

Bible Study on 1 Peter

Evangelical Commentary on the Bible

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*Assembled by Pastor Dave Kominsky
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I hope that you enjoy this Bible study adapted from the Evangelical Commentary on the Bible. My suggestion is that before you start it, read the entire book of 1 Peter one or two times, and then begin the study. Each day, after a time in prayer seeking God's blessing, read the section to be studied in your Bible, making notes of any questions that you may have, and then work through the study in this document. The idea is to demonstrate the power of the Word of God. The truth is, it does not need a "commentary" although it helps us to discover additional truths and cross references that we may not otherwise identify. It is my prayer that you find this valuable time to spend with God in His Word.

-pastor dave.

Bible Study on 1 Peter

SUNDAY

I. Suffering as a Christian (1:1–2:10)

A. The hidden inheritance, the hidden Lord (1:1–9).

1 ¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise to God for a Living Hope

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Peter begins his letter like any other in the world of his day, with a greeting, a prayer, and an expression of thanks. But his thrill at the wonderful message he has to impart is so great that, like Paul, he fills out these bare, formal “bones” with the glories of the Christian gospel.

He is not simply “Peter,” but an apostle who writes with the authority of Jesus Christ himself. His recipients are not just the Christians of northern Asia Minor, but God's elect, whose earthly address is only temporary. His prayer is not the usual “peace be yours in abundance” (see Dan. 4:1), but includes “grace.” Instead of the usual expression of thanks for something quite ordinary, like the good health of his recipients, Peter launches into a

shout of thanks and praise to God for all the heavenly blessings he has stored up for those who are his.

The themes of this opening greeting and doxology set the tone for the whole letter. Peter brings up the three persons of the Trinity before us again in the very next section (1:10–21), and thus picks up the Trinitarian blessing of verse 2. But particularly this opening section is balanced by 2:4–10, which brings to a close the first part of the letter. There Peter returns to the theme which above all thrills him here: the hidden things which are gloriously true of his readers, even if all the world should shout a different message at them. Whether they feel like it or not, they are a royal priesthood, a holy nation (2:9).

Doubtless they felt more like his description of them in his greeting: “strangers in the world,” “scattered,” tiny persecuted congregations spread across the huge expanse of half of modern Turkey, struggling to keep their faith alive against the pressure of a vastly pagan environment. But Peter will not let them dwell on what they look like from the world’s point of view. He wants them to see how *God* looks at them. And from God’s viewpoint, their scatteredness is his election. God has plucked them out of their paganism to be his own (v. 1). He has foreknown them (v. 2). Before ever they existed, the Father knew and loved them and made them his. God has sent his Spirit to sanctify them—that is, precisely to create the distinction between them and the world that causes them so much trouble, by leading them into a life of obedience to Jesus Christ, sheltered under the forgiveness won by his blood.

At the moment they are facing all kinds of trials (v. 6), and are tempted to hopelessness and despair. But here too Peter will not let them—or us—believe what the eye sees. The reality is unseen: there is an inheritance that can never perish kept in heaven for us (v. 4), as a result of Jesus’ resurrection and our new birth through him (v. 3). And there is no possibility of losing it, for however weak we may feel, we are being shielded by God’s power until the moment of salvation comes. Our present experiences are all preparatory, making us fit for glory. Jesus too is unseen: but even so, with our eyes fixed on hidden realities, we will love him and our hearts will thrill with a joy that surpasses language and even now partakes of the glory that is yet to be (v. 8). We already hear the strains of heavenly praise and share in heavenly joy, because we are already “receiving ... the salvation of our souls” (v. 9), even in the midst of suffering and pain.

These inspiring opening verses contain the whole message of 1 Peter in a nutshell. The rest of the letter merely explains and applies this vision in greater and more practical detail.

MONDAY

B. Preparation for action (1:10–2:3).

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Be Holy

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.

