

Study of I Peter
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I. Introduction/Background

- A. Peter was the first among equals with the Apostles, as we saw during our study of the gospel of John. He could fairly be said to be Jesus' best friend on earth, the one Jesus groomed to be the leader among his disciples. He was the first to declare that Jesus was the Messiah (Mark 8:29); he was the first to be rebuked when Jesus told the disciples he would die and rise again on the third day, and Peter disagreed with Jesus, bringing Jesus' rebuke (Mark 8:31-33); he was the first to declare during the last supper he would willingly die with Jesus (Mark 14:31), although he would later deny Jesus that very night; he was the first to speak on the day of Pentecost explaining the marvelous events that were unfolding before them (Acts 2:14-36). His leadership among the early church was so acknowledged that our Roman Catholic brethren consider Peter to be the first Pope.
- B. The Peter we met in the gospels was headstrong and, at times, rash. Only Peter pulled a knife and physically tried to defend Jesus when he was arrested at the Garden of Gethsemane. Only Peter suggested they build booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. Only Peter got out of the boat to walk on the water to Jesus.
- C. But the Peter we meet in this letter is an old man. He is no longer rash or unpredictable; he has mellowed, although not in his passion for his Lord. This letter is written sometime in the early to mid-AD-60s, just several years before he was crucified by the Roman government. He has spent the last 30-35 years serving his Lord and helping build the church from a small group of disciples in Judea and Galilee to a multicultural church throughout the entire Roman Empire and beyond which included Jews and Gentiles from all corners of the known world. He has seen remarkable things and has had the power of the Holy Spirit flow through him with healings and signs on a scale that was unprecedented. But his long years of service to God have not made him prideful, but rather humble, with a faith that is now unshakeable, as he reminds his readers to be humble, remembering the grace of God to them through Jesus Christ.
- D. Peter is writing this letter from Rome to "the exiles of the Dispersion" in various areas of the Roman Empire. They are exiles because the Romans had kicked all the Christians out of Rome. Peter was exempted only because he was in jail. Scholars have noted that the Greek in which this letter was written is more polished than Peter could have written, but that is explained in chapter 5. He dictated the letter to Silvanus, a fellow believer working with Peter who wrote with a more polished vocabulary. Peter is writing because Christians are going through serious persecution throughout the empire as we discussed during our study of Hebrews and James. It was a tough time for the Christians and like the authors of Hebrews and James, Peter urges the readers to be faithful, and mindful of the joy and glory that is to come.

II. I Peter 1:1-2 Salutation/Greeting

- A. Peter identifies himself as the author of the letter, and there is no record from the early church of anyone contesting that it was Peter who wrote it. The letter is written specifically

to the exiles in certain specific areas of the Roman Empire, although the letter is a general letter applicable to all the churches; in fact, it was distributed widely. All of the Christians in the early churches would have been most anxious to hear what Peter had to say.

- B. In verse two he reminds them (and us) that as Christians they have been chosen, just as Israel was chosen, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ. What is remarkable about this is that Peter is taking words and concepts like “chosen” and “sanctified” that had in the past been applicable only to Jews and applying them to the Gentiles to whom this letter is written (there would be Jewish readers also, but primarily Gentiles). From the beginning he is telling them they have inherited all the promises that formerly were only for Jews but are now applicable to all for whom Jesus died. And all of this was done with the foreknowledge of God. There was a plan from the beginning.
- C. Peter is also reminding them they have been sanctified to be obedient to Jesus. This idea is similar to that of the original covenant between Israel and God whereby the Israelites promised to be obedient to God and to his laws, and God would be their God. He would protect them and cause them to prosper in all ways. Their obedience, though, was an essential and necessary part of the covenant. When it was made, Moses offered a sacrifice and took half the blood of the lamb and sprinkled it on the alter and half of the blood was sprinkled on the people to remind them of their promise of obedience. Here, Peter is reminding them they have been made holy and forgiven by Jesus’ sacrifice. He reminds them they have been sprinkled with Jesus’ blood into a relationship in which they must be obedient to him. Remember, at the last supper Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” To those who have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus and promised to be obedient and faithful, he prays grace and peace over them in abundance.

III. I Peter 1:3-12 A Living Hope

- A. Verses 3-5 present a summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a few words, Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord, whose father and God is the same God the Jews have worshiped for centuries. Because of the Father’s great mercy, he says, we have been born again into a new life. Our bodies are not new, but our spirit is. We become so reoriented in our thinking, in our priorities, and in our hope for the future, that it can only be described as a new life for us, not just a reorientation of the old life. And what is this hope? It is the certainty of continued life lived in loving relationship with our creator that doesn’t end when our bodies wear out, but continues forever, brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as he arose from physical death with a resurrection body, so will we who put our trust in him.
- B. With this new birth, we acquire an inheritance—eternal life lived in relationship with God and in the presence of our Lord, who promised in the gospel of John that he would go to prepare a place for us. Peter describes this inheritance as imperishable, undefiled, and unfading—in short, perfect. It is awaiting us in heaven. Given what Peter’s readers were going through at the time, this reminder should refresh their souls and rekindle their resolve to be faithful through difficult times.
- C. In verse 5, Peter says they are being protected by the power of God through their faith for this inheritance, which he refers to as their salvation, which will come at the last day. The

last day is a phrase they were familiar with—a time of terror and judgment for those who do not believe but a time of salvation and deliverance for those who do believe. What does Peter mean when he says we are being protected by God until the last day? It is not that God saves us from the troubles, sorrows, and problems of this life, but that he enables us to encounter them, bear them, conquer them, and march on toward our inheritance. As Jesus said, “I will neither leave you nor forsake you.”

