



Peninsula City Church

1st Peter: Living as Christ-followers in the midst of trials for our faith

Introduction & Chapter One

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Contents

Introduction & Chapter One	3
Introduction.....	3
1. An Introduction	3
2. Chapter One.....	4
Some Concluding Thoughts.....	6

Introduction & Chapter One

Introduction

Q. Why do we have trials in this life if we are Christ-followers?

Have you ever been persecuted for something? It is not a nice feeling; it can seem that the whole world is against us. We may find some comfort from friend and family, but sometimes they do not seem to understand or be able to help. First Peter taps into this idea and maybe able to help.

1. An Introduction

Q. So, what is 1st Peter all about?

The letter of 1st Peter is an amazing, encouraging message to help Christ-followers living out their common faith in the midst of trials. They were being persecuted (and even killed) for their faith in Jesus Christ. This is something that can and does still happen today. So, it is important to know how we are to live to glorify God in the midst of these times as we live out our faith together.

Peter writes his first letter to what he calls the “dispersion,” or the Christ-followers scattered or dispersed because of their faith. They would have been scattered due to being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. So, Peter wrote to guide them how to respond to this persecution to bring glory to God.

¹ “This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God’s chosen people who are living as (scattered) foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia... ⁶ So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. ⁷ These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world... ¹² They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.

¹³ So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. ¹⁴ So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. ¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, ‘You must be holy because I am holy.’

¹⁷ And remember that the Heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favourites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of Him during your time here as ‘temporary residents.’ ¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days He has been revealed for your sake” (1 Pet 1:1,6-7,12-20; cf. also 1 Pet 2:21-25; 3:18-22).

However, this idea of suffering for faith in Jesus Christ was nothing new to Peter. Jesus had pointed out that he would suffer and then encourage others in their suffering. It has been said,

“Shortly before Peter denied his Master, Christ told him, ‘Simon, Simon, behold, satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers’” (Lk 22:31-32, underline and italics mine). Little did Peter know at that time how he would eventually be used of God to strengthen not only believers of his own generation but believers of all generations to come, through the two inspired epistles that he was to write.”¹

Peter knew that the church would be persecuted and that he had a role to play. In John’s gospel chapter 21 Jesus said as much, Jn 21:15-19. So, as Gordon Fee points out, “Peter’s primary concern is for true Christian living in the context of hostility and suffering.”²

So, a major theme in First Peter, that various trials for the faith. This is because the people to whom he was writing were suffering for their faith. It most probably was due to the Roman emperors (Possibly Nero’s persecution of the Christ-followers) thirst for worship to be directed towards him, rather than towards any other. This may account for Peter’s comments in 2:13-17; 3:13. It is important to take note how the themes of the suffering of Christ and the suffering of believers are intertwined throughout the letter; 1:6-9; 2:19-21,22-25; 3:14,17, 18; 4:1,12-13,15-16,19; 5:1,9-10. For an overview of this theme within the letter see the following table,³

Christ-followers Trials	A Divine Perspective
Various trials: 1:6	Rejoice; they are temporary: 1:6
Unjust authority: 2:18	Silence evil people by doing good, follow the example of Christ: 2:21
Suffering for doing what is right: 3:14	Be ready to give testimony of your faith: 3:15
Suffering because of a resolve to resist carnal desires: 4:1	Give up carnal pursuits: 4:2
Religious persecution: 4:12–14	Be partakers in Christ’s sufferings: 4:13, 14
Suffering as part of God’s refining fire for spiritual growth: 4:19	Commit your life to Him; He is faithful: 4:19
Suffering from the attack of satan: 5:8	Resist satan; be steadfast in faith: 5:9

2. Chapter One

Q. How are those around us able to see that we are the genuine article as Christ-followers?

Within the framework of this letter Peter, challenged the Christ-followers to live a life as the genuine article. He challenged these then, to live a joyful life, even in the midst of trials for the faith. This was despite how bad their trials would get,

“In this, you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Pet 1:6 ESV).

This joy in the midst of these trials was to be one that was “constantly rejoicing with a joy that expresses itself in a triumphant exuberance.”⁴

¹ Jensen, I.L. *Jensen’s Survey of the New Testament*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 438.

² Fee, Gordon D. & Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 402.

³ Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson’s complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament* [computer file], electronic ed.

⁴ Wuest, Kenneth S. *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*. (Iowa Falls, IA: Riverside, 1961), 549.

The reason for this joyfulness was that the trials would have a Kingdom of God result. That result was the testing of the genuineness of their faith.

“So that the tested genuineness of your faith (more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire) may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7 ESV).

