

## **Living out the new life in Christ**

### **1 Peter 1:1-12, 1 Peter 3:8-17 and 1 Peter 5:6-14**

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**Introduction:** Thanks to the Bible readers this morning. So, in the next few Sundays, we will be exploring some short books of the Bible and today we begin the series with the 1 letter of Peter.

Purpose of the letter: Peter himself says why he wrote this short letter,

*“I have written to you briefly, encouraging you [all]and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.” (1Pe 5:12 NIV)*

Peter encourages the exiles in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia to live the new life, their new identity in Christ. He encourages them but he also tells them that just like Christ suffered, they will also suffer at the hands of others because of THIS new life in Christ. Peter makes no false promises either for the moment or for their future.

Peter doesn't promise that everything will be alright living in their communities and surrounded by their Greco-Roman neighbors. But he gives them, or reminds them of who they are and the values they can uphold and build, within their Christian communities, the kind of life that

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they, and us, are called to live in the midst of a world that rejects Christ.

#### **But let's talk about the sender first**

The sender – some scholars argue that 1 Peter was not written by Peter, for several reasons. Some of the arguments are that the letter is written in elevated Greek. They don't believe that a fisherman from Galilee would be able to write at such a high level Greek. I think this is a weak argument though.

Another reason that he may not be the writer of this letter is that the Old Testament cited is exclusively in the Septuagint and that a Jew from Palestine would have quoted the Hebrew Bible. Another reason is that the letter assumes that Christianity was already widely spread in Asia Minor and this would not have been possible before 70CE. And if Peter was indeed crucified in 64CE by Nero, then yes, he could not have written it. There are many other reasons they put forward as reasons to assume that Peter is not the author of this letter. But I can't list all the arguments for or against a Petrine authorship. If Peter did not write it, Joel B. Green's commentary on 1 Peter, has this to say "...the possibility that 1 Peter was written after the apostle's death, perhaps by some members of the "Petrine

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Circle”, cannot be dismissed out of hand...it is easy to recognize among them such noble intentions as their concern to preserve and appropriate the apostle’s message, all while appealing to his authority” (Green 2007, 10).

Well, this helps a little. According to that this letter contains something that Peter would have written if the writers were in Peter’s inner circle and knew him well and would have been familiar with his teachings.

Another scholar, Reinhard Felmeier, says that “the reference to 1 Peter in the Epistle of Polycarp (about 120) gives every indication that 1 Peter could hardly have been composed after the end of the first century” (Feldmeier 2008, 39).

All those arguments are worth thinking about, but in the end the letter itself tells us that it is Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, the one who addresses the Christian in those regions.

On the other hand, tradition has it that Peter was crucified upside down 64CE a short time after the burning of Rome under the Emperor Nero. Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome. So, if Peter didn’t write it the letter was probably written between 70 and 90. Some

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historians portray Nero as an evil man. He did a lot of terrible things. If Peter suffered “fiery ordeal” under Nero then he would know what a “fiery ordeal” is like under the Roman emperor.

So, this letter was probably been read before the end of the first century and the churches felt that it was speaking to them and bringing the kind of encouragement and guidance that they needed in order to continue to live this new life in Christ. The Holy Spirit was at work in their life application of the teaching of this letter.

### **Geography:**

Again the location of these churches was Asia Minor. The churches had already spread far and wide from their origins in Palestine. You know, I am tempted to think that the reason Peter calls them the “elect foreigners” or exiles is that they had moved from Palestine to these places. However, it is more likely that the elect “foreignness” has more to do with their living in a world that even though they belong to it, their belonging to Christ made them different or the “weird ones.” As Joel Greens says, “Their lack of acculturation to prevailing social values marked them as misfits worthy of contempt.”

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Here in America and in the west, there is a widening gap between the dominant culture and the church and it seems to me that the gap distancing the church and culture is getting wider and wider. Even though the church in these United States of America still occupies a preponderant place at the table in the national conversation, some current events are undermining the credibility of some Christian traditions.

The coming of new philosophies of life and the structures of power being built around those philosophies may soon move the church out of the place that it has occupied for so long in America and in the west.

So, in light of that, I think that 1 Peter is even more important to us than ever and the church will do well to listen what the Spirit says to us through it.

#### **The recipients:**

The recipients would be Christians, Jewish and Gentiles who have become the new communities of faith with a new identity, a new way of life, a new hope, and whose identity is with that man of Galilee, named Jesus, who was crucified and who suffered at the hands of the same culture that is bringing “fiery trials” over their heads.

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The elected foreigner of the dispersion or diaspora would refer to the fact that they are living in this land but not feeling part of it. The fact that God elected them makes them like foreigners in their relation with the prevailing culture. There are things in which they refused to participate.

They refused to participate in the worship of the Emperor or the worship of the many other gods that Greco-Romans worshipped. They had serious problems participating in the pagan feasts and eating from the meats offered to idols. So, there are just a few things that they can really do with their pagan, non-Christian friends.

