

EXILES IN A PAGAN LAND

HOW BEING BORN INTO A LIVING HOPE
CHANGES THE WORLD

AGE TO AGE

A PEER LEARNING GROUP IN THE CRCNA

A GROUP BIBLE STUDY ON 1 PETER

FORWARD

What you are holding in your hand is the result of a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Grant from the Christian Reformed Church Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program. The authors of this Bible Study are six pastors who have spent time over the past 2 years observing, reading, and wondering about the rapid changes in our contemporary world.

When we started our research, we noticed that the people who used to be the vocal opponents of the Christian worldview – people like Richard Dawkins or Sam Harris – were fading to the background. They had claimed that we would all get over “primitive superstitions” and become secular atheists. However, that didn’t happen. What did happen is that people became *more spiritual* even as church attendance declined. To illustrate, in a recent lecture about those who have no religious affiliation, Nathan Jacobs quoted a woman who told him “I don’t believe in God, but I think my apartment is haunted.” Curiosity about things like ghosts and the paranormal is going up. Now it is fair to say that almost no one believes that we are in a material universe devoid of gods, spirits, ghosts or demons. So what is this new spirituality?

As we looked into this further we realized that this new spirituality actually seemed to be very old. In fact, there are many similarities to religion in the Roman pagan system and the new spirituality of those who aren’t sure about God, but live in haunted apartments. Like the Romans, such people don’t think too much about one God who rules over all, but instead they are pre-occupied by lesser gods or ghosts, or the various powers that can be contacted through mediums. Also like the Romans who included more and more gods in their ever expanding pantheon of gods, people today are likely to embrace a variety of spiritual practices and beliefs from a variety of sources. A person who believes her apartment to be haunted, might also practice yoga (rooted in Hinduism) while believing in karma (another Hindu idea), while at the same time encouraging her kids to practise mindfulness (rooted in Buddhist thought). She might watch a medium on TV, from the western spiritualist tradition, and probably go to church on Christmas because “all religions are the same.” This wouldn’t be that much different really a Roman who worshiped Athena in Athens and Artemis in Ephesus and wondering if maybe Athena and Artemis were in some sense the same.

Unlike Christianity, there isn’t a book to guide this new (old!) spirituality. It is far more intuitive and takes the experiences of people very seriously. Dreams and visions are interesting once again. And some are even trying to live as neo-pagans, complete with spell casting, secret rituals and magic. As Christianity declines, people in our culture are not becoming atheists, they are becoming more spiritual and their spirituality is getting weirder.

The Good News is that this presents wonderful opportunities for us. We’ve been here before, as Christians. After all, if Christianity could grow in the

Roman world, then surely it can grow in ours. And this makes I Peter, written by the Apostle Peter to Christians in the first century AD suddenly relevant again. For generations, commentaries on I Peter would begin by stating that I Peter was not really applicable because the culture was Christian, and for the most part that was true. But now, we will need to study I Peter in earnest. Our culture turned pagan right under our noses. Everyone's apartment is haunted and the gods have returned. Let us turn to Peter who tells us how to "live such good lives among the pagans."

As you go through this study go at your own pace - taking time where you need to. There are no assigned days but just places that you and your group might naturally stop. Think deeply about these things as you go through them, Our world is changing and we find ourselves as aliens and strangers in the world.

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. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Pet. 5:10-11 NIV

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INTRODUCTION

The letter of 1 Peter was written by Peter the Apostle while he was in Rome. It is written to a group of churches in Asia Minor, in what is now modern day Turkey. If you get a chance, find a map of the Middle East, move north from Israel and a little to the west. The area that Peter is writing to is bordered by the Aegean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. These areas were ruled by Rome. Within this same region are the seven churches addressed by John in the book of Revelation. This is the center of early Christianity. If you remember from the Book of Acts, people traveled from these areas to Jerusalem for Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes down. These people are converted and return home. Meanwhile, Christians are kicked out of Jerusalem. Where do they go? North.

The Christian churches in this area are sandwiched between Jerusalem to the south and its Jewish influence and Rome to the West and its pagan influence. Christians are no longer Jews and they are not pagans either. They are strangers and aliens in this no-man's land between Jerusalem and Rome. Peter addresses them as such, "To God's Elect, strangers in the world and scattered."

Much of the letter then deals with three interrelated themes. First, Peter tells them repeatedly that they are strangers and different from those around them and that they are to embrace this difference by refusing to conform. Second, Peter reminds them of Jesus, who promises them a true homeland and an inheritance kept in heaven. Their identity is wrapped up and bound to the identity of Jesus. Third, because they are strangers to the world around them they should expect to suffer and are called to endure suffering. Here, they have Jesus as their Saviour and Example of how to suffer.

