

Bible Byte - #4

Read: 1 Peter 3

Pray for God's wisdom as we seek understanding.

Spend a few minutes reviewing what you have discovered so far.

What spoke most deeply to you in 1 Peter 1?

What spoke most deeply to you in 1 Peter 2?

What have you struggled to understand or to take in?

1 Peter 3:1-7

This section is addressed to married couples and on first glance may be a little confronting.

- *Women, wives – how do you feel to be instructed to “accept the authority of your husbands”?*
- *Men – how do you feel about that instruction?*

The instruction is given in the context of a community and society where husbands were the “authority” in their households. The instruction is also given for a purpose – “that they [husband] may be won over... by their wives’ conduct” (3:1). “Won over” for the faith. The early Christian community had many more women than men, and this is a specific encouragement to Christian women to show the love and grace of God in their action and character. This is also the point of the comment about adornment (3:3). Rather than your clothes and jewellery being showy, let your character speak – “a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight” (3:4).

- *How often do you get drawn into thinking that outward appearance matters more than character?*
- *What does a “gentle and quiet” spirit look like? How does this sit with the need to be assertive sometimes about what you need?*

Verses 1-6 go hand in glove with the instruction to husbands in verse 7. Again there is specific instruction for a greater purpose. “Show consideration for your wives”, even though she will not be as physically strong as you. For the people of the time, and still for us today, this was a radical reversal. Husbands had the right to force their will on their household, but this calls them to something very different. Rather than forcing their will by physical force or emotional or mental force, husbands are called to treat their wives as equals, considering them equally in their decision-making.

And the purpose is “so that nothing may hinder your prayers” (3:7). The higher purpose is so that couples can pray effectively together. There is no point praying together if one is forced to be there, or one is forcing their will on the other. The assumption is that couples should approach God as equals, joining their mutual praise and requests.

- *If you are part of a couple, do you pray together? If not, what stops you?*

1 Peter 3:8-12

The writer then turns again to address the whole group, encouraging them to “unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (3:8).

- *How might you pay attention to developing these in your life and in our communal life together?*

They are encouraged not to “repay evil with evil or abuse with abuse” but repay with “a blessing” (3:9). Again, remember who this letter is written to – people who were strangers in a foreign land, many of whom were slaves or servants. The call to not retaliate will mark them out.

- *How often are you tempted to retaliate or repay abuse with abuse? What steps can you take to learn to control your responses and to bless others?*

The quote then is from Psalm 34, reinforcing the teaching about behaviour: “keep their tongues from evil” (3:10) and “turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it” (3:11). Again, this is about how the followers of Christ control their behaviour – actions and speech – and “seek peace and pursue it”. Seeking peace is active – Jesus’ followers are called to actively foster peace, not just withdrawing into the safety of ourselves and the people we are comfortable with, but working to create peace in our communities.

- *How are you pursuing peace in your family or community?*

Easter 6 – 1 Peter 3:13-22

The lectionary reading this week opens with a question: “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is right?” (3:13) I do hope that this question is a rhetorical one! We know from experience that doing the right thing does not protect us from harm. There are plenty of examples in the world where people who have done good things are then treated very poorly. Which leads us to the assurance that we are blessed when we suffer for doing what is right. This is not referring to general suffering, not the kind of suffering we bring on ourselves for making poor choices, but the suffering that comes when we have done the right thing.

- *Have you ever suffered for doing the right thing? Recall the circumstances. How did you feel? Do you also know the embrace of God?*

The writer also encourages us not to fear what they fear and to not be intimidated (3:14). Abuse and evil acts (3:9) are often generated out of fear. The writer is encouraging the followers of Jesus to not get drawn into the fear that society uses to perpetrate abuse and evil on others.

- *Can you think of examples in our world today where fear is used to control, abuse, or treat people badly? Are you ever intimidated by that kind of fear?*
- *How can we, as followers of Jesus, stand up to that kind of fear and intimidation?*

Verse 15 is one those verses that gets quoted a lot in Christian circles: “Always be ready to make your defense from anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (3:15). The encouragement to “be ready” assumes something – it assumes that our behaviour and our actions speak of the hope in a way that compels people to ask. Our behaviour and our actions should tell people of the love of God in Jesus before we

open our mouths. And when someone does ask, when we do open our mouths to give an account, let's not forget the next part that insists that we "do it with gentleness and reverence" (3:16).

- *Take a moment to practice – what would you say if someone asked you about why you choose to live the way you live?*

The writer then again reminds us of Christ's suffering, "in order to bring you to God" (3:18). Perhaps you could sit with that for a moment – Christ's suffering had purpose, to bring you to God. May God's love and grace surround you and embrace you right now!

Verses 19-22 seem very strange at first glance and they do need some explaining. Remember, again, that this letter is written primarily to people who are likely, as slaves and women and foreigners, to suffer unjust treatment from human authorities. The point the writer is making is that Christ also suffered, but that Christ, in his death and resurrection, has authority over all other 'powers' both human and spiritual and that those 'powers' have been put "on notice"!

While not all scholars agree on the detail, we can consider four elements:

1. Christ made proclamation to the spirits in prison (3:19) – this is likely a reference to 1 Enoch (a book in our Apocrypha). The book looks to the victory God will win over certain spiritual beings. The writer here claims that this victory has been won through Christ.
2. The spirits were disobedient in the days of Noah (3:20) – this is also a reference to 1 Enoch.
3. God saving Noah from the flood points to baptism (3:21) – the story of Noah would have been well known in the region this letter was addressed to as legend had it that the ark had rested on a mountain in that region.
4. Baptism is not so much about cleaning what is dirty but is about "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (3:21) – baptism is a marker, setting the followers of Christ on a new path that involves body and mind, not just about cleaning the body, but a new mind focused on who God calls us to be.

This is all wrapped together in the resurrection of Jesus Christ who is with God and has authority over all "angels, authorities and powers" (3:22).

So this fledgling and growing Christian community is encouraged to let their behaviour – peace-filled, gracious, generous – bear witness to Jesus Christ, knowing that in his resurrection, Christ has authority over all the powers and authorities in this world and the world beyond.