

Introduction to Preaching Series on I Peter

Theme of the letter: "Living Out Our Identity in Christ"

Key verse: I Peter 5:12

Sermon Main Idea: If the Spirit of God dwells in me, He changes me to reflect Jesus' life.

I want to tell you about three guys I first got to know in their younger years:

Ethan was seated at his desk in our high school in Venezuela, drenched in sweat, taking an English literature test. We'd tried to get him to shower after playing football, but acting strangely, even for Ethan, he had refused. He was kind of a goofball anyway, lots of fun but not the best or even the brightest student. In fact, on occasion Ethan was not above cheating to help with his grades. But as the rest of us were writing down our answers, there he was, thumbing through the exam, mumbling to himself, "I know I read something about this, but I just can't remember."

The teacher was used to that type of behavior from Ethan, so she just sat there bemused, watching him, totally unmoved to mercy until we started to point to our heads, indicating to her that possibly he wasn't alright in the head.

You see, as was our custom, we had been playing football with the ball as our only equipment for the game. Ethan had gone in for a tackle with no pads and no helmet, and hit his head in the process. When she saw that Ethan couldn't remember his own name to write it down, the teacher finally figured out that for once he probably had a valid excuse for doing so poorly on the test!

As an adult, Ethan became a pilot and then an instructor at a flight school. Because I knew his habits so well as a young person, I know that I'd never trust him enough to fly with him; much less would I fly with one of his students!

The second guy I want to tell you about, Titus, was one of the boys in our dorm when we were house-parents for five years in Rubio, Venezuela. Titus was super intelligent; in fact because he always had an answer for every question, the guys called him a walking encyclopedia. But since I was an adult, I could see a severe problem: though Titus always gave his answer with authority and assurance in his voice, the answer he gave was not necessarily true. Titus had the same assurance in his voice when he was making up an answer as he had when he really did know the answer, and so all the gullible kids who trusted his brain, believed him!

Titus is a medical doctor now and I'm glad his practice is in Ohio because I don't know if I'd have much personal confidence in his diagnosis! He might not have a clue, but I think he might just say what he thought in an authoritative voice using medical terminology anyway!

Now I want to tell you about Peter. In his younger years he was very enthusiastic, but you could never depend on him. Peter had really clean toes from putting his foot in his mouth so often! Peter looked out for #1, sometimes trying to take personal advantage over even his closest friends and relatives. Though Peter characteristically talked big, he could be a coward. And he certainly was

allergic to suffering! He was sometimes impetuous, acting before engaging his mind. He was a natural leader but he failed miserably to lead well. He was a rash, headstrong leader. Peter was not necessarily a person you would want to emulate.

Peter became an elder. How much do you think that you'd trust his spiritual counsel? How much would you look to him for guidance? How much would you look to him to explain the reality of the life of Christ in the believer? Yet today we are about to embark on a study of Peter's 1st general letter!

Having introduced Peter to you in the way he is portrayed to us in the four Gospels, you might be wondering why we would bother to look at Peter's letter. For me, a large part of the impact of this epistle comes from contrasting the younger Peter to the mature older man as he wrote the letter. You see, Peter was a changed man when he wrote this letter! Let's look at the letter together and start to uncover the reason he was so changed. First let's pray together and ask that the Spirit of God open our eyes and ears to understand His truth.

As we start studying I Peter, I first of all want to challenge you to read the whole letter once a week during the time that we are studying it. Try reading the whole letter through without stopping sometime to really get the flow or the thread of Peter's communication going through the letter. I've included an outline of I Peter for you on the back of the notes sheet in your bulletin.

