

Study 1

A JOURNEY THROUGH FIRST PETER CHOSEN TO BE STRANGE

First Peter 1

Peter was a fisherman. He probably loved his work. Given the choice between being an apostle or being a fisherman, Peter would have probably chosen to continue being a fisherman. Even during Christ's ministry, Peter continued to fish. Christ actually went out with Peter in his fishing boat several times. When it looked as if Christ was irreversibly dead, Peter went back to fishing. It was when Peter had just been fishing, that Christ challenged him to serve Him full-time.

1. From these Scriptures, what impression do we get of Peter during the time of Christ on earth?

a) Matt. 14:28-31

b) Matt. 16:22

c) Matt. 17:4

d) Matt. 18:21

e) Matt. 26:33

f) Matt. 26:40

g) Matt. 26:73-74

Peter was a rugged individual. He was a working man from a working class part of the country. He would have had a thick country accent and a tongue that

could swear the scales off a fish. Yet something happened to Him. So radical was the change in Peter, that he began to refer to himself and other Christians as *strangers in the world*. This was not something that Peter had invented. He may have well known the references in the Old Testament to God's people being *strangers in the earth* (Ps. 119:19). But something happened to him where this religious talk somehow seemed so real: He really did feel like a stranger.

BECOMING STRANGE

Being strange means not belonging. People often try deliberately to not belong. They might dress strange, act strange, pierce strange parts of their body, all in order to be strange. But the strangest people in all the world are: Christians. The Bible word *stranger* can mean *visitor*, or *one who doesn't belong*. This raises two questions: *why don't we belong?* and *where do we belong?*

2. Who was the greatest stranger to this world and why did He come? (Jn. 3:17)

3. How did the world receive this Stranger? (Jn. 1:10)

Jesus came to make people strange. Any person who accepts Christ's leadership immediately becomes a stranger to this world. Jesus said that we could expect the world to treat us the same way that it treated Him (Jn. 15:21).

4. In what way do we offer hope to this world? (Matt. 5:14)

5. What response can we expect generally from the world? (Jn. 3:19)

WHY WE DON'T BELONG

But we were in the world. Something miraculous happened to us. God *chose* to reveal something to us. This makes us *the elect* (1Pt. 1:1). He has chosen us (1Pt. 1:2). You did not choose Him, but He chose you (Jn 15:16). Once God commenced the process of calling you, you were faced with a choice- *will I accept His invitation to be His child?* As with any decision, there may have been moments of doubt or confusion. But the Holy Spirit enabled you to choose God and His offer of forgiveness. For the first time there was an awareness of guilt and sin. A horrible sense dawned on us that we had injured the most innocent person in the universe by what we had previously thought was tolerable conduct. We were made aware of our true condition. No longer was there a demand for self-esteem or personal pandering to our every whim from this life- for now we realised our utter depravity. A feeling of hopelessness overwhelmed us. How could we be good enough for God to accept us? How could God possibly forgive us for all that we had arrogantly done to Him? Even our most religious efforts seemed like filth compared to God's standard. We were broken. We were left without a claim to any personally achieved righteousness. We felt doomed. Then the Holy Spirit gently and lovingly took us by the hand and lead us to the cross. The great burden of sin, guilt, wickedness and filth that we had just become aware of snapped off our backs the moment the blood of Christ touched our souls. In just a few seconds, years of pain and anguish were gone. Like a man cooped up in a dirty smoggy room who struggled to breathe, we stepped out into fresh air, and breathed in God's forgiveness.

6. Once we were forgiven and saved, what did the Holy Spirit commence doing in our lives'?

(1Pt. 1:2)

7. In what way does the Spirit help us to live differently to those of the world?
(1Pt. 1:2)
-

8. What did Jesus mean in John 17:15-16?
-

Becoming a stranger in this world wasn't something we earned. It was achieved by the death of Christ. His blood was shed for us. We are sprinkled with His blood. The Old Testament has a picture of the High Priest sprinkling the people with blood as an act of cleansing the people and showing them the due penalty for their sin (Ex. 24:8; refer to Matt. 26:28). We have been spiritually sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

WHERE WE BELONG

The other implication of the word *stranger* is "one who goes off the road". It has the picture of a traveller on a journey who goes off the road to stay overnight in a town. Our conversion to Christ's Way means that we are strangers on a journey. We are going home. But even our journey is different to the people who belong to this world.

9. Consequently, because of Christ shedding His blood for us, what do we now enjoy along the way? (1Pt. 1:2 - last part of verse 2)
-

Peter, the author of our text, was a man on a journey writing to other people on a journey. He rarely touches on lofty issues, largely preferring to discuss practical road directions. He charts a course for all who have been called to the journey. He commences with our salvation, and ends with the triumphant return of our LORD. Let's begin our journey by reading the street directions that Peter was inspired to give us. May God help us to live like strangers, not to each other, but to the world. We need to be *really* strange to grab their attention. By living the way of Christ, we will automatically be classed as super-strange!

Amen.

Consider: Matthew 4:18 and John 21:4ff

Study 2

BORN AGAIN & BOUND FOR GLORY

First Peter 1:3:5

When asked to seek God about what they should be most thankful about, the participants in a worship seminar all returned with the same answer. There are many things worth thanking God about, but none more than this simple fact: *He has saved us*. Our thanks to God for saving our souls is inexpressible. The one who has received God's salvation is not racked with doubts about it- they are positively overwhelmed about it! Our thanks to God for saving us blends with ecstatic and emotional praise. At the point of salvation there is often weeping. Initially we weep tears of repentance and sorrow over our deeply offensive behaviour to God, but the tears of sadness soon become tears of joy as we realise that the same God who condemns our sin has also pardoned the sinner. I once helped an elderly widow by putting a light globe into its socket. She kept the light on at night to reassure herself that no-one else was in her home. She had been taken advantage of by unscrupulous tradesmen in the past and felt that the only way she could get her light globe changed was to call an expensive electrician. When I simply reached up and changed it for her, she immediately burst into tears. These were tears of joy responding to an act of kindness. What God has done for us is much more than replace a burnt out light globe in our lives, He has delivered us from cruel destruction. How much more should we be thankful?

1. What reason does Peter give for praising God? (vs. 3)
-

Appreciation for what God has done in our lives results in exuberant praise. Remember what David did when he was overwhelmed with gratitude for God (2Sam. 6:14)? The origins of the word *praise* are based on the Hebrew word "Halel" which means *to be (clamorously) foolish; to rave*.

2. What are some reasons why we don't praise God like we could?

3. How did Jesus say we should be prepared to worship? (Matthew 18:3-4)

4. Note the following Scriptures and observe the degree of response to God-
Deut. 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 2Chron. 15:12

Our praise to God must come from our heart. We must be like little children adoring our Father in what would appear to others to be foolish ways. Watch any father playing and laughing with his children. Observe the tenderness and naturalness when they exchange the words "I love you!". Often when my children are enjoying themselves in my company they'll sing a little impromptu song. This is a new song. It comes out of a heart of joy and thankfulness.

5. What do God's people do when they have a heart of joy and thankfulness?
(Ps. 33:3-4; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; Isa. 42:10; Rev. 5:9; 14:3)

Being saved is an event *and* process. We were *born again* the moment we accepted Christ's authority over our lives and His Spirit regenerated us.

6. What happened to our past sins at that point? (1John 1:8-9; Ps. 103:3, 12)

7. What are we instructed to do with our past? (Isa. 43:18; Phil. 3:13-14)

Before God saved us, we were headed to a future with no hope. Now we are destined to a future with a living hope. Our future is secure. We will spend eternity with God. He will wipe away every tear, and be our source of constant joy. All of this has come about because Jesus Christ died in our place. If Christ had just died for us, perhaps we could be assured of an eternity free from wrath. But there would still be no merit for us to enter into heaven and an everlasting relationship with the Creator. This is why Christ rose from the dead. He defeated sin and death and earned for us the entry into eternal life.

8. How does Peter describe what awaits us? (vs. 4)
-

SHIELDED BY GOD'S POWER

When we accepted God's salvation for us, we were adopted as His children. Not every person is automatically a child of God. Jesus said of some of the Jews that their father was the Devil (Jn. 8:44). Therefore, only those who have accepted Jesus are true children of God. As any father would, our God looks out for us. He keeps His protective eye over us (Ps. 6:1; 32:8; 34:15). The enemy can not snatch us from God's protection. This is why he tries to *lure* away the child of God from their Father.

9. What are some of the varieties of luring that the Enemy uses to draw us away from God? (note: Heb. 10:25; Luke 8:14)
-
-
-

Peter was writing to comfort Christians who were suffering under persecution. He assures them that God was guarding them. All they had to do was have faith in God. Faith in this sense means *constant reliance on Christ*. It implies *faithfulness*.

REVEALED IN THE 'LAST TIME'

Salvation is an event and a process. We *were* saved, we are *being* saved, and we *will be* saved. Peter says that there is a salvation ready to be revealed in the 'last time'. The context of what he is describing refers to God delivering His people in the midst of tremendous persecution. This reinforces to us that no matter what attacks His Church, He is still in total control. He still watches over His people. There is more to our salvation than what we enjoy now. There awaits the faithful believer a beautiful inheritance in the heavenly presence of the Lord Jesus.

10. How is this final stage of our salvation described in First Corinthians 2:9 (Isa. 64:4)
-

Amen.

Study 3

SUFFERINGS, TRIALS, AND TESTINGS

First Peter 1:6-7

The Christians of the first century were under tremendous pressure. The people of their day were entrenched in pagan practices such as immorality, idolatry, Emperor worship, and lewd festivals. Much of this cultural activity was actually laid down in Roman law. Naturally they refused to participate in such practices. For this they were seen as traitors and outcasts. Many rumours abounded about them. The fact that Christian adults worshiped and conducted their meetings alongside children, brought the accusation of incest. The fact that there was embracing and outward expressions of love, one for another, in Christian meetings brought accusations of indecency. The fact that Christians met secretly in homes at night brought accusations of treachery against the Empire. Then there was the refusal of the early Christians to acknowledge *Caesar as Lord*. Their catch-cry became *Jesus is Lord*, especially meaningful when they were publicly martyred by the Roman Empire.

1. During these times of persecution and distress, how was the church instructed to react? (vs. 6a)

(Note, James 1:2) _____

But in the midst of all this suffering, one thing stands out. These things were not getting the better of God. God is still in control even during dark times. Thus, sufferings become *trials*. Even Christ set us an example by enduring trials (Lk. 22:28; Heb. 2:10; 12:2-4). The Christian is destined to go through trials (1Thess. 3:3). If this life was all there was to live for, then sufferings and trials are a cruel joke. But if sufferings in this life produce something that will be of benefit to the believer for eternity, then we rejoice in our trials and sufferings.

2. How did the apostles react to suffering as recorded in Acts 5:41?
- _____

3. What does suffering produce in the Christian? (Rom. 5:3)

4. Why was Paul comforted during his sufferings? (2Tim. 1:12)

KINDS OF TRIALS

We mentioned some of the trials that the early Christians faced. Perhaps we could add to these such things as economic persecution, social ostracisation and denial of normal rights. Today, Christians suffer in the same way, just in different forms. Perhaps one of the strongest reasons to have a country based on Christian principles, even though it doesn't profess Christ as Lord, is the freedom it gives people to express their religion, and the moral flavour it sets for a country. This is a good reason for Christians to be politically vocal. While such things as pornography, abortion, homosexuality, adultery, murder (euthanasia), corruption, drug abuse, and fraud are only symptoms of a greater problem- *the wickedness of every human heart stained with sin*, we still need to maintain standards for the benefit of the *entire* community. Whenever there is massive opposition to Christians it is never logical. It is always spiritual. When we are persecuted for no apparent reason, we can be assured it is a spiritual attack.

5. How did Jesus say to respond to such attacks? (Lk. 6:28; also note Rom. 12:14)

FAITH REFINING

Why does God allow such trials to come upon His people? Certainly some of the troubles that Christians experience are self-induced.

6. Therefore how did Christ instruct His disciples to live? (Matt. 10:16)

The result of trials is always positive for the Christian who endures. With every trial successfully passed, the believer is better equipped to face the next one.

Does God have to keep bringing us back to a point where we obey Him fully in the midst of a trial, or do we learn to quickly obey Him and press on in our growth?

One thing that trials achieve in the church is the sorting out of genuine from non-genuine believers. In some countries of the world, the measure of Christian stature is not gauged by how many university degrees a person has, but how much they have suffered for their Lord.

7. What qualifications did Paul cite to prove his right to be a minister of Christ? (2Cor. 11:23-28)

GLORY & HONOUR TO JESUS!

If this life was all there was to living, then suffering would mean that there is no justice in the universe. But we are assured that God will bring justice.

8. What are some of the blessings that come from enduring through suffering? (2Tim. 2:12)

While God allows the enemy to bring suffering and trials upon the Church, God Himself will end the age by trying mankind.

9. What benefit awaits last-days believers who endure through sufferings, when God begins to try the people of the earth? (Rev. 3:10)

At the end of all things believers will receive *a crown of life* (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). We are given a glimpse of heaven in the Book of Revelation when we are shown crowned believers.

10. Note this passage in Revelation 4:4-11. What do the crowned saints do?

May we not wait for heaven to give Jesus all the glory! Any blessing that we receive now from God should be acknowledged as coming from Him and used for His immediate glory. Thus the believer goes from darkness to light, to suffering, to glory, to glorifying.

Amen.

