STUDIES IN
FIRST PETER:
A 13 WEEK STUDY GUIDE

DR. JAMES THOMPSON
THE CHURCH IN EXILE: WEEK ONE

Introduction. Although the personality of Peter dominates the four gospels, the literature bearing his name includes only 1 and 2 Peter, two very small books which have remained obscure and relatively uninfluential throughout the history of Christianity. Both epistles belong among the "General" or "Catholic" epistles, which were among the last epistles accepted into the canon.

1 Peter has been rediscovered in recent years because of its special theme: the church in exile.

Certain books of the Bible speak with special power at specific moments in history. The idea of the church in exile has been a subject of much discussion in recent years. We shall see if 1 Peter’s message is particularly appropriate for our time.

1. In the opening of the letter, the author identifies himself as Peter, an apostle, thus using the communication form first initiated by Paul.
   a. The writer remains in the background throughout the letter, making first-person references elsewhere only in 5:1, 12.
   b. Despite Peter’s influence in the gospels, these letters do not give us the portrait of Peter corresponding to that of Paul.
   c. The writer apparently writes from Rome, according to 5:13.

1. The readers from widely separate regions in Asia Minor (modern Turkey): Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.
   a. It would be good to note the distances represented by these provinces and the astounding fact of the solidarity between them: They were all exiles. The existence of such a letter addressed to all of these churches reflects their sense of “brotherhood” (cf. 2:17; 5:9). The presence of this book in our Scripture reflects the conviction that the message speaks beyond one locale. We ask if it speaks also to our culture.
   b. Two of these provinces -- Galatia and Asia -- have apparently been under Paul’s influence also.

1. The distinctive feature of the introduction of the letter is that the readers are addressed as “exiles of the dispersion” (RSV), “strangers in the world” (NIV), introducing us to a major theme of 1 Peter: the theme of the exile or “stranger.”
   a. The word used here (parepidemos) is often used for the “sojourner” who does not remain long in one place, i.e., someone who is not at home.
   b. A related word paroikos is used in 1:17; literally “one who lives in a place that is not his home.”
   c. Both words are used in 2:11.

1. The word “dispersion” was commonly used of the scattering of Jews after the exile. However, in 1 Peter the readers are obviously Gentile; i.e., they have adopted Jewish self-understanding. The Jewish experience had involved being “exiles of the dispersion.”
Now this is the experience of new Gentile converts:

a. Despite the extraordinary distances separating these communities, all know the exile existence. They are not exiles because of language or skin color, but because of their Christian faith.

b. The nature of their exile existence is indicated by numerous passages which indicate that they were the objects of rumor and slander (cf. 2:12, 16), abuse (2:18-25). Neighbors are surprised that Christians do not still go to the festivals (4:4). Note the separation from family in 1:18.


d. To the outsider they had the appearance of a cult which divided families (cf. 3:1) and undermined authority. They were obviously “clannish” and had strange moral views and practices.

e. Today we continue to know different forms of exiles; i.e., ethnic exiles; exiles because of conviction. Exiles are vulnerable to discrimination, loss of jobs, etc.

1. 1 Peter speaks with special force because Christians today increasingly becoming aliens.

a. We have lived for a long time under the Constantinian era; i.e., since the edict of Milan in 313, Christianity has been publicly supported in various ways.

b. Constantinianism" has many forms: European state churches; blue laws; prayer in schools, etc.; censorship in media. These are ways in which Christian influence was “propped up” by the government.

Discussion: forms of Constantinianism we have known.

a. As this Christian influence has diminished, Christians have returned to the "pre-Constantinianism" of 1 Peter.

Discussion: Examples of diminished influence of Christianity: entertainment, legal decisions, etc. To what extent are Christians actually exiles today? Is the Christian message meant to be lived under exile conditions? i.e., What, if anything, made the Christian message offensive in ancient times? Is the Christian message inherently offensive in such a way that Christians will be exiles?

1. We have seen numerous options for dealing with the exile situation.

a. The “Amish” approach: total separation from society; the attempt to be exiles.

b. The “Moral Majority” approach: to restore the past influence of Christianity in public life.

c. The approach which attempts to take away the offense of Christianity; i.e., approaches which present only the aspects of Christianity which are likely to gain approval.

d. The task recommended in this study is not to return to the earlier, more comfortable era where society "propped up" and supported our convictions, but to recognize that early Christianity found it no tragedy to live in exile.

1. In the opening address, Peter says that the exiles are in fact God's “chosen” ones; i.e., rejected by society, but chosen by God.
1. “Grace and peace to you be multiplied” is an offer of God's presence and peace to those who are “outsiders.”

THE CHURCH IN EXILE: WEEK TWO (1 PET. 1:3-12)

Introduction. After reminding the readers that they are exiles, the author opens the letter in the most uncharacteristic way: with a blessing, an expression of deep joy.

1. The form of 1 Pet. 1:3-12 resembles the style of Jewish prayers more than the letters of Paul.
   a. Paul's letters, like many letters in the ancient world, normally began with a thanksgiving; cf., however, 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Eph. 1:3-14.
   b. The style of 1 Peter 1:3-12 fits with the style of Jewish prayer (cf. Luke 1:68; Ps. 72:18; Ps. 88:19; 1 Kings 1:48).
   c. The striking feature of this section is its length; in addition, in Greek vss. 3-12 are all one sentence. The many parallel phrases, dependent clauses, etc., give this special rhetorical power. Some identify this as a hymn. It expresses special exhilaration and joy.
   d. In a letter to exiles, the introduction with such a hymnic and rhetorical statement reflects the fact that the community experiences joy within its exile.
   e. The section can be divided into the following parts:
      i. vss. 3-5, reborn to a living hope
      ii. vss. 6-7, rejoicing, although suffering
      iii. vss. 8-9, rejoicing in hope, although it is unfulfilled
      iv. vss. 10-12, the salvation we have received.

