

# Study Two - Reasons for a holy life

**Prayer** Open our hearts to your word, Lord, as we gather together again to read, discuss and learn from this letter from your servant Peter, and help us put the truths contained within to good use in our daily lives, we pray. Amen.

**Comment** Peter has talked about the reasons for the hope that Christians have, and their dual citizenship of this world and the one to come. There is also the assertion that Christians are in a very real sense 'strangers', 'sojourners' or 'pilgrims' in this life, having their citizenship in another place. The word that Peter uses also describes the patriarchs, and particularly Abraham in their wanderings, and with the people of Israel when they were enslaved in Egypt before entering the promised land.

Peter now turns his attention to the reasons why, as strangers, they should be living differently to the world around them, and the key word seems to be an uncomfortable one, 'submit' which we find six times in the letter. The tone of the passage here can seem very moralistic, maybe a bit 'Victorian' in its theme, but in context maybe seems less so. Christians were targeted from the very beginning. They were accused of just being another Jewish sect, and attracted the same animosity that Jews endured even in those days. There were accusations of cannibalism (referring to the body and blood of Christ), of immorality (their meeting was called the Agape or Love Feast), damaging trade (Acts 19), breaking up families (which may have inadvertently happened with conversion of a family member), turning slaves against masters (by giving a sense of worth even to the lowest in society) and disloyalty to Caesar by not worshipping his image.

Peter's answer echoes that of the ancient philosopher Plato, whose answer to being told that someone was slandering him replied; 'I shall live in a way that no one will believe what he says.'

The evidence of history is that, despite some terrible moments when the Church forgot its purpose, Christians have often been singled out for the positive qualities of their lives, often whilst living under corrupt, evil or repressive governments. It is the 'being different' that has made them stand out as beacons of light in the darkness. As Peter says; 'Live such good lives among the pagans that, although they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us!'

## Discuss

How comfortable do you find discussing religion in general with non-Christians, and what are the main issues that come up in conversation?

## Key Verse

'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect'

(part of 2 Peter 3:15,16)

1 Peter 2:11 - 3:22

# Discussion

- Q1** Is it right that as Christians we should expect our lives to be more closely examined by those around us than others, and be more liable to criticism?
- Q2** Submission to authority in Peter's day mean submission to an absolute ruler in an authoritarian state. Most of us today live in a democracy, where we have an input into those who are in government. Does this make a difference to our interpretation of 1 Peter 2:13,14?
- Q3** How does 1 Peter 2:17 sum up the duties of a Christian in society, and would you add any to Peter's list?
- Q4** In 1 Peter 2:18-25, Peter is talking to the people who formed a large part of the early Church, the slaves who did all the work of Rome, and that included many posts such as teachers and administrators that we might not think of under that description, as workers with no legal rights at all. Has the situation between employer and employee today been totally transformed or is there still room for improvement?
- Q5** As if to reassure his readers that they are not on their own in following his instructions, at the end of Chapter 2 Peter describes God as the Shepherd of their souls. What does this picture of God say to us?

- Q6** Peter's advice to wives at the start of Chapter 3 is far longer than that to husbands. But in those days the position of a wife who became a Christian whilst her husband was not could be very difficult, as she had almost no rights. For her to change her religion was almost unthinkable. So Peter's advice is all based on the premise that she remain with her husband and in love overcome the barrier that faith had created. What is the situation today?
- Q7** Do we have a bit of a culture clash in 1 Peter 3:17 when Peter calls the wife the weaker partner, or weaker sex?
- Q8** So how would you, in a sentence, re-word the advice to wives and husbands to speak into relationships in today's world, particularly in the country where you live?
- Q9** How good a rule of life is the passage in 1 Peter 3:8-12, and is there an over-riding theme here?
- Q10** Peter's advice about sharing our faith is admirable in vv.15,16 but where in our journey of faith is the best place to start?

## Takeaway

Think about the individuals who are, or were your leaders at work, and about your relationship with them, comparing it with Peter's encouragement to 'submit willingly' to their authority.

## Prayer

Pray for all those who are in management or leadership positions, that they might not abuse that position and treat others badly.

'Let the professors of Christianity recommend their religion by deeds of benevolence - by Christian meekness - by lives of temperance and holiness.'

(Richard Mentor Johnson)

'My life is such a contradiction. My soul yearns for holiness and then runs from the mortification necessary to attain it.'

(Mother Angelica)

'Our holiness is an effect, not a cause; so long as our eyes are on our own personal whiteness as an end in itself, the thing breaks down.'

(Charles Simeon)

'When Jesus comes to live in our hearts, the seed of holiness is planted.'

(Joyce Meyer)

'It is not because angels are holier than men or devils that makes them angels, but because they do not expect holiness from one another, but from God only.'

(William Blake)

'Holiness, not happiness, is the chief end of man.'

(Oswald Chambers)