In the midst of this testing of the genuineness of their faith, they were to continue living the holy life when he said,

“But as He who called⁵ you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16 ESV).⁶

This is the theme of the letter of First Peter, i.e. suffering for the testing of the faith in Jesus Christ. Notice Peter’s use of ‘therefore, in (1 Pet 1:13), as he now links and builds (vv13-21) on (1 Pet 1:3-12). He was presented Jesus as an example of hope in the midst of suffering to the recipients of the letter. He now encouraged and instructed these Christ-followers how they should respond as the genuine article to their suffering.

One thing that he highlighted that flows from the holiness of God was their walk in holiness. It was not to be humanistic holiness, rather a holiness that was the very nature of God. It was to be holiness that they had already seen (or heard about that had been) lived out in Jesus Christ. However, this was not a new thing that was being dealt with here. As Moses in the book of Leviticus had already dealt with this matter with Israel,

⁴⁴ “For I am the Lord your God. You must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy. So do not defile yourselves with any of these small animals that scurry along the ground.
⁴⁵ For I, the Lord, Am the One who brought you up from the land of Egypt, that I might be your God. Therefore, you must be holy because I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45 NLT).

God revealed Himself to Moses and then Israel as the holy God (Ex 3:5⁷; 15:11). The plaque that was on the high priest turban was before the Lord and a reminder to the people that He is holy as it had on it “Holiness to the Lord” (Ex 28:36; 39:30).

As you read the following passages, you will notice the practical aspect of the use of holiness in these passages in Leviticus. For example “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”’” Then in the next 37 verses, Moses expounded what it meant to live the holy life based on, Lev 19:1-2. Likewise Lev 20:7 used the same phrase and then went on to expound it (cf. also Lev 20:26; 21:8). Consequently, the phrase “Be holy, for I am holy,” could be seen to be “the motto of Leviticus.”⁸

Here we have an example of Peter interpreting these passages, and then applying them to the current situation, i.e. “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet 1:15). Since they were (amongst other things) a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5; Lev 19:6); and ‘a holy nation’ (1 Pet 2:9), they were to live a holy life even in the midst of trials. So, Peter was not creating an understanding holiness that was

⁵ Notice Peter use of the calling of God in their lives (cf. also 1 Pet 2:9; 5:10).

⁶ Cf. also 1 Pet 1:18,22; 2:1,5,9,11-12,20; 3:6,15,17; 4:1-6; 1 Thess 4:7; 1 Jn 2:20; Is 1:4; 5:16 etc. Harrington offers an alternate translation to this verse, i.e. “as the one who called you is holy” the Christians are to be “holy in all your conduct.” It is a demonstration of the character of God. Harrington, D.J. *Jude and 2 Peter*. Sacra Pagina Series Vol 15. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 3.

⁷ This is the first use of the word holy in the Old Testament.

⁸ Wenham, J.G. *The Book of Leviticus*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 18, cf. also 18-25.

subjective, rather one that already been established, this was eternal holiness. It was the holiness of God that was the standard.

We know from reading the Old Testament that, Israel failed at doing this, so how could the New Testament saints succeed? It was only through Jesus Christ that, they had been redeemed, were established in holiness, as He was the Holy Sacrifice. That is,

“It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God” (1 Pet 1:19 NLT).

They were to live out the holy character of God that was now theirs, and not be affected by the trials, the pagan world, flesh and sin that surrounded them.

In the midst of the trials, Peter challenged them not to be “conformed to the former lusts, as in your ignorance” (1 Pet 1:13-14). Then in verse 15, he says, “but...” Moreover the use of ‘but,’ then introduced them to their identity of who they really were and what they were to do. That is, they were holy as God’s children, and so were to live as holy ones. They were to conduct themselves in a holy manner in every activity of life, even in their trials. This was even as they dealt with those who were persecuting them.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. Why do we have trials in this life if we are Christ-followers?

So then, trials for being a Christ-follower are not a new thing. Knowing how we need to live in the midst of trials is not a new thing. What is new here is that this section of Scripture is now speaking to us here and now. So, what do we do about it, ignore it or embrace it? Our trials may come in various forms, but our response needs to be the same. That is, we need to rejoice, realise that the trials are testing the genuineness of our faith, and finally we need to be holy, for God is holy. Then one day we may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ when He comes again.

Will we pass all of the trials (testing)? Honestly, we know that the answer is no, we will not. But we can become more Christlike every day, every moment of the day. As Peter said,

“Though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Pet 1:6 ESV).

So, how are we living in the midst of our trials right now? There is an end in sight, even if we are unable to see it at the moment. The trials are for a little while, even if that little while is a day, month, year, or the rest of our life. We will live the rest of our eternal life which began the day we were born anew.

So, let me ask, “How do we live holy lives in the midst of trials?”