

## FIRST PETER

A Survey of the Epistle  
Tuesday Bible Class – October 3, 2006

**Intro:** Required reading – 1 Peter, once each week, more times if possible. We always need to pray for the blessing of the Holy Spirit before we read, and continue praying for understanding as we read.

There is really no reason to question that the Apostle Peter wrote this epistle, and the one after it in the Bible which also carries his name. They are the only two books in the NT written by the Apostle Peter.

Peter was the apostle to the circumcision, the Jews, as the Apostle Paul was the apostle to the uncircumcised Gentiles. See Galatians 2:7 and 8. And so it should not be unexpected that he would write to the Jews. And this he did, to the Jews who had been driven from their homes, primarily from Jerusalem, and had sought to become established in Roman provinces in the area which today is occupied by the nation, Turkey.

The best way to learn why any book of the Bible was written, is by reading it. And usually it takes several readings for us to learn the message of the book. It is good to get an idea of the major teaching of any book before taking up the details. Today I was to survey the book with you, and then state what the main message is. Before our class dismissed last Spring, I had covered the first two chapters of 1 Peter. We had studied the epistle of James before that. Next week I plan to go on with chapter 3 in 1 Peter, but I felt it would be good to start with a review to remind all of us of the chapters we have covered, and to bring any newcomers over the ground we have covered, so that we could all begin chapter 3 together.

In the additional reading and studying that I have done, I will probably bring out some points that I did not emphasize last Spring, but it is to be expected that added study would throw added light on the text if the Holy Spirit continues to teach us.

The emphasis in James is similar to the emphasis in 1 Peter. Compare James 1:2 with 1 Peter 1:6-8. And the two apostles were writing in general to the same people. James may have included more people than Peter did because he addressed himself to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). But it is also very possible that most of those people were in the five provinces mentioned by the Apostle Peter in the first verse of his first epistle.

There is no question but that those were difficult times for all Jews who had turned to Christ. They may have suffered from the Gentiles, but they also suffered greatly from their fellow Jews. The purposes of both James and Peter were the same. They wanted to encourage and to comfort their Jewish brethren who were suffering for their faith in Christ. This morning we want to see how Peter did it, and what was his main concern for them as they faced the future. Griffith Thomas, in his commentary on 1 Peter mentioned that *comfort* includes making them strong, brave, and happy. And we see evidence of all of this in 1 Peter.

If anyone want to argue about who wrote this epistle, one of their strongest arguments would probably be that the man who wrote this epistle does not sound at all like the Peter we meet in the Gospels. In the Gospels we see a man who was very impetuous, self-confident, and ready to set himself above and beyond his fellow apostles. And yet, apart from the evil which Judas did, Peter failed the Lord more miserably than the others by his strong, three-time denial that he even knew the Lord. How can we explain the difference? We can see in his epistles the result of what the Lord had done in his life. It probably had been at least thirty years since the Lord went back to heaven when Peter wrote this epistle. God does not give up on any of us although we may fell many times like giving up on ourselves. You can already see a difference in Peter in the book of Acts. The Lord continued to work in Peter’s life, and Peter continued to grow. He became stronger in the Lord. There

seems to be a lot of history behind Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:2 and 3 where he wrote to his fellow Jewish believers,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Peter 2:2-3).

Peter ought to be a great encouragement to all of us. We start out in the Christian life like we started out in our physical lives, as babies. A lot has gone into our growth, physically, as well as in maturity. The same is true of our lives as Christians. We are not yet all that we want to be, nor all that we will be. But there has been growth in our lives, and there needs to be more growth. But by the grace of God we know that we are not what we used to be. The Apostle Peter who wrote 1 and 2 Peter was an amazing example of what God is doing in all of our lives. It all begins with feeding on the milk of the Word, and gradually we get so that we eat the meat of the Word.

How did Peter begin his epistle?

He began by telling them who he was (and they all must have known him), and then he told them what they were and where they were. **But**, as you go on into verse 2 you see that he was identifying the people in those five provinces who were the Lord's people. Notice that in verses 1 through 5 he was speaking of *the Gospel!* This takes us down through verse 5. (Explain.) As we go through the epistle we will see that he came back to the Gospel again more than once.