Biblical Interpretation

**Context:**

**Superimposing our present context into a context in the past.**

We cannot superimpose our present context into a context in the past. In other words, we cannot take our ethical, theological, cultural context and demand that their past should have been as our present. The prevalent

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philosophy of life and the Greco-Roman theology cannot easily be dismissed as a non-factor.

What I mean by that is that every generation or culture builds a way of life and the structures of power that go with it on philosophical and theological foundations that support them. When those philosophical and theological foundations become widely accepted and unquestioned, then the culture, the way of doing is established.

If this way of being becomes socio/economic successful and it results in the perceived well-being of great number of people, then anything that is different to, or against, that which works for most people becomes suspicious.

### **Superimposing the past and its context to us today – back to the future**

Equally important, we cannot bring the past and its philosophical and theological foundations and superimpose them in ourselves, and pretend that there are no barriers between us and the past. There are.

So, this should be taken in consideration while we are talking about the strategies that Peter gives to these

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churches in order to live well their new life in Christ and be faithful to God in their cultural context.

### **The point of the letter**

Given the fact that they are living as foreigners, Peter wants to remind them about how especial they are and be encouraged. God has chosen them. That is no small thing.

They are participating in God's grand plan of salvation in Jesus (1:20), the chosen one Jesus, and it is in him and through him that they have come to know God. For us too, we know God when we know Jesus. The life of Jesus and his teachings reveal to us who God is and how God acts in the world.

And they, like us, had come to know and to love Jesus even though they did not see him, they loved him. They rejoiced with great indescribable and glorious joy, for it is him, in this faith, in their response to God, and in their believing God that in the end they are saved.

Even though they are to suffer they can still rejoice, for in the suffering, they will see a full revelation of Jesus in the end, even if now, the only thing that keeps them rejoicing is their faith in that full revelation in the future.

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They have learned that things here on earth and in their context will last a very short time. He tells them that this salvation is not something that just happened by chance, but that God had been working and revealing his grand plan of salvation through the prophets.

You see, for Peter, all those prophetic voices in the Old Testament were announcing God's plan of salvation. Later in the letter he quotes Isaiah 40:6-8 as quoted in 1:24 and 25 as a demonstration that in Christ the prophetic word of God through Isaiah is fulfilled. This is what it says,

“<sup>24</sup> For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,  
<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.  
(1Pe 1:24-25 NIV)

In view then of God's faithfulness, in view of that salvation, in view of this good news, in view of being ransomed from "the futile ways inherited from their ancestors, (philosophical and theological foundations of the culture there are called from) live your life in reverent fear of God.

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#### **Be Holy as he who called you is holy.**

They are called to be holy and to separate themselves out of the practices of this world and instead do what God does. It means that in the depth of their heart and desires, they would want to be like God and acquire the character of God in Christ.

And in Christ's example and empowered by the Spirit or as 1:2b says, "sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient in Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood" Yes, indeed they can, but not because they are able on their own but because the work of God the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit enables them to. How? By being obedient to the point of suffering, just like Jesus was obedient even to the point of death.

#### **New birth – and into a new life in Christ**

They are called to rid themselves of malice (or ill will), or hatefulness. All guile (or fraud) insincerity, envy, and all slander. They were not to act as the world around them did. Rather, they were to act like Jesus did.

Jesus did good things and he was still rejected by humanity. But that which was rejected became the very

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head of the corner. So, even though the world was going to reject them, they had an example in Jesus and in God's eyes, they were a chosen race now, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that they may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (Peter 2:9). Right there they have a new foundation to their way of life. They are a new people.

**Living it out in the marketplace: for the Lord's sake.**

#### **A call to all:**

To accept the authority of every human institution: To me this amazing considering the persecution that Christian suffered under the Roman Empire. Live as a free people, but do not use their freedom as a pretext for evil, he tells them. They are called to be good citizens and good neighbors.

The new you is not a license to dishonor the Emperor. "For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish" (Peter 2:15) and that is the point. Their good behavior is the only way to silence their hostile neighbors.

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#### **To Slaves:**

To the slaves that have become Christians, he calls them to accept their master's authority. And here is where I want to pause a little bit, because if we don't read this in their context only. If we don't do that, then we may come out with the ideas that somehow God not only condones, but vindicates slavery. But that is not the point of this passage.

To use this passage as justification or as the biblical foundation for slavery is not correct. This was spoken to Christian slaves in that day on how to behave in order to NOT bring disrepute to the gospel. The main concern is their witness of their faith and not that slavery is ok. The one whom they are following submitted himself to suffering and then became the "shepherd and guardian of your souls" (Peter 2:25)

#### **To Wives:**

To the wives he tells them accept authority of their husbands. Especially those who are married to unbelieving husbands, that their husband may be won over by their conduct (Peter 3:1) A Christian wife's is not to make a cultural statement or grandstanding but to do what is good

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in the community. One thing to remember is that these churches' cultural context was a patriarchal world. It was just the way it was.

### **To the husbands**

Peter calls the husbands, the same way, to show concern for their wives. Peter says to husbands about their wives, “they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life” – so they the woman just like men are heir of the gift of life.

