

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

St. Peter, the Apostle of Hope.

BY THE REV. J. J. CALEB, B.A.,

Curate-in-Charge of St. Margaret's, Erdington, Birmingham.

PETRINE theology has to some extent suffered neglect at the hands of modern theologians. It may be because Romanists have exalted this Apostle in a very one-sided manner, although, of course, it would be an act of ultra-Protestant unfairness were we for this reason only to overlook the special importance of his person and word. Or it may be because of the meagreness of his writings. He is not so prolific as his "brother Paul." Moreover, the genuineness of his second Epistle was early assailed; but as matters stand now it would be impolitic to set it aside. St. Peter was not a man from whom we would expect much in the way of literary production. He is the impulsive disciple, the man of feeling and action, not given much to abstract thinking, but living and moving in the sphere of the concrete, and of that which is immediately present. We would not expect of such a man to write much, or to work out some abstruse theological doctrine in all its bearings. He is likely to be very much more at home in the circle of historical than speculative ideas. He was a man who lived by heart-beats, and not by the slow, steady, calculating logic of a metaphysician or schoolman. And to a certain extent all this becomes apparent even to a superficial reader of his discourses and epistles. Even after Pentecost we find him and his companion St. John taken for *ἀγράμματοί καὶ ἰδιῶται* (Acts iv. 13). His claim for testifying of Christ is to be found rather in the burning zeal and fiery love which neither persecutions nor sufferings could quench.

We have already hinted at the paucity of Petrine writings. Therefore in tracing the development of his character, or the *bene esse* of his doctrinal teaching, or still more the essence of his theology, we have to remind ourselves of the sources of our information. The foremost place is without a doubt to be

assigned to the first Epistle of St. Peter, and the more willingly since it manifests a thoroughly subjective character. The Acts of the Apostles comes next, inasmuch as we are continually finding in that book fresh proofs that the Apostle with whom we first became acquainted there is the same Peter whom we find in the first Epistle. St. Paul also does yeoman service to us in our efforts to become thoroughly familiar with the natural disposition and bent of his mind. The second Epistle, too, bears an unmistakable Petrine stamp. It shows so many traces of the individuality of St. Peter as an Apostle of Hope, that, so far as internal evidence is concerned, there is much in favour of the genuineness of the Epistle. To the attentive reader the Apostle of Hope is as clearly revealed in this as in the first Epistle. Right away from the beginning the writer directs our attention to the Divine promises, and urges his readers to the work of continued sanctification (2 Peter i. 4). His look is ever directed with longing eyes to the future, and his exhortation to hasten unto the coming of the day of the Lord bears a distinctly Petrine colouring. And if the second Epistle of St. Peter had appeared anonymously the probabilities are that internal criticism would without doubt have assigned this writing to no other than the Apostle St. Peter. With this data we may well proceed to examine the claims of St. Peter as "an Apostle of Hope." We are familiar with St. Paul as "the Apostle of Faith," and with St. John as "the Apostle of Love." And we trust that a study of the words and writings of St. Peter may leave upon our minds the conviction that St. Peter is pre-eminently the Apostle of Hope. The title "Apostle of Hope" must not be regarded as presenting a feature of character belonging exclusively to St. Peter. There is not a single Apostle whose writings are not permeated with the song of the blessed hope of everlasting life. That does not surprise us; we feel it to be in the nature of things. St. John is known to us as the Apostle of Love, and yet the most beautiful poem in praise of love comes from the pen of St. Paul. St. Paul is by far and away the most able exponent of the

doctrine of faith, and yet the question of faith in its relation to works is dealt with by St. James with singular perspicacity. But the point we desire to emphasize is that Petrine theology more than that of any other bears a distinctively elpistic colouring. It dominates his conception of life. It is the centre of his doctrinal system. It colours his presentation of Christian truth. It gives us the clue to the progress of his ideas, their growth and final maturity. After the Apostolic commission to preach the Gospel unto all the world, we first come in contact with him at the election of Matthias. His important address on the occasion makes us realize that he is conscious of his great world-embracing mission as an ambassador of Christ, and more particularly as an eye-witness of His resurrection. He appears before us as a man of action, the first to lift up his gaze and make provision for the future as though by his very first apostolic act he would earn for himself the distinctive appellation of "the Apostle of Hope."

His speech on the day of Pentecost is notable because of its apt quotation of a very remarkable prophecy in Joel. And it is noteworthy how St. Peter there refers not only to what is applicable to the present extraordinary phenomenon mistaken by the ordinary onlooker as a result of a drunken debauch, but also to what may be expected in the future (Acts ii. 16-21). He is addressing himself exclusively to a congregation of Jews, and yet cannot resist the temptation of casting a forward look of hope, and to intimate that the promise is not only unto you and to your children, but to "all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts ii. 39). In Acts iii. we come upon that episode at the Gate Beautiful. There again we find him addressing the men of Israel and urging them to repentance, and the *raison d'être* of his whole argument lies in the hope that the "times of refreshing" shall surely come from the presence of the Lord, and He, although for the time gone up to heaven, will at His parousia set up His kingdom in Israel at the "restitution of all things." The address at the house of Cornelius also contemplates the fulfilment of that

Messianic hope when He who came "to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of His people Israel," shall open "the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers." He has abolished all differences, for He is no "respector of persons;" and He who commanded him to preach was also ordained Judge of the quick and the dead (Acts x. 42). The address at the Council of Jerusalem is necessarily brief, but even there we find an undercurrent of expectation to be realized in the future (Acts xv. 11). The whole doctrine of the Apostle as contained in the New Testament presents us "with the charming spectacle of a harmonious development." The whole warp and woof of the fabric of St. Peter's theology lies in this elpistic character, and nowhere can it be seen more prominently than in his first Epistle.

