

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 87: The Book of 1 Peter

Introduction:

The first thing that struck me as I studied the Book of First Peter was the obvious character change of the author. The Peter of the Gospels was impulsive; the writer of this letter is patient. Where he was restless, he is now calm. Fear has translated to courage, confrontation to love, and the tendency to run and hide and to avoid persecution has become a boldness to stand and suffer.

This is the supernatural, transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the primary evidences of the reality of Christianity.

Author:

We know more about Peter than any character in the New Testament other than Jesus Himself. He is introduced in the Gospels, his ministry is well documented in the Book of Acts, his pastoral heart is revealed in his letters, and we even have substantial traditional information in early church documents.

We first met him as Simon (Greek) or Simeon (Hebrew), Son of Jonas or John, and brother of Andrew, all of them fishermen in Bethsaida. Andrew brought him to Jesus and Jesus immediately renamed him Cephas (Hebrew) or Peter (Greek), which means stone or rock. (John 1:40-44)

Peter was called to follow Jesus (Mk. 1:16-17), and appointed an Apostle (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14-16). His boldness caused him to become the spokesman for the twelve, often speaking the words they were thinking but dared not verbalize. He is placed at the start of lists of disciples by each of the Gospel writers. (Matt 10, Mk. 3, Lk. 6, and in Acts 1)

He is best known for his zeal which often got him in trouble and caused him to be the object lesson of much of Jesus' teaching on humility and discipleship. This has made him to a source of encouragement to believers throughout the ages. and he is the favorite disciple of most believers.

After Pentecost Peter became the leading preacher of the twelve (Acts 1-12), performing miracles (Acts 3-9), opening the door to salvation to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Gentiles (Acts 10). As with all major characters in Scripture, his weaknesses are shown as well as his strengths.

He traveled, although not as much as Paul, and was probably accompanied by his wife (Mk. 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 9:5). Church tradition accounts that he encouraged her to "Remember the Lord" as he was forced to witness her crucifixion. The story of his execution is famous and tells of his request to be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died. All historical accounts indicate he was, in fact, crucified in that manner in Rome in AD. 67.

Since there is copious reference to Peter and his letters in the early church, and there had been no evidence to dispute his authorship until the twentieth century, I won't spend much time on the problem. Adequate treatment of these questions can be found in the MacArthur Study Bible, introductory notes to I Peter.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

The strong evidence of Peter's authorship include the style and vocabulary which match his preaching in the Book of Acts, quotes from Jesus to which he was a witness, and his eye witness treatment of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Audience:

This letter is addressed to the "*aliens, scattered*" or literally the "*wanderers of the dispersion*" (1:1). These were believers who were scattered throughout the northern part of Asia Minor that was off the main routes of trade and commerce. The Bible contains no clear record of how the gospel reached this area (many see it as an extension of Paul's missionary ministry others feel Peter went there), but it contained colonies of Jews with a predominance of Gentile settlers.

Their situation was one of persecution (4:12). I don't believe it was so much from the Roman government, for that would come later when Nero's plan to make scapegoats of believers was carried out, but pressure which came from living as a faithful believer in a pagan society. Peter writes to encourage them to rejoice and live above reproach with perseverance and commitment to Christ.

Date:

The place of writing was "*Babylon*," perhaps the city in Mesopotamia which had a colony of Jewish Christians as early as AD. 36. But, more likely a code name for Rome (itself a center of sin and idolatry), used by Christian writers who wished to avoid bringing the wrath of Rome on the believers living there.

There is strong evidence that Peter was in Rome during the last decade of his life and wrote this letter just before, or shortly after, the fire in Rome in July AD. 64. This places the writing at AD. 63-65.

Purpose:

Peter's letter was aimed at teaching believers facing persecution that they could live victoriously in a hostile world without losing hope and without becoming bitter, by trusting in their Lord and looking for his return.

