

LIVING FOR GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES

1 Peter 1

PREFACE

This booklet on 1 Peter 1 commences a series of Sound Words booklets that God willing will cover the whole of Peter's first letter. The title 'Living For God In Difficult Times' hints at the content and purpose of the whole epistle and the first chapter of this booklet will explain that in more detail. This volume was written to accompany the series of Sound Words radio programmes where Howard Sayers helpfully took us through Peter's writings verse by verse.

Howard is the pastor of a church in the South of England and his wealth of pastoral experience in the Lord's work is evident from the way he applies the Biblical teaching to us today. This whole volume is based on Howard's study notes on 1 Peter 1 and I am very grateful indeed for the way he so willingly agreed to make this valuable contribution.

It is our prayer that you will find this exposition of 1 Peter 1 of great benefit and that you will be strengthened to live for the Lord Jesus with faithfulness and joy.

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Chapter 1 A general introduction

Any study of the Epistles demands the application of some basic principles. We need to answer these questions.

1. Who wrote the letter in question?
2. To whom was the letter written?
3. What is the overall structure or form of the letter?

A grasp of these points at the outset will help us in various ways. We shall discover the main purpose of the letter. We will know why the letter was written as it is. We shall also learn how to both read and understand the letter and then apply it to our own lives.

1. The writer of the letter

The opening statement of this chapter and the whole epistle tells us the writer is "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...*" From this and what we learn in the rest of the New Testament we can get a good indication of the sort of man Peter was.

Perhaps the most well known fact about him is that he was one of Jesus' disciples. You may recall that these men are often referred to in the Bible as 'the twelve'. Peter was one of those and is sometimes referred to by his other name, Simon. He had been a fisherman and now he was a follower of Christ. This fact alone tells us a great deal about him.

- He was an ordinary man who had been converted by Jesus Christ. He had heard and responded to the call to leave all and follow the Lord (see Mark 1:16-18).
- He was one of the select band of followers chosen and called by Jesus to be with him and learn of him during the Lord's life upon earth (see Mark 3:12-19).
- He was also one of the *inner circle* of the disciples along with James and John so that he was privileged to know the deeper things relating to Christ and his glory. (See Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33).

From reading the Gospels we also discover that Peter was impulsive by nature and often got himself into trouble as one who frequently spoke or acted. We perhaps immediately think of him as one who fell into sin by denying he ever had anything to do with Jesus, and yet was restored by his Master.

Peter was also an apostle. We must say, therefore, that he was more than an *ordinary* Christian.

- As an apostle (1 Peter 1:1) Peter had personal dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ both before and after his resurrection.
- He had the special calling to the office of an apostle and his subsequent actions confirmed it – the sign/confirmatory gifts were evident in him. (See Mark 16:15ff; cf 2 Corinthians 12:12.)
- His writings therefore have the authenticity that marks them out as part of Holy Scripture inspired by God.

A third thing we can say about Peter is that he was a pastor. He was not just a great leader in the early church but, as we shall see from his letters, was a man sensitive to the needs of the people of God and able to address them in an attractive and practical way.

In summary we can say that Peter was a humble learner of Christ as a disciple, an inspired teacher of Christ as an apostle, and a genuine leader of the church as a pastor. His letters are therefore very important.

2. The readers of the letter

They are plainly described for us in 1 Peter 1:1-2. We summarise these verses by saying that the letter was written to Jewish converts to Christianity who had been scattered around the world and were being greatly persecuted because of their faith. We shall come to this in detail later in the letter.

Knowing that Peter is writing to persecuted believers the whole purpose of his letters becomes apparent. He is writing to encourage and help them to face their trials and problems and to do so in a way that will glorify their Saviour. He is well qualified to do so because he can identify with persecution as he had experienced this himself (See Acts 4, 5, and 12 for examples). He could identify with those who have caved in under fear and pressure because he had also failed the Lord in this way when he denied ever knowing Jesus (See Mark 14:53ff). In addition to these things he had a special commission to

help such from the Lord himself (See Luke 22:31-32). Remember also that when he wrote his letters Peter was an old man and could speak from his personal experience of life as a Christian.

