

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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1 PETER 1 – GOD’S GLORIOUS PLAN OF SALVATION

We begin covering *the second* of the General Epistles, written by the apostle Peter. These follow the order of the “pillars” of the Church in Jerusalem as Paul call them: “*James, Peter, and John*, who were known as *pillars* of the church” (Gal. 2:9 NLT). So the General Epistles start with the same order as these three men – James (1 epistle), Peter (2 epistles), and John (3 epistles).

In James’ epistle, we went over how God had carefully established the *correct order* of the books in both the Old and New Testament. The purpose was so that His truths would go from the basics of God’s laws to the more complex principles based on them (the milk to meat principle, Heb. 5:12-14). In the New Testament, it goes from the basics, or the Gospels (where Jesus magnified the law, as prophesied in Is. 42:21, “He will *magnify* the law and make it *honorable*,” KJV) to Acts, the Epistles of the Apostles and finally, to Revelation.

So James, who was Jesus’ half-brother and in charge of the headquarters’ Church in Jerusalem until he was martyred. As the fourth century church historian Jerome mentions, “After our Lord’s passion [His death and resurrection], the apostles ordained James as the bishop of Jerusalem...He presided over the Jerusalem church for thirty years, until Nero’s seventh year.”

James was called by Paul an “apostle” (Gal. 1:19) and had a panoramic view of the Christian community. He thus taught them how to faithfully keep God’s law, which he calls “the law of liberty,” “perfect,” and “royal” (James 1:25; 2:8). It is clear if James’ epistle had come first, as it should have, after Acts. Catholic or Protestant churches would find it difficult to have their antinomian (against the law) teachings accepted, for James describes the perfect balance between faith, works, grace and law, since each one of these spiritual elements has its rightful place and purpose in Scripture.

With the epistle of James, God established the respect all Christians should have for His laws as magnified by Christ. Now, with Peter’s epistle, instructions are added about how Gentile Christians should keep God’s laws but not be concerned about the ritual aspects of the law such as circumcision and sacrifices at the Temple.

In his many travels, Peter had a lot of contact with Gentile Christians. Remember, it was in Acts 10 when Peter had the first contact with the Gentiles called by God. In Peter’s epistles you will see the perfect balance in his instructions to the Jewish-Christians *and* the Gentile-Christians. It is evident the church remained *united* and stressed obedience to the Ten Commandments as amplified by Christ as the basis of everyone’s faith.

He begins: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied” (1 Peter 1: 1-2).

What a beautiful introduction! Peter first reminds the brethren they are “pilgrims” in this world and have been called according to the “foreknowledge” or God’s pre-established plan before the creation of the universe. To this end, they have received God’s spirit to “obey” and have been granted forgiveness by Christ’s blood.

Barclay notes, “As a token of this relationship of *obedience* between the people of God, Moses took *half the blood* of the sacrifice and *sprinkled it on the altar*, and *half the blood* of the sacrifice and *sprinkled it on the people*” (Ex. 24:1-8). Sprinkling was [symbolic of] *obedience*. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Christian is called into a *new relationship* with God, and he is *pledged to obedience* in the time to come.”

Peter continues to encourage them when he says: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an *inheritance incorruptible* and undefiled and that does not fade away, *reserved* in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Here, Peter shows an amazing gift of synthesis. In one sentence he summarizes God’s entire plan for mankind. This plan begins with God’s mercy, forgiving our sins so that we can be “reborn” or

start a new and purified life. To achieve this, Christ's resurrection was necessary, for He would be "the *firstborn* among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). With His resurrection, the possibility of our own resurrection begins, as Paul says: "But now Christ *is risen* from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

So, what is laid up in heaven for us? Peter answers: "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled...reserved in heaven." Is the Christian's inheritance heaven itself? No. Jesus clearly said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit *the earth*" (Mt. 5:5). When Christ *returns to the earth*, He will say to the faithful, "Come, you blessed of my father, *inherit* the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34). Clearly, Christ will reign on the earth--and with His saints (Rev. 5:10; 19:15; 20:4), but the inheritance is *registered* in heaven.

Peter then reveals another great truth—that salvation is not attained now, but in the future. He says that the members are "kept by the power of God through faith *for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Peter 1:5). Salvation is the gift of those *resurrected* to eternal life.

