

A SUMMARY OF FIRST PETER

Faith and Obedience

Loved ones, it is remarkable to many of us that the denominational world has separated faith from the obedience of God's Word, and is now being followed into that error by many in the church.

The doctrine of "salvation by faith only," which first began to be preached by Martin Luther, has been adopted by many since, even though it is unbiblical and nonsensical.

What a surprise it has been to many of us that some in the church now hold that position! Of course, it enables them to extend their hands in fellowship to every kind of religious error, as long as they say they have faith in Christ.

The Bible has a great deal to say regarding the necessity of obedience. It is obvious that the faith of the Bible includes obedience and that the obedience of the Bible includes heartfelt faith in the Deity of Christ.

Peter, the writer presently under consideration, has much to say about the importance of obedience.

He says his readers were sanctified unto obedience (1 Peter 1:2). He calls them children of obedience (v. 14). He says they were purified by their obedience to the Truth (v. 22). He says in no uncertain terms in 1 Peter 3:21 that they are saved through obedience in baptism—and he says much more.

He also talks about faith. They were guarded through faith (1 Peter 1:5). He writes about their faith's having been proved through the many trials they have endured (vs. 6-7). He writes about their "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (v. 9).

Is it not plain through what Peter (as well as the rest of the New Testament) teaches, that faith is irrevocably joined with obedience? What Peter says of one, he could easily say of the other.

We are to be genuine in our faith and in our obedience, which must be from the heart.

Where genuine faith is separated from genuine obedience, the result is either "dead faith" (Jam. 2:14-26), or (like the Pharisees) hypocritical obedience.

We must do what God says in the way God says do it. Claiming that only one of the two is necessary to salvation is false doctrine.

Word of God

What are we to believe? What are we to obey? We are to believe and obey the sword of the Spirit (Romans 6:17) – which is the Word of God.

God's word is known by various names in the writings of Peter: the Gospel, the glad tidings, the Truth, the Word of God, the Word of the Lord, the spiritual milk that is without guile, Scripture, the Word, the will of God, the oracles of God, and other designations.

In 2 Peter 1:3 Peter writes, "Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue."

His Divine power has, Peter tells us here, given us everything we need to know about life and godliness. It is adequate. We do not need the "Church" to be our authority, as the Catholics tell us.

We do not need the creeds or opinions of men, as the many denominations tell us. His Word alone is all we need to guide us from this world to the next.

It is the Truth which we have believed and obeyed (1 Peter 1:22-25). It is by our unpretended belief and obedience that we are begotten, purified, and born again. It is this birth to which Jesus had reference in John 3:3-7.

We have often said (and sometimes preached) that we are first begotten by faith in Christ and later born into Him by baptism. We have heard entire sermons based on this premise.

In fact, the Greek for "born" and "begotten" are the same. The Greek word is "gennao." There is no difference. It means to procreate – figuratively to regenerate – bear, beget, be born, bring forth, conceive, be delivered of.

In other words, sometimes the writers of the Bible place the whole process of conversion under the figure of a "birth," and at other times they place it under the figure of a "begettal."

Nowhere in the Bible is it taught that we are first "begotten" and then sometime later we are "born." Never in the Bible are we taught the process of first a "begettal" and then later a "birth."

The Bible teaches that by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17) we are moved to believe His Word and to obey His Word from our heart (Romans 6:17).

By believing and obeying His Word, we are "begotten" or "born" into the family of God. It is not hard to understand.

Christian Growth

Peter has a great deal to say about Christian growth both here and in second Peter.

He makes it plain that we cannot grow as Christians unless we are willing to leave sin behind. The attributes he mentions specifically in 1 Peter 2:1 are wickedness, all guile, all hypocrisies, envies, and all evil speakings.

One of the first things we notice about these specifications are their generalities! The King James Version translates the word wickedness as "malice." It is the opposite of excellence of character. Anything, therefore, that results in the Christian's being less than "excellent in character" is not acceptable.

Everything else comes under this generality: all kinds of deceit (guile), all play-acting (hypocrisies), the pain that we feel when we hear of the good fortune or blessings of others (envies), the unnecessary or unjust criticizing of others (evil speakings).

All of these things are sinful, and yet they are all things of which we have all been guilty. Excellence of Christian character is a matter of growth, and we must continue to grow. We will never be perfect while here in this body.

A Holy Priesthood

Peter, whom the Catholics claim (with no evidence) was the first pope, says in verse 5 of chapter 2 that those to whom he was writing (the elect in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia) are a "holy priesthood." In verse 9 he describes them as a "royal priesthood." They had no need for any other earthly priesthood.

A priest is one who is a "go-between." They could approach God themselves (through Christ). In the Catholic Church, the priest alone is ordained to grant absolution (forgiveness of sins). This is his lifelong right no matter how evil or how corrupt he may become.

Romanism puts the priest between the Christian believer and the knowledge of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and makes him the sole interpreter of Truth. It puts the priest between the confession of sins and the forgiveness of sins.

It carries this interposition through to the last hour, in which the priest, in the sacrament of extreme unction, stands between the soul and eternity (relate experience in South Africa back in 1984.)

Even after death the release of the soul from so-called “purgatory” and its entrance into heavenly joy is still dependent on the priest's prayers, which must be paid for by relatives or friends.

