

First Peter

Authorship

The genuineness of this letter, though greatly disputed later on, seems to have had clear attestation by the early church and to have possessed apostolic authority.¹ There have been linguistic and stylistic, historical, and doctrinal objections to Petrine authorship but nothing that should compel attribution to someone else.²

Date

It is most probable that 1 Peter was written just prior to the outbreak of the Neronian persecutions, that is in A.D. 63 or early 64. Persecution is in view in the letter but not necessarily of the official, empire-wide kind that would be found after Nero's fire of A.D.64.³

Original Readers

Even though Peter has been entrusted with the gospel for the Jews (Gal. 2:7), it is evident that those to whom he is writing include Gentile believers (cf. 4:3-4). Guthrie concludes that it was a mixed group, that is Jewish and Gentile believers.⁴ If this is the case, then the phrase "to the pilgrims of the Dispersion" (1:1) describes the readers' relationship to the world: "As God's people scattered throughout the Empire they are a sort of spiritual 'Diaspora'."⁵ The readers belong to churches in northern Asia Minor.

Occasion

It is clear that these churches are experiencing persecution, though not necessarily of an official kind (cf. 2:11-12; 4:12-19). In light of this, Peter is exhorting them to endurance and faithfulness.

Theme Statement

Believers may preserve an eternally worthwhile life experience because suffering in this world may be exchanged for glory in the next.

¹ See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. rev. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 760-62.

² *Ibid.*, 762-81.

³ For a full discussion of the data relating to dating see J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 150-69.

⁴ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 784-86.

⁵ Zane C. Hodges, "1 Peter," unpublished class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972, 1.

Outline⁶

I.	Salutation: Peter writes to spiritual pilgrims, chosen for divine purposes.....	1:1-2
II.	Preface: Salvation of the soul is the believer's hope and goal.	1:3-12
A.	The believer has been born again.	1:3-5
1.	This is to a living hope.	1:3
2.	This is to an incorruptible inheritance.	1:4-5
a.	It is undefiled and reserved in heaven.	1:4
b.	It will be revealed in the last time to those kept by God.....	1:5
B.	The believer is being grieved by trials.	1:6-12
1.	It is for a time by necessity.....	1:6
2.	It is for the purifying of faith.....	1:7-8
3.	It is for the salvation of the "soul."	1:9-12
a.	This salvation is the outcome of purified faith.	1:9
b.	This salvation was pondered by the prophets because it conjoined sufferings and glories.	1:10-11
c.	This salvation was reserved for the present believers.	1:12a
d.	This salvation is wondered at by the angels.....	1:12b
I.	Body: This salvation is to be worked out in experience in the course of this life. 1:13-4:19	
A.	Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to God.	1:13-21
1.	Out of obedience as a child.	1:13-16
a.	By means of a disciplined mind.	1:13
b.	For the purpose of holiness.	1:14-16
2.	Out of respect for the price of redemption.	1:17-21
a.	With anticipation of giving account of our conduct.	1:17
b.	With appreciation for the cost of our redemption.....	1:18-21
B.	Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to the brethren.	1:22-2:10
1.	Through constant love individually.	1:22-25
a.	We have been redeemed to render such love.....	1:22
b.	We have been reconstituted so as to render such love.	1:23-25
2.	Through spiritual growth collectively.	2:1-10
a.	Growth that is nourished by the unadulterated word.	2:1-3
b.	Growth that is directed toward the worship of God.	2:4-10
1)	As a spiritual house the church worships God.	2:4-8
2)	As a holy nation the church displays God.....	2:9-10
C.	Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to the world.	2:11-3:7
1.	Through abstaining from fleshly lusts.	2:11-12
2.	Through submitting to human authority.	2:13-3:7
a.	Submission to government of all kinds.....	2:13-17
b.	Submission to masters, good and bad.	2:18-25
1)	This applies even when suffering wrongfully.	2:18-20
2)	This applies because Christ suffered for us.	2:21-25
b.	Submission to husbands who may not believe.	3:1-6
1)	That they might win their husbands by chaste conduct.....	3:1-2
2)	That they might gain the approval of God.....	3:3-6