The historical context of Peter's writing this letter is indicated in verse one of the letter. Peter says that he is writing *"...to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen..."* The book of Acts tells us how these Christians were scattered among those nations. Acts 7 records the death of the first martyr, Stephen. That could have occurred as little as a year after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Then Acts 8:1 tells us that *"...on that day (that is, the day of Stephen's martyrdom), a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles."* Then verse 4 says *"...those who had been scattered went about preaching the Word."*

Remember that in Gal. 2:8, the Apostle Paul says that Peter is the Apostle to the Jews. So Peter seems to direct his letter to those primarily Jewish Christians, who were scattered throughout Asia Minor by persecution and to those coming to faith in Jesus through their message. It is also a good possibility that some of them might have come to faith in Christ as a result of the Apostle Paul's ministry. Most scholars think that this first letter of Peter's was written about 60 A.D., about 27 years after Christ ascension to heaven and about 5 years before Peter's own martyrdom.

So the early Christians that received this letter were no strangers to suffering. Besides suffering persecution as a result of being followers of Christ, they suffered the hard life of refugees in a country and a culture different from their own. So it is no wonder that suffering is such a major theme in the letter. Peter examines suffering in the light of our salvation, in the light of Christ's suffering, and in the light of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This letter is filled with encouragement for Christians distressed by hard circumstances, to live out their identity in Christ. That is why our series is titled, "Living out our identity in Christ!" Peter gives a summary of the whole letter in this key verse, I Peter 5:12 when he writes, *"I have written briefly to you, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"* Peter could give personal testimony to these Christians, giving them assurance, and he could exhort them, calling them to faithful living in this "grace of God"

But how could the Peter we got to know as a younger man in the Gospels become an apostle, an elder who could give testimony to the grace of God and effectively exhort others to stand firm in it? When Jesus first called Peter to follow Him (John 1:42), his name was Simon, son of John. Jesus said to him prophetically, "You shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter.)"

Peter, the Greek translation of the Aramaic Cephas, means stone or rock. But we certainly don't see the disciple Simon Peter as rock stable in the Gospels. Let me share just a few of many examples with you from the Gospels and then let's contrast that to some of what he wrote as the Apostle Peter in this letter.

Remember that Peter and his cousins, James, and John, were the three disciples in the close intimacy of Jesus' inner circle. In the Gospel account in Mark 10:35-45, James and John, who according to the Gospel of Matthew were aided and abetted by their mother Salome, came to Jesus asking Him to let them sit on the left and right hand of His throne in His kingdom. But verse 41 says that the ten remaining disciples became indignant. Can't you see Peter? He would have been the most furious of all. "How could they do this? I'm in that intimate circle with Jesus as much as they are. How would they even think to do this behind my back? I have as many rights to ministry benefits as they do!" That would be characteristic of the disciple Simon Peter who was in it for himself.

Compare that attitude with the Apostle Peter's exhortation in Chapter 5:1-4 where he is urging the elders to not try to get personal gain from their ministerial status. He exhorts the elders to *"exercise oversight not under compulsion but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."*

The disciple Simon Peter of the Gospels was impulsive, seeing things only from an earthly perspective. Luke 22:49-53 relates the story of Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, trying to defend Jesus, cutting off Malchus, the High Priest's servant's ear with a sword. Peter didn't understand the heavenly perspective of Jesus' kingdom, even when he heard Jesus say, *"My kingdom is not of this world."* Yet in his letter to persecuted people, the Apostle Peter says in 2:13-17 to honor and be subject to ruling authorities because we are subject to God Himself.

Right after Simon Peter gave His remarkable confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Matt. 16:21 says that *"Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."*

Look at what the next verses say about our presumptuous, audacious, and foolish friend, Simon Peter. *"Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you!'"* Jesus responded to Peter, *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."*

Peter didn't want to know anything about Jesus suffering. He spoke against it and Jesus had to rebuke him. In spite of the brave words he would sometimes blurt out in emotional times, Peter wasn't really excited about taking up his cross and following Jesus.

Yet in I Peter 4:12-13, we see Peter exhorting Christians to embrace suffering as part of the normal course of the Christian life, rejoicing in it, in fact, because *"if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."*

In Matt. 17:1-8, upon seeing Jesus transfigured up on the mountain with Moses and Elijah talking with Him, we see the disciple Simon Peter speaking mindlessly, foolishly. "Let's build three sacred tents here." His elevation of Moses and Elijah to equality with the Son of God, Jesus, was corrected by the Father who said from Heaven, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."* Contrast that younger disciple Simon Peter with the Apostle Peter who wrote the letter we are studying in words inspired by the Spirit of God.