Peter wanted his readers to live a Christian life-style that would convert pagan sneers and accusation into appreciation and respect. Peter stressed that by living an obedient, victorious life in the midst of persecution, believers could even evangelize their hostile world.

How in the world could they do that? Paul answers that in chapter 5, verse 12:

" . . . I have written to you briefly, exhorting you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"

So, not only does salvation come by the grace of God, but so does the ability to live it out, day by day. The grace of God brings security, sanctification, submission, suffering, and service.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF 1 PETER

I. SECURITY (Chapter 1:1-12)

The main argument for the security of the believer is the fact that salvation is all the work of God, not the work of man.

A. Salvation (1:1-9)

1. Believers are chosen of God. (v 2)

- a. Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.
- b. Chosen by the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work.
- c. Chosen to obey Jesus Christ. (Jesus becomes Savior and Lord.)
- d. Chosen to be redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ's blood.

2. Believers have hope because of the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 3-9)

- a. Hope of an eternal inheritance (v. 4).
- b. Hope for God's protection by His power (v. 5)
- c. Hope for maturity and joy through trials (vv. 6-7)
- d. Hope of obtaining salvation of the soul (vv. 8-9)

B. Scripture (1:10-12)

The prophets reported the grace and glory of salvation, understanding that the Messiah was going to suffer, but not knowing the exact time or circumstances. It was revealed to them, however, that their message was for others and would be revealed by the Holy Spirit.

The grace of God also brings . . .

II. Sanctification (Chapters 1:13-2:10)

Peter explained that the character of God and the high cost of redemption were incentives to produce a people set apart. His words in verse 13 would be the equivalent of us saying, "Roll up your sleeves and get to work."

We are set apart . . .

A. In Holiness (1:13-16)

Thoughts of the revelation (or return) of Christ should have the same result as all other prophetic information, . . . to change our life-style. Christians should respond to God's holiness by leaving the lusts of their former ignorance and adopting God's own behavior as their patterns of holiness.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

B. In Fear (1:17-21)

Fear of God because of His judgment, and reverence of God because of the value of the sacrificial work of Christ, should cause us to place our hope and trust in Him.

C. In love (1:22-25)

Peter urged his readers to express their holiness by showing genuine love for one another. The quotation of Isaiah 40: 6-8 showed that the experience of this love came from the creative activity of God.

D. In Growth (2:1-10)

He directed them to put aside old attitudes and instead to grow in respect to salvation by desiring the pure milk of the Word as a child longs for milk.

The growth of the church is presented in three images:

1. The church is a living body that gives sacrificial service to God (vv 4-5). Christ was the life-giving Stone who enabled His followers to produce spiritual sacrifices of obedience, worship (Rom. 12:1-2) and ministry (Heb. 13:15-16).
2. The church is a building built on Christ, the Cornerstone (vv6-8). Peter quoted O. T. Scripture to show that Christ was to be a foundation stone or a stone of stumbling, an instrument of salvation or judgment.
3. He used the texts of Exodus 19 and Hosea 2 to portray believers as a special selected nation (vv. 9-10), made up of those who were not a people, but are now God's people, reflecting the glory of God to the world.

The grace of God also brings . . .

III.SUBMISSION (Chapters 2:11-3:12)

Peter was eager for God's people to demonstrate unique, obedient behavior in order to convince critics that their faith was genuine. Rather like James', "*show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works.*" (James 2:18), he urged them to apply this by giving honor to all men, giving love to the family of God, giving reverence to God, and giving honor to their rulers (v 17).

A. To Governments (2:11-17)

1. Reasons

To avoid fleshly lusts which attach our souls (v 11).

To cause the pagans to glorify God at the judgment (v 12).

To silence the ignorant (v 15)

To show that we are free from sin and free to serve God (v 16)

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

2. Requirement

We are to submit to our rulers (v 13).

We are to submit to our rulers' representatives (v 14)

3. Results

Rulers punish the wicked (v 14)

Rulers praise the righteous (v 14)

B. To Masters (2:18-25)

In relation to their owners, slaves were to be in submission to them. The incentive for doing this, even in the presence of provocation, was the moving example of Christ's obedience and servant spirit.

