

1 Peter

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Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Early Christian Letters for Everyone James, Peter, John and Judah by Tom Wright, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklets Homeward Bound (1 Peter) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne and Walk this Way (Ephesians) by Bryson Smith, a series of Bible readings for St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson, Handbook of Life in Bible Times by J.A.Thompson, Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community ed. By Maxine Hancock, The Briefing magazine # 252, Living with the Underworld by Peter Bolt, sermons/talks by Iain Provan and John Dickson and sound bites from the Compass TV program.

Ed O'Connor 2014

Study 1, 1 Peter 1:1-12, Letters

Getting started

1. (Around the room.) Can you remember the last letter you wrote (not an email or twitter or a short comment in a birthday or get well card)?
Who did you write it to and what was it about?

Introduction

The letter we call 1 Peter is a 'circular' [to the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia – see map on p 1], deliberately general in its themes so that it could be copied and sent to multiple locations and still bring great blessing. The unifying themes of Peter's letter are the 'hope' we have in Jesus Christ and the temporary 'suffering' Christians experience while they wait. It seems that imperial pressure was beginning to be placed on Christians in this region. A letter of the Roman governor of Bithynia (Pliny) forty years later makes clear that by then it was routine practice for Romans to execute Christians who would not denounce Christ and worship the emperor and, further, that residents throughout the region were informing on their Christian neighbours. Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan [see below] concerned the correct procedure of interrogation and execution of Christians. It is chilling stuff.

There is no reason to think that such severe measures were already in place when Peter wrote to the believers of Turkey, but he mentions 'suffering' and 'painful trials' enough for us to suspect that Christians were definitely on a frightening trajectory. Peter urges believers to count their blessings from God, to look forward to the coming glory and, meanwhile, to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and humble toward all mankind, no matter what is thrown at them.

For us who live in relative security, but within an increasingly secular and antagonistic society, 1 Peter provides a beautiful reminder that our true identity is found in Christ not our status in the world, and that whatever society dishes out Christians are called upon to do good, even to those who hate us. It is challenging stuff.

From a series of Bible readings for St Andrews, Roseville from Dec 2013 to Jan 2014 by John Dickson.

Pliny to Trajan (about 112 AD):

It is my custom, Sire, to refer to you in all cases where I am in doubt, for who can better clear up difficulties and inform me? I have never been present at any legal examination of the Christians, and I do not know, therefore, what are the usual penalties passed upon them, or the limits of those penalties, or how searching an inquiry should be made. I have hesitated a great deal in considering whether any distinctions should be drawn according to the ages of the accused; whether the weak should be punished as severely as the more robust, or whether the man who has once been a Christian gained anything by recanting? Again, whether the name of being a Christian, even though otherwise innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes that gather around it?

In the meantime, this is the plan which I have adopted in the case of those Christians who have been brought before me. I ask them whether they are Christians, if they say "Yes," then I repeat the question the second time, and also a third -- warning them of the penalties involved; and if they persist, I order them away to be executed. For I do not doubt that -- be their admitted crime what it may -- their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely ought to be punished.

There were others who showed similar mad folly, whom I reserved to be sent to Rome, as they were Roman citizens. Later, as is commonly the case, the mere fact of my entertaining the question led to a multiplying of accusations and a variety of cases were brought before me. An anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing a number of names of alleged Christians. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods with the usual formula, reciting the words after me, and those who offered incense and wine before your image -- which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, along with the regular statues of the gods -- all such I considered acquitted -- especially as they cursed the name of Christ, which it is said bona fide Christians cannot be induced to do.

(b) Notice the “new birth into a living hope” is through the resurrection of Jesus **not** through Jesus’ death. What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make to our lives?

5. How is joy (v6 rejoice and v8) different from happiness?
6. What would you say is the heart of the Old Testament message?
7. Read 1 Peter 1:10-12.
Would you say this searching for Jesus is at the heart of Old Testament message? Why/why not?

To finish

8. Do you know people who are suffering for their faith? Pray for them.

Study 2, 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, Holiness

Getting started

1. What are our most important tasks as Christians: to be good
to pray
to read the Bible
to go to church
to serve others
to evangelise
to not swear
to vote Liberal
to know God
to love God
to obey God
to be creative
to think different?

Pick one or two and say why you picked it/them?