2 ¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The exhortation of 1:13 provides the keynote of this section, as Peter tackles the unspoken question, “How can I have a faith like that?” He mentions faith four times in 1:3–9, and it would be very possible for an oppressed believer to feel that the faith described is too high to attain. Peter sets out in this section to show what the roots of such a faith are—and it turns out that the way we think is absolutely vital.

Peter’s sudden introduction of “the prophets” (**1:10–12**) (probably shorthand for the whole Old Testament) is at first sight surprising. But there are two excellent reasons for their appearance. First, the prophets back up what Peter writes about the foreknowledge of God the Father in 1:2. God announced centuries ago his intention to save the followers of Jesus. It was in fact the Spirit of Christ who spoke in the prophets (v. 11)! Second, from the prophets we can learn the Christian faith which Peter has just so eloquently and movingly summarized. Even though they wrote long before Christ came, they realized that they were writing about a grace to be given to someone else, and eagerly sought to learn about the time and circumstances of its coming, the sufferings of the Christ, and his glories. The prophets became aware that they were writing for someone else, so that the gospel only needed to be “announced” when the time came. The prophets had already explained it.

This is tremendously important for Peter. His letter contains no fewer than twenty-five direct quotations from the Old Testament, and many allusions to it besides. It is the basis of the Christian gospel, for without it we would not understand Christ. And so, in practice, a mind properly fed by the Old Testament is the basic prerequisite for the experience of joy in suffering described in 1:3–9.

The existence of such a prophetic Word is a summons to prepare one’s mind for action (**1:13–21**). The proper response to the Scriptures is to get thinking. “Be self-controlled” (v. 13) is a poor translation. The original Greek means “make sure you keep all your faculties fully operational” (lit. be sober; Peter repeats this exhortation twice [4:7; 5:8]). The mind that is girded up, redirected by the Scriptures, will begin to think in a new way.

However threatening the present, the fully girded-up mind will set its hope “perfectly” on God’s grace. The redirected mind will focus on God’s priority, holiness. At its heart holiness means separateness: God calls us to be different, because he is different. Peter’s readers must not worry about their distinctiveness that provokes such hostility from others. It is inevitable! If we are God’s, we will begin to bear his likeness in every aspect of life.

The renewed mind knows that life will end with judgment. We must therefore live each moment under the scrutiny of the Judge. We may rejoice to know God as Father, but there must also be reverent fear! Every moment matters, eternally. The thought that we are to be judged according to our work could lead to despair; but our eternal salvation is not jeopardized by our moral feebleness. It rests upon nothing that we can produce, not even upon our silver and gold (v. 18): even our best perishes before God’s judgment. But our salvation rests upon “the precious blood of Christ” (v. 19), just as the blood of the Passover lamb saved the Israelites. Christ was chosen (lit. foreknown) before the foundation of the

world (v. 20): it was no sudden whim on God's part which made him the sacrifice for sin. And as a result we may place sure faith and hope in God, who though our Judge is also our Savior and Father. The resurrection seals the security of those who so believe and hope. In the midst of earthly insecurity, *here* is true confidence and security!

How may we be sure of knowing joy in suffering? Peter picks up what he wrote about the prophetic Word in 1:10–12 and applies it practically: if our hearts and lives are truly being fed by the Word of God, then we will be increasingly transformed within.

The Word of God gives new life (**1:22–25**). When we obey God's truth, love will be born in us. God's Word has a vital, life-giving power because of Who it is that speaks it. Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6–8, which contrasts the permanence of God's Word with the transitory nature of all that is earthly. The Word of God "stands forever" because of the preaching of the gospel.

The Word of God nourishes new life (**2:1–3**). Every newborn infant needs a healthy appetite and proper food or it will not grow. The pure "spiritual" milk that will produce healthy Christian growth is God's own Word.