In Luke 22:31-34 Jesus said to Simon Peter, *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*

Simon Peter immediately responded, *"Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and die."* Jesus predicted then that Peter would deny Him three times. And the disciple Peter, in spite of his bold talk, was a coward even before a young girl, denying Jesus three times. But what a difference we see in the Apostle Peter when he says in this letter (I Pet. 5:8-9) *"Be sober, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour, but resist him, firm in your faith..."*

According to Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*, because he wouldn't deny the resurrected Christ, the Apostle *"Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer."* Jerome says that Peter requested to be crucified that way because he wanted Jesus' death to be distinctive from his own. Peter claimed to be unworthy to die the same way as his Savior Jesus died. Peter's death fulfilled Jesus' prophecy in John 21:18-19 that he would be martyred in this way.

Then think how even after seeing the resurrected Christ, the disciple Simon Peter, who didn't see Jesus every day as he had before Jesus death, was ready to go back to the old life. "I'm going fishing" he said to his companions (Jn. 21:1-11). He was quick to forget that he had been called as a "fisher of men" and since Jesus wasn't there to keep him on track, he reverted to that which wasn't inherently evil, but rather was not at all that for which Jesus had chosen and called him.

Yet compare that with I Peter 5:1-4 where using another metaphor, the Apostle Peter exhorts his fellow elders to “shepherd the flock of God.” There are many things for elders to be involved in that aren’t inherently evil. But the challenge the Apostle Peter put out was to shepherd well in submission to the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, because that is the calling of an under-shepherd!

The change we have been looking at in Peter from disciple to Apostle begs a question: How did it happen that a fail prone disciple would become an apostle of Peter’s stature? Remember our key verse for this letter, I Peter 5:12. Peter testified in this summary verse that he had written about “...*the true grace of God.*” You see, Peter himself had experienced God’s grace, and that’s why he could testify that this was the true grace of God.

We obviously see a great change coming over Simon Peter when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. In a few minutes Peter was transformed from a defeated coward into the fearless articulate spokesman who couldn’t resist preaching a fiery sermon in Acts 2. In Acts 3 & 4 we see him and John healing the crippled man, preaching a sermon, and getting jailed because he claimed the miracle of healing was done in the power of the risen Christ!

All through the book of Acts, we are amazed at Peter’s boldness, his excellent leadership, and his consistent usefulness to the Lord. But Peter’s sanctification didn’t all happen overnight. Remember how in Acts 10 as Peter, on the rooftop in Joppa, saw the sheet come down from heaven filled with unclean animals, he had to grow in his understanding of God’s desire to reach the Gentiles for Himself. He had to learn not to reject what God had made clean. This opened the door of ministry by a primarily Jewish church, to include the Gentiles.

In Gal. 2:11-21 we see the Apostle Paul rebuking him for his hypocrisy because he withdrew from his Gentile brothers when some legalistic Jews arrived on the scene. But Peter grew to fully embrace Gentile believers too, with godly grace.

Now after that long digression, let’s return to the first two verses of Peter’s first letter and read verse 2. Certainly Peter experienced God’s grace. But look how he puts it so plainly. He says starting at the end of verse 1 that he is writing to those aliens “...*who are the chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.*” We can relate easily to these that receive this letter because in a real sense, we too are aliens in this world, because God chose us out of the world. We will suffer because we also are aligned with Him and not with the world.

Remember, Peter is testifying to us about the true grace of God. The Apostle Peter’s testimony here is about God’s gracious choice, that choice that is exercised “...*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*” Now, when a theologian reads the two words, “choice” and “foreknowledge” in the same sentence, it gives him cognitive dissonance!