⁶ The basic structure of this outline is that of Zane Hodges, *ibid.*

- c. Submission to God's design for marriage.3:7
- D. Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to suffering.3:8-4:19
 - 1. Through a life supported by a good conscience.3:8-4:6
 - a. We are called to the blessing of an obedient life.....3:8-12
 - 1) We are expected to be a blessing.3:8-9
 - 2) We are directed to expect blessing from obedience.3:10-12
 - b. We may experience suffering in spite of an obedient life.....3:13-17
 - 1) The principle: good does not normally bring harm.3:13
 - 2) The possibility: righteousness may invite suffering.3:14a
 - 3) The prospect: suffering with a good conscience will produce witness.....3:14b-17
 - c. We may, in Christ, suffer with a good conscience.3:18-4:6
 - 1) Christ suffered unjustly to bring us to God.3:18
 - 2) Christ preached righteousness through Noah.....3:19-20
 - 3) Christ became the believer's ark through baptism.....3:21-22
 - 4) Christ secures the believer's victory over sin.....4:1-6
 - 2. Through a life spread through with God's glory.....4:7-19
 - a. We must serve to God's glory.....4:7-11
 - 1) Prayer maintains seriousness for the end.4:7
 - 2) Ministry manifests the manifold grace of God.4:8-11
 - b. We may need to suffer for God's glory.....4:12-19
 - 1) We may rejoice in the midst of trial with a view to reveling in the glory of Christ.4:12-13
 - 2) We might be reproached for Christ's name with a view to the special ministry of the Holy Spirit.....4:14
 - 3) We must suffer for the right things with a view to God's recognition of the suffering's true worth.4:15-19
- II. Epilogue: Peter delivers specific admonitions to various groups.5:1-9
 - A. He counsels fellow elders to dutifully shepherd God's flock.5:1-4
 - B. He counsels young people in submission to their elders.5:5a
 - C. He counsels all to mutual submission and humility.5:5b-7
 - D. He counsels sober vigilance against the adversary.5:8-9
- III. Concluding greeting.5:10-14
 - A. Peter wishes them spiritual stability after suffering.5:10-11
 - B. Peter confirms his letter as bearing the true grace of God.....5:12-14

Theme Statement

Believers may preserve an eternally worthwhile life experience because suffering in this world may be exchanged for glory in the next.

Theme Development

Suffering has been the plight of the people of God from the very beginning. Peter writes to a group of churches experiencing persecution in order to help them overcome those hostile forces, both internal and external, that seek to rob the believer of experiencing the fullness of

Christ's salvation, in time and for eternity. Christ has provided not only for deliverance from the eternal penalty of sin but also for deliverance from a wasted life experience. Suffering is designed by the evil one to rob the Christian of the latter. God has provided a way in which suffering can actually be incorporated in the accruing of an eternally worthwhile experience. Peter calls this the "salvation of the soul" and shows the believer how to go about securing it.

I. Salutation: Peter writes to spiritual pilgrims, chosen for divine purposes (1:1-2).

Using the dispersion of Israel as a metaphor, Peter writes to believers in a region undergoing persecution as those who have been chosen by God for a pilgrimage of special privilege and opportunity, solely by virtue of the salvific work of the triune God.

II. Preface: Salvation of the soul is the believer's hope and goal (1:3-12).

Peter's readership has been born again to a living hope which consists of an inheritance to be realized in heaven (1:3-4). This inheritance is further defined as a "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Hence, this does not refer to the believer's justification, but rather to something that is future (1:5) and something that is merited through a godly response to trials; this will produce genuine, praiseworthy faith (1:6-9).⁷ This is an aspect of salvation that was not understood by the prophets of the Old Testament (though justification certainly was—cf. Rom 4) but had been hinted at through the connection of Messiah's sufferings and subsequent glories (1:10-11). Now that Christ has suffered and ascended, believers have the opportunity to exchange suffering for glory, just as He did, though it is still a great mystery to the courtesans of heaven (1:12). Since this is not an automatic outcome for Christians in their life experience, Peter now traces out the way in which such an "exchange" can be made.

⁷ Joseph Dillow, commenting on the concept of "soul" in Matthew 16:24 writes: "The psyche can be 'saved' in two senses. The first... refers to physical preservation. But the metaphorical sense... is derived from a common usage of psyche where it refers to the inner self within an individual which experiences the joys and sorrows of life, i.e. the person. The rich young fool (Lk. 12:19-23) stored up his goods so that his psyche could rest and be joyous. To save the soul in this sense is to secure for it eternal pleasures by living a life of sacrifice now. We are apparently, according to Jesus, developing an inner character which will be preserved (saved) into eternity. There is a connection between our life of sacrifice and our capability to enjoy and experience eternal fellowship with God.

'Gaining the whole world' refers to obtaining the joys and pleasures of this world. This 'gain,' however, can only be accomplished if a man is willing to 'forfeit his soul.' To 'forfeit the soul' is metaphorical for 'forfeit true life now and reward in eternity'....So the danger is that, if a man does not become a disciple, he will lose his soul. That is he will forfeit true life now and reward in eternity." Joseph Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 117-18.

III. Body: This salvation is to be worked out in experience in the course of this life (1:13–4:19).

In the body of the epistle Peter details four key areas in which care must be given with respect to living the Christian life. In all of them there is some undertone of difficulty or trial, though the theme of suffering is dealt with formally in the last section.

A. Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to God (1:13-21).

The first area of conduct dealt with is, appropriately, the believer's relationship with God. As a child, the believer is to be serious about spiritual character development, which is defined as the holiness of the Father Himself (1:13-16). As one who invokes the Father's protection and blessing, the believer must live in such a way that the great value of Christ's death is fully manifested (1:17-20). He is, after all, the One in whom the believer's faith and hope lie (1:21).

B. Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to the brethren (1:22–2:10).

