

Getting into 1 Peter: A Brief Introduction to this Grace-Filled Book

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by David Schrock

This Sunday we begin a new sermon series in the book of 1 Peter. And I want to share three reasons, even four, for why we are looking at this letter and why this book is so timely. These three reasons come from the outline of the book itself and will both introduce us to what we will find in Peter's first letter and how its contents equip us as Christians to live in our day.

First, in a world of idols inviting us to identify ourselves with them, 1 Peter reminds us of who we are in Christ. In modern, psychological, and political parlance, 1 Peter 1:1–2:10 give us a rich pedigree for understanding our self-identity. As [The Bible Project](#) helpfully illustrates, these verses depend upon various Old Testament types and shadows. They apply things like the Passover, the Priesthood, and the Temple to new covenant believers. Indeed, just as Israel found their identity from all that God did for them in the Exodus, so Christians are to find their identity in all that Christ is and all that he has done for us. Jesus is our Passover lamb who makes us a living temple and a holy priesthood. These are rich truths; we need to understand who we are.

In a world that teaches us to make a name for ourselves or to find meaning in the brands we buy or the political movements we support, 1 Peter gives a better way of living. In particular, 1 Peter 1:3–2:10 expounds the meaning of "elect exiles" (1:1–2), as Peter teaches us to find our true identity in biblical terms and titles. In a world of identity politics, few chapters in the Bible are better equipped to remind us who we are, who God has called us to be, and what it means to be God's elect exiles. This is the first reason we need 1 Peter.

Second, in a world hostile to Christ and his church, 1 Peter calls us to bear witness to God's grace. This focus begins in 1 Peter 2:9, which says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This verse serves as transition from the first part of the book (1:1–2:10) to the second (2:11–4:11), as our identity in Christ leads to the purpose of proclaiming the light of Christ to the world.

In fact, writing to God's "beloved" (a word that shows up in 2:11 and 4:12), Peter explains that in relationship to governing officials (2:13–17), in the marketplace (2:18–21), and in marriage (3:1–7), royal priests are to bear witness to the glories of Christ. Moreover, suffering, which is another key theme in 1 Peter, provides an important chance to bear witness to Christ. As 1 Peter 3:15 says to those suffering for righteousness' sake, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." The implicit understanding in this verse, is that when Christians suffer for being Christians, there will be some who ask them about their hope in the Lord. Peter writes to encourage Christians to be ready, so that they will declare the grace of God when suffering opens doors for proclamation.

In 1 Peter 4, the letter continues to combine themes of godliness (vv. 1–5) and gospel proclamation (v. 6), both rooted in the person and work of Christ (3:18–22). And in verses 7–11, Peter concludes this section and transitions to the next, by calling Christians to use their gifts to serve others. In fact, these verses not only point towards service, but they also train our eyes to consider where this world is going, as verse 7 begins, “The end of all things is at hand.” And in the next section, we see how verses 7–11 prepare the way for Christians to live with their eyes on eternity.

Third, in a world that is fading away, 1 Peter empowers us to live for God’s glory. From 1 Peter 4:12–5:14, the theme of God’s eternal glory pervades. In 1 Peter 4:12–19, we hear that a day is coming when the glory of Christ will be revealed (v. 13), and until that day those who suffer for Christ’s sake actually participate in his eternal glory now (v. 14). Similarly, church overseers who shepherd Christ’s flock are promised an unfading crown of glory (v. 4), even as Peter promises that all who suffer for Christ will eventually enjoy eternal glory when the end comes (v. 10). In short, this concluding section impels Christians to live for the later, greater, and eternal glory of God, even as they suffer for Christ in this age.

Indeed, as we live in a world where hostility towards Christians is growing, we need this reminder—that eternal glory should be our earthly aim! For as Peter speaks of his own eternal hope, he says that he is also a “partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (5:1). From his own hope in Christ, he seeks to bolster the elect exiles scattered throughout Asia Minor with an eternal and unfading hope. This theme begins in 1 Peter 1, as he speaks of the living hope that comes in the resurrection of Christ; it continues throughout the letter; and it culminates in the final chapter of his letter. Truly, this world is fading away. And we, who are bombarded with pictures and promises of worldly glory—if only we will find the right idol or elect the right candidate—need 1 Peter to call us back to what really matters. The glory of God that is and will be revealed in Jesus Christ is what Christians must set their hearts and lives upon.

This is perhaps the greatest reason why we need to study 1 Peter: it will help us live with an eternal perspective and passion for the glory of God. Still, there is one more reason we are studying 1 Peter.

Fourth and finally, 1 Peter is a book shorter and simpler than the book of Daniel. Since September our church has profited from Daniel. Yet, Daniel is heavy sledding. It is challenging to read, preach, and hear preached. It is necessary to feed on such books, but it is also good to return to books like 1 Peter that are simpler, but no less sublime, than Daniel.

So, in an effort to feed the flock with the whole counsel of God—with Old Testament and New Testament, prophets and apostles, apocalyptic and didactic—we turn from Daniel to Peter. And in the weeks ahead, we will hone in on shorter passages (sometimes two verses or less) with greater points of personal application. This brings balance to studying larger passages of Scripture and those books, like Daniel, that are more taxing to understand.

Have no fear, we will (as the Lord allows) return to larger and more complex books of the Bible. But for the next few months, we will settle into 1 Peter and pray for God to bless us with this word. And to that end, I would invite you to come join us for this sermon series.

Through it, may God solidify our identity in Christ, our mission of making disciples, and our focus on eternity.

For His Glory and your joy,

Pastor David