Bible

2. Read 1 Peter 1:13-2:3.
- (a) For us, what does it mean to be obedient (vv 2, 14 & 22) to Christ?
- (b) (i) What does it mean for us to be holy (vv 15 & 16)? Look up Lev 11:44-45, 19:1-2, 20:6-8.
- (ii) Is being holy different from being obedient? If so, how so? If not, why not?
- (c) (i) Are Christians excessively pre-occupied with sin – their own and other people's? Give reasons for your answer.
- (ii) What other things could a Christian be thinking about?

3. Read again 1 Peter 2:1-3.
(a) What is this “pure spiritual milk”?

(b) What is Christian growth?

To finish

4. In what respects have you grown (a) recently?

(b) over the years?

- (Father) It's not time to make a change,
Just relax, take it easy.
You're still young, that's your fault,
There's so much you have to know.
Find a girl, settle down,
If you want you can marry.
Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy.
- I was once like you are now, and I know that it's not easy,
To be calm when you've found something going on.
But take your time, think a lot,
Why, think of everything you've got.
For you will still be here tomorrow, but your dreams may not.
- (Son) How can I try to explain, when I do he turns away again.
It's always been the same, same old story.
From the moment I could talk I was ordered to listen.
Now there's a way and I know that I have to go away.
I know I have to go.
- (Father) It's not time to make a change,
Just sit down, take it slowly.
You're still young, that's your fault,
There's so much you have to go through.
Find a girl, settle down,
If you want you can marry.
Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy.
(Son – away, away, away, I know I have to make this decision alone – no.)
- (Son) All the times that I cried, keeping all the things I knew inside,
It's hard, but it's harder to ignore it.
If they were right, I'd agree, but it's them they know not me.
Now there's a way and I know that I have to go away.
I know I have to go.
(Father – stay, stay, stay, why must you go and make this decision alone?)

(a) What does it mean to find yourself?

(b) Did you find yourself?

(c) What did you find?

6. Read 1 Pet 2:9-12.

(a) Finding yourself means finding your identity. What do these verses say about our identity?

(a) How are we to live if we focus on the positive things in these verses?

(b) How would it affect our brand?

7. (a) Read Eph 5:21. What is submission?

8. Read 1 Pet 2:13-25.

(a) Why is it so hard to submit to someone?

(b) Is it any easier to submit to people after re-evaluating our identity from 1 Pet 2:9-12?
Why/why not?

Slavery

The submission that Peter speaks of in this passage is in part the submission of slaves to their masters. We must be careful as we read about this, for it is easy to form false impressions. The slave-master relationship in the ancient world was not really the same as our employee-employer relationships, although it was not entirely different either. Nor was slavery always what we associate with it. When we think of slavery, we might think of black slaves taken by force from Africa and put to work on American cotton plantations, and subjected to brutal oppression. Or we might think of Charleton Heston, chained in his Roman galley, pulling on the oars while the brutal centurion with the bald head and no shirt prowls up and down dispensing lashes with his whip.

In Bible times, slavery was a varied social structure. Doubtless there were slaves of the Charleton Heston variety, but there were also many slaves who enjoyed considerable freedom and responsibility. These latter sort were not harshly treated with whips and chains. Their place in the society and economy of their day was not entirely different from other social structures that we do not call 'slavery'—such as the serfdom of the middle ages, or perhaps the company man for whom the company provides not only a job, but in return for his lifelong loyalty and labour provides also for housing, schooling and retirement.

In particular, slavery was often a means of dealing with bankruptcy in the ancient world. If you owed money that you could not repay, you might be forced to be a slave to that person for a certain period to work off the debt. It was a normal and accepted part of the social fabric, and thus we find both Old and New Testaments providing instructions for the humane and godly treatment of slaves, and in turn how slaves should act towards their masters.

Even so, the Bible still regards slavery as an undesirable state to be avoided where possible.
From Homeward Bound (1 Peter) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne pp 54-55.