Study 4

THE BELIEVER'S FOCUS: JESUS

First Peter 1:8-9

"I'll believe it when I see it!" How many times have we heard these words. For the Christian, the reverse is true: *we'll see it, when we believe it!* Many people today, from all over the world, from diverse backgrounds, would gladly testify that they have "seen Jesus". They would immediately qualify it by saying that their sight of Jesus didn't come through their natural eyes, but it came spiritually. Even in this world there are numerous examples of things that most people have "seen" but could never visibly show anyone else. Such things as, *seeing* the correct approach to tackling a problem, or, *seeing* what someone was trying to say. But seeing Jesus is different again. It not only involves the intellect, it incorporates the emotions and the spirit.

1. What are we encouraged to do in Hebrews 2:9? (Note the request in John 12:21)

2. Thomas said that he wouldn't believe until he saw Jesus in the flesh (Jn. 20:24). When Christ appeared to him, what statement did He make about those who hadn't seen Him? (Jn. 20:29)

3. Peter said that even though these believers hadn't seen Jesus, they had responded to Him positively. How did he say they had responded to Him? (vs. 8)

4. What was the result of these Christians believing in and loving Jesus? (vs. 8)

Joy seems to be the most natural response when in right standing in God's presence (Ps. 21:6). While laughter can disguise a broken heart, joy is the fruit of a healed heart (Ps. 28:7). The believer is filled to overflowing with joy (Ps. 126:2-3). This joy manifests in laughing, weeping, and shouting (Lev. 9:24; Ezra 3:12-13).

5. What happens when God's people are in His presence according to Psalm 16:11? (Acts 2:28; Jude 1:24)

These believers were not experiencing times of prosperity or even popularity, yet in the midst of their trials they were filled with inexpressible joy.

REASON FOR JOY

The believer's response of joy was not the initial response to God. To not be right before God, and approach Him with frivolity would seriously bring into question whether a person truly recognised their condition before God. We note in the parable of the sower and the seed, that the one who received the seed with great joy, soon fell away when the heat of the day came (Matt. 13:20). Therefore we should not be surprised when we see new people in our services inexplicably weeping.

6. Why might this happen, and why shouldn't we be surprised about this?

Consequently, when a person realises their true condition before God, they might cry out with Isaiah "*Woe is me, for I am undone!*" which literally means- "I'm cursed, for I'm falling apart, everything I thought was good about me I've discovered is worthless!" (Isa. 6).

Joy is a great medicine. It produces life and healing in our bodies (Prov. 17:22). It makes us pleasant to be around. But it is not something we can produce. God gives it to us. It is like a garment that He clothes us with. When we repent and ask for forgiveness, and invite Christ to be our Lord, God saves us from our sin and exchanges our filthy rags for robes of righteousness. He then gives us the cloak of joy (Ps. 30:11; 132:16). Thus, our joy is a result of our salvation (1Peter 1:9).

A CLEAR FOCUS: JESUS

Times may get tough for God's people. In fact as the Day of Christ's return is brought nearer we are told that pressure and opposition will increase against us. But like the Israelites under the oppression of Egypt, we will grow stronger and larger (Ex. 1:12). We keep our focus on Jesus by a lifestyle of worship to Him. We tend to talk most about what we think most about. By talking about Jesus with others, we focus on Him. By remembering His words to us. By considering how He wants us to react to a situation- *how would Jesus handle this?* or more appropriately *how would you react to this Lord?*

7. What is the goal of our faith? (vs. 9)

8. Had they received this goal yet? Explain.

Amen.

Study 5

CHRIST: SUFFERED BUT WAS GLORIFIED

First Peter 1:10-12

What account would two blind men give each other of the same elephant they had just felt? While describing the same animal, one might state it couldn't have been very big, because its tail was so short. The other may have felt its leg and said that it must be a big animal. Both men were accurately describing the same animal. In a similar way, God showed the prophets of the Old Testament era, the time of Christ. They saw God's Messiah. They saw His triumphant majesty. They longed to know when He would appear. There is only one recorded narrative of an Old Testament prophet that foretells the time of Christ's arrival. Daniel was told that the Christ would publicly appear 483 years after the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Dan. 9:25). The decree to rebuild to Jerusalem came in 458 BC. Christ appeared at age 30, in 26 AD. This is exactly 483 years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Thus the prophets saw and longed for the Day of Christ.

1. What did Jesus say of the privileged position of those He spoke to and lived with? (Mtt. 13:17)

2. Observe the prophecy of the coming Messiah in Psalm 2, and Psalm 72. What impression do these predictions give us of the coming Messiah?

Thus the expectation of the Messiah was that He would be a strong military figure who would overthrow the enemies of God with the aid of divine wrath. The prophets must have been impressed with the power of the coming Messiah. When God spoke of Him, He used terms like "King" to describe Him. He revealed to David that He would be of his lineage, and that He would establish a kingdom that would have no end (2 Sam. 7:13).

3. But when Christ did appear, how did He interpret His "kingdom"? (Luke 17:21)

4. Was Christ's kingdom to resemble an earthly kingdom? (Jn. 18:36)

THE CHRIST WOULD SUFFER?

The prophets who prophesied of the coming Messiah were baffled about what the Holy Spirit was showing them. They had no trouble accepting that Christ would reign in glory, but they were curious about what they were shown preceding Christ's glory.

5. Read Isaiah 53. What did Isaiah foresee?

God's Word is an unfolding Word. That is, it unfolds to give us greater levels of detail and understanding about a topic. From almost the very beginning, God declared He would send the Christ who would suffer and then be glorified.

6. What expression in Genesis 3 supports this concept of a suffering yet triumphant Messiah?

This unfolding of God's Word is sometimes referred to as *progressive revelation*. The predictions of the coming Messiah were also progressive. They reach their highest level of revelation in the Gospels and then in the Epistles of the New Testament.

A REDEEMING SACRIFICE

It became apparent to some of the prophets, especially Isaiah, that the Christ would be the lamb of God. John the Baptist plainly declared Him to be so (Jn. 1:29). Thus, the Christ was not just to suffer as a mere martyr, His sufferings and death were to be redemptive. That is they would pay the price for our sin.

7. When Christ died, what ended? (Hebrews 9:26; Col. 2:14; refer to Rom. 10:4)

Mankind was created as a race, not a company. A race originates from two parents. A company is made up of numerous persons unrelated to each other. Because Mankind is a race, it was possible for them to be redeemed by another Head of the Human race (Christ, the last Adam- 1Cor. 15:45). But angels were not created as a race. That is why if they fall, there is no possibility of redemption for them.

8. Therefore what do angels do? (1Peter 1:12)

CHRIST GLORIFIED

The suffering of Christ was not all that the prophets of old foresaw. They saw that the Christ would be glorified after His sufferings.

9. What was an aspect of Christ's triumphant glory after His suffering? (Col. 2:15)

10. Where did Christ position Himself after His suffering? (Luke 22:69; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1)

11. What did Christ anticipate happening soon after His sufferings? (Jn. 17:3)

We serve a risen, triumphant, all-conquering Christ who is presently seated on His throne, at the right hand of God Almighty.

Amen.

Study 6

LIVING THE WALK: HOLINESS IN MIND

First Peter 1:13-14

Christians are called to think differently. We are not called to be pessimists. Neither are we called to be optimists! We are called to be *realists*. The reality is, that God is in control. The reality is, that God will judge everyone. The reality is that Jesus Christ has saved us by His merit alone. The reality is that one day He will return for His church and destroy His enemies. This is not thinking optimistically, but realistically. Such is the power that our minds play in our lives, that we are instructed to discipline the way we think. In fact every transaction of our minds, eventually, if left unchecked, will affect the way we behave (Prov. 23:7 KJV). We use our minds to believe. We base our beliefs on the available information in our minds.

1. What did David want God to do in his prayer of Psalm 26:2?

DON'T BE AN EMPTY HEAD!

2. If we could take Jesus' statement to Peter as an indication of the two basic ways of thinking, what two basic ways of thinking are there? (Matt. 16:23)

3. What are we told to do with our minds in Mark 12:30?

4. What was necessary to happen before the disciples could understand what Jesus was saying to them? (Luke 24:45)

So important is the content of our minds, that the Bible instructs us in not only what shouldn't go into it, but also what should go into it (Phil. 4:8). In our Text, believers are instructed to prepare their *minds* for action. The implication is that something is going to happen - and time is running out.

RIGHT THINKING- RIGHT ACTIONS

The outflow of a mind that is obedient to God will be *self-control*. While it is true that *God* is transforming us, it is also true that *we* are expected to change. God's Word clearly shows us that we have a tremendous power at our disposal: *the power to choose*. God enables this power in us by offering His grace. That is, when presented with the offer of salvation, we must choose whether to accept it, or reject it - and He enables us to be able to choose to accept His offer.

5. What was a vital part of Paul's preaching to potential converts? (Acts 24:25)
-

Living God's way gives us the power to live self-controlled (Gal. 5:23). Peter later urges believers to live self-controlled (2Peter 1:6), thus implying that believers have the power to choose whether they will live for God or for themselves.

HOPE FULLY IN GOD'S GRACE

What the NIV renders *prepare your minds for action*, the Greek actually says something like- *gird up the loins of your minds*. This expression of "girding up the loins" was first used in the Old Testament.

6. Note the occasion of its use, and what was about to happen. (Ex. 12:11-14)
-

The Christians who Peter wrote to were under intense persecution. Perhaps the temptation might have been to ask God to judge these persecutors with His wrath. Perhaps they may have wondered if God really cared about them because they were persecuted so much. So, Peter encourages them to trust God, despite the circumstances. They were to be prepared for the return of Christ at any moment, thinking correctly, and to hope fully in God's grace. No matter what they were going through, God's grace was going to sustain them. Secondly, when Christ returns, He will judge all those who have rejected Him by persecuting His church (2Thess. 1:6-10).

BE CONFORMED TO, AND BE DEFORMED FROM

God's grace is available to the ignorant. This is probably most people. When Paul was evangelising Athens, he alluded to them as being ignorant (Acts 17:30). Therefore, he emphasized God's grace to those he considered ignorant.

7. While the Bible presents and emphasises grace to the ignorant, what does it present to those who wilfully, and in full understanding of the consequences, reject God's grace? (Mk. 3:29; Heb. 6:4-6)

8. What does Romans 12:1-3 urge?

There is a lot of subtle pressure on Christians to be conformed to the world's way of thinking. The world looks for salvation from its governments (note how much undeserved blame governments get). Christians don't think in terms of governments having all the answers. We believe that God has the answers. The world also looks for salvation from its employers, financial institutions, and social-welfare agencies. The way the world thinks about these things results in either praise or criticism. But the way the Christian thinks about these things should result in prayer and intercession.

WHAT DO YOU DESIRE?

When we were ignorant we were led astray by our desires (Rom. 6:12). Sin had corrupted us totally. Before we knew God, it was only His *prevenient* grace that restrained the extent to which we sinned (Rom. 5:20). Our evil desires often trapped us (Prov. 11:6).

9. What else does the Bible instruct us to do about evil desires? (Col. 3:5)

Our desires need to be God-centred (*Theo-centric*). As we focus on Christ's will for our lives (Christo-centric) our desires are replaced with *His* desires (Phil. 2:13). We will to do His will. Our desires become focussed on achieving God's purpose, not our lusts or ambitions. This is delighting ourselves in the Lord.

10. What does Psalm 37:4 promise to those who do this?

Amen.

Study 7

WE LIVE DIFFERENTLY

First Peter 1:15-17

Becoming a Christian didn't stop the moment you accepted Christ into your life. There are always new discoveries. The amazing thing about growing in the Christian walk, is just how simple the revelations God gives become. We desperately seek God and His will to be done in our lives. We cry out to hear His voice. But when He speaks He speaks in simple terms. The paradoxical thing about these simple revelations, is their profundity. There is a major revelation that God has revealed to us in His Word: *be like Me*. Sounds simple. Is paradox.

WHAT GOD IS

If asked to describe God, we might use words like- *big, powerful, old, loving, forgiving, clever* and so on. But how many people would include the descriptive word: *holy*? To be holy is to be special. But not just ordinary-special, but extraordinary-special. It means that it is not for common everyday use, but for special occasions. It was not to be treated as something familiar, but as something pure, reserved, and dedicated. Often God described the utensils in the Old Testament Tabernacle as *holy*. He also described Israel as holy. But most of all He describes Himself as holy.

1. What was the first thing that God dedicated as holy? (Gen. 2:3)

2. What happens to any area where God is? (Exodus 3:5)

BECOMING LIKE SWISS CHEESE

It appears that when God created Adam, He created him to be a holy being. Adam was *set apart* from other beings. He was *special*. He was *dedicated* to God. Sin

destroyed these three aspects of Adam's holiness. But through Christ we have a way back to holiness.

3. Note what Christ has done for us-

a) 1Cor. 1:2

b) 1Cor. 1:30

c) 2Tim. 1:9

God has called us to holiness. But this call is not just an empty divine wish. God has given us His Spirit to lead us into holiness. That is why He is known as the Holy Spirit. The more spiritual we become the more holy we become.

4. What does holy do to the Christian? (Ps. 96:9; 29:2)

Holiness is not legalism. It is not a matter of keeping external rules. It starts in the heart. It is the believer's voluntary pursuit of lifestyle that pleases God. Rather than asking God how much sin we can get away with, and still enjoy His grace, the believer seeking to live a godly life develops a hatred for sin. The issue is no longer *can I get away with this sin?*, but- *don't even let me be tempted to sin!* Thus the focus is not primarily against sin, as much as it is seeking to please God.

