

## **1 Peter: Persistence Through Difficulty**

### **Session 2 1 Peter 1:13—2:3**

#### **I. 1 Peter 1:13-16**

1. The “elect exile of the dispersion” live in the time of the Messiah. This time began with Christ’s resurrection and will come to its full fruition with “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13). We live in messianic time now; we are not simply waiting for it to come. However, it has not yet come in its fullness.
2. Significantly, the first imperative of the letter is to hope: “set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you” (1:13). Here, hope is not one quality among others but sums up the whole of the Christian life and is grounded in Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension (not human feelings or desires). While the “powers” (human and demonic) may appear to be in charge, hope offers a “counterintelligence” that the reign of Christ is the world’s true determining power. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 7:31, “the present form of this world is passing away.” While the various structures of our world (political, economic, social and spiritual) appear to be solid, they are destined to pass away. Christians are not to allow these things to determine their lives because they belong only to this present age.
3. This hope involves mental activity, “being sober-minded” (1:13). In other words, living in hope (allowing the hope of Christ’s reign to shape our lives) requires conscious effort. It is not a vague ideal, something to expect when we arrive in heaven but, rather, something which should shape our lives now. For hope to be real, we must have some vision of what Christ’s reign will be like and this must be based on the pattern of Christ’s action in the Gospels. Two examples might be helpful: (1) Philippians 2:1-11: Here, hope is to shape life in very concrete ways. The Christian life is about having the “mind of Christ” which means adopting the same fundamental posture as Christ. By living in this way, Christians witness to Christ’s reign. (2) Revelation 5:11-14: Here, hope lives from the vision of all creation worshiping the “Lamb who was slain”. Note that creation belongs not to the conquering empires of the world but to the Lamb whose self-offering has brought Life. What we see in Christ is not simply an example to be followed but our destiny and the future pattern of our lives. The pattern looks something like this: Faithfulness to God through suffering followed by vindication and glory (where glory means not us getting everything we want but restored creation). In Christ, the human vocation is both revealed and fulfilled. Hope prevents us from simply being conformed to the world or from sliding into cynicism.
4. The second imperative is to be holy: “as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1:14). Perhaps one of our problems is that we have a superficial understanding of holiness (in many cases understanding it as not doing certain things). It

is important to remember that holiness is one of God's attributes and in 1:15 Peter is alluding to Leviticus 19:2. Holiness, then, depends upon God's call, God's setting his people apart for some service. Becoming holy is only possible because of God's call to holiness. Note what this means: we can only become holy as God transforms us to reflect his character. This transformation involves not just different actions but, more fundamentally, transformed desires. Apart from God's call (grace), we are "conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" (1:14; cf. Ephesians 4:18). Sin is not simply immorality or unbelief but, fundamentally, the desire for something other than God. Sin is fundamentally disordered desire (note Romans 1:24-32). Sin as disordered desire leads to sin as warped understanding of the world. Holiness involves the transformation of desire and one of its consequences will be the surrender of our autonomy. For sinners to become holy they must become "obedient children" (1:14). Of course, it is important to point out that for truly holy people holiness does not feel like mere obedience but genuine freedom. For Peter, Christians are assumed into the obedience of the Son through the Holy Spirit. The call to become "obedient children" can only be answered because of this. This obedience can be compromised or even lost by not training our patterns of thought and desire. Through faith and baptism, we are joined to Christ and so freed for responsive obedience to God, but this freedom must be exercised and will not happen automatically (Romans 6:5-14).

## II. 1 Peter 1:17-21

1. Through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, God's people may call upon him as Father. This should not be thought of simply as being about what we now call "religion" (since it carries the connotation of being optional). Calling upon God as Father, entering into a relationship with God which mirrors the Son's relationship with the Father, is an essential part of our humanity; to live outside this relationship is to be less than human.
2. Peter reminds us that having God as our Father is a call to holiness (1:15) and that God "judges impartially according to each one's deeds" (1:17). Grace is not given to us to excuse us from holy living but to make it possible. The purpose of mentioning God's impartial judgment is not bring about fear but to help us understand the Christian life properly.
3. The Christian life is not fundamentally about morality but about bearing witness to God's redemptive work. This is why Peter exhorts Christians to "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile" (1:17). Here, fear means the reverent acknowledgement of God. Christians are to live in the recognition that God is the standard of justice and goodness and their lives are to bear witness to this. To live in this way, is to not need social recognition/support and to live without fear. This is the way of Jesus who endured suffering and death. The vocation of Christians is not be powerful or even influential but to be witnesses. Christians are in "exile" and their mission is not to make themselves comfortable in the world.
4. This life of witness is made possible because in Christ we have been "ransomed" "from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers" (1:18). To ransom or redeem a person was to purchase their freedom from slavery or captivity. In Exodus 6:6 God tells Moses

that he will redeem the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Peter reminds us that while we are in exile, we have been liberated from those powers which would oppress us. Principally, we have been set free from “futile ways” (1:18), ways of living and thinking that draw us away from God and which, therefore, are not life-giving but death-dealing. The cost of our ransom, the “precious blood of Christ” (1:19), should alert us to its profound meaning and to an appropriate appreciation of it.