TUESDAY***C. The hidden spiritual house (2:4–10).***

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸ and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter began his letter with the themes of God’s elect and his mercy (1:1, 3). He ends this first section on the same note (2:9–10). He also returns to his central theme of hiddenness, though his treatment is different here. In 1:3–9 his thought was angled entirely toward the future, to the coming inheritance and the coming Lord, both now veiled, yet objects of love and joy. But now Peter turns to the past and the present. The hidden but coming Lord was rejected by men (v. 4), who did not see the estimation placed upon him by God. In their present rejection, therefore, Peter’s readers are sharing the fate of Jesus

himself. He was like the stone the builders rejected (v. 7). Peter carries through his theme of God's Word by quoting three "stone" passages which were applied to Jesus from a very early date (the tradition seems, in fact, to originate with Jesus himself; Matt. 21:42): Psalm 118:22f.; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 (cf. Rom. 9:33). A stone can look most unimpressive—but it can perform a vital function if made the cornerstone of a large building; or it can bring a person tumbling to the ground if he or she stumbles over it. Jesus has become the cornerstone of God's spiritual temple, and there are two possible responses. We can either take our own angle and position from the Cornerstone, and line ourselves up on him; or we can refuse to live by reference to him, and stumble over him instead. It is a vivid picture.

Peter urges his readers to see that they are being built in line with Christ: sharing all the angles of his life, experiencing his rejection as well as the glory. His opponents stumble fatally, but those joined to Christ are a chosen people, a royal priesthood (v. 9), contrary to all appearances. In verses 9 and 10 Peter piles up phrases from the Old Testament (Exod. 19:6; Isa. 42:12; 43:20f.; Hos. 1:10; 2:23) to show how all that is true of God's chosen covenant people is true for those who believe in Jesus, however rejected and weak they may seem.

II. At Home, But Not in This World (2:11–3:12)

In the second section of his letter Peter tackles the question that arises at the end of the first. If Christians must reckon themselves to be gloriously different from what they *appear* to be, if they must look beyond their scatteredness and suffering and see themselves as God's chosen people, then what should their attitude be toward their earthly circumstances? Peter's readers must have been tempted to respond to persecution by adopting an antiworld attitude and withdrawing as much as possible into the comforting warmth of Christian fellowship.

But Peter will not let them do this, even though he has underlined so powerfully their new and hidden status as God's people and the life and love that binds them. Withdrawal from the world is not an option for Christians. Rather, their difference must be expressed through the distinctiveness of their life *within* their earthly callings.

A. *The Christian's inner self (2:11–12).*

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

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They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Living Godly Lives in a Pagan Society

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

In verse 11 Peter reaffirms the general attitude toward the world which ran through the first section of his letter. His readers are “aliens and strangers” in it; their home and their roots are elsewhere. It is natural therefore that he should go on to urge them to abstain from sinful (lit. fleshly) desires. This world is not our true home, and the flesh seeks to stifle the life of the Spirit within us. Though we may be citizens of another world, we still have to “live ... among the pagans,” and do so in a way which testifies clearly to the existence and power of that new world. This declaration depends not so much on word (Peter is remarkably silent about verbal witnessing), as on behavior. Non-Christians watch what we do. The word translated *see* means to watch over a period of time, implying prolonged observation. We must see to it that, even though we may be mocked (or apparently disregarded), the evidence of our lives will speak so loudly that, on the day of judgment, non-Christians will glorify God, because they will have to concede that the testimony was laid before them quite unambiguously, even if they failed to heed it. What we are on the inside (v. 11) will become obvious on the outside (v. 12).

WEDNESDAY

B. A life of submission (2:13–3:7).

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." ²⁵ For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

3 ¹Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Romans 13:1–7 is a close parallel to **2:13–17**. Paul and Peter concur that respect for and obedience to worldly authority are important, because it is an expression of *God's* authority. Peter begins and ends by mentioning the Roman emperor as the one who embodies all the different forms of secular authority under which Christians find themselves.