As you begin this Bible Study, it may be helpful to watch the Bible Project Video on 1 Peter. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhP7AZQIzCg> or at bibleproject.com

Part 1 Exiles in the World

Read Chapter 1:1-2

1. As Peter opens this letter, who is he writing his letter to? Write down some of the words Peter uses in verses 1 and 2.

2. In general, what do these words mean?

3. As we study this letter it soon becomes apparent that for Peter these are identifying statements. These describe who we are as Christians. Have you ever thought of yourself in these terms? What does it mean to be identified this way?

4. Are there any areas of life that you feel like a stranger or exile?

5. What changed in the lives of the people so they now find themselves as exiles? In other words, what has God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit done?

Soft Persecution

When Peter writes this letter to the Christians in Asia Minor in about AD 64, there is some persecution going on. Some of it may have been violent, but much of persecution would have been soft persecution in the form of social and economic exclusion. Peter is likely writing before the bloody persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Nero.

What did this soft persecution look like? The Roman society was very tolerant of other gods. As they conquered new areas, they were able to incorporate new gods into the large group of gods already being worshipped. After a time, they even included emperors in their group of gods. So it was perfectly normal for a person to worship one god at home, another at a temple, another to get into the market, another god who was worshipped by their industry or guild. It was completely normal and expected that people would worship all the gods that they encountered.

What they couldn't tolerate was for a group to reject all the gods in favour of only one God. It was unthinkable that a person wouldn't offer sacrifices to all the gods encountered on a daily basis. Furthermore, it would have been beyond the pail to say, as Christians did, that the gods weren't really gods at all. When

people came to the Christian faith, they would have had difficulty in their homes where the gods of the house were worshipped. They would be cast out of their industry and guilds for not worshipping the gods there. They may not have been welcomed in the markets where offerings were expected to another set of gods. They certainly were looked down upon for not worshipping the emperor - an expectation of a good citizen of the Roman Empire. Christians would have been seen as very strange.

Let's think about a specific example. Imagine that you live in a small farming village, coincidentally the term pagan comes from the Latin word for farmer. You and your fellow pagan farmers worship the god of the sun and the god of the rain. As long as everyone worships the god of the sun and the god of the rain, the gods are happy, the sun shines, the rain comes and the crops grow. Now, in your village you've got a small group of people who decide that they are not going to worship the god of the sun and the god of the rain anymore. "These gods," they say, "Aren't really gods and should not be worshiped." This is a problem. Because as a good pagan farmer you know that if everyone doesn't worship the god of the sun and the god of the rain, the gods will get angry and the sun won't shine and the rains won't come and the crops won't grow. You have to get rid of these people who aren't worshipping the gods, or you will starve! Here we can see a bit of why Christians were persecuted by their neighbours. There was a lot more at stake than "you worship your God and we will worship ours."

1. Is there violent persecution of Christians today? What does it look like? Can you share a story? If you have time go to the website vomcanada.com for information about global persecution of Christians.
2. Think about our cultural context, in what ways can you think of a soft persecution happening today? Keep in mind that a soft persecution is not violent, but a very clear "unwelcomeness." Do people, like the pagan farmer above, feel threatened by Christianity?
3. Have you ever felt the pressure to change your morals and ethics to suit the culture around you instead of letting them be shaped by your identity in Christ and his Word?

Now let's return to 1 Peter.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-12

1. In first nine verses of this section Peter tells us what God has given us. What has God given us?
2. Why do Christians have hope even though we are strangers and exiles?
3. Why is this a living hope (1:3)? Have you seen others who have lived and died in this hope? What did it look like?
4. In verses 6 and 7 Peter speaks about trials and grief. Why have trials and griefs come?
5. In verse 8 and 9, Peter praises his readers and tells them they are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy. Why do they have joy? How often are our lives characterized by inexpressible joy?

Trials, Grief and Joy

As we read about the promise of trials and hardships, we can see these things as a test. Sometimes we have negative associations with tests - especially ones that are pass/fail. When the Bible uses the illustration of a test, it is not something God sends to see if you pass, rather, it is an opportunity to grow. An example of this may help. If you want to build muscle, you challenge yourself by lifting heavier and heavier weights. As you test your muscles they grow. Some testing is meant to strengthen. God is concerned about the kind of people we become - character. The purpose of suffering and trials often is sanctification, the process by which the Holy Spirit works in us to make us holier. The real challenge for a Christian is not that we suffer, but how we suffer and how we glorify God even in the midst of the storms.