The next logical area of relationship is the Christian community. Through the purifying work of Spirit, the believer has been rendered capable of constant love of the brethren (1:22-25). Not to do so means to live as less than we really are. Love is carried on as an individual activity. However, the church is an organism, designed to display God through its corporate activities. For this to happen each member must be growing spiritually by means of the word (2:1-3) so that he or she can function properly as a "stone" in God's house, that is, the body of Christ (2:4-5). God receives worship when believers, motivated and enabled by Jesus Christ, offer up the spiritual sacrifices of service (2:5). This is only possible, and only makes sense, for those who truly value His person and work (2:6-8). The church exists in the world for the same reason that the nation of Israel had been created, to display the excellent qualities and character of God to all peoples (2:9-10). Through love, service, and worship God is glorified and the believer develops an eternally worthwhile life experience.

C. Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to the world (2:11–3:7).

Though the believers are in the world as sojourners and pilgrims, a proper deportment must be maintained on this "foreign" soil. Even when it is hostile, the believer is still responsible for manifesting the demeanor of Jesus Christ. Generally speaking, the believer must abstain from the lusts of the flesh which are contrary to the life of God (2:11) so that the world will have nothing to accuse and may, thereby, come to embrace the truth.

Specifically, the believer must be respectful of any and all authority relationships. This includes government structures of all kinds (2:13-17), and service to masters, whether they be

harsh or good (2:18). The rationale for such respectful submission is that God expects it (2:19-20); in addition Christ exemplified such an attitude (2:21-25). As He was able to entrust Himself to the Father as the righteous judge, so may His children, who in turn receive the tender care of the good Shepherd. Wives may find themselves united with unbelieving husbands (3:1). The way they submit will mean everything for their own spiritual development (3:2-6), as well as giving their husbands the best opportunity for becoming Christians (3:1). Husbands are not without responsibilities in marriage (3:7). They submit to God by loving their wives according to His design.

D. Salvation of the soul is to be worked out in relation to suffering (3:8–4:19).

Finally, Peter turns to address suffering in and of itself. Having a right attitude towards suffering and being armed with the right approach makes all the difference in seeking to live a god-honoring life. The key is to maintain a good conscience.

1. Through a life supported by a good conscience (3:8–4:6). Peter first asserts, on the basis of Psalm 34, that, normally, good behavior brings blessing in life, including harmonious and profitable relationships (3:8-13). However, it does happen that just the opposite is the case (3:14). In this case there is still a blessing to be experienced (3:14). If Christ is set apart as the absolute ruler of life, then obedience may be maintained even in the presence of mistreatment, with positive results in the area of witness (3:15-17). But who can really have a good conscience when it comes to suffering? There is always something the enemy can point to in order to spoil the testimony. The answer lies in the believer's union with Christ.

It is possible to maintain a good conscience in the midst of suffering because Christ has already suffered for any sin I may commit, and has brought me to God in complete and full acceptance (3:18). Though He lived in the realm of the flesh, where sin normally resides, He was made alive from the dead in the realm of the spirit, by which He had given witness to disobedient spirit beings during the time of Noah (3:19-20). Therefore, Christ may boast of a complete and untainted experience of proclamation with a good conscience because He was never tainted by sin. Because the believer is united with Christ via the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (3:20-21), and because, thereby, Christ's death in the flesh may be reckoned as the believer's (4:1), sin can be resisted and testimony given with a good conscience (4:2-4). In this way spiritually dead people may hear effective testimony and become alive (4:5-6).

2. Through a life spread through with God's glory (4:7-19). Regardless of how one is treated in this world, life may be lived to the glory of God through prayer (4:7), love (4:8-9), and

the exercise of spiritual gifts as good stewards of the grace of God (4:10-11). When suffering does become the lot of the believer a positive response is still possible (4:12-19). This is because godly suffering will result in a heightened share in Christ's glory (4:12-13) and because reproach for the name of Christ will result in the special ministry of the Holy Spirit (4:14). However, the believer must be suffering for the right things (4:15-19). When undeserved suffering is encountered in this manner, the "life" may be entrusted to God in doing good, with the realization that it has eternal worth and will be preserved by the Father for the believer's eternal enjoyment. This fittingly concludes Peter's message.

IV. Epilogue: Peter delivers specific admonitions to various groups (5:1-9).

Peter concludes by applying his teaching on the proper response to trial and difficulty to specific groups. To elders he counsels diligence in their roles as undershepherds because there is a special reward for those who suffer for such labor (5:1-4). Submission and humility are enjoined as cardinal qualities of those desiring to be exalted by God (5:5-7). Finally, Peter counsels vigilance against the adversary who would like nothing better than to spoil the believer's inheritance through an unbelieving response to suffering (5:8-9).

V. Concluding greeting (5:10-14).

Peter never leaves the subject of suffering, wishing for his readers spiritual completion and stability at the end of their approaching ordeals (5:10-11). What he has testified concerns the true grace of God which has been and continues to be the basis of their position before God (5:12). Peter's writing from the heart of the empire ("Babylon") that will soon unleash its full fury on the church will substantiate his letter of admonition for all sufferers for Christ for the whole age.

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