In theory, worldly authorities exist “to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (v. 14; cf. Rom. 13:3f.), but Peter is as aware as we are today of the possibility of corruption in high places. He even calls Rome “Babylon” in his closing greeting (5:13). Yet just as we abstain from fleshly desires and still remain committed to ordinary human society (2:11–12), so we submit to worldly authority even though it is to pass away under the judgment of God. We know that God’s world is fallen, but we submit to his ordering of it, keen to testify by our lives to what is to come. Simply by doing good we might silence (lit. muzzle) people inclined to revile us (v. 15). Peter emphasizes this by the verbs he uses in verse 17. The proper attitudes are: timely respect for all men (i.e., we are to take every opportunity to show honor to our fellow men), love for fellow believers, fear of God (full devotion of heart, mind, and soul), and continuing respect for the emperor.

Peter next homes in on a group for whom a very particular application of the principle of submission to authority is necessary: slaves (**2:18–25**). Unrest among slaves was widespread at this time, and undoubtedly some Christian slaves believed that, having been “bought” by Christ, they had been set free from their earthly masters. Later on, there were actually Christian groups which encouraged slaves to run away from their masters on these very grounds. But Peter will not allow this! The same principle of nonwithdrawal from the world means that slaves must not stop being slaves, but instead become better ones—even when their masters are harsh. If they suffer, they must make sure that they suffer unjustly, because it will not do their Lord credit if they deserve the beating they get!

Then Peter attaches to this straightforward teaching a marvelous passage about the Servant Jesus (vv. 21–25). In fact, it is likely that this is an adaptation of an early Christian hymn about Christ. It suits Peter’s theme beautifully as, in close dependence on Isaiah 53, it describes how Jesus, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, submitted to suffering in this world because of his obedience to his heavenly Master. Belonging to his Lord did not deliver him from suffering, but led him straight to it! And through his suffering we have found forgiveness (v. 24). To suffer, therefore, is simply to walk in his footsteps (v. 21), and we can be sure that, whatever happens, he is a caring Shepherd (v. 25).

Peter has deliberately placed this hymn in the middle of this section, so that it has a central place: Jesus is our example, not just in the way he suffered, but in his obedient submission to the powers of this world.

The zoom lens now focuses in on another, still more intimate relationship from which Christians were tempted to withdraw because of their new, otherworldly faith: marriage

(3:1–7). Should Christian husbands or wives leave their partners if they do not share their faith? Again, some Christians answered, “Yes.” But Peter insists that they should not. He devotes more space to wives (vv. 1–6), because they could more easily be made to suffer by their husbands than vice versa. He eloquently teaches that the greatest beauty is that of character, and that the loveliness of Christian character speaks far more powerfully than a hundred sermons. The word *see* in verse 2 is the same as that in 2:12, implying extended observation. The incident in mind in verse 6 is probably that of Genesis 12:11–20, where Sarah submits to some very unkind treatment by her husband, and in that context her beauty is emphasized. Abraham tries the same trick again later (Gen. 20), insisting that Sarah must show her love for him in this improper way and she again submits. (She calls him “Lord” in Gen. 18:12.) The Christian calling is patient submission to suffering within the structures of this world.

What about the Christian husband with the unbelieving wife? Verse 7 summarizes it beautifully. No separation! Even if they cannot share on the deepest spiritual level, they are still together “heirs ... of the gracious gift of life” (i.e., ordinary human existence). The husband must show all the respect and care due to a weaker partner; and in so doing his own bond with the Lord will not be weakened.

C. The Christian’s corporate self (3:8–12). “All men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35): this is the principle underlying these verses, with which Peter summarizes the whole section. Christians treasure their fellowship with one another. Faced with persecution, their common joy in their Lord becomes all the more precious. But Peter wants to impress upon them that their relationship with each other is not entirely inward-looking. People will notice what they say to each other about the injustices they suffer (v. 9). Consequently, the Lord must be their model. The quotation from Psalm 34:12–16 in verses 10–12 contains the key word of this entire section: “Do good!” It also highlights the use of the tongue, just as the end of the last section did (2:9; cf. 2:1): the way we speak will reveal the shape of our whole life.