- D. We all face difficulties in life. There are times when we wonder whether we have the strength or resolve to go on. Undoubtedly, some of Peter’s readers were feeling that way, and Peter is reminding them of the hope that was in them, the same hope that is in us. Peter is telling us we know how the story ends if we will just persevere. Indeed, in verses 6 and 7, he reminds them to rejoice despite going through various trials at the present time, and he reminds them they can withstand whatever life brings them because of what lies beyond the trial—their inheritance. He is also subtly reminding them, as James did, that every trial is a test of their faith, which will become stronger as they overcome the trials they face.
- E. In verses 8 and 9, without explicitly saying so, Peter draws a contrast between his readers and himself and pays them a compliment. Peter had known Jesus personally. He walked and talked with Jesus; he ate with him; he traveled with him; he was there when Jesus was arrested and Peter followed him to Annas’ house, then Caiaphas’ house where Jesus was questioned, and where Peter denied him; he met the risen Lord who commissioned Peter to “tend his sheep.” His readers had done none of these things. Yet, Peter says, “You love him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.” They—and we—are doing so because they have received life—the salvation of their souls. Remember, at the last supper, Jesus prayed not only for his disciples, but also for those “who will believe in me through their word.” His readers have believed through their word, and Peter is commending them for their faith.
- F. In verses 10-12 Peter is telling them what a great and glorious time they were living in, and how privileged they were, despite the unpleasant circumstances they were facing. The prophets of old had prophesied of the great grace that was now theirs. The prophets had searched the scriptures and had discovered the sufferings which the Messiah must endure. Peter may have had in mind Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which describe in detail what Jesus later suffered. And the prophets realized the Messiah’s glory was foretold in scriptures such as Psalms 2, 16, and 110. The prophets searched the scriptures to see what the eventual coming of the Messiah would be like, even while realizing they would not experience his coming themselves—only a later generation would. Peter is telling his readers: You are that generation. You are seeing things that even angels longed to see. The implicit message is: recognize the historic times in which you are now living and be grateful to God for the great grace that has been given to you.

IV. I Peter 1:13-25 A Call to Holy Living

- A. Having reminded his readers of how blessed they are to be present in the time all of scripture had pointed to, Peter tells them to live lives worthy of the great grace they have been given. Focus on Christ; discipline yourselves; don’t live the kind of life you did before you came to faith in Christ; be holy just as God is holy.

- B. He reminds them they rely upon God who is the impartial judge of all mankind. Therefore, they must live in reverent fear during their lifetimes. There is such a thing as holy fear—a holy awe and deep reverence—as Proverbs repeatedly reminds us, and Peter is saying we must live out our lives in a state of holy awe and reverence for what God has done for us. He reminds them we Christians have been ransomed. The dictionary definition of a ransom is “a consideration paid or demanded for the release of someone or something from captivity.” Here, Peter says they were ransomed not only from the shackles of sin which held them captive, but also from the futile ways of the past, into a life of freedom in which God’s very spirit—the Holy Spirit—dwells within them. The consideration paid for this freedom is not an unblemished lamb, as in the past, but rather the very blood of Christ. Further, this ransom price was determined and destined before the world was created, although only recently revealed, of which they—and we—were beneficiaries. After Jesus paid the ransom price for us, God raised him from the dead and glorified him, therefore their faith and hope in God is focused on Jesus.
- C. Perhaps because of our familiarity with these concepts, we often don’t appreciate how stupendous and earth-shattering these events were. Stop and focus on them for a moment. With the coming of Jesus, the entire relationship changed between mankind and our creator. As Peter will say in the next chapter, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Truly, this is good news, the best news, and that is what “gospel” means—good news.
- D. In verses 22-25, Peter reminds his readers that their souls have been purified by their accepting and being obedient to the truth—which is another way of saying they have been born again into a new life. This new life is characterized by genuine love for one another as Christians share the life of Christ. The seed that brings us into this new life is the living and written word of God, and Peter quotes from Isaiah, chapter 40, to make the point the word of God will endure forever even as the grass withers and the flower fades.

V. I Peter 2:1-10 The Living Stone and A Chosen People

- A. In the last few verses of chapter 1, Peter reminded them they have purified their souls through obedience to the word of God—the truth—and they have been born again. In the opening verses of this chapter Peter tells them they must therefore live differently than they did previously. They must throw off all malice, guile, envy, and slander. They are to be as innocent as babes, longing for the word of God just as a newborn yearns for the mother’s milk. And by doing so, Peter tells them they will grow into salvation. He is not telling them they will *earn* their salvation; he is telling them they will grow spiritually into a mature Christian who has entered into a new life in harmony with God rather than estranged from him.
- B. In verses 4-6, Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 to say that Jesus is the cornerstone of the new covenant—the new relationship with God of which they are beneficiaries. This new relationship was established by Jesus, who was rejected by the Jews. But he was precious in God’s sight and became the living stone which is the foundation for the spiritual house of which they are now a part.

