

A Gift That Can Never Be Destroyed



SABBATH—APRIL 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Peter 1:1, 2; John 3:16; Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Peter 1:3–21; Leviticus 11:44, 45; 1 Peter 1:22–25.

MEMORY VERSE: “You have made yourselves pure by obeying the truth. So you have an honest and true love for each other. So love one another deeply, from your hearts” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV).

HERE ARE A FEW QUESTIONS that need to be answered, if possible, whenever you study a book of the Bible.

First, who is the author writing to? Is the author writing to one person or a group of people? The answer to this first question tells us who the audience is. Second, why was this book of the Bible written? The second question may be even more important than the first question. So let us word the second question another way. Was there a *topic* the author wanted to talk about?

To answer the second question, it would be good to know, as much as possible, what was happening in history at the time that Peter wrote his first letter. What was he saying, and why? And, of course, here is the most important question of all: *What message can we take from his letters?*

Yet, to answer that question, we have to ask the following question: *What could Peter possibly have to say to us?* After all, he wrote his letters, with the Holy Spirit's help, hundreds and hundreds of years ago. But we will see the answer to our question clearly as we read the first few verses he wrote. We will know that Peter indeed has a lot of important truths to give to us today.



Here is the important question to ask when studying a book of the Bible: What message can we take from this book?

TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LIVE IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY (1 Peter 1:1)

Read 1 Peter 1:1. What does this one verse tell us about the situation in which this letter is written?

Peter clearly identifies himself. His name is the first word in the letter. But he immediately defines himself as “an apostle [teacher; leader] of Jesus Christ.” So Peter does what Paul often does (Galatians 1:1; Romans 1:1; Ephesians 1:1). Right away, Peter establishes his connection to Jesus. And this shows that he has the right to send this letter to his readers. He places special attention on his divine calling. He is an “apostle.” And the One who has sent him is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter identifies the places he has sent his letter. These places include Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These are all regions in Asia Minor. Today, these regions are in the part of modern Turkey that is east of the Bosphorus. The Bosphorus is a body of water that is about 18 miles (29 kilometers) long. It separates the part of Turkey that is in Europe from the part of Turkey that is in Asia. It also connects the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea.



Peter identifies the places where his letter is sent: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

So is Peter writing mostly to Jewish believers or to Gentile (non-Jewish) believers? The words Peter uses in 1 Peter 1:1 are “people who have had to wander in the world,” and are “scattered.” These are words that were used to describe Jews living outside of the Holy Land in the first century. The words “chosen” and “holy” in 1 Peter 1:2 (NirV) can be used to describe either Jews or Christians. In his letters; however, Peter describes those who are outside of the community of believers differently. He calls them “Gentiles” (1 Peter 2:12; 1 Peter 4:3). This fact seems to tell us that Peter writes his letter mostly to Jewish believers.

But some Bible thinkers argue that what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:18 and 1 Peter 4:3 is meant for Gentile believers, not Jewish ones. We may never know for sure who Peter was writing to. But there is something more important for us to know than who the audience was. And it is what the message says.

CHOSEN (1 Peter 1:2)

Read 1 Peter 1:2. What else does this verse tell us about the people to whom Peter is writing? What does he call them?

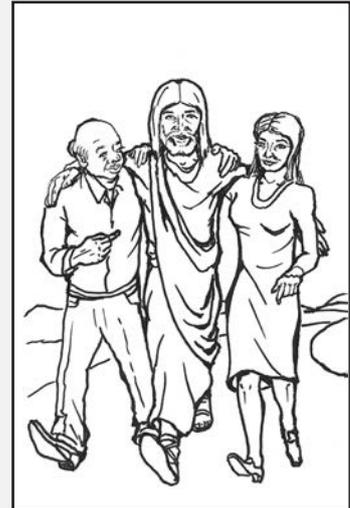
We may not know for sure exactly to whom Peter is writing. But Peter is clear about one thing. The people he writes to “have been chosen in keeping with what God the Father had planned” (1 Peter 1:2, NIV). We need to be careful how we explain this verse. It does not mean that God chose some people to be saved and some to be lost before they were born. And it does not mean that the ones Peter writes to happen to be the ones chosen by God for salvation. That idea is not what the Bible teaches.

Read 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16; and Ezekiel 33:11. How do these verses help us understand what Peter means when he calls these people “chosen” (1 Peter 1:2)?

