

Book of First Peter

"In the Fellowship of the Fire"
(cf. Isa. 43:2; Dan.3:25; 1 Pe.4:12).

Introduction: (see 'Wm. Barclay' introduction on 1 Peter)

1. First and Second Peter are grouped in what are called the General Epistles, written to the church at large. The theme of First Peter is the refining and growth potential in our sufferings, 1:3, 6; 2:2. This epistle was written to believers scattered by persecution throughout Asia Minor (1 Pe.1:1). The date was circa 64-65A.D., the beginning of Nero's persecutions.
2. First Peter is the best known and loved of these epistles, called by E.J. Goodspeed, "One of the most moving pieces of persecution literature." This epistle is written to suffering believers, and is styled by Isaac Walton as, "affectionate, loving, lowly, and humble".
3. This epistle conveys an intense expectation of the Lord's return, as seen in 1:5,7,13; 2:12; 4:13,17; 5:1,4.
4. It has been shown by scholars E.G. Selwyn and C.H. Dodd that this epistle conforms to the recorded sermons of Peter in the book of Acts in five main respects or topics.
 - A. The messianic age has dawned: Acts 2:14-16; 3:12-26 w/ 1 Pe.3: 10-12; 4:7.
 - B. This is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: Acts 2:20-31; 3:13-14 w/ 1 Pe.1:20-21.
 - C. By resurrection/ ascension Christ is exalted at God's right hand: Acts 2:22-26; 3:13 w/ 1 Pe. 1:21; 2:7, 24.
 - D. These events will be consummated in Christ's return in glory: Acts 3:19-23 w/ 1 Pe.1:5,7,13; 4:5,13,17.
 - E. These things provide grounds for repentance and faith: Acts 2:38,39; 3:19; 5:31 w/ 1Pe.1;13-25; 2:1-3.
5. Peter is quoted or referenced by Irenaeus, Clement, and Polycarp as evidence of its early acceptance and authenticity.
6. The epistle is noted for its excellent Greek and vocabulary, due no doubt to the scribe Silvanus (5:12), the Silas of Acts 15:22,27,32,40; 16:19; 17:4; and companion of Paul, cf. 2Co.1:19; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:1.
7. The recipients were undergoing persecution, which began with Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1-4) and gained steam under Rome; Christians being accused of cannibalism (the Lord's table), incest (couples called brother and sister"), treason (refusal to say "Caesar is Lord"), and sex orgies (the love feasts).
8. Parallels with Ephesians show a close familiarity with the writings of Paul, and see also 2 Pe.3:15-16. Compare 1 Pe.1:3 w/ Eph.1:3; 1 Pe.1:13 w/ Eph.6:14; 1 Pe.1:20 w/ Eph.1:4; 1 Pe.3:22 w/ Eph.1:20-21.

Greeting: Setting the stage, 1:1-2

This greeting is a masterful stroke by Peter to remind these pilgrims of the providence of God.

1. First, they are “*elect pilgrims*”. The English removes the adjective from its object. They are in fact “*chosen pilgrims*”. God has not lost track of them, nor are they “*scattered*” by some awful accident.

2. Their unique position in history is “*according to*” a divine standard of providential care. They are in the “*dispersion*” for a purpose, as is illustrated by Acts 8:1-4. The word *diaspora* implies “seed that is sown”.

3. The three-fold plan of God for them is outlined by the prepositions:

A. *Kata* – according to the all-wise omniscience of God, “*the foreknowledge of God*”, his pre-determined and eternal purpose.

B. *En* - His goal of refining and purifying them “*in* (through, or, by means of) *the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit*”.

C. *Eis* – with a view toward their increasing obedience to His will, resulting in the “*sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*”, in the sense of the spread of the Gospel and the winning of many to faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Ex.24:3-8).

Note in Heb.10:22 we have already been “sprinkled” and cleansed; our task is to spread it around!

Note the Outline:

I. Foreknowledge – the eternal plan of the Father, 1:1-2:10.

II. Sanctification – the transforming work of the Spirit, 2:11-3:12.

III. Obedience and Sprinkling – the fruit of faith in Christ, 3:13-5:11.

Conclusion: 5:12-14.

Three great principles:

1. Every believer is to use life, with all its ups and downs, to be a living witness to Jesus Christ. Our witness begins, not with our lips, but rather with our lives! (1 Pe.3:15). “*Always preach the gospel, and when necessary, use words.*”- St. Francis.