Discussion: The significance of music and its power to express deep conviction. We could imagine this exile community in song.

a. Note the content of the song in vss. 3-5: the accent is one hope.
   i. “Born again” in vss. 3, 23 (cf. 2:1-4) may indicate that the readers are recent converts; they are "exiles" by conversion. They have come from a pagan society.
   ii. “Born again to a living hope” suggests that hope was not a part of their natural experience, but was distinctively Christian.
      (1) Note the importance of hope in 1 Peter (1:3, 13, 21; 3:15).
      (2) Note the relationship between past, present, and future: born again (past), salvation ready to be revealed (future), being guarded (present experience).
      (3) Other passages (1 Thess. 4:13; Eph. 2:12) suggest that ancient societies suffered from hopelessness.

Discussion: Is our society known for hopelessness? Discuss forms of hopelessness in our society. Do we see any signs that Christians are more hopeful than the rest of the world.

a. Vss. 6-7 reflect the relationship between future hope and the present exile experience; the motif of rejoicing occurs in vss. 6, 8; 4:13. Future hope effects present outlook.
i. The reference to “grieving” is a reminder of the exile condition.
ii. On “testing” to prove genuineness, cf. James 1:2; Prov. 17:3.
iii. Tests are necessarily in order to prove genuineness; in 1 Peter the community was being tested in a corporate sense. What forms of testing do we experience?

a. Vss. 8-9 emphasize that faith rests on the unseen. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:7.

a. Vss. 10-12 emphasize the present experience: Although they are suffering now, they are also the recipients of an incredible gift. This passage shows that Christians do not merely wait on the future; they have experienced the fulfillment of ancient hopes. This passage is juxtaposed with the references to the grief and suffering of Christians.

i. In the preceding vss., salvation awaits us in the future; here Christians are already recipients.

ii. The NT has numerous references to the conviction that the promises are already fulfilled; cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; Luke 4:18; Matt 11:2-6.

iii. The suggestion that the recipients are the culmination of history and of God's promises would have been a powerful statement for a community of exiles.

Discuss 1:3-11 as a resource for exiles. How do modern people respond to the triumphant attitude and certainty of the exile community? Is this spirit offensive to others? Is it a necessary resource for Christians today?
1. The tone of this letter to exiles changes radically in the new section of 1 Peter, which begins in 1:13. The opening paragraph celebrates God's grace and the Christian hope, into which the Christians have been “born again.” That is, exiles are reminded of their extraordinary possession. The next section is dominated by the imperative.

1. The change of tone is indicated in the place of hope in the two sections; in 1:3-12, Peter celebrates the fact that Christians have been given a hope; in 1:13, they are told to hope.
   a. Hope is the basis for moral effort in this section.
   b. The intensity of their efforts is indicated by the mixed metaphor, “gird up the loins of your mind” (cf. Lk. 12:35).
   c. The metaphor suggests intensity, effort.
   d. The imperative and the call for intensity reminds us that grace should not be “cheap grace.”

1. The nature of the exile existence is suggested by the two options facing the church: to be “conformed to previous passions” or to be holy; cf. Rom. 12:1-2. The passage indicates the radical nature of conversion from a pagan society.
   a. On the past existence of the readers, cf. 4:3-4; on “passions” in Gentile society, cf. Rom. 1:24; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 4:5.
   b. Exile existence was thus distinguished by a radical conversion from the sexual mores of the culture.
   c. We easily lose any sense of what “conversion” -- radical reorientation -- meant to ancient people; cf. quotation from Justin Martyr.

Discussion: In a Christian culture, what happens to the idea of conversion? Can we assume that new converts into the church understand Christian morality? Where do we commonly hear the specific demands which Peter gives? In the post-Constantinian situation, we are likely to hear more about "alternative lifestyles," etc. Where do we pass on the specific injunctions found in 1 Peter?

1. The alternative of being “conformed” is to be holy.
   a. Christians are challenged to be “holy” in all conduct; i.e., there is a distinctively Christian lifestyle.
   b. The moral advice is taken from Lev. 19:2, which was central to Israel's identity. She was to be holy as God was holy.
      i. This passage appears in the larger section (Lev.17-26) known as the “holiness code,” which lays down the expectations of a holy people; Israel was expected be different from her neighbors.
      ii. This Gentile church finds its identity as heir of Israel, God's holy people.
      iii. By challenging the people to be holy (cf. the same theme in 2:9), Peter demonstrates that the exile existence is a positive matter.

Discussion: What happened to the concept of holiness in our instruction? To
what extent do we think of ourselves as a holy people? Has Holiness disappeared from the Christian vocabulary? If so, does this mean that we are unprepared to be aliens?

1. In vss. 17b-21, we are reminded that the imperative is based on the overwhelming sense of awe at the salvation in Christ. This is a resource for the exile existence.
   a. On “fear” as a part of Christian behavior, cf. 2:18; 3:2, 16. It seems to be the opposite of arrogance.
   b. The life is “the time of exile,” v. 17.
   c. Vss. 18-21 show the basis of this awe.
      i. Although separated from families (v. 18), they describe themselves as “redeemed” -- the language used for Israel at the exodus. V. 18 also shows why they received hostility: “vain traditions...”
      ii. Vss. 18-21 are one long sentence celebrating the precious gift by which they have been redeemed. This is the resource for living as outsiders.

1. Earlier the exile existence was associated with sexual purity; in 1:22-25 it is associated with the solidarity of the community.
   a. As in the previous paragraph, an imperative ("love one another earnestly") is based on the extraordinary gift.
   b. Compare the contrast (“not with corruptible seed” but “with the incorruptible word of God”) with the contrast in the previous paragraph between silver/gold and the blood of Christ.
   c. Note the emphasis on the preached word.

Discussion; Our passage shows a second aspect of the exile existence: those who were separated from families became families. Are we serious about being families? Or is this empty language?

The dominant mood of the entire passage: Redemption leads to hope as a driving force in moral intensity? How do those who have been redeemed maintain the sense of awe which one finds in 1 Peter's description of the new life?
THE CHURCH IN EXILE: WEEK FOUR
1 Pet. 2:1-10

1. In the previous section of 1 Peter, we have noted that initial instruction on Christian behavior was given in 1:13-25. We may summarize these themes.
   a. Emphasis on being “born anew” (1:23).
   b. Conduct appropriate for those who have been “born anew”: rejection of lust that is common in pagan environment; new adoption of affection, brotherly love.
   c. These two motifs reflect the cohesion of the community: brought together by common lifestyle and by affection that one normally finds in a family.