- C. Peter also says they are a holy priesthood. This refers to the New Testament belief that we Christians are a priesthood of all believers. Why so? In the Old Testament, the role of the priest was twofold: to go to God on behalf of the people, and to offer sacrifices, which were animal sacrifices. Under the new covenant, we have the right and privilege to go directly to God ourselves. We do not need a priest to petition God on our behalf (although as Hebrews taught us, Jesus is our high priest who continually goes to the Father on our behalf). For example, in the Lord’s Prayer, we go directly to “Our Father.” Second, we now offer sacrifices ourselves instead of their being offered for us, but instead of animal sacrifices, we offer our worship as a sacrifice to the Father. Thus, we lay people now perform the *functions* of a priest and that is why we are a priesthood of all believers. We still have our priests, thankfully, but their function is different from those in the Old Testament.
- D. In verses 6-8, Peter quotes Isaiah 28 to point out the prophets foretold the role Jesus would play—he would be the cornerstone of the new covenant. But he also quotes Psalm 118 and Isaiah 8 which say that the cornerstone—Jesus—has been rejected, which is another way of saying the Messiah has come and has been rejected by those who have refused to believe him. This includes not only the Jews who rejected Jesus, but all who have since rejected him. To them, Peter says, he is a stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble and fall because they have refused to believe the word of God and have rejected Jesus who has given them the word of God. You may recall from our study of the gospel of John that Jesus made this same statement.
- E. Verses 9 and 10 are simply some of the most inspiring and glorious words in scripture. Peter says we are a “chosen race.” But Christians are a race based not on skin pigment or a common ancestry, but rather upon having a common savior who has by his death and resurrection redeemed us by his own blood sacrifice. Moreover, we are not just a chosen race, we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people. As such, we are commissioned to proclaim what Christ has done for us. He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, and that is what we must proclaim. He reminds them—and us—that formerly they were not a people, but now they are a people (referring to being a people united in their allegiance to Christ); once they had not received mercy, but now they have received mercy.

VI. I Peter 2:11-17 Live as Servants of God

- A. In verses 11 and 12, Peter urges them to abstain from “the desires of the flesh.” Today, that phrase usually refers only to sexual sins, but the phrase, as used by Peter and others in the New Testament, was intended to be much broader. Just as James warned against following one’s “cravings” (meaning one’s selfish desires of any kind), Peter is saying we must not follow our self-centered desires. Also, in Galatians chapter 5 Paul includes a definition of “the sins of the flesh” to include all types of selfish desires. Peter warns that following our selfish desires will lead to war within our souls as our selfish desires conflict with God’s desires for us.
- B. Peter also refers to his readers as “aliens and exiles.” Although the Christians have been exiled from Rome and are scattered abroad, that is not exactly what he is referring to here. Peter is referring to the fact that for the Christian this world is not our true home. Our true home is with Jesus, who promised that he was going to prepare a home for us. Therefore,

we are strangers and aliens in this life, looking forward to a better world, even though we live in this one at present.

- C. While we are aliens in this world, however, Peter says we should conduct ourselves honorably among the Gentiles so as to give them no grounds for maligning Christians. In fact, the Gentiles *were* maligning the Christians at the time Peter wrote. Because of the wording of the Lord's supper ("this is my body; this is my blood") Christians were accused of cannibalism. Also, the dinners they had in connection with the Lord's supper were referred to as "love feasts." The Gentiles twisted those words to accuse Christians of incest and immorality. Finally, since Christianity was initially viewed by most of the world as just another sect of Judaism, all of the accusations against Jews were also made against the Christians. Such accusations may seem too ridiculous to us today to believe anyone could take them seriously. But stop and think about some of the accusations being made in the political world today. We match the Gentiles of that time accusation for accusation. What Peter is saying is we should conduct ourselves so honorably that our lives will eventually overcome the false accusations against Christians and bring the unbelievers to Christ.
- D. In verses 13-17, Peter admonishes them "for the Lord's sake" to be good citizens of the country in which they lived. For his readers, that meant submitting themselves to Roman rule. He says they must honor the emperor and the governors the emperor appoints. This follows Jesus' teaching that we should render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. Keep in mind that the only obligation of the citizen in those days (other than paying taxes) was to be obedient. They had no say in the government. We, however, live in a democracy. As such, we have the opportunity to actually participate in our government, at the very least by voting. For us, we should take our obligation to vote as part of rendering unto Caesar as Jesus instructed us to do. Some Christians do not see voting as part of their duty as Christians, but I believe Peter would say it is. In any event, Peter is presenting the existing government as appointed by God to maintain order, even if some of the things the Roman government did were questionable. We should obey the civil government, unless there is a matter of principle, such as with emperor worship, but in a democracy we can still work toward and vote for new people in government.
- E. Peter is also saying that the foolish charges being made against the Christians will best be silenced by living an upright life, and by submitting themselves to the civil authorities. Since they have been set free from sin, they can live as free people, but they should never use their freedom as a pretext for evil. (It is amazing how contemporary some of the issues addressed in scripture are; the same issue of abusing one's freedom exists today and has arisen throughout human history.)
- F. In verse 17, Peter provides a summary of what the Christian's guidelines for living should be. Honor (respect) everyone; love the brothers and sisters in Christ; Fear (have deep reverence and awe for) God; Honor the emperor (the civil authorities).

