

EPISTLE: 1 PETER

1



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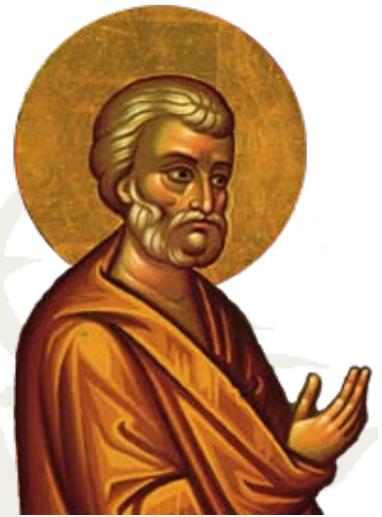
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PRACTICE QUIZ

Take a quiz to test your knowledge of 1 Peter chapter 1.

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In beginning a study of 1 Peter it is useful to remember that, while the message comes from the Holy Apostle Peter, the text was written down by his secretary, St. Silvanus (see 5:12). This is important because it explains why the language used in the epistle is far more sophisticated than would have been used by a fisherman from the Galilee. The epistle was written in Rome (critically called “Babylon” in 5:13) sometime between 50-67 AD.

The apostle wrote to the Jewish Christians living throughout the Roman empire (1:1), reminding his readers, in the words of the monk Andreas, “that God sanctifies us by His own Spirit and cleanses us believers with His own blood” (1:2). In fact, through Christ’s Resurrection God the Father has given us “a living hope” that cannot be tarnished or taken away (1:3-5), which St. Gregory Palamas describes as this: “They (who have lived in a godly manner) will share not only in resurrection, but also in the Lord’s Ascension and in all divine life.”

Notice the qualification given by Ss. Peter and Gregory: this reward is given to those who hold to their faith through the

end

of their lives (1:5). This living hope is a source of great rejoicing to those who are undergoing adversity, because—like gold being refined in a fire—the Christian who faithfully remains in communion with God “may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:6-7). The souls of such people, St. Peter says, will be saved (1:9). This salvation that comes through Christ is so important that the prophets of the Old Testament engaged in deep prayer and study to learn what they could; they then passed on what they learned to the people of later generations (1:10-12).

I want to point out something remarkable: the very things we learn from the Church—the gospel of Jesus Christ—are things “which angels desire to look into” (1:12). It’s good to remember this when we become bored with studying the Bible: we are privileged to learn about the things that excite the angels! We should therefore always maintain the attitude described by St. Hilary of Arles, “The angels long to look into these things because of the greatness of their love. They meditate on the Spirit and go on doing so forever, because love never comes to an end.”

Another key way in which we should respond to Christ’s saving work is to follow God’s command to “be holy, for I am holy” (1:16, quoting Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7). Pay attention to the character we must develop: “sober,” “obedient,” “not conforming yourselves to the former lusts,” “holy in all your conduct” (1:13-15). Didymus the Blind

puts it like this, “Since God, Who called us to salvation by the gospel, is holy, those who obey His calling must also become holy in all their thoughts and behavior, especially since He Who calls us to this also provides the necessary sanctification Himself.”

Our desire to be holy should increase when we consider that we can be saved only because of the tremendous price paid by Christ. We cannot buy salvation with money, nor can it be earned by practicing false religions—it only comes because Christ became human, died and was resurrected (1:17-21). This means “your faith and hope are in God” (1:21).

Believing this truth and pursuing a holy life “purifie(s) your souls,” because it involves “obeying the truth through the Spirit,” but it alone is not enough: we must also use our purified hearts to love one another (1:22). It all makes sense: Holy Scripture is clear that we can be saved only because God loves us (John 3:16); we were born again at baptism “through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23); love is therefore central not only to our relationship with God, but our relationship with those around us (see Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27).

LIFE TIP

St. John Chrysostom teaches us that, in addition to wanting to meditate on the things of God, there is another way in which we can become like the angels: “Do not the angels differs from us in this respect, that they do not want so many things as we do? Therefore the less we need, the more we are on our way to them; the more we need, the more we sink down to this perishable life.”