1. 2:1-3 continues the instructions for new Christians. This is continuation of the theme introduced in 1:13-25.
   a. The subject of “new birth” remains important (2:2).
      i. On the imagery of food for the infant, cf. 1 Cor. 3:1ff; Heb. 5:11-14.
      ii. Quotation is from LXX Ps. 33:9.
      iii. New converts were commonly told to “put away” some of their past deeds; metaphor of changing clothes. Here 5 items are listed.
   b. The passage suggests that growth follows conversion. The church is a place where people learn to grow beyond the stage of infancy.

   Discussion: Once more we see the church as a moral community. Not only are sexual sins prohibited. Other prohibitions include slander, etc. How might we better pass on such requirements to new converts?

1. 2:4-10 suggests how the community may “grow into salvation.”

   a. 2:4-5 has two imperatives for the church: “come to him” and “be built into a spiritual house.”
   b. It is not coincidental that Jesus is described as the stone that was rejected by men and chosen by God. This is an appropriate reminder for the exile community.
   c. Vss. 6-8 will clarify the descriptive language with words from Scripture.

   Discussion: The Christian life is rooted in the view of Jesus: Here he is the rejected one, the outsider. To what extent do we commonly portray Jesus as the outsider? Do we assume the vast difference between human standards and God’s standards, as they are assumed here?

      i. Vs. 5 is important for clarifying the church’s identity.
      ii. The language reminds us of Paul’s imagery of the church as the body of Christ; it indicates that one lives the Christian life only in solidarity with others.
      iii. The passage offers a description of the task of the church: to offer spiritual sacrifices; i.e., it is God’s new temple.

   Discussion: What is the mission of the church? What is meant by offering “gifts
and sacrifices?"

1. Vss. 6-8 demonstrate the observations of vss. 4-5 with quotations from Scripture.
   a. V. 6 quotes Isa. 28:16; cf. Rom. 9:33. In 7a, “those who believe” are the Christians.
   b. V. 7 quotes Ps. 118:22; cf. Matt 21:42.
   c. V. 8 quotes Isa. 2:8; cf. Rom. 9:33.
   d. The quotation of the three "stone" passages is used to show that society is divided between the believers and the unbelievers: those who believe and those who stumble.
   e. This offers an explanation of their current situation. That is, if they wonder why the world does not believe, Scripture has an explanation.

   **Discussion:** The explanation offered here for the church’s minority status is that Jesus is a divisive figure who separates people into believers and unbelievers, thus leaving no room for a middle ground. He is offensive to some but precious to others. To what extent have we maintained the “offensiveness” of Jesus. Discuss the comment that Christians give the world less and less in which to disbelieve.

1. Vss. 9-10 are a ringing declaration of the Church's identity.
   a. Like Jesus' words about salt and light (Matt 5:14-16), these may be words to a community with an inferiority complex; i.e., “do you know who you are?” The minority status could easily have intimidated them.
   b. Their sense of identity is drawn with images of Exod. 19:6.
   c. Their mission (“that you may declare...”) grows out of their strong sense of identity.
STUDIES IN FIRST PETER: A 13 WEEK STUDY GUIDE
DR. JAMES THOMPSON

WEEK FIVE:
Evangelism for Exiles

1. Evangelism appears to have a bad name in our culture.
   a. The term itself evokes negative images for many church people: manipulative methods, the ignorance of many of the evangelists we would not want to identify with. One could list other reasons why evangelism has a bad name.
   b. A primary reason why evangelism has a bad name in western society because it is offensive in violating two primary western values: tolerance and pluralism. Tolerance and pluralism are mean: all opinions should be accepted except those which claim to be true; i.e., it is offensive to indicate that others accept our values.
   c. To evangelize is to suggest that the Christian faith is true for everyone.

Discussion: What happened to evangelism? Why is it not a driving force in our churches?

1. In 1 Peter, one reason that the Christians are aliens is that they appear to be very intolerant. Conversion meant radical separation from other traditions (cf. the intolerance suggested by 1:18: “the vain traditions inherited from the fathers”).

1. One might expect outsiders/aliens to be too intimidated by the majority society to think about evangelism. Note other examples of alien communities.
   a. Qumran community at the Dead Sea: Primary interest in preserving identity; rigorous steps for outsiders who wanted to join.
   b. Amish communities are not very evangelistic.

1. Evangelism plays a major role in 1 Peter; Christians are not intimidated by their role as outsiders.
   a. The hostility which they received was undoubtedly rooted in their success in gaining new converts; no one would have bothered to persecute them if they had not been successful, at least in part.
   b. Evangelistic possibilities are seen in 2:9 (“that you may declare...”); 2:12; 3:2, 15; i.e., in their full interaction with non-Christians in society, in the home.

1. How and why did Christianity win?
   a. One indication is given in 2:9: “that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness....”
      i. The passage suggests a sense of wonder in the Christian message; a sense of gratitude for God's gracious call.
      ii. 2:9 is an allusion to Isa. 42:12, “declare his praise in the coastlands.”
   b. Evangelism was rooted in declaring; i.e., in having a story to tell; this involved making claims that would have been considered “intolerant.”
   c. They had few “methods” of evangelism at their disposal. They simply had confidence in their message.
Discussion: Why is Christianity in retreat in the western world? Is it that Christians are not convinced of the power of the message?

Some attempt evangelism by demonstrating that Christ is the answer to psychological needs, family crisis, etc. Are we actually “changing the subject” because we do not have confidence in the message?

a. The Christians of 1 Peter had few “means” of evangelism; i.e., media, door-knocking campaigns.

b. Evangelism in this passage grew out of the sense of identity suggested by the verse.

1. According to 2:12 and 3:1-2, Christian behavior had an evangelistic impact.

a. Christian behavior was so exemplary -- even by pagan standards -- that evangelism resulted.

i. At times the morality of aliens actually fit in with the morality of the pagans; i.e., contrary to rumor, Christians were not a threat to public order.

ii. Christians are reminded to have an evangelistic concern.

a. According to 3:2, one can notice the ways in which evangelism took place; one can conclude that evangelism took place, not through some kind of organized program, but through family and friends.

Discussion: Examples of "lifestyle evangelism" which we have seen.

a. Did the evangelistic strategy work? Historians suggest two reasons why Christianity won: a) their intolerance; b) high moral demands.

