

## 1 Peter Introduction

Today we begin the study of a new letter from the New Testament – [1 Peter](#). Too often it seems that when people think about Peter, their thoughts race to how impetuous he may have been and generally they associate Peter with his denial of Christ. Certainly all of those circumstances that surrounded his life were very real vignettes of his early relationship to Christ and to his lack of maturity in certain areas of his life. However, when we arrive at the epistle of [1 Peter](#), we are not dealing with the same person that may be described in the Gospels. We are probably some 30 years removed from the death of Christ and the work that God has done in Peter's life is remarkable. Here is the man that openly denied Christ and told the young teenage girl that he did not even know who Jesus was. [Matthew 26:72](#) says,

**Mt 26:72** **But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"**

At best, that was an outright lie. However, listen to the words that Peter spoke in [1 Peter 3:15](#),

**1Pe 3:15** **But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;**

Certainly God had done a very deep work in Peter's life to bring him to this point. We know historically that when Peter was executed that he requested that he be crucified upside down because he said that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same way that Christ was crucified.

I do not know about you, but somehow I can very much identify with Peter. I can remember different occasions in my life where I know that I failed Christ miserably. Maybe I was reluctant to communicate the gospel to someone, or maybe my personal zeal became very out of balance and actually distorted God's message. I am sure that on those occasions where I was hesitant and unwilling to openly share about Christ that I was no different than Peter, so I have to be very careful not to criticize his failures, but rather look to God's deeper work in his life as an encouragement for my own life. I am sure that if we were all honest and transparent about our personal lives that there would be plenty of testimonies regarding how we have failed Christ in our lives - maybe miserably at times. Somehow and somewhere we just seemed to get off track and lose sight of what was truly important and eternal in nature. If you are like me, I can remember way too many things that I may have regretfully said to someone in frustration, irritation, impatience, or even anger. I can vividly remember something that I said to the pastor of the church that I was attending at a particular time in my early Christian life. My words were hurtful and inappropriate, and now as I look back on what I said, I am stunned and staggered by my arrogance and audacity. He had never done anything to hurt me, but only to help me. God actually disciplined me for 12 years because of the rashness of my words, and honestly I am surprised that God has even allowed me to be a pastor. "Undeserving" would be very descriptive of what God has allowed me to do. In reality, I was no different than Peter when he said things that were rash and inappropriate. In fact, one time Jesus rebuked Peter very sternly and said this to him in [Matthew 16:23](#),

**Mt 16:23** **But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."**

Well, I can certainly appreciate that at times my life has been an "offense" to Christ simply because I was "not mindful of the things of God". The word for "mindful" is "*phroneo*" and simply means to think a certain way, to have a certain mindset and perspective on something.<sup>1</sup> In this case, it means **not**

to have a certain mindset about the things of God, and the result of that absence of thinking like Christ thinks can be offensive to Him, as well as to others. That was my problem many years ago when I stepped outside of God's boundaries and spoke to someone in a way that diminished the work of Christ in my life. It was not just that I hurt and offended the individual (which I certainly did), but rather I deeply offended God with my inappropriate behavior. Even now I can still suffer greatly from not thinking the way that God would want me to think. The problem is that if we do not think right, then we will not act right. We cannot separate how we think from our behavior.

The great news, however, that can be taken away from the story of Peter's life is that God is much greater than our failures. He is more than willing to forgive us and to restore us to a place of spiritual health and usefulness that probably far exceeds our own personal expectations. One of the great lessons learned from Peter's life is that **failure is never final in the believer's life**. There is no sin that any believer can commit that has the ability to trump the grace of God in their life.<sup>2</sup> God is much better at restoring people's lives than we often give Him credit. As a loving Father, He understands that there is no long-term benefit in just condemning us for our failures. From a purely spiritual perspective, a believer's failures become the seedbed for God's deeper and more lasting work in their life. Everyone, no matter who they are or how spiritual they may be, learn more from their failures than they do from their success. I can promise you that I will never again be careless around a table saw. I know this may seem a little awkward when I say it, but a believer's failures actually become meaningful assets in their life. They become those specific and difficult lessons in life that are vital and essential for a more meaningful walk with God. When our failures are properly appreciated, they become a genuine testimony of how God's grace becomes effective in our life and actually overcomes our failure to deeply strengthen us.