C. To husbands (3:1-7)

In the home women were to win their unsaved husbands, not by outward flashiness, but by serving them and showing them respect with an inner beauty. An inner beauty comes from a gentle and quiet spirit and is "*precious in the sight of God.*" Sarah, the example Peter chooses, was holy (not perfect), hoped in God, and was submissive to her husband.

Husbands were to be understanding and treat their wives as full heirs of God's grace, spiritually equal, if their prayer life was to be effective.

D. To Everyone (3:8-12)

Peter concludes this section by asking all Christians to practice harmony, sympathy, brotherly kindness, and humility. The example of how to treat people should not come from their enemies, but from their God.

In contrast to seeking revenge, he urges blessing. He quoted from Psalm 34 which explains that submission blesses our lives, leads to peace, and keeps us in a right relationship to God.

The grace of God operates in the midst of . . .

IV. SUFFERING (Chapters 3:13-4:19)

In the heart of his letter, Peter deals with the problem of persecution and suffering in the lives of believers which occurred despite their desires to live peacefully and their eagerness to do good deeds.

A. Reason (3:13-4:6)

Righteousness brings reaction, but "*it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.*" (v 17) Why is it better? . . . Because suffering for righteousness does no eternal harm but is rewarded with blessing (v 13-14).

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

And, it is also better because suffering brings opportunities:

1. We may get opportunity to explain our hope (v. 15)
2. We may put our slanderers to shame by our response (v. 16-17).
3. We may be like Christ and Noah who brought glory to God and vindication to themselves (vv. 18-22).
4. We may be freed from the reign of sin in our lives (4:1-6). *"We have been crucified with Christ and no longer live, but Christ lives in us."*

B. Reactions (4:7-19)

Peter presents Christ's return as an incentive for action and an encouragement to obedience. What is the purpose of prophecy? *"The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer," etc., etc. . .* (Change life-style.)

Thinking about the fact of Christ's return should promote love, hospitality, and the proper use of our spiritual gifts (vv. 7-11).

Trials should not come as a surprise (v. 12), so instead of complaining we should rejoice that we can share in Christ's sufferings and, of course, we know testing brings maturity.

Peter warned his readers against involvement with evil actions remembering that even though believers face difficulties, the fate of the unbelievers is terrifying.

And last, the grace of God leads to . . .

V. SERVICE (Chapter 5:1-14)

One of the reactions to the grace of God is to serve the body. There are many ways to serve but each person has a role.

A. Requirements (5:1-7)

Elders are to shepherd, lead and feed, the flock. Caring for God's people is a rough job even when things are good, and especially hard when things are bad.

Peter urged them to assume their tasks not because they felt obligated, but because they chose to eagerly. At Christ's return the faithful leaders were promised an unfading crown.

Young men are to submit. Perhaps the pressure of persecution had caused the young men to want to take things into their own hands. They must be humble, cast their anxieties, frustration, and cares on Jesus and remain under authority.

B. Resistance (5:8-14)

Meanwhile, all are to stand firm in the fight. They are to be alert and self-controlled because the enemy (the Devil) is prowling, looking for victims. But, they are not alone, others are also suffering and it is Christ who always accomplishes the work. *"And after you have suffered for a little while,*

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (v. 10)

Peter closes with greetings and a benediction and the command, *"I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. **Stand firm in it!"***

Lessons:

1. Our best reason for patient endurance in trials is the hope brought by the death, resurrection, and soon return of Jesus Christ.
2. We should live holy lives because God paid an immense price for us.
3. It is good for us to suffer for doing right because it silences our critics and makes a lasting impression on the people of the world.
4. It is the grace of God that leads us to salvation and holy living.

Homework:

Read: The Book of 2 Peter

Think: Is my suffering brought about by my righteous life-style?

Apply: Live this week in obedience because of what God did for you by His grace.