

THE BOOK OF 1 PETER

What is it that makes Christianity unique compared to all other world religions?

According to C. S. Lewis, one of the greatest Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, *“Grace sets the Christian faith apart from every other world religion. What is grace? Simply put, grace is God’s unmerited favor. You cannot earn grace; you cannot do anything to deserve grace. It is simply God doing something for you with no strings attached. God’s grace is solely motivated by love: deep, abiding, unconditional, sacrificial love.”*

Phillip Yancey puts it this way: *“The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. In The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish Covenant, and Muslim’s code of law, each offer a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God’s love unconditional” (What’s So Amazing About Grace, 45).*

However, don’t confuse grace with cost—**just because grace is free, it is not cheap**. It cost Jesus, the Son of God, the most humiliating, excruciating death that is known to mankind—an *old, rugged cross*!

What do you think is the most memorable event in the life of Peter? His call? Walking on the water? Confession of Jesus as the Messiah? Whacking off the High Priest servant’s ear? Denial of Jesus? Powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost? Healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful? Restoration by the resurrected Jesus at the Sea of Galilee? Rooftop vision and visit to the home of Cornelius, the Roman centurion? Confrontation with Ananias and Sapphira? Resurrection of Dorcas? Angel’s unloosing of his chains to free him from prison? Defending Paul and Barnabas before the Jerusalem council? His unique death (tradition)?

There is an interesting detail found only in Luke’s account of Simon Peter’s betrayal of Jesus. It’s found in Luke 22:61 (LSB): *“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.”*

What do you think was in that look? What if you had been in Jesus’ sandals; how would you have looked at Peter? Would it have been a look of hurt or anger? Would you have given Peter the evil eye and said, *“Peter how could you?”*

How could you do this to me?" These would be natural responses to such denial, and if Jesus had looked at Peter that way, who would have blamed Him?

But here's the incredible thing: *none of these natural responses were in the look that Jesus gave to Peter.* The Greek word for "looked" in this verse carries the idea of interest, love, concern, empathy.

Jesus did not look at Peter with scorn or contempt, but with grace. According to the biblical word that Luke used in recording the event, Jesus was saying: *"Peter, I love you, and I'm concerned about you, because I know how broken you are going to feel now that you have rejected me.* Even during his betrayal of Jesus, Peter experienced God's amazing grace.¹

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Peter was again blessed with the amazing grace of God when Jesus restored him for each time, he had denied the Lord. That day changed Peter's life forever—this crusty blue collar fisherman was transformed into an ambassador of God's grace. As Peter penned the words of this first letter bearing his name, Peter surely intended his inspired words to bring the hope of God's grace to every struggling, often failing, disciple of Jesus.

AUTHOR

The first verse of Peter's letter identifies the author as *"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ."* Peter's Hebrew name was *shimon ben yonah*, translated as "Simon, son of Jonah." The name *shimon*, means "heard." It's interesting that when Jesus restored Peter, he reverted to Peter's given Hebrew name (cf. John 21:15).

According to John 1:42, it was when Jesus met Andrew's brother, Shimon, Andrew's brother, that He gave him the new name, Kephas—the Greek translation of the Aramaic name, *Kepha*, meaning "stone or rock."

In Mark 3:16, when Jesus was sending to "Twelve" out to preach, named Shimon was first on His list but Jesus clarified that this was Peter (*Petros* in

¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.. **Be Hopeful (1 Peter): How to Make the Best of Times Out of Your Worst of Times** (The BE Series Commentary) (pp. 9-13). David C Cook. Kindle Edition

Greek), a Greek name that has no equivalency in Hebrew. He is the only man in the New Testament called Peter.

Before we go any further, we need to address the response of Jesus to Peter's Great Confession at Caesarea Phillipi. Jesus said, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter (petros—a small stone or pebble), and upon this rock (petra—a massive stone, bedrock) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."*

Jesus was not declaring Shimon Petros to be the foundation of His church—the only question is, "If not Peter, upon what was Jesus going to build His church?" The answer is either Jesus was referring to confession of Peter which identified Jesus as The Christ, the Son of God. Or Jesus was referring to the object of Peter's confession, namely Himself. We talked about hermeneutics last week—one of the primary principles of hermeneutics is "let scripture interpret scripture." So let's look at just a couple of New Testament verses:

- 1 Corinthians 3:11 *"For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*
- Ephesians 2:19-20 *"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone (cf. 1 Peter 2:5-8)"*

Until recent times, the authenticity of the epistle's claim to apostolic authorship was unchallenged. Then some modern scholars noted that Peter was considered by Jewish religious leaders as *"unschooled"* and *"ordinary"* (Acts 4:13). However, the superb literary style and sophisticated use of vocabulary in 1 Peter seem to indicate that its author was a master of the Greek language. The few who would doubt Peter's authorship say that such sophisticated Greek literature could not have flowed from the pen of a Galilean fisherman.