VII. I Peter 2:18-25 The example of Christ's suffering

- A. These verses are difficult. Today, when we see any reference to slavery we expect to see immediate condemnation of it, usually with vivid examples of how inhumane it was. Yet,

Peter does not condemn slavery; nor does any other New Testament writer. Indeed, the lack of condemnation of slavery in the Bible was often cited as justification for the institution of slavery while it was legal. Today the church openly condemns slavery, so why did Peter and the other New Testament writers not condemn it in the scriptures? We should first remember that Christianity was spreading throughout the Roman Empire during the early days of the church, but Christians remained a tiny minority of people residing in the Roman Empire, and most of the new Christians were slaves. There were as many as 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. The slaves did virtually all of the work, including the work of doctors, lawyers, accountants, business people, and teachers. The entire economic system was based upon slave labor. Given this situation, had the leaders of the church directly attacked the slave labor situation they would have been promptly arrested and probably tried as insurrectionists. The time was not yet ripe for the church to pursue the abolition of slavery.

- B. Although the church did not attack slavery directly, it laid the groundwork for an end to slavery. Slaves then, as later in America, were considered property, really not much different than domestic animals, and they had no legal rights whatsoever. In the church, however, slaves were considered the equal of free men and women. Indeed, many of the leaders of the church were slaves, including some of the pastors and bishops. It was possible for a slave to be the head of a local church and his or her master to be merely a member—a revolutionary situation. As you can imagine, this new recognition of the dignity of the slave could lead to very awkward situations between the master and slave and could lead some slaves to no longer be willing to submit to the master, and a sensitive master could be uncertain how to treat his servants. So, although within the church the groundwork was being laid for the recognition of the dignity of all men and women, the time was not yet ripe for the church to pursue the abolition of slavery. Just as Jesus did not come to bring salvation to the whole world until the time was ripe, the time for the abolition of slavery had not yet come.
- C. However, what the church did do, was model and teach that all people should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their status of slave or free. A good example is Paul's letter to Philemon found in the New Testament. That short letter was written by Paul to Philemon, a fellow Christian, on behalf of Philemon's slave, Onesimus, who had run away from Philemon but then became a Christian and decided he should go back to Philemon. Paul writes to Philemon to say he should willingly take back Onesimus as his slave but treat him as a beloved brother in Christ. That did not happen outside the church.
- D. This change of viewpoint to consider all people worthy of dignity and respect, regardless of race, nationality, or culture was unprecedented in human history. It was this teaching of the church that eventually led to the proclamation in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. . ."
- E. What Peter is saying in these verses is that Christian slaves should continue to be subject to their masters, even if the master is not kind and generous. He tells them that just as Jesus willingly suffered, they must be willing to suffer under harsh masters and do their duty willingly just as Christ did his duty willingly and suffered for it. It is a tough love message but one that was necessary for the times. Thank God we live in the times we do.

- F. In the final verses of this chapter, Peter reminds them Jesus bore our sins on the cross, enabling us to live righteously. We were like sheep gone astray, but Jesus brought us back to himself, who is the shepherd and guardian of our souls.

Viii. I Peter 3:1-6 Wives

- A. In the previous chapter, Peter admonished his readers—both Jew and Gentile—to accept human authority and submit to it, which meant submitting to the Roman government, from the emperor to his local authorities. He also advised slaves to submit to their masters, whether the master was fair and kind or whether the master caused them to suffer unjustly. He held up Jesus’ unjust suffering before the Jewish Sanhedrin Court and before Pontius Pilate, leading to his crucifixion, as the example for them to follow. In the first few verses of this chapter, he gives similar advice to wives. To modern ears this advice might be hard to swallow, but we must understand the status of women into which Peter spoke.
- B. In both Jewish society and Gentile society, women had almost no rights at all. In Jewish law, a woman was owned by her husband just as he might own a slave; she had no independent property or rights. She could not leave her husband, although the husband could leave the wife simply by giving her a certificate of divorce and returning the dowry. Similarly, in Greek and Roman society the wife was totally subject to her husband with no legal rights, and she could be dismissed at any time. Compare this status of women with what happened in the church. Within the church, women were to be treated in most ways as equal to men. As Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” So, that is the way things were (or were supposed to be) in the church, but that was not at all the way things were outside the church.
- C. If a man became a Christian, it was understood and accepted that he would take his wife with him into the church, and she would be expected to become a Christian. But what happened if the wife first became a Christian and the husband was not. How was the wife to behave? Note what Peter does *not* advise. He does not advise the wife to leave her husband (neither did Paul—see 1 Cor. 7:13-16). Instead, he instructs wives to be submissive to their husbands, living such a pure and holy life that the husband may be won over by the wife’s conduct. As with the slaves, this would put the wife into a difficult situation at times, but the wife was expected to be submissive to the husband’s authority nevertheless.
- D. In verses 3-6, Peter gives wives practical advice about how to be submissive and godly in respect to their husbands. Women lived very restricted lives at the time. They had almost no role in public life; they usually were not educated so their range of interests would be narrow. They were confined to domestic duties. In wealthier families who had servants or slaves, they may not even have had domestic duties. Accordingly, women tended to be excessively preoccupied with personal adornment with fancy and expensive clothes and jewelry (at least for those who could afford them). Peter is advising Christian wives to accept the idea that their adornment was to be the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which he says is precious in God’s sight. He is not saying outward beauty is of no consequence, but the Christian wife should focus on becoming a godly woman rather than one focused on fancy clothes and jewelry. He says this is the example given by the holy

women in scripture—think Old Testament—with Sarah (the wife of Abraham) setting the prime example, which the wives should follow. This seems to be practical advice that wives should follow, but it would not have been easy. These Christian wives were mostly living in a heathen culture where the women all around them were focusing on outward beauty, fancy clothes and expensive jewelry. Imagine the difficulty for a Christian wife trying to maintain a marriage with an unbelieving husband who probably believed his wife should be as focused on outward beauty as the heathen women were. Yet Peter urges such wives to win their husbands to the Lord by their humble behavior and gentle demeanor.

