

1 Peter: Chapter-by-Chapter

Introduction

The first letter of Peter leaves very little in the way of dispute to its authorship. Peter identifies himself in the first verse and early Christian letters outside of the Bible refer to this letter as authoritative from the apostle Peter. The date of the writing is uncertain, but most scholars put it in the 60-65 AD range. This would be less than 10 years before Peter was martyred. It is highly probable that Peter knew Greek due to his profession, but whether he could write Greek or not is debatable. This letter was most likely scribed by Silvanus, as is mentioned in chapter 5.

The letter appears to be written with the intent of bringing unity to a persecuted Christian church as there are numerous subjects being addressed but all seem to point back to the Christian way of life. The letter is not specifically addressed to any one group of people, but the numerous Old Testament references found throughout would be familiar to Jewish converts.

Peter's name is mentioned in the four gospels more than anyone else second only to Jesus. His prominence in the early church gave weight to his letters. They would have been accepted by the readers with a sense of authority behind their words.

Chapter 1

V1-2

Peter starts off his letter with a typical introduction. He establishes his status as an apostle. His letter is addressed to "pilgrims." The Greek word behind this phrase is someone who is temporarily living in a foreign land. As Christians, we live in this world, but this is not our home. This is just a place we are visiting until we reach Heaven.

What does the phrase, "According to the foreknowledge of God" mean in verse 2?

There are many who use this verse as evidence of a lack of free will on the part of humans and believe that God selects which people will go to Heaven and which ones will not. This is only partly true. God chose *everyone* to go to Heaven. We merely have to accept the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. God knows who will choose Him, but this does not remove our choice to pursue Him or not

Why is "sanctification of the Spirit" important?

Accepting the gift of salvation gets us to Heaven, but it does not alleviate our responsibilities as Christians to follow the teachings of God, Jesus, and the Bible while residing on Earth. The blood of Jesus saves us while the Spirit compels us.

Even though the word "trinity" does not appear in the Bible itself, these verses are one of many examples of how the three-in-one God appears in Christianity. The trinity and the new covenant are the defining traits of the New Testament.

V3-12

This opening passage of the letter is often referred to as the "outpouring of an adoring heart." It is considered a love song of praise and worship to God from a humble apostle. It depicts a God of mercy, hope, and generosity.

It is frequently pointed out that Peter does not say what the Christian inheritance is, but that he states what it is not. It is not corruptible, it is not something that will spoil, and it is not fleeting. It also cannot be taken away. Verses 4-5 would offer comfort to those being persecuted for their beliefs. No matter what this world does to us, it cannot take away our salvation and our eternal reward.

Verses 6-9 are of great importance to Peter and to his fellow Christians. Peter had met Jesus face-to-face. He had walked with Him, learned from Him, denied Him, and saw Him after He had been crucified, alive and well. Yet here is a group of people that Peter is writing to who had not seen Jesus, but still believed in Him. Peter is seeing the power of the Holy Spirit at work in every believer. No doubt Peter is recalling the words of Jesus found in John 20:24-29 where Jesus offered a blessing to those that believe but have not seen. The faith of Christians who have not seen Jesus, but still believe in Him is a testament to the Holy Spirit. This faith will be tested and refined like gold in fire, but the reward is eternal purity.

What does the phrase "...end of your faith" mean in verse 9?

Christians emphasize faith in God regularly and frequently, with good reason. But it is easy to forget that faith will not be needed in Heaven. All will be revealed and everything that we hope for, every answer we've been seeking, will be readily available with Jesus standing in front of us. As important as faith is, it will be obsolete in Heaven. When there is no doubt, there is no need for faith.

Peter offers comfort to Christians in that even though we still know little, we know more than the prophets of the Old Testament did. Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies as the culmination of generations of puzzle-pieces that had little meaning to the old prophets. Those small glimpses into the salvation yet to come is now fully revealed to this new church.

What does Peter mean when he states, "things which angels desire to look into?"