5. What does the Bible ask in Romans 6:1-3, and why?

GOD WILL JUDGE

The Christians response to God will be judged. In Second Corinthians 5, the Bible says that because we understand that we will be judged, and that causes us to live soberly, we are even more concerned about the lost who do not know God, because they will be judged severely. A good safeguard to ensuring a more pleasant Judgment Day for the believer is to make sure our hearts are clean before God now.

6. What prayer did the Psalmist utter in relation to his heart before God? (Ps. 26:2)

7. What aspect of our lives will come under scrutiny on the Day of our Judgment? (Mtt. 12:36)

8. What else will be judged about our lives, and what seems to be its purpose according to First Corinthians 3:12-15?

LIVE AS STRANGERS

Living a holy life will automatically set us apart. We will be different. The constant challenge we face in living a holy life, is that we don't confuse it with living a withdrawn life. We must live among unholy people. Our lives must remain faithful to God while under the scrutiny of unholy people.

9. What simple pursuit does the Bible present us with? (Eph. 5:10)

10. In our pursuit, we are told to relate to those in darkness in a certain way. What is this way, and how do we do it? (Eph. 5:11)

11. Read Romans 13. This chapter contains instructions for living like a holy stranger on this earth. Note some of the practical ways it mentions that we should relate to the unholy-
-

Part of our motivation for living like strangers here on earth, is that we are constantly aware that for everything we do, we must give an account. We live as if we were ready to meet the Lord at any time. May God grant us that we become more like Him: holy. Not just on the inside, but openly displayed to the world without yielding to the trap of legalism.

Amen.

Study 8

WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED

First Peter 1:18-21

To be redeemed means to be *bought back*. When Adam rebelled against God, he virtually sold the human race into sin. During the times of the Old Testament, God demonstrated to His people the seriousness of their sin and situation by detailing the requirements for sacrifices and offerings.

1. Did these Old Testament sacrifices redeem the people of God from their sin? (Heb. 10:4)
-

The purpose of Old Testament sacrifices was to constantly remind God's people that they needed redeeming (Heb. 10:3).

2. The picture of God's redemption is graphically portrayed in the Exodus. Note some of the ingredients of God's redemption for Israel (Ex. 6:6). Fill in the blanks-

Israel were _ _ **a** _ _ _ (typical of our bondage to this world's system of sin). They were in the land of _ **g** _ _ _ (typical of Satan's domain). After their redemption they would no longer be Egypt's property but the _ _ _ **d'** _ .

THE LAW COULD NOT REDEEM

If the Law could not redeem us, then what was its purpose? During the centre of the Reformation in Germany, Martin Luther was aggressively arguing that the purpose of the Law was not, and never was, a part of man's salvation. The basis of Luther's argument was Paul's teaching in Romans 7.

3. Note Romans 7:7, 13. This was the basis of Luther's argument. Can we see how Luther might have defined the purpose of the Law?
-

While the Old Testament Law plays a far less role in day-to-day living in our modern culture, a related attitude still prevails. This attitude is *redemption by works*. The belief that redemption could be earned by good works is a hang-over from the days of the Law. It still prevails today because mankind doesn't like to receive something for nothing. We always feel an obligation to pay for something we receive, or at least return the favour.

4. What is not the basis of redemption according to Ephesians 2:8-9?
-

5. What is the basis of our redemption according to Romans 3:24?
-

6. When Christ redeemed us, what privilege did we also receive? (Gal. 4:5)
-

We are no longer our own. We have been bought by God through Christ. We are now His slaves. Someone has once said that there is no freedom like the freedom experienced in being a slave of Christ.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

The Old Testament sacrifices and offerings could not redeem anyone. They were still treated as holy, divinely appointed ceremonies that pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. They were shadows of the Sacrifice to come. During the times of the Old Testament sacrifices, God revealed the true nature of blood.

7. Why was blood so important according to Leviticus 17:11?
-
-

A person's life is dependent on their blood. Perhaps it is the natural equivalent of our spiritual life (James 2:26). When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He was literally giving up His life.

8. Note the relationship between Christ's blood and our redemption. What is the relationship?

The highest day in the religious calendar of the Hebrews was the day of atonement. This was where one goat was slain, while another goat was released. The highest religious festival involving all the Hebrew people was the Passover. This feast involved a lamb, without blemish or defect, being sacrificed, then roasted, then eaten. This lamb typified Christ. Thus, John the Baptist announced Jesus to the waiting crowds as *Behold the Lamb of God*. Peter also calls Jesus the *Lamb of God*.

GOD'S ORIGINAL (ONLY) PLAN OF SALVATION

Christ is referred to as being chosen before the creation of the world. The New Testament makes it very clear that Christ was God's original plan of salvation.

9. When did God decide to save His people? (Ephesians 1:4)

10. When God decide to provide His Son for our salvation? (1 Peter 1:20)

Thus the system of animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant was a shadow of the salvation to come. God has always required faith and obedience. The Old Covenant sacrifices required this. The main difference between the faith of the Old Covenant

and the New, is that the faith required under the Law was anticipatory faith, while under the New it is commemorative faith. Our confidence in Christ's redemption of us is justified by His resurrection which sealed our redemption and gave us a sure hope.

Amen.

Study 9

WHAT LOVE MEANS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

First Peter 1:22

Becoming a Christian isn't an isolated solitary event. It automatically means that you are related to others who have also done the same. But not as a fellow member of an institution, but as a fellow member of a community. But this community of Christians is more than just an association of like-minded people who deliberately meet with each other. It is a community that stands out from all other communities. *It is the community of the redeemed. It is the community of the forgiven.* Those who don't know Christ are neither redeemed nor forgiven. While most people who accept that there is a God, consider Him to be a forgiving God, they have never sought or received that forgiveness that they instinctively know is available.

1. Why did God redeem us? (Rom. 5:8)

2. Why did God send Jesus into this world? (Jn. 3:16)

Now that we have been forgiven and redeemed, we are called to live differently. In fact, the way we used to live doesn't hold the same attractiveness to us any more. The way we used to treat people no longer seems appropriate now because of the way that God has treated us.

3. What is one of the main principles by which we are to relate to others now? (Mtt. 6:14-15; 18:21-22)
-

BY THIS WE MUST PURIFY OURSELVES

God's Word is the truth. Peter commends these saints for obeying the truth. The result of them obeying the truth was that they were to have sincere love for each other.

4. What other kind of "loves" can we have for others?
-
-
-

By loving others we take the focus off ourselves and thus purify ourselves of ourselves. We love others by our actions as well as with warm feelings. We listen to what others are saying and respond with kindness. We take an interest in people that goes beyond exchanging greetings.

5. People are funny creatures. They have highs and lows. How are we to relate to our brothers and sisters during such times? (Rom. 12:15)
-
-
-

In Jesus, we have the perfect example of how to love. Not once did He ever say that He loved! (Although He did say that He had compassion for people [Matt. 15:32]). His love for people was a demonstrated love.)

6. What kind of love does the Scripture command us to have? (1Jn. 3:17-18)



This is a principle: feelings follow actions. This is another principle: you reap what you sow. In both principles the initiative begins with us, not someone else.

7. At what times is it hard for us to love others?

LOVE DISPLAYS UNITY

Christ's love sets the Christian community apart as evidence that there is a God who can intervene in human affairs. Surely this world needs to know that there is God who loves them deeply. Surely we need to be the community of God's people who display this love, firstly to each other then to the world.

8. Is it right to show preference to other Christians over non-Christians? (Gal. 6:10)

10. What promise did Jesus make in reference to believers loving each other? (Jn. 17:22-26)

It's often the little things that we can do for each other that end up meaning a lot. Small acts of kindness can sway even the hardest of hearts.

11. What can heal a relationship, or even prevent damage to one? (Prov. 10:12; 17:9; 1Peter 4:8)
-

Perhaps another way of translating the expression love one another from the heart is to say don't just love theoretically, but show your compassion in practical ways. Men, look for opportunities to love the children of single mothers (who may not have a male role model), or perhaps help out with maintenance of a car, house or other machinery. Ladies, look for opportunities to help young mums with new children, who may need a break or a hand. Young people, look for opportunities to help another young person, perhaps in making friends, or in doing some task. Maybe there is an elderly person who would appreciate the friendship of a young person. Whatever we do, may God help us to do it in love.

Amen.

Study 10

LIFE IS SHORT YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

First Peter 1:23-25

One of the greatest dangers in life is that people only ever see this life as the total of their existence. Jesus made it plain that there is another existence. He claimed to have come from Heaven to be born as a man (Jn. 3:31). He also claimed that He would return to Heaven after His time on earth (Jn. 14:2, 4). Therefore, if Christ can be trusted, we can live forever in Heaven after we die.

HOW TO QUALIFY FOR THE ULTIMATE HOLIDAY

Again if Jesus can be trusted, not everyone is automatically guaranteed entry into Heaven.

1. What is the condition for entry into Heaven? (Jn. 3:3)

Becoming a Christian means a new beginning. It is a radically different way of living. No longer do we live for ourselves, but now we live for God.

2. What does God do with our past when we accept His salvation? (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12; 10:17)

3. In reality, what do we deserve for our lifestyle of sin? (Jer. 14:10; Isa. 13:11; Romans 6:23)

4. What was our certain destiny before we surrendered to God? (Rev. 21:8)

FLOWERS FADE

Christianity is not a fad. It is based on something that is imperishable, living and enduring. No matter how much attack the Word of God comes under, it endures. Despite accusations of its ineffectiveness from its enemies, it continues to effectively change lives. The Word of God is truth that endures. Men have from time to time showed their ignorance by claiming to have evidence that God's Word is inaccurate or merely the concoctions of men, only to be humiliated when new discoveries verified the Word of God's account. For example, critics claimed that the accounts of Abraham could not be true because the civilisation of that era had no written languages. Then archaeologists discovered what is now known as the Weld Dynastic Prism (pictured below) which detailed Sumerian (Babylonian) history up to ten generations prior to the Flood.



Impression made by a cylinder-seal engraved with a scene representing two figures seated by the side of a sacred tree, or date palm; behind the figure on the left is a serpent. It has been suggested that this scene refers to a Babylonian version of the Temptation of Eve, but no cuneiform text in support of this view is known. This was found in 1922 and dates back to 2000 BC.

5. What is it that is sown into a person's heart that causes them to be born again? (1Peter 1:23)

6. Who causes this seed to sprout?

7. But not all people respond to this seed. What reasons did Jesus give for this? (Mk. 4:14-22)

LIFE IS SHORT

Unfortunately its perhaps only a tragedy where a life is suddenly lost that we are starkly reminded that life is short. None of us are guaranteed even our next heart beat. We must make sure that we have peace with God before we die.

8. What does the psalmist ask God to do for him? (Ps. 39:4; 90:12)

Mankind has only one hope: to accept God's Word. There is no other gospel, no other saviour, no other God, that can save - only the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Peter reminds the believers of this truth by highlighting to them that this is exactly what happened to them. And because this has happened to us, we should have a burden to reach those around us.

Amen.

Study 11

DON'T HATE, DON'T LIE, DON'T NEGLECT THE WORD

First Peter 2:1-3

Decisions. We all make them. Even not making a decision is making a decision. The fact that we can make decisions reinforces the notion that God has created us with the power to choose. Perhaps every step we take in life is based on the *choices and decisions* we make. Becoming a Christian involved a choice and a decision.

1. Observe Colossians 2:6. What relationship does a person's original conversion have to their on-going walk with the Lord?

2. What kind of conversion is God looking for in people? (Psalm 119:2; Jer. 24:7; Matthew 22:37)

Jesus told a parable of seed sown in four kinds of soil. Each different kind of soil resulted in different levels of success. The soil that was open, broken and moist was the soil that bore the best crop. In the same way Jesus was making two points. Firstly, as evangelists of His gospel, we can expect mixed results. Secondly, He was saying that we can respond to God's Word in different ways.

OUR HEARTS ARE OUR FARMS

A grain farmer must maintain his soil. It is his livelihood. He knows how to irrigate it. He knows how to rest it. He knows how to sow it. But he also needs to be able to prepare it for sowing. When he rests his land, it is called fallow land.

3. What relationship does God make to a farmer's fallow land, and the preparation required in our hearts in order to be fruitful for Him, in Hosea 10:12?

4. But before the farmer can plant in his fallow ground, he must do something. What did God tell Jeremiah to do that resembles this task of the farmer? (Jer. 1:10)

Just as our hearts are like a farmer's field, they are also susceptible to weeds and other foreign things that take root. Peter mentions five things that specifically may have taken root in believers' lives. Note these five deadly weeds and discuss how they might be planted in a heart -

Malice _____

Deceit _____

Hypocrisy _____

Envy _____

Slander _____

Along with these things that take root in our lives, the New Testament also mentions some others- bitterness (Heb. 12:15), and the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10).

5. In First Peter 2:1, who does Peter say is responsible for the removal of these weeds from our lives?

FILL THE VOID

The process of ridding ourselves of these weeds is supplemented by replacing them with something that is fruitful.

6. What are believers told to replace these things with by craving for something instead? (1Pt 2:2)

7. What is the aim of this craving? (1Peter 2:2)

Salvation is being born again. But it is also an ongoing experience. Just as when a baby is born, there was growth that made that possible, and that same kind of growth continues in the life of that baby after they're born, so with our conversion. When we become a new Christian, we are born again and we are like spiritual babies. Our first cravings are for milk. Our spiritual milk is knowledge of the Word of God.

