

Prayers

To God

Pray in the spirit and submit yourself to the will of the Father. Pray for His Kingdom to come, and in your prayer imagine what this might really mean ...

For myself

Weekly theme: doing the work of the Gospel

I am doing all I can, Lord Jesus, but I know it is not enough. My love seems to have limits beyond which I cannot go; I do not have enough time to do what I should for others, I cannot remember everything I have said I would do, and I disappoint others by failing to grasp what they have said or what they think.

But You, Lord Jesus, have the love of God which is unbounded and free, limitless in compassion and unending in effort! So, connect me to Your energy supply, I pray, and then the Holy Spirit will work within me the love of God the Father, and all I do and say will become a part of Your mission to bring people into God's Kingdom; Alleluia! We praise You, Lord Jesus; AMEN

For others

Pray for those who are having to deal with the belligerence of North Korea, whether they are a real threat or simply engaging in posturing. Pray that world peace will not be shattered by dangers posed by North Korea. Pray for the eventual resolution of the state of war on the peninsular.

Meditation

Only God has known my heart and my spirit
since Creation, the beginning of all time

Only God has cared about everything in my life
Indeed, all that has ever happened to me

Only God has in His hands a right and just answer
to my deepest needs, thoughts and aspirations

Only God has provided me with perfect direction
to find a peace that is greater than all things

Only God has walked the path He has set before me

and can understand my heart as I now walk it

Only God has given me His true and honest love
by which I know the guidance of a Saviour ...

Only God can move my soul and body onwards
To the greater glory of His promised eternal life

Bible Passage

1 Peter 1:13-16

¹³ Therefore, preparing yourself for action, be self controlled, and set your hopes completely on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you at His revelation. ¹⁴ Like obedient children, do not be shaped by the desires you previously held to in ignorance, ¹⁵ but just as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all you do, ¹⁶ for it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'

Review

In general, Peter's first letter offers us magnificent advice about how to live the Christian life. Here in this passage, he challenges God's people to be ready to live the life of a disciple, '*preparing your minds for action*' (1:13). Today's passage is small, but its verses add up to make a fascinating summary of discipleship. Verse 13 is about being well prepared; verse 14 is about having the right approach to Christian life, and verses 15 and 16 are about the true objective of the Christian life, to '*be holy, for I am holy*' (1:16).

Peter's words here are clear cut. He speaks with authority to all who wish to follow the Lord's ways, and everything he says here reminds us of Jesus. He was ready for action, purposeful and driven by the will of the Father (1:13), obedient and holy. We should not be surprised therefore that Peter calls us to be prepared to do what God wants and happy to trust Him, '*self controlled*' and focussed on our Saviour, on the '*grace that Jesus Christ will bring*' (1:13). This may sound simple, but how easy is it for us to do this?

The next verse (1:14) calls us all to be obedient and recognise our status as 'children' of God. But Peter is not talking about obedience like that of a Jew to the Laws of God. When he says, '*do not be shaped by the desires you previously held ...*' he is delivering two distinct messages. He calls on Jews who have turned to Christ to renounce the ritual and legalism of Judaism, and he calls on Gentiles to turn away from the sinful ways of the world. To us today, these words tell us not to fall back into religiosity, and to make sure we rise above the sinful nature of the world in which we live. Peter's word here is this clear cut.

The last two verses (1:15,16) summarise God's call to the disciples of Christ, and this is the most challenging of Peter's words here. He says, '*be holy, for I am holy*', which is a text gleaned from Old Testament scripture, Leviticus 11:44,45. Now, people today, even in church, will quickly say that holiness lies far beyond them and is perhaps only attainable in heaven. Holiness is for them a moral quality attained only by very good people. But nothing could be further from the truth. Peter calls on all Christians to recognise that their holiness is a gift of God given through baptism! Although this holiness is not yet perfect because of the sin in our world, it is within our grasp! Let us therefore aim for it!