IX. 1 Peter 3:7 Husbands

- A. Husbands do not get a free ride in this new relationship. Although wives were subject to their husbands under both Jewish and Roman law, Peter says husbands must treat their wives with respect, considering the wife's situation. In effect, he is saying although wives have no rights and must be subject to their husbands under the civil law, you are to treat them as a fellow heir of salvation and give them a special place of honor as the weaker sex. This reference to being the weaker sex has reference to women's limited role in society which has given rise to the need for the husband to treat them more generously than the law required. Also, since women were to have an equal status in the church, Christian husbands were expected to treat their wives as their equal before God. If the husband failed to do so, Peter warned that it would hinder their prayers. Therefore, any husband interested in honoring God must also honor his wife and treat her with respect.

X. 1 Peter 3:8-12 Characteristics of the Christian Life

- A. Having addressed how the exiles, the slaves, the husbands and the wives should live, Peter addresses what kind of living is expected of a Christian. What he has to say here briefly summarizes Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.
- a. First, he says Christians must be in unity, which echoes Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper. The unity Christians are to have is unity in the belief in and submission to Jesus Christ. When we focus on that and not other issues that may arise, the church will prosper. All of the Apostles emphasized unity in their letters.
 - b. Second, we must have sympathy or mercy. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." If there is any characteristic Christians should show to the world it is mercy or compassion. We are in fellowship with God as Christians solely because God had mercy on us, not because we are worthy of it. Likewise, we must learn to put ourselves in the other person's shoes in order to show compassion as Jesus commanded.
 - c. Third, we must show brotherly love. We must remind ourselves regularly that Jesus gave us a new commandment—that we must love one another. In fact, Jesus said showing brotherly love is how the world will know we are his disciples.
 - d. Fourth, we must have a tender heart towards others, not an unfeeling one. The lack of a tender heart results in one being selfish concerned only for one's self.

- e. Fifth, we must be humble. When we consider who God is and what he has done in creation and in our redemption, we realize we have good reason to be humble. Second, when we consider that all Christians are merely sinners saved by the grace of God, we realize we have no grounds to think we are superior to anyone else. We are all equal opportunity sinners.
 - f. We are not to retaliate and repay evil for evil, or abuse for abuse. Rather we are to repay with a blessing, which will result in our receiving a blessing. Jesus said we must bless those who spitefully use us or seek to harm us, even our enemies.
- B. To sum up what he has just said, Peter quotes Psalm 34 which conveys the same thoughts and says the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous; he will hear their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

XI. I Peter 3:13-22 Suffering for Doing Right

- A. Remember that this letter is being written by Peter to Christians who are suffering from persecution, primarily although not exclusively from the Roman government. In these verses Peter picks up a theme that was prominent in our study of James. Many of them have been caused to suffer not because of something wrong they did, but rather because they were being obedient to God. Just as James told his readers a blessing would come from suffering unjustly, Peter is sending the same message. Although normally you will not be harmed for doing good, sometimes it will happen. Rather than complaining of the unjustness of suffering for doing right, Peter says you will be blessed. He also says they should not be fearful or intimidated. It is better to suffer from doing good, than to suffer (justly) for doing evil. He points out that Jesus suffered because he was obedient to God, not because of any evil he had done. And it was Jesus' suffering that brought Peter's readers to God.
- B. There is another piece of advice Peter gives us, especially those who might be called to suffer for the cause of Christ. Peter says in verse 15, "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." Here, it's clear that Peter is speaking of making that defense in a situation where the Christian may be subject to punishment or at least criticism for their actions or testimony. However, it is good and appropriate advice for the Christian in any situation. How would you respond if someone asks you, "Why are you a Christian?" Or "What makes you think you will go to heaven, and some other people might not?" This is an opportunity for us to spread the gospel, and we should be ready to explain our hope in Christ Jesus.
- C. In verse 18, Peter summarizes the gospel of Jesus Christ. "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous (himself) for the unrighteous (all of mankind) in order to bring you to God." This idea must be a part of anyone's explanation as to why he or she is a Christian.
- D. He wraps up by saying Jesus is now in heaven, at the right hand of God, with all authority having been given to him by the Father.

