

If you have ever wondered how an uneducated fisherman could write *First and Second Peter* in excellent Greek, you need look no further than Peter's acknowledgment of Mark and me at the end of his first letter. We were both excellent scribes, both well educated. I, however, was also a prophet. And one more thing Peter noted, and of everything, it is the highest compliment, but we'll get to that.

I am best known for accompanying Paul on the Second Missionary Journey. I was chosen to accompany Paul when he took the letter from the Jerusalem Council that made it easy for non-Jews to become Christians. From that account you can learn some things about me: I was a leader in the Jerusalem church, I risked my life for the sake of Jesus, and the prophet thing.<sup>1</sup>

But I was a close friend of Peter, I know, I know, I was best known for being a friend of Paul, but I was also Peter's friend. About the only other person who could claim that favored status was Mark, he was even closer to Paul and Peter than I was.

You should also know that both of these letters, First Peter and Second Peter were written in the early to mid-60's AD, more than three decades after Peter left the Sea of Galilee to become a fisher of men. The Holy Spirit's power was often demonstrated powerfully in Peter in his speech, his memory, and his actions. When you read this letter, you are awed by how much Peter matured from his impetuous beginning.

Peter wrote this letter to Christians who had backgrounds as Jews and Gentiles. It is a letter of general instruction, not meant to solve specific problems like many of Paul's letters were meant to do. As such, it is surely applicable for Christians of all ages who want to live like, well, Christians. Little Christs.

Peter opens his letter with words that might be a bit mysterious today, but were surely familiar to his audience: "To those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit." Wow, whoa, concepts of predestination, foreknowledge, and sanctification just thrown in as an introduction. And then he continues with words about new birth, living hope, and resurrection. This is no light-weight writing and you don't need a prophet to point that out.

Rather than leave these difficult concepts, Peter goes on to tell us that we have an inheritance that can never perish. It is so valuable that we should rejoice even when we have to suffer grief

<sup>1</sup> Acts 15:22-27, Acts 15:32

in all kinds of trial. Suffering just proves the genuineness and high value of faith, which results in the praise and glory and honor of Jesus.

Peter reveals that the Old Testament prophets tried to obtain what they prophesied about, but they were unable. The glories and mysteries of Christ were reserved for Peter's hearers. How joyful that must have made them! They were more important than the Old Testament prophets.

So, it is imperative that his hearers live lives worthy of their calling. Lives that are holy. Lives that are worthy of the high cost Christ paid.

Keep in mind that many of his hearers may not have understood what it meant to lead a holy life. Peter introduces them to some aspects of that kind of life...be done forever with evil, deceit, pretense, and jealousy.

Christ's followers are to be a new type of people...holy, a holy nation, separate, chosen. One of my favorite descriptions of Christ's followers is that they are to be peculiar. Not peculiar as in weird or strange, but peculiar as in distinctly different. One of these distinctions is living on earth as temporary residents or strangers.

Have you ever noticed when traveling to a new town one that is not your own, You may search reviews of their local restaurants and coffee shops but you really don't search their high school sports, or city council decisions, or upcoming road construction and detours. It just doesn't concern you. So, like that. A visitor. Temporary resident. Stranger.

Peter makes the observation that Christians should behave in such a way that when disaster comes, they may glorify God. That observation has sometimes been interpreted as disasters happening to Christians. In a twist to that interpretation, in the next centuries after Peter's life, many disasters happened within the Roman Empire. The church grew despite those disasters because Christians provided aid, stayed through disease and plagues, helped war victims, and glorified God in all circumstances. When they acted peculiarly, as God's people, others were attracted to Christianity.

Peter echoes Paul's letters in many respects. He mandates that Christians should obey every man-made authority. He mandates that household servants and slaves should be submissive to their masters. Wives should be submissive to their husbands, and so make their faith attractive. In fact, all people should behave in a submissive way, just as Jesus did. These mandates must have caused quite a stir among many people who were used to complaining about their Roman masters and their high tax policies.

Like Paul, Peter drops little nuggets that grab your attention. Peter says that husbands should understand and honor their wives as equal heirs of the grace of eternal life. What happens to husbands that don't do this? They find it impossible to pray properly. Not difficult, not hard. But IMPOSSIBLE to pray properly.

Peter sums it up by saying that Christians should live with true love for each other. Acting with sympathy, generosity, and courteousness. How about this other nugget? The eyes of the Lord watch the righteous, and he hears their prayers. BUT, the Lord is against those who do evil.

Also, like Paul, Peter does not pull any punches. He says that following Christ means pain and suffering. But, Peter indicates the suffering may come in an odd way. It comes from not living a life of indulging self. From not living like non-believers. From having former friends think you odd for not joining with them as they follow their lustful and carousing ways, a de facto standard of acceptable living. From having them think you are odd that you don't value the things they do. Ultimately, they will have to answer for their ways of living.

Let me remind you that the first letter of Peter was written at least three decades after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Many Christians had been deeply disappointed that Jesus had not returned as quickly as they expected. It was obvious that their sense of time and God's were different. Probably no stranger to that feeling, are you? It was also becoming increasingly clear that the last days, the day of the Lord, and other end times thoughts were not necessarily meaning what some people thought. And that may be true for you.

Peter approaches the end of his letter by talking about how people should live as the end of all things comes near. They should be calm, self-controlled, prayerful. Not fearful, freaking out, and shrieking at the top of their lungs at things of this world things like politics and economies.

Above all else, they should have real, deep love for each other. So often people think they already know what this means, when actually, they don't. Be good and faithful through persecution, and not give in to worldly ways. Stop and think, what are "worldly ways" and responses?

Peter ends his first letter with instructions for good behavior within the church. Leaders should look after the well-being of their flocks, so they can win approval of Jesus, the chief shepherd. Younger members should submit to the elders. Everyone should have an attitude of service and submission. Would you look at that...still applies today.

Reminding his readers of the spiritual war that rages, all Christians should be self-controlled and vigilant so they can resist the devil. The devil is like a roaring lion searching for his prey. Those that resist and remain faithful will receive all grace and share eternal life with God.

Peter finishes his letter by including greetings from his spiritual son, Mark, and from the church in "Babylon." Which Babylon? Maybe the true Babylon, maybe Rome, maybe an evil city like Babylon, maybe all of the above, who knows.

Oh, and he tells his readers that he is sending the letter by Silvanus...that's me, Silas. Silvanus, Silas. Potato, potato. He compliments me by calling me a faithful brother. And if you know Peter, there is no higher compliment. A faithful brother!