The Roman priests, the Virgin Mary, and the "saints" are designated as mediators, and in making membership in their church the indispensable requirement for salvation. These man-made ordinances place a screen between God and the people.

Where in this system does Christ come in? If you search you will find Him in the background, behind the priest, behind the Virgin, behind the Catholic church.

No matter what the moral character of a priest, his prayers and his ministrations are declared to be valid and efficacious because he is in holy orders.

The Council of Trent has declared that, "Even those priests who are living in mortal sin exercise the same function of forgiving sins as ministers of Christ."

Such a declaration was necessary at that time, in the middle of the sixteenth century, if the Roman Church were to continue to function at all, because of the general and well-known immorality of the priests.

Being Falsely Spoken Against

At least three times in this first epistle, Peter tells those to whom he was writing that they can expect to be falsely spoken against.

"For it is better, if the will of God should so, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evildoing (1 Peter 3:17).

"Wherein they think strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:4).

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye" (v. 14).

All Christians since apostolic days have been reproached. Let us not be surprised if we are lied about. We will be. Perhaps in the near future, we will be lied about and persecuted more often than we have ever suspected.

All of us are sinners, as the Bible teaches us (Romans 3:23), as well as our own experience. But once we are forgiven, let us not continue in our sin.

Let us be careful that our lives be what they ought to be, so that if evil is said about us, it is a lie and not truth.

As Peter says, “11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Qualifications of Answered Prayer

Peter mentions in chapter 3, verse 12, as a qualification of answered prayer, being "righteous" and refraining from evil.

This is not the only place in Scripture where the inspired writer teaches that the answer to prayer is a matter of qualification.

"And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22).

The blind man who was healed said to the Jews in John 9:31, "We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth."

Even though we recognize that the blind man was not inspired, he spoke the truth.

It is plain from these passages and many others that we must be obedient to the will of God if we expect God to answer our prayers with a yes.

Christ taught in the model prayer, "Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). It should be obvious that if we want a guarantee that God will answer our prayers, we must pray that His Will be done.

In fact, God will answer no prayer that is not in accordance with His Will.

John wrote, "14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Being Ready to Give Answer

"But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

This is a responsibility that falls upon every Christian (not just preachers and elders), but there are few today who are ready. Seldom has ignorance of the Bible been so widespread.

Who believes that liberals could have made the inroads into the church that they have if the members of the church knew the Bible? But to know the Bible, they would have to study the Bible! It would not be a matter of feeling, but a matter of right and wrong, of knowledge.

The time is long past to draw the line! We will simply lose more people.

We are now at a position similar to, but beyond, that of more than one hundred years ago, when the Disciples of Christ and the Christian Church denominations began. Let us have the courage to do as those faithful brethren did and cast them out.

Baptism

It is hard to find a more definite statement regarding baptism than that of 1 Peter 3:21: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Peter here compares the salvation of Noah in the ark with our salvation through baptism today. Baptism is as necessary to our salvation today as the ark was to Noah's during the flood.

Notice the word “NOW.” Water baptism is the point when a penitent believer is forgiven and saved by the blood of Jesus (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Matthew 26:28).

A number of years ago a lady who had visited our services was shown the first Jule Miller filmstrip. When we had reached the point of the flood and the quotation of 1 Peter 3:21, she suddenly said, "That's not in the Bible."

Of course, we immediately took the opportunity of turning to the Bible and showing her that it was really there. Her response was that she did not care what the Bible said, and that was the end of the study. There is no question what the Bible teaches about the necessity of baptism.

The Name "Christian"

The name Christian is found three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and here 1 Peter 4:16).

The name is referred to elsewhere: "Do not they blaspheme the honorable name by which ye are called?" (James 2:7).

The name Christian was not a name that was given in derision and just adopted by the early Christians, as we have sometimes been told. The Old Testament prophesied that a special name, different from that of Israel, would be given to God's people after the Gentiles were brought in.

"And the nations [Gentiles] shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of Jehovah shall name" (Isaiah 62:2).

If we carefully read the latter part of Acts 11 (beginning with verse 19, which is a continuation of the great parenthesis which began in Acts 8:4-5), we find that the name Christian is given to the members of the first Gentile church (that we know of) in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

The Greek word translated "called" is everywhere used in the New Testament to mean "called by God," unless this is the single exception.

Babylon

In the last part of chapter 5, Peter said he was in "Babylon" as he wrote this letter. Scholars disagree as to what is meant by "Babylon," but let's see what we can learn from a brief look at the Scriptures and the statements that Peter made in chapter 4.

It is more usual to interpret Babylon to be actually Babylon or Rome. However, we believe "Babylon" to be Jerusalem.

Compare Matthew 23:35, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son batrachian, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar" and Revelation 18:24, "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth."

There is no doubt that in the passage in Matthew the Lord is speaking of Jerusalem. What about the one in Revelation?

Look at Revelation 11:8: "And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Is there any question where the Lord was crucified?

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7). Obviously, Peter is not referring to the end of the world and the literal end of "all things."

What does he have in mind? The end of the Jewish state. As this event approached in A.D. 70, the persecutions of Christians increased.

"For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (vs. 17-18).

OK. That is a brief summary of 1 Peter. Lord willing next Thursday evening we will begin a verse-by-verse study of this great book. We encourage you all to be here if possible.

Lord willing, we will also be on ZOOM for each lesson, but it will be so much better if we could see your face in this place.

Invitation.