Our salvation gives us a taste that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). This motivates us on to maturity. We need to have the milk of the Word to nourish us onto spiritual maturity where we crave for the meat of God's Word. May we be like a tree planted by streams of living water as we meditate day and night on God's Word and obey what we read.

Amen.

Study 12

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH BUILDING PROGRAMME

First Peter 2:4-8

When Christ was incarnate (in the flesh) on earth, He was involved in making things. He was a trained carpenter, a builder. When He spoke to His disciples about His dream for the Church, He spoke about it in building terms. He used words like foundation and good materials to illustrate this.

1. The Church is described as a building. But it contains unique features. Note these-

a) Foundation- (Matt. 16:18; 1Cor. 3:11)

b) Door- (Jn. 10:7, 9)

c) Wise building practices- (Matt. 7:24)

Driving down Burwood Road, near Ferntree Gully, one will see a Lutheran church with the sign out the front reading- *the place where the church meets*. A church is not made of bricks and mortar.

2. According to our text, what is the church made of?

CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE

The cornerstone of a building determined its direction and structural stability. It was the foundational stone of a building, just as important as the foundations itself. Christ described Himself as a Stone on several occasions (note- Matt. 21:42; Rom. 9:33). The implication was that He was the Cornerstone.

3. What difference will building upon *the Stone* make to a person's life?
(Matthew 7:24-25)
-

Christ was the chosen plan of God to commence the rebuilding of mankind's relationship with God. Several times the Scriptures predicted that men would reject this "Cornerstone" (or "Capstone" NIV). As such, Christ gave a stern warning to those who were rejecting Him.

4. What was both Christ's plea, and warning found in Matthew 21:44?
-

5. Christ was aware of His rejection by men. He gave some comforting words to His followers in Matthew 10:17-25. What were these words?
-

A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

With Christ as the Foundation Stone, God is building a spiritual house with His people as the building stones. But these stones are not like other building stones.

5. What is the one outstanding characteristic of these building stones according to verse 5?
-

This is no mere institution that Christ is building. It is living! It involves people. Therefore, it is unpredictable. There are no problems in Christ's Church- only challenges. And every challenge is caused by people. In order for Christ to build His Church with living stones, He has to do some preparatory work to each of His living stones. Rough edges need to be smoothed. Odd shapes need to be refigured. Sharp critical tongues need to be turned into sweet encouraging ones. Gifts once used for the Devil or self, are re-worked and re-directed into the service of Christ. Talents are maximised. Independence gives way to co-operation. Pride is put (beaten) to death. Mortar is put between each of the stones to bind them together. Each stone supports the structure and makes the other stones look good. Each member of the Body of Christ compliments the other.

A HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Every believer is a priest! Christ is our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1)!

The Old Covenant's system of the Levitical priesthood ended at Golgotha. A priest was someone who stood between men and God. Now there is only one Person who has this honor: Jesus, our High Priest. We now have direct access to God because of Him. We are therefore- priests, holy priests. Some refer to this truth as the priesthood of all believers. It was one of the elementary points of the Reformation that every believer could access God without the need of a priest or ecclesiastical institution (such as the Roman Church). In First Peter 2:5, the Scriptures expose the extent of Christ's work on the cross. Not only are we saved, but we are now brought near to God (Eph. 2:13).

6. Consequently, how can we now approach God? (Hebrews 4:16)

Amen.

Study 13

THE PEOPLE OF GOD WITH PURPOSE

First Peter 2:9-10

While the saying “*saved to serve*” is true, it is not *entirely* true. We are saved to do more than just serve! Even our salvation was not some random incident in the cosmic events of the universe. It was sovereignly planned by Christ. We are a *chosen* people. Now that we have responded to our choosing, we are a *royal priesthood*, a *holy nation* and a *special people* belonging to God.

1. What purpose of our salvation is mentioned here in First Peter 2:9?

We are called to be a people of praise. Our praises to God should not be dry and formal. Not after what God has done for us! He has delivered us from eternal darkness and brought us into His glorious light. Our praise is therefore an expression of thanks. To the Hebrew, thanks was expressed not necessarily by direct contact with the one to whom thanks is owed, rather, it was expressed by telling someone else what the person had done. In a similar way, we give thanks to God, not only by directly showing our appreciation, but also by telling *others* what God has done for us.

CALLED BY GOD

Has God called everyone? This is not a simple question. The Scriptures implore God's people to reach out to those who don't know God. This would seem a strange thing to command if these same people had no possibility of being saved. Yet the Scriptures speak of those who have accepted God's salvation as though God had appointed it.

2. Note the implication of Proverbs 1:20-24. Does it appear that God calls generally, or specifically?
-

The implication of saying that God calls specifically, is what the Reformers called, *Irresistible Grace*. They believed that Scripture taught that those God was calling to be saved He was also enabling to believe, repent, and follow Him. In this sense, becoming a Christian is merely an intellectual exercise. Rather, it transforms a person's heart through *regeneration* (being "born again"). Thus, while someone may claim to be a Christian, then later reject the Gospel, they may never have actually experienced the kind of inner transformation that the Gospel alone can bring when the Holy Spirit saves a soul.

3. How does this compare, though, with Acts 13:48?
-

In either case, we should be even more grateful to God that He has called us and saved us. We need to do whatever it takes to reach those who do not know Him.

CALLED TO DECLARE

We have seen that God has called us to be a holy priesthood (1Peter 2:5). Now Peter calls believers a royal priesthood. One of the main responsibilities of a priest, was to offer sacrifices.

4. In 1Peter 2:5, Peter says that believers offer spiritual sacrifices. What form do these spiritual sacrifices take, based on verse 9? (note also- Psalm 54:6; Heb. 13:15)
-

Our praises are motivated by our salvation. When God saved us, He transferred us from darkness to light. This has two basic implications about the way we live. Firstly, it means we are going to see things differently. No longer are we blind to the things of the enemy. This is not the case with the world (Rom. 2:19; 2Cor. 4:4; 2Peter 1:9; 1Jn. 2:11; Rev. 3:17).

Secondly, because we can now see where we are going, we live differently. The way we live is often referred to as our walk. Therefore, the Scriptures encourage us to walk appropriately (Eph 5:8; 1Jn. 1:7).

5. Note the passage in Ephesians 5:8. How does it say we should walk in the light in the following verses (verses 9-13)?

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Under the Old Covenant, God chose a small nation to be His people. He required these people to reflect His character to the world. They were bonded together by blood. They were all descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (and then one of the twelve tribes). As they strayed and eventually rejected God, God prophesied that He would indeed have a nation of people all to Himself. But this nation of people would not be bonded by their blood relationships. God would make a people from those who had not previously been a people (Hosea 1:10).

6. Who does Peter say these people are?

7. As the people of God, what is a benefit that we enjoy that once belonged to the natural nation of Israel? (Gal. 3:28-29)

Amen.

Study 14

BE OBJECTS OF PAGAN ADMIRATION

First Peter 2:11-12



Much imaginative dribble has been taught about spiritual warfare. Suggestions of believers entering into cosmic battles with spirits of a varying degree of demonic intensity has been presented as the essence of spiritual warfare by some popular preachers. This is despite the Bible clearly stating what the grounds of true spiritual warfare are. Rather than warring with some external powers, the Scriptures reveal that the main battle-front is actually internal.

1. Where does James say that "wars" start? (James 4:1)

2. Paul also talks about our warfare in Galatians 5:16-24. What does he see as warring against the Christian?

Peter's solution to this warfare was to abstain from fleshly lusts. He doesn't say that a believer should battle with these things. He says that a believer should keep away from these things! Abstain not only means keep away from, but it also means to hold back from, as well. We must hold ourselves back from entertaining temptation. Jesus taught His followers to pray to God that they would not even be led into temptation (Matt. 6:13). This shows us how serious God regards the threat of sin against His children.

3. Note what things the Bible tells believers to specifically abstain from-

- a) Acts 15:20 _____
- b) 1Thess. 4:3 _____
- c) 1Thess. 5:22 _____

LIVE THE TALK

How can we increase our chances of winning our lost community to the Lord? Peter is about to state a principle of Christian living that vitally affects our evangelism. He will repeat this principle further in his letter. The principle is simply: *actions speak louder than words*. Some Christians have failed to recognise the value of *Christian works* in evangelism. Often they are heard describing an area as too hard for the gospel. But no area is too hard for the gospel. Especially if we apply this principle that Peter is going to elaborate on.

4. What similar thought is contained in Matthew 5:16?

A person's message is either verified or disqualified by their conduct. Proverbs 20:11 says that even a child's true character is known by their conduct, while Proverbs 21:8 says that the innocent are proven to be such by their conduct. Paul urged the Philippians to conduct themselves in accordance with the Gospel (Phil. 1:27).

5. What does the Scripture tell believers to do to each other in regard to this? (Heb. 10:24)

6. How are Christians described in 2Corinthians 3:3?

AMONG PAGANS

Our conduct is constantly being scrutinised by the world. When our conduct reflects Christ in us, people notice it. We don't talk like them. We don't spend our time like they do. We don't laugh at the same things they find funny. We feel compassion for those that the world is rejecting. We display loyalty and respect. We reflect a life that is untroubled by the uncertainties in life.

7. Note 1Peter 2:12.

a) What should unbelievers see or observe in us?

b) What will this cause them to do?

c) This is despite them doing what?

If we want to emasculate our evangelism, then we should lead lives that disgrace the teaching of Christ. If we want to advance the kingdom of God into our community we should take careful heed to how we live our lives. May God both help us and make to change into a people that delight Him in our conduct and evangelism.

Amen.

Study 15

SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

First Peter 2:13-17

When Pilate asked Christ "So you are a king then?" Christ had just told Pilate of His kingdom (Jn. 18:36-37). The occasion for Him doing so, was in total submission to Pilate's authority. Christ's reason for doing this seems to suggest that we are just strangers on this planet, and as such we should respect its authority. Christ said that if this was not the case, His followers would have taken up arms and resisted rather than submit to it (Jn. 18:36). So, even though it cost Christ His life, He lived a life that reflected submission to the authorities of this world. This was consistent with His teaching also.

1. Note the following instructions from Christ-

a) Matthew 23:3

b) Matthew 22:21

2. To whom does Peter say that Christians should submit? (1Peter 2:13-14)

3. Peter also gives a reason for submitting. What is this reason? (vs. 13)

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

Clearly the greatest example of submission to authority in the Old Testament is David. Despite a corrupt, evil king, David recognised that it was God who placed people into positions of responsibility. He often referred to Saul as the Lord's anointed (1Sam. 24:6). As such, he refused to harm or even speak against Saul. On several occasions David had opportunity to kill him, but chose to rather show his loyalty to Saul by not killing him.

4. Why did David submit himself so thoroughly to King Saul?

The nations of the world relate to each other on a daily basis through their embassies. Their embassies are headed by ambassadors. These ambassadors represent the country which appointed them. If someone slanders the nation's ambassador, they were slandering the nation which he represented. Also, if someone slandered the nation which the ambassador represented, they were also slandering the ambassador. In a similar way, God has appointed ambassadors.

5. To what extent (in what areas, "spiritual" only?) has God appointed leadership? (Rom. 13:1-5)

6. The Apostle Peter wrote his epistle at a time when Christians were increasingly looked at with suspicion. How does he advise believers to conduct themselves in First Peter 2:13-15 and what does he say this will help to achieve?

While Peter was urging followers of Christ to be loyal, law-abiding citizens who submitted to the State, this injunction did not over-ride the believer's obligation to obey God even though a government authority may forbid it.

7. Read Acts 5:25-33. This is a narrative about the author of First Peter. Discuss how he 'submitted' to the ruling authorities. (Note also his message to those in authority and discuss what this reveals about his heart.)

AVOID ANTINOMIANISM!

The New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek word for "law" is *nomos*. Thus, the English word, *antinomianism* means *against the law*. The epistle of James was written very early in the first century to address this emerging problem within the Church. It arose out of a misunderstanding of God's grace. If salvation was all due to God's grace and not at all determined by our *good* works, they reasoned, then neither would our bad works (sin) disqualify us from salvation once we had received God's saving grace.

8. Reading First Peter 2:16 and discuss how Peter responded to this still present heresy some twenty years later.

It is perhaps difficult for us Westerners to appreciate everything the New Testament teaches about being in a New Covenant community (the local church). Our individualism is a dominant cultural trait and is reflected in our action-hero movies, our pop idols, and our shallow obsession with "celebrities". This all makes it very difficult for us to appreciate what the New Testament describes of the church *community*.

9. Apart from honouring the King, how does First Peter 2:17 effect how we as believers relate to one another within our local church? What does this verse teach us about resolving conflict with another believer in our church fellowship?

Amen.

Study 16

GODLINESS IN THE WORKPLACE

First Peter 2:18-20

Perhaps the majority of the first Gentile Christians were slaves. This is deduced from the fact that all of Paul's epistles, except Second Corinthians and Philippians, indicate there was the existence of slavery. The New Testament does not endorse slavery, it merely gives principles to both slaves and masters for living a God-glorifying life. The issue of a slave living a Christ-like life was probably made a lot easier when their master was kind and benevolent. Hopefully the kindest and most benevolent masters were the Christian slave owners! Surely a slave could expect justice and fairness from a Christian master. But what if their master was not a Christian? How were they to respond to an owner who made unfair demands upon them? And what about the Christian slave? How were they to respond to a cruel non-Christian owner? Today the issue is not slavery. But the principles of employer and employee relations are the same.