Discussion: Discuss attempts at evangelism which demand too little. “We take 'em any way we can get them.”
1. Although 1 Pet. 1:1-2:10 has given some description of the alien lifestyle (cf. 1:14, 22-25), a full treatment of the demands of the Christian life is not given until 2:11-4:11, which has a series of imperatives.

1. The entire section on Christian lifestyle falls under the heading of 2:12, “Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles ... when they see your good works.”
   a. Some exile groups attempt to withdraw from society, and thus they are not concerned with the interaction with the rest of the world.
   b. As an appropriate introduction to the paragraphs which follow, 2:12 indicates that the following passages deal with the Christian's relationship to society.
   c. The paragraphs on citizenship (2:13-17), slavery (2:18-25), and marriage to non-Christians indicate that Christian morality is practiced in interaction to non-Christians; i.e., exiles do not retreat from the world.

In the context, Christians have been told that they were “ransomed” or “liberated” (1:18) from the traditions of the fathers.
   a. Ancient listeners could have taken this as a call for liberation from the institutions of society: citizenship, slavery, marriage to those who had not been “ransomed.”
   b. The rumors about Christians concerned their negative influence on public order; i.e., it was assumed in the ancient world that social position and one's place was fixed; one can imagine the rumors that Christians were a “liberation movement.”

Discussion: We might reflect on the common understandings of freedom in our society. According to Bellah and others, how is freedom commonly defined?

   a. The New Testament indicates that freedom was a “dangerous” word, commonly open to misunderstanding; cf. Gal. 5:1, 13ff. Perhaps this was a problem in 1 Peter; cf. 2:16 and the advice not to use freedom as a cover for evil. In the context of 1 Peter (cf. the advice to slaves in 2:19ff; cf. also 4:15ff), Christians were tempted to rebel against institutions or to refuse to admit that they had any authority over “liberated” people.

   a. Each of the following paragraphs is introduced by “be submissive.”
      i. Basic meaning is to be seen in the etymology of sub -- ordinate; sub = under; ordinate: emphasis on order. Emphasis on the fact that Christian does not undermine order.
      ii. In 2:13-17, the point is that Christians do not attempt to undermine civic order.
      iii. Submission in 1 Peter should be placed in the larger context of 1 Peter, where it is associated with humility and Jesus’ refusal to look first to his own interests; cf. 2:21ff; 3:8ff; 5:5ff.
Discuss current attitudes toward submission. Does submission appear to be the opposite of freedom?

1. 1 Peter presents a distinctively Christian understanding of freedom: not one that escapes from responsibility, but one that promotes an orderly life and supports civic life. We should recall that this was spoken when Christians were not a part of the government, but were often intimidated by government.

Discussion: What is the role of Christians in civic life in the situation we now face?

In what ways do we indicate in our teaching that freedom, as understood by Christians, is not claiming one's rights, but something very distinctive? Have we unwittingly accepted an understanding of freedom that is contrary to Peter's view of the freedom through submission?

1. 1 Peter appears to suggest that the morality of aliens, on the one hand, appears strange to the rest of the world, while, on the other hand, it is appreciated and accepted by the non-Christian world. Discuss this paradoxical message of 1 Peter concerning morality. Is it true that Christian morality is both "alien" and acceptable to the majority culture?
1. In 1 Peter, as in the rest of the New Testament, slavery was a fact of life; cf. other NT passages which assume the existence of slavery: 1 Cor. 7:21-24; Philemon; Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9; Eph. 6:5; Col. 4:1.

1. The passage on slavery in 1 Peter should be compared with similar passages in Ephesians (5:21-6:9) and Colossians (3:18-4:1).
   a. Here we note that the normal household was comprised of parents, slaves, husband and wife.
   b. It is significant that the NT frequently reports that “households” were baptized (cf. Acts 16:33; 18:8).
   c. In other instances (cf. Philemon), masters were converted without slaves and slaves without masters; wives without husbands, etc.

1. The distinctive feature about 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 (in comparison with the other NT instructions for household) is that 1 Peter does not address reciprocal relationships (husband/wife; slave/master, etc.) Furthermore, he includes instructions for dealing with the government officials.
   a. The instructions of 1 Peter apparently reflect a situation in which the church is composed primarily of those who are in a subordinate position: slaves and wives.
   b. The general heading for this entire section is provided by 2:11-12. This concerns conduct toward outsiders.

1. Our passage suggests that ancient slavery could be very abusive (2:19, 20); i.e., slaves had no civil rights. We are tempted to read this passage in the light of the American experience of slavery. Ancient slavery was not related to color. Slaves could even be well educated, capable of teaching in the household.

1. Modern people express shock that the NT does not condemn the institution of slavery; instead the command to submit appears here, as in 2:13; 3:1.
   a. As a suppressed minority, Christian writers had no leverage for challenging the institution of slavery.
   b. This passage should be understood within the context of 1 Peter: According to 2:12, rumors were spreading about the Christians. The rumor was that they undermine public order with their “secret meetings, etc.”

1. The advice to “do good” or “do right” (2:20) and suffer unjustly is parallel to 4:14-16. That is, the experience of slaves is paradigmatic for all of these exile Christians. All are vulnerable to injustice, and all are involved in situations where they are vulnerable to abuse. The point is that Christians resist certain tactics that call for violence. The advice can be compared to Paul's in 1 Cor. 6: Christians should be wronged rather than take a brother to court.

Discussion: Give examples in which Peter's advice runs contrary to popular views.
What would Peter say to the Christian businessman/businesswoman? Suffer abuse when you are wronged? What would Peter say about "assertiveness training?" What about the use of power for a greater good, i.e., in the political process?

1. In advising slaves to submit, Peter says, “for unto this you were called.” Cf. the same wording in 3:9. “Calling” is commonly a word for being called by the gospel or “called” into God’s service. Here it is used for the slave’s place in life; i.e., his “calling” is to serve God in the place where he now lives.
   a. The Latin equivalent for calling is the root word “vocation.” It suggests the view, generally held in Protestantism, that one’s work is his religious calling.
   b. One may ask whether we have commonly lost any sense of a religious dimension to our work as calling.