3. The form of the letter (or its structure)

The letter does not readily or neatly divide into sections like Paul's epistles. Peter makes various observations and then applies them to his readership. There does not seem to be a logical and reasoned argument which works towards a climax. Rather great spiritual truths are stated and then applied

For example:

- What we are and why. (See 1:2; 2:9-11.)
- What the believer's prospects are (1:3ff)
- Where our foundation lies (1:24ff)

Which leads into:

- The Christian's attitude towards the world in general – to governments who oppress them – to employers, husbands, wives etc who do not know the Saviour.
- The Christian's attitude towards the Christian church – as elders/leaders – old and young.

Chapter 2 What a Christian is (1 Peter 1.1-2)

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,

through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

Introduction

We have seen that the purpose of Peter's letter is to encourage and help Christian believers to face their trials and problems in a way that will glorify their Saviour. Now to do that we need to know what a Christian believer is. Peter therefore begins by stating exactly who will be encouraged and helped by his letter. 1 Peter 1:2 is one of the best definitions of a Christian we can find. It is also a summary of the basic doctrine of God and salvation. That is the God in whom true Christians believe and the basis on which they are saved. Peter wrote that true believers are those “...*who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.*”

Peter is teaching us that if we do not believe in the God described here we are not genuine Christians and cannot expect to enjoy the encouragements given in this letter. Also, if we are not saved in the way described here then we are not saved at all. We cannot enjoy the grace and mercy Peter wishes upon us. So the first question we need to ask is: Are we Christians? Are we saved? This must be our first priority and we must not rest until these questions are resolved.

We shall consider two themes very briefly from these opening words of Peter,

- (i) the God we believe in as Christians, and
- (ii) the basis of our salvation. We will do this by examining key words in the verse.

1. The God we believe in as Christians

Christians believe in the Personality of the Triune God. Reference is made in this verse to God the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. One local Christian church has put it like this in their statement of faith: “...*there is but one only true and living God; ... that there are three divine persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are equal in nature, in power and in glory.*”

Peter shows us that each person of the Triune God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – are at work in our salvation. This is seen in the activity of God the Father choosing us (electing), the Spirit sanctifying us, and Jesus Christ living and dying for us.

In this great work of our salvation Peter also teaches us about the remarkable sovereignty of God to do as he pleases and which we are to treasure. He writes of the “*foreknowledge*” of God. Our God knows everything before it ever takes place. This is not something that only Peter writes about, but the other writers of our New Testament say similar things. For example, Paul wrote in Romans 8:29-30: “*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that*

he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Then Peter reminds us that Christians believe in both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ.

Jesus = humanity, Christ = divinity.

2. The Bible’s basis of salvation as believed by Christians

Peter tells us we are saved according to God the Father’s purpose and grace. We were “...*chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...*” Again we see this paralleled by Paul in Ephesians 1:4-6 “*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*” So we see the One who chose us, God the Father – how he chose us, in love – when he chose, before the foundation of the world – why he chose, to be holy and blameless and to bring glory and praise to his holy name. See also 1 Peter 2:9.

Peter goes on to teach us we are saved by the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit. Sanctified means ‘to be set apart by’, and the Holy Spirit does this by bringing us to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He sets us aside for God by convincing us of our sin and showing us

the efficacy of the Son to save. This initial work takes place when we are converted and creates in our hearts a new desire for holiness which was not there before. But this is only his initial work in us, because wonderfully he continues to work in the life of the believer making us grow in holiness. That is sometimes called 'progressive holiness' where the Spirit of God makes us more and more like Jesus. This of course is a life long work in us that will be brought to perfection only when we go to be with the Lord at the end of our lives. See also Ephesians 1:13-14 and John 16:8-15.

We are also saved by the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit so sets us apart that we trust in this alone. The obedience referred to here can be taken in two ways. It can refer to the obedience of Jesus, passively when he yielded to the suffering inflicted upon him at the cross as God laid upon him the iniquities of us all (see Isaiah 53:4-9), and his active obedience where he responded perfectly to the commandment of his Father to come to this earth and live subject to the law of God for mankind (see John 6:38; John 8:28-29; Psalm 40:7-8; Hebrews 10:7-9). The other way that the obedience can be taken is to refer to the believer's obedience which is the result of the Spirit's work drawing us to true saving faith in Jesus as our Saviour. In effect we really need both these aspects of obedience. The sprinkling of the Saviour's blood is the ultimate basis for our salvation, as it refers to all that his death accomplished. The shedding of blood brings forgiveness of sin (see

Hebrews 10:17-18). It is the blood that makes atonement for sin (see Leviticus 17:11 alongside Romans 5:11). It is Christ's blood that makes propitiation (Romans 3:25) and that brings peace with God (Acts 10:36).

