



Bible Study

1 Peter

1 Peter 1

The first letter of Peter is not written to any one congregation but to all Christians. Peter introduces himself as an apostle and, unlike Paul, his apostolic status appears to be fully accepted. He speaks to those who have come to Christ in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia – key places where Christianity grew in the early life of the church.

Chosen by God

Peter is writing to Christians, who he describes as being sanctified by the Spirit according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. This means simply that they are chosen by God – an important truth that strengthens, comforts and encourages all believers, even in times of affliction!

God's choosing is not random. Before we came to Christ, God already knew that He would choose us and we are sanctified by the Spirit for obedience. While some would like to think that becoming a Christian has only to do with going to heaven or hell, Peter reminds us that it also touches earth. A claim to be a Christian is doubtful if there is no evidence of holiness and obedience.

We are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses us from sin and we are blessed by the Trinity: God the Father, God the Spirit and God the Son – Jesus Christ.

Living Hope

God has caused us to be born again into a living hope. We have eternal life through the Saviour who has conquered death. The hope that lives in us is an incorruptible inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade away, because it is safely secured in heaven. This is in significant contrast to any inheritance on this earth. We are protected by the power of God through faith, the promise of our inheritance is certain and we have great joy as we look forward to that day when Jesus will return and reveal our salvation!

Trials and Testing

Christians do sometimes suffer trials which cause grief but God has a purpose in these things and, more than anything, will use them to bring us closer to Him. Our faith is tested to show that it is sincere and true faith. Our faith is tested to show that our faith is strong. Our faith is tested to purify it and to burn away the dross from the gold. We especially sense God's keeping power when we endure trials, knowing that He will protect us. Our faith is much more precious than gold that perishes and the fulfilment of our faith is when we see Jesus return or we go to heaven. Peter knows that, although he has seen Jesus, almost every Christian in the early church has not seen him but, even so, they love him. Jesus is no less real because he is unseen. The sense of his presence brings inexpressible and glorious joy!

Prophecies of Salvation

It is important to Peter – and to all of the New Testament writers – to demonstrate that their teaching is not new but that it was spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, who longed to see the grace of the New Covenant to come. As they prophesied by the Spirit of Christ, they foresaw something of his suffering and glory and Peter tells us that, in the same way, even angels long to see the unfolding of God’s eternal plan!

Holy Living

God has only just begun to show us the riches of His grace and, in the light of God’s grace towards us, Peter urges us to prepare our minds for action, to be watchful and to hold fast to our hope in Jesus. We are to live holy lives which are based upon our faith and hope in God. We will stand on that day when Jesus comes back, only because of the unmerited favour that he has given and will give to us. We received God’s grace when we first gave our lives to Jesus, we know God’s grace now as we live our lives in dependence upon him and, in the future, Jesus will give God’s grace to us as we head for heaven.

Fulfilling God’s call to holiness requires that we, as obedient children, break away from evil desires. We are to be holy in the sense that we live differently to the world. We love people but we do not love the ways of this world. “Be holy, because I am holy.” This high call for holy living makes sense because of the price that was paid for our redemption. The precious blood of Jesus was the price paid and he was without sin, so could qualify to be our Redeemer. The work of Jesus was God’s plan, decided before the foundation of the world.

Loving One Another

Holy living is incomplete if it is not accompanied by love. To be a Christian means to have a sincere love for our brethren, but we are encouraged to exercise that love with a pure heart, having been born again by the eternal word of God. Peter reminds us that, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands for ever.” (*Isaiah 40:6-8*). The word of the Lord certainly has endured. It has survived centuries of persecution, criticism and neglect by the church as well as the world. But the word of the Lord endures forever. It is still the world’s best seller!

Points to Consider:

1. What is the living hope that we have in Christ?
2. What is the purpose of trials and testing for the believer?
3. What did the prophets foresee about the salvation that we have in Christ?
4. What motivates you to live a holy life?

