

The core message of 1 Peter – Rev. Nishantha Fernando

Introduction

As one of the significant letters in the New Testament the main theme throughout the 1 Peter was the suffering¹. The suffering is the prominent theme in the 1 Peter in the beginning to the end;² in the midst the Roman persecution of Christians. The significant feature of the 1 Peter's message was that in the midst of persecution how to be kept the Christians' moral stand. Therefore authors' aim was that in the midst of the suffering character growth of the people³; for that he encouraged and motivated the people in the midst of all the challenge of their faith, rejection and fear. As 1 Peter 5:13 mention the name Babylon most authors agreed it referenced to Rome; therefore Peter remind people to how Israelites were suffered Babylon in exile similarly Christians as God's people too suffering under the rule of Roman's imperial power⁴

In this essay I will forces the moral stand and character growth of the people in the midst of suffering. Therefore I will emphasise more of in that line as details of core message on 1 Peter.

Historical and literary background of 1 Peter

As historical basis Emperor Trajan wrote to Pliny about the Christians it shows how Christians were punished and treated badly because of their faith in Christ⁵. The persecution has been done in various ways and levels but, in 1 Peter the nature of persecution in passages was limited to a false accusation and verbal slander⁶. Also as scholars pointed out it's look like a situation that Christians were suffered by verbal hostility and ridicule from their neighbours⁷. The other thing was that those sufferings seem to be a personal and sporadic rather than the whole empire⁸. In the beginning Peter address to five districts of Asia Minor (1Pet 1:1), the most of gentile environment that in the midst of persecution encourage the people⁹. Also, in the opening verses of 1 Peter

¹ Dave Allen. *Introduction to 1 Peter: Week 5 Lecture* (Birmingham, Queen's Foundation), accessed 11. June. 2013.

² David G. Horrell. *"1 Peter" New Testament Guides'* (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.53.

³ Alex Yesudas. *Discussion on 1 Peter* (Birmingham, Queen's Foundation), on 10. June. 2013.

⁴ David G. Horrell. *"1 Peter" New Testament Guides'* (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.85.

⁵ Karen H. Jobes. *"Letter to the Church" A survey of the Hebrews and the General Epistles'* (Grand rapids, Zondervan, 2011).p.279.

⁶ Darian Lockett. *"An Introduction to the Catholic Epistles" T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies'* (London, T & T Clark, 2012).p.52.

⁷ David G. Horrell. *"1 Peter" New Testament Guides'* (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.54.

⁸ Darian Lockett. *"An Introduction to the Catholic Epistles" T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies'* (London, T & T Clark, 2012).p.53.

⁹ Philip B. Harner. *"The Catholic Epistles?" What Are They Saying About'* (New York, Paulist Press, 2004).p.33.

address to people as ‘elected strangers of the Diaspora’¹⁰. In socially Christians were identified as ‘anti-social’ people, as Tacitus puts it – became known for their ‘hatred of the human race’¹¹. If someone acknowledge in courts as ‘Christian’ they were liable to punishment and execution¹². In this context, 1 Peter has been called the epistle of hope¹³.

As literary nature of the book there were some similarities, parallels with Old and New Testament books. Though there are some parallels with Pauline letters (1 pet 2:4-5// Eph 2:19-22) there is no evidence that 1 Peter knows or make use those letters: it is same with James it may be both are attributable to common use or used the same biblical text (James 1:10-11//1pet 1:23-24) or same cord ethical guidance (James 1:2 //1 Pet 1:6) ; also Romans has few parallel text with 1 Peter, in connection to rulers and authorities Paul and Peter speak same idea(Rom 13:1-4 and 1 Pet 2:13,17), in the area of advising to the congregations both are speaking (1 Pet 4:7-11, Rom 13:13), in connection to Hebrews in reference to strangers and aliens (1 Pet 2:11;1:1, Heb 11:13)¹⁴. In the Gospel traditions there are similarities that shows the author was familiar with Gospel materials (1 Pet 2:12, 3:14 and Mt 5:6, 5:10)¹⁵. In Pauline tradition small influenced but significant was that ‘in Christ’ was mention 52 in Pauls’ letters and 1 Peter 3 times mentioned (Rom:3:24; 6:11, 23, 1 Pet 3:16, 5:10, 5:14)¹⁶. Also some scholars suggest that author of 1 Peter new and used some forms and turns of phrase that reflect some knowledge of Pauline letters¹⁷. And another comparable materials which 1 Peter borrowed the forms of compact Christological confessions found in Phil 2:5-11, Col 1:15-12, 1 Tim 3:16¹⁸. In connection to Jewish tradition, I Peter used various Old Testament books such as Levites and Proverbs¹⁹, Isaiah also another book he used specially Isa 53.