So, when I think about Peter and how God worked in his life, it gives me great hope. Having said that, it should be obvious that one of the things that Peter is going to do in this letter is to give people great hope. Here was a man who had failed greatly in his life, but as we see him during the time of his writing this letter, he is a man of great faithfulness and godliness. He is an individual who had been tested greatly and had maintained a continuing testimony of amazing victory over those tests in his life. What the life and testimony of Peter teach us is that our failures are not greater than God's sovereignty over our life. Stated another way, just because someone has failed in their life does not somehow nullify and override the power of God to sustain that individual and to teach them through that failure. We have a very real and meaningful promise in [Philippians 1:6](#) that says,

**Php 1:6** **being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;**

[James 1:4](#) encourages believers to endure the trials and failures and difficulties that often plague them,

**Jas 1:4** **But let patience (endurance, perseverance, steadfastness) have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

There simply will be difficult moments that every Christian has to endure. It is inevitable because of the failures and weaknesses of our flesh, the physical and health struggles that people often have, difficult people that we have to deal with, as well as the influence of the world and the devil's work against us. No one is exempt. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to write people off after they have failed in some miserable way. It could be any kind of failure – spiritual unfaithfulness, ongoing moral failures in their

life, financial failures, family issues, and personality issues – anything really. The tendency is to look at that individual as someone who has kind of skidded off the runway, who has dropped the ball, and who has messed up too bad for any kind of meaningful recovery. My understanding of Scripture is that if we take that perspective and just write someone off that ultimately what we have done is demean the power of God to work in that individual's life. Listen very carefully. If God is working in a person's life there is nothing that can prevent God from completing His good work in them. Everyone has value, everyone's life is meaningful to God. When someone miserably fails in their life, God does not have some kind of spiritual Excel sheet where He marks them off as no longer useful. None of this is to minimize the fact that we as believers are to live responsibly, but by the same token the worst thing that we could do is to remove God from the process and only see the failures of the individual. My personal expectation is that everyone is going to fail – everyone. That puts me much more at ease. Everyone is going to be a disappointment at some time in their life. Everyone is going to sin against God and others at some time in their life. It is at that moment that we should embrace the power of God to restore that individual. Listen to how that is often done in [Galatians 6:1](#),

**Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**

If you ever reach a place in your life where you think that God has possibly written you off as no longer useful to Him, just reminisce about Peter for a few moments and you will be encouraged.<sup>3</sup> One of the things that Peter had to do in order to be successful was to accept God's forgiveness for his failures. That is so crucial to someone's ongoing spiritual stability and spiritual strength. We have said it often, but you cannot drive a car by always looking in the mirror. Once a person genuinely accepts God's forgiveness for their sins and failures, they will then be able to actually forgive themselves. Here is what I want us to see in this. We must see that God is greater than any of our failures or sins. We must see God and His work in Christ on our behalf. It is a very real work. It has eternal consequences. It is active and alive and always working. Forgiveness is not just for those who outwardly appear to be more spiritual, but forgiveness is for everyone who comes to Christ – no matter how greatly they may have failed in their life. What Peter is going to do, especially in the first part of this letter, is to give hope to those who may be struggling in their lives.

Whenever we fail, we must understand that God wants to use those failures as a way of helping us to minister to others who may go through something very similar. [2 Corinthians 1:4-7](#) states it this way,

**<sup>2Co 1:3</sup> Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup> For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. <sup>6</sup> Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. <sup>7</sup> And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.**

There is so much in that passage that it defies explanation. Whatever it is that you may have gone through, even those things of your own making and choosing, God is the God of all comfort and His

desire is to use those moments for His glory. [Isaiah 61:3](#) says that He wants to give “**beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness**”. God is always looking at the big picture, but too often our focus is only on what is happening to us right now, and therefore we lose God’s perspective. The word “**comfort**” is the Greek word “*paraklesis*” and comes from “*para*” which means beside and “*kaleo*” which means to call. Literally, it means to call beside or to come along side someone during their time of difficulty. <sup>4</sup> It is a word that speaks specifically of encouraging someone – something that we all need from time to time. Over the years, whether it is right or wrong I do not know, I have always believed that those individuals with the gift of encouragement generally had the greatest impact on a congregation. Everyone needs encouragement, and some much more than others. Encouragement is an attribute that always provides hope to the individual.

