

Bible Study

Week commencing 27th September 2020

Study Three – 1 and 2 Peter

1 Peter 4: 1-5:14

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Opening prayer: -

Speak to us, Lord, through our reading and understanding of your word to us today, and be in our discussing and questioning, that we might grow together in faith and fellowship. Amen.

Comment: -

Peter has spent time encouraging his readers to live lives worthy of their calling, lives that single them out as distinct from those who 'go with the flow' of the prevailing culture. To live lives that silence the criticism and false accusations that are being aimed at the early Church.

Now, as his letter draws toward its conclusion he reminds them of the power residing in them that will enable them to not only rise above the pettiness of those lined up against them, but also to persevere when times get tough, because the time of judgement draws ever nearer, and it begins with the believers before passing along to those who have not yet responded to the call of God.

The Jews were used to being persecuted, and little has changed over the centuries, but for Gentiles who had converted to Christianity this was something unfamiliar, and Peter tries to show how they are a part of the bigger picture of the children of God. Along with the blessings of this new life will come a share in the pain that the Jews had endured, but more importantly a sharing in the suffering of Jesus. It is human nature to distrust and be suspicious of those who live a different life, but Christians bring with them the standards of Jesus Christ, which they must try to uphold.

Avoiding persecution is easy - it simply means avoiding making those changes to lifestyle that Peter lists as being that of Christian - but Peter calls for solidarity, standing firm with believers everywhere to show the power of God's love overcoming opposition from the world.

‘Stand firm in the faith,’ he tells them, ‘because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.’

There’s an echo of Jesus’ own words when Peter tells the elders and young men to be self-controlled and alert for the actions of the evil one, along with reassurance that God will grant them the strength to persevere.

We also learn something of the way this letter has come to us, through the assistance of a man called Silas, who was possibly the same Silas mentioned both in Paul’s letters and in Acts – a leader in the early Church. Peter was a Galilean fisherman, Silas was an educated Roman with a good grasp of Greek (and this letter is written in excellent Greek) and may well not only have written it based upon Peter’s dictation or teaching, but also delivered it as well.

Question: -

What pressures are there on people’s lives in your home town these days that might lead them to ‘overindulge’ at the end of a working week, and what difference is there in the life of a Christian?

Key Verse: -

‘If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides...’ (part of 1 Peter 4:11)

Some questions: -

1. There was probably less persecution for these Christians than those addressed in Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, but Peter still warns his readers to be ready for it, perhaps echoing a line of Jewish thought which considered suffering a purifier of the soul. How does that speak into the culture you live in?
2. Verse 7 of Chapter 4 has a very apocalyptic theme. How do you interpret the word ‘near’?
3. Is it useful to see this verse in the context of our physical lives, which are ever drawing toward their end, whatever our age?
4. ‘Love covers over a multitude of sins’. How do these words speak into our relationships with others, and our relationship with God?

5. How important is it to recognise in others the gifts of God in their many forms, and encourage them to develop these gifts within the fellowship and in mission (Chapter 4:10)?

6. Is the Christian duty of hospitality as important now as it was in New Testament times when there were no church buildings as we know them, and believers met in each other's homes although this would not be possible at the moment. (Romans 16:3-5)?

7.1 Peter 5 starts with an appeal to the Church elders. Would the first four verses make a good job description for a Christian leader today, and are there other qualities you would add?

8. Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:5 talk about clothing ourselves with humility. The word he uses to 'clothe yourself' relates to the apron that Jesus would have tied around his waist before washing his disciples' feet (John 13:4,5). How does this speak into the lives of believers today?

9. Read 1 Peter 5:7 and discuss how easy or difficult you find it to do this when times are hard?

10. Silas (or Silvanus in the Greek) is known only by name but was an invaluable servant to the Church – both for Peter and Paul. Can you think of others in the past who have been content to be in the background but have worked tirelessly for the Church?

Something to think about: -

Consider the work of Silas (5:12) and think about how you might use your skills better in the service of God and the fellowship of believers to which you belong.

Prayer: -

Pray for all those who today are suffering for their faith, either financially or physically.

Some quotes: -

'Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.' (Helen Keller)

'The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.' (Ben Okri)
'To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.'
(Friedrich Nietzsche)

'Physical comforts cannot subdue mental suffering, and if we look closely, we can see that those who have many possessions are not necessarily happy. In fact, being wealthy often brings even more anxiety.' (Dalai Lama)

'Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.' (Khalil Gibran)

'Truth is everybody is going to hurt you: you just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.' (Bob Marley)