Peter explains this will take effort: "In this you greatly rejoice [in the coming reward] though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by the various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving *the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls*" (1:6-9).

Just as James began by encouraging the brethren to stand firm in the midst of trials, so Peter does the same. He compares the testing of faith to the way gold is purified in a furnace by burning off all the dross. A jeweler classifies the purity of gold into 24 degrees of purity, called karats, so a 24-karat gold ring is completely pure, but it is never found that way in its natural form, for it is always mixed with imperfections. Our spiritual character is also tested

by trials, and God wants it to be purified so it can become more valuable than pure gold.

Barclay comments: "Before gold is pure it has to be tested in the fire. The trials, which come to a man test his faith and out of them that faith can emerge stronger than ever it was before. The rigors which the athlete has to undergo are not meant to make him collapse but to make him able to develop more strength and staying-power. In this world trials are not meant to take the strength out of us, but to put the strength into us."

Still, we should pray to God to be gentle with us in our trials, as Jeremiah prayed, "So correct me, Lord, but please be gentle. Do not correct me in anger, for I would die" (Jer.10:24 NLT).

As an encouragement to those going through difficult trials, Peter reminded them to look at the big picture and long for the coming of God's kingdom and His promised reward. Peter says, "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Here he reveals to us two great truths: (1) That it was the Spirit of Christ which inspired the holy men of God in the Old Testament, therefore, there is no such thing as a third person in the Godhead for Christ cannot be two persons at the same time. (2) It is Christ, and not God the Father, who primarily interacted with Israelites in the Old Testament. God the Father has left Christ, or the Word, in charge of running things down here on earth until the whole plan of salvation has been completed (see John 1:3; 1 Cor. 10:4; 15:24-28).

With this inheritance of salvation in mind, Peter urges them to faithfully persevere to that end in those trials. He says, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as *obedient* children, not

conforming yourselves to the *former lusts*, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1:13-16).

The phrase, "Gird up the loins" refers to the practice of tying long, loose tunics to a broad belt for freedom of movement when doing strenuous work. When it is applied to the mind, it means to "tighten" or "shut" your mind to what you think or see, *focusing* on what is decent and good and rejecting what are lustful or wrong thoughts.

Peter adds, "And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in a reverent fear of Him during your time here as 'temporary residents'" (1 Peter 1:17, NLT). Since we are on this spiritual pilgrimage to God's kingdom we are just temporarily here on this earth, as in training. As Jesus said, we are "in the world" but not "of the world" (John 17:11, 16).

It is all long journey, where we must "unlearn" many false beliefs, eliminate vices and assimilate new truths. As he continues, "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from *your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers*" (1 Peter 1:18).

So it is much harder to *uproot* those traditions and habits pass down to us by our well-meaning parents, but they didn't realize they were deceived by the astute god of this world--Satan.

Peter reminds us how costly it was to God for us to undertake this pilgrimage to His kingdom. He says about being redeemed or paid for by: "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have *purified* your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:19-22).

Here he makes it clear to us that the offering of Christ's sacrifice is freely granted by grace, but it is not cheap. This is why it requires such a serious and mature decision before being baptized. It is revealed here that even before the creation of the

universe, God, who became the Father, and Jesus Christ as the Word, had decided Christ would have to come to the earth and sacrifice Himself for mankind's sins. It shows the gravity and heavy price of sin and also Their great love for us.

Peter mentions about being "purified" by obeying the truth, something he first learned from his experience with Cornelius, who was "purified" by faith in Christ and his obedience to the truth and not by ritual sacrifices. As Peter had said, "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, [between the ritually pure and not], *purifying* their hearts *by faith*" (Acts 15:8-9). That was a central message Peter preached to all.

What should the result of that faith be? It is: "in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been *born again*, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass, the grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:22-25).

He uses the analogy of comparing a human birth to spiritual birth. It first takes place with baptism and the laying on of hands, when God the Father begets us through His Holy Spirit, that is called the 'incorruptible seed', which is implanted and grows as it is nourished by the Word of God. The second stage of this spiritual birth, though, is when we are resurrected into God's kingdom and become fully-fledged spirit beings in God's family.

As John explains, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, *now* we are children of God; and it has *not yet been revealed* what we shall be, but we know that *when He is revealed*, we shall be *like Him*, for we shall see *Him as he is*" (1 John 3:1-2).