Conclusion

These are the essential beliefs for a Christian. Without a belief in God and his grace in salvation the rest of the letters of Peter may be interesting but not really stimulating and helpful in life. Grace can only be multiplied where it exists to begin with and peace likewise. God's grace is known only as we believe in these things. Peace is the enjoyment of grace and only comes through believing them. This is why Peter closes his second letter as he does (2 Peter 3:18 *"But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen."*)

Chapter 3 The Christian's hope (1 Peter 1. 3-5)

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."

Introduction

One of the exhortations Peter gives his readership later on is found in 3:15 and has to do with the Christian's

testimony of his or her hope. This hope is described for us here. It is the hope that belongs to those described in 1:1-2 – true Christians according to the Bible’s standards.

What does Peter and the Bible mean by this word “*hope*”? This is important because it is quite different from the way we use hope today. For us the word hope has a measure of uncertainty in it. We might hope it will rain tomorrow, but tomorrow may turn out to be a completely dry day without a drop of rain. The Bible word hope is quite different. It refers to something in the future which is absolutely sure and certain and guaranteed to happen. It creates in us a confident expectation concerning future blessing promised by God and which we grasp by faith. (See Romans 8:24-25 and Hebrews 11:1.) With this in mind we shall examine Peter’s words on this vital and glorious subject.

1. Hope’s source 1:3

Hope has its origin in God and his mercy 1:3, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope...*” Unless God has mercy upon us we are without any hope at all (Ephesians 2:12), that is the anticipation of any future peace and joy. That mercy is revealed and embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth and lived and died for the salvation of those described in 1:1-2. God’s mercy is great, not small or ineffective. It is abundant in its extent and power. Faith in Christ produces this hope and expectancy.

2. Hope’s nature 1:3

This hope is “*living*” hope. That indicates that it is vibrant and vigorous. There is something very positive and active about it. It responds to stimuli and moves to action. It produces an effect and does something. That ‘something’ is enlarged on in 1:6-9 (see our next chapter).

3. Hope’s foundation 1:3

The Christian’s hope is built on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a living hope “*...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*” If our hope finds its origins in the life and death of the Lord Jesus, it is given backbone by his resurrection. (See 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.) The resurrection is God’s personal statement that all that Christ did has satisfied him. It means the whole debt for sin is paid and the resurrection is like God’s receipt. It assures us all the Saviour set out to do has been accomplished – the salvation of his people, of all those who put their trust in him, those who are described in 1:1-2. Since Christ is risen we have confidence that (Ephesians 2:13; 19ff) “*...now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone...*” Just imagine now what type of life can be erected on such a foundation!

4. Hope’s substance 1:4

The Christian believer now has a future inheritance. “...*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you...*”

We normally think of an inheritance as property to which one is entitled on the fulfilment of certain conditions. The condition we attach is usually death. However that is not necessarily the case in the use of the word in the Bible. It can mean, as it did in the Old Testament, the portion of land divided out among the tribes by lot. The word carries with it the idea of *real estate* and an *entitlement* to the property for some reason. The believer’s inheritance to which he/she is entitled is eternal life (John 3:16; John 10:10). This life has certain qualities. It is incorruptible, so cannot be marred or spoiled. It is undefiled, so is free from any deformity or contamination, especially in an ethical sense. It does not fade, it will not wither; it will not wear out and will last forever throughout eternity. Furthermore, it is reserved in heaven for you. It is already ours and is watched over by our Saviour so that it cannot and will not be given to another. It has a reserved sticker on it.

5. Hope’s certainty 1:5

True believers in Christ, “...*through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*” In other words we are preserved and kept to enjoy it. Our inheritance – eternity of life – is not only kept for us but we are also kept so that we shall enjoy it. God keeps us by his power and that can never be overcome or fail. This was something that Christ

prayed for in John 17:11. It is something Christ himself accomplished in John 17:12. This is the work of the Triune God who is pledged to do it – the God we have thought about in **1:2**. Note this preservation is through faith. Our present enjoyment of it is as we believe what God has said and done in his Son. Our complete enjoyment will be when faith gives way to sight at the end of our life – the ultimate salvation that awaits us.