THURSDAY

III. Suffering—The Road to Glory (3:13–4:19)

In this section Peter focuses more precisely on the subject of suffering. The last section laid down the basic principle of submission to the structures of this world. Peter now shows how suffering fits into that submission. Once again, this section begins and ends on the same note: doing good (a favorite theme of Peter's) and suffering for God's sake or for what is right.

A. Suffering for doing good (3:13–22).

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

These verses are among the most difficult in the whole New Testament, because Peter refers to traditions and stories obviously familiar to his readers, but unfortunately not to us. Yet the overall message is clear. Peter tells us that if we are called to suffer for what is right, we must look to Jesus, who suffered for our sins and through that suffering has come to a place of supreme authority, raised over all the powers of evil that seem so overwhelming to the persecuted Asian Christians. Jesus suffered, though he was righteous, and if we will now set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts and follow in his footsteps we can be delivered from the fear of our persecutors, confident that through suffering we will share his victory. In the meantime we must bear witness to our hope, by both word and deed,

remembering that our baptism was our pledge to God to live with good consciences before him.

Peter shares with Paul, and early Christians generally, the belief that authority and power in this world are earthly expressions of unseen fallen spiritual entities. Submission to secular authority as well as submission to all the constraints of earthly existence is a form of bondage to the powers of evil. Having told us to submit, Peter must touch on the spiritual implications of his teaching.

The “spirits in prison” (v. 19) are not the souls of dead human beings, but fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). According to Jewish tradition (1 Enoch 6–20), they deceived and corrupted the generation who lived before the flood, teaching them the arts of sin (see Gen. 6:1ff.). As a result they were locked up in prison at the time of the flood, “to be held for judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). They were the counterparts of the angels, authorities, and powers (v. 22) still active today.

Jesus’ preaching to these spirits was not an offer of salvation, but a proclamation of his final victory—in fact, the announcement of the judgment hanging over them. The spiritual forces behind the greatest corruption the world has ever seen have received their final condemnation at Jesus’ hands! Having dealt with them, he finished his journey to heaven and took his place at God’s right hand, in full authority over the powers behind the suffering experienced by Peter’s readers. However much they may feel themselves to be victims, Christ is the Victor.

The refusal of the angels to submit to their Creator was matched by the mockery of Noah’s contemporaries, who did not respond to God’s warning of impending judgment, given by Noah’s preaching (cf. 2 Pet. 2:5) and by the slow construction of the ark miles from the sea (v. 20). The water in which they died was, paradoxically, the very medium of Noah’s salvation. In this respect the flood foreshadows Christian baptism, for that too pictures death but leads to life. When they were baptized, Peter’s readers pledged themselves to live for God and embraced the hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ. But in so doing they actually brought suffering upon themselves, just as Noah did by his obedience to God’s command to build an ark and to warn his generation. Yet in their suffering, symbolized by their baptismal “death,” they follow the path already trodden by their Savior on the way to glory.

Peter thus seeks to minister to his suffering brethren in the deepest possible way: not by simply pointing them to compensation in the world to come, nor by painting vividly the judgment in store for their enemies, but by showing them that, precisely in their suffering, already pictured in the baptism which united them with Christ, they are sharing with their Lord in his victory over all the powers of evil in the universe.

FRIDAY***B. Living for God (4:1–11).***

Living for God

4 ¹Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ²As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

There is no break in the flow of thought at 4:1. Although Noah is not mentioned in **4:1–6**, we will best grasp Peter’s meaning if we keep him in mind. For what Peter says in essence in verses 3–5 is: “You are in the same position as Noah, who refused to join in the profligate and licentious behavior of his contemporaries, even though they thought him peculiar for his refusal. Hold yourselves aloof from such practices, for God is about to act in judgment now as he did then.” The striking word *flood* in verse 4—the only occasion on which this word is used with other than its literal meaning—points toward Noah. The outpourings of vice around them are horribly reminiscent of the floods of God’s wrath about to break!