Both Peter and Paul (1 Corinthians 4:9) allude to the human relationship with God. This relationship that God seeks with all mankind is a curiosity among even the angels. Even though they know who God is and have no doubt of His power and majesty, they do not comprehend His love for us. This personal relationship with God makes us special among all of His creations.

V13-16

Our faith and our belief urge us to be strong against sin. We have a new purpose in this life. Not just to survive mindlessly in this world, but to see the Creator and show the Creator to others. If there is no change in our actions and attitude, then why would the world care what we have to say? If we do not act as God has called us to act, then why would the world care about our God?

V17-25

Here, Peter reminds the new church that the price for our salvation was not money or even the blood of a lamb or dove, but the blood of God. Our payment for eternity is surrendering this worldly life to Him. The reward is eternal life with Him.

Peter reiterates that command that Jesus so heavily emphasized to the disciples at the last supper: love one another. Jesus is love. Share that love with everyone, everywhere, throughout all time.

Peter closes this chapter by quoting Isaiah 40:6-8. The word of the Lord endures forever. Peter adds to this statement that Jesus is the Word that endures.

Chapter 2

V1-3

Chapter 2 is a direct continuation of the thought behind chapter 1. Chapter 1 is spent validating God's character and His instruction to us. Chapter 2 tells us how to react to these instructions.

The first sentence of this chapter provides a list of the most common evils to avoid. As children of the God of Love, these hurtful and hateful practices are counter-productive to living a Christian life.

What is meant by "evil speaking" in verse 1?

The original Greek word used for this term is more closely translated as "spicy gossip" or even "hurtful gossip."

The Bible is full of comparisons between Christians and newborn babies. Just as infants are experiencing the world for the first time, our relationship with God opens our eyes to a new world. God's instruction through His word is what feeds us as born-again humans.

V4-8

Peter is conveying a message of unity to the early church. As Jews or even pagans, there were often temples to congregate in. This provided a sense of community for like-minded people. The early Christian church was still finding its way in the world and had no place to meet other than homes or rented auditoriums. Peter is offering comfort to the church by saying that our temple is spiritual and built on Christ. We are all living stones that make up the church.

Verse 5 would almost be slanderous to the Jews as the priesthood was considered sacred. Now, with Christ as the Chief Priest, we are all "priests" in that we no longer need an intermediary to talk to God. Jesus has eliminated the need for that separation.

What does the term "spiritual sacrifices" mean in verse 5?

Although Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice, we are to die to ourselves to be made whole to God through Jesus. There is nothing we can offer to a holy God other than ourselves, finally made pure through the blood of Jesus. The whole point of the Old Testament is to show how impossible it is for us as humans to stand before a righteous God. Jesus makes it possible.

With Christ as our foundation and Christians as the building block of the spiritual temple, Peter observes that people will either love the church or hate the church. There is no in-between.

Psalms 118:22, Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, and Daniel 2:44-45 all prophesy of the coming "Stone" of God.

V9-10

Peter once again proclaims the end of the old covenant by declaring that we who choose Jesus are the "chosen people." This title is no longer exclusive to Jews.

Why does Peter use the phrase "royal priesthood" in verse 9?

For the Jews, the priesthood was separated from positions of royalty. These positions became jealously guarded by the bearers of those titles. Jesus is doing away with a culture of petty differences and giving everyone an equal inheritance.

Peter goes on to say that whatever our background, whoever we may be, if we choose Jesus, we are of the same people. This would be jaw-dropping for Jews and relieving for Gentiles. If we are all equal in Jesus, we can all praise Him equally.

V11-12

These two verses are important regardless of context, but at the time of Peter's writing there were countless accusations against the Christians.

- Pagans accused Christians of sacrificing infants and drinking their blood and eating their flesh for communion.
- Rumors were spread that "agape feasts" were wild orgies.
- Christians were thought to be anti-social because they did not participate in the lewd and immoral entertainment of the culture.
- Christians were accused of being atheists because they did not bow down before idols.

Peter is reminding the new church that their behavior separates them from non-believers, but not in the way they were being accused of. It is even more important to adhere to God's instructions while being under the scrutiny of a pagan society. Only their actions would win over such a people.