Conclusion

Since we have such a hope we should never be ashamed of bearing a testimony to it. Moreover it should have a profound effect on our lives and attitudes towards difficulty. These persecuted believers were here reminded of it and the consequence this knowledge should have on them, and us, follows in 1: 6-9 which we shall turn to next.

Chapter 4 The consequence of the believer’s hope (1 Peter 1. 6-9)

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Introduction

Having set out the Christian's Hope, its source, its nature, its foundation, its substance, and its certainty in verses 3 to 5, Peter now makes application to his readers by setting out the consequence of such a hope for those who have it. Put another way, *"What the impact this hope should have on us, our outlook and our lives."* Key words and phrases sum it up in 1:6-9.

1. Rejoice in hope 1:6

This hope is confidence about a future as yet unseen but firmly believed in. As we set our present situation against the future we have before us we greatly rejoice. We are filled with exultation because the victory is ours. The present heaviness, battles, pressures and temptations of great variety are only temporary and for a season. The best is yet to be!

2. Precious testing 1:7

Set against this hope the present testing experiences become very precious. The word trial or testing is a word used when gold is being accredited or hallmarked. It is used for an examination as to the reality and genuineness of an article. Through these trials God is proving the reality of our faith and trust in him and what he has promised. The present path is leading to praise, honour and glory when our Lord returns. The present scorn, ridicule, and shame is only until our Lord comes or calls. The opposite lies ahead of us and the greater our faithfulness the greater

our glory in a sense. How precious to be those who will by reason of the present be fit for heaven.

3. Love to Christ 1:8

Once we grasp that our hope is in the Lord Jesus who will appear for our deliverance, the inevitable consequence must be love for him who is unseen but grasped by faith. We love him not for what we have seen but because of what we believe. The usual evidences of love will be shown in our testimony, our obedience, our worship etc. - whatever the consequences might be.

4. Rejoicing in Christ 1:8

Because our hope is built on and in Christ we rejoice not only in hope but even more so in him. Because our hope is in the Saviour it is unshakeable and sure. It originates in the mercy of God displayed in Christ and has its strength in his resurrection 1:3. That joy in him is beyond words – it is unspeakable. That joy in him is full of glory – the Christian gives all the glory to Christ alone. This joy overwhelms us and we just praise God in the face of all the opposition.

5. Salvation 1:9

In advance of the reality faith believes in its certainty. This hope and prospect is so sure it is as if we already had possession. Salvation, deliverance of our souls, is a present condition with the fullness to come. As Paul would say: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* (Philippians 1:21)

Conclusion

The consequence of having this hope must therefore be that we are filled with joy on account of both our hope and also the way it comes to us. The present with all its trials takes on a new complexion. We are already saved.

Chapter 5 The wonder of our salvation (1 Peter 1. 10-12)

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”

Introduction

Having brought up the matter of “salvation” 1:9, Peter enlarges on its wonder in 1: 10-12 to motivate us to holy living and perseverance 1:13-21. We use the word ‘wonder’ to express the idea of the amazing, grand, moving nature of our salvation. Samuel Davies the hymn writer expressed it like this:

*“Great God of wonders! All Thy ways
Are matchless, godlike and divine”*

As we ponder the wonder of our salvation it should have an effect on us beyond our emotions. It should stimulate and motivate our whole pattern of life.

1. The prophets enquired and sought for it 1:10

These prophets are those who in Old Testament times declared the future deliverance and hope of the Jews and mankind in and by the Messiah. They are the same holy men of God Peter refers to in 2 Peter 1:21. We are told they “*searched intently*”. This was a term used in relation to a student questioning his teacher. These prophets asked God various questions as they examined the law and sacrificial system given by God through Moses which relates particularly to what Messiah would do 1:11. They did this with great care like a detective piecing information together as they tried to understand the time and manner of Christ’s appearance 1:11. They prophesied or declared the grace that should come through Christ himself and his work. This was true of the major prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and the minor prophets too. Each had something to add to the clarifying of the mysteries of God’s gracious activity in Old Testament times. Innumerable times the words “*In that day*” are used by the prophets referring directly to Messiah’s sufferings and the fullness of the Gospel period.