To finish

9. What should our attitude be towards governments, even the ones we didn't vote for?

Study 4, 1 Peter 3:1-7, Wives & Husbands

Getting started

1. What things have helped enrich your relationship with your spouse?

Bible

2. Read 1 Pet 3:1-7 and briefly sum up what is being said here about wives and husbands by completing the following sentences:

Wives should be

Husbands should be

3. Many more aspects of marriage are taught in the Bible (e.g. see Gen 1 & 2, Song of Songs, 1 Cor 7, Eph 5 and Col 3). Why do you think Peter focuses on the particular aspects he mentions in 3:1-7? Before you answer this question look at what has been said in the first 2 chapters of 1 Peter and determine the general message of the letter so far.
4. Now, considering the context, why do you think Peter focuses on the particular aspects of marriage that you outlined in Q2?
5. Peter explains what he means by submission by describing what we should see when a wife submits to her husband. What should we see?
6. The Greek word for 'quiet' in v4 means 'not making a noise' but it contains other connotations as well. In the following quotations the English translation for the Greek word for 'quiet' is in bold:
Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they **rested** on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. (Luke 23:56)
When they heard this, they **had no further objections** and praised God. (Acts 11:18)
When he would not be dissuaded, we **gave up** and said, "The Lord's will be done". (Acts 21:14)
How do these meanings change what we understand by 'a gentle and quiet spirit'?
7. Is Peter saying women should not wear jewellery or fine clothes or have their hair done nicely (v3)? Why/why not?
8. (a) In general, what challenges face women with unbelieving husbands?

(b) And how should these challenges be met?

(c) What does 1 Pet 3:1-6 say to this situation?

9. Before we make the jump from the first century to the 21st century in applying this passage we need to look at the **cultural context** of Peter's time.

First, the Greco-Roman context:

By law, the man was the master of his household. Paul writes in a context where the patriarchy was absolute, and sustained by law. Usually, but not always, he required the household to serve his gods. Unlike our understanding of home, such a household was not a place of consumption, but of production; not a private refuge, but often semi-public. His was the only public role, and part of the house often served as a place to do business and was basically open to others. The women, especially daughters, lived in the rear and were not permitted to stray into the public domain of the house for fear of becoming abused or a seductress.

The average age of the man when he married was 30, of the woman, less than 18. The reason for marriage was not "love" in our usual sense, but to bear legitimate children, to keep the family line going; indeed, failure to bear children, especially sons, was often cause for divorce. Moreover, almost all men were promiscuous. As Demosthenes says "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children." Wives, therefore, were often promiscuous as well—although they tried to be more discreet, since their infidelity was considered to be a matter of shame.

The idea that men and women might be equal partners in marriage simply did not exist, evidence for which can be seen in meals, which in all cultures serve as the great equalizer. In the Greek world, women scarcely ever joined their husbands and his friends at meals; and if they did, they did not recline at table (only the courtesans did that), but sat on benches at the end. And they were expected to leave after eating, when the conversation took a more public turn.

From ch 4 *Gender Issues: Reflections on the Perspective of the Apostle Paul* by Gordon D. Fee in *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community* ed. By Maxine Hancock.

Second, the Jewish context:

"In the later centuries of the Old Testament period, official Jewish teaching was certainly male-orientated, and women were regarded as second class in both social and spiritual terms. . . . women were treated as possessions rather than people; a wife is listed along with a man's property, land, servants and animals in the commandments about covetousness, although a special word for coveting a wife is used which clearly distinguishes her from the rest. Wives seem to have called their husbands 'master' or lord, much as a slave would address a king.

A woman could not divorce her husband, nor could she make a vow unless her husband or father gave consent, and if he did not, the vow was null and void. Daughters and wives could not inherit property from their father or husband unless there was no male heir."

From *Handbook of Life in Bible Times* by J.A.Thompson pp 87 and 88.

Third, listen to this sound bite from Ian Provan's lectures called "Old Testament Reloaded", Gospel Conversations, Macquarie Uni, July 2011: WomenLaw300pvProvan30072011.mp3

Read 1 Pet 3:7 again and, considering the context outlined above, . . .

(a) how is this verse radically different from the cultural norm?

(b) How is the wife the weaker partner (v7)?

To finish

10. How should we apply this passage in our 21st century context?

11. If Gen chs 1 & 2 are the ideals for the relationship between wives and husbands (read Gen 1:26-27 and 2:18-25) then how far have we come towards those ideals?

Study 5, 1 Pet 3:8-22, Persuasion

Getting started

1. (Around the room question.) Think back to your early days as a Christian. What were the negatives and what were the positives?