2. At the moment of salvation, we look to the finished work of the cross. Our assurance of eternal life rests in what Christ accomplished for us by crucifixion. But, it is crucial to understand that in the spiritual life (sanctification), our focus must shift to the resurrection, for here is found the provision for overcoming all the tests and trials of this life (cf. Rom.8:18-39, with emphasis on v.34).

3. Much defeat and failure can be accounted for in Christian lives by failing to look beyond the cross to the resurrection. While the cross provides our so great salvation, it is the experience of resurrection power that brings victory in life.

I. Foreknowledge – the eternal plan of the Father, 1:3-2:10.

"according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..." 1:2a

Key Verse, 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The theme of the book is our "*living hope*" in the midst of suffering.

1. God's plan provides for our refining, 1:3-12.

Our "*living hope*" is built on the fact and power of the resurrection. It is God's will that we lay hold of that power for our lives (Col.3:1-4). The security of our salvation gives the assurance necessary to face our trials in faith, and in the midst of them, to see Christ revealed in experiential and personal ways. The victorious life of the church age believer is the envy of prophets and angels!

2. God's plan provides for our growth, 1:13-2:3.

We need to "roll up our sleeves" and prepare for action. We can rest our hope completely on the all sufficiency of God's grace, which comes to us with the personal presence and power of our Lord, revealed to us in our trials. By the Spirit's power, we grow in holiness (wholeness) and become living evidence of the precious price of the cross of Christ. Meanwhile, our trials refine our lives to greater love and purity, always the true benchmark of the Christian life.

3. God's plan provides for our service, 2:4-10.

Believers are, individually and collectively, the temple of God (1 Co.3:16; 6:19). We are indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom.12:8-11) and are called to be a royal priesthood. We serve under our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb.5:5-10; 8:1-2) to intercede for men and to proclaim the way of salvation (Acts 1:8; Mat.28:18-20). In addition, every believer is a minister to the saints (1 Co.12:7; Eph.4:12) and an ambassador to the unsaved world (2 Co.5:14-21).

Summary:

1. We enter into living hope when we are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, "*begotten again*".
2. The foundation of this hope is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. If He can conquer death and the grave, He is able to overcome any problems I may have in life.
3. This life of living in hope (confidence/assurance) is sustained by continual drawing on the resources of the "*abundant mercies*" of the Living God, the endless fountain of His grace (Rom.12:2).
4. If we by faith claim the birthright that is ours, we will always be praising, glorifying, exalting God in our lives, both by word and by deed. "*Blessed be*" is better rendered, "*We ought always to be praising*".

II. Sanctification – the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, 2:11-3:12.

"in (by means of) sanctification of the Spirit..." 1:2b

Key verse: 2:11 "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul..."

Here we see the "spiritual strategy" of our living hope. Only by the sanctifying work of the Spirit can we hope to present a living witness by which some will come to faith and "glorify God in the day of visitation" (2:12).

1. Evangelism - a focus of our sanctification, 2:11-12.

The only fitting lifestyle for the believer is that of a "pilgrim" who is "just passing through" this world. As such we live as sojourners", those who are citizens of another country (cf. Phi.3:20; Heb.11:14-16).

2. Submission - the effective evidence of sanctification, 2:13-3:7.

Christianity is all about right relationship, first with God, then with others. In every relationship we can be an example of Christ if we humble ourselves and serve those around us, for their good and benefit (cf. Rom.15:2; 1 Cor.12:7).

3. Blessing - the consequence of our sanctification, 3:8-12.

Note that we are called for the purpose of giving blessing, that we might inherit blessing. A faithful, obedient lifestyle (v.10-12; Ps.34:12-16). As we "bless" others, we receive blessing from God. The idea of inheritance implies eternal reward.

