

1 Peter

Purpose: “To encourage and testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (1 Peter 5:12).

Outline: 1:1-12 – Praise to God for a living hope

1:13-2:12 – Eager living for God

2:13-3:7 – Total submission

3:8-4:19 – Eager living for God, Even amidst suffering

5:1-14 – Rules for elders and young men

Author: Peter

Date: 60-68 AD

Highlights:

The letter is addressed “To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered...” This General Letter may have had mostly Jews in mind, but seems to indicate a more general audience. This letter must have been written between 60 AD (because of Peter’s familiarity with Paul’s prison letters) and 68 AD (when Peter was crucified upside down in Rome). The letter was written from “Babylon” (cf. 5:13), which is often seen as the “Babylon” of Revelation.

Peter begins, in chapter one, by offering praise to God for the living hope we have through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter encourages his listeners in the midst of the trials they are going through. Peter has been aptly called the “apostle of hope.” The trials may refer to the persecution of Christians occurring in and around Rome. His opening encouragement reminds them of the goal of faith – “the salvation of your souls” (1:9).

In the light of this salvation, Peter encourages us to be holy. We are holy, because the God who called us is holy. This exhortation begins in the latter half of chapter one and the beginning of chapter two.

2:4-12 is an important section for understanding our calling. Verse 9 tells Christians what was told to the Israelites in the Old Testament – that we have been chosen to declare the praise of God. This no longer applies to Jews only, but to Jews and Gentiles who have received salvation through Jesus Christ.

The next section begins in 2:13. Here we have extensive teaching regarding the difficult task of submission in this life. We are, of course, to submit to the will of God and not to the powers of darkness; however, sometimes submitting to God’s will means submitting ourselves to human authorities. If you live a holy life then submitting to human authorities isn’t as much of an issue. Furthermore, if you unjustly suffer as a result of doing good – that is commendable before God, and ultimately (and sometimes almost immediately) brings glory to God. We should follow the example of Christ who suffered for us.

Sometimes the most difficult submission is not to human authorities, but to your spouse. 1 Peter 3:1-7 has been misunderstood as implying that women are inferior. First, it should be said that submission to authority does not imply inferiority in their humanity, but is a role or function necessary for order (“Too many chefs spoil the pot”). Equality is seen in verse 7 where wives are “heirs with you (husbands).”

Notice also the phrase “in the same way (or “likewise”)” in verse 1 and 7. In the same way that we are all to submit to authorities, wives are to submit to their husbands. Being a “good” wife means that submission is rarely an issue. And where suffering may take place, women will be commended before God and bring glory to God by their continued godly behavior. There are many occasions in which husbands have been, are, and will be, “won over” as a result of their wives godliness. Though, no one should marry a man who is an unbeliever hoping that she can convert him after they are married.

In the same way that wives are to submit to husbands, men are to be considerate of their wives. In the areas where their wives may be “weaker” (keeping in mind that there are ways in which they are “weaker” than their wives – if this weren’t the case than Peter wouldn’t have needed to write v.1-6), men need to be respectful and considerate. For example, if your wife doesn’t understand sports or finances or God as well as you (or cannot run as fast as you), than be considerate and respectful. If she is not weaker, then she needs to let her “gentle and quiet spirit” prevail.

The theme of suffering for doing good continues to the end of chapter three, and is developed further in chapter four. The final chapter contains a smorgasbord of important truths for all Christians to keep in mind – especially leaders in the Church.

2 Peter

Purpose: “To teach the Christians how to deal with the false teachers around them” (cf. 2 Peter 2:1).

Outline: 1:1-11 – Call to Fruitful growth in the knowledge of God

1:12-2:22 – Call to remembrance in the face of false teaching

3:1-18 – Call to remembrance in the face of scoffers at the Second Coming

Author: Peter

Date: 60-68 AD, but after the first letter (probably between 65-68 AD)

Highlights:

As with the first letter of Peter, this letter would appear to be written in Rome. The reference to his imminent death in 1:14 suggests a time near the end of his life (67/68 AD). It is also possible that 3:1 refers to the first letter, which would mean that the letter was addressed to the same recipients as in 1 Peter (Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor).

There are some stylistic differences between the two letters, which have resulted in some scholars’ questioning Petrine authorship. In 1 Peter 5:12, Peter refers to writing that letter “with the help of Silas.” This can be translated to understand Silas as the one who actually wrote the words, and may have even affected the style of the letter. 2 Peter does not contain a reference to the help of Silas, so it is possible that Peter wrote this with his own hand, or had another “secretary” help him.

This 2nd letter from Peter also has some similarities with Jude. Compare 2 Peter 2 with Jude 4-18. This probably means one of three things: 1) Jude borrowed from 2 Peter (not likely); 2) 2 Peter borrowed from Jude (scholars consensus); or 3) there was common source that both borrowed from, but unknown to us (least likely).

In the first letter, Peter pastorally focused on the recipients’ struggles from persecution. In this letter Peter desires to help the recipients to deal with false teaching. Peter cuts right to the chase.

After his greeting (1:1-2), Peter goes right into a discussion (1:3-4) about God’s abundant provision and promises – through our knowledge of him. Peter may have been writing this to combat an early form of the heresy, Gnosticism; but it certainly applies to us today – in the face of all kinds of false teachings in the church.

1:5-8 is a wonderful section talking about the steps of fruitful increase in godly attributes. Faith is just the starting point. Look at how many steps you have to go through to get to true godly love. Maybe true Christian love is different than what most people think of it.

1:9-11 contains a warning against forgetfulness, and a final encouragement to fruitful growth in the knowledge of God. 1:12-15 begins the second “Call” that Peter issues. Rather than suffering from forgetfulness, I (Peter) want to help you remember. Peter is obviously expecting to die soon (1:14).

1:16-21 is an important section regarding the authenticity of the apostolic message. Here, Peter notes that the apostolic message was not man-made, but came directly from God. This is not a story, but an eyewitness testimony to Christ’s glory; and it is confirmed by the divinely-given prophetic scriptures.

Chapter Two begins some no holds barred warning regarding false teachers. 2:1-3 introduce the treachery of false teachers, and the way in which they bring shame on the truth (and thus the church).

2:4-9 is a sort of side note, showing that just as God judged the angels who fell, so is God able to judge the wicked while protecting the righteous.

2:10-22 returns to the discussion about false teachers. They can be identified by their arrogance against authority, their sensual indulgence and greed; and their hypocrisy and deception, which especially traps those who were just starting to respond to God’s grace.

The third chapter contains the third “call” of Peter. This begins with a reminder about the words of the prophets and apostles (3:1-2) and continues with a further warning about those who scoff at the notion of a Second Coming and the judgment of God. They will suggest that nothing has changed since the beginning of time, conveniently forgetting about creation and the flood.

Therefore, we must not forget (3:8-9), but acknowledge that the Lord’s delay is a demonstration of his patience and mercy. We should also remember (3:10-14) that God doesn’t see time like we do (cf. Psalm 90:4). The coming destruction of the old heaven and earth serves as an initiation of a new call for holy living. So, let us not distort the Scriptures – like some do. Grow in grace rather than die in error.