1. Peter indicates in 2:21-25 that the demand for submission is rooted in the story of Christ as the model for submission to injustice. Many scholars consider 2:21-25 a hymn; it is set off in meter in many Greek New Testaments. That is, the song shapes the imagination and orientation of the Christians. Their story shapes their behavior; it is not a mere abstraction.
   a. Submission was not required merely because it less controversial; it is rooted in the story of Christ.
   b. Charles Sheldon’s famous book, In His Steps, was based on the wording of 2:21; it became one of the best-selling novels in American history.
   c. It appears unusual that the imperatives are interrupted by the narrative of 2:21-25. However, this is a reminder that a very distinctive story shapes our moral choices; it is not left in church, but is very “portable.” The story is taken into daily life.

Discussion: Stories of heroes shape behavior (Horatio Alger, etc.) and the imagination. What stories today give us models for behavior? To what extent does the cross shape the choices we make and distinguish us from others?
In the instructions to families in Ephesians and Colossians, the reciprocal duties of pairs (husbands/wives; parents/children; slaves/masters) were given, suggesting that whole family units became Christians together. The household instructions of 1 Peter reflect the alien existence of Christians, inasmuch as those who are addressed are (with the exception of husbands in 3:7) those who were in a subordinate relationship. This suggests that the composition of the church was largely that of women and slaves.

The context for the household instructions, we should recall is provided by 2:11-12. Note especially that rumors about Christians were spreading (cf. 3:16). The primary rumor is that Christians are a threat to public order; i.e., they are revolutionaries who incite slaves and women.

The instruction to wives is the third paragraph in a series which uses the word “be submissive.” On this verb addressed to wives, cf. Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:21-22.

a. The term is not identical to “obey,” which in 1 Peter is used for one’s response to God (cf. 1:2, 14; cf. 3:1, “those who are disobedient to the word.”

b. The root of the English word “subordinate” conveys the significance of the word in Greek (hypotasso): sub + ordinate. Emphasis not on sub but on ordinate = order. Compare the use of the verb in 1 Cor. 16:22; Eph. 5:21.

c. A striking fact is that, in advice to exiles to “be different,” Peter offers the same moral advice which Jews and pagans would give. Wives were expected to be subordinate. Thus Peter repeats the same advice.

d. The irony of the advice is that those wives who have become Christians have already disobeyed their husbands.

Wives are told that they might “in” their husbands with behavior which husbands approved.

a. These disobedient husbands were very likely among those who were slandering the Christians.

b. As in 2:12, Peter anticipates an evangelistic impact of oral behavior toward outsiders.

c. The experience of mixed marriage which we know in this culture is scarcely like the mixed marriage of pagan and Christians in ancient society. Some indication may be offered in 4:4; imagine the potential for conflict!

d. Historians indicate that one of the reasons why Christianity was compelling was that it offered high moral demands; here husbands are expected to appreciate the behavior of their wives.

Discussion: 1 Peter suggests that the morality of aliens is not always entirely alien. Sometimes Christian morality consists in “fitting in” to popular expectations. What are examples of Christian morality which fits in?

According to 3:3, submission is demonstrated in hair style, clothing, and jewelry. Pagan husbands would have approved of dress, etc., that were not ostentatious (cf. similar
advice in 1 Tim. 2:9, again in the context of submission). Such dress was considered seductive in intent (a form of sexual harassment toward husbands?).

1. This passage confronts us with a significant test case for interpretation. The advice to wives is in the same context as the advice to slaves. The advice is offered in the context of rumors against Christians. Its major thrust is: don’t aggravate the situation (cf. 2:19-20) by lending support to the rumors of Christian insubordination. Thus the question for interpretation is: Is the advice actually to be understood as a call to “fit in” to the existing social structure? Or is it an unchanging rule for all times? Is the advice on the submission of wives to be taken as the divine order for marriage ("love, honor, and obey")? If so, does the commandment on jewelry carry similar weight?

1. Part of the answer to the questions raised above can be given when we recognize that "submission" has a deeply Christian significance. According to 2:21ff, Christ was the example of submission. According to 3:8ff, all Christians are to defer to others. According to 5:1-5 those who are in leadership positions should not abuse power. In 5:5, “all” are to be clothed with humility. Thus submission is not to be written off as merely belonging to that society. According to 1 Peter, submission is a characteristic of all. Wives and slaves, in their subordinate positions, could be examples of subordination.

Discussion: Are Christians in a confused situation in matters of authority in the home? Must someone be in authority? Is mutual submission a possible approach to marriage?

What dimension has Christ brought into our family relationships? Books on the family by Christians routinely offer secular advice. Do we see any qualities which make Christian marriage unique?

1. The advice to slaves is supported by a reminder of the story of Christ (2:21-25); Christian wives are reminded of Sarah in 3:6. The allusion to Gen. 18:12 is chosen because of the word “lord.” The OT says nothing of Sarah's submission.

1. The brief advice to husbands suggests that there were Christian couples in the congregation. As in 5:1-5, those in power are told not to abuse power. Special deference was given with the recognition that husband and wife are equals in Christ.
1. At 3:13, a new section begins in 1 Peter. After addressing people who were in subordinate positions by advising them not to undermine public order ("be submissive"), the author now turns to encourage them in their situation.
   a. In the preceding paragraphs, he advised them to “do right” or “do good”; i.e., meet the common expectations of society; do not give the appearance of undermining society: note the repetition of “do right” in 2:14, 15, 20; 3:6, 11.
   b. Now he addresses their fears: “Who can do you harm” (3:13)?
      i. The question suggests the sense of fear and intimidation which Christians had (cf. 3:6).
      ii. The question is rhetorical, implying the answer: “no one” (cf. Rom. 8:34; Isa. 50:9).

1. 3:14 continues the theme of fear/intimidation.
   a. The saying is reminiscent of the beatitude in Matt. 5:10-12; cf. also 4:14-16.
   b. Peter addresses their fear by alluding to Isa. 8:12. Note the context of the passage: Conspiracies against Israel were in progress. The mighty Assyrians pose a threat. Isaiah says: Don't fear the Assyrians. The alternative: Regard God as holy. To sanctify God is to place human threats in perspective!

