

## Prayer

Lift our hearts in purest praise to you, O Lord most High. We thank You for being our Lord, and for listening to us when we need re-assurance and help. Lead us onwards to greater things we pray, and may we never be ashamed to bear Your name or be counted as Yours. You are our Lord and our God. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Personal Relationships

Each of us enjoys personal relationships with people in different ways according to our lifestyle, where we live and the work we do. It is easy to take for granted the people we meet regularly; but this week I ask you to pray for them. All are children of God and our prayers for them can be a source of great blessing. Pray today for the people you have met at church or worship.

## Meditation

We all experience moments when love seems far away;

But You are closer than the air around us.

We long to know 'why', when the mysteries of life loom large;

But You hold the secrets of the world in Your mind.

We search for all truth, seeming to be so near, and yet so far;

But You are the truth we so earnestly seek to find.

We struggle with our fears, our worries and our temperaments;

But You remain constant and Your love never fails.

We try to deal with the evil that assails us, always unexpectedly;

But You have all victory over the Evil One, for ever.

So bridge the gap, we pray, between our experiences of life,

And the glorious truths of our Salvation in Christ.

Then, we will be at peace, and there will be no comparison to be made.

## Bible Study - 2 Peter 2:1-3

<sup>1</sup> There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce divisive teachings. They will even deny the Master who redeemed them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their immoral ways, and because of these teachers, the Way of Truth will be maligned, <sup>3</sup> and in their greed they will exploit you with words they have made up. Their condemnation, pronounced against them long ago, is no idle threat, and their destruction will be real.

### Bible Study

In yesterday's passage at the end of 1 Peter, we read about the importance of the testimony of the Old Testament prophets, whose word was, and remains, a vital part of our understanding of the life and work of Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of Salvation. Having spoken so forthrightly in the first chapter about the glorious Gospel and its standing as the truth, Peter turned immediately to speak about false prophets who contradicted the Gospel and brought division and disunity amongst God's people. It is possible that Peter's main aim in writing the letter was to speak out against those who sought to disrupt and damage the life of God's people, the Church.

Peter began by making reference to the fact that there were false prophets back in Old Testament times. A casual reader will not quickly pick up on these false prophets, but they were a very significant part of the life story of God's people. In Amos' day (8<sup>th</sup> century BC) the court of the northern kings of Israel employed prophets whose job was to tell the King what he wanted to

know, but Amos was determined to speak only the truth of God's Word, and it led to a big confrontation (Amos 7:10-17) between Amos and the King's priest at Bethel, Amaziah. It was no small argument, for Amos insisted that the Lord was a God of justice, and the luxurious life of the 'haves' in Israel was lived at the expense of the 'have nots' (Amos 2:6-16) and was damaging to the true worship of God. Amaziah had Amos kicked out of Bethel (Amos 7:13). Jeremiah also found himself in conflict with a false prophet, by the name of Hananiah. Jeremiah knew that God had brought punishment on His people through the Babylonian invasion of Judah, but Hananiah insisted on prophesying that God's people would be miraculously saved from Babylon. Jeremiah was right, and Hananiah was wrong, and the story of their confrontation was long and painful, ending in Hananiah's death (Jer 28:12-17) because of his misrepresentation of God's Word.

There are many stories of false prophets in the Old Testament, and Peter had them in mind as he forewarned the church in his letter that false prophets and teachers would lead people astray. It had happened before and would happen again, for Peter was not the only New Testament writer who was concerned about the activities of false teachers and heresy within the church. Paul was desperately concerned about false teaching in both Galatians (see Gal 3:1f.) and Philippians (Phil 3:2f.), as was John (1 John and 2 John).

Peter warned that the consequences of false prophets and teachers within the church would be division (2:1) and an increase in immorality within the church (2:2). Frankly, it does not take too much observation to discover that this remains true to this day. Many mainstream churches do harbour ungodly teaching which is contrary to the historic Gospel and in some cases, in plain denial of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ (2:1). There is also a genuine crisis of morality within many churches, even the energetic new churches of Africa, for example, because people find it difficult to cut themselves off from traditional pagan beliefs.

Peter spoke forthrightly because he knew that there was and is only one God, only one Gospel, and only one Saviour, Jesus Christ. The church only ever existed to testify to this truth, and this has never changed. Anything else, and anything less, is false teaching for which the consequences are set out with equal clarity (2:3). Peter's words are truly prophetic for us today.

*Space for notes*

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## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Can you give examples of what you might call 'false teaching' within your church or from your experience?
2. Discuss whether you feel God should be more generous to those who teach in error than is implied by this text.
3. What are the most significant consequences of false teaching, and how important do you think this matter is today?

## Discipleship

All of us who seek to follow Christ's ways and walk the path of discipleship should seek to test out the teaching we hear. The classic model of how we do this is to judge it against the Bible, which is the 'standard' for all Christian teaching, our personal experience, the historic teachings of the church, and also common sense and reason. We cannot conduct such an in-depth assessment of everything we hear, but we certainly need to do so when it comes to significant teaching we hear which lies behind the things we do. No disciple should avoid the challenge of testing out what they have been taught.

## Prayer

We revel in Your presence, Holy Spirit of God, great comforter and guide, giver of energy and vitality, and origin of the Church at Pentecost! Move amongst us with power and authority to expose sin and root out what is wrong and evil, and make us shine as bright spiritual lights in the dark places of this world! Thanks be to God; AMEN