The experience of suffering as Christians

According to the letter there were various types of sufferings people faced, “various kinds of trials (1:6), suffering for the sake of righteous (3:14), a fiery trial (4:12), and sharing the suffering of

¹⁰ David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.47.

¹¹ David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.55.

¹²David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.58.

¹³ Martin H. Scharlemann. "Exodus Ethics : Part One--1 Peter 1:13-16." *Concordia Journal* 2, no. 4 (July 1, 1976): 165-170. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.167.

¹⁴ J. Ramsey Michaels. “*1 Peter*” *Word Biblical Commentary v.49*. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.xliv.

¹⁵ David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.36.

¹⁶ David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.37.

¹⁷ David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.38.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.p.40.

¹⁹David G. Horrell. “*1 Peter*” *New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008).p.32.

Christ” (4:13)²⁰. Also ‘suffering for doing goods’ is thematic in the letter (3:17; 4:15; 5:10), but it does not mean Peter invite Christians to find the opportunity to suffer²¹. Throughout I Peter link between suffering of Christ to suffering of Christians often connect to eschatological implication (2:21; 3:17,18; 4:1,12,15)²². 1 Peter some specific scenarios in which Christians may be made to suffer especially the slaves who were under the cruel masters (2:18-20); it was also the wives who married to non-Christian husbands should be follow the husband’s religion (1 Pet 3:1-6)²³. When Peter speaks about, aliens and strangers they are connected to the theme of those who are suffering in 1 Peter²⁴. Archibald M. Hunter suggests the word ‘aliens and strangers’ (2:11) mean that Christians’ real home not in this world it is in heaven²⁵. Also as John H. Elliott seen Christians in the society as ‘social nonconformity’, Christians as aliens (2:11) Elliott’s argument was they received limited rights of political and legal benefits as well as social status²⁶. Though they are in that position the duty of the Christians is, as living in exile to be ‘exemplary aliens’ among the around culture²⁷. In connection to Isaiah 53 to Jesus’ suffering; though the various New Testament authors quote Isaiah 53 in various contexts, 1 Peter gives complete reflection of how Jesus’ suffering and Isaiah 53 is connecting each other²⁸.

Call for ethical life (1Peter 1: 13-16)

This section was connected to exodus ethics which was closer to action part of the day today life as followers of Jesus Christ. In this context apostle asked people to response hardly in their life circumstances; he does not ask his readers to fall on their knees but to think their part as baptized²⁹. Peter quotes a Scripture passage; Leviticus 19:2 "You shall be holy because I am holy." This verse

²⁰ David G. Horrell. *“I Peter” New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008),p.53.

²¹ Joel B. Green. *“I Peter” The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary*’ (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2007).p.81.

²² James W. Thompson. "Be submissive to your masters": a study of I Peter 2:18-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1966): 66-78. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 23, 2013).p.73.

²³ David G. Horrell. *“I Peter” New Testament Guides*’ (London, T. & T. Clark, 2008),p.53.

²⁴ Darian Lockett. *“An Introduction to the Catholic Epistles” T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies*’ (London, T & T Clark, 2012),p.51.

²⁵ Philip B. Harner. *“The Catholic Epistles?” What Are They Saying About*’ (New York, Paulist Press, 2004).p.39.

²⁶ Philip B. Harner. *“The Catholic Epistles?” What Are They Saying About*’ (New York, Paulist Press, 2004).p.40.

²⁷ Philip B. Harner. *“The Catholic Epistles?” What Are They Saying About*’ (New York, Paulist Press, 2004).p.42.

²⁸ Karen H. Jobes. *“Letter to the Church” A survey of the Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand rapids, Zondervan, 2011),p.286.

