

FIRST LETTER OF PETER

The First Letter of Peter is one of two “Catholic” Letters attributed to him. Although it was generally accepted until the 20th Century that St. Peter was the author, modern Scripture scholars are uncertain about its origin. Some hold that Peter did, indeed, write the letter shortly before his death during Nero’s persecution (64-67 AD). Others think it may have been written, not merely transcribed, by a secretary, Silvanus (mentioned at 5:12), after Peter’s death. Based on the content and communities addressed, others think it may have been written in the late 1st or early 2nd Century.

The repeated exhortations of this letter are to keep the faith even in the face of persecution and to show others the same mercy and love that God has shown to them. Even Christians who may not yet suffer persecution can feel alienated living in a society that does not share their values. The letter reminds readers of their baptismal calling to a new life of grace and of the salvation that Christ gained for them by his suffering.

Outline (with selected verses)

1:1 – Greeting to five churches in Asia Minor

1:2-25 – We are reborn to hope in our salvation through Christ. Be holy in your conduct, keep faith in God, and love one another from a pure heart.

*Although you have not seen (Christ) you love him;
even though you do not see him now yet believe in him,
you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,
as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls. (1:8-9)*

2:1-10 – You are the living stones of God’s spiritual house

*Come to (the Lord), a living stone, rejected by human beings
but chosen and precious in the sight of God. (2:4)*

2:11-23 – Christian living in a hostile world

*It is the will of God that by doing good
you may silence the ignorance of foolish people.
Be free, yet without using freedom as a pretext for evil,
but as slaves of God. (2:15-16)*

3:1-12 – Proper conduct between couples and within the Christian community

*Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult; but, on the contrary, a blessing,
because to this you were called, that you might inherit a blessing. (3:9)*

3:13-22 – Blessed are those who suffer because of righteousness

*It is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God,
than for doing evil. (3:17)*

4:1-6 – You have broken with sin, now focus on God's will, not human desires

4:7-11 – Live charitably and use your God-given gifts to benefit others

*Let your love for one another be intense,
because love covers a multitude of sins. (4:8)*

4:12-19 – Rejoice if you are persecuted, for you share in the sufferings of Christ

*Whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed
but glorify God because of the name. (4:16)*

5:1-4 – Presbyters should tend to their flocks eagerly and provide good example

5:5-11 – Final advice to the whole community

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you.

Be sober and vigilant.

*Your opponent the devil is prowling around
like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour.*

*Resist him, steadfast in faith,
knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world
undergo the same sufferings. (5:6-9)*

5:12-14 – Concluding remarks and a wish for peace.