In verse 6 we see that the Jews to whom he was writing were in a condition of great joy coupled with great heaviness. The Christian life for them had not all been a glorious experience. They found that their faith was being tried. But Peter assured them that there was great benefit in their trials even though there was great suffering, and the reason was that God had allowed them to suffer to show those about them, whether unsaved Jews or pagan Gentiles, the reality of their faith. Their trials had not made them abandon their faith, but had made them turn more fervently to the Lord for His grace and peace. *And then from verse 7 on down through verse 12 Peter went back to speaking about the Gospel again –what the Lord was doing to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, and then, in verses 10 through 12 how the OT prophets, and even the angels, wanted to understand even what they had written about the sufferings of the Messiah (Christ) and the glory that should follow. The prophets learned that they were not writing about something that was going to take place in their day, but at a future, unknown time, which had not been revealed to them. But these people who read the prophets had learned that the Messiah had come, had died, had risen from the dead, and gone back to heaven. And so it for them that the prophets had made those wonderful predictions.*

That was all well and good, but what were they to do in the trying circumstances that they found themselves? At this point Peter began to give them a series of exhortations, coupled with warnings as to what they were not to do. This starts with chapter 1, verse 13, and continues down through verse 21.

Verse 13 tells them what they were to do. Verse 14 tells them what they were *not* to do. And in verses 15 and 16 Peter was telling them what the Lord was seeking accomplish in their daily lives, even as their faith was being tried. He was seeking to make them like He is, HOLY! In verse 13 the Apostle Peter indicated that this was the purpose of their salvation, and he indicated that the process would go on until the Lord returned.

Now what Peter had been telling them up to this point (v. 21), he had been saying what applied to all of them, but it applied individually. We grow individually. We all have individual responsibilities to feed upon the Word, to gird up the loins of our minds, and so on. But when we get to verse 22 we see that Peter gave them that had to do with their relationship with each other. They were to love each other with pure hearts fervently! We are not just individuals going to heaven. We are members of the family of God, having been born again by

the instrumentality of the Word of God. This is a Word which “endureth” in spite of all of the opposition that the Lord or His people may experience, and the message of the Word of God is the same for every generation: “Ye must be born again”! And the last statement of chapter 1 indicates that when Peter was speaking about the word of the Lord, he was speaking specifically about “the Gospel.

Coming to chapter 2 . . .

We have another exhortation which is preceded by a negative. We are to *lay aside*,” that is, not to have anything more to do with the sins mentioned in verse 1. We are to leave them, and not come back to them. And verse 2 tells us how we can leave them behind. It is only as we are feeding on the Word and growing into the people that the Lord wants us to be. The Lord is a living Stone, and we are living stones. God is building us into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices to Him. See verses 9 and 10. God has taken, and still is taking, those who were not His people, and making them His people. When the trials come, we need to remember this, and be encouraged by it. God is always at work in our lives and in the lives of others that we should live for His glory, and show forth His praises.

In verse 11 of chapter 2 again Peter reminded the people to whom which he was writing (which now includes us), to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” And this makes it possible for us to live outwardly in a way that is consistent with what we are inwardly. The only way that people can be made aware of what God has done in us, is when it is lived out for them to see. This is what “honest” means. “The Gentiles” means unsaved Gentiles. And one way in which we show the reality of our faith is in our relationship to the government under which we live. In the case of the people we are reading about here in 1 Peter, *that government was Rome!* This emphasis goes from verse 13 to verse 17. It would be impossible to state how very important this point is. We may be “strangers and pilgrims” here, but we are responsible to live godly lives in our relationship to our government. Our Lord was certainly an example in this. Centurions came to Him, and so did many Jewish leaders.

The last part of chapter 2, verses 18-25, is addressed to “servants.” This probably included most of the people when we think of the circumstances under which they were living. People today talk about their “rights.” If you were a Christian living in the Roman Empire, you didn’t have many rights. Paul could appeal to Caesar because he was a Roman citizen by birth. But even though that was true of many Jews, yet their nationality was a big strike against them.

Note what Peter told the servants to do, and then notice that He cited the Lord Jesus as the supreme Example, and again he got into the Gospel in the latter part of the chapter.