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V13 **'prepare yourself for action'**

Other translations:

'once you have your minds ready' (CEB)

'gird up the loins of your mind' (KJV)

This is a paraphrase of what the Greek says which is *'gird up the loins of your mind'* (see KJV). This expression was a colloquial way of calling people to 'get ready' and there is not any special emphasis on the readiness of the mind, as is sometimes suggested.

V13 **'be self controlled'**

Other translations:

'thinking clearly' (CEB)

'discipline yourselves' (NRSV)

The Greek word for this means 'be sober!' Doubtless, it is used here in a colloquial sense for being self controlled.

V14 **'like obedient children'**

Other translations:

'as obedient children' (NIV)

'you should obey as children' (NIRV)

This phrase translates the Greek expression *'as children of obedience'*. However, in English this could give the wrong impression, implying that obedience comes from a sense of duty. In Christ, however, our relationship with God is one of love, and so our obedience is to be thought of not so much as duty but as pleasure and delight. See study.

V14 **'do not be shaped by the desires you previously held to in ignorance'**

Other translations:

'do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance' (NIV)

'do not allow yourself to be shaped by the passions of your old ignorance' (NRSV)

the Greek word for 'conformed' is *'suschematizoi'*, and you can see within this word the beginnings of the English word 'scheme' meaning to 'shape' or 'plan'. Because of this, my translation brings out the idea of being 'shaped'.

Further Comments

What it means to be ready! (1:13)

Verse 13 begins with a wonderful phrase '*prepare yourself for action!*'. The Greek of this phrase '*gird up your loins ...*' (see notes above) is used in the Old Testament in a number of places (e.g. Proverbs 31:17, Jer 1:17 etc.), but what does it mean? In ancient dress, long flowing robes enabled people to keep cool in the heat of the Middle East, but were of no use when it came to running or acting quickly. The phrase carries with it the idea not just of being ready, but of acting quickly; we are not to be ready as if standing on our marks awaiting orders, we are to get on with doing Lord's work! The Gospel is the most urgent message in the world, and we must deliver it!

The Greek phrase speaks of having one's mind ready for action, but this does not mean mental activity. In the Bible, the word 'mind' does not carry with it the idea of intellectual activity as it does today. In ancient times the mind was thought to be the seat of guidance more than rationality, so to be ready in one's mind meant ready to direct the whole body to do God's will. This is why my translation omits the word 'mind' and focusses on what it means to be ready as a whole person.

The 'grace ... at His revelation' (1:13)

Certainly, those who have received Christ have been blessed with the 'grace' of God. This theology of salvation is found in several New Testament letters (e.g. Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 2:1-8; etc.) and is at the heart of Christian theology. However, the saving grace we have found through Christ is but the start of God's gracious blessings. Peter tells us clearly that all God's people should expect more of His blessings and grace. Indeed, plenty of texts in the New Testament speak of the abundance and outpouring of God's grace, even His desire is to give us '*grace upon grace*' (John 1:16). When Peter says '*set your hopes completely on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you at His revelation*' (1:13) however, he is speaking of the hope of the final revelation of Christ when all will know the fullness of God's grace!

What though is God's grace? The word '*grace*' come from the Old Testament where it is usually translated '*favour*' or '*blessing*' and perhaps '*love*'. In addition, '*grace*' is not an imaginary or intellectual quality; it is profoundly real and needs to be experienced. One way of talking about it is to call it the '*loving-touch*' of God. Some speak of the touch of God, or grace of God, which is like His touch on their lives that has brought them to submission, for example. Here, however, Peter is talking about the revelation of God's complete blessing at the End Time! This should fill us with awe and wonder, and Peter encourages us to maintain this as our highest hope.

Children 'shaped' by obedience to the Father (1:14)

We have already looked briefly at the phrase '*obedient children*' earlier. But what is most interesting however, is the idea that we are all changed as we are obedient to our Father in heaven; just like real children, we grow! We do this by making choices about which pathways we choose and by keeping close to the guidance of our Lord and God. Here in this passage, Peter reminds us that we are to be 'shaped' not by our past prejudicial life from before we came to Christ, but by the direction of Christ Himself. The first way is that of selfish ignorance, and the second is that of liberation! But we cannot pick and choose what we want!