1 Peter 2

Peter covers several themes in this second chapter. He speaks about spiritual growth, he shows us that we are being built up like living stones into a spiritual house and he gives us a detailed explanation of what it means to be the people of God. Peter then urges us to live upright lives, to respect those in authority and not to be rebellious in our hearts towards those who rule over us. He concludes by reminding us of the suffering of Jesus and what that suffering has achieved for us.

Spiritual Growth

Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander are indicators of sinful attitudes and spiritual immaturity. However, our salvation is in Christ and we grow up in our salvation by feeding upon the Word of God. We are to desire the milk of the word, although theologians have different views about what this is. Nevertheless, a good approach is to consider is the way in which a new-born baby contentedly drinks milk from its mother and enjoys the warmth of the mother's embrace. In the same way, we should hunger and desire to learn and understand the essential truths of the Gospel. The milk of the word is not in any way to be despised. It represents the foundational truths of our faith – our need of a Saviour and the mercy, love and kindness of Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again, to lead us into victory over sin, death and hell.

A Spiritual House

We are all being built as living stones upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, the living stone that was rejected by men but is very precious to God the Father. We are a chosen people, offering spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus. We worship the living God, giving praise, honour and glory to Jesus. Jesus is very precious to us who believe but those who reject him will stumble and fall, because they do not believe who he is and what he came to do.

Peter's description of what it means to belong to God is very powerful. He is writing to people who feel that they are outcasts and refugees but these people are described as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's precious possession. God has rescued us from darkness and obscurity, to declare His praises and to enjoy His mercy!

Living Upright Lives

As God's people, Peter strongly encourages us to keep away from sin and live uprightly before men, so that our good deeds will glorify God. There will be accusations but our Christian godliness must outshine them. We should obey those in authority and seek to be good citizens, showing respect to everyone.

Enduring Punishment

When Peter wrote this letter, society handed out rough and cruel justice and it was a time of persecution for God's people. Peter makes it clear that if we do wrong, there is nothing praiseworthy in enduring the punishment that follows. However, if we are punished unjustly and we endure it, then this is commendable before God.

The Suffering of Christ

Christ suffered because he was being punished for our sin but his suffering is also an example of how we should handle injustice towards ourselves. Christ committed no sin, told no lies and was humble and honest, despite the ferocity of the verbal and physical attacks upon him. The crowd saw a man who had been whipped, beaten and nailed to a cross but Peter saw more than that. He saw what the human eye could not see. He saw Jesus taking our sins upon himself. Jesus taking the punishment that we deserve. The suffering of Jesus brings us deliverance from all of the damage that sin has done to us. We were lost and without hope but now we are saved by the mercy, love and kindness of Jesus!

Points to Consider:

1. How hungry are we to grow up in our salvation by feeding upon God's word? Do we still have spiritually immature attitudes that need to change?
2. We are described as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's precious possession. How do you regard yourself as being a part of God's people?
3. How different do you feel God's people are in your country? Is Christian godliness apparent or are we indistinguishable from the world?
4. What were the reasons for the suffering of Christ and what did it achieve for us?
5. How much do we long to declare the praises of God who has called us out from darkness into His wonderful light?

1 Peter 3

In this chapter, Peter continues to address the subject of Christian behaviour. He talks about the attitude of wives towards their husbands and husbands towards wives. He then speaks about how we should live in harmony with one another and the effect that righteous behaviour can have in creating a fruitful prayer life. He encourages believers to always be ready to give an answer to those who ask the reason for the hope we have in Christ and he shares with us, some more thoughts on the suffering and glory of Christ.

Wives and Husbands

Peter is aware that quarrels and tensions can arise within a marriage, particularly when married to a partner who is not a believer. He urges that a wife should be submissive to her husband and live a life of purity and reverence, so that by her behaviour she might win her husband for Christ. He also advocates that her beauty should not come from her outward appearance but, rather, from a gentle and quiet spirit that reflects the beauty of her inner self. Sarah's obedience to Abraham is a good example of righteousness and submission.

At the same time, husbands must always be considerate towards their wives and treat them with respect. As the weaker partner, there are times when a wife will need her husband to be particularly sensitive and caring. Also, when a husband and wife pray, they need to be in good relationship with each other for their prayers to be effective. Often, when shared prayer is not part of a relationship, it can be a warning sign of problems within the marriage.