In chapter 3 . . .

Peter spoke to wives. In our Bibles there are six verses for wives; one, for husbands. When Paul spoke to husbands and wives, he put wives first. When he spoke to parents and children, he put children first. When he wrote to masters and servants, he put servants first. He was really giving those with the less responsibilities, the place of honor. Maybe here in 1 Peter, Peter gave an extended word to the wives because there were more wives who were believers than there were husbands.

There is a serious mistranslation in verse 1. Peter was not saying that a wife could win her husband to the Lord without the Word, but without a word. That is, her life is what is going to make her husband realize the truth of the Gospel, not her constant nagging Him to turn to the Lord. The Word of God always has a major part in the salvation of any sinner.

And then in verse 8 of chapter 3 Peter addressed all believers again –beginning with what they are be and do, and then moving, as he has before, into what they were not to do. It is often the trouble that the world see of believers with each other that turns them away from the Gospel. But when the world sees the love that we have for each other and how concerned we are for each other, and how we care for one another, that is what they notice. But Peter stresses what is most important. The Lord sees how we live, and He blesses those who obey Him. His ears are open to our prayers. So when we are in difficult circumstances, we are inclined to pray, and that is one reason for the troubles that we have. They turn us to the Lord. We must be careful not to be guilty of wrongdoing. Even then the people of the world may criticize us, but it our “good conversation,” our good conduct (the way we think, the way we live, the way we talk), that makes them realize their criticisms of us are false.

Notice in verse 18 that Peter got into the Gospel again. Peter’s repeated emphasis on the Gospel gives great support to what Jerry Bridges has told us more than once, that we need to preach the Gospel to ourselves every day. Peter support practically ever point of exhortation in this epistle, by referring to the Gospel.

In chapter 4 . . .

Peter again refers to the Gospel – Christ suffering for us. But we need to prepare ourselves for the same kind of a reception from the world. But instead of seeking to please them, and to continue to live like unbelievers live, we are to live to please God. We are left in this world to glorify God through holy living. If people are to be reached, it will not be through our living like they live, but through our living like God wants us to live. We don’t need to be ashamed if we suffer as Christians, but we do need to be ashamed if we suffer from wrongdoing.

In chapter 5 . . .

Peter addresses the elders as one of them. Their place in the church is extremely important. They are to “feed,” or *shepherd*, the people of God. Sheep are a favorite figure of speech for the Lord’s people. Even David, the mighty king of Israel, said, “The Lord is my shepherd.” The Lord Jesus, in speaking of His people, said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

Elders are not to serve the people of God because they have to, *i.e.*, because it is their job, “not by constraint.” They are not to serve because that is what they are being paid to do. They are not “lords over God’s heritage.” They are to serve by being examples to the flock. And so Peter again places his emphasis upon the lives of the Lord’s people.

Verse 5 is for the younger members of the family of God. They are to be submissive to the elder – probably here, to the leadership of the church. But the same principle would apply to people who are older in the Lord. Humility was one of the chief characteristics manifested by our Lord when He was here on earth, and it is one that extremely important for all of the people of God.

Notice especially verses 5b through 10. In verse 10 Peter made it very clear that it is God, and only God, Who can make us what Christ died to do in our lives.

Verses 12 through 14 give us the conclusion of the letter.

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Now in the light of all that we have seen, it seems to me that in verses 13 through 16 of chapter 1, Peter has

stated the key verses of the letter he was writing. God has saved us because He wants us to be holy people. And being holy means being like He is. And these verses indicate what Peter said throughout the epistle, we become like the Lord by doing what He wants us to do, and not doing what He does not want us to do. The Bible tells us the difference, and all Three Members of the Godhead are committed to seeing that the purpose of God in saving us is fulfilled.

This is what Paul stated also as the purpose of our salvation – not just to get us to heaven, but to make us like Christ. Here is the way Paul stated it:

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-30).

I ask you to be praying with me that in our study of 1 Peter this Fall, and possibly Winter, the Lord will use our reading and study of this epistle to conform us more and more into the likeness of our precious Savior. And Peter makes it very clear that we never see Christ more clearly than we do in the Gospel.