V13-17

These verses would be very difficult for the early church to adhere to. The Roman government was a fierce empire that demanded loyalty and heavy taxes from its subjects. And the Romans did not care for Christians, while merely tolerating the Jews. Jewish zealots constantly rebelled against their Roman rulers and refused to pay taxes to any government not from God. For Peter to tell the persecuted church to submit to Roman authority would almost be disheartening. But, just as with the pagans, the actions of Christians would speak much louder to those that spoke against the church than words ever could.

V18-20

Here, Peter addresses slaves and indentured servants. Although there were plenty of decent slave-owners, there were those who were harsh and unfair. Being punished for wrongdoing does nothing to honor God, but enduring mistreatment while doing nothing wrong brings favor to God.

V21-25

Peter sums up this hard-to-swallow statement by reminding the early church that Jesus already suffered in this same manner, being innocent and free of sin. Peter isn't telling us to "suck it up" for no reason. Jesus already set the example for all of us by showing patience, endurance, and love.

Chapter 3

V1-6

The previous chapter closes with the command to submit to authority figures, such as your employer, your master, or even the government. This chapter continues that same train of thought starting with the husband-wife relationship.

Why would this command be relevant or even necessary?

The first-century culture adhered to many of the historical traditions, including the treatment of women as second-class citizens. It would be highly uncommon for a wife to hold a different religion than her

husband. Peter and the early church were constantly being asked what a converted wife was to do once she became a Christian. Peter was telling the women to remain faithful and loyal to their husbands. With Christianity, everyone was considered equal in the eyes of the Lord. However, there is still the marriage relationship established as far back as Genesis where the male is the head of the household, and the woman is to submit to that authority. It is even more important for the wives to remain submissive in a relationship where the husband was not a Christian in order for the husbands to see who Christ was through the lives of their wives.

Why does Peter address the jewelry and clothing in verse 3?

Prior to the first century, it was common for jewelry and clothing to identify the religion of the bearer. Many pagan religions had women dressed up in layers of jewelry. However, at the time of Peter's letter, trade routes and commerce were well established, and it was not uncommon for people to wear clothes and jewelry from foreign lands simply because they looked pretty. Peter was reminding the women that jewelry and fine clothing were not forbidden, but the reason for wearing them must be taken into consideration. Peter wanted the beauty of a Christian woman to come from within, not from necklaces, scarves, or rings.

Why does Peter invoke the name of Sarah in this passage?

In Genesis 12:10-12, Sarah obeys Abraham even when he was wrong. Abraham's decision put Sarah in a difficult and even dangerous position. Yet, she submitted anyway. Peter was reminding the newly converted Christian women that they were in good company.

V7

Peter uses 6 verses to address wives, but only one verse to address husbands. Yet the modern commentaries on verse 7 are just as vast as the first 6 verses. Peter packs a lot of ideals in this single line. It is possible that Peter spent more time speaking to the women because he knew that as a man, he needed to be more understanding. He couldn't put himself in their shoes, so he offered Sarah as an example rather than himself. With the men, he could be more blunt and more succinct because he was addressing his peers.

- To dwell with their wives meant that they were not just roommates, but they were to share their lives with each other. This concept would be contrary to many of the practices of the day.
- Peter told the husbands to *understand* their wives. This would move their wives to an equal level and not leave them to be treated as "staff."
- Husbands are to honor their wives, putting them on a pedestal. This would be highly contradictory to the practices in the first century where wives were considered property.
- The Greek word for "weaker vessel" in this context refers to the physical differences between a man and a woman. The husband was tasked with protecting the wife.
- The term "heirs together" reminded the Christian husband that he and his wife are married in this life, but they are family in eternity with Jesus.
- Peter reminds the men that a husband who does not honor his wife in these ways is not living a Christian life and the Spirit may not be in him.

V8-12

Peter sums up the purpose of these passages by reminding them that they are all human. One might call this the “Why can’t we all just get along?” passage.

Verse 8 is translated as “be of one mind” or even “be harmonious.” What Peter is saying is that we as Christians need to be in harmony with Christ’s mind, not our own. This is another example of how we are supposed to give up control of our lives to God.

