

## **Introductory Thoughts on I, II Peter**

**2009 August 24<sup>th</sup> for September 16<sup>th</sup>**

Now we come to two books written by Peter, one of Jesus' inner three disciples. As with many books of the Bible there is some controversy about the authorship of I and II Peter but within our intent here, we will assume that Peter the disciple was the author.

Peter was martyred under Nero, crucified head down according to tradition because he did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same way that Christ was. This was a tradition that even my anti-traditionalist father cited. This puts authorship of these books sometime before 60 A.D.

It is my impression going in that Peter writes these letters in encouragement to new and growing churches, much the same theme as Paul's epistles and that they treat various issues of practical Christian living. What were the other problems of the church when it was about thirty years old?

## **I Peter 1**

**2009 August 24<sup>th</sup> for September 17<sup>th</sup>**

The opening chapter does indeed read like a letter from Paul. To wit:

“To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood:

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’

“Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or effect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Though him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God,. For,

‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;  
the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.’

“And this is the word that was preached to you.”

## **I Peter 2**

**2009 August 31<sup>st</sup> for September 18<sup>th</sup>**

Instruction on how to behave like a Christian: “rid yourselves of all malice and deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.” Grow in salvation. God is good.

The church is like a building built of stones. Jesus is the cornerstone. This is strength to those who believe and a stumbling block to those who do not. “They stumble because they disobey the message -- which is also what they were destined for.”

This language implies a belief by Peter in pre-destination. In my generation, this is one of the main arguing points among the various denominations. Are we predestined to whatever we are going to do and helpless to do anything different or do we have freedom and control? Cosmic mystery either way.

Anyway, now that you have received the light, the mercy, the salvation, act like it.

“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 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.”

This includes obeisance to the king, to governors, to your boss (your “master”), and in other normal social conventions. Further, “it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?”

After all, Jesus did nothing wrong and look what he got. Moreover, “by his wounds you have been healed.”

### **I Peter 3**

**2009 August 31<sup>st</sup> for September 21<sup>st</sup>**

Wives should make themselves beautiful through a quiet and gentle inner spirit, not by hairstyles and jewelry. In this way, they win over their husbands without saying anything. “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

Live in harmony, be sympathetic, compassionate, and humble, “love as brothers.” Return insults with blessings. Do not speak evil or deceit. Seek good; pursue peace. No one will harm you for doing good, but if they do, don’t be afraid. Keep a clear conscience and have a ready answer for your faith. “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

God was patient during the days of Noah when nearly everyone on earth was disobedient. Eight people were saved on the arc. Now, Christ is in heaven with all authorities and powers and angels submitted to him by God. Keep a good conscience towards God.

### **I Peter 4**

**2009 August 31<sup>st</sup> for September 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Because of Christ’s suffering, he lives apart from “evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do -- living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.”

The end is near! Love each other deeply “because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

Don’t be surprised at pain, trial, insult, or suffering “as though something strange were happening to you.” You suffer with Christ as he suffered. This is nothing to be ashamed of. After all,

“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

(This was one of dad’s favorite quotes, after which he would quote another preacher as saying, “Well, they won’t be found in church!”)

If suffering in God’s will, commit yourself to the “faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

## **I Peter 5**

**2009 September 1<sup>st</sup> for 23<sup>rd</sup>**

The instructions for mentors and the mentored read nearly like proverbs:

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers -- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

““God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers through-out the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

“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.”

The first letter of Peter then ends with some greetings from Silas, who helped with the writing, Mark “my son” and “She who is in Babylon.” It is not clear whether the Babylon reference is about sin and evil, deportment, Rome itself, or something else.

## **II Peter 1**

**2009 September 1<sup>st</sup> for 24<sup>th</sup>**

Peter writes another letter to the righteous, instructing them in various tenets of the faith.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” This allows us to “participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Things to add to faith: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Be eager “go make your calling and election sure.” So doing, you will not fail and you will be welcomed into the “eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Peter knows that he will not live much longer, Jesus has shown him this, but wants to make sure that they remember these things after he is gone. The stories about Jesus were not clever enticements, they were eyewitness accounts. They heard with their own ears God saying from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” There is also prophecy to this effect. No prophecy is merely a man’s interpretation or initiated by a man, but “the men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

## **II Peter 2**

**2009 September 1<sup>st</sup> for 25<sup>th</sup>**

There are prophecies, then there are false prophecies. False prophets make up destructive heresies, distorting or lying about the message of Christ and lead some astray.

If God punished angels, or everyone else in the world in the time of Noah, or everyone who lived in Sodom except Lot then he knows how to preserve the righteous and destroy the unrighteous and this will be the fate of the false prophets.

Such men are arrogant and do shameful, blemished things in broad daylight. They seduce those who have just escaped from trouble or who are otherwise confused. “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity -- for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.”

And it can be even worse. They can escape the corruption of the world by knowing Jesus then get entangled in their false knowledge again and end up worse off than before. The proverbs are true:

“A dog returns to its vomit”

and

“A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

## **II Peter 3**

**2009 September 2<sup>nd</sup> for 28<sup>th</sup>**

This final chapter of the second letter of Peter contains instruction concerning the author’s purpose, the prophets, the letters of Paul, the last days, and the way to live in the mean time.

“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

“So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.”

## **Concluding Thoughts on 1, 2 Peter**

**2009 September 2<sup>nd</sup> for 29<sup>th</sup>**

Peter’s two letters do read something like Paul’s several, but there are clear authorship differences. Peter (who may or may not have been helped by a scribe and grammarian) doesn’t go on stream-of-consciousness as much as Paul does. Peter is more concise.

His main themes are similar. Work to justify your salvation. Don't slip and fall away from this great gift. There are several ways it could happen, mostly having to do with being carried away into lawlessness, easy lusts, or depravity. Perhaps Peter had seen it happen, but he doesn't give examples.

Unlike Paul, Peter doesn't condemn his religious opponents with strong language.

At the end of Peter's life, some decades after the crucifixion of Christ, there was apparently beginning to be some concern and harassment about his second coming. People from the beginning had expected it to be imminent. They hardly shopped. They didn't buy green bananas. Today, one hundred and ninety eight decades later, we have the same issues. Always be prepared to go, or to suffer. Good advice whatever the expectations are.

Peter also addresses the veracity of the Gospels and counters heretical trends, usually promoted by self-centered would-be leaders of this great faith. Today we face these same issues as well.

As we near the end of the New Testament it is good to hear from one of the close disciples, well after the departure of Christ. The issues he faced and addressed as an old man leading the young church foreshadow centuries of similar struggles up to this day.

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