The Bible makes it clear that God’s plan is for everyone to be saved. This plan was in place for all people even before the world was made. “God chose us to belong to Christ before the world was created” (Ephesians 1:4, NIV). The idea that “all” are “chosen” is true in one way. It is true that it was God’s plan from the start for everyone to be saved and for no one to be lost. In other words, He chose all people for eternal life. The plan of salvation was enough to save everyone. Everyone was meant to be covered by God’s offering for sin, even though some would not accept what God offered.

So God knows who the chosen are. He knew beforehand what their free choice would be. He knew if they would choose His gift of salvation or refuse it. God’s knowing beforehand in no way forces a person’s choice. The following example helps explain this truth more fully. Suppose a mother knew beforehand that her child would choose chocolate cake instead of green beans. Does that mean the mother forced the child to choose chocolate cake? Of course not! In the same way, God’s knowing what we will choose does not force our choice either. We are free to choose.

God has chosen you to be saved. How does this truth encourage you? How does it give you hope?



God chose us to belong to Christ before the world was made.

IMPORTANT TOPICS (1 Peter 1:3–12)

Read 1 Peter 1:3–12. What is Peter’s main message in these verses?

Peter writes about the Father and Son. And He writes about the work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Peter also introduces many of the topics that he will come back to later.

Peter begins in 1 Peter 1:3 by saying that Christians have been born again. Their whole lives have been changed. Jesus has changed their lives by the power of His return to life from the dead. And “a gift that can never be destroyed” waits for Christians in heaven (1 Peter 1:3, 4). So Jesus’ return to life is a central part of the Christian hope. We find this truth in so many other places in the New Testament.

This hope gives Christians a reason to rejoice. Many of the first Christians who read 1 Peter are suffering. This suffering tests their faith. It makes their faith pure. Fire tests and makes gold pure in the same way. Peter’s readers did not meet Jesus during His work on earth. But they love Him. They believe in Him. And the result of their faith in Jesus is salvation. Here, Peter says that Jesus promises them and us “that we might share in what belongs to him. This is a gift that can never be destroyed. It can never spoil or even fade away. It is kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4, NIV).

Peter also lets his readers know that the prophets (special messengers) of old had foretold the “grace that was going to come to you” (1 Peter 1:10, NIV). The prophets before the time of Jesus “searched [the Old Testament] very hard and with great care” (1 Peter 1:10, NIV). They wanted to find out about the salvation that Peter’s readers now experienced in Jesus.

Peter’s readers suffer for their faith. They are persecuted for what they believe. But Peter points out that they are part of a much wider war between good and evil. In the end, Peter wants to help them stay faithful to the truth through all their hardships.

First Peter 1:4 says that there are possessions “kept in heaven for you” (NIV). Think about that wonderful truth. There is a place in heaven just for you. What does that truth mean to you personally? So then, what should your personal answer be to this wonderful promise?



Christians have been born again. Their whole lives have been changed by the power of Jesus’ return to life from the dead.

LIVING THE LIFE OF SALVATION (1 Peter 1:13–21)

Read 1 Peter 1:13–21. According to these verses, why should Christians live holy and faithful lives?

First Peter 1:13, NIV, begins with the word “so.” The word “so” shows that what Peter will say next grows out of what he has just said. In yesterday’s study, we saw that Peter talked about the grace (mercy and forgiveness) of God. He also spoke about the hope that Christians have in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3–12).

Yes, Christians have this grace and hope. So Peter urges his readers to “be watchful, and control yourselves completely” (1 Peter 1:13, NIV). This is because his readers have received salvation in Jesus. Now they must prepare their minds in order to stand firm and be faithful (1 Peter 1:13).

Read 1 Peter 1:13. This verse tells us to “put [our] hope in the grace that lies ahead” (NIV). What does that mean?

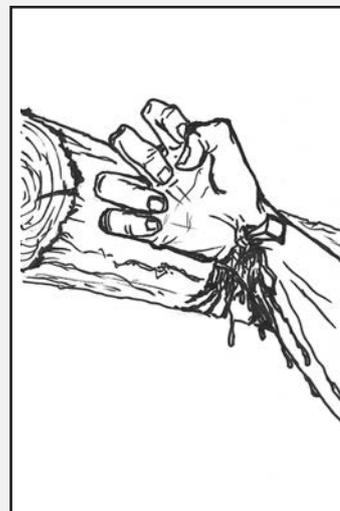
There is no question that Peter tells his readers their hope rests only in Jesus. But then he makes it clear that they must behave well. Why? Because they have been saved. To convince them, he mentions three great reasons Christians have for living holy and faithful lives.

