

I PETER

BORN TO GROW (Christian Maturity)

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT:

Every Christian is born to grow! God wants every child of His to grow up to full manhood like that of Jesus Christ. Birth is important as Peter says, "Baptism, which corresponds to this (vs. 20), now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 3:21). But birth is only the beginning for the spiritual life just as it is for the physical. Three times Peter begins with the new birth and proceeds to the growing process:

"...we have been born anew to a living hope..." I Peter 1:3

"You have been born anew, ...through the living and abiding word of God."

"Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, ..."

I Peter 2:2

Peter pictures the new Christian as an alien and exile in this world (See 1:1 and 2:11). Just as Israel suffered the exile of the Babylonian rule, so the Christian suffers during the exile of this present world. Peter seems to pick up the theme of Isaiah 40-66 as his own theme in order to give encouragement and instruction to the modern-day "exile". The theme in Isaiah is that no matter how much you may suffer or how bleak the future looks toward the fulfillment of the promises of God. "The word of the Lord abides forever." (Isaiah 40:8; cp. I Peter 1:24,25). In other words, if you as a new Christian (or older) will pay attention to God's word and be faithful to the Scriptures God will see you through the trials of life!

In order to reach Christian maturity there are certain basic principles you must understand. We will take these principles from I Peter and call them:

THE PETER PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE #1 KEEP THE FAITH, BABY!

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials..."

I Peter 1:6

The expression, "Keep the faith, baby!" has meaning for the young Christian. Indeed it is faith (God's faithfulness in V. 3 and *our* faith in v. 6) that guards the living hope and imperishable inheritance awaiting us in heaven.

"...they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory."

I Peter 1:11

When the great prophet Isaiah was writing the suffering servant passages of Isaiah 40-54, he did not fully understand it. Isaiah 53 without a doubt shows us the purpose and plan of God in Christ Jesus. Peter picks up this theme again in 2:24 -- "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

"For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly...but if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval."

I Peter 2:19,20b

You may have to suffer various trials in order to keep the faith. That is good because it will prove your faith to be genuine! We do not suffer without a purpose. We know the reason why!!!

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

I Peter 2:21

In giving us salvation, Christ suffered. In accepting that salvation, suffering will certainly find us out. Paul says in Phil. 3:7-11 that suffering is essential to sharing in Christ's resurrection.

"But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them or be troubled."

I Peter 3:14

Most of us Western Christians know little about suffering and perhaps less about the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. A.E. Wilder Smith asks: "Is it because we have not sought out the only maturing process known in Scripture leading to this knowledge - and to Christ?" Americans as a whole fear and are troubled by any kind of suffering. We can't stand pain. We avoid it. Well, we are not suggesting you search for it, but if it comes, make sure "it is because you are doing God's will in keeping the faith!"

"For it is better to suffer for doing right. If that should be God's will, than for doing wrong."

I Peter 3:17

"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

I Peter 4:1

If a Christian really keeps the faith in the midst of severe suffering, he ceases from all thoughts of sinning against God! Smith says: "It is generally conceded that Christ's death is basic to the Christian's salvation. But the suffering type of death is not usually emphasized. Perhaps it is too barbaric for our cultured society to bear. Regardless of our reactions to the awfulness of the death on the cross, God chose it in order to bring to mankind a full salvation—not only from the

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

I Peter 4:12,13

guilt of sin but also from its power, not only to save us from eternal damnation but also to demonstrate to us how to become approved in the same way that Christ became approved. In fact it was to teach us how to cease from sin."

"Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God."

I Peter 4:16

Sometimes people will look upon one who is suffering as deserving it. But this is not always true. If a Christian suffers for doing and being right, he has nothing to be ashamed about either in this life or the life to come!

"Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator "

I Peter 4:19

Remember that God will take care of his own people. He will wipe away every tear and comfort us in our sorrow. There is coming a day in which God will vindicate the righteous in all things. Let God do the judging. Look beyond any sufferings in the present world to the Glory to be revealed (Romans 8:18). God's glory will be given to us. Therefore, keep the faith!

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory In Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you."

I Peter 5:10

PRINCIPLE #2 BE YE HOLY!

"Since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

I Peter 1:16

This principle does not mean you have to become a "holy Joe" as we sometimes say. Peter says so clearly, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct...conduct yourselves with fear (reverence) throughout the time of your exile (life on earth)." (I Peter 1:14,15,17b)

"Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles (unbelieving world), so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

I Peter 2:12

To be holy is to also maintain good conduct before the world. No one will listen to a sinning Christian. Consistent Christian living is the key to holy living (See I Peter 3:1-2).

"...live...by the will of God."

I Peter 4:2

At home, school, office, work, restaurant, ball game, church building, or wherever, remember that holy living is essential to Christian maturity. (Read I Peter 4:4,5.)

PRINCIPLE #3 BE YE HUNGRY!

"Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation."

I Peter 2:2

There is an old saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink!" That's true. It is also true that you can give birth to a child but you can't make him grow unless he will eat and drink. All babies have that desire and longing for milk and that is the picture Peter uses for the third principle. Christian maturity depends on spiritual hunger for the Word of God. Jesus said: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

"You have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

I Peter 1:23

The new birth came about by the "seed," the word of God, and it is the word of God that sustains life and brings us to maturity before God. (Read I Peter 2:4,5.) We must beware for Peter warns us that we too can stumble, fall, and be rejected just like ancient Israel, "for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." (I Peter 2:8b)

This principle is essential for Christian growth! Taste the word of God and you will find it is good!

PRINCIPLE #4 DON'T BABY YOUR FAITH!

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

I Peter 2:9

As God's people who have received mercy, we are to declare the wonderful deeds of God in Christ! We have been saved to save someone else. We have been told to tell! The best way to keep your faith is to give it away!

Every newborn Christian has an opportunity to share his or her faith. It is essential that you do. You have friends who need Christ. Tell them what your life was without Christ, how Christ found you (your decision to follow HIM), and how you are growing now!

"Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

I Peter 3:15

There are times when the world will not listen to you, but if you continue to live in contrast to the ungodly life of the world, someone at sometime will come and say, "What have you got that I haven't got?" Then you can tell them of the hope you have in Christ with gentleness and reverence.

PRINCIPLE #5 BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

"Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing."

I Peter 3:9

This principle is similar to #2, but it goes much farther in that it is actively seeking to share God's good gifts with others.

"As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

I Peter 4:10

Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 teach us that every Christian has received spiritual gifts from Christ. Some of these gifts are listed as: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, money and giving, administrative, gifts, mercy, love, hospitality, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discerning spirits, tongues and their interpretation. Other gifts are men themselves: apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastoring teachers...

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

I Peter 4:14

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

I Peter 2:21

Do not let disappointments or discouragements keep you from sharing your blessings. Even in your doubts God will bless you.

This is the theme of the Bible, indeed of the Christian life, that we are blessed to be a blessing. This is our ministry and service to the world as well as the Church. We are "suffering servants" patterned after Christ.

CONCLUSION: Let us restate the Peter Principles:

- (1) KEEP THE FAITH, BABY! Suffering purifies our faith!
- (2) BE YE HOLY! The Christian lifestyle is the basis of all other service and ministry.
- (3) BE YE HUNGRY! Studying God's Word is the one vital source for spiritual growth!
- (4) DON'T BABY YOUR FAITH! Live in the world but don't be a part of it! Share your faith wherever you can!
- (5) BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING! Spiritual gifts are given to be shared by the whole body of Christ; use your gift!