CHRIST AND SLAVERY

Imagine how Christ must have felt when He walked among people who were perhaps ignorantly doing things that deeply hurt His Father's heart. One of the most curious things about Christ was that He didn't say more than He did! He could have addressed nearly every area of life. He could have shown people all that was wrong, why it was wrong and the eternal consequences for doing this wrong. Maybe we don't appreciate the cultural setting of the New Testament enough to realise the significance of Christ not saying much about slavery. The danger is that we interpret Christ's *silence* as His *endorsement*.

1. Christ referred to His limited amount of statements and assured His followers that He would reveal more to them than what He had been able to communicate in His three and a half years with them. How was He going to do this? (Jn. 16:13-14)

2. Christ did not endorse the concept of slavery. But it seems He did extol it as a desirable attitude for what type of people? (Matt. 20:27)

The same is true today. We can confuse Christ's silence for His endorsement. Or, even more common, we confuse His blessing for His endorsement (Matt. 5:45). Let us not become conceited when we allow compromise into our lives and God's blessing still seems to be with us.

CHRIST IS OUR EXAMPLE

The goal of every believer is to live like Christ. We can imitate Christ's character no matter what role we play in society. One of the essential aspects of Christ's character was how He handled suffering. His suffering was totally undeserved. It was not His fault. Peter uses this aspect of Christ's character to illustrate to slaves how they should display the character of Christ in the work-place.

3. According to the principle that Peter is employing (*imitate Christ*), how does he say slaves should conduct themselves towards their masters? (1Peter 2:18)

The first apostles viewed it as an honour to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). Being a Christian in the first century almost always guaranteed a believer that there would be some suffering involved. But the New Testament distinguishes between two types of suffering. The first kind is suffering that is warranted (or justifiable) as a form of punishment.

4. Note Romans 13:1-5. What does Paul have to say about those who suffer at the hands of authorities?

Fred has been a Christian since his early youth. He went to a Christian school. After finishing his final year at secondary school he got a job. At first he was keen and motivated to be able to have a job where he could be a witness to all the non-Christian employees. The bosses were very impressed with Fred. He arrived early, stayed back late, and put in extra effort to make the job that much better. Fred was also challenging the other employees about Jesus. "Unless you give your heart to Christ", Fred was often heard saying, "you can not go to heaven when you die."

Then Fred's incredible enthusiasm for the job began to wane. Occasionally he would arrive late because he had had such a late night at the mid-week Bible study the night before. Then his Christian friends began regularly dropping into Fred's work-place and talking to him for up to half an hour at a time. Because Fred's church was holding a daytime Bible school and he began taking "sickies" so he could attend some of these special classes. Eventually Fred's employer called him into the office. He loudly told Fred that his work performance was terrible and that he was close to being sacked. Fred left the boss' office feeling miserable. That night at the mid-week Bible-study he asked for prayer. "The persecution at work is becoming unbearable", he shared, "They're threatening me with the sack now because I'm a Christian!"

5. Imagine Fred was at this Bible Study. How would you counsel Fred using First Peter 2:20?

The comforting thought about verse 20 is that God will use employers to sharpen our character. When we grow slack, as all employees tend to do, our supervisors are there to spur us back to peak performance. Sometimes this is achieved by a harsh rebuke. Sometimes this is achieved by a gentle word. In either case it is a necessary part of a manager's duties. The other aspect of work-place friction is that God is fully aware of those situations where the treatment of His people is unjustified. When we are being given a hard time at work for simply being a Christian, and we are sure that our work performance is more than acceptable, we can rest in the knowledge that we are not working for our employer, but for someone else.

6. Whom do we work for? (Col. 3:22-23)

We may even feel that our careers are being hampered because of our Christianity. But this need not be the case. Remember Joseph, Daniel and others all the reached the top of their "industry" and served God whole-heartedly. Being successful in a career or job is not sinful. We need more successful Christians in business, industry, politics, and management.

7. Ultimately where does job promotion come from? (Psalm 75:6-7)

Amen.

Study 17

NO RETALIATION FOR INSULTS

First Peter 2:21-25

"I wish I hadn't said that!" How many times have we all thought that? Usually we do so after having earlier just had an argument or shouting match with someone. Even though Christ used strong words against those who were opposed to Him, He never lowered Himself to a mere exchange of insults.

1. What characteristic of a person qualifies them to be perfect according to James 3:2? (Pr. 17:27)

2. How does Proverbs 10:19 describe someone who guards what they say?

WORDS ARE POWER

The old saying says that sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. The only problem with this is that words do hurt. In fact, words can often hurt more than physical inflictions.

3. Words are power. What example of the power of words do the following Scriptures give?

a) Proverbs 12:25 _____

b) Proverbs 15:1 _____

c) Proverbs 25:11 _____

4. How did Jesus describe His words? (Jn. 6:63)
-

We are created in the image of a God who spoke the worlds into existence (Heb. 11:3). We have a degree of this creative ability invested in us (because we are created in His image). This is most apparent in the relationship between words and imagination. In some cultures (eg. American Indians), the imagination is considered more real than the tangible. With words we can create things in the imaginations of others. Novelists use this ability. Film producers use this ability. Politicians use this ability. Psychologists use this ability. Creating things with words is an ability we all take for granted. The most positive affect that words can have, is to create faith in people's hearts (Rom. 10:17). This is why God has entrusted to us the responsibility of sharing Christ with others through the use of words.

CHRIST SUFFERED INSULTS

We know that Christ was physically inflicted with pain. But He was also mocked (Matt. 27:29; Lk. 22:63). Jesus even told His disciples that He would be mocked and insulted (Lk. 18:32). We need to note the response of Christ to these unfair insults.

5. In fact, Peter says that we need to do more than just note them. What are we to do with the example that Jesus set in regard to handling insults? (First Peter 2:21)
-
-

DISCUSSION SCENARIO

You've had a hard and trying day. You come home to hear your partner complaining about something you forgot to do. This isn't the first time they have done this. You know that they aren't interested in the reason why. They then proceed to angrily state that you must be loosing your grip on reality because this isn't the first time you've done this. Your blood pressure is rising with each insult. "You're hopeless! I don't know why I put up with this! Haven't you got a brain!" And then you...

6. Based firstly on the principle in First Peter 2:21, how should you respond?

PEOPLE CAN BE CRUEL

A gracious Christians was once heard remarking in response to hearing of some wicked person's actions- "There go I, but for the grace of God!". The implication being, that even the best person is contaminated with sin, and is able to commit the most vile acts of wickedness. The fact that some people don't act wickedly has more to do with God's grace, than it does with natural human goodness (Rom. 3:10, 23; Titus 2:11)! So we are not surprised when people act wickedly. Occasionally these people will act cruelly toward us. Our response to their treatment will be a test of our godly character.

7. How did Jesus teach in Matthew 5:39 that we should respond to acts of cruelty against us?

8. How did Jesus lead the way in *showing* us how to respond to acts of cruelty against us?

(1Peter 2:23) _____

CHRIST WAS MORE THAN AN EXAMPLE

Most people, despite their religious backgrounds, acknowledge that Christ was a great man. They may even acknowledge that He did bring a *degree* or *type* of salvation, though it was definitely not the only provision of salvation that "God" has revealed to mankind. As such, they view Christ's sacrifice of Himself as nothing

more than a noble example to all who seek to find the path to salvation. When Jesus said that He was *the* way to God (John 14:6), He actually meant that He was *one of the ways* to God, they claim.

9. But how does 1Peter 2:24 refute this?

10. Compare Isaiah 53:5 with the last part of First Peter 2:24. How do they differ?

Writing to slaves who had possibly been sorely treated by their masters, these words of Peter would have been most appropriate. While having every understandable right to feel bitterness toward their cruel masters who may have physically whipped them, they are reminded of Christ's attitude and then pronounced healed because of Christ.

11. What could this *healing* for Christian slaves encompass?

Allowing bitterness and hatred to enter a believer's heart, is a sure sign of a soul drifting away from the Lordship and character of Christ. By renouncing such things and showing genuine loyalty and submission to authority, despite their treatment of us, we are *returning to the Great Guardian and Shepherd of our souls*.

Amen.

Study 18

UNSAVED HUSBANDS

First Peter 3:1-6

Peter is about to continue his theme of *actions speak louder than words* by turning his attention to marriages. He has already applied this theme to Christian citizens and their relationship to the Empire, Christian slaves and their relationship with their non-Christian masters, and now he addresses the wives of unsaved husbands. Curiously, Christianity has always attracted more women than men. What we observe today in most churches generally was also true in the first century church: *many women have become believers while their husbands have not*. Perhaps one of the reasons why women more readily accept the Gospel is that the Christian message is transmitted by two very appealing means to a woman. Firstly, *words*. Women are generally wordier than men. Secondly, *relationships*. By far the majority of people who come to faith and obedience in Christ do so because of a relationship with a believer. Women are more likely to have more relationships which are more meaningful than what most men have. Added to this, women are far more likely to share their faith in Christ with others because women are far more likely to share with another generally. And women are also generally more expressive and transparent with their feelings than men which means that they are more likely to confess their sin and acknowledge their need for a Saviour. But once a woman commits her life to Christ, when her husband has not, she is faced with a dilemma: *to whom does her first loyalty lay (Christ or her husband)?*

1. How do the following Scriptures instruct wives about relating to their husbands?
 - a) Ephesians 5:22 _____
 - b) Colossians 3:18 _____
 - c) First Peter 3:1 _____

To *submit* means *to render obedience to*. Husbands are instructed to lead their wives as Christ leads the Church. The basis of this is *love*. Husbands are to love their wives and this involves the husband bearing the responsibility to *lead* his wife.

God's plan for marriage and the relationship between a husband and a wife was first seen in Eden when He charged Adam with the responsibility of leading, protecting, caring for, and providing for his wife Eve. Eve was to be a support to her husband and *together* they were equipped to withstand the Enemy. This is still the pattern for marriage today, that the husband bears responsibility for leading, protecting, and providing which is why the New Testament still calls wives to *submit* to their husbands. But what if a believing wife's husband is not a believer?

2. Consider again First Peter 3:1. Does *submission* or being *subject to* imply that there is *agreement* or *disagreement* between a believing wife and her non-believing husband. Explain.

The wife of an unsaved husband was to render loyalty to her husband without forsaking her loyalty Christ. Her submission to her husband should not be undermined. Doing so would place her outside of God's order and subsequently blessing for her life. Naturally though, the wife of an unsaved husband seeks two basic things: *her own spiritual growth and the salvation of her husband (his spiritual growth)*. To achieve the first objective the wife must be careful not to move outside of her husband's authority, because (despite him not being a Christian) he is still the *spiritual* head of his household. God's order is still to be honoured even if a husband has not surrendered to Christ.

3. According to First Peter 3:1-2, how can the wife of an unsaved husband have the best chance of seeing her husband come to Christ?

Many wives of unsaved husbands do themselves a dis-service in their evangelising of their husbands when they continually preach *at* them. Peter says that unsaved husbands should *see* Christ in their wives. Many years ago, David Pawson visited Australia on a preaching tour. He had many wives of unsaved husbands request prayer for their husbands' salvation. Instead of praying for them, he counselled them to stay at home with their husbands on a Sunday rather than going to Church (much to the dismay of the local pastors). He based his counsel to these women on

First Peter 3. When David Pawson returned to Australia twelve months later he revisited these churches. At every church he returned to, women came to him to thank him for his advice and to introduce him to their husbands (who were now saved)! Previously these husbands had felt that Church and Christianity was a wedge between their relationship with their Christian wife. When these wives had opted to spend time with their unsaved husbands rather than at Church, it de-threatened their husbands and open them up to the Gospel, and eventually coming to church themselves.

INNER BEAUTY

Peter advises women to make the pursuit of *inner* beauty a higher priority than beautifying their outside appearance. That is, their real beauty should not merely be superficial. Does this mean that women should *only* look plain?

4. Does First Peter 3:3 instruct women not to wear beautiful clothes or adornments? Discuss and explain.

5. What are the things that Peter tells women to adorn themselves with?
(1Peter 3:4)

6. According to verse 5, how did women of old make themselves beautiful?

"The outstanding wives of the Old Testament times, particularly Abraham's wife Sarah, are introduced as an example or parallel to inspire Christian wives. These women enjoyed a privileged status as members of God's chosen people; they were *holy*. They learnt for themselves to make the God of Israel their confidence and

hope ... Their lives were adorned by those desirable characteristics of personal conduct, particularly in relation to their husbands, namely, submission, active well-doing and freedom from panic and alarm."

Alan M. Stibbs' Commentary on First Peter

To make the point about submitting to *unworthy* husbands, Peter reminds wives about how Sarah submitted to her husband, Abraham. On numerous occasions Abraham made some terrible mistakes in his judgments and choices. But Sarah still submitted to Abraham despite this. Does this mean that Sarah withheld her differences of opinion from her husband? Hardly! We remember the incident involving Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21). Sarah told Abraham that she wanted him to cast out Ishmael and his mother Hagar (Gen. 21:10). Abraham strongly disagreed (Gen. 21:11).

7. Who did God tell Abraham to listen to in the midst of this circumstance?
(Genesis 21:12)

Despite her willing submission, Sarah was always free to discuss her differences with her husband. As Peter points out, because Sarah submitted to her husband, she enjoyed God's blessing on her life. At times this required her to have faith. Her submission to Abraham did not give him licence to abuse her (as perhaps many women fear if they were to submit to their husband). Submission is only needed when there is *disagreement*. It does not mean that a woman should *submit* to her husband's mistreatment - especially if it's physical. This would be a clear violation of a husband's marriage vows to his wife.

as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

First Peter 3:6

Amen.

