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LIVING WITHOUT FEAR

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I OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF I PETER

PURPOSE: To offer encouragement to suffering and persecuted Christians.

AUTHOR: Peter, the apostle.

TIMELINE: Approximately 62-64 A.D.

SETTING: Peter was possibly in Rome when the great Christian persecution under Nero began in 64 AD. Peter was martyred during this persecution which tortured and killed Christians and scattered them from the church at Jerusalem.

BLUEPRINT: A. God's great blessings to his people (1:1-2:10)

B. Conduct of God's people in the midst of suffering (2:11-4:19)

C. Shepherding of God's people in the midst of suffering (5:1-14)

MEGATHEMES OF I PETER

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Salvation	Our salvation is a precious gift from God, who chose us out of His love for us. Jesus died to pay the penalty of our sin and the Holy Spirit cleansed us from sin when we believed. Eternal life is a wonderful gift for those who trust in Christ.	Our safety and security are in God. If we experience joy in relationship with Christ now, how much greater will our joy be when He returns and we see Him face to face. Such a hope should motivate us to serve Christ with greater commitment.
Persecution	Peter offers faithful believers comfort and hope. Christians should expect ridicule, rejection, and suffering. Persecution makes us stronger because it refines our faith. We can face persecution victoriously, as Christ did, if we rely on Him.	Christians still suffer for what they believe. We should expect persecution, but we don't have to be terrified by it. The fact that we will live eternally with Christ should give us the confidence, patience, and hope to stand firm even when we are persecuted.
God's family	We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Christ as the founder and the foundation. Everyone in this community is related, as we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God.	Because Christ is the foundation of our family, we must be devoted, loyal and faithful to Him. By obeying Him, we show that we are His children. We must accept the challenge to live differently from the society around us.
Family Life	Peter encouraged the wives of unbelievers to submit to their husbands' authority as a means to winning them to Christ. He urged all family members to treat others with sympathy, love, compassion and humility.	We must treat our families lovingly. Though it is not easy, willing service is the best way to influence loved ones. To gain the strength we need for self-discipline and submission, we need the help of the Holy Spirit.

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Judgment	God will judge everyone with perfect justice and we will all face Him. He will punish evildoers and those who persecute God's people. Those who love Him will be rewarded with life forever in His presence.	Because all are accountable to God, we can leave the judgment of others to Him. We must not hate or resent those who persecute us. We should realize that we will be held responsible for how we live each day.

II BACKGROUND

One of the major themes of I Peter is the challenge to be God's people in a world that is often hostile to our convictions. After having establishing the certainty and joy of salvation (**I Peter 1:1-12**), that holiness is the standard that Christians must embrace (**I Peter 1:13-25**), and identifying the consistency between belief and daily living in which a Christian must display the new identity he or she has in Jesus Christ (**I Peter 2:1-12**), Peter moves on to consider the nature of the believer's identity. Peter showed that God's promises are not only future oriented, but have tremendous benefits and privileges attached to them in the present.

In **I Peter 2:11-12**, Peter began to focus on the conduct that a Christian should manifest in his or her daily living. If we are to be a people of God, then certain behaviors are to be expected and certain behaviors are to be avoided. The exhortation to honorable behavior is set in context of witness, as unbelievers will always be watching the 24/7 Christian ambassador to Christ. Through good behavior, the Christian will effectively encourage non-Christians to be open to God, which may ultimately lead to the salvation of the lost.

III SCRIPTURE

FOCUS ON YOUR BLESSINGS (3:13-14)

1 Peter 3 - Submission and Suffering

Peter shows the First Century Christians how to handle your emotions and feelings when doing good for the glory of God is returned with evil from your neighbors.

(13-14) How to handle it when our good is returned with evil: Though Peter says that Christians should always answer evil with good he also lives in the real world with millions of people sold out to depravity, ready to be devoured by a roaring lion adversary, and devoid of spiritual understanding (**I Corinthians 2:14**). Peter clearly knows that people will often answer our good with evil and addresses this matter accordingly.

"Not to be hated by the world; to be loved and flattered and caressed by the world - is one of the most terrible positions in which a Christian can find himself. 'What bad thing have I done,' asked the ancient sage, 'that he should speak well of me?'" (Meyer)

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We are also reminded that there is even blessing for us when we suffer for righteousness' sake. We can be assured that God will care for us, **especially when we suffer unjustly**. Moreover, suffering unjustly always paradoxically brings grace into our lives (**Matthew 5:3, Matthew 5:4, Matthew 5:10, Matthew 5:11**). Therefore, as hard as it is, we do not need to be concerned about the extent or intensity of suffering; our task is to focus on passionately doing good.

Jesus spoke of the same attitude: And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

We see the completeness of Jesus' work by His exaltation to the right hand of God the Father, and the subjection of all created angels, authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. Therefore, though Jesus suffered for doing good, **He had the ultimate triumph**. The example of Jesus proves Peter's point in **I Peter 3:9** where he shows us that when we suffer for doing good, we will inherit a blessing.