²⁹ Martin H. Scharlemann, "Exodus Ethics : Part One--1 Peter 1:13-16." *Concordia Journal* 2, no. 4 (July 1, 1976): 165-170. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.166.

would commend itself to the Peter because of its references to holiness³⁰. When Peter used Leviticus 19:2 he used priestly terms and for him priestly character of the church was identification as he emphasised in 1 Pet 2:9³¹. Therefore Peters' emphasis was that God call them to be a saint through their action. As God command Israel people to be a good people in the wilderness in the midst of challenged; apostle also invite Christians to be like obedient children to God. The Christians as children of God whom they know their Father (1 Pet 1:17) in biblically God's character as care His/her children (Ps 103:13; Mt 7:9-11), and children's characteristic duty was to obey their Father³². The word children or sons with the abstract noun widely accepted Semitic idiom referring to those who characterised by quality which that noun present³³. When Peter mentioned 'as obedience children' he expect Christians to be live an example qualitative life in the midst of other beliefs. Therefore he invited people to not to live like this world for that, he asked two things to concerned, that was ignorance and lust which they had before they become Christians³⁴. When Peter used ignorance he specifically focused to past life style of the peoples in Greco-Roman paganism³⁵. The author therefore asked from people to focus their all the expectations to Jesus' return in glory then they will be free because Jesus will be the ruler of this world³⁶.

New Birth and New Beginning (1Peter 2:1-3)

Peter as a pastor to this new community he emphasised the moral life of the people taking a day today example of birth which was connected to various customs in the Greco-Roman world. The author continuously used various metaphors in order to keep his audience firm in their eschatological journey³⁷. The lifestyle of the people should be continuously long for the 'high

30 Martin H. Scharlemann, "Exodus Ethics : Part One--1 Peter 1:13-16." *Concordia Journal* 2, no. 4 (July 1, 1976): 165-170. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.169.

31 J. Ramsey Michaels. "*1 Peter*" *Word Biblical Commentary* v.49. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.60.

32 I. Howard Marshall. *1 Peter* (Leicester, IVP, 1991).p.52.

33 J. Ramsey Michaels. "*1 Peter*" *Word Biblical Commentary* v.49. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.56.

34 Martin H. Scharlemann, "Exodus Ethics : Part One--1 Peter 1:13-16." *Concordia Journal* 2, no. 4 (July 1, 1976): 165-170. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.168.

35 J. Ramsey Michaels. "*1 Peter*" *Word Biblical Commentary* v.49. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.57.

36 Martin H. Scharlemann, "Exodus Ethics : Part One--1 Peter 1:13-16." *Concordia Journal* 2, no. 4 (July 1, 1976): 165-170. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.167.

37 Philip L. Tite, "Nurslings, milk and moral development in the Greco-Roman context: a reappraisal of the paraenetic utilization of metaphor 1 Peter 2.1-3." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 31, no. 4 (June 1, 2009): 371-400. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.371.

quality word-like milk' that helps growth into eschatological salvation³⁸. In verse 1 Peter asked reject the some evil attitudes and practices and to be a morally accepted one³⁹. As a new born baby most prominent desire is mother's milk; Christians also as babies searching their mothers' milk means they can never be satisfied, always be hungry⁴⁰. For Peter 'pure Milk' something new it's like a attention, hope, or holy conduct or reverent fear of God or love each other⁴¹ This milk can be identifying as the sustaining life of God which has given to His/her children⁴². In this section God is seen as a mother and nurse and it inter related to the mother/nurse and nursling (Jer 31:20, Hos 11:1, Ps 33:9; 103:13)⁴³. In Peters language the people who received 'Milk' of Christ's mercy or kindness should be show through their action; the ethical stance of a person gives evidence of spiritual development towards salvation can be emphasised either as the imitating Christ or doing good⁴⁴.

