

1 Peter 1:1-12

Today we are going to begin our study of the book of 1 Peter. This epistle contains a variety of instructions concerning the life and duties of a Christian – and it is very applicable to our life today. How should Christians respond to the world around them? What is the right way to handle suffering? What are the duties of elders? How should the young conduct themselves? 1 Peter answers all of these questions.

Before we dive into the actual text, though, let's take a moment to investigate the background of this letter. According to 1 Peter 1:1, this book was written by the apostle Peter. Scholars date this book to the early 60s AD – which means it was written a few years before Peter was executed by Nero in 67/68 AD. The letter was written to Christians who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

At the end of the book we are told that it was written from Babylon:

1 Peter 5:13a: “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you;...”

There are a couple theories about this. Some people think that this verse is actually a symbolic reference to Rome, and that Peter was in Rome when he wrote this epistle. However, there are a few problems with this view. The first is that there is no evidence that anyone referred to Rome as Babylon until the book of Revelation was written. Revelation was written in the 90s AD, around 15 years after Peter died. The second problem is that 1 Peter is a very straightforward book. There is no use of symbolic language in chapter 5, or any indication that Peter is trying to be figurative here. If Peter was writing from Rome then he certainly could have said so, but he didn't.

The second possibility is that Peter really did write this letter from Babylon. In the first century Babylon still existed as a small town on the Euphrates river. The apostles traveled far and wide to spread the message of the gospel to as many people as possible. Peter may well have traveled to the city of Babylon in order to start a church there.

This letter is comprised of a series of exhortations. Peter earnestly desired to see Christians pursue a godly, holy life. As we just discussed, the letter is written to other Christians who are scattered throughout the world:

1 Peter 1:1: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,”

The recipients of this letter may be strangers to the world – and even strangers to Peter – but they are not strangers to God. The Lord had saved them and was working in their lives to conform them to the image of Christ:

1 Peter 1:2: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

There is a lot of truth packed into this verse. Let's take some time to delve into the topics that it raises.

The first thing this verse does is refer to Christians as the “elect”. This isn't something that we only find in 1 Peter; this same idea can be found throughout the Scriptures. In the book of Isaiah, Jesus is referred to as “elect”:

Isaiah 42:1: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”

Later on the book of Isaiah, Israel is called the “elect”:

Isaiah 45:4: “For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.”

When the book of Isaiah speaks of a future time when there will be great peace and prosperity, it refers to God's people as the “elect”:

Isaiah 65:22: “They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

When Jesus spoke of the time of great tribulation, when the whole world would experience the terrifying wrath of God, He said that the reason the tribulation would be shortened was for the sake of God's people – the “elect”:

Matthew 24:22: “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

Jesus went on to say that the antichrist would do great miracles that would deceive the whole world – but they would not deceive His chosen people, the elect:

Matthew 24:24: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

In the book of Romans the Bible says that God has justified His people, the elect, and their sins have been forgiven:

Romans 8:33: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.”

I could go on – there are many more references – but I think I have made my point. The concept of election comes up quite a lot in the Bible. It can be found in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Election is something we are very familiar with. After all, we live in a democracy, and we regularly *elect* our leaders. When we cast votes and elect a President we are *choosing* someone. It is an act of choice. When God referred to Israel as His elect, that was simply another way to say that Israel was His chosen people. God repeatedly said throughout the Old Testament that He had chosen Israel to

be a special people:

Deuteronomy 7:6: “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.”

God chose Israel and called them to be a holy people who were dedicated to the Lord – a light to the nations. Sadly, Israel did not live up to their calling, but God did not abandon them. The Lord still loves Israel and He still has a plan to save them. Although Israel has been blinded in this age, they have not been cut off forever. God will never forget His people whom He loves.

God has not chosen just Israel, however. He has also chosen us as well. He has called us to be holy and righteous – a light to the nations. It is a great comfort and blessing to know that we are also God's people. We were once cast off from God, separated from Him, but God has made a way to bring us into His family. He has given us hope and a future, and He has transformed us into new creatures.

As 1 Peter 1:2 states, God is using His Spirit to sanctify us. Sanctification is the process through which God makes us more like His Son, Jesus Christ. When we become Christians, God does not instantly remove all the sin from our lives. He forgives us for our sins and makes us new creatures, but we still face temptations and trials. God wants us to be just like His Son. He wants us to be holy and blameless. He wants us to hate sin and pursue holiness and do what is right.