1. The allusion to Isa. 8:12 continues in 1 Peter 3:15: Those who sanctify Christ as Lord (language of Isa. 8:12) give a defense of their hope when they are asked; i.e., they are not intimidated when they are asked hostile questions.
   a. The passage suggests the constant interaction of Christians and pagans; i.e., “exiles” continue to talk to non-Christians. The questions were often hostile. They were probably evoked by the strangeness of Christians.

**Discussion:** Is it common to be asked to explain our hope or convictions? If this is uncommon to face this situation, what does this suggest about our Christian behavior?

   a. The word “defense” or “answer” (*apologia*) was commonly used for defense speeches in the book of Acts (Acts 22:1; 25:16; Phil 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:16). It suggests a reasoned explanation of one's faith. That is, Christians are not to be fearful or intimidated, but bold enough to defend their faith.
      i. In the second century, the “apologists” were men who defended Christianity against numerous misunderstandings and rumors. They addressed the educated classes with the gospel.
      ii. T.R. Glover gave as a major reason for the triumph of Christianity the claim that “Christians outthought the rest of the world.”
      iii. “Apologetics” has remained a significant feature of Christian ministry.

**Discussion:** What role does “defending the faith” have in modern Christianity? In what way are people today equipped to “give a reason?” How would you begin to give a reason for the hope within you?
1 Peter calls for Christians to give a clear defense of the faith. Discuss the modern approach of offering a message which appeals to the tastes of secular people in the name of relevance. Is church growth most assured by offering a distinctive message? Or a message that appeals to self-fulfillment, self-centeredness, etc.

Discuss Peter Berger's comment that the form of Christianity which will survive is one that has a clear and distinctive message.

1. The defense is not to be done in a rude or disrespectful way, but in a uniquely Christian manner: with meekness and fear.
   a. “Fear” has a different meaning than in 3:14. Here it is “fear of God” or reverence; cf. 1:17; 2:18; 3:2.
   b. Just as slanderers will be impressed by Christian behavior (2:12, 15), the manner of giving a Christian answer will also be important in interaction with outsiders.

1. The narrative in 3:18-22 relates the sufferings of Christians to the sufferings of Christ. 3:18-22 tells the story of Christ in order to demonstrate why Christian behavior is both bold in making a defense and meek in its demeanor. This passage has major difficulties, but its major point should be noted.
   a. It is one major thought unit, describing Christ's suffering and ultimate victory; thus the major point was that the Christ who suffered won the ultimate victory.
   b. One may compare 2:21-25, where advice is followed by the narrative about the suffering of Christ.
   c. One could read 3:18 and 22 together to form the complete thought of the victory of Christ; this is a reminder to Christians that their suffering results in triumph.

1. The most problematic part of 1 Peter is 3:19-20, which actually appears in a parenthetic statement. This is a very obscure statement, and should not be overemphasized. It is the origin of the statement “descended into Hell” in the Apostles Creed. We cannot be sure what it meant. It resonates with stories from Jewish folklore (especially the book of Enoch); Peter is probably echoing some of these stories, in which Enoch went back and preached to the people of Noah's day.

1. The story may offer a special significance to the analogy between Noah's time and the time of the church. Only eight -- a small minority -- were saved. Through baptism the church has an analogous situation. Baptism is the new “Noah’s ark.”
WEEK TEN: EXILE COMMUNITIES
1 Pet. 4:1-11

1. The powerful statement of 3:18-22 was intended as a basis and motivation for the summons to Christians that is given in 3:13-17. In 3:13-17, Christians are called upon to suffer for doing what is right (3:17), and not to be intimidated by hostile outsiders. In the new section in 4:1-6, Christians are challenged to live as people who follow the Christ who suffered in the flesh. This calls for a decisive break with the past.

1. 4:1-6 shows what is involved in a break with the past.
   a. “He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” = “has made a break from the life of sin”; this interpretation is confirmed by the context.
   b. V. 2 contrasts the "rest of the time" with the “time that is past.”
      i. Behavior that belongs to the past is listed under the heading “passions” in v. 2; then v. 3 lists the specifics of these “passions” (what the Gentiles like to do, v. 3): licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. Note: Compare the list (v. 3) in various translations.
      ii. Compare this description of “before” and “after” with 1:14-2:4. With this repetition, Peter is giving concrete description to new converts on what is to be expected of them.

Discussion: Do we commonly portray becoming a Christian as this kind of radical break with past behavior? Can assume that new Christians know what is expected of them?
   i. Present behavior is marked by a willingness to follow Jesus into suffering and to give up past behavior (4:1-2).
   b. According to 4:4-6 the new Christian behavior evokes a negative response from the populace.
      i. “They are surprised that you do not join them in dissipation.” Note references in Exile for pagan charges against Christians. “You do not go to our shows.” Christians did not pursue pleasure as did pagans.
      ii. According to 4:5, the hostile critics will give an account at the judgment. Christians should not be intimidated, knowing that the final judgment will vindicate them.

Discussion: In 1 Peter, Christian morality draws a negative response from others. Is this the case today? Can you imagine the pagan complaint of 4:4 being made today? Do Christians distinguish themselves by their discriminating attitude toward accepted practices? What about the arts? Dramatic presentations with violence and unhealthy attitudes toward sex?
   i. 4:6 has been a troubling verse; one wonders if it is a reference to the same thing as 3:19-20. Opinion is divided. Note that the passage is actually
only a footnote to v. 5. One can render 4:6, “preached to those who are now dead” (but were once alive).

1. Having encouraged Christians to break with the past and to expect vindication (4:1-6), the paragraph in 4:7-11 describes further the uniquely Christian conduct.
   a. The perspective for Christian conduct is governed by thefirst phrase in 4:7. Expectation of the end places priority in perspective and gives motivation for lifestyle and a sense of urgency (cf. 4:12-19 and the intensity of the expectation of the future).
   b. Expectation of the end leads to intensity in prayer (v. 7).
   c. It is not accidental that love is mentioned first (cf. Gal. 5:22; love in the NT is directed toward fellow believers. They are a cohesive community, with family-like atmosphere (cf. Exile for references). [The NT says little about love for outsiders, but portrays genuine intimacy in these house churches.]
   d. Hospitality was highly treasured; congregations had "networks" by which they took in strangers from other congregations. On the value of hospitality in the NT, cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-8; Heb. 13:1-3, etc.
   e. That exiles must live in community (i.e., in a “congregation”) is indicated in 4:10-11; compare 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:1-8. As in the other passages, Christians find their place of service within a congregation.

