

## Prayer

Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God; it is a wonderful privilege to offer You praise together with Your people gathered together for worship! I am proud to be one of this congregation; I am thrilled at the work of Your Spirit amongst us, and I am eager to know what You will call us to do in Your service in the days to come. Thank You Lord Jesus. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: The Church in the Community

In this coming week we will pray for the witness of our churches in the community. People have very different views on what this means, but the truth is that the Lord calls us to proclaim the same Gospel which has always been proclaimed, but to do so in a way that can be received. Jesus loved the people to whom He brought the Good News; and we should do the same.

## Meditation

The trees bend in the wind, and consequently grow stronger;  
A beautiful flower dies but only to make the seed, and flower once more;  
The grass is cut again and again, just to make it grow and grow;  
And rain falls on the ground to clean and bring the earth to life.

We go to work each day to earn our wages, and not for fun;  
The demands upon our resources are hard, but we alone decide;  
For as a family grows, and more and more of money and love and goods  
Are shared, the life we lead opens out to new hopes and dreams.

And, if we allow Him, the God who made the trees and flowers,  
Who envisioned all our life before we were even thought about,  
Will mould together every fibre of life; spirit, soul and body,  
What we know about, and what remains unfathomable mystery.

And He will make of each of us someone so treasured, so precious,  
So perfect in His eyes, so complete in every faculty, and loved:  
That, in Christ His Son, He places Salvation in our hands,  
And commissions us to share this gift with all Creation!  
We hold the only hope our world can ever have, to pass it on ...

## Bible Study - 2 Peter 2:11-16

*Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to slander glorious beings. <sup>11</sup> Now, angels, who are greater in might and power, do not make slanderous judgments about them in the presence of the Lord, <sup>12</sup> But these people slander what they do not understand, and like irrational animals, creatures of instinct who are born to be caught and killed, they will perish just like such beasts <sup>13</sup> and suffer the penalty for doing wrong. They think it great fun to let themselves go even in the daytime; they are like embarrassing spots and scars, partying with indulgence even as they feast with you. <sup>14</sup> They are always looking for adultery, insatiable for sin, and they seduce unstable people with hearts that are expert in greed. Accursed children!*

### Bible Study

This is hardly a passage of Scripture that will be read in church on Sunday, unless it is read as part of a larger selection of Scripture and explained in full during a sermon! Peter has just taught about how the Lord rescues people from the power of sin and evil (2:4-10), but it seems as if the process of doing this has triggered in his mind an angry broadside against people who remain attached to the church but who resist the Gospel and openly live a life of sin alongside the faithful, and unashamed of the pagan life values they exhibit. The whole context of Peter's letter makes it clear that his attack is not against pagans in general, but those who want to live by the values of the world and claim to 'feast' within the church at the same time (2:13).

Peter's first point is that the sheer effrontery of such behaviour is beyond that of the fallen angels he has just been speaking about (2:4-10, see yesterday's study), for angels, whether

fallen or not, recognise the presence of God and His judgement. But those who live as pagans within the church have the appalling nerve to ignore the moral righteousness of God whilst in His presence. To them, God is irrelevant (2:10,11).

We could delve into the social history of the Roman Empire in order to example the more disgusting moral standards and behaviour that would have been considered normal in the first or second century AD. Television 'docudramas' about the Roman Empire produced in recent years are well researched and graphic enough to make us recoil from the brutality, sacrifice and slavery of life back then. Scripture does not require of us this historic exercise however, and nor does Peter. Whilst his language was graphic, what he said was as true of our own day as it was of his; he was making general points.

For example, It is quite possible to find people in church today who are happy to be called Christians or even hold office and be ordained in the Church, and blaspheme God at the same time. In my own country I have heard one President of the Methodist Conference say openly that the Gospel of Christ is not God's means of salvation for all, and an Anglican Bishop preaches, writes and has a reputation in which he revels as a Bishop who 'does not believe that God exists'; he says people have come of age, can look after themselves and don't need God as a prop. There are sad and unhappy reasons why these people say what they do, but they 'slander what they do not understand ...' (2:12).

The latter verses of our text describe with candour and horror the human tendency towards hedonism (the seeking of pleasure for the sake of pleasure) which characterise human sin in every generation, usually mixed with liberal attitudes towards sexual behaviour (2:14). It is not hard to make connections between Peter's words and the life of the church today, in an age when we are asked to make our worship 'fun' so that we can relate to the people of the world around us, and where our young people have difficulty understanding why the church rejects the practice of having sex before marriage!

There are no answers given in this Scripture to the problems mentioned. Peter has already declared the Gospel of Jesus Christ and sees no need to repeat it (1:16f.; 2:9), and he is amazed that anyone in the church should still be self-centred and rooted in sin. There may be times when we should cry out the same, for there is no path except Christ, and there are no morals except those of the Creator and they have been amply revealed in the history of His people! God bless those who accept Christ and take care to understand His ways.

*Space for notes*

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## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What sins come to your mind when you read this passage? Are they a significant problem within the church today?
2. Discuss why it is that people attach themselves to the church who have little intention of accepting God's gift of Salvation.
3. What forms of sexual sin are a problem for the life of the church now?

## Discipleship

This is a tough passage of Scripture, but it faces us with some hard questions. To what extent does any of our behaviour reflect the values of the world and not of God's people, the Church? Satan has done a good job today in making many people feel negative about what we mean by the 'Church', but it is the gathering of God's people, and we are its members. Does our behaviour reflect the love of God, or the world? Let us not be those who succumb to Satan's temptations to live as we like whilst calling ourselves Christians, just because we have been fed negative 'vibes' about the church. In so doing, we come under the judgement of this Scripture.

## Prayer

Wonderful Lord, wash away the sin, waywardness and rebellion that we have all suffered from, and make us clean and worthy to be counted as Yours, we pray. May we then be so filled with joy and happiness that no other temptation can drag us away from the source of our elation. Thank You Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord! AMEN