There are two aspects to this process of sanctification. First of all, God is the one who sanctifies us. 1 Peter tells us that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to transform us. Since God is at work in our lives, it would be tempting to think that it is entirely His job and there is nothing for us to do. Some say “Well, I'll just sit back and relax and let God worry about it. There is no need for me to get involved.” However, this is an error. The Scriptures are full of exhortations of things that we need to be doing. God tells us that we ought to be studying the Word:

2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Notice that God does not say “Don't worry about studying or learning anything. The Holy Spirit will tell you everything you need to know.” Instead God commands us to study His Word so that we will know what it has to say. God expects us to know His word.

God also commands us to fight against the devil and resist him:

James 4:7: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Notice that God does not say “Don't worry about the devil – the Holy Spirit will keep him at bay. You can just relax.” Instead we are told to put on the full armor of God, so that we may withstand the temptations that come our way. We are told to fight back and resist the evil one.

As if all that were not enough, take a look at what Paul told the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 7:1: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

What did Paul command the church to do? To cast off all sin and wickedness and to pursue holiness. Notice that Paul did not say “Don't worry about fighting sin; God will take care of that. Just go about your lives without a care in the world and everything will be fine.” Instead he commanded us to fight the sin in our life. He commanded us to seek the things of God.

Yes, it is true that God's Holy Spirit is working within us to make us more like Christ. Without His Spirit there would be no hope at all. But it is also true that God has commanded us to get up and *work*. God has commanded us to seek Him, to fight the sin in our life, and to pursue the things that are good and right. We are not called to just “go with the flow”; we are commanded to seek the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

But there is still more truth packed into that second verse. Notice the key phrase “unto obedience”. Whole sermons could be preached about those two little words. You see, God did not save us so that we could go back to our sinful lives and do whatever we wanted. God did not give us a “get out of Hell free” card that allows us to sin as we please but not face any consequences. No, God saved us “unto obedience.” God saved us *from* sin. He forgave our sins and commanded us to *stop sinning*. This is something Jesus said throughout His ministry:

John 8:11: “She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

The book of Hebrews contains a dire warning about people who think they can be saved without ever repenting of their sins:

Hebrews 10:26: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,
27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

Sanctification is the process whereby we learn to overcome our sin. God commands all Christians everywhere to stop sinning and obey Him. As you can see, this is *absolutely vital*. There are some people today who believe that if they go to the front of the church and pray a short prayer, they can then do whatever they want for the rest of their lives. They want God to keep them from going to Hell but they completely reject the idea that God has any control over their lives. “Bring me to Heaven when I die”, they say, “but God, don't you dare tell me what to do. I will do as I please and live as I please.” That is *not* the gospel. In order to become a Christian you have to surrender your life to Christ. You have to wholly yield yourself to the Lord. Once you are a Christian, God is in complete control over you. He controls your actions. He controls the way that you think and the way that you view the world. He controls how you live. He controls the choices that you make. He even controls the things that you desire in life. He controls *all* of you, and He demands that you seek to obey Him in all things.

Now, no Christian can obey God perfectly. We still struggle with sin in our life. However, those who reject God and say “I refuse to obey the Lord and I am going to do whatever I want” *are not actually Christians*. The book of 1 John makes this very clear:

1 John 2:3: “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.
4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

We are not saved by our works; we are saved by the grace of God. But *genuine salvation always results in a transformed life*. If you are not seeking holiness but instead have rejected the authority of God and are living as you please, then you are not a Christian. God commands all of His people to obey Him. This is not optional.

There is so much truth in each of the verses of this chapter. One lesson is far too short a time to cover so many verses. In order to make it through the rest of this passage we are going to have to pick up a little speed.

In verse three Peter blesses God and praises Him for the great things that He has done for His chosen people. And what has he done for us? He has given us tremendous hope through the resurrection of Christ:

1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"

When mankind sinned we became separated from God. We were guilty. There was absolutely nothing we could do to obtain forgiveness or pay for debt. All we had to look forward to was the eternal wrath of God, which the Lord would pour out upon all of the wicked – and *everyone* was wicked. There were no righteous people anywhere:

Psalm 53:3: "Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

The best man who ever lived was still wicked in the sight of God. We had no hope at all.