Negatives

Positives

Bible

2. First, we'll look at one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. Read 1 Pet 3:18-20.

There are 5 main attempts to explain these verses:

1. When Noah was building the ark, Christ 'in spirit' was in Noah preaching repentance and righteousness through him to unbelievers who were on the earth then but are now 'spirits in prison' (people in hell).
2. After Christ died, he went and preached to people in hell, offering them a second chance of salvation.
3. After Christ died, he went and preached to people in hell, proclaiming to them that he had triumphed over them and their condemnation was final.
4. After Christ died, he proclaimed release to people who had repented just before they died in the flood, and led them out of imprisonment (in Purgatory) into heaven.
5. After Christ died (or: after he rose but before he ascended into heaven), he travelled to hell and proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood.

The two most popular views amongst scholars are 1 and 5 (Archbishop Glenn Davies favours view 5) but Tony Payne in an article from The Briefing magazine # 252 (March 2000) makes an argument for view 6:

6. After Christ died and was raised in triumph, he went and proclaimed to the spirits of the Old Testament exiles, imprisoned in the darkness of Sheol, that the time of their salvation and liberation had finally come. Following Isaiah's lead, the example of Noah is invoked as a further encouragement that God will deliver and bless his people in the midst of judgement and destruction.

(a) What do you think of these explanations?

(b) Is it worth going any further into these verses?

3. Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.
(a) What are blessings (v9)?

(b) What sort of blessing would you repay (v9)?

(c) What sort of blessing is meant at the end of v9?

4. Read 1 Peter 3:13-17.
What situation is Peter talking about in these verses?

5. Imagine you are going to tell someone the reason for the hope that you have (v15).
 - (a) Would you go beyond telling them about Christ's resurrection (see 1 Pet 1:3)? If so, what would you say? If not, why not?
 - (b) Is this the same as trying to persuade someone to become a Christian?
 - (c) What would you say if you were trying to persuade someone to become a Christian?
 - (d) Would you talk about the negatives and positives you outlined in Q1? Why/why not?
 - (e) In trying to persuade someone to become a Christian how much is about "selling it"?

6. Read 1 Peter 3:21-22.
 - (a) How do you get saved? (John 3:1-21, Acts 2:14-38 and 17:22-34 are different approaches.)
 - (b) What has baptism got to do with it?

To finish

7.
 - (a) Do you think the church tries to "sell" Christianity? If so, how does the church try to sell it?
 - (b) How *should* the church present Christianity to non-Christians (see Luke 14:25-33)?

Study 6, 1 Pet 4:1-19, Sin

Getting started

1. "The trouble with going to church is that everything they tell you is about sin."
Agree or disagree? Why?

2. (a) How much of a Christian's life is about trying not to sin?

- (b) What else is there to think about?

- (c) If a Christian got drunk would you think what a terrible sinner he was or "And he calls himself a Christian!" or would you think about grace? How would thinking about grace effect your attitude towards him?

Bible

3. Read 1 Pet 4:1-19.
 - (a) How much of this passage is about sin? List the verses that are about sin.

 - (b) Is the sin in this passage about the sins they used to do before they became Christians (i.e. past sins) or about trying not to sin as they live their lives as Christians?

 - (c) What else does this passage say about how to live their lives as Christians?

When Peter quotes (from Proverbs 10:12) the famous saying that '**love covers a multitude of sins**', he doesn't mean, and Proverbs doesn't mean, that love is what we call a 'cover-up' operation, hiding things we'd rather not face. Rather, the gift of love we are invited to offer one another minute by minute, day by day

throughout our lives actually *transforms* situations, so that the ‘multitude of sins’ which were there before are taken out of the equation. They are forgiven! We can be reconciled! Instead of squabbling and fighting, we can now live together and work together!

From Early Christian Letters for Everyone James, Peter, John and Judah by Tom Wright p 85.

4. Looking at the whole letter of 1 Peter you find we are told about Jesus and who we are in Jesus (i.e. our identity in Christ) before we are told how to live as Christians. When we are told how to live as Christians it involves trying not to sin as well as what I will call “positive living” (for want of a better expression).

(a) In the table below, fill in the aspects of positive living that Peter writes about.

Identity	don't sin	positive living
1:1-5, 13	1:14	1:13-16
1:17-21, 23	2:1	1:22
2:4-10	2:11, 16	2:12
		2:15-17
2:21-25	2:24, 3:9-11	2:24
		3:1-12
		3:14-15
(We looked at ch 4 in Q 3.)		
	5:2-3	5:2-3, 5-9

(b) Is 1 Peter more about positive living or trying not to sin? Why/why not?

(c) Should a Christian be thinking more about positive living or trying not to sin? Why/why not?