Peter lists what this harmony should look like:

- Christians should show compassion, especially to each other, but not exclusively.
- Christians should have a family-type of love for one another.
- Christians should be tenderhearted.
- Christians should be courteous, which would be a novelty in some cultures of the day.
- Christians should return evil with kindness. This has been and still is even today one of the hardest concepts for humans to grasp. It is easy to react out of anger. Responding with kindness is difficult.

Adhering to these Christian traits is not only good for our fellow man, but good for us, as well. The reward for doing evil (sin) often provides immediate satisfaction. The reward for doing good often takes time and even work. Being a sinner is easy. Being a Christian is hard. But the rewards for doing good far outweigh the rewards (and consequences) of sin.

Peter quotes Psalm 34:12-16 here to reiterate his point.

V13-16

Peter knows that human nature will be difficult to overcome, so he expands on the topic of returning evil with kindness. There are those that will misinterpret a “good” response and take evil even further. This world is temporary. And it is filled with sin. For a Christian, sin is the bad news, but eternity is the good news. Our conduct here, our display of love here, and even our suffering here all pale in comparison to the blessing of life with Jesus in Heaven. If we can justify our actions before God, then whatever the world can throw at us does not matter.

V17-20

Regardless of your lot in life, some people suffer, and some people don’t. It is better to suffer for doing good than to live a life of sin in comfort. For just as Jesus suffered and rose again in victory, so all Christians have this opportunity to live eternally through Him. We can suffer now and live in Heaven, or we can sin now and suffer for eternity. That is the choice of the human being.

What does Peter mean when he says Jesus preached to the spirits in prison in verse 19?

This is a much studied and much debated topic of discussion. The general consensus is that Jesus spent time in Hell between His death on the cross and His resurrection here on Earth. During that time, Jesus spoke to certain spirits. The Jewish tradition holds that the demons from Genesis 6:1-2 were punished by being imprisoned in Hell. It is believed that these demons may be who Jesus was speaking to which is why Peter goes on to mention Noah and his family. What is not revealed is what Jesus said to them or why He spoke to them. This is one of the great mysteries of the Bible.

V21-22

Peter uses the story of Noah to preach our salvation, using the blood of Jesus as the cleansing water that washes sin away.

It is important to note that the word baptism is used here, but this should not be mistaken as a way of salvation. Peter is referring to the baptizing blood of Christ which saves us, not the act of baptism itself, which is a public declaration of salvation through Jesus. Peter even addresses this specifically when he refers to the difference between a bath and a good conscience. Christ's completed work is what provides that good conscience.

Chapter 4

V1-6

The opening of this chapter may be hard for modern Americans to accept, but to the persecuted church of the Roman Empire, these words would be a reminder that Jesus Christ has suffered in the same way that they were suffering. As Christians, we are not called to a life of comfort. We are called to be like Jesus, even to a painful death.

With verse 3, Peter is telling the church that we not only should think differently and act differently, but that we ARE different. Once we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are guaranteed our place in Heaven. What we do between those two points in time are what separate us from the world and present us with opportunities to show the rest of the world who Jesus is.

Peter goes on to list sins that denote a worldly perspective, not a Godly life.

What does Peter mean when he says that the gospel has been preached to the dead in verses 5 and 6?

It is believed that before the death and resurrection of Jesus that followers of God did not enter Heaven upon death. They entered into "Abraham's Arms" or "Abraham's Bosom." This is a reference to the family of Jews which began with Abraham (which begs the question, "What about the people *before* Abraham, such as Adam and Noah?") The followers of God waited outside of Heaven for the completion of the Old Covenant. It is further believed that Jesus preached to these people after His death and before His resurrection to let them know that it is finished.

V7-11

Peter tells the church to be watchful and serious in their prayers. This is a reminder that this life is fleeting and small. Eternity far outweighs anything that can happen to us here. Our prayer life should reflect that.