Study 19

A WORD TO HUSBANDS

First Peter 3:7

Much attention is usually drawn to the Bible's statement to women that they should submit to their husbands. In proportion, much less attention is given to the instructions directed towards husbands. Marriage is so foundational to society, and even life itself, that it is presented as the only standard for a life-long relationship between a man and a woman. When a marriage is out of God's order, there is always strife. Although marriage is a two-way commitment, it is the husband who bears the *greater* responsibility for the flavour of the marriage. God's Word says that he needs to treat his wife in a certain way. If he fails to do this, it will affect even his relationship with God.

MAKE HER YOUR CROWNING JOY

Having just instructed wives to be submissive to their husbands (even undeserving ones), Peter now instructs husbands to firstly treat their wives in a certain way.

1. How does he say that husbands should treat their wives? (vs 7)

The Greek literally reads that husbands are to dwell with their wives *with knowledge*. This means that husbands must get to *know* to their wives. They must know them in the sense that they understand them, and use that knowledge to be considerate of them. It goes beyond merely knowing things about your wife, although it starts with this, and embraces the notion of knowing how your wife would be *feeling*. It is often said that men are moved by logic, and women are moved by emotions.

2. A wife can be one of two things to a husband according to Proverbs 12:4. What are they?

3. How does Colossians 3:19 command husbands to treat their wives?

HONOUR & RESPECT

Men are created with a capacity to withstand stress and pressure. We assume this from the fact that God ordained the man to be the *head* of their house (Eph. 5:23). Husbands should not expect their wives to carry burdens that God has ordained their husband to carry. We note that God commanded Adam to work the earth to support his wife (Gen. 3:17-19). Eve presumably helped. But the responsibility was directed to *Adam*. Grace allows us to recognise that there are situations where this is impractical. But where it is not impractical, the husband is to wear the responsibility for providing for his family.

4. Refer to Ephesians 5:25-29 and note the implications of what responsibilities a husband has toward his wife-

Husbands are to regard their wives as the *weaker* partner. This is in the sense of being physically weaker than the husband- not intellectually, or in value. Husbands need to honour their wives with encouragement for all that they do. This honouring should be contagious among the children of the couple. Children should be taught by instruction and observation that their mother is to be respected and highly regarded. When she says "jump", the children should honour her instruction. Wise husbands know how to reinforce this to their children. If the children observe that their dad does not honour and respect his wife, then neither will they!

- 5. How do children who have been taught to respect their mothers, treat them according to Proverbs 31:28?

A Christian marriage can be the closest thing to heaven that a person can experience. When both partners have God as their focus, they enjoy Him and each other. Husbands must make every effort to deliberately enjoy the company of their wife. Even many preachers and evangelists have forgotten to give their wives proper attention and suffered in their ministry because of it.

- 6. What reason does First Peter 3:7 give for the prayers of husbands being hindered? How then can this be rectified?

PRAYING TOGETHER

It is the husband's responsibility to set the spiritual pace of his marriage. He should initiate times of prayer with his wife and family. The spiritual aspect of a marriage should be paramount for a husband as he leads his wife and family.

7. So important is the spiritual aspect to a marriage relationship, that First Corinthians 7:5 instructs a couple to occasionally do what?

Amen.

Study 20

A SUMMARY THUS FAR

First Peter 3:8-10

Like most preachers, Peter throws in a “finally” (like, “*in conclusion, let me finish by saying...*”) well before he has actually finished! Perhaps this is to almost give the impression to his readers that he has nearly finished and they should pay close attention to the remaining portion. We note that *Paul* also did a similar thing (refer to Phil 3:1; then 4:8). But in this sense of Peter saying “finally”, it means *let’s state the result of what we have just been saying*. Thus, we might best understand this passage to be a *summary* of what Peter has just said in his epistle.

ALL OF YOU

The Holy Spirit uses Peter to tell believers that they must do some things. These things are not just for the few. They are to be done by all. Therefore these things are not *gifts* or *ministries* but are the expected standard of all believers.

1. We could list five things in 1Peter 3:8 that we are instructed to do. What are these five things?

The fact that we are commanded to do these things shows us that they do not come naturally. They require work. They demand that we make an effort, despite how we feel. The challenging aspect to these things is that they involve other people. In fellowshiping with others, we are to make all the adjustments and place no demands on others to accommodate to us. Naturally we let people know about things that we find really offensive, but the responsibility to get along with others depends on us changing. Some people would rather flee fellowship, than allow it to make us more Christ-like.

2. In what way did Paul change and relate to other people who may have been very different from himself? (1Cor. 9:19-22)

3. How did Paul say we should change and relate to others, despite what we are going through? (Rom. 12:14-16)

WE SOW BLESSING

At times we may feel like cursing someone, rather than blessing them. This is especially so when we are treated maliciously by someone. But we are instructed to return blessing for any evil we are shown.

4. What descriptive term does Paul use in Romans 12:20 to make the point that we should not curse anyone?

To heap burning coals onto a person's head was an Oriental act of hospitality toward weary travellers. The coals were apparently put into a cloth or leather bag and used like a hot-water bottle for the head to counter the chill of a freezing winter's night. It was a much appreciated act of kindness. Therefore, Paul was *not* saying that by doing an act of kindness, we would be, in effect, *hurting* someone who was evil to us. Rather, he was making the point that we should respond to acts of evil by doing acts of *kindness* which would be like *taking the chill out* of cold-hearted acts of evil. By responding with kindness to a person's cruelty, we are sowing blessing which we will surely reap.

5. If we return blessing for evil, what will we inherit? (1Peter 3:9)

SEE GOOD DAYS

Peter gives us an indication where he sees the main source of evil coming from. When people commit acts of evil against us, it is often their words that they are inflicting on us. To respond to evil *with evil* would be to speak back to them in the same way.

6. What are we told to keep our tongues from? (vs 10)

By guarding our tongue we are investing into our future. When our investment matures, we will reap peace and goodness. All of this because we guard our tongues! What a difference a godly mouth can make to the direction that a person's life takes.

7. Turning from evil is now replaced with what? (vs. 11)

8. How does this compare with Hebrews 12:14?

Peter finishes this section by suggesting that when we live peaceably, the Lord is attentive to our prayers. The implication is that if we refuse to show kindness to those who are evil and don't guard our lips from deceit and evil, we are not going to have our prayers answered. This is a hard lesson to learn. But may God give us the strength and grace to put it into practice.

Amen.

Study 21

QUIET EVANGELISM

First Peter 3:13-18

Peter has been counselling a persecuted church. In the midst of their persecution he advises them to walk closely with the Lord. During these dark times he wanted them to diligently guard their conduct. He implies that *a Christian's true spirituality is revealed when they are under pressure*. Persecution produces such pressure. Thus, Peter is imploring Christians that the most urgent requirement for them, during these times of persecution and pressure, is to remain faithful in their Christ-like conduct. If the world can see a truly spiritual Christian during times of heavy pressure, they will be impressed that Christ must be alive in that person.

1. How does Second Corinthians 3:3 describe Christians showing Christ in their lives when under pressure?

2. What did Christ say awaited His followers and why in Matthew 5:10?

3. What godly virtue does tribulation produce according to Romans 5:3?

THE PURPOSE OF PERSECUTION

History shows that there have been frequent outbursts of persecution against God's people. These have generally come from two sources: *governments and religions*. At various times some governments have viewed Christianity as a *threat* to their control over people. The most recent large scale example of this was *communism*. Religious leaders have also viewed true Christianity as a threat to their control over people. This includes those religious leaders who were claiming to be Christian.

4. What type(s) of persecution did the early Church face?

These persecutors were using persecution in an attempt to destroy Christianity. If torture couldn't persuade a believer to forsake Jesus, and thus discourage others from following Christ as well, then they would use *murder* to silence them! The early Church was experiencing this. Yet these persecutors came to recognise that Christianity was could not be controlled by them because it was empowered, guided, and protected by God. After the initial wave of persecution against the Church was unable to destroy it, it seems that the Enemy devised a new strategy of attempting to destroy the Church from within! When godless men attempt to control the Church, the Church inevitably ceases to be the Church! The end result of a man-controlled Church is a mere religious institution filled with lifeless man-made rituals and ceremonies (2Tim. 3:5).

5. In Exodus 20:25 the Israelites are told to establish certain altars made from an *unhewn* rock. No chisel or tool was to shape the rock used as an altar for making sacrifices to God. .How does this (Exodus 20:25) illustrate the principle of man not attempting to control God (or even the worship of God)?

The force behind the persecution of the Church is Satan. He continues to move carnal man with his original lying promise that you could be (like) God (Gen. 3:5); that is, don't let God be in control, *you take control*. This is what motivates persecutors. Thus the purpose of persecution is to stop the spread of God's control in people's lives. The enemy seeks to use persecution to snuff-out evangelism.

6. But what actually happened after the first wave of persecution against the Church? (Acts 8:1, 4)

REACTING TO PERSECUTION

7. Knowing that God uses anything the enemy does for His glory, how does Peter advise the Christians to respond in verse 14?

8. Rather than being silenced about Christ, what should believers be ready to do according to verse 15?

9. What would confirm the believer's witness about Christ changing their lives? (vs. 16)

Peter says that people will notice Christ in us by the way we *live*. They may even ask about what it is that has made such a difference in our life. We need to be prepared and ready to give an answer. In this way our evangelism is preceded by quiet, godly living. This is especially powerful in situations where people have an opportunity to closely observe our lives. In those circumstances we don't need to be on soap-box preaching at them continually, because our lives will do that for us.

CHRIST GLORIFIED

In the midst of whatever we might be going through, we are reminded of what Christ went through for us. This reminder comes in such a way as to show us that His sufferings were for a time, then came glory (vs. 18). No matter what suffering, trial, or hassles, you're having now, they won't last! Hang in there! Don't be a quitter.

Amen.

Study 22

THE BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

First Peter 3:19-22

Noah is an example of a godly person who remained faithful to God during times of opposition. While there is no record of him ever preaching to his fellow citizens, he is described as *a preacher of righteousness* (2 Pt. 2:5). Peter uses him as an example to the believers of a quiet godly man, whose life largely did the preaching for him. By the actions of Noah, God was both warning and announcing His judgment upon the world. Actions speak louder than words. By our quiet, godly lifestyle, we are both a warning and an announcement to the world. Peter parallels the time of Noah to the days in which Christians live.

1. In what ways are the days of Noah and the present days similar? (refer also to Lk. 17:26-27)

Noah took a long (but unreasonable) time to construct the ark. It probably took over fifty years. All this time, the world would have had opportunity to seek the LORD and repent. They didn't. Even though God was extremely patient in delaying His judgment, they refused to submit to Him. Later, in his second letter, Peter will point to the patience of God during the times of Noah to show that God is being very patient now waiting for people to repent.

SPIRITS IN PRISON

If Peter had been a Bible College student submitting his letter as an assignment, he may have very well failed. He has used a strange thought to illustrate his point. Just what he means by *He went and preached to the spirits in prison* is a mystery. We can only guess about its interpretation. One theory has it that Christ descended into Hell after He died on the cross, and "preached" to the spirits of the dead there. In particular, He preached to those who perished in Noah's Flood. This was not to offer them a second chance, but to confirm God's judgment upon them.

From this passage we note that there is a place where the wicked dead go. Here it is described as a *prison*. There are several references to Hell which describe it as a "remand centre" awaiting God's ultimate judgment (the lake of fire). It is described as having bars, gates and chains.

SAVED THROUGH WATER

In a way it was the ark that saved Noah. But the ark was just the product of Noah's faith and obedience. The saving factor for Noah was his faith in, and, obedience to, God. So as the ark went through the waters and Noah was saved, we go through another product of our faith in and obedience to God.

2. What is the "product" (or display) of our faith in and obedience to God? (vs. 21)

If a person is water baptised without having any faith in God, and no intention of being obedient to Him, there are merely getting wet. Water baptism is therefore not an external ceremony that has any power in itself. It is a display of what God has already done in the heart of the believer. It is also becomes both a test and display of the believer's obedience to God. If a person is too proud to be water baptised, then perhaps they are too proud to acknowledge their need for a Saviour.

3. What Old Testament example of this do we initially find in 2Ki. 5:10-11?

The issue isn't the water! It's *faith* and *obedience* that really count.

BAPTISM AND THE RESURRECTION

Baptism is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4). It is the believer's way of identifying with Christ. When a believer comes up out of the waters of baptism, they quite often experience an inner cleansing. This is what Christ has purchased for us at Calvary: *peace with God and clear conscience* (Rom. 5:1; 1Pet. 3:21).

4. Should believers today be baptised? Explain.

5. What's the difference between infant christening and the type of baptism that the Bible talks about? (refer to Acts 2:38-39)

CHRIST EXALTED

Christ's resurrection was a momentous event. It literally changed the course of human history. His resurrection sealed His victory over death (1Cor. 15:22-27). The act of the resurrection ended any possible speculation that there was any force greater than God. The resurrection proved that not even death was greater than God. This event causes the universe to acknowledge that there is One who is worthy to judge the world.

6. Note the question that was asked in Revelation 5:2, and the response in Revelation 5:12 (see Rev. 1:18)

7. What did Christ's death and resurrection achieve according to Colossians 2:14-15?

Amen.

