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—Dr. Joel R. Beeke
President and professor of systematic theology and homiletics,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

1-2 PETER

AN EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARY

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R.C. SPROUL



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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*To the Ligonier Ministry board members:
Faithful witnesses in Christ's kingdom and godly support to me.*

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SERIES PREFACE

When God called me into full-time Christian ministry, He called me to the academy. I was trained and ordained to a ministry of teaching, and the majority of my adult life has been devoted to preparing young men for the Christian ministry and to trying to bridge the gap between seminary and Sunday school through various means under the aegis of Ligonier Ministries.

Then, in 1997, God did something I never anticipated: He placed me in the position of preaching weekly as a leader of a congregation of His people—St. Andrew’s in Sanford, Florida. Over the past twelve years, as I have opened the Word of God on a weekly basis for these dear saints, I have come to love the task of the local minister. Though my role as a teacher continues, I am eternally grateful to God that He saw fit to place me in this new ministry, the ministry of a preacher.

Very early in my tenure with St. Andrew’s, I determined that I should adopt the ancient Christian practice of *lectio continua*, “continuous expositions,” in my preaching. This method of preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible (rather than choosing a new topic each week) has been attested throughout church history as the one approach that ensures believers hear the full counsel of God. Therefore, I began preaching lengthy series of messages at St. Andrew’s, eventually working my way through several biblical books in a practice that continues to the present day.

Previously, I had taught through books of the Bible in various settings, including Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and audio and video teaching series for Ligonier Ministries. But now I found myself appealing not so much to the minds of my hearers but to both their minds and their hearts. I knew that I was responsible as a preacher to clearly explain God’s Word *and* to show how we ought to live in light of it. I sought to fulfill both tasks as I ascended the St. Andrew’s pulpit each week.

What you hold in your hand, then, is a written record of my preaching

labors amidst my beloved Sanford congregation. The dear saints who sit under my preaching encouraged me to give my sermons a broader hearing. To that end, the chapters that follow were adapted from a sermon series I preached at St. Andrew's.

Please be aware that this book is part of a broader series of books containing adaptations of my St. Andrew's sermons. This book, like all the others in the series, will *not* give you the fullest possible insight into each and every verse in this biblical book. Though I sought to at least touch on each verse, I focused on the key themes and ideas that comprised the "big picture" of each passage I covered. Therefore, I urge you to use this book as an overview and introduction.

I pray that you will be as blessed in reading this material as I was in preaching it.

—R.C. Sproul
Lake Mary, Florida
April 2009

PREFACE

Imagine what it would be like to receive a letter from someone who was a personal friend of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Beyond that, imagine receiving two letters from such a person. That's exactly what we have in the New Testament correspondence known as 1 and 2 Peter. Peter is known as a thundering paradox of a man. On the one hand he is known for his impetuosity, for his vacillating between faith and doubt, for his treachery of public denial of Jesus at the time of Jesus' greatest peril. On the other hand he is known for his magnificent confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi where, without hesitation, he declared his confidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

He is known also for his heroic acts of sacrifice and of suffering for the faith after the ascension of Jesus, even to the point of his martyrdom in Rome. When Peter writes to the church about faith and trust in the providence of God in the midst of suffering, he is speaking not in abstract terms but from the vantage point of one who has been called personally to endure such sufferings himself. He is one who testifies beyond speculation, as one who was an eyewitness, testifying not to cleverly devised myths or fables but to what he had seen with his eyes and heard with his ears. This is the testimony of a man who not only was part of the entourage of Jesus during his earthly ministry but was an eyewitness of the resurrection and part of the inner circle of disciples in the great triad of Peter, James, and John. These three were present on the Mount of Transfiguration and were able to see with their own eyes the glory of the transfigured Christ.

A letter from a man such as this is a treasure for the church. His letter, beyond the value of his own eyewitness testimony and his intimate friendship with Jesus, carries with it the weight of the divine inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. What Peter says to the church is merely an extension of what his Lord and Master, Christ, says to the church, so that we receive his apostolic testimony as from the Lord Himself. It is an enormous privilege and blessing for us to take the

time to consider line upon line and precept upon precept the teaching set forth in these two majestic epistles, 1 and 2 Peter. I commend to the reader a careful and devout reading of these letters.