But God changed all that. Now, God did not have to do anything for us. We did not deserve forgiveness; what we deserved was the wrath of God. God would have been perfectly justified if He had chosen to save no one and instead cast us all into Hell. But God didn't do that. Instead He sent His Son Jesus to this world to live a perfect life and then die a painful death on the cross. Since He was a perfect sacrifice, He could suffer on our behalf. Jesus – and Jesus alone – could pay the debt that we owed. Jesus could die in our place and purchase our forgiveness with His own blood.

Because of this staggering act of love and compassion, we no longer face the wrath of God. Instead we have been forgiven. Our debt is paid! We do indeed have a lively hope, because we know what God has promised us. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead (showing that death had been defeated), so one day we will be raised from the dead as well. We are no longer facing the wrath of God. Instead we eagerly look forward to the great things God has promised to us:

1 Peter 1:4: "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,"

The riches of this life are subject to all manner of misfortunes. They can be lost or stolen. They are here one day and gone the next. They are not reliable; they do not last. But the things God has given to us are very different. In Heaven God has reserved for us an incorruptible inheritance. It is an inheritance that will never fade away and which will never be stolen from us. No matter what may happen in this life we cannot lose it, for it is kept by the power of God Himself:

1 Peter 1:5: “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

The reason Christians cannot lose their salvation is because our salvation is kept by the power of God. Who can possibly overcome God? Who can take any of us out of His hand? The answer is *no one*. God is the one who is keeping us safe, and if God is for us then who can be against us? God is never going to abandon us, or forget us, or cast us aside.

Now, it may seem to us that there are those who were once saved but who cast off their salvation and left God. But the Bible tells us that this is just an illusion. Those people who have walked away from God were never actually saved in the first place:

1 John 2:19: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

There are a number of people in this world who *seem* to be Christians, but in reality they are not Christians at all. They are just putting on an act. They are fooling the people around them (and quite possibly themselves as well). It is the difference between fool's gold and real gold. Both of them may look quite convincing, but only one of them will pass the test.

This is why the Lord tries our faith and puts us through tests: in order to reveal if our faith is real or if it is a forgery. The disciple Judas looked very much like a real disciple for a number of years, but in the end he was shown to be a liar and a deceiver. God knew all along, and in due time God revealed Judas for who he really was. Judas was *not* a godly man who lost his salvation. At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry the Lord was quite clear that Judas was evil all along:

John 6:70: “Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

Judas was *always* evil. He just hid it from everyone else for a time.

This is why the trials of our faith are so important. In fact, Peter tells us that they are actually a cause for rejoicing:

1 Peter 1:6: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”

The trial of our faith is what proves that our faith is real. It shows that we are a saint of God and not a traitor like Judas. When the difficult times come and when life becomes unbearably painful, that is when we discover what sort of people we really are. If we curse God and abandon Him then we show that our faith wasn't genuine – it was just a worthless house of cards. However, if we seek God in our hour of great trial and trust Him regardless of our circumstances, we show that our faith truly is genuine. God knew all along what sort of faith we had – but the trials reveal to *us* what sort of people we are.

Our faith truly is much more precious than gold. Gold cannot purchase forgiveness for your

sins. Gold cannot save you from the wrath of God. Gold cannot purchase everlasting life. Gold cannot buy you a ticket to Heaven. Only faith – genuine faith – can do those things. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith it is impossible to be saved. Without faith there can be no forgiveness. Your faith is more valuable than all of your possessions. It is more valuable than your home, your job, your bank account, and even your very life. It is priceless – and it *must* be tested. It must be tried with fire. It must go through times of pain order to reveal its true character.

In Matthew 13 Jesus told the parable of the wheat and the tares. The wheat was valuable and needed to be saved, but the tares were worthless and only good for being burned. However, when the plants were young it was difficult to tell which was the wheat and which was the tares. The master of the field decided to wait and allow both the wheat and the tares to grow. As time went on and both of them matured, it became obvious which was good and which was bad. Time revealed their true nature. No wheat turned into a tare – there was no danger of that. Instead, the truth would be made known.