Though Peter could be called *"unschooled"* and though Greek was not his native tongue, he was by no means ordinary. The Jewish leaders saw Peter as

unschooled simply because he had not been trained in rabbinical tradition and not because he was illiterate.

Luke also recorded (Acts 4:13) that these same leaders were astonished by Peter's confidence and the power of his Spirit-controlled personality. Peter's public ministry spanned more than 30 years and took him from Jerusalem to Rome. He lived and preached in a multilingual world. It is reasonable to think that after three decades Peter could have mastered the language of the majority of those to whom he ministered.

Any doubts about Peter's authorship based on linguistic style may be answered by the fact that Peter apparently employed Silas as his secretary (1 Peter 5:12). Though a Jerusalem Christian, Silas was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:36–37) and may have had great ability with the Greek language. But regardless of whether Silas aided Peter with the grammatical Greek nuances, the epistle's content remains Peter's personal message, stamped with his personal authority.

The **parallels between this letter and Peter's sermons** recorded in Acts are significant (cf. 1 Peter 1:20 with Acts 2:23, as well as 1 Peter 4:5 with Acts 10:42). One of the more striking examples is the similarity between 1 Peter 2:7–8 and Acts 4:10–11. In each passage Psalm 118:22 is quoted and applied to Christ. It is interesting that Peter was present when Christ Himself used Psalm 118:22 to indicate His rejection by the Jewish leaders (Matthew 21:42).

Another allusion to Jesus' ministry that strongly supports Peter's authorship is found in 1 Peter 5:2 where he commanded elders to *"be shepherds."* The only other place in the New Testament where this word is used as a command is in John 21:16, where Jesus gave Peter the same charge. In several other passages the author indicated that he was an eyewitness of Christ's earthly ministry (1 Peter 1:8; 2:23; 5:1).

This epistle exerted a wide influence on early Christian writings. **The early church unquestionably accepted the authenticity of 1 Peter as the author.** The letter's content and the witness of church history support beyond any

reasonable doubt the simple affirmation in verse one—the letter indeed comes from *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”*

DATE

Apparently, Peter wrote this epistle just before, or shortly after, the beginning of Nero’s persecution of the church in AD 64. Since Peter indicated that the government was still functioning (1 Peter 2:13–14), some believe that the church was not yet facing an organized Roman persecution. Evidently repressive laws had not yet been enacted against Christians. It was still possible for Peter’s readers to *“honor the king”* (2:17). The persecution and suffering to which Peter referred was primarily social and religious, rather than legal. A hostile pagan society would slander, ridicule, discriminate against, and even inflict physical abuse on those whose lifestyles had radically changed because of their faith in Christ.

However, Peter seemed to indicate that greater persecution was imminent. He assured his readers (1:6) that they could rejoice though they *“may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”* Peter exhorted them to prepare, to be self-controlled (1:13), and possibly suffer as Christians according to God’s will (4:19). Apparently, Nero’s severe persecution had already begun in Rome and was spreading to the provinces to which Peter was writing. **This would place the date of the letter in late AD 64 or early 65.**

That such persecution had already begun in Rome would explain why Peter referred to his location as *“Babylon”* (5:13). **Peter was in Rome during the last decade of his life.** His martyrdom is about AD 67. At the time of writing 1 Peter, he was not in custody of the Roman officials and evidently wished to conceal his true location. (*Note: some scholars believe that Peter was in the literal city of Babylon, where a Jewish community then flourished.*)

DESTINATION

First Peter is addressed to Christians scattered throughout five Roman provinces of the peninsula of Asia Minor. That area today is **northern Turkey.** The churches in those provinces were made up of both Jews and Gentiles. This epistle is rich in references and quotations from the Old Testament. Jews who

lived outside of Jerusalem were referred to as living in the *diaspora*. Jewish Christians would have found special significance in the term *diasporas*, translated “scattered,” used in the salutation (1:1).

Gentile readers would have noted Peter’s exhortation to holy living considering their rather complete ignorance of God’s Word (1:14). Gentile Christians also would have been greatly encouraged by the fact that though they *were* ignorant of God’s Word, they were still considered “*the people of God*” (2:10). Clearly, Peter carefully included both Jewish and Gentile Christians in his letter of encouragement to the churches of Asia Minor.