Notice that Peter is not telling Christians that they have to be happy about their circumstances. They aren't joy-filled because of the trials but because they are saved in Christ Jesus. They could lose everything in life, but the promise here is that God will never lose them. They are being shielded, they have an inheritance being kept for them, they are receiving the goal of their faith. Nothing can take that away. When trials come our way, it is easy to become despondent, especially if we lose material things. In the story of Job, the devil makes the mistake of thinking that Job's happiness and trust in God were dependent on his material possessions. That is not where joy lies. Those that promise material blessings will bring hope are preaching a false gospel. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). The apostle Paul has an example for this. In 1 Corinthians 9:24ff, he uses the illustration of a race. You run through the cramps, the pains, the aching muscles, because you know the finish line is coming and the prize is worth it.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-17

1. What are some ways that Peter encourages us to be holy?

2. What are areas of your life that this has been a challenge? In what areas do you "conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance" (1:14)?

3. Peter is beginning to help us think about how to live as strangers and exiles. How does living our lives in reverent fear (1:17) shape how we think about living in exile? Who should we fear?

Holiness and Fear

In these verses, Peter quotes Leviticus 19:2. The idea is that God is holy - he is separate, without sin. The people of God are also called to be holy - to be separate, to be consecrated to God. In the Old Testament, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were rooms in the temple. As we will see in chapter 2, Christians are the new temple, built out of living stones. They, like the temple before them, are to be “holy places.”

A holy place can inspire reverent fear of God. For some of us, the idea of being afraid of God, or fearing God sounds foreign. Elliot Clark helps this concept sound a little less foreign. He writes, “fearing others more than God usually demonstrates itself in trying to please them more than God. To put it another way, you know you fear someone when you desire their approval and live for their praise.” When we live our lives in reverent fear, what we are doing is living a certain way because we want God’s approval and praise. It is good to fear God, it is good to want God’s praise more than the empty praises of people. And our fear of God keeps us on the straight and narrow path. In times of trial and persecution it is impossible for anyone not to feel afraid. The point is to be more afraid of God and more desiring of God’s approval than being afraid of what the persecutors might do.

Reread 1 Peter 1:10-12 and then read 1 Peter 1:18-25

1. Who were the prophets who spoke of the grace to come talking about? Who were these prophets serving?
2. How does Peter summarize the gospel message in verses 18-21?
3. In verse 23-25 the Word of God is compared to a seed. Seeds produce plants that live and then die. But the word of God stands forever. What happens to people who receive the gospel word? How do people receive the gospel word?

The Preached Word

In verse 23 Peter says that we are born again “through the living and enduring Word of God.” Verse 25 tells us that the Word of God has been “preached to you.” The Bible teaches that people need to know the truth about sin and

salvation in order to be converted or born again. The way people learn this is through preaching.

The preaching of the Word of God is central to what we do in our worship, for by it we come to know the truth, we are convicted, we are encouraged, we are rebuked, we are trained for service in the kingdom of God. When we listen to a minister, we are listening to the Word of God. If you want to see how this has been said through the history of the Reformed church, you can look up the form for ordination for ministers (CRC), the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 35), or the Canons of Dordt (III/IV Articles 6, 17).

Have you ever thought about preaching this way? Does thinking about preaching this way change the way that you might prepare for worship together?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3

1. Peter has been working on a subtle theme. Look again in chapter 1:3 where we read “He has given us _____ into a living hope.” In Chapter 1:23 For you have been _____, not of perishable seed, but imperishable.” Now Peter in chapter 2:2-3 writes “Like _____ crave pure spiritual _____.”
2. While Peter’s readers are adults, they are in another sense, “spiritual children.” And children need to learn their manners so they can be good members of the household. What bad manners should “spiritual children” rid themselves of?

Part 1 Summary

As Christians we are exiles and strangers, not because we moved, but because we have been born again into living hope, by the power of God, through the preaching of God's Gospel Word, and now belong to God's family and have an inheritance held for us in heaven. In other words, we've been redeemed, bought back, by the blood of Jesus, from our former empty way of living. We are now to be holy, not to conform to evil desires, and to love each other deeply. As newborns in the faith, we are to crave the pure spiritual milk of good Christian manners, so we can grow up rightly in the faith. As we grow, we will face trials and sufferings, but these come so that our faith will be proved genuine and then when it is all over we will receive the goal of faith - salvation! Look through the chapter and jot down some ideas that are meaningful to you when it comes to:

Your Identity In Christ -

Your Christian Calling-

The Hope You Have-

Part 2, Living Stones

Read Chapter 2:4-12

1. Notice the parallels between Jesus and Christians in this passage
 - a. Jesus is the living stone. Christians are the _____.
 - b. Jesus was rejected by men. Verse 12 says that pagans may _____.
 - c. Jesus was chosen by God. Verse 9 says “But you are a _____ people...”

