

**Spirituality in 1 Peter**  
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I've asked you to write up an accounting of what a particular book of the Bible says about being spiritual. Some of you have done this in other classes with me before (think "Scripture Reading Reports"), and you know what I'm looking for. Others of you haven't done this, so I thought it best to provide you an example of the kind of thing I'm looking for. For my own essay, I've chosen to examine what we learn about the Spirit, spirituality, and how to practice the Spirit-filled-kind-of life from 1 Peter. Notice that I've not just done a chapter-by-chapter recitation of the verses and what they mean (boring; low grades!). Instead I've done all that and *then* rearranged the evidence I've found according to some common themes. This is how I'd like you to approach this kind of assignment. (This is standard fare for nearly all of my Bible classes, so it's best you learn to do this well as soon as possible.)

**The Spirit and the Message of Redemption**

One of the first things I notice is that Peter keeps referring to the Spirit, without really explaining who the Spirit is. It's as if Peter expects his readers to understand it already, as if he's taught them about the Spirit, or as if they've heard about the Spirit as part and parcel of their conversion in Christ. Nevertheless, a few clues help us identify exactly which "Spirit" we're talking about.

Peter says that the Spirit was sent from heaven (1:12), and the term he uses is that normally used for the Apostles (*apostellos*, "one who was sent to bear authority"). The Spirit is "sent" in the same manner as the Apostles were sent—to proclaim the message and to exercise authority (Mark 3:14-15). The work of the Spirit is then tied to various communication events throughout redemptive history. He filled the prophets (1:11) and the preachers as they spoke (1:12) the redemptive message of God. Jesus also preached to the souls in "prison" through the Spirit (3:19-20).

The Spirit predicted the sufferings of Christ in the writings of Scripture (1:11). This same Spirit is the one who made Jesus alive after his death (3:18), and is now linked to our own resurrection to new life in Christ in baptism (3:21).

**A Chosen People**

What is the Spirit's role *after* the message has been received? A cursory glance at 1 Peter suggests that the Spirit is in the business of creating a people for God, and once that people has responded to the message, his role is to sanctify them and make them holy like him, i.e. "Spirit"-ual.

This people who have responded to the message do not belong to themselves, and neither are they God's people by accident. They are "chosen ... through the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1:12). The idea of them being "chosen" has nothing to do with the Calvinist-Arminian debate that arose in the Reformation, but has everything to do with identifying the new Christian believers as the fulfillment and culmination of the "chosen people" (i.e., Jews). In other words, that they are the "chosen people" means that they stand in line with Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the priests of Israel, and the Temple as belonging to YHWH, set apart from the nations. That they are "chosen" is further qualified by their identification as a "royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (2:9-10). The Temple imagery comes to the fore as the Spirit builds them into a

“spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices” (2:4-5). These people are not those who “confess me [Christ] with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matt. 15:8; Isa. 29:3). They are, rather, those who set up Christ as Lord of their hearts (3:15) and who constantly choose to live for the will of God rather than evil, human desires (4:2).

### **The Work of the Spirit**

How does the Spirit do this? How does he take a people who have responded to Christ and set him up in their hearts as Lord and make them a people fit for God? He “sanctifies” them (1:2), which really means that he makes them holy, as YHWH is holy (1:15-16). How does this work?

In short, the sanctification process is tied to *everyday action* among the believers responding to the Spirit’s leading. The people of God are called to be active in their faith (1:13), to pray (4:7), to use their gifts to serve one another (4:10), and to live in harmony with one another (3:8-9). This harmony comes by loving one another deeply from the core of their being (1:22, 4:8), by offering hospitality to one another (4:9), and by being sympathetic, compassionate, and humble (3:8-9). By doing these things, they are “purified from malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander” (2:1).

Submission to one another is a characteristic of authentic spirituality in Peter’s view. Everyone is to submit to those who are in authority over them (2:18-20), as Christ was submissive to his Father. The congregation is to submit to its Elders knowing that the Elders are submissive to Christ, to whom they must account for the flock (5:2-4). Wives are to demonstrate their spirituality by rejecting the façade that “attractiveness equals spirituality” (which is just as prevalent in our day as it was in Peter’s) and embracing a genuine, quiet spirit (3:3-6). Husbands, if they want their prayers to be heard by the Father, are to be spiritual by treating their wives with respect, as if they were co-heirs of grace (3:7). The submission to one another is to be mutual (3:1-6), and when everyone is humble, God will be sure to reward (5:6).

Peter also mentions that being self-controlled (1:13) and alert has direct ties to spirituality, as mental alertness has two primary purposes. First, being “clear-minded and self-controlled” brings a focus in prayer (4:7). Second, it keeps us alert to temptation and gives us the mental acumen to resist the Devil (5:8), so that we may abstain from sinful desires (2:12, 4:2), which include debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry (4:3; those who live this way will be *judged* in the Spirit, 4:6). This clear-mindedness and rejection of sin is to be done in the grace and will of God (4:10-11).

Purification—sanctification, holiness—come from obeying the truth (1:22). The people of God are to love and crave this truth like a newborn infants crave their mother’s milk (2:2), so that this truth may nourish us and mature us in salvation.

### **The Spirituality of Suffering**

Finally, Peter sees a certain spirituality of suffering—not that suffering *is* spiritual. Peter seems to see suffering as an inevitable part of the Jesus-kind of life, and the *way we respond* in and to our suffering either reveals that we’re allowing the Spirit to do the deep work of transformation in our lives, or that we’re behaving in more humanistic, carnal types of ways.

Peter's comments about suffering are tied to the story of Jesus, and that story—the account of Messiah's sufferings—goes all the way back to the prophets, who spoke of Jesus' sufferings through the Spirit (1:11). It was always the plan that Messiah would suffer, and those who find themselves bound to him in this way should count it an honor to wear that Name (4:16) and rejoice to participate with him (4:12-13). Those who are insulted because of the name of Christ have the Spirit of Glory and of God resting on them (4:14).

Suffering (spiritually speaking) cannot be the result of bad behavior. Suffering in the name of Christ must be the kind that comes from doing what is good and right (2:21-25, 3:13-14, 17), and in the midst of it, we should *continue* to do good (4:19). To do so requires the proper attitude (of refusing to allow sin to reign in the midst of suffering, 4:1) and a refusal to retaliate (3:9-12).

Those who suffer this way are promised “blessing from YHWH and vindication from God their Savior” (Ps. 24:5). Jesus told the two Emmaus Road travelers that “it was *necessary* for Messiah to suffer and *then* enter his glory” (Lk. 24:26). So it is with his people. Those who participate with him in his suffering will also participate with him in the glory to be revealed (5:1). And as God raised Jesus from the dead, so he will restore those who suffer in Christ's name and make them strong (5:10).