2. The Holy Spirit foretold it 1:11

The work of the Holy Spirit is the same throughout the whole of time and history. He testifies of the sufferings of Christ, his life and death work, including the incarnation

and the glories that should follow those sufferings. That is, the resurrection and ascension and all that flows from them, the assurance of salvation to all those that believe on the Saviour and the preaching of the Gospel to all men. This means that God did not leave the Old Testament saints without salvation. They had faith in that which was to come while we have faith in that which has been done. (Compare with John 14-16 – the work of the Holy Spirit since Messiah has come.)

3. The sufferings of Christ achieved it 1:11

Those sufferings foretold by the Spirit through the prophets and sacrifices all pointed to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so that Peter is able to make the statements of 1:18-20.

4. The consequent glory of it 1:11

This glory lies in the following:

The **CERTAINTY** of salvation by reason of the resurrection.

The **HOPE** of salvation in the ascension and intercession of Christ.

The **FREENESS** of salvation as the gospel is preached to every creature.

The **CONSUMMATION** of salvation in the future return of Christ.

5. The Apostles have declared it 1:12

This is no doubt a specific reference to the Apostles themselves who were the Holy Spirit's channel to complete the canon of Scripture. The Spirit gave them wisdom in unravelling the mysteries of the Old Testament prophets. Think especially of Paul's letters which unlock the wonders of the law and sacrificial system. Consider the way Hebrews unfolds the meaning of much of the Old Testament as being fulfilled in Christ.

We are justified in taking it this way because the context leads on to the Scriptures in 1:25. Here Peter is setting out the background to the Holy Scriptures, as given by the Holy Spirit through God anointed prophets and apostles and containing all we need to know about salvation, its content and how it should be spread.

6. The angels long to understand it 1:12

Salvation is for mankind not fallen angels. This is beyond the comprehension of those created beings who can only look on in amazement and fall in humble adoration of the great God who has accomplished it. The song of glory will consist of redeemed humanity who have received this salvation and the angelic realm who have observed with wonder what God has done. The song of all will revolve around Christ and his redeeming work.

For the effect such a salvation should have on its recipients we look at 1 Peter 1:13-21 in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 The consequences of this salvation on the believer (1 Peter 1. 13-21)

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’ Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Introduction

So far we have learned from Peter that salvation is so wonderful that the prophets enquired and sought to understand it (10), the Holy Spirit foretold it (11), Christ’s sufferings achieved it (v11), great glory accompanies it (11), the apostles declared it (12) and angels long to understand it (v12). It is a very great salvation that is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we are the recipients of this salvation then it should radically affect the way that we live, and this is what we

discover as we turn to verses thirteen to twenty one. Peter indicates that the effect should be on the whole of our lives under three headings:

1. Our attitude will be different 1:13

Our attitude should be marked out by self-control. Our thinking powers should be ready for action. That means we need to be always prepared and thoughtful, rather than acting on impulse. Our minds are to be used for the Lord, and to be taken up with the teaching of the Bible. We are to think through the issues of life in a Biblical way. (See also Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Hebrews 8:10.) One of the things that is to be true of us is that we are constantly to be thinking about our future hope. Heaven is something that is absolutely assured to us, and a day is coming when the Lord will take us there from this world with all its pressures. This glorious future should help us not to think in a worldly or sinful way, but to have the prospect of eternity on our minds. For example, when we suffer persecution and are tempted to give up following the Lord Jesus, thinking about heaven will strengthen us not to forsake him but to persevere, because to suffer for his sake in this life is nothing compared to the glory that the Lord will give faithful believers in the end. (See Rom 8:18.) So we need to be careful and self-controlled in the way we think. In addition, by doing this persecuted and pressured believers will draw strength and encouragement from their salvation.

2. Our way of life should be holy 1:14-16

Holiness is both a negative and a positive matter. Now that our minds have been filled with the knowledge of our salvation we must be obedient to that knowledge. Negatively this means we will not be found conforming to this world and its attitudes and ways, we will turn away from evil in all its forms. (See also Romans 12:1-2.) Positively it means we will want to be like God himself who is holy. He is absolutely pure and spotless, and we will strive to be like that ourselves. We will therefore have to resist temptation to do, think or say anything wrong, and positively we will endeavour to be like our dear Saviour more and more. This is a life long matter that demands our undivided attention until the Lord comes or calls us home to be with him. It is also the only fitting response to the way the Lord has so graciously dealt with us. When we grasp the wonder of our salvation we shall want to do that which pleases our God. Remember too that a holy life gives no valid cause for accusation but rather brings judgement upon our persecutors.