Cognitive dissonance is when something is said that makes a thinking person’s brain rattle uncomfortably, trying to reconcile two seemingly opposing ideas. Does God elect those to be saved, or does He just know ahead of time which people will turn to Him in faith? The answer to that

question is above my pay grade! I'm personally unable to reconcile it completely, so I have to accept that in His foreknowledge, He chose me just like He chose Peter and He chose the recipients of this letter.

But notice how God accomplished that. It was *"...by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood."*

In His Grace the Father has given us His Holy Spirit just like He gave Him to Peter, to set us apart for God, to make us holy because He is holy! That work of sanctification is a work that only the Holy Spirit of God can do. The disciple Simon Peter had every good intention of staying faithful. He never intended to deny Christ. He wanted to follow Jesus completely. But only after the Holy Spirit started His ministry in Peter's heart was he able to follow Jesus until he was martyred for not denying Jesus.

Think back through your life. How much better have you done on your own than Simon Peter did in being set aside completely for the Lord? Are you able to be holy even as He is holy? Are you strong enough to always follow Jesus faithfully? Could you stand for Christ if you were a Christian captured by the Islamic State, or would you deny Jesus? What would happen if Satan himself would pile on like he did in Peter's case on that night that Jesus was betrayed? How genuine would your consecration to the Lord prove to be?

You know that on your own you would fail, just like I would! You see, you and I need the same One to save us as did Peter. We need the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God in us just like Peter experienced. We can't do it through self-effort any more than could Peter.

A more literal though less contemporary translation of verse 2 would read: *"...by the sanctifying work of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ."* The force of the sentence is more than "...by the sanctifying work of the Spirit so that we may obey and be sprinkled..." The sense of the grammatical construction is more that the sanctifying work of the Spirit accomplishes obedience and sprinkling with Jesus' blood.

This then is the effect when the Spirit's sanctifying work is accomplished in us. Obedience and sprinkling. As we go through 1st Peter, we will see again and again that we are sanctified progressively to obey Christ, and we are sanctified positionally before God as we are sprinkled with Jesus' blood. To understand more clearly what that means, let me remind you again of the summary verse that Peter gave in chapter 5, verse 12. *"...I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"* Remember that Peter is talking about grace here. He says that he is challenging the readers and us to recognize that what he is writing about all through the letter is the true grace of God. And then he points to his own life and says, I have experienced it and so I talk to you about it from personal experience, testifying that it is true grace and it is from God!

By its very definition, grace is unearned. In its essence, grace is the unmerited favor of God toward man. God extends His favor to men who could never earn it. John's description of Jesus in Jn. 1:14 is that Jesus was *"...full of grace and truth."* In verse 16, we learn that out of that fullness of grace

and truth in Jesus, we all have received grace upon grace! Then in verse 17 we read that "*...the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized (Lit: "...came to be") through Jesus Christ.*"

Apart from Jesus, there could be no grace. Think about it. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never had to extend grace among themselves because none of them ever sinned. Forgiveness was never needed. They treated each other justly because each of them received the honor, love, and fellowship that they enjoyed together.

God never extended grace to the angels. Those who rebelled are going to eternal damnation. Forgiveness was never granted to angels. But grace came to be through Jesus who was full of grace and truth. So in a real sense, grace is what God, who is perfectly just, was free to extend to us, only when Jesus took our guilt upon Himself. Indeed grace came to be through Jesus!

So Peter, in verse 2, is not speaking about legalistic obedience that gains us righteous standing before God. That standing is only given to us by God's grace when we are sprinkled by the blood of Christ, when we are cleansed by His blood shed for us. That is the sanctifying work the Holy Spirit does as we look in faith to Jesus alone. The Spirit applies the work of Christ on our behalf so that His shed blood makes us clean. That cleansing and right relationship with the Father is something we could never earn ourselves.