It is especially helpful to read verse 6 with Noah in mind. Scholars disagree here also, but it would be most perverse—and would not fit the context—to interpret verse 6 as teaching that a further chance of embracing new life is given after death. The Bible is quite clear that the books are opened and all men’s accounts are settled when the tale of our earthly existence has been told (e.g., Heb. 9:27), and Peter himself says as much in 4:17–

18. The best interpretation is to take verse 6 as a reference to Noah, who was revered as a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5).

Peter has his readers’ persecutors in mind as he writes this. They may heap abuse on the Christians (v. 4), but no one is so far gone as to be beyond the reach of God’s life-giving power. Who knows what God’s purpose may be in the coming judgment? Those who heard Noah preach died in the waters of the flood. But those waters symbolized baptism, because baptism is likewise about doing away with the flesh. Who knows whether their death in the flood might not have been a baptism for them, an entry into life? The same could be true for the Christians’ persecutors.

The basic principle holds true for all: “he who has suffered in his body [lit. in the flesh] is done with sin” (v. 1). This was supremely true for Christ, who through death has conquered sin in all its manifestations; it is necessarily true for his followers, who through their suffering learn to dethrone evil desires and live for the will of God (v. 2); and possibly it is even true for the persecutors of the church, who might come to life through the judgment of death and must therefore be the objects of patient testimony, by word and deed.

The flood was a partial judgment, a foreshadowing of the total winding-up which is now near. If Noah prepared with such diligence for the flood, how much more should we seek to be ready for the end (4:7–11)? Peter outlines the vital features of a life lived with an eye to the coming judgment.

In the privacy of heart and home, Christians need minds that think straight and hearts that pray straight. In ordinary social relationships, Christians must love each other and offer hospitality. In undertaking Christian ministry, each must put into active service whatever gift God’s grace has bestowed, whether it is teaching or more practical forms of service. The believer must draw upon God’s resources and provision, and not for personal gain or glory. Rather, the object of life this side of the end must be the praise of God.

SATURDAY***C. Sharing the sufferings of Christ (4:12–19).***

Suffering for Being a Christian

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

In this final subsection Peter draws the threads together. His readers must not be surprised at the painful (lit. fiery) trial they are experiencing, because suffering is not something foreign as far as Christians are concerned. Rather, it lies at the very heart of our existence! Peter gives three reasons why we should not be surprised:

First, we are participating in the sufferings of Christ (v. 13). We must expect to receive the same treatment as our Master, simply because we are his servants (John 15:20). Suffering is woven into human experience as part of a fallen creation, but Jesus has blasted a way through death to eternal life. And so we should rejoice as we participate in this great saving movement, looking ahead to glory!

Second, because Jesus is already victorious, our suffering is a foretaste of that coming glory, a blessedness that comes to us as God's Spirit rests upon us. What a revolutionary understanding!

Finally, our sufferings are the opening phase of God's winding-up operation, the beginning of his judgment. Peter deliberately calls the tribulation "judgment," partly for theological reasons (because he understands all suffering and death as part of the curse laid by God on a fallen world), but also because he will not let his readers relax their guard. Their suffering is a trial (v. 12), and they must make sure that they do not suffer deservedly (v. 15)! But if we suffer according to God's will (v. 19—i.e., with our hearts set upon God's will, even in the midst of our suffering) then God will uphold us.

SUNDAY**IV. Final Exhortations and Greetings (5:1–14)**

To the Elders and the Flock

5 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **2** Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; **3** not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. **5** In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud

but shows favor to the humble.”

