

Prayer

Wonderful and glorious Lord, we appeal to You for the lives the thousands of people who are unable to gather to praise You today because of persecution and intimidation. May they know they are not forgotten, and may Your people rise up to liberate all who are oppressed, in Jesus' name. May our words and our deeds express our praise, glorious Lord; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Administration in the Church

There are many godly people who work hard to keep the life of the church organised properly and where necessary, legal (with respect to property and money). This week I shall suggest prayers for those people who administer our churches, and whose spiritual gift is not always recognised for what is and its importance for mission and ministry (see Romans 12:7)

Meditation

The Lord is choosing His people;

He is constantly seeking them out to save them.

Not because they are good, but because they know this is their goal,

And have faith in the one true God, through Jesus Christ, to help them.

Not because they can pray or read the Bible or speak in public,

But because they are willing to do their best for Him who has saved them.

Not because they have conquered sin, but because they know they need to,

And have found the only power over evil and sin is found in Jesus Christ.

Not because they come from any race or creed across the world,

But because they are all loved for who they are, in the image of the Creator.

Not because they have any special spiritual gifts or graces,

But because they are open to the Spirit for everything He would give them.

The Lord is choosing His people;

And His book is not yet closed; it is open still.

Bible Study - 2 Peter 3:14-18

¹⁴ Therefore, my friends, since you are indeed waiting for all this, strive to be found by Him blameless and pure, and at peace. ¹⁵ Think of the Lord's patience as salvation; as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when teaching about this. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which ignorant and insincere people distort, as they do with the rest of Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ Therefore dear friends, since you have been told about this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Bible Study

Peter's second letter comes quickly to an end after his forthright attack upon any teaching which might undermine belief in the second coming of Jesus on the 'Day of the Lord' (3:1-13). As his letter draws to a close, Peter divulges a few more gems of spiritual guidance before his final commendation and grace (3:18). However, in the middle of this is a remarkable and unique passage which refers to the apostle Paul and the Scriptures (3:15,16). It is easy to read over these verses and do little more than give passing notice to the connection it mentions between Peter and Paul; but this does give us important information about the formation of the

New Testament as we now know it. It is very difficult to date the letter of 2 Peter, but even with these uncertainties, it is still an important text.

At the beginning of this passage, Peter continues his advice about godly living in the light of the return of the Lord; 'since you are waiting for this, strive to be found by Him blameless and pure ...' (3:14) However, his main point is that when faced with the uncertainty about when this will happen, we must exercise that most difficult of human attributes; patience. This thought then triggers Peter's memory, and Peter pays due and familiar respect to Paul, the great missionary apostle, calling him 'our dear brother' (3:15). He recalls that Paul frequently taught and wrote in his letters this same point, preaching that all should be patient whilst awaiting the Lord's return (3:16). Paul undoubtedly wrote more letters than those we know about or those contained in the Scriptures, and all of them in our Bible bear more than passing reference to what happens when God brings all things to their end. Certainly, this is a major theme of 1 Corinthians (ch 15), and the letters to the Thessalonians (at least) are set against a backdrop of uncertainty about the Lord's return. Peter is loosely correct that Paul is always talking about the second coming of Christ!

Peter continues by reflecting what people have said though throughout the centuries, which is that the letters of Paul can sometimes be very difficult to understand. But what comes next is far more important than a casual comment. He says of Paul's teaching that '... ignorant and insincere people distort [it], as they do with the rest of Scriptures, to their own destruction.' (3:16) The point of the sentence is no more than what Peter has already said, but it is the mention of 'Scriptures' which is interesting. We know that people of Jesus' day, including the early church, held the Jewish writings which we loosely describe as the 'Old Testament', as 'Scriptures'. This means they were regarded as holy writings inspired and revealed by God. However, if you read the sentence closely you will see that at the time Peter wrote, probably only 70 or so years after the death of Jesus, Paul's letters were also regarded as Scriptures! This is the first and only indication in the Bible itself that writings were gathered together by the early church and designated, probably by common assent, as 'holy', and therefore comprising a 'New Testament' Scripture to go alongside the Old. This is an important text.

The close of Peter's letter gives a further warning about not losing one's way through false teaching, but ends with a powerful benediction. Appropriately, it emphasises the importance of knowledge, for his whole letter has been an urgent request to God's people to know the difference between truth and falsehood. 'But grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.' (3:18). Churches today often use the closing verses of 2 Corinthians as a shared 'grace' at the close of worship, but this benediction of Peter deserves to be considered as an alternative!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group how the people of the early church may have come to the conclusion that a piece of writing was worthy of being included in the Scriptures.
2. Is Peter's description of Paul's writing true for us today, in what ways?
3. Look up the ending of some other letters of Paul and the other epistles, and find more of them which have endings capable of being used as a 'blessing'.

Discipleship

Peter said at the beginning of this passage that we should 'strive to be found at peace' (3:14) when the Lord returns in glory. What does this mean to you? Each of us bears problems or issues that cause us concern and draw us away from that perfect peace which we may have in Christ. Consider spending a day or two reflecting upon those things that regularly cause you grief, and ask the Lord to help you gain victory over these things so that they cannot dominate you.

Prayer

Our life at home and at work is blessed by special days; birthdays, anniversaries, festivities and special events. Lord Jesus, help us to make the most of all the special occasions that come our way, and as we praise You in our joy and celebrations, may we honour the Spirit who gives us life, in all its fullness. AMEN