But what does Peter mean when he speaks of the sanctifying work of the Spirit unto obedience of Christ? He is not talking about some obedience we can achieve through self-effort. He is referring to an obedience that comes by faith, an obedience that we experience only because God works it in us as we walk in the Spirit. Paul talks about this "obedience of faith" twice in the letter to the Romans. It is the obedience of faith that James' letter refers to when he says that faith that doesn't show works of obedience is not faith at all. As the Spirit of God sanctifies us unto obedience of Christ, we come to look like Jesus Christ.

You see, if we believe, we will obey. Let me illustrate this for you. I had an aunt who really believed that whatever ailed me could be cured by drinking some of her apple cider vinegar! If she would send some of her apple cider vinegar to school with me to cure my cold, I can assure you that it went down the drain because it sure didn't ever go down me! You could tell that I wasn't a believer because I didn't drink it. If I had believed, I would have drunk some to cure my ailment. In the same way, if you truly believe, you will obey what God says. If you don't believe, you will not obey. But in your own strength you could never obey. We can only do it as the Spirit of God enables us to obey. It is all of grace.

Let me point you back again to the verse where Peter explains what this letter is all about, I Peter 5:12. "*This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*" As we come to rely only on God, as we put our full trust in Him and in Him alone, He gives us His Spirit who applies the shed blood of Jesus to us and enables us to walk in the obedience of faith as He changes us into the likeness of Jesus Christ! I want to encourage you as we get into the study of I Peter during the coming weeks to put your full weight on Jesus. Trust Him alone. Trust Him completely and watch His Spirit sanctify you

unto obedience and cleansing by His blood just like He did with Peter. *"This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"*

Rom 15:13

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

STUDY OF I PETER

Key Verse: I Peter 5:12 *"...I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"*

Outline:

- Greetings to God's scattered people (1:1-2)
- Salvation brings participation in the community of faith (1:3-2:10)
 - Born to a living hope (1:3-5)
 - Born to be tested (1:6-12)
 - Born to live holy (1:13-21)
 - Born to love your brother (1:22-2:3)
 - Born into a living organism (2:4-10)
- Intrinsic responsibilities of God's saints (2:11-4:11)
 - Living as aliens (2:11-25)
 - Living in God's pattern for marriage (3:1-7)
 - Living in the church fellowship (3:8-22)
 - Living purposefully under suffering (4:1-6)
 - Living in light of the end (4:7-11)
- Suffering and submission in God's economy ("managed order" or some better synonym) (4:12-5:11)
 - Suffering with Christ (4:12-19)
 - Shepherding under Christ (5:1-4)
 - Submission under Christ (5:5-7)
 - Salvation through Christ (5:8-14)
- Conclusion (5:12-14)

Probable Sermon Divisions

1:1-2 Introduction

1:3-5 "Born to a Living Hope" God's people entering into life

1:6-12 "The Proof of your Faith" God's people living (10-12 going on behind the scenes) under testing

1:13-21 "Be Holy" God's people living holy because He is holy

1:22-2:3 "Love Your Brother" God's people living in sincere love for their brothers

2:4-10 "Living Stones" God's people as a living organism

2:11-25 "Excellent Aliens" God's people living as aliens and strangers

3:1-7 "Husbands and Wives" God's people living in His pattern for marriage

3:8-22 "Living in Community" God's people living in the church fellowship

4:1-6 "Suffering with a Purpose" God's people living purposefully under suffering

4:7-11 "Living with a Purpose" God's people living purposefully in the end times

4:12-19 "Sharing Christ's Suffering" God's people suffering with Christ

5:1-4 "Shepherding Well" God's people tended well by undershepherds

5:5-7 "Choosing to Submit" God's people characterized by humility

5:8-14 "Living Alertly" God's people resisting the adversary, confident in the Savior

"INTRODUCTION TO 1ST PETER"

1 Peter 1:1-2

Main Idea: If the Spirit of God dwells in me, He changes me to reflect Jesus' life.

The disciple Simon Peter and the Apostle Peter

The chosen aliens

The sanctifying Spirit of God

"Unto obedience"

"Unto sprinkling with His blood"

Grace and Peace in the fullest measure