With this in mind, we will be spending eternity with all our fellow believers. We should show not only courtesy to one another, but love should be abundant in the Christian community. There should be no jealousy, no grumbling, and no envy found among Christians.

V12-19

This would be a difficult passage to hear. The early Christian church was looking to Peter and the other apostles for comfort in their time of persecution. If anyone would understand the desire to strike back at their oppressors, it would be Peter, the man who drew his sword to protect Jesus at His arrest.

Instead, Peter tells them something else. Peter offered them comfort, but it would not come in this life. The faith of the persecuted Christian brings rewards that are not fathomable here on earth.

Just as the suffering endured for faith brings blessings, the deserved suffering for the consequences of sin brings no blessings. Here, Peter is reminding the church that they are to be different than the rest of the world and not retaliate with hatred or murder for their persecution.

God can use this persecution as a way to teach and grow His children as the Body of Christ. Our behavior as Christians should be such as to open the eyes of the world that is watching in curiosity.

Chapter 5

V1-4

Peter opens this chapter with special instructions to the elders of the church. As elders, they would typically be the recipients of the letters and then read them to the congregation. Peter humbles himself by not claiming any special status as a disciple or head of the church. He is simply an elder and one who has walked with Jesus. He is speaking to the elders of the church as a peer, not a supervisor.

Peter asks the elders to treat their “flock” just as Jesus treated His followers; Love them, nurture them, be an example to them. Peter also subtly reminds these elders in verse 4 that they will answer to Jesus for the way they’ve treated their congregation. The reward will be great for those who shepherd with honesty and love.

V5-7

Here, Peter briefly addresses the younger members of the church. Those that are young are still learning and should humble themselves to be able to learn more. But Peter reminds the elders and the church as a whole that they should teach humility by example. Being an elder does not allow one to stop being humble. We should all be humble in front of the God who humbled Himself to walk among us.

Why does Peter use the phrase “clothed with humility” in verse 5?

The Greek word used here refers to a slave putting on an apron before serving. Peter is colorfully reminding the church to serve rather than seek stature. Peter even quotes Proverbs 3:34 to remind the readers that humility is not a new concept.

Why does Peter remind the church to cast their cares (or “anxiety” in some translations) upon God in verse 7?

For many, dealing with the problems in life is a personal struggle. They feel defeated if they can’t overcome adversity. This can be a difficult way to live, especially for a Christian of the first century church. This can lead to vengefulness, hatred, fear, and various other feelings of inadequacy. Peter is asking the church to humble themselves by praying to God and asking Him to handle their adversities.

V8-11

Why does Peter compare the devil to a roaring lion in verse 8?

Jesus defeated Satan with His resurrection, yet Satan still has a voice. A loud voice. The temptations he presents can be enticing and difficult to overcome. Peter is warning the church that even though Satan can’t harm them, he can still persuade them to turn away from God.

Peter offers the comfort of knowing that we do not suffer alone. We are all tempted. We all have weaknesses. We can all stumble. It is our fellow Christians that should be the encouragement to get back up and continue the journey after a fall.

Peter closes the body of his letter with a prayer. The suffering referenced by Peter in this prayer is our life on this Earth. Whatever hardships we may suffer here will be greatly rewarded in eternity.

V12-14

Peter closes his letter in the typical fashion with greetings and acknowledgement of friends. Silvanus is recognized as the scribe of this letter. Some believe that this is Silas from Paul's letters, but this is not a confirmed fact.

What is meant by Peter in referencing "She who is in Babylon" in verse 13?

It is unclear the intent of Peter using this phrase, but it is most likely a metaphorical reference to the church that resides in Roman-occupied regions. It is possible that Peter was writing this letter from the city of Babylon as there were two cities with that name at the time of this writing, one on the Euphrates River and the other a fortress in Egypt. But as there are no references to Peter visiting either one of these cities, this presents the metaphor as the most likely candidate.

Peter also mentions Mark, the author of the gospel bearing his name. It is believed that Mark used Peter and Matthew as the primary sources for his gospel.

Peter closes his letter with a reminder to openly display affection for one another in a world that often saw bitterness and even hatred.

References

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