Love, Compassion and Humility

Peter wants God's people to be sensitive and thoughtful in the way that they relate to one another. Love, compassion, humility and a desire to bless rather than seek revenge, are the ways in which a Christian should behave. This is all part of the calling that God has placed upon our lives and Peter gives us sound advice for enjoying a good and long life. He tells us that we should never say anything that is evil or deceitful, we must turn from evil and do good and we must be peacemakers, not troublemakers. The Lord watches over the righteous, desiring to answer our prayers but his face is turned against those who do evil.

Suffering for Doing Good

Peter tells us that we are blessed if we suffer for doing what is right, so when we are faced with intimidation or threats, we should not be frightened but focus upon Jesus Christ our Lord. Our Lord Jesus suffered because he was not afraid to say and to do the right thing and Peter reminds us that, whatever men may say and whatever people might do to us, our hope is in Christ.

Christian Witness

Peter advises that, although we can boldly share our testimony, we must be sensitive and wise about how we express our hope to others. Even so, we should always be ready to give an answer to those who ask us about the reason for the hope that we have. Jesus Christ, who was sinless and righteous, died for our sins and our unrighteousness. His sacrifice has brought us to God and he has been raised from the dead. Jesus is truly our Living Hope!

The Days of Noah

The closing verses of this chapter are difficult to understand, because what is described here is not found anywhere else in Scripture. Peter talks of Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison, who disobeyed long ago in the days of Noah. They had been given a long time to repent under the preaching of Noah and God had waited patiently but there was no repentance. The point here is that those who disobeyed had rejected not just Noah but also Jesus, the Saviour of the world. The water became a flood that took the lives of many but it also provided salvation for Noah and his family, by keeping the ark afloat.

A Good Conscience

Peter tells us that we are saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the water symbolises our baptism into a good conscience towards God. Jesus Christ, who died and was buried but who also rose from the dead, is now at the right hand of God the Father and everything submits to him. Hallelujah!

Points to Consider:

1. Cultures vary and attitudes towards marriage change. However, how should we apply Peter's teaching to our marriages today?
2. Do we reflect upon our marriages and consider whether our prayer life is hindered by our behaviour towards one another?
3. How do we handle our relationships in the body of Christ? Are we humble or arrogant towards those with whom we disagree?
4. To what extent does the example of Christ guide us when we are wrongly accused?
5. How can we warn people that the patience of God does not mean that there is no judgement?
6. How readily do we share the hope that we have in Christ?

1 Peter 4

This chapter has a lot to say about suffering and how we handle it as believers. God does judge His people but a great deal of suffering arises out of the reaction of people who see our relationship with Christ and our commitment to him.

Suffering as Christ Suffered

Peter tells us that, in the same way that Christ suffered in his body because of his holiness and commitment to righteousness, our bodies now belong to Jesus and as we live for him, we may face suffering and trials. Therefore, we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ. He was selfless and he was humble, he was committed to pleasing God, not men, and he didn't complain about his suffering.

Our Old Life

People who come to faith, all come from a background that was full of sin and habits that were destructive. Those who knew you before you came to Christ, do not understand why you have changed and why you no longer want to join in their sinful activities. Therefore, they may abuse you, criticise you and be very unpleasant. Nevertheless, in due time, they will each have to account to God for their behaviour. He is the judge of the living and the dead. All who have died will face judgement and those who are still alive when Christ comes, will also face judgement.

The End is Near

Bearing in mind that Christ's coming is near, we must be alert, clear minded and self-controlled, so that we can pray. We must love one another, protect one other, be hospitable and serve one other with the gifts that God has given us. Our speaking and serving should always be for the glory and praise of God, through the grace and strength that He provides.

Painful Trials

The church has always been persecuted but the intensity of persecution and the evil, cruel acts that Christians suffer, sometimes come as an unexpected shock. Of course, there is a big difference between suffering that is caused by our own sinful behaviour and suffering for Jesus. We must do our best to avoid needless suffering but we can rejoice if we suffer because of Jesus. Peter says that we should not be dismayed or surprised if the abuse that Jesus suffered is also experienced by believers but, rather, that we should rejoice that we share in his suffering. He also tells us that if we are persecuted in the name of Christ, then the Spirit of glory and of God rest upon us. At such times, we can receive and treasure a special awareness of God's presence, knowing that He is comforting our fears and sorrows!