—R.C. Sproul
Orlando, 2010

1 PETER

1

GREETING TO THE ELECT PILGRIMS

1 Peter 1:1–2



Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace be multiplied.

When we study a book of the Bible, we begin by asking basic questions of prolegomena or introduction: Who wrote the book? To whom was it addressed in its original composition? At what time in history was the book written? What were the circumstances or occasions that generated such a book? Asking such questions is customary, whether we are studying a Gospel, an epistle, or a book of the Old Testament. Knowing who wrote a book, for whom it was written, the time it was written, and the circumstances that provoked it assist us in understanding the book.

The Author of 1 Peter

The author is identified immediately as **Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ** (v. 1). The book of 1 Peter claims to be authored by the Apostle Peter, one of the two most important apostolic pillars of the early church. The basic distinction made in the early church was between Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles and Peter

as the Apostle to the circumcised, the Jews. Critics have waged war against this book, as they have virtually all the books of the Bible, and have challenged its Petrine authorship for several reasons.

The first reason that Peter's authorship is questioned is that at the end of the epistle, when the final greetings are given, there is a greeting to the people from Silvanus, which indicates his involvement in the production of the letter. As a result, people say that the letter was not written by Peter but by Silvanus.

The second problem we encounter is that the Greek of this particular epistle is highly elegant. We think of Peter as an unschooled fisherman who, in all likelihood, would not have had the command of the Greek language displayed in this particular epistle.

Third, the epistle is addressed **to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia** (v. 1). Traditionally, *pilgrims* or *sojourners* was the term used by the Jews to describe Gentiles. For the most part, the churches established in Asia Minor in the apostolic age were established among Gentiles, and since Peter was the Apostle to the circumcision, not to the Gentiles, it seems unlikely that this Apostle would address his letters to a Gentile community.

Additionally, the circumstances that prompted the writing of this letter presumably involved suffering under persecution. We know from history that the persecution by the Roman Empire against Christians did not extend beyond the city of Rome until much later, toward the end of the first century and into the second century, with the persecutions of Diocletian and Domitian. Since the occasion of the letter was to comfort people in persecution, the critics say it could not have been written during the lifetime of Peter because Peter was martyred in Rome in A.D. 64. Peter and Paul were martyred, according to tradition, during the vicious persecution of Nero. Emperor Nero blamed the Christian community for the fire that wreaked havoc in the city of Rome, and many think the fire was set by Nero himself. Tradition holds that he played his fiddle while the city was burning. His fury against the Christians was, for the most part, confined to the city of Rome and did not reach into the provinces, particularly not as far out as the northern and western regions of Asia Minor.

Much of the content of 1 Peter sounds almost identical to the teachings of the Apostle Paul. We know from the book of Acts that Paul and Peter did not always see eye to eye, yet this epistle reads almost like a carbon copy of Paul's letters. That too has raised questions about whether this epistle was actually written by Peter or by someone associated with the Apostle Paul. It also reinforces the theory that the letter was actually written by Silvanus. That name, Silvanus, is just a longer version of the name Silas, and the only Silvanus or Silas that we know of

in the New Testament is Paul's companion on the missionary journeys. So, there are several reasons for which questions have been asked about the authenticity of the Petrine authorship.

Those who conclude that 1 Peter was not written by Peter, and then not until the end of the first century or into the second century, also assume that the epistle was not apostolic in origin but had its basis in the Gnostic literature of the second and third centuries.