3. Our outlook should be marked by reverent fear 1:17

Our time in this world is only temporary, for we are travelling through it to a much better place. Really each believer does not belong to this world but to the world to come, to heaven (Philippians 3:20), so we should spend our time here in reverent fear. We live with a sense of the awe and wonder and majesty and glory of God. Because we know that God will be our judge as well as the judge of others. It is a fear that springs from a deep love for God. A love that wants to obey him and fears disobeying him. A

love that wants to bring honour and praise to him and is fearful of doing or thinking or saying anything that would grieve or dishonour him. We look at everything in the light of the great judgement day. Remember that persecution is only until then; trouble then will end for us. We respond to pressures now in the light of that day.

4. These three responses are stimulated by the wonder of our salvation 1:18-21

Remember we must apply our minds to thinking about our Saviour, so Peter reminds us of his precious blood and death which was the price of our salvation (1:19). He tells us about Jesus' own holiness which was essential for our salvation - "*he was without blemish or defect.*" (1:19) He tells us that even before the beginning of time the Lord Jesus was set apart by God the Father to accomplish our salvation and was sent into the world for that purpose (1:20). Peter also writes about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, something that is vital for the assurance of our salvation (1:21). He also refers to Christ's exaltation which gives us confidence and hope for the future (1:21). The more we apply our hearts and minds to these things the greater will be our strength and confidence as we face the variety of life's pressures and experiences and the more our lives will bring praise to God.

Chapter 7 The purity of the Christian in God's sight (1 Peter 1. 22-23)

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love

one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Introduction

You will recall that Peter’s purpose in writing this letter is to encourage and strengthen his readers who were facing persecution. One form of persecution that has always had a weakening and discouraging effect on Christians is when their faults and failings are pointed out to them – failings that are often evident and undeniable. Peter therefore reminds them that they are pure in God’s sight and exhorts them to behave appropriately whatever the world may think or say. Peter speaks of them having “*purified yourselves*” which means to be spiritually pure. The old Bible commentator and pastor Dr. John Gill has put it like this, “*...it is internal purity, purity of the heart, that is here particularly respected.*”

We come now to examine a number of issues related to the purity of the believer as God considers us.

1. The method of our purification v22

Peter mentions specifically that this came about by the believer’s obedience to the truth. This raises the question, ‘What is the truth that Christian believers have obeyed?’ You will know that the Bible teaches us that God’s Word, the Bible, is truth (John 17:17; John 15:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). It also tells us that Jesus Christ is truth (John 14:6). And we also discover that the Holy Spirit is truth (1 John

5:6). Putting this together in this context, Peter is teaching us that these Christians have heard the truth of the gospel which is contained in the Word of God, and is about Jesus Christ the Word. They had heeded the call of the gospel to repentance, faith and discipleship (cf. Luke 9:23). This was the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Elsewhere the Bible teaches us that no man will acknowledge Christ as Lord, much less obey him as Lord, unless the Holy Spirit works in them (1 Corinthians 12:3). It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us that stirs up conviction that we are sinners which leads to repentance which leads to faith (John 16:8). The Spirit works through the Word. He uses the Bible to bring us to realise our need of Christ and to believe in him. This is the principle of Scripture and our Lord himself. (See 1 Timothy 3:14-17; 1 Peter 1:2; 1:23; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 5:7-8.)

2. The evidence of our purification v22

The particular thing that Peter highlights as a mark that someone really has been purified is their sincere love of the brethren. There are other evidences but the chief and most clear evidence is that we love the Lord’s people. Those who were converted at Pentecost were characterised by this in their loving care for one another, particularly those in need. (See Acts 2:37-42). They stood in sharp contrast to the selfishness which characterised the world in which they and we live. It was rooted in doctrine, the apostle’s teaching. They believed the teaching of the Bible. It was shown in their commitment to one another in fellowship.

They were members one of another and delighted to be with each other. It was stimulated by remembering the love Christ had for each of them as they regularly broke bread and was demonstrated in their prayers for one another and united praise to God. This love of the brethren arises out of a love to the brethren's Lord. (See also 1 John 1: 7; 2:9-10; 3:10-12; 14-18; 23 4:20-21.)