XII. I Peter 4:1-6 Obligations of the Christian

- A. In the previous chapter Peter gave advice to his readers who were undergoing difficult times, including persecution and other suffering. In these verses he points out that Christ himself suffered and as his followers, we may be called upon to suffer also. Here, he is saying we have an obligation to suffer, if called upon to do so, rather than deny our Lord because of what Christ suffered for us. He says we must arm ourselves with the same intention Jesus had—which was to go through the suffering in obedience to the Father no matter how difficult. So, in other words, make up your mind that if you are called upon to suffer for the cause of Christ, you will do it, and not deny or renounce your faith.
- B. In verse 1, he says “whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin.” Scholars have offered a variety of interpretations of this phrase. The most likely true interpretation—keeping in mind that baptism at that time was mostly adult baptism—is that when we are baptized, we symbolically join with Christ in his suffering and death, leaving our old lives behind, and we are raised into a new life in submission to God. Therefore, the Christian must live the rest of his or her earthly life in obedience to God, not to our human desires. In other words, don’t go back to your old ways. He reminds them they have already spent enough time living the dissolute life as Gentiles do. Your former friends may be surprised you no longer join them in this lifestyle—and even make fun of you for no longer joining them—but their day of judgment will come, and they will be required to give an accounting to Christ of how they lived.
- C. Verse 6 is another passage whose meaning is in dispute. Some have interpreted this passage to say that even those who have refused to accept Christ in this life will be given a second chance to accept him, even after physical death. There is nothing in Jesus’ teaching, however, that would seem to support this interpretation. Another interpretation, although not widely accepted, is that this refers to all those who died before Christ came. The more conventional interpretation is that when sin came into the world death also came into the world as punishment for sin, so all have sinned, and all have died or will die in the flesh. However, God sent Jesus so that even though all mankind has or will die in the flesh, we can live in the spirit forever even as God himself lives in the spirit. I tend to agree with this interpretation; otherwise, we might decide to continue to live as in our former lives following our own desires for our lives rather than God’s desires for us, planning to take advantage of a “second chance” after death. Scriptures such as Galatians 5:16-21 seem to directly refute a second chance after death.

XIII. I Peter 4:7-11 How to Live as the End Approaches

- A. In verse 7 Peter states what every New Testament writer anticipated, namely that the end was near—the time when Jesus Christ would come again—and judgment day for the living and the dead would take place. They lived in a heightened expectation that Jesus’ appearance would likely happen during their lifetimes. Some have challenged the reliability of what is written in scripture because what they anticipated did not occur during their lifetimes. However, Jesus clearly taught that even he did not know the date or time of his second coming (See Matt. 24). But he also clearly taught that all should live in the expectation of his return (Matt. 24). Likewise, the prophets of old looked with anticipation

to the coming of the Messiah, but that day did not arrive until the time was ripe in God's eyes. Furthermore, although it may not have been what Peter was thinking at the time he wrote those words, we must keep in mind the end is near for each of us. Our lives are finite, and most of us are much closer to its end than its beginning. We must live our lives in the knowledge that we will meet our Lord upon the end of our physical lives and that day is not far off for any of us.

- B. Peter goes on to say that we must live our lives in view of our judgment day approaching. That means living disciplined, serious lives, not frivolous lives that ignore God as if he doesn't exist. This doesn't mean we must be dour or gloomy; indeed, we are instructed to rejoice always. But these two things are not mutually exclusive. We can live disciplined, serious lives filled with Joy. Just as Peter warned husbands to respect their wives and treat them appropriately so their prayers wouldn't be hindered, he tells both men and women to be disciplined so as not to hinder their prayers.
- C. Above all, Peter says, love one another. In this command, he is repeating Jesus' command that we love one another, for "love covers a multitude of sins." The love he refers to, however, is not a Hallmark version of love. It is difficult and often unintuitive to love the way Peter is referring to. It has nothing to do with feelings; it is an act of the will rather than an act of the heart; it is *agape* love which seeks the best for the wellbeing of others, even those who treat us shabbily or even wish us harm. Jesus said we are to love those who spitefully use us. For such people we will not have happy feelings, but we must "love" them nevertheless to be obedient to Christ. Peter says love covers a multitude of sins, emphasizing how critical it is for Christians to show *agape* love.
- D. Peter goes on in verses 9-11 to give practical advice on how to love. Show hospitality to one another without complaining; serve one another with whatever gift God has bestowed on us; speak only to one another in a godly manner; serve with all our strength to bring honor and glory to God through Jesus Christ. Even though Peter believed the end was near, he was not instructing his readers to withdraw from the world, but rather to continue living actively in a manner that brings glory to God.

XIV. I Peter 4:12-19 Suffering as a Christian

- A. Peter returns to the topic of suffering and persecution the church was going through. Although the Jews had a long history of being persecuted, this would likely have been a new experience for Gentile Christians. When they first became Christians, they probably did not anticipate that their new-found faith would also come with a large helping of pain, persecution, and suffering. They were learning, as Christians have in the ages since this letter was written, that the Christian life can, at times, bring its own loneliness, unpopularity, sacrifices, and problems. Rather than give them false hope that all the persecution will soon go away, Peter candidly tells them not to be surprised at what they were experiencing. Suffering and persecution were the natural expectations for them as followers of Christ. Instead of being surprised and mystified by what they were experiencing, Peter tells them to recognize it for what it is—their testing—and to rejoice because they were sharing in the sufferings of Christ. They were instructed to be sure they were suffering because they were *righteously* following Christ and not for doing wrong. Righteous suffering or maltreatment is not a disgrace, but rather a cause for celebration

because the person has been deemed worthy to join in Christ's suffering. When that happens, Peter says, we are blessed, and the Spirit of God will rest upon us.