The first thing that Peter says will help Christians to live holy and faithful lives is knowing who God is. Who God is can be said in this way: “God . . . is holy” (NIV). Peter quotes from Leviticus 11:44, 45 when he says, “ ‘Be holy, because I [God] am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:16, NIV). So those who follow Jesus must also be holy (1 Peter 1:15–17).

The second reason why Christians should behave well is found in the coming judgment. Christians realize that God will judge everyone fairly. He will judge everyone according to what he or she has done (1 Peter 1:17).

A third reason comes from the great truth that Christians are saved. They have been bought with a price. It is a very high price: “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19). And Peter makes it clear that the death of Jesus was no accident of history. Instead, Jesus’ death was something planned before the world was made (1 Peter 1:20).

What causes you to be a Christian? Suppose someone were to ask you: “Why are you a Christian?” What would you answer, and why? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.



Christians must live holy and faithful lives. This is because of how much it cost God to save them.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER (1 Peter 1:22–25)

Read 1 Peter 1:22–25. What important point is Peter making here about what it means to be a Christian? What does it mean to live a holy and faithful life?



Love for others comes from a heart that has been “born again.” The new birth comes through living out the truths of the Bible.

Peter begins in 1 Peter 1:22 by saying that Christians “have made [themselves] pure by obeying the truth” (NIV). The Greek verb for “to make pure” is closely related to the two words “holy” and “holiness.” These two words connect to what Peter wrote a few verses earlier in 1 Peter 1:15. First, Christians give their lives to Jesus. Then they are baptized (read 1 Peter 3:21, 22). In doing so, Christians set themselves aside for God. They do these things by obeying the truth.

This change in Christians’ lives results in another change. They now find themselves in a close relationship with others who share their beliefs. These relationships are very close. Peter uses the language of family to describe them. He says Christians are to love one another as brothers and sisters. In 1 Peter 1:22, Peter talks about this “love for each other” (NIV). He uses the Greek word for love, *philia*. This word means the “love of brother or sister.” This love is the love that families have for one another.

There are several different words in Greek that are translated as “love.” First, there is *philia*, which means friendship. Second, there is *eros*, which is the desire of a husband and wife. And third, there is *agape*, which is a pure love that causes a person to try to do good for another person. Peter uses the word *agape* for the word “love” when he writes “love one another deeply, from your hearts” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV). Here the word *agape* usually means the pure love that seeks the good of others. Such a love comes from a heart that has been “born again” (1 Peter 1:23; read also 1 Peter 1:3). In other words, Peter is saying that this new birth comes from living out the truths of the Bible. This kind of love comes only from God. A selfish heart cannot show this love. And that is why Peter puts such importance on being pure and on “obeying the truth” (1 Peter 1:22). The truth is not just something believed. It must be lived.

How can we learn to be more loving? What choices must we make if we want to show the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart”?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Ellen G. White, “Christ the Way of Life,” pages 365–368; “Perfect Obedience Through Christ,” pages 373–376, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

The first chapter of the first book of Peter is rich and deep. It covers a lot of ground. Peter begins his letter (book) with deep thoughts on the Godhead. This means he talks about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He says that the Father has given us a Savior in His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that we are chosen in Jesus to live holy lives and to obey. So we come to love Jesus. And in Him we feel joy. Why? His death and return to life from the dead are a promise. They promise us a gift that can never be destroyed. And this gift waits for us in heaven. It is true that we will suffer hardships. But we can greatly find joy in the salvation offered us in Christ. It is true that “His [Peter’s] letters were meant to give courage and strength to the faith of those who were suffering. Peter’s readers were going through many temptations. They were in danger of losing their hold upon God. Peter’s letters were meant to help his readers to begin to do what is right again.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders; Teachers]*, page 517.

Thus, Christians should live holy lives. In other words, their lives should show that they obey the truth. And churches should show they are filled with the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to the question at the end of Wednesday’s study: What causes us to be Christians? How are everyone’s answers the same? How are they different?
- 2 Twice in this first chapter Peter brings up Jesus’ return to life from the dead (1 Peter 1:3, 21). What is it about Jesus’ return to life that is so important to our faith?
- 3 Peter talks about a “gift that can never be destroyed” (1 Peter 1:4, NIV). (Read also Daniel 7:18.) What does that mean? Think about all the things in this world and this life that fade away or that can be destroyed instantly. What should those things tell us about how wonderful our promised gift really is?
- 4 How can our faith grow, even when we suffer? That is, what choices can we make to help us to learn from our suffering?



Churches should show they are filled with the kind of love that comes from a “pure heart.”