Stones and Altars

In these verses, Peter brings together the ideas of temple, priesthood and stones - concepts that were very familiar to his readers but may not be for us. In the early Old Testament stones were used to build altars to mark God’s presence in a particular place (ie. Gen. 35:7). Whenever Abraham stopped with his family the first thing he did was build an altar of stones (Gen. 12:7,8; 13:4,18). Eventually massive stones were quarried and cut for the building of the temple (1 Kings 5:15-18). The temple is the place where the prayers of the people go up to God and the Word of God comes down and is preached to the people. Standing in the middle are the priests, lifting up the prayers and sacrifices to God on behalf of the people, while also teaching the people the Word of God. Likewise, Christians now have this function. They are to offer spiritual sacrifices to God and to declare God’s praises to those around.

2. Take a moment and read Exodus 19:1-6. This is God speaking to the Israelites after they have been “born” through the Red Sea and now are in the Wilderness. What key words do we see in Exodus 19 that also appear in I Peter 2:9-10? Who are we?
3. In verse 11 speaks about abstaining from sinful desires, which war against the soul. How have you experienced this internal war? What have you done about it? What do you need to do?

4. The Heidelberg Catechism QA 86 says that one of the reasons we should do good works is “so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.” What does Peter say about this in verse 12?

Part 2 Summary

In this section we learn some of the ways that Christians are like Christ. He is the living stone, they are living stones. He was rejected by men, Christians too will be subjected to accusations of wrong doing. Jesus was chosen by God, Christians are chosen by God. Using imagery from Exodus 19, Peter declares that Christians are the stones of the temple, the priests in the temple, and the holy nation of God at worship. God has made those who were not a people into his people!

To wrap up this section, copy below I Peter 2:9-10. Memorize it if you can.

Submission to Every Authority

Peter writes “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority.” These authorities were certainly not Christian. Throughout the first century the emperor in Rome begins to be worshiped as divine, or a divine incarnation. For instance, Caesar Augustus (r. 27BC - 14AD) takes on titles of *pontifex maximus* (great priest) and *dominus noster* (our lord); Nero (r. 54-68) takes the title *lord*; Vespasian (r. 69-79) adds *savior*; Domitian (r. 81-96) is addressed as *lord and god*. Shortly after people read this letter, Nero will begin persecuting Christians in Rome and blaming the burning of the city on them. A generation or so after Peter writes this letter, the governor in Bithynia, Pliny, will use worshipping the emperor as a test to identify, and persecute and kill, Christians men and women. And yet, Peter instructs Christians to honor the king (vs. 17), *for the Lord’s sake*. We can see how the conflict will play out. Christians will insist that they honor the authorities over them. They follow the laws, they pay their taxes, they live peaceful lives. Yet Christians will also refuse to worship the emperor, reserving the act of worship for Jesus their Lord and Saviour. This will create a puzzle for pagan rulers who will wonder what to do with this Christian sect that rebels against the law to worship Caesar, but in every other respect conducts itself as a model of citizenship and virtue, including respecting and honoring their political rulers.

Similar to our world today, many of the places where first century Christians interact with others (ie. the public markets, the home) were places where most people wouldn’t believe the same things as they did. In fact, they would have had a deep suspicion of Christians. As a Christian you didn’t worship the emperor. As a Christian slave you didn’t worship the gods of your master. As a Christian you didn’t worship the gods of the household, guild, or market. This creates a tension, an unwelcomedness that leads to and is part of persecution. But Peter wants the Christian to be persecuted for the right things - rejecting idols, rejecting immoral behaviour, and worshipping the true God are those things. The way to do that in daily life is to submit, which means obey, as is proper, except when commanded to sin.

6. The second relationship is between servants (slaves) and masters (vv. 18-25). These masters were often idol worshippers. What does Peter say about Christians who are under these authorities? Why should they submit to them?