- B. This message echoed what was written in Hebrews and in James. As Christians, we are likely to endure some degree of persecution and suffering, and suffering is never easy to endure no matter how strong the person's faith. Furthermore, we should not feel guilty when suffering challenges our faith and our willingness to press on in obedience to God. At Gethsemane, Jesus himself sweated "great drops of blood" in his anguish over the ordeal that lay before him and prayed that the Father would "remove this cup" from him. It was not to be, and Jesus submitted to his Father's will. Peter, like James and the author of Hebrews, is reminding them that suffering for Christ is difficult, but he also reminds them that the reward of being faithful is to share in the glory of Jesus.
- C. Although we Christians in America do not suffer to the same extent they did in New Testament times—or as Christians in other parts of the world still do today—we may still experience ostracism or discrimination due to our faith. Some people who knew us as friends before we became Christians may decide they no longer want to be friends with us. Some people who did business with us may no longer be willing to do business with us. When those things happen, we need to remind ourselves this is to be expected, and, although it can be painful, we should rejoice that the Lord is changing us from the person we once were to the person he wants us to be.
- D. In verses 17-19 Peter encourages them to be obedient Christians, remembering that Judgment will soon come. However, he says that judgment will first come to the house of God. Some Christians are surprised by this statement because Jesus said he came not to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through him (John 3: 16-17). However, many other scriptures say that a day of judgment will come both for believers and non-believers. (see Romans 14:10) The difference is that for the Christian God judges us to bring purity to the church and to our lives; it is a form of discipline that leads us to repentance. Following death, we will still have to give an accounting for our lives, although our eternal security with Christ is assured. For those who have never accepted Jesus as savior and Lord, however, the judgment day will mean permanent separation from God because they have refused to believe in the one who has the gift of life—Jesus Christ.
- E. Peter acknowledges that the discipline of God's judgment can be difficult for us. He quotes from Proverbs 11:31 to say that if it is hard for the righteous—the believer—to be saved, what will become of the ungodly—the sinners. He wraps up this point by urging those Christians who are suffering in accordance with God's will to entrust themselves "to a faithful Creator" while continuing to do good. By this, Peter is urging us to follow Jesus' example. He remained faithful during his suffering, and he died saying, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." His trust in his Father was complete.

XV. I Peter 5:1-5 Tending the Flock of God

- A. With chapter 5 Peter pivots to the subject of leadership in the church. He addresses the elders of the church to provide guidance for their leadership role. To understand this section of Peter's letter, we need to understand who the "elders" are. The word "elder" in common usage means an older person. However, the *title* "elder" has a long history in

Judaism, going all the way back to the Exodus from Egypt. In Numbers chapter 11 we find the Israelites in the desert. They had departed Mount Sinai and were in the desert wilderness. The people were grumbling about the conditions in which they were living, particularly the fact they had no meat to eat. They were also grumbling against their leader, Moses, who had led them out of slavery in Egypt. Compared to wandering in the desert, they told Moses, they would prefer to be back as slaves in Egypt. At least there, they had plenty of food to eat, including meat; they were tired of just eating manna. These complaints apparently drove Moses to the brink because he told God the burden of being the leader for all the people of Israel was too much (“How am I going to get meat for all these people? If this is the way it’s going to be, put me to death now.”) God’s initial response to Moses was not to send the coveys of quail to satisfy the people’s desire for meat—which God subsequently did. Instead, he addresses Moses’ need to have others share his leadership responsibilities with him. God instructed him to choose 70 elders known to be trustworthy and bring them to the tent of meeting where God put some of the spirit that was on Moses on the elders. And thus was created the *office* of elder. Thereafter, the elders were a permanent feature of Jewish life. They are mentioned throughout the Old Testament. By New Testament times, every village had their elders; a large section of the Sanhedrin Court consisted of elders. Elders were the administrators of the synagogues, and they exercised discipline over its members. Finally, in the book of Revelation, we find 24 elders around the throne in heaven. Even in the Greco-Roman world there was an office of “Elder” similar to what existed in Jewish culture.

- B. The office of elder was carried over into the Christian church. There were elders in the church in Jerusalem; Paul appointed elders in every church he established. Among their responsibilities was the financial administration of the church. They were also part of the leaders of the church at the Council of Jerusalem at which the decision was made to open the church up to Gentiles. So, the elders are the leaders in the church whom Peter is addressing in these verses. Except for the Presbyterians, who still have the office of Elders, the corresponding group of leaders in other denominations have different names. In the Episcopal church, it is the Vestry.
- C. In addressing the elders in the church, Peter says he is a fellow elder himself, one who has actually witnessed the suffering of Christ, and also one who shares in the glory to be revealed. Although Peter was widely acknowledged as an apostle who was with Jesus, he humbly takes on the title common to the leadership in each church who would read this letter. Humility was not a trait that seemed to accurately describe the Peter depicted in the gospels—even in the Gospel of Mark which is based largely on Peter’s teaching and recollection. This letter, however, was written years later, after long years of service to Christ and his church. Humility was, by then, a defining characteristic of Peter, so much so that when he was condemned by the Romans to death by crucifixion, he asked to be crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy even to suffer death in the same way as Jesus did, and the Romans granted his request. Peter was clearly one to whom the elders in the church would look for guidance.
- D. In addressing how the elders should exercise the duties of their office, he describes what we today would call “servant leadership,” or one who is acting as a fiduciary. A fiduciary always must act in the best interest of those for whom he acts. He tells the elders to carry out their duties as God would have them do it, not for personal gain, but yet with enthusiasm. Watch

over the flock in their charge as a good shepherd would, not under compulsion but willingly. Nothing the elders do should be for selfish reasons or selfish gain, but rather for the benefit of the flock in obedience to God. Be an example to the flock, he tells them, and if they do so their reward will be a crown of glory. This promise by Peter references a theme repeated throughout the New Testament. We are to be obedient to the Lord in this life, even if it leads to persecution or suffering, knowing that a reward awaits us in this life or in the life to come, or perhaps in both. The reward we should all strive for is to have Jesus someday tell us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

- E. But no leaders will be successful unless they have good followers. So, in verse 5, he addresses the followers—the younger people. He tells them they must accept the authority of the elders. It is often the attitude of the young that they can do things better than their elders because the elders were just doing things in a certain way because that is how they have always been done. At times this may even be true. But Peter is telling the young people, and the elders who are exercising authority, to be humble with one another. Indeed, he tells them they must clothe themselves with humility in all their dealings. He quotes Proverbs 3:34 to support his advice to them.