Study 23

A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE

First Peter 4:1-3

A lot of things just seem to never stop. The earth never stops. Time never stops. People never stop. Just when we want to stop, something keeps us going. Imagine the staff in the emergency ward of a busy hospital wanting to stop immediately after losing the fight to keep an accident victim alive. In the midst of their disappointment and despair an expectant mother about to give birth may be rushed into their emergency room in the final phase of delivery. The same staff who just minutes before lost a patient, are now bringing another one into the world. Life never stops. To say that it never stops suggests that it is moving. But where is life moving? This can only be answered individually. All individuals are moving somewhere in life. The direction they take is determined by what they are seeking.

1. In verse 3, Peter mentions certain things that people were seeking from life. Compare this with Romans 2:8 and Titus 2:12. What are these people seeking that determines the direction for their lives?

2. What type of people will increase in the last days according to 2Timothy 3:4?

When people seek pleasure-only for their lives they exalt themselves to the position of being their own god. There's nothing wrong with pleasure, in itself. However, when it becomes the goal of a person's life, it becomes an idol. When we became Christians after the Holy Spirit touched our hearts, we went from being basic pleasure seekers (living for ourselves) to being infant seekers of God. It caused a radical change in attitude.

3. What did this different attitude in Christ enable Him to endure? (vs 1)

Suffering isn't pleasurable. It's down-right unpleasant. But when a person is prepared to voluntarily suffer for what they believe, it shows that they aren't necessarily living for themselves. This is what Christ did. Peter says that Christ's example of not merely living for pleasure, and enduring suffering is one that we should follow. When the world sees that Christians are prepared to endure hardship for the sake of their beliefs, perhaps they may be more persuaded about the gospel.

4. Who else does Scripture say did not live for pleasure? What pleasures were at his disposal? What did he choose instead? (Hebrews 11:24-25)

SEEK AND YOU WILL...

Peter says that believers should be living for the will of God (vs. 2). If a Christian is seeking to do God's will, they are going to have their time occupied in a way that will keep them from doing harmful things. The Bible is full of things that a believer can be doing. But there is one thing that it repeatedly urges God's people, either directly or by example, to do.

5. Note what the Bible repeatedly urges God's people to do-

- a) Deuteronomy 4:29 _____
- b) Psalm 27:14 _____
- c) Psalm 34:10 _____
- d) Psalm 42:1-2 _____
- e) Psalm 105:4 _____
- f) Psalm 119:2 _____
- g) Isaiah 26:9 _____
- h) Isaiah 55:6 _____

Clearly, doing the will of God has more to do with having a relationship with God than it does with doing things for Him.

6. How is this illustrated by the incident of Mary and Martha? (Luke 10:38-42)

a) Which one was *doing* things for the Lord? _____

b) Which one was seeking the Lord? _____

c) Which one did Jesus say was necessary? _____

7. What is God's promise to those who seek Him now? (2Chronicles 15:2; Proverbs 8:17)

A young preacher once went to the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon to ask him for advice on how to pastor successfully. Spurgeon solemnly said to the young man—seek God, get on fire for God and people will come from miles to see the flames!

FIERY ZEAL

We need a different attitude about life compared with those who live in the world. We need to move from a position of just being content with our Christianity, where we just go through the motions, to an attitude of continual hunger for God.

8. What kind of Christianity does Romans 12:11 urge us to live?

We need to be on fire for God. Just when we think we are on fire for God, God reveals to us (as we seek Him) that there is more. There is a greater measure of

God's presence that we can be continually pursuing. What a delight it would be if people commented that person has been with God! People will perceive that God is real when we ooze with His presence. When a group of God-seekers get together to do Church, the presence of God should be awesome.

God, please draw me into Your presence and pour Your Spirit and presence into my life. Ignore my reluctance and keep me going on with You. Help me to hear Your voice clearly. Show me how You want me to change, and help me to be humble enough to accept those changes from whatever sources they may come. May I burn with a zeal for You that never wanes. Please make me, break me, mould me into the person you want me to be. God, I want to go through the rest of my life with an increasing passionate love for You. Help me to seek Your forgiveness when I fail You, and to never give up because of my weaknesses. God I give myself to You. Amen.

Amen.

Study 24

YOU'RE STRANGE!

First Peter 4:4-6

It's interesting how the world defines "normal". If you cheat (and get away with it), flirt, swear, drink alcohol, live promiscuously, you're considered normal. If a teenager gets drunk every Friday night, vandalises public property, gets (or gets someone) pregnant, drops out of school, loafers around all week, and verbally abuses his/her parents, they are considered "normal". But, if a person becomes a Christian and starts living honestly, soberly, and morally they are considered "strange". If a teenager becomes a Christian and stays at home with their family on a Friday night, shows respect for public property, abstains from illicit sex, studies hard at school, spends their time throughout the week productively, and speaks highly of their parents, they are considered "troubled" or "strange".

1. What does Christ warn His people against in Luke 21:34, that Peter also mentions as an activity of non-Christians?

"Dissipation", "riotous excess", "wild and wasteful things" are some of the ways that translators have rendered this thought of Peter's. It directly implies the abuse of alcohol. The overall message of Scripture is that alcohol relieves a person of self-control. It becomes an illusory way of escape. One of the earliest Biblical references to the use of alcohol is when Noah got drunk. The result was an irreparable family breach that would eventually become Israel's biggest stumbling block in possessing the Promised Land of Canaan (Gen. 9:21ff). The next reference is when Lot's daughters got their father drunk and committed incest with him. The eventual result was that Israel was hedged by the nations that descended from this incestuous act, who were generally antagonistic towards them (Gen. 19:33).

2. When parents were forced to expose a rebellious child before their community, what were among the accusations presented? (Deuteronomy 21:20)

3. How does Proverbs 20:1 describe the use of alcohol? (Note also Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21; 31:4-5)

Alcohol is something that can control. Isaiah says that people who live for parties and pleasure have no understanding of what they are doing, or any respect for the LORD (Isa. 5:12-13).

4. While the world admires someone who “can hold their drink”, what does the Bible think about such people? (Isa. 5:22)

The other implication of dissipation is *excess in eating delicacies*. The word often used for this is *gluttony*.

5. When people become obsessed with eating whatever they want, and however much of it they want, what will it lead to according to Colossians 3:19?

6. What hyperbole does the Bible suggest for those who are getting into gluttony? (Prov. 23:2)

Drunkenness and gluttony are two of the things that Peter describes as normal living. When someone becomes a Christian they stop doing these things. No longer are they being controlled by their appetites (either for drink or food), they are now led by the Holy Spirit. This self-control in a believer's life is evident to the world.

7. What response can Christians now expect from those still in the world? (vs. 4)

8. If a Christian might be tempted to backslide into their former practices with their worldly friends, what sobering thought should be taken into account based on what Peter says in verse 5?

What the world thinks as normal and acceptable, God often sees as abhorrent. When Jesus was describing the condition of the world in the last days immediately before His return, He used the following shocking description-

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building."

Luke 17:26-28

Why is this a shocking description of a society? It seems that Jesus is saying that the worst description of a society is when total disregard for God becomes normal. When people go about their daily lives with no regard for God, they are living for themselves. This is the worst kind of idolatry.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The expression that *God will judge the living and the dead* (Acts 10:42; 2Tim. 4:1) has two possible interpretations. It could mean that God is going to judge all those who have previously died, and, that He will judge all those who are currently living. Secondly, it could mean that God will reward the spiritually alive, and condemn the spiritually dead, when He judges. In either case, the following verse can not mean that the dead are given a second chance. Because the Gospel can only be preached to the living, the expression those who are now dead must refer to people who heard the Gospel and became Christians, but have since died. *Judged according to men in regard to the body* must refer to the judgment that is common to all people: *physical death*. This was the original judgment that Adam and Eve incurred. Despite a Christian dying, they live on beyond the grave in God's eyes. The end result of a Christian who refuses to conform to this world is eternal life. This requires endurance, but it is an endurance that reaps a priceless and eternal reward.

Amen.

Study 25

BEING A CLEAR MINDED PRAYER HEAD

First Peter 4:7-9

Prayer is the believer's focus on God. At times it requires maximum self-control. Being sober allows a person to pray. Being drunk robs a person of self-control, and consequently hinders them from praying. Even mild intoxication clouds the mind. Peter has been urging the believers there to stand out from the world and its practices. While they may not want to listen to their message, if the believers live godly lives, their lives will do the preaching for them. But they must live self-controlled lives.

THE END IS NEAR

Peter now introduces the concept of "last days". This is a concept that was an essential part of his very first gospel message.

1. In Peter's first message, what did he say would happen in the 'last days'? (Acts 2:17)

If it was the last days on the day of Pentecost, then it was certainly the last days when Peter wrote to these believers. The great event linked to the last days, would be "the coming of Christ". This expression has caused confusion in the minds of modern readers. In the mind of the Jew, the expression "the coming of the Lord" or "the Lord is coming" was an Old Testament expression of God's impending judgment. It should not be thought of as "the *return* of the Lord" (which is a different Biblical teaching).

2. Consider Psalm 96, especially verse 16. How does the Psalmist describe the purpose and the result of the Lord's "coming"? (Note Psalm 98:9)

Peter knew that the "coming of the Lord" was at hand. That is, the Lord was about to once again judge Jerusalem just as He had done in the time of Jeremiah. The Prophet Isaiah even used the expression "the Lord is coming on the clouds" to describe His judgment against Egypt which was fulfilled in the time of Jeremiah (Isaiah 19:1).

Peter's declaration to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost that this was now the "last days" needs to be understood in relation to the *last days of the Old Covenant* - not the last days of "the world". Everything that had been predicted as leading up to the *coming* of Christ appeared to have been fulfilled. There was a cruel dictator who had set himself up as God (Caesar), the church was going through tribulation (massive persecution), the Chief Priests (the "False Prophet" of the Book of Revelation) were colluding with Rome (the "beast from across the sea" described in Revelation 13) to persecute Christians. The gospel had been taken to nearly every nation in the empire (Colossians 1:5-6, 23). All of this seemed to point to the immanent coming of Christ to end the Old Covenant and its elements (the Temple, the priesthood, sacrifices and ceremonies). If Christ was coming soon, then believers should prepare themselves!

3. What does Christ instruct His followers to do while they wait for His return in Matthew 25:13 and how does this correspond to First Peter 4:7?

In Matthew 25, Jesus gives the parable about The Ten Virgins. These virgins are typical of the church. Half of them are described as falling asleep and having no "oil" in their lamps.

4. What was *oil* typical of in the Old Testament? (refer to First Samuel 16:13 and Isaiah. 61:3)

5. What then might Christ be warning His followers about in the Parable of The Wise and Foolish Virgins of Matthew 25?

The Church today needs to be full of the Holy Spirit! It's no longer good enough for just one or two representatives of the church to have this anointing - the true Church must rise up and together seek the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

BEING SELF-CONTROLLED

Self-control is perhaps the greatest indicator that there is a difference between believers and the world. And the greatest vehicle for reaching deeper self-control is prayer. Prayer is our communication with the invisible God. Being invisible, it is easier to be distracted by the visible. Urgent things press in on us. Thoughts pop into our minds. Time is over-committed. All of these things must be dealt with, and this requires self-control.

6. Note the condition of people described in Second Timothy 3:3. What warning is there for us in this description?

LOVE ABOVE ALL

Another way that the Christian community should stand out from the world is by how they relate to each other.

7. In what way did Jesus say that the world would know who His disciples were? (Jn. 13:35)

8. How did Paul say that Christians should relate to each other? (Rom. 12:10)

9. What will loving one another result in? (Prov. 10:12; 17:9)

DEGRUMBLIZED HOSPITALITY

The first church was characterised by continual hospitality (Acts 2:46). Hospitality was regarded as entertaining strangers. Therefore it is the means by which people get to know each other.

7. What do these passages say in regard to hospitality?

a) Rom. 12:13 _____

b) 1Peter 4:9 _____

c) 3John 7-8 _____

Amen.

Study 26

DO WHAT YOU DO, DO WELL!

First Peter 4:10-11

Disinterested students sat sprawled in the classroom. The frustrated teacher began to write the word A P A T H Y on the blackboard. One student curiously asked his class-mate, "What does 'APATHY' mean?". To which his class-mate replied "*I don't care*". And that was a perfect definition.

There has generally been an aversion to excellence in the Christian community. Excellence has been equated with worldly. But it is not. In fact, quite the reverse should be true. Christians should strive for excellence in all they do. There's nothing particularly spiritual or holy about being sub-standard, or offering inferior levels of service.

1. Note what Daniel was renowned for in Daniel 6:3?

2. What kind of attitude, in this particular reference, to spiritual gifts, was the Corinthian church told to have? (First Corinthians 14:12)

3. What six things were they told to *excel* in according to 2Corinthians 8:7?

I have seen churches that operate on a "*she'll be right*" basis. Decisions were made for the immediate benefit, not for the long term benefit. Short-cuts were made which had to be patched up and rectified at a later date. On the other hand I have where a church has made decisions based on the long term benefit of the church which has actually led to stronger growth and better stewardship of resources.

4. What Old Testament principle found in Exodus 34:26a is applicable to anything we offer to God today?

5. By submitting to God's will for our lives, what can we expect God to do with us? (Isa. 48:17)

GIVE AWAY YOUR GIFT!