7. Sometimes we rationalize disrespect by saying that people don’t deserve it. What would Peter say about that?

8. The slave made a livelihood working for a master, just as we make our livelihood working for employers or supervisors. Are there ways that you struggle to submit to these authorities? Do some reflection on some of these areas: Having a harsh supervisor, working in a job you don't like, working for a person you don't like, having a grievance against someone over you.

Submission as a Slave or Employee

Two things are important to note regarding slavery in the Roman empire: first, slavery then was *not* racially motivated or determined. Slaves were often part of the same race as their master. Some slaves would have been more educated than even freeborn citizens; and prominent slaves could become wealthy and even own their own groups of slaves. The second thing to be aware of is the regular occurrence of slavery in society. In the first century slaves made up approximately 3 million of the 7.5 million inhabitants of Italy and about 10% of the total population of the rest of the empire. Some people would sell themselves into slavery to advance their position in society. A slave who matriculated out (retired) could be granted citizenship by their former master. Likewise, 1 Clement, an early Christian writing, tells about Christians who sold themselves into slavery in order to buy food for others or buy others out of slavery (1 Clement 55:2).

9. The last relationship is between husbands and wives. Many times, someone's spouse might not have been a Christian. What is the purpose of godly behaviour in a marriage (3:1-7)?
10. If you are married, are there ways that you struggle to submit in your marriage? Note: The word used in v. 7 for honor is the same word used 2:17 for honouring the king. So although respect, honour and submission look different, both husband and wives have responsibilities here. The point is that marriages should be places that other, non-christians, can look at it and say "that's a good marriage" (see again 2:12). Think especially of times that it is more difficult to submit. Do some reflection on some of these areas: having a disagreement with a spouse, raising children, deciding where to spend money...

11. Peter uses Abraham and Sarah as an example of a marriage (we know from Genesis that it wasn't all perfect). Do you know people who exemplify a good marriage? What are some characteristics of a marriage that this world says, "that's a good marriage?"

12. Peter spends verses 2-4 talking about beauty. According to Peter, what does it mean to be truly beautiful? How does that differ from what the world says is beautiful? Do you know of anyone who is beautiful in this way?

Rebellion vs Submission

Let's take a step back for a moment. Peter is talking about living good lives among the pagans. Peter has told us that we are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. This is who Christians are, meaning that they are strangers or migrants even, in the place where they find themselves. They are guests, in a sense, in someone else's home. How do you live as a good person in a society that is not your own? One temptation you might feel is the temptation to say to your King, or Governor, your Master, or your Husband, "Hey! I am part of a holy nation. I am a servant of Jesus the King! You better leave me alone!" If you do this, you will be perceived as a rebel. The main sin that Peter is warning against then is rebellion.

Jesus stands out as the example: Jesus is King of Kings and yet, he does not assert his authority with displays of power. Peter writes, "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" in verse 23. God will judge unjust rulers, unjust masters and unjust husbands. Like Jesus, we entrust ourselves to "him who judges justly."

We are part of the holy nation and yet like Jesus, we make the decision to submit to earthly authorities. We are part of the holy nation, and yet like Jesus, we make the decision to submit to an earthly master. We are part of the holy nation, and yet like Jesus, we may make the decision to submit to a pagan husband. And yet, all the while, because we are part of the church, we belong to the King of Kings and are made royal priests! Slaves became bishops and had spiritual authority over free men and masters! (According to Christian tradition

the slave Onesimos became a bishop and had authority over his at-one-time master Philemon.) Women who were Christian are closer to God than husbands who are not. Peter is not telling those who are already oppressed by society to submit to their oppressors. Rather Peter is telling those who have been set free by Jesus and who are now spiritually superior to governors, masters and pagan husbands to avoid the sin of rebellion, by following Jesus their King down the pathway of submission and suffering, through the cross, and up to resurrection, ascension and vindication. One day, our true Christian identity will be revealed to the world.

Throughout this section, remember that Peter wants Christians to have godly behaviour in the public realm in order to point people to Christ. Peter doesn't want Christians to be rebels against the state, or lead slave revolts, or destroy their marriages. That would cause persecution for the wrong things! On a deeper level, rebellion would communicate to the world a lack of confidence in the suffering-dying-rising way of Jesus, undermining Christian mission and evangelism.

It is important to see that Peter is not promising ease or prosperity by calling for submission to authorities. In fact, it may be the opposite: while it is possible that a gentle, quiet and submissive wife might win over her husband, she might also be abused for disobeying his rule of the household. Similarly with a slave: a slave might be recognized for doing good in the masters house, but equally might be beaten for refusing to take a bribe and secure a contract. Obedience is its own reward and justice will come (2:23).