Judgement Begins with the Family of God

God disciplines His people. Scripture teaches us that it is sign of belonging to Him that He brings correction into our lives. It is important to understand that God wants His people to be holy and that, although the ultimate judgement of hell has been removed by the blood of Jesus, we, nevertheless, have a responsibility to bring honour and not disgrace, to God's name. It is a privilege to be part of God's family and we must not be careless. In the unfolding purposes of God's will, we discover that the Creator of the whole earth is faithful and trustworthy. As we commit ourselves to Him we must do what is upright and good, regardless of how we are treated by the world.

Points to Consider:

1. How did Christ handle his suffering and how did he respond to those who abused him?
2. How well do we handle the response from friends and family who knew us before we came to Christ?
3. Realising that Jesus' return is near, how can we strengthen our love for other believers?
4. Do we know of people facing strong persecution, who we could pray for more regularly?
5. As saved Christians, how aware are we that God still requires us to give an account for our lives?

1 Peter 5

Peter concludes his letter by giving clear instructions to leaders. He reminds God's people of the need for humility and respect but also of God's care for them. He warns them of the destructive activity of the devil and encourages love between the saints.

Eldership

Peter has some comments to make about eldership. He speaks as a fellow-elder and reminds the elders that he saw first-hand the sufferings of Christ and knows the glory that will be revealed when Christ returns. He urges, therefore, that they feed the people of God. Peter was, of course, a fisherman but here he uses the picture of a shepherd. The elders must share the word of God and see that God's people are nourished and grounded firmly in Scripture. This was demonstrated in the earliest days of the church and was a key reason for delegating the task of caring for the widows. God's word must not be neglected. Elders should not act out of pressure or obligation but must care willingly for God's people. Financial gain should play no part in eldership but, sadly, the desire for money has spoilt many ministries. Elders need to be alert, with their minds fixed on achieving the will of God. They are servants who, with humility, should lead the flock in such a way that their example is an inspiration to God's people.

Reward

Peter assures the elders that Christ is the Chief Shepherd. He will return and when he comes, he will reward those who have served faithfully, with a crown of glory. Crowns or rewards given by men are temporary but the crown of glory given by Christ, is eternal. We may not receive much honour in this life but Christ provides us with a place in glory forever!

Humility

Peter is concerned about the dangers of pride and urges respect, not only between young and old but also between all believers. He states that God opposes the proud and rather than find ourselves in a disturbing state because of our pride, we are encouraged to humble ourselves, because God is pleased to lift up those who are truly humble.

Care

God truly cares for us, so pride must not prevent us from bringing all our concerns to Him.

Our Enemy

Peter wants us to be have healthy minds that are vigilant and alert, because our enemy, Satan, wants to destroy us. He is like a 'roaring lion' but he cannot harm us. However, he will

do his best to frighten and intimidate us! His agenda is the same for all believers, not just some, and we must resist him, standing firm in the faith and trusting in Christ to defend us.

Closing Greetings

Peter acknowledges the help of Silas in writing this letter and sends greetings from the church at Babylon and from Mark. He urges us to greet one another with a kiss of love (a great contrast with Judas' kiss of betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane) and Peter ends his letter by desiring peace for all who are in Christ Jesus.

God has endless grace with which to supply us and all of our trials are temporary. In this life, trials prepare us for eternity and produce character and strength, while we wait for heaven. However, we are called to enjoy eternal glory in the presence of God forever!

Points to Consider:

1. It is important to observe the instructions that Peter gives to elders. When we choose elders for our churches, how careful are we about this and what are our priorities?
2. How vigilant are we to avoid pride in our lives and ministry?
3. How well are we resisting the intimidation of Satan, the 'roaring lion'?
4. How much do we reflect upon our eternal reward from Christ, when he comes?