Some find it hard to accept that the path of discipleship means complete sacrificial obedience to Christ, which puts self aside and submits wholly to the Lord. We can all go on courses, for example, which encourage participants to explore their gifts and aim to bring out their natural abilities. This appears right and productive, and yet this can fly in the face of what Christians generally are called to be, which is people who have placed 'self' to one side in order to serve God and others.

Holiness (1:15,16)

God Himself is by definition holy (Lev. 11:44,45, Isaiah 40:25, Hos 11:9), so the call to be 'holy' is a call to be like God. The idea of 'holiness' describes the fact that God is different from us; He is the creator of the world and is perfect in Himself and different from our imperfect world, which falls so far short of His perfection and glory. However, the New Testament message is that this separation had been removed by Christ, symbolised dramatically by the tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom at the point of Jesus' death (Matt 27:51). Every believer could justly claim that they were made 'holy' through Christ; not completely because of the nature of sin which remains in the world, but sufficiently to have access to God the Father through Christ, and to be set on the pathway of holiness which leads to glory!

So we should not be surprised that Peter speaks about the call to holiness quite naturally as if everyone in the church would understand this common calling. The Holy Spirit, of course, is the agent of God's holiness, enabling people to fulfil the call of Peter to '*be holy yourselves in all you do*'. This great call of the Old Testament (Lev 11:44,45) is now fulfilled in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer!

Discipleship

Application

A summary of Christian life and intent

This passage sets out a clear starting agenda for anyone who wants to walk the Christian pathway. It does not give us options, but presents the logical consequences of giving oneself in complete abandonment to Christ as Saviour and Lord. In summary: be mentally alert and ready to do what God requires, be encouraged by the grace of God in Christ, be set on pleasing your Father in heaven rather than the world, and set yourself to be 'like God' in holiness.

An agenda for the new Christian?

This may sound a daunting agenda for a new Christian, but those who have truly been saved by grace will immediately recognise its significance. The difficulty we face is that many who have grown up in the church find it hard to think in terms of a 'starting place' for being a disciple of Christ. Some will understand that this might follow baptism or confirmation, but many Christians of later life lump together the advice of this scripture with all the other advice within the letters of the New Testament and do their best with what they can; and many flounder without clear direction. Of course, it may be wise to follow through the logical consequences of what Paul says in one of his other famous letters rather than this advice here in Peter, but as I explained in an earlier study, this letter is probably designed as a sermon to be preached at a baptism service, and so it is natural that it should begin first with an affirmation of Christ (1:3-12) and then continue with initial instructions for Christian living. We should read it as such and use it in this way, for like this, it is challenge for us all.

An agenda for an 'old' Christian?

I am personally challenged by this passage of scripture because it makes me think about where I am in my faith. I ask myself whether I have started from the right place, and in one or two matters I am unsure and wonder whether I should take stock, and think things through from the beginning. Even if you know where you are going, it can be hard to know your direction if you have no real fix on where you have come from!

Ideas for what to do

- Discuss with someone close what your priorities are as a Christian, and compare them with the guidance of this passage.
- Write down what it means to you to pursue a path of Christian holiness. Remember you are holy now 'through Christ' and your complete holiness lies in heaven, so how do you travel, spiritually, between the two?

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways is it important to show self control as a Christian? How can we help each other exercise self control?
2. How has the church been shaped by the ways of the world? How are Christians (regrettably) shaped by the ways of the world?
3. Discuss with each other what you mean by the path of Christian holiness.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may we seek and always find You within this world of ours. All too often we forget You and miss what You are doing. So, give us the grace to accept our failures and turn to You for constant love, support and guidance. You never fail us! Thanks be to God!
AMEN