However, what this passage in [2 Corinthians 1](#) says is that we cannot be an encouragement and offer comfort to others if we ourselves have not experienced God’s encouragement in our own personal life. Often times the way that we gain encouragement is when we ourselves have experienced “**affliction**” ([2 Corinthians 1:4](#), NASB, ESV). The word “**affliction**” or “**tribulation**” in v4 is “*thlipsis*” and it means to be crush, to compress, to squeeze. It is a word that refers to the myriad of pressures in our life that weaken us and create stress in our life.<sup>5</sup> This is a word that speaks specifically to those things that happen in a believer’s life that weaken them in some way. It could be emotionally, financially, mentally. It could be relationally or in your marriage. It could be spiritually. It really does not matter to the enemy how he afflicts you just as long as what he is doing is weakening you and breaking you down so that you become discouraged. Then often times it is actually God who is weakening us to get our attention and to draw us back to Himself when we have spiritually wandered away from Him. [Romans 5:3-5](#) is a great passage on this when it says,

**Ro 5:3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations (*thlipsis*), knowing that tribulation (*thlipsis*) produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

What God is doing through trials and afflictions is producing perseverance and endurance in our lives – something that we all need. He says that perseverance leads to character and character leads to hope. I have taught it often, but if an individual does not have character and integrity, that in reality they have nothing of any real value. Character is everything in the Christian life. It is what allows the believer to be useful to God. God does not use people who have no character. They can come to church and read their Bible, but once they lose their character they begin to quickly forfeit God’s blessings on their life. They make themselves spiritually non-useful. It is certainly possible to recover from that spiritual place, but it is not without some level of spiritual loss that is often very difficult to quantify.

“**Endurance**” is what makes our personal encouragement to others meaningful and it is what gives them hope. What is important to understand about how the idea of “**tribulations**” is used in the New Testament context is that it did not so much mean things like poor health or financial difficulty, but rather it was directly related to the struggles and sacrifices they had to endure because of their profession of Christ. We will vividly see this in [1 Peter](#). Peter will use the concept of “**suffering**” six (6) different times in his encouragement to his readers. Listen to what happened to the believers in [Hebrews 10:32-33](#).

Heb 10:32 **But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:<sup>33</sup> partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches (insults) and tribulations (afflictions / *thlipsis*), and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;**

**1 Thessalonians 3:3** says,

**<sup>1Th 3:3</sup> that no one should be shaken by these afflictions (*thlipsis*); for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.**

Let me urge you to be an encourager to others. Find a way to always be offering people hope even in the midst of their personal struggles and failures. Help them to see life from God's perspective. Be compassionate with people and speak to them with grace and encouragement. We never know what one word of encouragement may do for someone because we can never measure what one meaningful conversation may produce in someone's life. Let people know that they are not alone and that there are people who genuinely care about them and what they are experiencing in their life. We live in an electronic world of I-Pads, I-Phones, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, MySpace, Linked In, Meetup, and who knows what else. These are sites where people can virtually hide and live in their own little worlds that they completely control without any interference. They can choose friends, de-friend people, and live in a world that no one else ever sees. It is my conviction that we are creating a generation of very lonely people who have no meaningful contact or conversation with people other than a short "text" on their phone, and ultimately they will become people without hope. Peter encouraged his readers in **1 Peter 1:13** with these words,

**<sup>1Pe 1:13</sup> Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, 1454.

<sup>2</sup> Swindoll, 136.

<sup>3</sup> Swindoll, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, 199.

<sup>5</sup> Zodhiates, 736-737.

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