

456 One in Christ

Peter's first epistle within the New Testament bears the title "The First Epistle General of Peter", with the Greek word translated here as "General" meaning "catholic" or "universal". Then in the first verse Peter addresses this letter "to [the] elect pilgrims of [the] dispersion" (Literal, Ch.1 v.1) living in areas of what is now Turkey. We gather therefore that this letter, from the Holy Spirit through Peter, provides general spiritual and practical teaching for a wide range of Christians, of different backgrounds, circumstances and locations.

Blessings abound from the start of this letter! – all founded on the wonderful grace of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: Christians are "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ ... begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, kept in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time ... (we are redeemed) with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (from Ch.1 vv.2-5, 18-19, KJV). What comfort is ours as we hold on to such gracious truths in these turbulent times.

Turning on to Chapter 2, we learn more of Christ and of our calling and status in Him. The Lord Jesus Himself is "gracious, as a living stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious ... a chief corner stone laid in Zion, elect, precious ... the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence (from Ch.2 vv. 3-8).

It is fascinating to see here how Peter, a Jewish believer in Christ (a "Messianic Jew" in today's terms), is used by the Holy Spirit to link these new Christians of the New Covenant of Grace to many features of the Jewish Old Covenant of Law. So in Christ, we of Gentile background, "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ ... a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ... who in time past [were] not a people, but [are] now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (from Ch. 2 vv.5-10). Via a Concordance, most of the descriptions mentioned here will be found beforehand in the Old Testament.

This reminds us that the Christian Faith is thoroughly rooted in the Jewish Faith and is wholly dependent upon that Faith for its existence. Praise God, Jewish and Gentile Christ-believers are now “one in Christ”, (egs., Galatians 3.26-29 / Ephesians 2.13-22; 4.4-6) - though this oneness is rarely seen in practice to date.

So there is neither spiritual nor practical reason for Christians in this Church Age, who are largely of Gentile stock, to ignore or belittle the Jews. In their great need most Jews still await their Messiah, and it is up to Christians of the Church humbly to hold forth to them “their own” Lord Jesus to them, for the Jews are still “the natural olive tree” of Romans 11.17-24. Sadly the Church’s track record in that task has fallen far short, and must have distanced from Jesus how many Jewish souls down the centuries?

Arising from these spiritual links between the Old and New Covenant peoples are also behavioural links. Last time, from some Psalm 119 verses, we learned of our need to live in liberty within obedience, to witness, and to meditate on God’s Word. Staying in I Peter Chapter 2, we find much similar practical teaching. We are: to avoid malice, guile, hypocrisy, bad speech and fleshly lusts; to desire “the sincere milk of the word” so that we can grow; to show forth our praises to the Lord; to live and speak honestly among not-Christian people; to submit to legitimate authority; and, to sum up – “Honour all [men]. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (2.17, KJV). These verses, among the many others in the New Testament, show that both Jewish and Christian daily discipleship are virtually identical in practice, the only, but vital, difference between the two Faiths being, for the moment, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. By God’s mercy, that difference is to be swept away, producing at last one flock under the one Shepherd (eg., Matthew 24.29-31 / John 17.20-23 / Romans 11.25-31).

We are thus freshly aware of the indissoluble links between the Old and New Covenants, and between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. Thanks be to God, these links are forged wholly in Christ and, under the gracious providence of God the Father, are approaching their final in-Christ fulfilment. Until then we go on praying “for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122.6), with all that that peace in Christ will involve (Revelation Chapters 19-22).