Summary:

1. The primary work of the Spirit in the believer's life is that of sanctification. This means to be "set apart" from this world to God (cf. 1 Th.1:9-10, 5:23-24).
2. The believer must cooperate in this work by surrender to the indwelling Spirit and active obedience to God's word. The word of God is our guide to the need for confession, correction, and right conduct (cf. 1 Jo.1:9; 2 Ti.2:19-22; 3:16).
3. The word "submit" is a military term which speaks of taking one's proper place in the ranks. In the Bible it is a comprehensive term for expressing the character of Jesus Christ in willing service to those around us (Rom.15:1-3; 1 Co.10:33).
4. Most often, the blessings of God are spiritual in nature, rather than material. The false "prosperity gospel" promises wealth and health, but this is in obvious conflict with the experience of Christ and the apostles. The greatest blessings in this life are inner peace and joy, and an effective prayer life (cf.Rom.5:1-5; 14:17; 1 Pe.3:12).

III. Obedience – the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ, 3:13-5:11.

"for (with a view toward) *obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...*" 1:2c

Key verse: 4:1 "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind..." Now we see the battlefield tactics of living hope in believer's lives. To better understand how our "obedience" to the faith results in the "sprinkling" of the blood of Christ to those in our sphere of influence, see how Paul uses the idea in Romans.

1. Taking up the cross of Christ, 3:13-22.

When the faithful suffer, it always has a redemptive purpose. The more we become like Christ, the more we will share His sufferings (Luk.9:23, 2 Ti.3:16).

2. The objective of obedience, 4:1-11.

To be "*armed with the same mind*" of Christ means to suffer with the same goal in view. The application is to bring others to God (3:18). Persecution serves to highlight the believer's faith, and the power of the word of God.

3. The Role of suffering, 4:12-19.

Suffering provides the believer the opportunity to "fellowship with the Lord in the fire" (Dan.3:25). Christ has promised to reveal Himself more fully to those who are faithful to the word (Joh.14:21-23), especially in times of trial. Since nothing can touch us apart from God's permission (Job 1:10; Rom.8:31-39), affliction teaches us to trust our heavenly Father when things seem all wrong.

4. The value of team effort, 5:1-11.

The fellowship of the saints is designed to be a source of strength and comfort in times of trial. This requires much patience and dedication on the part of leaders and members alike (v.1-5). By corporate humility and mutual service, the body can resist what one believer alone could not. Vigilance and steadfastness overcomes Satan, and brings all along the way to maturity. In this way all share in glorifying God.

Summary:

1. There are no "lone rangers" in the plan of God.
2. Teamwork in the family of God is the key to both personal and corporate victory in the invisible war for souls.
3. Just as Christ could not fulfill His purpose apart from suffering, neither can we as believers. We were born for battle! Let's put on the armor and stand firm!

Obedience to the faith

1. Rom.1:5; God provided grace and apostleship to bring all nations into the obedience of faith. Obedience to the faith is synonymous to "obey the gospel" or "obey the truth", cf. Rom.2:8; Gal.3:1; 2 Th.1:8, 3:14; Heb.5:9.
2. Rom. 5:19; By His obedience to the Father's plan, Jesus Christ provided for God's righteousness to be given to all who believe.
3. Rom.6:16; When the believer becomes a "slave" of obedience, his life reflects the righteousness of God. By this he becomes a living witness to the power of grace.
4. Rom.15:18; By his obedient service, Paul brought many Gentiles into the obedience of the faith.
5. Rom.16:19; the obedience of the Roman believers had become a powerful witness to bring others to faith in Christ, cf. 1 Th.1:5-10.
6. Rom.16:26; Obedience to the faith is the objective of the redemptive plan of God.

Conclusion: 5:12-14

1. Silvanus (Silas), the scribe (or amanuensis) of the book, is a great example of faithful, steadfast, and cooperative service (cf. Acts Ch. 15-18; 2 Co.1:19; 1 Th.1:1; 2 Th.1:1).
2. Silvanus was also responsible for the beautiful Greek of this epistle. Second Peter, possibly written by Peter himself, is much more complicated and rough.
3. Peter summarizes the content of the epistle as "*the true grace of God in which you stand*" (cf. Rom.5:2). The NASV takes the verb as imperative, "*Stand firm in it*". This true grace of God, again, is summarized in 1:2, "*According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ.*"
4. The sense of fellowship is strengthened by greetings from the church in Babylon (most likely Rome, in code), and from John Mark, who became a student and disciple of Peter, from whom he got the information for the Gospel of Mark.
5. The "*kiss of love*" was a common greeting of the ancient world, exchanged only with the same sex. Spiritual love, which is holy and pure, is always the forerunner of peace (cf. Gal.5:22-23).