Knowing these spiritual truths, the presence or possibility of suffering for doing good should no longer make us shrink back from doing good. Instead, we should give a special place to God in our hearts (**Isaiah 8:13**) and always be ready to explain our faith, doing it with a right attitude of meekness and fear.

KEEP A CLEAR CONSCIENCE (3:15-17)

How can we always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you? It can only happen as we spend time in His Word.

(15-17): Always giving a clear defense: Peter knew how important it was to give a defense (i.e., apologetics) to everyone who asks you. He was put on the spot in situations described in **Acts 2:14-39, Acts 3:11-26, Acts 4:8-12, and Acts 5:29-32**, and in each situation, he relied on the power of the Holy Spirit and was able to give a proper and convincing defense of his faith in Jesus Christ. The focus of your defense should be on the difference Christ has made in your life.

Our good conduct, when our good is returned with evil, will prove others wrong in their opinions about us, and it will make them ashamed for speaking against our godly lives.

Some Christians believe that faith is a personal matter that should be kept to oneself. It is true that we shouldn't be boisterous and obnoxious in sharing our faith, but we should always be ready to give an answer, gently and respectfully, when asked about our faith, our life-style, or our Christian perspective. Can others see your hope in Christ? Are you prepared to tell them what Christ has done in your life?

Christians should be honorable in their speech and lives, always maintaining a gracious tone. Such good conduct, demonstrated when our good is returned with evil, will prove others wrong in their incorrect opinions about us, and it will make them ashamed for speaking against our godly lives. Their accusations would be undercut by the good lives that Christians maintain.

You may not be able to keep people from speaking evil against you, but you can at least stop supplying them with ammunition. As long as you do what is right, their accusations will be empty and only embarrass them. Therefore, keep your conduct above criticism by living beyond reproach, just like Jesus did.

CLAIM VICTORY IN CHRIST (3:18-22)

(18) Through His godly suffering, Jesus brought us to God: There is no longer any finite sacrifice or any finite atonement that can please God. Our own suffering is insufficient to pay for our sins. The good news is that the price has already been paid by the sacrifice of the infinite God-man, Jesus Christ (**Romans 5:8**).

The just for the unjust: Jesus is a perfect example of suffering for doing good. He, the just, suffered for all of us, the unjust; and the purpose of it all was to bring us to God and restore our broken and dead relationship with Him.

Since Jesus did all this to bring us to God, how wrong it is for us to not come to God in fellowship! The ancient Greek word translated bring is the same word used for access in Romans 5:2 and Ephesians 2:18. In ancient literature, the word bring was used “of admission to an audience with the Great King.” (Blum)

Jesus did die in His body, but was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. Here, Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. It also tells us that the Father raised Jesus from the dead (**Romans 6:4**), and it says that Jesus raised Himself from the dead (**John 2:18-22**). The resurrection was the work of the Triune God.

(19-20A) Jesus preached to the spirits in prison through godly suffering: Apparently, this work was done in the period after Jesus’ death, but before His first resurrection appearance to the disciples. Jesus went to Hades, the abode of the dead, and preached to the spirits there. He proclaimed God’s message, but not the proclamation of good news. Instead, Jesus probably preached a message of judgment and final condemnation to these disobedient spirits in Torments in light of His finished work on the cross. In doing this, there was a completion in Jesus’ triumph over evil, even the evil occurring before in antediluvian times.

Are these spirits demonic spirits or human spirits? We know that their disobedience was in the days of Noah (I Peter 3:20). We have evidence that this was a time of gross sin for both demons and humans, when there was an ungodly mingling of humans and demons (Genesis 6:1-2).

Scripture states that even those under the earth must acknowledge Jesus’ ultimate Lordship. Here, Jesus was announcing that fact: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth (**Philippians 2:10**).

“This passage, once cleared of misunderstanding, should also function today as an encouragement to us to be bold in our witness (as Noah was), to be confident that, though we may be few, God will certainly save us (as he did Noah), and to remind us that just as certainly as the flood eventually came, so final judgment will certainly come to our world as well, and Christ will ultimately triumph over all evil in the universe.” (Grudem)

(20B-22) Salvation of Noah as a picture of baptism: Peter draws a picture in these final verses of Chapter 3. Even as Noah’s salvation from judgment of God was connected with water, so the Christian’s salvation is connected with the water of baptism. The water of the flood washed away sin and wickedness, and brought a new world with a fresh start before God. The water of baptism does the same thing, providing a passage from the old to the new (**Romans 6:4**).

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Peter is careful to point out that it isn't the actual water washing of baptism that saves us, but the spiritual reality behind the immersion in water. Baptism is a visible pledge and act of obedience that symbolizes the cleansing and new life people receive when they trust Christ as Savior. What really saves us is the answer of a good conscience toward God, a conscience made good through the completed work of Jesus.

Peter shows the baptism ceremony is evidence of our faith in Christ's death and resurrection. It is a symbol of cleansing that occurs only in the hearts of those who believe (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12). By identifying themselves with Christ through baptism, First Century Christians could resist turning back, even under the intense pressure of persecution.