13. Identify some of the challenges and fears you may have in living in the way Peter is calling us to.

14. The center of this whole passage on relationships is 2:21-25. Read that passage out loud a few times. The key word is “model” or “example” from the Greek *upogrammon*, which is etymologically related to our English word “grammar.” The word originally referred to the lines that a grammar teacher would draw to help guide a student who is learning to form letters. Jesus has given us the lines, in which we form our lives, as we follow in his footsteps. How have you followed in the footsteps of Christ?

15. How does the “living hope” of chapter 1:3 and the identity statement of 2:9 come together to spur us on to godly living in the face of such suffering?

Part 3 Summary

In this section Peter provides practical advice for living out what he wrote in 2:12, “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.” Jesus, who suffered for us, provides for us the example of submission and trust in God that we should follow. Throughout this section, Peter encourages us to keep our focus on God.

To wrap up this section, circle or highlight in your Bible all the times Peter uses the word “God” in this text. You can also write the sentences that use the word “God” in the space below.

Part 4 What is Expected from All of You

Read 1 Peter 3:8-14

1. In verse 8, Peter turns his attention to the Christian manners expected from “all of you.” In verses 8 and 9, what is expected of all Christians?
2. Being humble was not a virtue of the Roman society. Humility isn’t very popular today either. Who is the most humble person you know? How can you grow in humility?
3. It is very common today to advocate repaying evil for evil and insult for insult. How are Christians called to live differently, especially on social media? Notice that this is a call to imitate Christ (See 2:23).

Christian Ethics are Peculiar

One of the synonyms of the term “holy” is “peculiar.” Since chapter 2 verse 13, Peter has been giving Christians a particular and peculiar code of conduct, a code that would often starkly contrast the conduct of the pagans surrounding them. This code reflects the particular calling they had received from God to be a “chosen people” who live such good lives that others might praise God because of their good deeds. (2:12) Beginning at chapter 3 verse 8, Peter summarizes this segment, focusing less on instructions on particular relationships, and more on certain dispositions to be reflected by all believers. Living differently from the world around us, even if we are dedicated to what is good, may still lead to suffering. People tend to dismiss rather than try to understand those who are different and peculiar. In the early church, the Christians were accused of cannibalism because of Lord’s Supper and incest because they called everyone ‘brother’ or ‘sister.’ Because they rejected all the gods around them, they were accused of atheism and blamed for the fall of Rome. In spite of being misunderstood and even persecuted, Peter reminds us that “if we suffer for doing good, we are blessed.” No doubt Peter was

Blessed by Suffering?

Blessed by suffering is a thought that flies in the face of what most people believed. They would have believed that they were blessed when they prospered. If you weren't prospering, the solution was simple: you simply needed to visit a temple with more sacrifices and your fortunes should change. Peter's suggesting a different experience for the believer. He's saying that Christians are blessed even when they might suffer, because the blessing they experience is not simply an earthly blessing, but a greater, future one. In quoting Psalm 34, he chooses a Psalm where the experience moves from unjust suffering to vindication, a storyline that's seen through familiar narratives such as Joseph, Daniel, and of course, Jesus Christ. Christians are encouraged to model such similar behaviour (keeping tongue from evil, deceitful speech, doing good) because God does see and hear their plight and He will redeem his servants (Psalm 34:22).

Read 1 Peter 3:15-22

8. In Part I of this study we quoted Elliot Clark and this quote is relevant again here: You know you fear someone when you desire their approval and live for their praise. We seek to please most those we fear most. (59) Who do you want to please and whose approval do you need?

9. Peter says that we ought to set apart Christ as Lord, or fear God. What would it look like if God's approval was more important than the approval of anyone else?

Fear

"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. (1 Pet. 3:14-15 NIV). Fear is a theme that shows up repeatedly throughout I Peter. In 1 Peter 1:17, he writes, "live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." In 1 Peter 2:17 Christians are instructed to "fear God." In 3:6, Christian wives are told to "do what is right and not give in to fear. Lastly, in 3:14, Christians are instructed to "not fear what pagans fear." One of the ways to think about this is that Peter is encouraging us to have our fear properly ordered. We should fear God above all other fears we may have. As an

illustration, many parents today are concerned about letting their kids go to the park or walk to the neighbors unattended because they are afraid their children will be abducted. At the same time, they are rather unconcerned about letting their kids get excessive amounts of screen time. Statistically the risk of a stranger abducting a child is incredibly low, while the risk of screen time negatively impacting one's physical and mental health is very high. We need to fear rightly. To take this further, look up what Jesus says in Luke 12:5. On the other hand, Psalm 111:10 reminds us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” If we fear God and desire God’s approval, the rest of life will fall into place.