Be submission to your Masters- 1Peter 2: 18-25

Peter as a Pastor to the newly Christian community the challenge he faced in connection to the slaves was that how he compromise this social issue with the Christian way because some believers were the slaves. Peter addressed the slave as *hoi oiketai* (2:18), while Paul used term as *doulos* in his four letters; Peter used *oiketai* may be family issues (3:1-7) in that here he think slaves as members of the social unit of the home rather than the members of a social class; Peter encouraged slaves to be subject in fear to their masters and this use of participle imperative similarly it can be seeing in *Haustafel* in Ephesians⁴⁵. Peter and Paul both were link slaves to be obedience with fear, Peter's encourage was fear of God not fear of the masters (Col 3:22; 1 Pet 2:17), God is always

³⁸ Philip L. Tite, "Nurslings, milk and moral development in the Greco-Roman context: a reappraisal of the paraenetic utilization of metaphor 1 Peter 2.1-3." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 31, no. 4 (June 1, 2009): 371-400. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.394.

³⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels. "*1 Peter*" *Word Biblical Commentary v.49*. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.84.

⁴⁰ Philip L. Tite, "Nurslings, milk and moral development in the Greco-Roman context: a reappraisal of the paraenetic utilization of metaphor 1 Peter 2.1-3." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 31, no. 4 (June 1, 2009): 371-400. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.374.

⁴¹ J. Ramsey Michaels. "*1 Peter*" *Word Biblical Commentary v.49*. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.87.

⁴² Philip L. Tite, "Nurslings, milk and moral development in the Greco-Roman context: a reappraisal of the paraenetic utilization of metaphor 1 Peter 2.1-3." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 31, no. 4 (June 1, 2009): 371-400. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.374.

⁴³ Philip L. Tite, "Nurslings, milk and moral development in the Greco-Roman context: a reappraisal of the paraenetic utilization of metaphor 1 Peter 2.1-3." *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 31, no. 4 (June 1, 2009): 371-400. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 17, 2013).p.376.

⁴⁴ J. Ramsey Michaels. "*1 Peter*" *Word Biblical Commentary v.49*. (Rio De Janeiro, Thomson Nelson, 1988).p.91.

⁴⁵ James W. Thompson. "Be submissive to your masters": a study of I Peter 2:18-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1966): 66-78. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 23, 2013).p.70.

object of Christian fear throughout the 1 Peter⁴⁶. Therefore the significant feature of Peter's emphasis about 'fear' was that it connected God as Christians; that indicate he has interpreted the social issue in Christian faith way which God is your master. Peter has given an answer to unjust suffering and it was connected to Christ's suffering which he was witness (1 Pet 5:1). He tries to show that slaves find favour in God's eyes because of their unjust suffering⁴⁷. The reason why slaves should act according to verses 18-20 was that the ethics based on that 'imitation of Christ' a common theme of the New Testament which was Christ was the supreme example of slaves (Phil 2:7), though he didn't do wrong he suffered and fully trusted in God's righteous judgment⁴⁸. Peter's motivation to slaves was that Christ also suffered unjustly quoting Isaiah 53 and going further to introduce a doctrine of atonement⁴⁹. Peter draws attention to Jesus' non-retaliation in suffering situation as modal for followers of Jesus, reformulating the silence of a sheep before its shearers in Isaiah 53:9 so that it applied directly in the context of Christians having hostility (2:19-20, 22-23)⁵⁰.

The end time ethics (1 Peter 4: 7-11)

In this section Peter invited his community to be serious about their prayer life and other day today activities as exemplary Christians. Peter urge to see solidarity of the community in new way for that he used familiar terms as love, hospitality, service / household stewards and orientation to the other or one another⁵¹. As Peter emphasized various arrears of performance of life for him love is the most important part of the life (4:7), "in Peter it is love that is supreme. For it is into a relationship of brotherly love (*Philadelphia*) that one has purified his soul and been born anew (1:22-23). Therefore, as a member of the Christian eschatological community, one is to love the brotherhood (*adelphotes*; 2:17; cf. 3:8)"⁵². The significant feature of the love is that it covers multitude of sin (4:8).

⁴⁶ James W. Thompson. "Be submissive to your masters": a study of I Peter 2:18-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1966): 66-78. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 23, 2013).p.70.

⁴⁷ James W. Thompson. "Be submissive to your masters": a study of I Peter 2:18-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1966): 66-78. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 23, 2013).p.71.

⁴⁸ James W. Thompson. "Be submissive to your masters": a study of I Peter 2:18-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1966): 66-78. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 23, 2013).p.73.

⁴⁹ James W. Thompson. "Be submissive to your masters": a study of I Peter 2:18-25." *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1966): 66-78. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 23, 2013).p.77.