We don't speak today, or at least some don't think of women as “the weaker sex”. I hope we don't. The truth is that woman have shown time and time again that if the oppressive and artificial ceiling over their head is taken out, they can do just as great as man can do.

### **Towards a new peoplehood: new cultural and theological foundation:**

What we do becomes our culture. We become what we practice.

For all: have a unity of spirit. As they live out their faith in their community, they are to strive for unity. Strive and work towards unity, I think it is a timeless value.

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Unity is a Christian value that we have neglected too many times. It is interesting that he calls them to unity while the world outside considered them a threat to the social order.

This unity is based in the sharing one spirit, the spirit of God and the non-conforming to the ways of the world.

He calls them to sympathy on one another. In their case, this is especially important in sharing their suffering experiences with each other.

Love for one another: and this is so important. He is calling them to love one another. Not compete with one another, but to love one another.

Loving requires a tender heart. Be sensitive to other people, especially those who belong to your community of faith.

A humble mind, what is a humble mind? It is a mind that can learn and that can recognize and/or to admit that maybe our ideas are not the best, that we don't know everything. And that we must learn by listening to what others have to say.

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Do not repay evil for evil, or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. That is what Jesus did. When he was on the cross, he prayed “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing”. (Luke 23:34)

I really think that if these values are practiced at deeper levels by all member of a new community, this may lead to some theological foundation that will eventually change our attitudes towards woman, towards slavery and towards those who are abused and/or discriminated against.

How can we say we love a neighbor and hold him/her as slave? How can a husband truly love his wife if he thinks that somehow, by virtue of her gender, she is inferior to the husband? Not to mention that we, Christians, claim to believe that God created male and female in his image.

How is it that a government that includes people who call themselves Christians can create artificial structures of power that keep people from fully realizing their God given potential?

All these questions can be asked and answered now that the church has moved from a position of vulnerability to a position of power. We can't hold on to an anachronistic

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philosophy that seemed, even though, I don't believe that was Peter's point, pro-master and pro-slavery.

I don't believe that Peter's purpose was to set the theological foundation in favor of slavery or the theological foundation for a wife's uncritical, and by virtue of being a woman, acceptance of a husband's authority. Peter admonished the husbands back then to have consideration for their wives for they are heirs of the gift of life. This would probably have been a little revolutionary then. A woman has the same footing as a man in the final revelation of Jesus. So, why not practice it now?

### **So, what do we make of this?**

Peter was inviting the church to be good neighbors. To be good citizens by accepting, for the Lord's sake, the authority of every human institution. Perhaps for us this also means to be good neighbors and good citizens. To respect the laws and to recognize them as instruments that attempt to impart justice.

Our form of government today is different from the form of government then. Our government is or should be a government of the people, by the people and for the people. So, those in government, especially those who call

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themselves Christians have the obligation to serve the interest of the people and not their own interest.

We do not have an emperor. Thanks God for that and our current foundational ideas do not allow for that. If a Christian is in the government, then the Christian is to be a good servant and a good neighbor and a good citizen. If one is not in the government, be a good citizen and participate in the civic life of the country to the extent that it doesn't get in the way of our relationship and obedience to Christ.

Our current context rejects the idea of slavery and it should stay that way. People, all people, anywhere in the world should not have to live under a master who owns them. I think this is actually more in tune with the overarching Biblical theology of our identity in Christ and in whose image we are created.

I think that each Christian couple can and should decide upon mutual and loving agreement how their relationship will play out in their lives. But it has to be based on mutual consideration so that together they may worship the Lord and nothing hinders the prayers to God. Each spouse should have the freedom to reach their God given potential by the talents and gifts that God has

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endowed in each one of them in the way they have chosen to serve God.

Finally, in a patriarchal society, man enjoyed special privilege. They had no social or religious barriers that kept them artificially down. So, in the new Christian life, man must admit to the special preferential treatment that we have enjoyed and strive to level the field so that the same privileges for man are also enjoyed by woman. Tear down any artificial barriers I mean philosophical or theological barriers that keep women down. According to Peter, they are also heirs to the gift of life.

And all submit to one another and clothe ourselves with humility in our dealings with one another. (5:5). Humble ourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Let us, as the people of God cast all our anxieties on him because he cares for us.

If the world around us, if the culture around us reject us, let it not be because we are insolent, and take our freedom in Christ as an occasion to be disruptive and sometimes plain nasty.

In all my years here at SRBC I have learned and grown more in my relationship with Christ than I think it would

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have been possible in another church's cultural context. I am grateful for that.

As we continue our journey, let us continue to be good neighbors, good citizens, good brothers and sisters to the world out there. I have mentioned in the past some ministries that we are doing here, the ESL, the food pantry, the community garden and so many things, that I think are so great.

May the Lord grant us the endurance, the patience, the desire to continue to serve our community in that way as long as God grants us the capability and ability to do so.

Peter wrote, "I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. (1 Peter 1:12b).

Amen!