

1 Peter 1

HOLDING ON TO HOPE

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Student Guide

One of the most excruciating ministry moments a pastor faces involves presiding over a funeral of a suicide victim. The family grieves because they lost something precious—their loved one. They grieve even more because they see the suicide as a needless loss, something entirely preventable. They are ridden with guilt. We wonder how a person gets so low and so empty, that he or she would lose all sense of dignity and self-worth. The answer lies in the loss of hope. Luke gives us a vivid picture of lost hope as he describes the final journey of the Apostle Paul. On their way to Rome, Paul and his companions (including Luke) suffered shipwreck. Just prior to God's miraculous rescue, Luke records in stark detail what they believed to be the end. He writes, "And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Acts 27:19-20, italics added). When hope leaves, expectation for rescue completely vanishes. And, as we will see from 1 Peter, only God is big enough to rescue us in our hopeless condition. As we study chapter one together, we will observe hope from perhaps the brightest light in the New Testament. The Apostle Peter explains many aspects of hope's necessity.

1. Who Needs Hope? (vv. 1-2)

Hope is essential not only to life. Hope is essential to a happy life. When we are in the tunnel of tragedy, hope points to the light at the end. When temptation suggests to us to quit the race, hope drives us to run a few more laps. Our living with bad decisions becomes offset by a vivacious, Biblical hope which reveals God's remedy for horrible circumstances. Hope is like a telescope which brings God's promises into full view to the eyes of faith. The Apostle looks at hope and the people who need hope from two different vantage points.

First, Peter speaks of our *earthly position*—"strangers scattered." For Peter, our earthly dwelling places are mere tents—temporary campsites—because, as Christians, our citizenship belongs in heaven (cp. Phil. 3:20). Hence, we should be aware of our pilgrim-nature at every juncture of our lives, especially during intense persecution. Nevertheless, while we are "aliens" we are also "ambassadors" for Christ offering a message of hope to the hopeless. Who needs hope? Every person on this planet!

Second, Peter refers to our *heavenly position*—"elect." Believers cannot be tied to an earthly perspective. Our heavenly citizenship must neither be compromised nor neglected. Peter briefly exposes the believer to a Biblical doctrine which has caused some people much unnecessary confusion. He calls believers the "elect" of God, "according to the foreknowledge..." of Him Who elected us. And, while Peter does not fully expound upon the full process of election, he does indicate much we may consider. Also, we should note that when it comes to understanding the mind of God in election and predestination, every attempt is bound to fail if we expect to understand it completely. We no more may understand all there is to know about predestination than we can know all there is to know about the Trinity. God is revealed to us as surpassing our ability to comprehend. It should be enough for us to trust Him even when we do not understand Him or precisely how He eternally operates in His created universe.

Even so, there are some truths about election Peter reveals. First, we are elect "according to the foreknowledge of God." Peter reaches back into eternity and explicitly asserts God *knew us beforehand!* When you trusted Christ, it did not take God by surprise. He determined to save each and every one who believes in Him and determined it in eternity past. Additionally, Peter speaks of the "sanctification of the Spirit." Our hope stems directly from the active work of God's Spirit in our lives. Without Him, we would not experience the hope of His calling in Christ Jesus.

Question: *If you have been “elected” by God, does that mean you have no responsibility to believe and trust in Jesus for salvation? Explain.*

2. What is Hope? (vv. 3-9)

Peter tells us hope is designed for every soul. God is not willing for any to perish, but all to possess eternal life. But, what exactly is hope? Hope begins and ends with Jesus. In Him, we have a *living hope* (vv. 3-5). While the source of our hope is the resurrection, the substance of our hope is our “inheritance” which, according to Peter is “incorruptible.” In addition, since our faith is an enduring faith, our hope is an enduring hope. Hope establishes us and pushes us to trust in God during tough times. Peter reminds his readers of his relationship with Jesus in the days of His flesh (vv. 8-9). Though his readers had not seen Jesus, Peter certainly had. Neither have we seen Jesus in the flesh, yet our hope remains established through the apostolic witness to which Peter testifies. We are captivated by His love. Little wonder we have a sure faith expressed by “joy unspeakable.”

Question: *When you express “I hope so” are you not expressing a form of doubt? What is the difference between “I hope so” and “My hope is in God”? Explain.*

3. What Good is Hope? (vv. 10-21)

Peter keeps coming back to the theme of hope in the salvation only God can give. While the Triune God works to make salvation a reality (v. 3), hope (along with faith and love) brings salvation into our experience (vv. 4-9). And, Peter makes perfectly clear the salvation we have from Him is applicable not only in eternity future, but also in the past as well as the present. The Holy Spirit revealed centuries before Christ, that the Messiah would come, would both suffer and die but be raised from the dead. Hence, the inspired Word became as it were a Divine revelation from God Himself. Indeed, the redemptive hope the Apostles preached was a record of events even angelic beings were curious to investigate (v. 12c).

Hope, therefore, if even curious to angels, must bear some benefit to its possessors. Therefore, what good is hope? Hope *inspires*. We must “be holy” for God is holy (v. 16). Hope furthermore *examines*. Hope prods us to examine our personal life, making adjustments when we do not live up to Scriptural standards. Finally, hope *redeems* (vv. 18-21). While it is true, we look ahead to our examination, we look back to our redemption. From what did our hope in Christ redeem us?

4. How do we Keep Hope? (vv. 22-25; cp. 2:1-3)

The Apostle ends this section with one of the strongest statements in the Bible on inspiration. Hope stays alive in us because the Word of God came to us. The Scripture is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to regenerate our souls (cp. James 1:18). Without the Word of God, no one can be saved.

The Word not only *saves*, the Word also *sanctifies* (vv. 22-25). The Bible is a cleansing agent used by God. Scripture is God’s soap to wash us up. On the one hand, God does the *initial* cleansing, the beginning of sanctification. However, on the other hand, *individual* cleansing is initiated inwardly in our hearts. The Word of God is the instrument He uses to save and sanctify His people.

Finally, not only does God save and sanctify us through His Word, He also *sustains* us through His Word. Because the Word endures forever, it becomes the means through which God sustains us now and throughout eternity. Our hope is kept because God is a God of His Word and always will be!

Question: *Is the way we view the inspiration of Scripture a significant doctrine to maintain? Why or why not?*

Wrap Up

While Paul may be characterized as the Apostle of faith because of his deep understanding of doctrine, and John as the Apostle of love because of his focus on love in his writings, Peter may be characterized as the Apostle of hope. Hope keeps us going in the right direction and sustains us when the going gets rough. Hope pushes us to look always to better days ahead and the deliverance our God will surely bring.