10. When we set apart Christ in our hearts as Lord, that means we desire his approval more than anyone else’s. How is this connected to the command to “fear God?”

11. Practice! Give an answer for the hope that you have

Using what you have learned so far from I Peter, what would you say in response to the following people, with gentleness and respect? Are there any verses from 1 Peter that might help?

-A close friend just received a cancer diagnosis.

-Your child’s coach demands to know why your kid wasn’t at practice on Sunday Morning.

-Your co-workers tease you because you won’t join them after work at the gentleman’s club.

-Someone remarks that “you seem it have it together” or “why are you always so joyful?”

-A supervisor asks you to contribute to a cause or charity whose mission you disagree with.

-Your co-workers spend their lunch breaks complaining about their wives or their husbands or their children.

12. Take some time (perhaps homework) to write a summary of the Gospel or Christian faith. You don't have to have all the answers, but what can you describe what is at the center? Does the Apostles Creed help? The Heidelberg Catechism? What verses from 1 Peter might help?

13. Suffering in exile in a pagan world means suffering for the right things. What might be included under verse 17?

14. Verses 18-22 are among the most difficult to interpret in the book. A good Bible commentary from a reputable publisher will outline the various possible interpretations of the phrase "preached to the spirits in prison." Let's direct our attention to verses 20b-21. How is the church like Noah's Ark? How is baptism like the Great Flood?

Part 4 Summary

In this part of the text Peter gives instruction for all Christians regardless of their life circumstances. The section begins with Christian ethics or manners: love, having compassion, living in harmony, returning no one evil for evil or insult with insult. It is not enough, though, for Christians to act in this way. They also must be prepared to give an answer for the hope they have, even if that leads to suffering. It is better to suffer for doing good, than for doing evil. The section concludes with the encouragement and reminder that Jesus died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

Here are some final reflection questions:

Identity: How are Christians different than pagans?

Calling: How are Christians called to live?

Visibility: How are Christians perceived sometimes?

Fear: How can we fear God more than those who speak maliciously against us?

Part 5 Christ-like Suffering

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11

1. Peter says that he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. In what way are Christians done with sin, (for help read verse 2)?
2. Which sins in particular does he list as the sins of a pagan world that we are done with? Why are these things sinful?
3. Why do Christians suffer for giving up particular sinful actions (v 4). Can you think of a modern situation where Christians say no to something and have abuse heaped on them?
4. In many ways, the commands that Peter gives in vv 7-11 are the opposite of the sins that he lists in v. 3 such that, if we are engaging in the sins, we are unable to “live for the will of God.” Describe how they are opposite.
5. Verse 7 suggests that actions and behaviours can get in the way of our prayers. How does participating in sin affect our prayers? (ie. committing adultery, pornography, despising other people, slandering, gossiping) Have you had this experience of feeling like you aren't worthy enough to pray after you've committed a sin? How did you react to that feeling?

6. What is the goal or motivation for how we behave in the world? See verse 11.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

7. In chapter 2:21, Peter says that Jesus is our example in suffering. Now he says that with the suffering that the people are experiencing is the suffering of Jesus. We share in his suffering. What does he mean by that?
8. The first martyr of the faith was Stephen. Read through Acts 6:8-7:60. How does Stephen share in the sufferings of Christ? How does he respond to suffering? How does he give God glory in his suffering?
9. Peter lists in these verses ways that we are supposed to suffer. What should Christians do while they suffer?
10. Suffering for the faith is a frightening thing. We don't want to suffer but as we continue to live in a pagan world, suffering will come. What comfort does verse 19 give?

Suffering for the Gospel

The theme of suffering is a reoccurring theme throughout the book of I Peter. He opens his letter by saying that his readers “now for a little while have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” (1:6) He discusses how others may “accuse Christians of doing wrong,” (2:12) he refers to the “ignorant talk of foolish people” [against Christians] (2:15), he speaks about how slaves may suffer for doing right, (2:20). In chapter 3, he again references suffering for doing right (vs.14) and those who speak maliciously against the good behaviour of Christians.(vs 16). In Chapter 4, he speaks about those who suffer in the body (v 1), and about how others ‘heap abuse on you.’ (v 4). The Christians Peter is writing to are enduring a “painful trial” 4:12.

