives may so influence their husbands to believe in the Lord Jesus. Their real beauty should not be outward tinsel, but inward character of meekness and quietness (3:3,4). Husbands are to regulate the home life according to knowledge and understanding. Honor is due to wives as joint-heirs of eternal life (3:7).

Finally, everyone in Christ is to live with the mindset that will enable them to face and overcome persecution and trial (3:9, 10). The governing principle of a Christian's activities was explicitly taught by Jesus Himself. The kind of behavior to which we are called is in direct opposition to what seems natural to men.

No greater test could befall a Christian than persecution for his faith. How is he to react? Peter begins by saying we are not to retaliate. We are assured that God knows what is happening and will respond (3:9, 12). If, despite our earnest efforts to do only that which is good, persecution comes, we are to have Christ in our hearts (3:15). A Christian is not to engage in an aggressive attack on people's wills. Instead, in a logical and reasoned explanation of the hope he has, he should respond to all challenges without arrogance or self-assertion. The Christian suffers side by side with the

suffering of Christ. His body was put to death, but made alive (3:18). God is longsuffering to sinners today just as He was in the days of Noah. He gave sinners time to repent and enter the ark. Noah and his family were saved through water even as baptism saves people now (3:21). Baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Christ.

IN CHRIST WE ARE ARMED FOR SUFFERING (4:1-6)

As Christ suffered in the flesh for sins, we must arm ourselves with the same mind (4:1a). One who suffers in the flesh on account of his faith has given up the sinful life. This seems strange to former associates. Those who were once close to you may speak evil of you because of their ignorance of Christ. God is aware of their conduct and will hold them accountable (4:5). None can escape this final responsibility to answer to God for his words and deeds. Since God is the Judge, let us concentrate on serving Him.

PRACTICAL DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP (4:7-19)

Peter continues his exhortation because "the end of all things is at hand" (4:7a). End of what? Certainly not the end of the world since it still continues. Most likely it looks forward to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem which produced far ranging consequences to Jews everywhere. Since there were some Jews in the church, and since Christians were considered just another sect of the Jews, they too could feel intensified opposition.

What are Christians to do under trying circumstances? Peter tells us (4:7b). Be of sound mind. This sinful and self-indulgent world is not the place to lose one's mental or moral balance. Since Divine help is needed, watch unto prayer. Do not fail in your love to one another. One manifestation of love is to be hospitable since many brethren may be driven from their homes. In all cases, use prayerfully whatever gifts you have, natural or miraculous, so that God will be glorified in your lives.

Trial and suffering, endured because of our faith, should be regarded, not with surprise or shame, but with rejoicing as a means of glorifying

God. Peter makes three main points. First, the purpose of persecution was to test whether they were worthy of the kingdom. Second, their attitude in persecution was to be one of rejoicing since they are sharing in Christ's suffering. They are to take care not to suffer as an evil doer. Third, it was a time of judgment. If they survive, but with great difficulty, what will be the end of those who do not obey God and do not have His protection.

SHEPHERDS AND THE FLOCK (5:1-11)

The elders of the churches are addressed by Peter as a "fellow elder," not above them, but an equal; yet one who saw Christ's suffering. Their duty is to shepherd the flock of God. The word "tend" means to act as a shepherd. Thus the elders, not preachers, are the pastors. The service of the elders is to be rendered willingly, not as overlords, but as ensamples. By so doing, they will be crowned when the Chief Shepherd returns.

The rest of the members are not overlooked. The young are to submit to the elders, and all are to serve one another in humility under God. Warning against the devil is needed for there is such a personality who, like a roaring lion, is always looking for prey (5:9).

CONCLUDING WORDS (5:12-14)

Silvanus, a faithful brother, was the bearer of this letter. He is most likely the Silas of the book of Acts. The purpose of the letter was to urge them to stand (5:12). They were to live their lives standing in the true grace of God.

As is often true in the epistles, Peter closes with a benediction of peace. Peace means unity and harmony in the church, and is a fruit of the Spirit of God. It means harmony with God, and comes only through His forgiveness. If you are not at peace with God, why not purify your soul in obedience to Christ by being baptized (1:22; 3:21)?

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Questions & Answers

JIM EVERETT

QUESTION: *"Would you explain John 6:53-57 — Is Christ speaking of eating (devouring) his word, or the Lord's Supper (communion) or both?"*

— NB, Ok.

ANSWER:

The context of these verses goes back to the beginning of the chapter. Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. The next day the people who had shared in the benefits of the miracle followed Jesus to the other side of the sea. Jesus rebuked them, because he knew that they followed him for the food and not because of the miracle. In their response to Jesus the people ask what sign Jesus would show them that they should believe and they refer him back to the giving of manna to their fathers by Moses. They seem to be implying, perhaps in response to Jesus's rebuke, that there might be some justification in following Jesus for food, because their fathers followed Moses and he provided manna. The manna served, not only as sustenance but, also, as a sign.

Jesus corrects them by observing that it was God and not Moses who really provided the manna and then makes a comparison between that manna and himself — "...but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world...I am the bread of life: he that