

What's the Point....of 1 Peter?

Mark Garner

Drawing upon many years of ministry, not to mention his own unforgettable personal experiences with Jesus, Peter wrote two epistles to pass along some of the most important lessons he had learned. The apostle wrote particularly to those who recently had come to believe in Jesus, but his writings contain many lessons from which all believers can benefit.

General Themes & Background

In this epistle, Peter helps us realize that spiritual blessings and heavenly things are much more valuable than the temporary blessings that we find in this world. We also see the joy and faith of Peter himself, in the ways that he clearly expresses the lessons that God has taught him. He reminds us of the widely scattered nature of the earliest congregations of the church of Jesus Christ, and he primarily intended the letter to be circulated in areas where many believers had only recently come to believe in Jesus. Peter was one of the most widely known of the earliest Christians, and he most likely wrote this epistle in the early 60's AD.

To This We Were Called - Overview Of 1 Peter

Through years of hard experience, Peter has learned how to discipline himself so that God can use him to teach and encourage many others, yet he never lost his innocent enthusiasm about following Jesus. Peter opens by reassuring us that the message of Jesus, and our faith in him, are of greater worth than gold (1:3-12). Then he elaborates on another essential principle, as he reminds us to set our hope fully on God's grace (1:13-25).

Next the apostle describes what it means when we come to Jesus, and how it transforms us. He explains the inward changes and the way it changes our identity (2:1-10). Next, he describes us as aliens in this world, and the implications this has. This section concludes with a reminder of all that Jesus did to make it possible for us to come to God (2:11-25).

The next chapter opens with a discussion of what it means to live in harmony, calling us to live pure, humble lives (3:1-9). Then, Peter explains that living by faith can sometimes involve suffering for the truth. Here Peter echoes some of Jesus' own teachings, and how faith can help us with putting them into practice (3:10-22).

The apostle now calls us to turn away from this world's ways and teachings, and cautions us not to listen to this world's forceful voices and its misguided viewpoints (4:1-6). Then he elaborates what it means to live with an eternal perspective (4:7-11), and then helps us understand that sometimes we are participating in the sufferings of Christ (4:12-19).

The epistle then concludes with an appeal for all of us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand (5:1-7), and then calls us to be self-controlled and alert (5:8-14) as we live in this fallen world. As the apostle discusses all of these topics, throughout we see the same devotion to Jesus we saw in Peter from the beginning. The same positive qualities that we remember Peter showing us in the gospel accounts can still encourage even the oldest believer, and they make both the epistle and its teachings well worth reading.

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Caleb Dillinger

When wondering which book of the New Testament is most vital today for living as a faithful Christian, 1 Peter rises to the top of my list. Peter writes to Christians spread all across the world (the elect exiles, 1:1). As Christians living in a non-Christian world, how are they to hold fast to their faith? How are they to spread their faith? How do they treat each other? 1 Peter addresses those questions.

The letter begins with a reminder about God's power and blessing, as well as the call for Christians to be holy. For Christians to live into this blessing and receive this power, they have the Holy Spirit. But the call is clear: Christian life should look different from the world. Christian life should be pure, godly, and functions as a "born again" life. This language of "born again" (1:23) still strongly permeates Christian culture today.

The second chapter continues with themes of holiness and the role Jesus played as the cornerstone. Christian life is, not surprisingly, built on Jesus. Consequently, the church is called to be holy, a people for God. We act on behalf of the Lord, which Peter ties to earthly power structures. Even in foreign lands, Christians are called to be submissive to the government, "living as servants of God." (2:16) Peter knows this can lead to suffering, but connects the suffering of Christians to the suffering of Jesus. It is not as if God was pampered and asks for his followers to suffer - Jesus himself suffered and died. He is the example, but because he lives, he now is also the great Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

Continuing the theme of submission, Peter addresses slaves to their masters, wives to their husbands, and contrasting with the society of the day, Peter also calls upon the husbands to honor their wives "since they are heirs with you of the grace of life." (3:7)

Peter returns to the theme of suffering and the importance of the sacrifice of Jesus and connects this to baptism, not saying water saves, but through that submissive act, Jesus saves. This suffering leads to a different way of living, a way that is self controlled and submissive to God. Due to all the suffering and persecution, Peter exhorts the elders to keep shepherding the flock (5:1-3). Humility is applicable to all, elders and young, men and women. This humility also helps the Christian join Jesus in suffering for the sake of faith and others.

The point of 1 Peter today, therefore, is to remember the Christian life is not easy, but it is the life to which all people are called. Live holy, humbly, lovingly. This is the call of God.