5. 1:20 is very important. Christ was “foreknown before the foundation of the world”. What the Father intended to accomplish through the Son and the pattern of suffering and glorification that he would follow was present before creation. In short, the outworking of God’s purposes in Christ are the outworking of God’s purposes for creation (note Colossians 1:15-20). Although Christ preceded creation, he was made manifest “in the last times”. The appearance of Christ ushers in the consummation of time for he is the consummation of creation. Peter is drawing upon the distinction time as *chronos* or succession of moments and time as *kairos* or qualitative time. Christ’s appearance introduces *kairos* into the midst of *chronos*. Jesus’ resurrection inaugurates God’s kingdom and serves as the foundation of hope (1:21).
6. “Your faith and hope are in God” (1:21). It is important to not confuse “progress” with hope in that our hope is not that the human condition will progressively get better and better. We do not have hope because we can see progressive improvement but because we trust in God and God’s faithfulness.

### III. 1 Peter 1:22-25

1. The theme of this section is purity, something much misunderstood. In a cynical age, we are inclined to think that purity is either an impossible ideal or something that is not even desirable (this is true even for some Christians!). Purity is often incorrectly thought of simply as not doing certain things or avoiding certain people. Because of this, it is often confused with being prudish or moralistic.
2. Purity is a central theme of the New Testament. The fundamental notion is that Christ is the source of the purity of God’s people. Purity comes from “obedience to the truth” (1:22). This means that purity is the product of a fundamental trust in Christ and the devotion of heart and mind to him. Purity is not an impossible ideal and the deeper our faith becomes, the more we will desire it.
3. Purity comes in daily faithfulness and is both empowered and evoked by Christ and the Holy Spirit. It might be helpful to think about purity in a positive way: purity comes about in the life of the Church when our common object of love is Christ. The purity of which Peter speaks here is the purity of soul.
4. Note what purity leads to: “brotherly love” (1:22). It is important to also note that love here is an imperative. It is possible to have “brotherly love” because of the “Spirit of Christ” (1:11) and so it can be enjoined upon Christians. Purity empowers not self-righteousness or a particular sense of privilege but genuine community, a true fellowship with Christ and the members of his body. Purity enables genuine cruciform love.
5. Purity is the fruit of the new birth and it is important to note that 1:23 occurs in the passive participial form. This emphasizes the fact that the new birth is something we undergo,

not something we bring about. God is the agent of new birth and for this reason the life into which we have been reborn is an eternal one. This does not simply refer to life after death but also to life now. We are reborn into a life which can already display some of the characteristics of eternal life. In short, the life of the Church should give us a glimpse of what eternal life will look like. This occurs not in some ideal world but in the midst of human greed, lust, violence, pride, anger, envy and superficiality.

6. 1:24-25 indicates that all merely human attempts to bring this about are doomed to failure and even Christians may think of purity and brotherly love as impossible. Peter reminds us that “the word of the Lord remains forever” (1:25; Isaiah 40:6-8). Purity and brotherly love are made possible by God who reveals his character in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:1-5). While it appears that all creaturely life fails and while it appears that purity and brotherly love are impossible, appearances must be re-evaluated in light of the Word that God has spoken in Christ and the Holy Spirit. God’s Word is the final Word; it “remains forever” (1:25). God gives birth to a new people.

#### **IV. 1 Peter 2:1-3**

1. Because we have been granted an imperishable life, it is necessary to put away the perishable life and its associated qualities. A few of its characteristic qualities are enumerated: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander (2:1; cf. Ephesians 4:30-32). All of these qualities are essentially based on fear and stem from the human rejection of God’s good order of creation. Needless to say, they all make genuine community impossible; they are all symptoms of sin (note Romans 1:28-32). For those who have turned away from the Creator, life always seems precarious and we must constantly work to shore up our importance, security and success...at all costs.
2. The irony is that God is enormously generous (2:2). Just as infants turn hungrily to their mothers for milk, we can turn to God for “pure spiritual milk” (2:2) which will nourish us so that we can “grow up into salvation” (2:2). Here, the word often translated as “spiritual” is the word *logikos* (which can also mean rational). This milk, which is the truth of the Gospel, is not just for souls but also for minds. Part of what the Gospel involves is a different way of thinking, a way which counteracts the characteristics listed in 2:1.
3. 2:3 cites Psalm 34:8. Spiritual maturity involves a desire for Christ, a desire analogous to the desire for good food. This longing is essential to “growing up into salvation” (2:2). This introduces an important element. Spiritual maturity involves taking delight in Christ (it is not simply a matter of duty).

#### **V. Questions For Reflection**

1. How can we nourish hope and avoid being conformed to the world or sliding into cynicism?
2. Peter makes it clear that we are called to purity and that this is rooted in “obedience to the truth”. What dimensions of your life need to be obedient to the truth?
3. What are some ways we can bear witness to God in our daily conduct?

4. What is the connection between purity and brotherly love? What are some of the obstacles to brotherly love?
5. What are some of the ways in which we can take delight in Christ?