⁵⁰ Joel B. Green. "*I Peter*" *The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary*' (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2007).p.87.

⁵¹ Joel B. Green. "*I Peter*" *The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary*' (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2007).p.140.

⁵² Kline, Leslie. "Ethics for the end time: an exegesis of I Peter 4:7-11." *Restoration Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (January 1, 1963): 113-123. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 23, 2013).p.115.

The other area that Peter talked to his audience was that about hospitality because, hospitality was a one of the symbols of showing love and it was characterized the Christian community⁵³. As he mentioned “The commanded of mutual love is supplemented in verse 9 by hospitality”⁵⁴. Therefore, hospitality is a basic love commanded in the New Testament tradition (Rom 12:9-13; Heb 13:1); Christ himself mentioned (Matt 23:35, 43); in the Pastoral Epistles it connected to as a qualification of a bishop (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8) or a widow (1Tim 5:10)⁵⁵. If there is love there is fellowship and sharing (Matt 25:35/Rom 12:13). “Hospitality is considered a *charisma* ("gift") (Rom. 12:6-13; 1 Peter 4:9-11) with which the believer is responsible for serving others, especially ‘those who are of the household of faith’ ”⁵⁶. As an eschatological community it was important that to maintain the hospitality as for express the Christian love especially for those who are travel as teachers and missionaries.

The other important area Peter speaks about gift and service in the context of power and hierarchy; it is different in God’s rule as Jesus mentioned (Mark 10: 42- 45/ Luke 22: 24-27)⁵⁷. In Peter eight times refer to the benevolence of God (1:2, 10, 13; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12); here specifically emphasized the gifts which are freely and graciously given by God for service⁵⁸. For those who have various gifts they should responsibly use it because it has given to them by God use for glory of God not for their glory. “Therefore, because God is the source of all these things, supplying his gifts and acting ‘through Jesus Christ’, the proper use of these gifts in love by the church has as its purpose and goal: ‘in order that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ’ ”⁵⁹. Invitation of Peter was use the gifts in democratically without violating God’s rule which had given through Jesus Christ.

⁵³ Kline, Leslie. "Ethics for the end time: an exegesis of I Peter 4:7-11." *Restoration Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (January 1, 1963): 113-123. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 23, 2013).p.119.

⁵⁴ Reinhard Feldmeier. “*The First Letter of Peter*” *A Commentary on a Greek Text*’ (Waco, Baylon University Press, 2008).p.219.

⁵⁵ Reinhard Feldmeier. “*The First Letter of Peter*” *A Commentary on a Greek Text*’ (Waco, Baylon University Press, 2008).p.219.

⁵⁶ Kline, Leslie. "Ethics for the end time: an exegesis of I Peter 4:7-11." *Restoration Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (January 1, 1963): 113-123. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 23, 2013).p.119.

⁵⁷ Reinhard Feldmeier. “*The First Letter of Peter*” *A Commentary on a Greek Text*’ (Waco, Baylon University Press, 2008).p.220.

⁵⁸ Joel B. Green. “*I Peter*” *The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary*’ (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2007).p.145.

⁵⁹ Kline, Leslie. "Ethics for the end time: an exegesis of I Peter 4:7-11." *Restoration Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (January 1, 1963): 113-123. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed June 23, 2013).p.122.

Conclusion

The core message of the 1 Peter is telling us to be a practical and realistic Christian in this wider society. That message was based on teaching of Jesus and guidance of the Holy Spirit according to God's plan. Through this message Peter taught us what is the meaning to be a Christian as well as what are the qualities of the Christians that should be keep and develop for the glory of God. As a person who had a living experienced with his Master and the Lord who died on the cross, Peter's attempt was that give a real teaching of Jesus Christ who was the model for a servant hood. Also his attempt was that answered to the social issue in realistic and spiritual way; therefore he used Old Testament, Pauline letters and Gospels for his argument as supportive documents to educate newly suffering faith group of Jesus' followers to build up their faith and keep them as valuable citizens of the society. Specially through his experienced he talked who is a Christian or a follower of Jesus Christ and he tried to show that, though the being a Christian was a challengeable still they have hope in God because the world they live was not a real place for them there is a permanent place for Christians.