The Epistle opens with a doxology. The verbal correspondence between it and that in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians reminds us of the remark of Jülicher, who maintains that there is nothing in the Epistle inconsistent with a Pauline authorship. But, as far as the doxology itself is concerned, there is difference with a distinction. St. Paul is speaking only in general terms of the spiritual blessings in Christ; whereas St. Peter gives thanks for regeneration to a lively hope through the Lord. It is this living hope which is the keynote of the Epistle. This hope is to be consummated in that inheritance which is described in a series of master-strokes which are as bold as they are picturesque. "It is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away"—or, in the expressive paraphrase of Dean Alford, it is "in *substance* incorruptible; in *purity* undefiled; in *beauty* unfading." This eternal, holy, and glorious inheritance is fully assured to believers (verse 4); it is reserved for them, and they are preserved unto the salvation which is already on the point of being revealed (verse 5). Believers are not to be overwhelmed by afflictions. They are only for a short time, and are to be looked upon as harbingers of the joy that is at hand (verses 6, 7). Faith is presently to be crowned in the salvation of their souls; the end, therefore, ought to be looked forward

to with joy unspeakable (verses 8, 9). Life is a battle-field, and like wise men they must have their loins girt and their lamps trimmed. Life is a duty, and if, sentinel-like, they are ready at their post, the relief will come in the earnest looking forward to that grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. If the resurrection of the Lord is a fact historically certain and proved by infallible demonstrations, it was only that "your faith and hope may be in God" (verse 21). Christians, therefore, ought to be ready to be able to give an account of the hope that is in them (1 Pet. iii. 15). The time is short; judgment is about to begin on the Church (1 Pet. iv. 17). There is nothing that the Apostle would desire more for himself than that he should be partaker of the future glory (1 Pet. v. 1). The thought of the imminent Christ leads him to exhort ministers to feed the flock; and all Christians to feel the necessity of casting their cares upon Him, and to beware of the designs of the evil one—and all this because the chief Shepherd is about to appear, and at His parousia we shall receive a crown which fadeth not away (1 Pet. v. 2-9). As a learned writer has pithily observed, "the expectation of His glory is, as it were, the axis around which the Apostle's doctrine turns. Nowhere is there found a hint that he yet looks for a prolonged struggle of the members: their head is ready to come. The condition of Christians after death, the resurrection of the Just, the endless chastisement of the wicked, is here entirely, or almost entirely, passed over. Far beyond all this extends the glance of the Apostle to the glorious end, the personal parousia of the Lord."

To show that we have not made an altogether incorrect diagnosis of the theology of our Apostle, we here append an analysis of the first Epistle by Professor Van Oosterzee, to whom for this, as for much else in this paper, we are deeply indebted. The Apostle, writes the Professor, first of all "celebrates in an exalted strain the glory of hope (i. 3-12), in that he shows its sure basis (verses 3-5), its joy (verses 6-9), and its exalted character (verses 10-12). Immediately after, he makes a

powerful effort to call forth and strengthen the life of hope. The general exhortation to his readers to place their hope fully upon grace (verse 13) may be taken as the pregnant text, which is at once the result of all that precedes, and the theme of all the following exhortations and consolations. These are partly (*a*) of a more general kind (i. 14 ; ii. 10), and call all believers, without distinction, to personal sanctification (i. 14-21), mutual love (i. 22 ; ii. 3), and the common glorifying of God and the Saviour (ii. 4-10) ; partly, also (*b*), they have a more definite relationship (ii. 11 ; v. 5), and apply either to Christians in the world and social life (ii. 11 ; iv. 6) as subjects, servants, married persons, or members of the whole suffering and militant Church, or concern the mutual relationships of Christians to each other (iv. 7 ; v. 5), in that they are called for each other to live (iv. 7-11), with each other to suffer (iv. 12-16), and to each other to be subject (v. 1-5). In conclusion (*c*), all is once more summed up in the general exhortation to look upward with humility (v. 6, 7), to look within with diligence (v. 8), to look around with sympathy (v. 9), and to look to the future with hope (v. 10, 11). But among all these exhortations there is scarcely one which is not directly or indirectly connected with that first and general one (i. 13) : "Place your hope entirely upon the grace which is brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The hope which proved to be the guiding star of St. Peter's life is not yet fulfilled. It was not realized by him or by the Christians of his day and generation. What then? Is it any the less real, or does it belong to the region of the futile and chimerical? The day of the parousia of our blessed Lord was never actually defined by Him. Signs and tokens, indeed, have been given so that he who runs may read. But the hope to which St. Peter pointed must ever remain a point of individual expectation, and to those who look forward to His glorious appearing this blessed hope is, and no doubt ever will be, an inexhaustible fountain of inspiration.