What are you most passionate about? What are you most interested in? What sort of things do you have a deep appreciation of (which may have caused you to be critical of anything of inferior quality). Chances are this is your area of gifting. Perhaps God invests certain gifts in people from birth. Some people are born leaders, or sportsmen, or craftsmen, or writers, or engineers etc. Some people receive gifts from God later. Some "natural" gifts are "spiritualised" when a person comes to Christ. An example of this could be a person who has remarkable perception, discernment, and fore-sight. When a person like this comes to Christ, the Holy Spirit may be able to empower these abilities into prophetic insight.

6. What kind of gifts are mentioned in Romans 12:6-8?

If a person can relax and accept their gift, they will learn their limitations and probably become more fruitful - even though we may think that our gift isn't as grand as another person's.

7. What does First Corinthians 12:22 have to say about this?

8. If a person develops their gift, what principle can they expect based on Proverbs 18:16?

Peter says that the believers should use the gift that they have received. When God gives a gift He expects it to be used.

9. How is this point made in the teaching of Jesus found in Matthew 25:14-29?

10. According to verse 11, what should the result of using God's gift be?

Whatever we do, we should strive for excellence. This should be seen in our workplace, our home and our church. Let's not be ashamed of achieving and maintaining excellence.

GOD'S VARIED GRACE

God's grace is God's undeserved provision for our need. We most commonly think of salvation being the only expression of God's grace. While our salvation is certainly made possible by the grace of God, it is not the only expression of God's grace toward us. When we cry out to God to meet a particular need - and *He does* - this is also because He is gracious.

11. How is God's grace described in First Peter 4:10 and how does this verse support the statement above?

12. According to First Peter 4:10, how is God's ποικίλης ("multi-coloured") grace ministered to others?

The next time you pray for God's grace you might find that God's answer to your prayer comes in the form of a brother or sister in Christ.

Amen.

Study 27

WHEN SUFFERING IS GOOD AND JUDGMENT NECESSARY

First Peter 4:12-19

"Why me?" "What did I ever do to deserve this?" A Christian needs to understand that life often has ups and downs, but God is still in control. A distressed and mourning father who had just tragically lost his son, angrily said to his family's pastor "Where was God when my son was dying?" The pastor replied, "The same place He was when His own Son was dying: *on the throne*". Peter tells believers that when they suffer because of persecution, they should not be surprised!

1. What does the Bible say awaits those that live godly lives? (2Tim. 3:12)



Peter told the Christians of the first century that they could expect to suffer persecution because they were living for God. The greatest example of this is Jesus Himself. No one suffered more than Christ. No one was more godly than Christ. Through the ages many holy people have suffered terribly from persecution. Living faithfully for God doesn't always exempt us from

persecution. Right now in the Sudan

there are thousands of Christians who have had their homes bull-dozed, their possessions confiscated, and their right to buy or sell denied, simply because they live for Christ! How much more should we be thankful that we have peace and freedom to worship Christ in our country!

2. If a Christian suffers for Christ, it is commendable. But why shouldn't we have sympathy for a Christian who suffers for the reasons given in 1Peter 4:15?

3. How did the first Church respond to persecution? (Acts 5:41)

SUFFERING PRODUCES GLORY!

Glory means dignity, honour, brightness, magnificence, splendour, excellence, praise, exalted state, and perfection. According to Philippians 2, Jesus laid aside His glory to become a man. As a man He suffered much opposition. In His final days He suffered intensely. But something dramatically happened to Christ after His ascension.

4. Christ prayed about this in John 17:5. What did He ask to be returned to Him?

God has promised us that if we endure suffering for His sake, we shall receive glory (2Cor. 3:18; 4:17; Col. 3:4; 2Tim. 2:12). The important thing now, is not what others think of us, but what God thinks of us. Reputation is what others think you are, character is what you really are. Suffering for good reasons produces character.

5. What didn't the early apostles seek from others? (1Thess. 2:6)

It would be easily understandable if the persecuted Christians of the first century were asking God to judge their persecutors. But it would be wrong for God to judge the world if His own people were involved in the same things that the world were doing. Therefore, judgment must begin with the "House of God", or "Family of God". All the more reason to make sure that God's people are not involved with worldliness and sinful lifestyles.

6. What warning is given to those who know God and His righteous judgment? (Romans 2:3)

Now, if God was using persecution to judge the motives of His people, and the short-term result was suffering, what will happen to the unrighteous when God starts judging them? If the righteous go through judgment and they live in obedience to God, what will happen when God starts judging those who don't live for God (vs. 17)? Peter says that the righteous are scarcely saved (vs. 18). This means that the righteous are not saved by their own works or efforts. They are saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

7. What are believers encouraged to do in 1Peter 4:19?

Amen.

Study 28

THE REQUIREMENTS OF AN ELDER

First Peter 5:1-4

Sheep are interesting creatures. Their most outstanding attribute is their intelligence. Not their vast amount of it- but actually their general lack of it! To put it another way: sheep are dumb! And this is the analogy that God uses of people. Not just His people, but all people.

1. What do all sheep need? (Num. 27:16-17; 1Ki. 22:17; Ezek. 34:12; Zech. 10:2; Mtt. 9:36)

As people are continually referred to as *sheep* in the Bible, God is repeatedly referred to as a *Shepherd*. The concept of a shepherd with his sheep is a warm and friendly one. Generally we think of shepherds, who hang around cute fluffy sheep all day, as being gentle and caring. It was their responsibility to watch over the sheep. Jesus gave the illustration of two types of shepherds in John 10.

2. Note the descriptions of the two types of shepherds in John 10:11-14. How could these two types of shepherds be described?

The irony of God being *the Great Shepherd*, is that He became *the Lamb of God*! He became one of *us*. This shows something of the heart of God. The one who would be a shepherd, would do well to remember that he too is a *sheep*. (Many shepherds today develop a proud heart and forget that they too, are actually sheep.)

3. What was Peter's instructions to the elders about their attitude toward sheep in 5:3?

To follow Christ is to follow The Shepherd. To become like Christ is to become like the Shepherd. Therefore, the more we hang around Jesus, the more we will develop a shepherd's heart. So to ignore the heart of Christ, and try to lead His people, will cause us to become sheep-herders rather than shepherds. The difference is where we stand in relation to the sheep:

4. What does verse three say that the shepherd should be to the flock?

Ultimately a believer's relationship with the LORD is determined by their relationship with the LORD. They are accountable to the Shepherd who has promised to tend and care for them as His own sheep (Psalm 23:1-6). No believer can hold another believer responsible for their poor relationship with God. But God has placed within His Church, people that He has called to be "under-shepherds". These are people that He has gifted with the capacity to lead other sheep. They are not replacements for God. They are not the priests of the flock, but they are given shepherd-like responsibilities.

5. According Peter, a shepherd's first task is to:
- (a) serve as masters over the flock
 - (b) be employed as spiritual guides to the busy among the flock
 - (c) serve as overseers (exercise oversight)
 - (d) fleece the sheep.

As Christians we are all called to be shepherds by virtue of wanting to imitate Christ (1Pet. 2:21). Yet, God calls people into leadership, who are especially called to be shepherds. God yearns for His people to be shepherded (Mark 6:34; Acts 20:28;

Ezek. 34:5). But throughout history, there have been times when God's shepherds have either abused or taken advantage of their sheep. On one occasion God expressed His disappointment with these shepherds through the prophet Ezekiel.

6. Based on Ezekiel 34:1-16, what can we observe as God's expectations of His shepherds?

7. According to 1Peter 5:2, what should not be the motivation of shepherds?

What should be their motivation? _____

The New Testament refers to shepherds as elders. In our modern language, we use the word "Pastor" in the same that the New Testament uses the word "elder". But the word pastor actually means "shepherd". A shepherd was one who watched over sheep, tended to sheep (cleaned them, carried them when they were weary, mended their sick), led them to secure pasture, protected them from wolves and attackers, sheared them (to make them fruitful, and comfortable), and most importantly fed them.

8. Shepherds/elders/pastors are not to be motivated by material gain. Instead, they should be motivated by the knowledge that they will be rewarded in a special way by whom? (1Pt. 5:4)

Amen.

Study 29

THE BEST THING TO DO WITH WHAT LITTLE SELF ESTEEM IS LEFT

First Peter 5:5-7

Tony Campolo was publicly praying once during his college days when he was interrupted and sternly rebuked by his professor during the middle of his prayer. "Not worthless!" snatched the forthright professor of theology, "Unworthy, yes ~ but not worthless!", he continued. This interruption came about during a prayer that Tony was in the early stages of offering up to God. "Dear Lord God, Heavenly Father, Creator of the Universe, we humbly come before You as worthless people-". After the professor's rebuke, Tony never prayed that way again.

1. What is the difference between being "worthless", and being "unworthy"?

Peter has just reminded the elders (pastors) of the churches to serve Christ wholeheartedly by caring for the flock entrusted to them. They were to do this through the ministry of God's Word and hands-on oversight (praying with people, visiting etc). The motivation for doing this was their love for Jesus. One day He would return and bless them according to their faithfulness in carrying out their responsibilities.

2. Read Luke 17:7-10. When we serve God, are we actually worthless to Him? What was the response and attitude of the servants in this parable?

REAL HUMILITY

The opposite to humility is pride. Perhaps humility is then best seen when we clearly see what pride is.

3. How would you define "pride"? Discuss.

Consider the opposite characteristics of what you have just discussed. These are the qualities that we are told to aspire to. In Philippians 2:8, Jesus is described as humbling Himself.

4. What is the common thread in the instructions given in James 4:10, 1Peter 5:5, and 1Peter 5:6?

Having looked at what humility is by comparing it with pride, let's consider what it is not. It is not: (i) considering yourself worthless [note Psalm 8 which describes the incredible worth of mankind in the sight of God], (ii) pretending that you are inferior [false humility; sometimes admitting your true talents is quite humbling], and (iii) refusing to be acknowledged for your legitimate achievements (God honours His servants, and we are told to honour certain people as well).

5. Who does 1Peter 5:5 immediately address. Why would this need to be addressed?

If we want God's grace on our Church, our city, our state, our nation, we must humble ourselves. The nation that says they have no need of God, is arrogantly heading for destruction.

6. According to Exodus 10:3, what angered God most about Pharoah's attitude, which eventually brought His wrath on the nation of Egypt?

7. When King Solomon dedicated the Temple, what instructions were the people given for those times when they had lost the blessing of God? (Refer to Second Chronicles 7:14)

SELF ESTEEM OR SELF DENIAL

We have a God who thinks that we are of great worth. The greatest display of this divine thought, was the sending of Jesus Christ to this earth. We should never doubt that we are loved by a God who considers us to be of such immense value that He sacrificed His Son for us. But our value doesn't make us worthy. We are unworthy- but not worthless. While the psychological teaching on self-esteem tries in humanist terms to tell mankind that they are worthy, the Bible points the human race to the Cross, and reminds us that we are not worthy. By coming to Christ we are made worthy because of His merit. When we do this God considers us to be his children.

8. According to verse 7, what privilege do we now have as children of God?

Amen.

Study 30

THE PROTECTION OF GOD

First Peter 5:8-11

Peter closes his first epistle by peeling back the curtain which conceals the driving force behind the church's persecution. We remember that he has spent the entire epistle telling the believers that they need to let their actions speak louder than their words. This should happen in the market-place, in the church, in the home, between husbands and wives, between slaves and masters, and between subjects and rulers. Despite the church being viewed with immense suspicion and treated with intense outbreaks of persecution, Peter admonishes the believers to live quiet and godly lives (1Pet. 3:4). He uses words like gentle and loving to describe the Christian's response to persecution. He points them back to Jesus as the example of someone who conquered oppression through gentleness and love (1Peter 2:21).

1. Note who Peter reveals is the actual driving force behind their persecutors, in verse 8-

2. Knowing that it is the Devil who is at work to destroy the Church, what did Peter say believers need to do, immediately before mentioning the Devil? (note vs. 8)

Being disciplined, sober, or self-controlled, is an action of the believer. It requires constant comparing to the standards of God's Word to keep our lives in order. By striving to live a godly and holy life, in word, deed and attitude, we are constantly on the alert.

3. Why is the Devil on the prowl? (vs 8)

Who are likely to succumb to this prowling?

4. Peter tells us to “resist him” by doing something, and remembering something. What are these things? (vs 9)

In a tragic way, hearing of the trials of our brothers and sisters in foreign lands where Christianity is illegal, is an encouragement to us who live in a free “Christian” land to be more appreciative of the grace we enjoy.

CALLED TO GLORY

The Bible is clear as to what awaits the believer: glory. Being saved now, is not the end of all that God wants to give us. There is more. But we can only have a taste of it now. It will be all ours once we arrive home.

5. In the meantime, what might we have to put up with? (vs. 10)

6. What did Christ have to do before He received something else? (Luke 24:26)

Peter concludes his epistle by giving glory to God. This is the chief end of mankind—to worship and glorify God. Even in the midst of suffering and trials we are required to praise, adore, worship and glorify God. When times seem incredibly “dark”, remember God is in the midst of the darkness. Even though God is light, He is still present in the midst of darkness. When He descended down onto the mountain to give the Law and Plans, He came in thick darkness. When the Tabernacle of Moses was built, the Ark of the Covenant was to be put in the Holy of Holies where there was no light. Even astronomers have recently discovered a variety of light in outer space that is “dark”. So, when when life seems dark, and God seems far away, He's probably closer than you realise.

To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¶ By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

First Peter 5:11-12

Amen.

Dr. Andrew Corbett

www.legana.org

andrewcorbett.net

findingtruthmatters.org

Twitter: @DrAndrewC

YouTube: DrAndrewC

Facebook: fb.com/findingtruthmatters.org