

GENERAL EPISTLES: 1 & 2 PETER

INTRODUCTION

In these two letters, Peter is writing to believers in Asia Minor after he is jailed in Jerusalem and before he is martyred in Rome for his faith in Christ. The whole point of these two epistles is summarized in 2 Peter 3:17-18, where he calls the believers to “take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” In 1 and 2 Peter, Peter reminds his readers of their new identity in Christ and calls them to stay grounded in their faith as they pursue holiness. Many of these believers are faced with strong opposition by unbelievers and wicked emperors like Nero, but Peter calls them to live for Christ amid suffering. Ultimately, God will use their sacrifice for him to convict the nations, show them a powerful witness for Christ, and glorify God in heaven.

Peter also recognizes the different evils and false teachers threatening to steer their loyalties away from Christ and hinder their witness. He points to Christ as the ultimate example to follow and challenges the readers to throw off everything that hinders them from pursuing him. As Peter reminds them in 1 Peter 1:3-5, and now us, no matter what temptations we face or suffering we endure, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” We know that there is always hope in our suffering because of who we are in Christ, who he is, and his victory for our sake on the cross.

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

If you have ever done a sport or an after-school activity like choir, dance, or band, you are used to having a director or coach guide you and help you grow in that activity. The whole role of a coach is to point out where you are falling short and give you a clearer picture of what you should be striving for. Peter, an apostle or “coach” for believers during the first century, challenges the believers of his day to holiness and powerfully uses the gospel of Christ to refute the lies they are believing. Even today, Peter's words in these two epistles show us how to live for Christ and suffer well as a part of his body.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

1 Peter

- Salvation of the Believer (1 Pet 1-2)
- Submission of the Believer (1 Pet 3)
- Suffering of the Believer (1 Pet 4-5)

2 Peter

- Cultivation of Christian Character (2 Pet 1)
- Condemnation of False Teachers (2 Pet 2)
- Confidence in Christ's Return (2 Pet 3)

JESUS IN THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 PETER

In these two epistles, Peter writes to encourage believers to grow in holiness in Christ. After listing character traits that the Holy Spirit develops in us as we submit to him, Peter then points out that “if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). For Peter, the whole point of living and suffering well, the very things he calls his readers to do, is found in the identity given to us because of Christ's sacrifice for us. Without him, we are dead in our trespasses (Ephesians 2:5), but he makes us alive in him and makes it possible to imitate God as his beloved children (Ephesians 5:1). In this book, keep in mind how putting the flesh to death and becoming holy is only possible because of Jesus' work on the cross. The only way we can truly grow and obtain the fruit of the Spirit is through life in Christ.

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 PETER

OBSERVATION

- What is God teaching us in 1 and 2 Peter?
 - People: Who is Peter speaking to? What is their background?
 - Time: What was going on during the time Peter was writing?
 - Events: What is Peter addressing?
 - Purpose: How does Peter bring up the issues he addresses in 1 and 2 Peter?
- What literary devices are being used?
- What is the author emphasizing, repeating, contrasting, or bringing attention to?

INTERPRETATION

- What does the author want the reader to notice? What are some common themes/words/phrases? Can you trace what he is saying to any of Jesus' teachings?
- What is happening at this point in history? What are the believers facing? Why might they be stuck in the sins that Peter is addressing?
 - Explore how Peter describes God's character in these books
 - How does Peter use God's character to help believers understand these issues better? Example: God is our faithful Creator even when we suffer (1 Peter 4:19)
- How do these books challenge our comfort zone and priorities? How does Peter raise the bar on the issues that he is addressing? Hint: what does he say about suffering well?
- Is the standard that Peter sets for believers perfectly attainable? How does Peter call us to holiness while acknowledging our imperfect nature?

APPLICATION

- What and how does God want us to pray so that we can live and suffer well for him?
- How does God want us to face trials and temptations?
- What is our role in the process of sanctification? What is the biblical relation between faith and works?
- How do we seek God's will and desires over our own?
- What does God want us to prioritize?
- How can we respond when God calls us to do hard things?
- How can we be better characters in God's story?
- How can we recenter our lives to look more like God's?

PRAYER

- In 2 Peter 1:8, Peter tells us to continue to grow and mature in the fruit of the Spirit so that we may be effective and fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. How can we strive for these attributes yet be dependent on the Holy Spirit to grow them in us? How can we pray for this growth in our lives today?
- 1 Peter 4:19 says, "[L]et those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." How can we accomplish this?
- Author N.D. Wilson once said, "Sometimes standing against evil is more important than defeating it. The greatest heroes stand because it is right to do so, not because they believe they will walk away with their lives. Such selfless courage is a victory in itself." In Ephesians 6:13, Paul tells us to "put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." Sometimes, when we face evil like Paul and Peter did, we will not see victory in our lifetime. In some cases, like with death, we will only see the final victory in heaven. However, we are fighting a battle that is already won and have a glorious hope in Christ (1 Peter 1:3-7). Read these verses again. How can we live as good characters in God's story regardless of personal cost? Pray that God will shape and mature you to "stand in the evil day" because it is the

right thing to do, not because you will walk away unscathed. How can we live with this eternal perspective in life?

WHAT CHURCH HISTORY HAS SAID ABOUT THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 PETER

“The two most important things in our holy religion are faith and life. He who shall rightly understand these two words is not far from being a master in experimental theology. Faith and life! These are vital points to a Christian. They possess so intimate a connection with each other that they are by no means to be severed; God hath so joined them together, let no man seek to put them asunder. You shall never find true faith unattended by true godliness; on the other hand, you shall never discover a truly holy life which has not for its root and foundation a living faith upon the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Woe unto those who seek after the one without the other!”

—Charles Spurgeon

“We are in danger of forgetting that we cannot do what God does, and that God will not do what we can do. We cannot save nor sanctify ourselves—God does that. But God will not give us good habits or character, and He will not force us to walk correctly before Him. We have to do all that ourselves. We must “work out” our “own salvation” which God has worked in us (Philippians 2:12). *Add* means that we must get into the habit of doing things, and in the initial stages that is difficult. To take the initiative is to make a beginning—to instruct yourself in the way you must go.”

—Oswald Chambers

(on “add to your faith virtue” from 2 Peter 1:5)