Peter tells us in a variety of ways that suffering is par for the course when it comes to being a Christian. In Part 1 of this study, we spoke about soft-persecution in the pagan world. And now as we are coming close to the end of our study, we can see how the experiences of Christians during Peter’s time are similar to the experiences we may be having. As Christians we might find ourselves suffering because we did the right thing. We might find that people speak ignorantly about our faith. We might be falsely accused of doing the wrong thing and some may speak maliciously about us. We suffer these trials not because we’ve done something wrong, but because we are living rightly, as Christians for Christ.

What is the point of all this suffering anyway? Peter gives a variety of answers to these questions. He begins by saying that suffering is like the fire that purifies precious metals, through suffering our faith is proved genuine. He reassures Christians that suffering for the sake of Christ brings blessing. For this reason, Christians are to rejoice in suffering, a command Peter gives a few times. When Christians suffer, they are following in the footsteps of Jesus, who suffered for them. Peter rarely talks about suffering, without connecting our sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus. This comes to it’s climatic conclusion in verse 13, where Peter tells us that Christians who suffer are participating in the suffering of Christ. Jesus suffered and then was raised from the dead and vindicated by God. Christians who suffer for Christ, will participate in that story of humiliation and vindication. Christians suffer in hope that God will make things right on the last day.

11. How then should we suffer well? Have a look through I Peter, it is not a long book. How should Christians suffer? What are good Christian table manners for dining at the table of suffering?

Part 5 Summary.

In this section, Peter gives more instruction and also repeats much of what he said earlier. Again we have the theme of suffering from the insults of others, and the encouragement to live godly lives. Peter encourages hospitality, and reminds his readers that love covers over a multitude of sins. The judgment of God is coming. God vindicate the Christian who has endured injustices and God will punish the wrong doer. Christians therefore suffer as those who have hope that one day their suffering will end.

As we conclude this section reflect on the times when you may have suffered for the Christian faith. If you can't think of a moment when you suffered for your Christian commitments, how can you prepare yourself for the trials that may come?

Concluding Meditation: The Work of Christ

Throughout the letter, Peter returns again and again to the work of Christ. As we wrap up our study, let's look back over the whole book and look for the various titles Peter gives Jesus.

What does it mean to you that Jesus is...

- Resurrected from the dead? (1:3)
- The lamb without blemish or defect? (1:19)
- The Living Stone rejected by men and chosen by God? (2:4)
- The one who bore our sins in his body on the tree, who heals us by his wounds? (2:24)
- Shepherd and Overseer of your souls? (2:25)
- Christ is Lord in your hearts? (3:15)

What does this mean for you in terms of

- Identity (who you are in a pagan world) -
- Calling (what you look as priests in a pagan world) -
- Visibility (how people see you in a pagan world) -
- Suffering rightly in a pagan world -
- Future Hope in a Pagan world –

Epilogue

According to speaker and writer Aaron Renn, our world is rapidly changing from a place where being a Christian was a net social positive into a world where there may be a real social price to pay for being a Christian. Tim Keller in a recent sermon pointed out that 100 years ago, if you walked into the bank to ask for a mortgage, the bank manager would likely ask what church you went to. Society at that time generally assumed that being a church goer meant that the person was reliable and would be worthy of a loan. We have come a long way from that point of view. We now live in a world where it is likely that the bank manager is of a different faith than the person asking for the loan, or has no “organized” faith at all. Being a church going Christian would be considered completely irrelevant. This indicates that attitudes about Christianity are changing from positive, to neutral, to negative.

In some parts of the Western world being a Christian and being vocal about it may now be a net social negative. Christians may be passed over for promotions at work or may be viewed with suspicion by colleagues. We certainly no longer live in a world where going to church will get you a bank loan!

We are likely to face again the misunderstandings and slander that the early Christians faced. May 1 Peter prove to be a reliable guide and may you experience the faithfulness of Jesus as you live as “exiles in a pagan land” because you are “born again to a living hope!”



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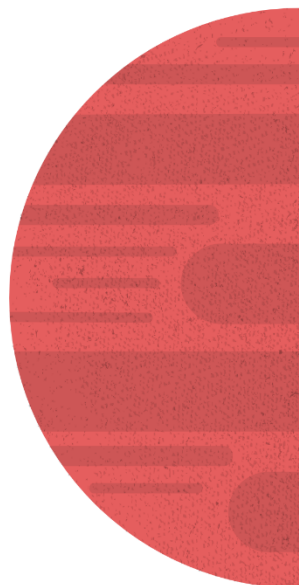
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