5. One of the consequences if Christians focus too much on sin is that it effects how we come across to non-Christians. For example, last year there was a series on TV called Holy Switch as part of Compass. A person of one religion switched places with a person of another religion and lived there for a week. The most interesting episode was a switch between an evangelical Christian lady from Tasmania, Kim, and a Hindu bloke from Sydney, Akeesh (pronounced Rcarsh).

Listen to sound bites from “Holy Switch”.

To sum up, Kim felt loved by her Hindu hosts and was enriched by the experience. Akeesh set out to learn more about the Christian faith and succeeded in that but he learnt about judgement, not love, and he didn't feel love, he felt judged and condemned. On the last night he cooked a curry for his hosts and Kim's Bible study group but he doesn't care if they like it or not because he doesn't care for them.

It may have been that the evangelical Christians in Tasmania focused more on sin and judgement than love or the producers of Compass wanted evangelical Christianity to look bad, but my point is that, by focusing too much on sin, we can come across to non-Christians as judgemental and condemning rather than loving and gracious.

Kim's BS group focused on John 14:6 and Akeesh got the message that he was going to hell because he didn't believe in Jesus. What other approach could Kim's BS group have taken?

To finish

6. At church should we be hearing more about positive living or trying not to sin? Why/why not? (Reflect on your answer to Q 1.)

Study 7, 1 Pet 5:1-14, Church leadership

Getting started

1. How do you handle criticism?
2. What good does criticism do?

Bible

3. Read 1 Pet 5:1-7.

In a number of translations (including the NIV), chapter 5 seems to begin a new topic. This is because the important word ‘therefore’ is omitted (which is in the Greek text of 1 Peter 5:1). It should read: “Therefore, to the elders among you, I appeal . . .” In other words, the instructions to the elders are a continuation of the idea that Peter’s readers should continue to do what is good in the face of suffering (4:19).

From Homeward Bound (1 Peter) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne p 88.

- (a) How does the leadership style of elders imitate Christ, the Chief Shepherd?

- (b) What aspects of Jesus life does this make you think of?

- (c) If we can equate “elders” with “overseers” (v2 and 1 Tim 3) and “ministers” at St Faiths. How do our “elders” measure up?

- (d) Earlier in 1 Peter we looked at a number of passages on submission but what about submission to elders/ministers? Is the extent of a congregation's submission to its ministers any greater than the submission of one Christian to another Christian (Eph 5:21)? What authority does a minister have over his congregation (Heb 13:17)?

Listen to these sound bites from sermons by John Dickson from St Andrews, Roseville:
1/7/2012 Heb13 and May 2013 "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" 2, Acts 2:36-47.

4. What is humility?
5. What is the difference between someone who is humble and someone who has low self-esteem?

6. Read again 1 Pet 5:5-6.

(a) How are we to be humble at church?

(b) Does our humility mean we are not to think critically and voice suggestions or criticisms? Why/why not?

(c) If you thought something was wrong at church, how would you express your thoughts about it?

(d) Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. How could we apply these verses to our lives and still be humble?

5. Read 1 Pet 5:8-14.

(a) How do we resist the devil?

(b) Can we ever say “the devil made me do it”? Why/why not?

(c) What does the devil do?

Jesus said he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). That about sums up what he does. He lies to deceive, and once he has deceived, he kills. . . . What has this master of the underworld got to do with us? The answer is that we, too, are deceived in order to be killed.

From Living with the Underworld by Peter Bolt p 67.

To resist the devil we don't have to do much because; by Jesus' life, death and resurrection; he has already defeated sin, death and the devil (read Rom 6:3-4). If the devil could bring a charge against us or if he could condemn us then that would be a problem for us but he can't because of Jesus (read Rom 8:33-39). We are absolutely secure from the devil (read John 10:27-28).

All we have to do against the devil is to stand! Don't go looking for him. Don't go asking for a fight. Don't seek out exorcism opportunities. Simply be strong in the Lord, have confidence in what God has done for us and stand firm. As James says, resist the devil and he will flee (Jas 4:7). In other words, forget the movies about objects being thrown about the room and heads spinning round. The only power the devil has is the power we give him when we believe his lies. Just resist him. Be strong and you will triumph.

From the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet Walk this Way by Bryson Smith p 58.

To finish

6. Besides thinking critically and making suggestions or criticisms we can also encourage people at church. (a) Who could you encourage at church?

(b) How would you encourage them?

(c) Who could you encourage outside of church?