

Introduction to First Peter

The overarching theme of the epistle is encouragement to Christians who are suffering or are about to suffer persecution, reminding them of the source of their identity as God's people and their responsibilities to live out that identity in spite of their suffering. It may be that Peter wants to encourage the Christian churches that have been set up by Paul in the face of growing persecution in the reign of Nero, the same guy who blamed them for the fires in Rome and subjected them to horrendous barbarisms. Faithfulness in actions as well as unity among themselves are to be the mark of God's people. Even though they may be alienated from earthly social structures, they have been reborn as children of God, and are therefore members of God's household. And though they may suffer for their faithfulness, they can await with confidence God's judgment on unrighteousness.

This is a timely letter for us to study. The letter gives us a sense of the overall theme and intent in Chapter 2: "2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5 like living stones, let yourselves be built[a] into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." It will explicate what it means to be part of a "Holy Priesthood," consistent with the prophetic call from Isaiah. Martin Luther captured this sense in both the Address to the Christian Nobility and the Babylonian Captivity in highlighting what he would famously call the Priesthood of All Believers. It would be fun for this study to pay some attention to what Luther had to say - and the message that is pertinent today for us!

As always, we never know how long our discussions may take. This study will be the first time I've utilized Zoom, and I will do my best to include and present the written materials, etc. Also, I hope it will be way more interactive than me just lecturing... There is so much in First Peter that is drawn from in the rest of scripture; my hope is that you read it and bring those references to the table. So, I have included a general outline and a more specific one. Here goes:

Structure of Letter

Overall Outline:

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. The Identity of the People of God (1:3–2:10)
- III. Characteristics of Living and Conduct of the People of God (2:11–3:12)
- IV. The Attitude of Doing Good: The Promise of Vindication (3:13–4:11)
- V. The Responsibilities of a Church and its Elders in the Midst of Trials (4:12–5:11)
- VI. Concluding Remarks (5:12-14)

Detailed Outline:

I. Salutation (1:1-2)

II. The Identity of the People of God and Characteristics of Living (1:3–2:10)

A. A Precious Salvation (1:3-12)

1. Salvation as Hope (1:3-5)

2. Salvation as Joy (1:6-9)

3. Salvation as Privilege: Witnessed by Prophets and Angels (1:10-12)

B. A New Way of Life (1:13-25)

1. A Life of Holiness (1:13-16)

2. A Life of Reverence (1:17-21)

3. A Life of Love (1:22-25)

C. A Chosen Priesthood (2:1-10)

1. Craving the Word (2:1-3)

2. Coming to Christ in Worship (2:4-5)

3. Biblical Argument (2:6-8)

4. An Identity Affirmed (2:9-10)

IV. The Responsibilities and Conduct of the People of God (2:11–3:12)

A. Summary: The Mission of God's People in the World (2:11-12)

1. Negatively Stated (2:11)

2. Positively Stated (2:12)

B. Respect: The Key to Living in the World (2:13–3:12)

1. Respect for Everyone (2:13-17)

a. Respect for Authorities (2:13-14)

b. Result: Silencing Fools (2:15)

c. Posture: As Free Men (2:16)

d. Summary (2:17)

2. Servants: Submit to your Masters (2:18-25)

a. The Admonition to the Servants (2:18-20)

b. The Example of Christ (2:21-25)

3. Wives and Husbands (3:1-7)

a. Wives: Submit to your Husbands (3:1-6)

1) The Admonition to the Wives (3:1-4)

2) The Example of Sarah (3:5-6)

- b. Husbands: Honor your Wives (3:7)
- 4. Respect for Everyone (Theme Repeated) (3:8-12)
- IV. The Attitude of Doing Good: The Promise of Vindication (3:13–4:11)
 - 1. Suffering for Doing Good (3:13-17)
 - 2. The Vindication of Christ (3:18-22)
 - 3. Living for the Promise (4:1-6)
 - a. The Example of Christ (4:1-2)
 - b. The Former Lifestyle (4:3)
 - c. The Future Judgment (4:4-6)
 - D. Mutual Love: The Key to Christian Community in the End Times (4:7-11)
- V. The Responsibilities of a Church and its Elders in the Midst of Trials (4:12–5:11)
 - A. The Fiery Trial (4:12-19)
 - 1. Suffering and Glory (4:12-14)
 - 2. Suffering as a Christian (4:15-19)
 - B. The Responsibilities of a Church in the Midst of Trials (5:1-11)
 - 1. The Elders (5:1-4)
 - 2. The Rest of the Church (5:5)
 - 3. Humility and Trust in God (5:6-7)
 - 4. Warfare against the Devil (5:8-11)
 - a. Admonition: Facing the Devil (5:8-9)
 - b. Benediction: Trusting God (5:10-11)
- VI. Concluding Remarks (5:12-14)
 - A. Purpose of Epistle (5:12)
 - B. Final Greetings (5:13-14)