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. **7** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **9** Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. **11** To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. **14** Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

The final chapter begins with a resounding “therefore” which the New International Version has strangely failed to translate. This makes the connection clear: in times of suffering and trial, special responsibility rests upon the leaders of the churches to support and be shepherds of God’s flock (v. 2). Peter turns to this vital practical concern to round off his letter. But in fact his concern is not just pastoral, for there remains a theological question, raised by what he has said about submission to earthly powers and Christ’s

victory over them, which needs to be tackled as well. If, as he has told us, we must submit to earthly authorities even though Christ has proclaimed his victory over them, if we must continue to live as loyal citizens of Babylon (v. 13) even though we know her satanic power has been broken, then what about authority structures within the church? What kinds of submission are appropriate for those who are already touched by the glory of the coming age?

Peter's pastoral concern predominates in **5:1–5**. His self-designation in verse 1 hints at this deeper concern. He is a “fellow elder”—not an exalted apostle—and with them a witness of (better, “to”) Christ's sufferings. He therefore enters into all that that means, sharing those sufferings himself, and thus participating in the glory to be revealed. His readers are not alone in their suffering! Peter stands beside them.

He urges the elders to be aware of their special responsibility as shepherds. The imperative has an urgency about it—get on with the job! Then in three pairs of balancing phrases (“not ... but,” vv. 2–3) Peter tells them how they should exercise their pastoral care as far as *inner motivation* (“not because you must, but because you are willing”) and *outward incentive* (“not greedy for money”) are concerned.

With the last “not ... but,” Peter's second theological concern surfaces clearly. He uses here the same word that Mark records Jesus as having used when discussing this very issue with his disciples (Mark 10:42f.). Even if the church seems to possess a conventional, earthly authority structure, it actually reverses the normal pattern, modeling its vertical relationships on the Son of man who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life ...” (Mark 10:45). This is the style of leadership that will bring the full realization of the glory known now but in part (v. 4). Peter drives this point home beautifully in verse 5 by using the single word *likewise*. He implies that the young men must be submissive to the “elders” in the same way as the elders are submissive to the young men! On both sides there is a “submission” which recognizes the distinctive gifts and ministry of the other and seeks to serve for Christ's sake. Verse 5b puts it in a nutshell: they must all tie humility around them like a robe, so that they may enjoy God's grace in all their relationships. For God himself does not “lord it” over his creatures, but by his grace reaches out to us and suffers with us, in Christ.

Peter summarizes all for which he longs for his readers (**5:6–11**). Here is the framework upon which he wants the house of our Christian life to rest.

For all that he has urged us to submit to our earthly circumstances, however trying, it is really to God himself that we submit (v. 6), in hope of his deliverance. We humble ourselves before him not as before an earthly master, awaiting instructions, but so as to feel the burden of anxiety lifted from our shoulders (v. 7).

For all that his readers are consumed with anxiety about their earthly enemies, Peter tells them that the spiritual foe is far more deadly (vv. 8–9). And we feel his pressure upon us not just through our earthly trials, but especially through the temptation not to face those trials with faith.

For all that we seek stability and strength in this life, Peter reminds us in his closing blessing (vv. 10–11) that these are things which God reserves for the age to come. After the suffering of this age, in which we already trace his grace, he will finally complete us, strengthen us, and set us on a sure foundation.

Peter associates with himself in his final greeting not just his two closest helpers, Silas and Mark, but also the whole church to which he belongs. “Babylon” (v. 13) is almost certainly a reference to Rome, which was increasingly called “Babylon” by both Jews and Christians at this time. Using this term here fits beautifully with Peter’s theme. It reminds us of the true (satanic) nature of secular power. Christ, however, has conquered it. But also—and more particularly, at this point—it reminds us of the place of Israel’s exile and of the fact that we too are aliens and strangers in the world. The letter thus ends on the same note with which it began, when Peter saluted his readers as God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered. For though exiles, we are yet God’s chosen, his elect people, destined for glory.

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¹ Motyer, S. (1995). [1 Peter](#). In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, pp. 1164–1170). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.