Peter therefore not only mentions that his readers already possessed this sincere love for each other, but went on to urge them to continue to exercise this love deeply from their hearts v22. 1 Corinthians 13 gives us a superb description of the nature of the love the true believer is to display.

3. The cause of our purification v23

When we ask the question, 'Why did these believers act in this loving and pure way?' Peter tells us it was because they "*...had been born again...*" Peter returns to the sovereign grace and mercy of God in our sanctification. We are purified, sanctified (set apart by the Holy Spirit) and sanctify ourselves (cultivate holy, godly lives) because we are born again. We have eternal life implanted in us. This the Holy Spirit has accomplished in us "*...through the living and enduring word of God.*" In other words we base all on the Word of God, the Bible. (cf. Matthew 7:24ff)

Conclusion

Be encouraged and stand firm. Whatever men say, we are pure in God's sight and can be sure of it because of our love to the brethren. (See 1 John 3:14.)

Chapter 8 The Word of God and the pressurised Christian (1 Peter 1.24-25)

Introduction

We have noted how Peter picks up various points of doctrine and applies them to his readers to encourage them. Having mentioned the Bible, the Word of God, in 1:23, Peter enlarges on the subject of the Word in 1:24-25, which in turn should affect his readers in a certain way 2:1-3.

One effect of persecution is the temptation to be less than we ought to be, and thus avoid the attention and pressures that the world might focus on us. It is the temptation to take the easy way out instead of standing faithful for Christ whatever the cost. The remedy for that is to use the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). We now think about Peter's description of the Bible in 1:24-25.

In the context of persecution and pressure two things are particularly relevant:

- It is an **ENDURING** word.
- It is **GOOD NEWS** for troubled hearts.

Peter now uses an illustration to demonstrate the contrast between the Word of God and everything else.

1. All that this world is and has to offer is temporary and fading 1:24

“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall...”

This expression is a direct quote from Isaiah 40:6-8 and is an image used frequently in the Psalms and other parts of the Bible (see Psalms 37:2; 90:5; 103:16; 129:6; and 2 Kings 19:26 after Sennacherib had fled Jerusalem). Peter begins by saying that *‘all men are like grass’*. Man is weak and soon crushed and trampled underfoot withering like the grass under the midday sun. The life span of any human being is tiny in comparison with eternity. It is encouraging to see our persecutors in that light. Then Peter tells us that man’s glory is like the flower of the field. This is the glory that proud man imagines he has as he considers himself to be equal with God. Man’s *imagined* prowess, wisdom, power, intellectual capability, authority etc., is nothing more than the flower of the field which falls away like the chaff carried before the wind. Again this is encouraging as we think that man’s greatest wisdom is folly and his strength is weakness and apply that to those who persecute us. Man and his glory is temporary and his power is only for the shortest of seasons. However, Peter does not want his readers to rest in the consideration of

man’s weakness etc., but to see the Word of God as just the opposite.

2. God’s Word is an enduring word 1:25a

“...but the word of the Lord stands for ever...”

This refers to all that God has spoken and revealed to mankind. Now that Scripture is complete this phrase simply refers to the Bible. Here in Scripture God has made known in writing all that man needs to know about God and how we can come to know him personally. In contrast to the life span of man which is very short indeed, God’s Word endures for ever. It continues, lasts, and stands certain without ever losing its power and authority.

This must mean therefore that:

- *ALL* that is written in Scripture is sure and certain of fulfilment
- *ALL* that Scripture says is true and meaningful whatever it is speaking about.

It is true in all it says about God, man, life, the world, creation and everything else that it covers. (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

3. The Word of God is ‘Good News’ for troubled hearts and lives 1:25b

“...And this is the word that was preached to you.”

This is God’s good news for his pressurised people. We have a point of reference that will never let us down. This word is preached, that is it is made known *“to you”*. It is

these persecuted believers that have the Word of God before them. They have the true wisdom and strength to withstand the assaults of the adversary while the adversary has only his own pitiful power and wisdom. They are not in ignorance as to the wiles of the devil and how to face them. (See 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11.) This surely is good news for us when assaulted by temptation to hide our testimony and not let others know we are followers of Christ. We are children of the light and therefore must walk as such.

Conclusion

With such a source of direction and strength before us how should we live? What should we be doing when temptation comes? The answer is in 1 Peter 2:1-3 which we will come to in our next Sound Words study booklet.

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