But these trials will not last forever. We are in pain and great heaviness for a time, but that time has a limit. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns for us our time of pain and trial will forever come to an end. On that day our faith will be a cause of praise, honor, and glory. Since we know that this day is coming, we can look forward to His return with eagerness and great joy:

1 Peter 1:8: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:
9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

We have never seen Christ – but we love Him. We have never walked with Him, as the disciples once did, but we still serve Him and have dedicated our lives and our very being to Him. Even though we were not eyewitnesses to the crucifixion and resurrection, we still believe in who He is and what we did. Since we believe we rejoice with great joy. We have so much to rejoice about! Our sins have been forgiven. Death has been conquered. We will one day live in a world without pain, without suffering, without disease, without evil and sin:

Revelation 21:3: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.
4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

God has given us salvation. We will not face the wrath of God; instead we will be given endless joy and peace. We have a great deal to look forward to! Even when the trials of our life are great and there are problems on every side, we still have much to rejoice about. We must never lose sight of that.

This plan of salvation is not something new. The Old Testament spoke about it time and time again. God told the world what He was going to do before He did it:

1 Peter 1:10: “Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who propheesied of the grace that should come unto you:”

This is a reflection of God's great love and care for us. He did not want us to fall into despair, thinking that there would never be any salvation and that all hope was lost. He told the world that a

Messiah was coming. He told His people that there was reason to hope, for God had taken pity on mankind. Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem the Lord revealed what was going to take place. God does not want His people to be in the dark. He does not want them to be lost and in despair. He wants us to know what He is doing:

Amos 3:7: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”

Jesus expanded upon this very topic to His disciples:

John 15:15: “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

If God wished He could have chosen to keep mankind completely in the dark. He could have kept His plans and purposes hidden – but He didn't. Instead He told us what He was going to do. He revealed His amazing plan to us. Why? Because God loves us. Notice how Jesus called us friends – friends of God. Servants are not brought into their master's confidence; they are not told his plans. God could have made us servants, but instead He chose to call us friends.

The prophets of old had a great deal to say about the coming of the Messiah:

1 Peter 1:11: “Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

There simply isn't time to go into the many prophecies of the Old Testament that spoke of Christ. The prophets foretold that Jesus would be a descendent of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the line of David. They said He would be both God and man, born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem. They said He would be a prophet, a priest, and a king. They said He would be rejected, sold for 30 pieces of silver, tried and condemned, suffer terrible things, and die a violent death. They said He would be buried in a rich man's tomb and would be resurrected. God gave His people an amazing picture of the person, work, and life of the Messiah hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem! God told us the end from the beginning.

What had once been prophecy was now reality:

1 Peter 1:12: “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

The people of Peter's day had heard the gospel from eyewitnesses of Christ. People of that era had actually seen the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled. They were given firsthand accounts of what happened. The Messiah was no longer a prophecy; He truly had come and given His life for His people, and His disciples had seen Him after His resurrection. This is how Peter put it in his second epistle:

2 Peter 1:16: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made

known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

In the Scriptures we have a firsthand, eyewitness account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. These letters were not written centuries later by people who were not involved. This letter that we are studying today was written by Peter himself. It was written by someone who knew Christ, who walked with Him, who talked with Him, and who saw Him after His resurrection. It was written by someone *who was actually there*. The gospel is not a clever fable or myth; it is the power of God to salvation for all who believe.

There is one last thing in verse 12. Peter tells us that the gospel is something that “the angels desire to look into”. That’s a rather odd thing to say, isn’t it? But it makes sense if you think about it. You see, mankind is not the only race that fell into sin. The Bible tells us that the race of angels fell as well. A third of the angels rebelled against God and tried to overthrow Him. Those angels – which included the devil – left their holy estate and became demons. After the fall there were two groups of angels: there was one group that was holy and served the Lord, and another group that was wicked and hated God.

As we know, God put together a plan of salvation for mankind. He sent His Son to become a man and die in our place. However, God did *not* put together a plan of salvation for angels. The sacrifice of Christ was able to save men because Jesus became a man and died in the place of men. However, it is *not* able to save fallen angels. Jesus did not become an angel and die in the place of angels. There is no sacrifice that can save fallen angels. There is no way for them to be saved.

This means that God did something for mankind that He did not do for angels. What God did for us is unique. He gave us a special gift – and it is one that has grabbed the attention of the angels. Is it really so surprising that they would be interested in the great things that the Lord has done for us?