PURPOSE

This epistle could be interpreted as a handbook written for ambassadors in a hostile foreign land. The author, knowing persecution would arise, carefully prescribed conduct designed to bring honor to the God that they represented. Therefore, the purpose of 1 Peter was to encourage Christians to face persecution in a way such that the true grace of Jesus Christ would be evidenced in them (5:12).

This epistle gives a theology of practical exhortation and comfort for believers’ daily needs. Peter linked doctrine (*orthodoxy*) with practice (*orthopraxy*). In that regard, the **NEW BIRTH** provides a living hope to those committed believers who were experiencing persecution:

- **New conduct** is prescribed because their Lord endured unjust suffering.
- **New behavior** is required to demonstrate the amazing grace of God to an unbelieving and hostile world.
- **New responsibilities** are given to the leaders and members of the body of Christ because they should stand together as living stones against the onrushing tide of persecution.

Those who read 1 Peter are encouraged to lift their eyes from their present problems and trials to gain an eternal perspective. Although for a while,

believers may suffer pain and grief in their trials, they wait for an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.²

Three Great Truths in 1 Peter:

Truth 1: This earth is not our home—our home is in heaven. Throughout this letter, Peter repeatedly reminds us that we are “*strangers in the world*” (1 Peter 1:1 NIV)—this life is not all there is—it is a small, small portion of our lifetime. There is so much more to come!

When we receive God’s grace of forgiveness through Jesus’ death on the cross, we are assured of a home in heaven. In six days, the Lord created a beautiful and amazing world (Exodus 31:17; Colossians 1:16–17)—*I can only imagine* what heaven is going to be like!

When we grasp how amazing eternal life is going to be in our Father’s presence, it enables us to endure whatever may come our way in this brief, physical life.

Truth 2: God uses adversity in this life to strengthen our faith. Peter reminds us that we will suffer “*grief in all kinds of trials*” (1 Peter 1:6)—however, we can live in hope, because God never wastes pain, problems, or troubles. In His will, God uses such difficulties in a supernatural way to strengthen our faith and confirm our salvation. The writer of Hebrews emphasizes the value of our faith: “*Without faith, it’s impossible to please God*” (Hebrews 11:6).

Nothing in our lives happens without God’s consent. God is not the author of evil! However, He does allow evil in our lives, but NEVER without a means to redeem what He allows. He supernaturally uses our resultant suffering to shape us into men and women who bring Him glory. Even in the face of great persecution, Peter encouraged his readers to stand firm in their hope in Christ, because they could be confident that their faith was being purified to bring honor and glory to God.

Truth 3: The end is near! Therefore, Peter admonishes his readers to live intentionally by sharing our witness with unbelievers (1 Peter 3:15–16) and by

² Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 837–839). Victor Books.

demonstrating our love toward believers (4:8–10). Since believers are going to live with God in heaven for eternity, everything we do in this life should glorify God, as well as store up treasure for us in heaven (Matthew 6:19–20).³

These truths provide a powerful hope as we experience God's redeeming grace every day of our lives.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF 1 PETER

Theme: God's grace and the Living Hope

Key verses: 1 Peter 1:3; 5:12

- I. God's Grace and Salvation (1 Peter 1:1—2:10)**
 - A. Live in hope (1 Peter 1:1–12)**
 - B. Live in holiness (1 Peter 1:13–21)**
 - C. Live in harmony (1 Peter 1:22—2:10)**
- II. God's Grace and Submission (1 Peter 2:11—3:12)**
 - A. Submit to authorities (1 Peter 2:11–17)**
 - B. Submit to masters (1 Peter 2:18–25)**
 - C. Submit in the home (1 Peter 3:1–7)**
 - D. Submit in the church (1 Peter 3:8–12)**
- III. God's Grace and Suffering (1 Peter 3:13—5:11)**
 - A. Make Jesus Christ Lord (1 Peter 3:13–22)**
 - B. Have Christ's attitude (1 Peter 4:1–11)**
 - C. Glorify Christ's name (1 Peter 4:12–19)**
 - D. Look for Christ's return (1 Peter 5:1–6)**
 - E. Depend on Christ's grace (1 Peter 5:7–14)**

³ Wiersbe, Warren W. **Be Hopeful** (1 Peter): How to Make the Best of Times Out of Your Worst of Times (**The BE Series Commentary**) (pp. 11-13, 18). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.