Discussion: In the twentieth century, is it the case that churches have increasingly “professionalized” all services? Have we moved from the small church with many volunteer activities to the larger church where professionals are in charge? If so, what is the result?

Do we increasingly find it difficult to find a role in the modern church that would allow us to minister in a way that seems to be implied in 1 Pet. 4:10-11?

A definite urgency is to be seen in the advice in 1 Pet. 4. Note especially 4:12-19. This is the basis for the instructions in 4:7-11. Is this urgency possible to recover in our own time? What role does "the end is near" (v. 7) have in our thinking and planning?
WEEK 11: LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

1. In the urgency of the situation that is described in 1 Pet. 4 (v. 7, "the end is at hand"; v. 12, a "fiery trial that is coming"), Peter describes the importance of community life in this difficult situation (4:7-11); here the whole congregation practices mutual ministry, and "each" has a gift for serving others; some speak, and some serve. In the new instructions in 5:1-5, elders are mentioned for the first time.

1. Some have seen contradictory views of church life in the two sections 4:7-11 and 5:1-5; one with “mutual ministry” and one with elders. One may assume that Peter had no difficulty reconciling the two units. That is, the church needs special leaders, while at the same time everyone ministers. In 5:1-5 there are obviously special tasks reserved for elders.

1. The word “elder” appears in the NT in Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5 (apparently synonymous with “bishop” in 1:7); 1 Tim. 5:17 (apparently synonymous with “bishop” in 1 Tim. 3:1); Acts 15:2. The word suggests the importance of age in ancient society: older men assumed positions of leadership.
   a. Ancient societies, like pre-industrial societies today, defer to age, which is associated with wisdom.
   b. Modern societies assume that knowledge (not wisdom) is paramount; it is not associated with age.
   c. Early Christian leadership was associated with age as well as seniority/experience (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15, 16).
   d. The guiding role of “older men” fit well in ancient patriarchal societies.

   A point for discussion: Does our democratic experience not have an impact on our understanding of church leadership? Do we think of elders as our representatives? Are they voted in and voted out? What place does democracy have in the guidance of the church's affairs?

1. Peter's role as "fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ" may suggest that his larger role was analogous to that of elders in local churches. Note that his role is closely associated with that of being witness to the sufferings of Christ; i.e., his leadership role is connected with paying a price.

1. Although everyone had a ministry, certain ones emerged to provide guidance. Note the role of elders. This may be the clearest statement in the NT of the job description of elders. The church needed special leadership of those who were recognized by all.
   a. The primary task: feed (literally “shepherd” the flock); same shepherding/pastoral image is found in Acts 20:28.
      i. Focus is on providing nutrition for the flock; i.e., determining that they are well fed; leading them to pasture; cf. Ps. 23 for the role of shepherd.
   b. In the NT, the teaching office is that of elder; no mention made of minister; elders were ministers.
Discussion: Compare the expectation of elders in 1 Peter and today. Has the complexity of modern life changed the way leadership functions? [Ancient elders did not concern themselves with physical property, budgets, assets, etc.]

1. The dangers of leadership are stated in three warnings.
   a. “Not by constraint but willingly” (cf. Heb. 13:17). The church is served by those who emerge and are not coerced into service.
   b. “Not for shameful gain but eagerly”: The temptation of money. This suggests that elders were paid for their ministry; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17. On the place of money in the early church, cf. 1 Cor. 9:7-12; Gal. 6:6.
   c. “Not as lording it over them but being examples.” This calls for a distinctly Christian leadership.
      i. Cf. Jesus’ statements about the exercise of power; Matt. 20:24-28; Lk 22:24-27.
      ii. The early church avoided any positions of power; avoided titles suggesting power.

Discussion: Jesus called for a distinctly Christian approach to leadership, which was distinguished from leadership forms in the culture? How can we maintain his call for a leadership through service? How does this leadership emerge?

If Peter spoke to specific dangers of leadership, what are the special dangers of leadership today?

1. The instructions for a time of duress call not only for leaders who lead with sensitivity, but also for the younger people to defer to the elders; to recognize the need for leadership. Followers could have been as tempted to want power as leaders. Note the parallel to the advice to that given in 3:1-7: those who are in positions of power (husbands, 3:7) are told not to abuse power; those who are in subordinate positions (wives, 3:1-6; younger people, 5:5) are to “be subordinate.” It is not a community with a grasping for power.
WEEK TWELVE: OUR ADVERSARY
1 Pet. 5:6-11

1. After the repeated challenge to Christians to be humble (5:5; cf. 3:8 and the submission passages, 2:13, 18; 3:1) in their dealings with each other, the final section of 1 Peter turns toward the relationship of Christians to God: “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.” It follows with the clause: “that he may exalt you.”
   b. In the context of 1 Peter, the passage is a reminder of the perilous circumstances of the readers: as exiles who anticipate a “fiery ordeal” (4:12), their only hope is to place matters in God’s hands.
   c. V. 7 is a dependent clause to v. 6: lit. “casting your cares on him...”; i.e., we humble ourselves before God by casting cares/anxieties on him.
      i. Cf. Ps. 55:22, 23; Matt. 6:25; Phil. 4:4-6.
      ii. The reference to anxiety in 1 Pet. reminds us of the earlier references to the community's fears: cf. 3:6, 14, 15. In the earlier reference, the community is reminded that sanctifying Christ as Lord (3:15) is the alternative to fear. In 5:7, the knowledge that God cares is the alternative to fear.
      iii. The anxieties addressed here are the ones they face together, not the more general forms of anxiety. (One may assume that he would have given the same advice to those who suffered from more individualized forms of anxiety.)
      iv. In all of the references to anxiety that are noted in Scripture, the reference is not to modern forms of Angst, but to more basic anxieties: food, clothing, physical fear.
   v. Note the Christian response to anxiety in 1 Peter and in the other passages: Matt. 6: “Your Father knows...”; Phil. 4:4-6: prayer; 1 Pet. 5:7: “Cast your cares...” The response is to recognize the value of prayer.