XVI. I Peter 5:6-11 The Laws of the Christian Life

- A. Peter has been emphasizing humility and suffering, and here he tells his readers to humble themselves under the "mighty hand of God." This phrase is used often in the Old Testament, most often when referring to the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The idea was that the mighty hand of God was on the destiny of his people, if they would just humbly and faithfully obey God and accept his guidance. This is something we, as Christians, should remember. If we will humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, our destiny will be what God wants for us. This will enable us to overcome the unhappy experiences or the seemingly unjust episodes of life that can lead to resentments or a sense of hopelessness. A good biblical example of this was Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his own brothers, and who thereafter suffered for years unjustly in prison due to a false accusation by his master's wife. But he remained humble and faithful to God and was eventually exalted to the highest office. Peter may well have had Joseph in mind as an example as he wrote these words.
- B. In addition to being humble, Peter tells them not to worry. How? "Cast all your anxiety on him. . ." In this life there will always be things to worry about. We don't know what we will have to face in the future, and that very uncertainty can lead us to worry incessantly. As Peter has already informed his readers, being a Christian will not exempt us from suffering and persecution, but that doesn't mean we must be anxious about it. We can go through such difficult times knowing that Christ goes through them with us. He overcame the worst possible suffering by being faithful and obedient, and we know that Christ cares for us. He will not allow us to go through more than we can endure. Therefore, regardless of the circumstances we can view the future with hope.
- C. But by casting all our anxieties on God Peter does not mean to say there is nothing we need to do. We must discipline ourselves to be obedient to God. This involves our being vigilant, alert to temptations that may come upon us suddenly and without warning. Peter reminds us that Satan is our adversary, always looking for a way to lead us astray. In our culture, if

Satan is spoken of at all, he is portrayed as a little red man with a long tail and a pitchfork who can hardly be taken seriously—perhaps naughty, but nothing more. But as Peter points out, he is a malevolent spirit, as dangerous as any roaring lion. He is always on the prowl, looking for someone to devour—meaning to bring under his control. As James described in his letter, it is our own wrong desires that make us susceptible to temptation, and Satan knows all our vulnerabilities. He always looks for opportunities to exploit those vulnerabilities with the appropriate temptations. Peter is saying we must be aware of this and recognize temptations when they arise and where they come from. We must resist Satan and his temptations, recognizing that our brothers and sisters in Christ are going through similar temptations and suffering. In other words, we must be steadfast.

- D. Peter goes on to remind his Christian readers that a reward awaits those who remain faithful through suffering, temptations and trials. In verse 10, he tells them that after suffering for a little while, the God of all grace will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. It doesn't get any better than that. And it is a promise we can rely upon.

XVII. I Peter 5:12-14 Final Greetings and Benediction

- A. In verse 12, Peter tells his audience he has written this letter “through Silvanus.” We mentioned this fact at the beginning of our study to explain why this letter was written in more excellent Greek than Peter was capable of; it is because Silvanus was the scribe. When we look more closely at who Silvanus was, we find that he was a prominent leader of the early church. The name Silas was often used for short for men named Silvanus in New Testament times. Biblical scholars have researched the question of who this Silvanus was, and they have concluded that this Silvanus is the same person referred to in Acts as Silas, who was the right-hand man of Paul. He is mentioned in many of Paul's letters. Toward the end of their lives, both Paul and Peter were in Rome and Silas/Silvanus was helpful to both of them. He was a true leader of the early Christian church, and his efforts have benefitted the church even to this day.
- B. In verse 13, Peter sends greetings from “your sister church in Babylon.” The actual words in the original Greek were, “She who is in Babylon.” Some scholars have speculated this might be a reference to Peter's wife, but by far the most likely interpretation of “She” is that presented in the NRSV—meaning the church in Babylon. The word “Babylon” itself, however, is a code word. It is a reference to Rome. Christians were under persecution and were therefore reluctant to be openly critical of Rome or its government. Remember, in the book of Revelation, Rome is referred to as “Babylon.” The reason for this is that ancient Babylon was viewed by both Jews and Christians as the epitome of a godless, decadent, self-indulging city. Both Jews and Christians viewed Rome as being the reincarnation of ancient Babylon. When either a Christian or a Jew referred to Babylon during the period of time this letter was written, the reader would have understood the reference was to Rome.
- C. Another interesting item in the final greeting is that Peter sends greetings from Mark, who was there with Peter. It is likely Mark was working on the gospel named for him at this time. Nearly all scholars agree that Mark's gospel is based almost entirely upon the preaching and memories of Peter. His gospel is estimated to have been written in the mid-60s A.D., around the same time this letter was written.

- D. Peter sends final words of love and peace to those in Christ to whom he has written. Peter writes another letter—II Peter—not long after this letter, in which he tells his readers his end was near. He was correct; shortly after his second letter, he was crucified as a Christian martyr.