

No.27, 1 Peter

The book of 1 Peter is one of the group in the NT known as the general epistles. The general epistles were not written to specific congregations or to believers in one specific place but to God's people as a collective company in various locations. But while classified as a general epistle, 1 Peter has a very definite message for the Lord's people.

THE THEME OF THE EPISTLE – THE SUFFERINGS & THE GLORY OF THE SAINTS

Once again we have before us an epistle written to Jewish Christians, v.1 – where the words “the strangers scattered” read *the sojourners of the dispersion*. Moreover, they were new believers, ch.2: 2 in which they are described as “newborn babes.”

These details throw much light on the situation in which these believers found themselves. Being Jews they would have been looked on with much antagonism by the Gentiles of the lands where they were scattered; and being Jewish Christians they would have been regarded as apostates by those Jews who followed the system of Moses. Therefore, it is not surprising that they were enduring intense persecution as the epistle indicates. Indeed, in every chapter there is a reference to the sufferings of the recipients of this letter; and there was also the warning of even more severe persecution to come, ch 4: 12.

But in this epistle Peter also points the Lord's people to the victory that is theirs through Christ. Note in ch 1: 3 the reference to the “lively hope” set before God's people. The word *lively* simply means “living” and this living hope is through Christ's resurrection. Thus, the victory of the saints rests in the One who triumphed over death providing for His people an incorruptible inheritance, v.4. Then see ch 5: 1 – believers are partakers of the coming glory; a glory that will be revealed at Christ's coming, v.4; and to which believer's are called, v.10.

Thus, the Lord's genuine people are a people who are tried & tested but who also triumph in Christ, and this is essentially the theme of this epistle – the sufferings and glory of the true believer. Note ch 1: 11 in which Peter sums up the entire work of Christ – “*the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.*” This is striking – just as Christ suffered before He entered into His glory, so must the child of God. See also Luke 24: 26 – here is the same theme: *the sufferings and the glory*, see also Rom 8: 17 & 18. This was the pattern in Christ's experience; and it is also the pattern in the life of His people. This point is vital – there is no glory except after suffering. This is not to say that as a result of the sufferings of the saints they are given glory. Rather, it is simply to say that this is the mark of the genuine Christian experience – a far cry from the false notion so prevalent today that it is not the Lord's will for the believer to suffer. Hence, the theme of this epistle is that of the sufferings and the glory of the true people of God. There are certain points that Peter presents in this epistle about God's true people.

1. Explanation

The identity of those who are the Lord's genuine people is set before us at the very beginning of the epistle in ch 1: 2. The terms of this verse not only identify God's people, they also provide an explanation as to why anyone ever becomes a child of God.

(a) They are chosen by the Father – “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*” The word for “elect” comes from the verb that means *to choose*. Thus, a people have been chosen or elected by the Father. Moreover, it is utterly unconditional in that it is according to God's *foreknowledge* or foreordination, v.20. See Acts 2: 23 where the same word is used. The grammatical structure of this text signifies that “determinate counsel” and “foreknowledge” are one and the same. But the point of God's electing programme is that it is all of grace and for His own glory, Eph 1: 6.

(b) They are called by the Spirit – “*through sanctification of the Spirit.*” Here, the word “sanctification” is used in a very broad sense. It refers to the entire work of the Spirit of God in the regeneration of sinners which then leads on to His full work in their hearts & lives. Thus, the term indicates that the Spirit effectually calls sinners or sets them apart, bringing them out of a state of sin & misery into a state of grace.

(c) They are cleansed by the Son – “*unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*” The reference to “obedience” is important. It is the obedience of faith that is meant. The choice of the Father and the call of the Spirit lead to the obedience of faith. Such by the operation of divine grace are brought into obedience to the Gospel; and they seek for the cleansing that is found in the merits of Christ's atoning death & precious blood. Note throughout the epistle the emphasis on Christ's sacrificial & atoning work – redemption by Christ's atonement, ch 1: 18 & 19; expiation by Christ's atonement, 2: 24, and reconciliation by Christ's atonement, 3: 18.

2. Elevation

The epistle shows that true believers are a people who have been elevated to a whole new relationship with the Lord which is set forth under a variety of terms. For example they are *the temple of God*, 1 Pet 2: 5, noting the reference to the spiritual house. The Church is uniquely the dwelling place of God, Eph 2: 19-22. In this light Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple were pictures of the Church. In those times the Lord manifested His glory in those edifices to foreshadow this truth that His people are given this marvellous position of being the temple of

the Lord. Believers are also *the special possession of God* – “a chosen generation...an holy nation, a peculiar people.” The latter term literally means *a people for a possession*. The focus is on the covenant relationship between the Lord and His people. Then they are *God’s priesthood, vs. 5 & 9* – a holy & royal priesthood, terms that clearly point to the elevation of the Lord’s people to a most unique & privileged level. The terms speak of their access to worship & to offer up their spiritual sacrifices.

3. **Expectation**

The epistle shows God’s expectation of His people with regard to how they live in this world. Based on the previous points of truth then surely there must be an expectation that the Lord holds with regard to the manner in which they conduct & behave themselves. They should live in *happiness before God, ch 1: 6 & 8*. But note that it is contentment that flows out of what they have in Christ – “wherein ye greatly rejoice.” They should live in *holiness before God, ch 1: 15* and other similar exhortations. Then there is *humility before God*, with many calls to various parties to humble themselves, *ch 5: 5 & 6*. Believers are also expected to live in *hope before God, ch 1: 13*.

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