Discussion: 1) Do we know forms of congregational or brotherhood anxieties and are they topics of conversation? What forms of communal anxiety do we face? What fears for the future do we have? 2) Our culture is "therapeutic" and addresses various anxieties. What is the Christian response, according to 1 Peter, to various anxieties?

1. Although 5:6-7 call for placing ourselves in God's hands, 5:8 begins with the call to recognize the seriousness of the challenge; church is serious business.
   a. One does more than leave matters in God's hands; this is a call to be sober, be watchful.
      i. Cf. Matt. 26:40-41 for the disciples in Gethsemane.
      ii. This advice is common in the New Testament; God is in control, but the people are challenged to be alert: cf. 1 Thess. 5:6, 10; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; Matt 25:42, 43; 25:13; Lk. 12:37, 39.
   b. The church must be watchful because of your adversary, the devil.
      i. Cf. the psalmist's cry in Ps. 22:13-14.
iii. The language of a battle appears in Eph. 6:11-17.
iv. The devil is here probably a references to the forces which threaten the community. His concrete manifestation would be seen in the forces of hostility arrayed against the church.

c. The challenge: *resist*. This suggests the language of a “resistance movement” in warfare, a struggle against a formidable enemy; compare the language of warfare in Eph. 6:11-17.

*Discussion:* Some churches have debated the appropriateness of military metaphors in hymnals. List some of the songs which contain military metaphors. How do we deal with this military language? With discomfort? Without much reflection? Out of place for modern church life? In the present setting, do we find military language descriptive in any sense for the task of the church? Do we convey any sense that a war is going on?

Not only do we not speak of a war; we also do not speak often of "the devil" or "Satan." Why? Do we not picture the power of an adversary for the church? Is it the case that the language of “resistance” becomes meaningless if we do not believe in an enemy? [One might want to read sections from C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters.*]

a. Source of strength: Knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brethren throughout the world.
   i. On “the brotherhood,” cf. 2:17.
   ii. 1 Peter has a strong sense of “brotherhood” beyond the local congregation; the letter is written to several congregations at once.

*Discussion:* Does “congregational autonomy” sometimes reduce our vision of the universal church? What is our response to suffering churches? What sense of solidarity do we demonstrate?

1. Primary source of strength: The God of all grace. The church does not resist the devil alone. Note the significance of hope throughout this letter (cf. especially 1:3-11).
WEEK THIRTEEN: THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD

1. We know very little about ancient sermons that were delivered to the local church. [Acts records many sermons, but they are all to the unchurched: chapters 2, 3, 7, 13, 17.] The closest we can come to knowing what sermons to churches were like is to be found in the epistles, which were originally dictated to a scribe and then delivered and read to the local congregation. Thus the production of the epistles was an oral event: dictated and then read publicly.
   b. Note also the role of the assistants in delivering a letter and carrying personal messages, Acts 15:27.
   c. Paul frequently refers to co-workers as co-authors: cf. 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 and 2 Timothy.
   d. In 1 Peter 5:12, Peter refers to his act of writing “through Silvanus”; we are not sure what role Silvanus is playing. Co-author? scribe? delivery man (as in Acts 15:27)? [He appears to be the same as Silas in Acts (chs. 15-18)]. Strangely, Paul’s companion has now become Peter’s co-worker.


1. The message of 1 Peter appears to be summarized in v. 12: he has written exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. This is the conclusion of the sermon. It is also a good model of what one should expect of preaching: exhorting and declaring.
   a. Much of 1 Peter has been composed of “exhorting.” The word for “exhorting” (RSV; check other translations) is parakalo. It means literally, “urge,” “beseech,” “appeal to.”
      i. The same word is used in 2:11; 5:1.
      ii. One finds Peter “exhorting” (though a different word is used) in 1:13-15, 22; 2:1-4; 2:13-3:17; 4:7-11.
   b. “Urging” is closely related with “declaring” (literally witnessing). Note that the book often breaks into song and tells the story of Jesus. What he declares is the basis for his frequent words of encouragement. Cf. the opening words in 1:3-12; 1:18-21; 2:21-25; 3:18-22.

Discussion: What are the marks of a good sermon? Is 1 Peter a model for Christian preaching? Should we expect the sermon to "urge" and "declare?" Do we tend to emphasize one at the expense of the other?

1. Peter summarizes the message of the book: “that this is the true grace of God.” This has
been a book about grace.

a. The grace of God, according to Peter is not “cheap grace.” The message is that those who live in difficult circumstances will triumph only by the grace of God. The book resounds with the message that exile Christians have not been abandoned.
   i. The pervasive theme is the suffering of the Christian: cf. 2:19, 20; 3:14, 15, 16; 5:9, 10. This experience is the true grace of God.
   ii. One does not find in this book to exiles a sense of despair or foreboding, but one of hope and joy (cf. 1:3, 13, 21; 3:15 on hope; on joy, 1:6; 4:13).
   iii. The “true grace of God” is not a life of ease, but of vulnerability.

b. Peter appears to offer a challenge to our understanding of church life. We should ask where grace is found and what God has called us to do.

i. Cf. Charles Sheldon's book, In His Steps, an American bestseller. It was a challenge to “middle class American Christianity.” The book was based on 1 Peter 2:21, “to walk in his steps.”


Discussion: Where are people today likely to identify with Peter’s message, “this is the grace of God?” In the western world? In the third world? What has happened to the “cost of discipleship” in the modern church?

1. In. v. 13, Peter gives the traditional closing greeting

a. The solidarity of Christians is again indicated by the fact of one church sending greetings to another.

i. “Fellow elect” is reminiscent of 2 Jn 1, 13.

ii. “Babylon” is probably a word for Rome; cf. Rev. 14:8. The actual city of Babylon was in ruins during this time.

iii. Greetings are also extended by Mark; according to tradition, the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome by Mark, who recorded the preaching of Peter.

iv. The holy kiss (cf. Rom. 16:16) was a remarkable sign of the family-like atmosphere of the early church.

Discussion: One may note, as in 5:9, the strong sense of brotherhood between churches. Compare other letters where greetings are sent from one congregation to another. Are we not losing the sense of cohesion that we once had?