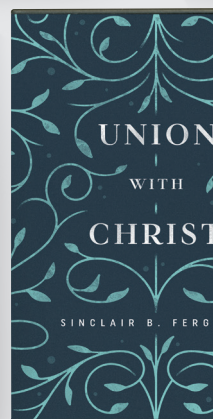
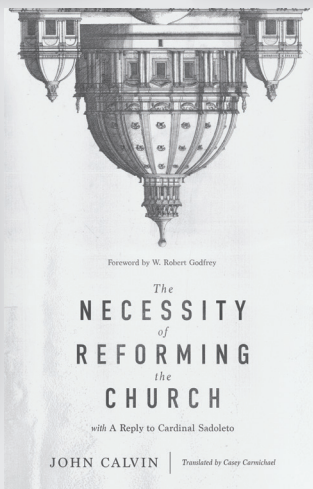
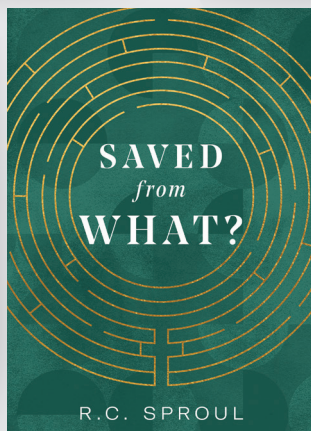
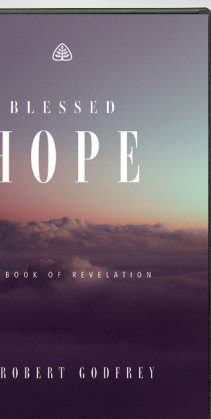
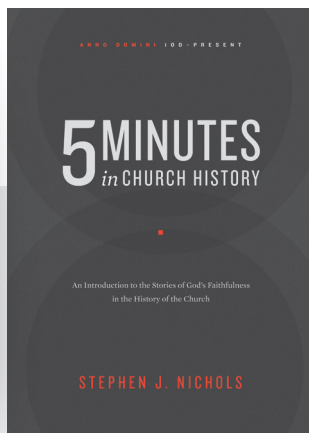
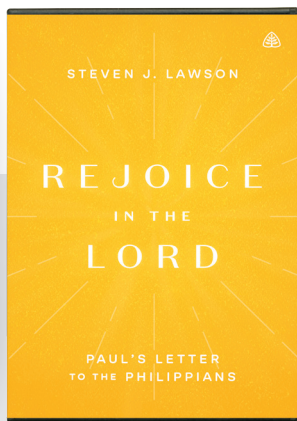
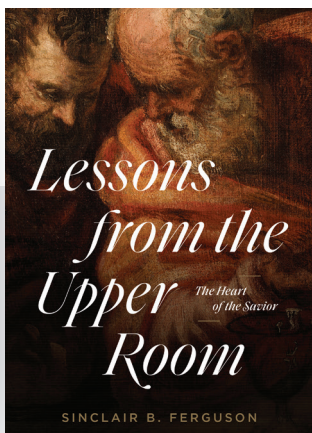
As we seek to understand the authorship of a book in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, we must look at two things. We must look at the internal evidence and then at the external, historical evidence. The internal analysis includes an examination of the literary style, the level of Greek used. That notwithstanding in this case, the letter claims to have been written by the Apostle Peter.

This is where your view of Scripture virtually controls your interpretation of Scripture. If you think the Bible was errantly produced by authors without the supervision and superintendence of the Holy Spirit and therefore reflects diverse, even contradictory, theologies, that gives some license to compromise the internal claims of Scripture. However, if you come to the text already persuaded that it is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, then God has to say only once that this letter was written by the Apostle Peter. The argument is settled. So, the most important internal evidence is the specific reference to Peter as the author of the epistle.

Concerning external testimony, the testimony of the early Christian church is universal and unanimous. This epistle was received in the very earliest times of Christian history, in the middle of the first century, as having come from Peter. That testimony is seconded by the greatest minds of the early centuries. It was affirmed by Irenaeus in his dispute against heresies, and by Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the historian Eusebius. These are the most respected authorities outside of the Bible in the early centuries of Christendom. Not until the nineteenth century in the throes of higher criticism did anyone seriously suggest that the epistle was not written by the Apostle Peter. Both internal and external evidence agree that Peter the Apostle was the author.

What about the problem of the Greek language and the references to Silvanus at the end of the letter? Natives of Galilee in ancient Palestine were bilingual. They spoke Aramaic and Greek. Therefore, Greek was a native language of Peter's. Even though he had no formal schooling under Gamaliel, Hillel, or any rabbi in Jerusalem, he was certainly not unintelligent, and he was articulate, as we see in the record of his speeches, particularly on the day of Pentecost. The role of Silvanus in the production of this letter was, in all probability, that of an

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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