

First Peter Outline

Introduction: The Letter of First Peter, written between 70 and 90 CE, gives us an incredible insight into how one wing of the early church tried to figure out how to live in the world and maintain their sense of identity without condemning the neighbors around them. One scholar, Miroslav Volf, writes that in First Peter we see an incredible example of a community attempting to maintain what he refers to a 'soft difference'.

Now, a hard difference is easy to understand- a hard difference is when a Christian community looks and speaks in a very different way than the culture around them, and they believe that unless members from that culture become like that particular Christian community, they are destined for hell or at least not welcome on Sunday morning. These hard differences extend even to other Christian communities, as well, claiming that if other Christian communities hold different views than they are no better than the host culture regardless of their professed commitment to Christ. Christians who express their difference to others as a hard difference are often the folks that lead many to say they like Jesus all right; they just don't like his friends.

Now, on the flip side of a Christian community is a community professing no difference. Christian communities professing no differences make every possible effort to blend in with the host culture, concerned only for popularity and increasing membership. A church establishing no boundaries will rarely speak an uncomfortable word, rarely lift up concepts like sacrifice, and will prefer silence around controversial issues than engagement. Christian communities professing no differences run the risk of becoming glib social clubs at which people gather even though no one can really say why other than they just like being together.

In First Peter, we see a community endeavoring to live in the midst of a culture that is at times hostile to them. But rather than looking down on the people around them or responding in anger, the letter of First Peter calls the community to see themselves as an exile people meant to change the people around them by example, not by force. Again and again the Letter of First Peter calls the community to accept sacrifice as part of their identity in Christ, and by suffering with honor present such an example that all the world may give glory to God. In a nutshell what we see in First Peter is a Christian community acknowledging that being a member of a church is to be called into a high calling, into a calling that means being different and even suffering upon occasion. But rather than being a community essentially closed in upon itself looking down at the world around them, the community of First Peter is forever conscious of those around them hoping to set a good example to all the world.

Chapter 1: The living hope of new birth in Christ; enduring various trials; call to holiness

Chapter 2: The community as living stones built into a temple, the people a priesthood;

Be examples to all and accept local authority; accept suffering

Chapter 3: Wives submit to husbands, and husbands are to treat wives well; suffer while doing right

Chapter 4: A call to live apart; suffer as a Christian

Chapter 5: Tending to God's flock

Stories to know: The priesthood of all believers (2); relationship with the outside community (2); Christ preaching to those imprisoned (3)