

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

We live just two doors away from a large primary school, where children are aged from about 4 to 10. Yesterday evening was the end of term school concert, so everything went on outdoors. Yes, they enjoyed themselves immensely. But, what saddened my wife and I was the kind of music being played by the disc-jockey. Every year it is similar.

At one time children had their own youthful music and songs, written and played for children. Now, the youngest of children listen to the latest offerings of rock music. Modern music is inevitably accompanied by videos, and the music being played yesterday had scenes of girls in provocative dance routines, wearing next to nothing. The words are all about sex and 'love', or about rebellion and crime.

How can we justify this? How can a school justify it? How can parents allow their children to listen to it? What began as cynical exploitation of the young by music businesses in the 1960's, is now well-entrenched in society, and kids of all ages now expect to listen to and watch the most graphic of 'music'. Along with all this goes the usual clothing demands, with designer labels and trainers! None of it accords with Christian values. And that is the problem.

Do we, as adults, think as Christians? Do we accept that scripture has only one divinely-given interpretation, but many human misinterpretations? Do we accept that most of us live as though we had never been saved, doing what the Gentiles do? Do we teach our saved children to live according to the will of God and to cast aside all the glittering baubles around them that are so enjoyed by their unsaved friends? Do we advise them against sex before marriage? Do we even show our unsaved children a far better way than the way they find in the world, at least to keep them safe from the vile affections in society today??

To live as a Christian can be hard, but it is made even harder if we resist the Holy Spirit and try to live like everyone else around us. And if children are not shown a better way, they will quickly follow their peers to oblivion.

Verses 1&2

1.

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

2.

That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

Because Christ suffered for our sakes, we must also have the ‘same mind’. What does this mean? Does it mean we must desire to suffer? No, it means we must be prepared to suffer like Christ (in the flesh, for no man can endure, or be qualified to endure, His anguish of soul). It also means enduring if we DO suffer.

Christ suffered ‘for’ us, *huper*, ‘on behalf of’. There can be no greater sacrifice than that of dying for someone else! Many ordinary men have died for the sake of their friends or family. But, no man has died for the sake of the whole world (that is, for those in the world who are elect) and had their just dues cast upon him. And no human death can ever save a man from his sins. Only Christ was able to do this.

Importantly, the text speaks of Christ suffering in the ‘flesh’, or body, *sarx*. This refers to His existence as a man, not to His eternal existence as God. This is because no man can share God’s divinity, but God can share man’s humanity... because He is God. God could not suffer harm, but His human body *could* suffer, because it was so ordained in eternity.

This was no small thing, for Christ’s body was put through sheer torture and violent pain. And, on top of that, the full weight of God’s wrath came upon Him, because He bore all the sins of the elect in His own body, so that they could be consumed in the sacrifice. No mere human being could possibly stand up to that kind of awful pressure. Only Christ could do it. And only God could sustain Him in His suffering.

We must ‘arm’ ourselves in the same way. To ‘arm’ is very much like ‘same mind’. It is *hoplizo*, meaning to take on the same mind. We do it by grasping the tools or weapons that enable us to withstand the suffering, *hoplon*

1 Peter 4

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Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

- . The term 'same mind' is *autos ennoia*
- . Autos = the same; ennoia = mind, or understanding, thought, same manner.

If the text had ended there, we would find it very difficult to understand what is meant. But, as often happens in scripture, we are provided with a qualifying statement. In this case it proceeds from the earlier phrase: "for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin."

Does this refer to Christ, Who suffered in the flesh? No, it cannot possibly refer to Christ. Why? Because Christ was sinless. He never sinned and was not capable of sinning. Therefore, this phrase must refer to saved men. Just suffering in itself does not make us like Christ or necessarily make us of the 'same mind.' For example, a man who suffers because he has been taking mainline drugs can hardly be equated with Christ! A man who jumps into a crowd and starts fighting for the fun of it, and gets beaten up, cannot be equated with Christ. And the suffering of neither can make them free from sin!

How can suffering make a man free from sin? To 'cease', *pauo*, can mean to stop altogether, to desist. But, in this text it means to restrain from (doing something), to be 'released' from sin, and not to be stirred by the seduction of sin, *hamartia*

. This means to miss the mark, to be in error, to wander from God and to do wrong against His law. There are at least ten synonyms for this word.

Christ suffered because He preached the truth. When we suffer for the same reason, we, too, will be blessed. However, we must be careful, for not all suffering by Christians for the Gospel are acceptable to God. For example, if we go ahead in our own strength and suffer, then we suffer for something we have done ourselves, and not because God sent us to do it. A huge number of people fill church pulpits daily, yet they have never, ever been called by God to preach! If, then, they suffer for being preachers, they suffer in vain. Unless God calls us to do this or that, we must not do it. But, if we are called by God to a task and then suffer for it, God will bless us.

How? Well, by doing God's will we are most likely to have turned our faces from doing wrong. That is, our lives will be characterised by an overwhelming holiness, not of our own making but from God. Even when no human eyes can see us, and no ears can hear us. All Christians can 'look good' when in front of their peers (and oh how they try to impress when in their churches)!

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

It is something altogether different to be the same way 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, even when alone!

When we do God's will and suffer because of it, then God blesses us and we can say we are of the 'same mind' with Christ. That is, the seductions of sin do not affect us as they once did, and though we are still susceptible to sin, it is not our heart's consideration. That is, our innermost being and desires are holy, not sinful. We are not yet sinless, for this will not be our status until we reach Heaven. Even so, we are counted by the Father to be without sin, for He sees us through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

The person who lives according to God's plan and will does not centre his life around the 'lusts of men'. Lusts, *epithumia*, are the cravings and desires for things forbidden by God. Of course, in absolute terms, whatever is not directly prompted by God is not of God and is therefore sin. However, Peter has far more obvious things in mind, from sodomy to theft, railing to violence, etc. Everybody lived by these lusts before their salvation. Those who are unsaved are ruled by their lusts and thus by Satan. Today, homosexuals are a prime example. They even pretend they cannot help it, in order to maintain their evil lifestyles.

Once we are saved, though, we desire after what is holy and good and true. It is then that we see the utter futility of our former lives, and want to be rid of the sins we once lived by. Then, we live by the will of God.

Verses 3-5

1.

"For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

2.

Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:

3.

Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead."

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

Before we are saved we are, says Peter, quite content to live according to the 'will of the gentiles', the unsaved pagans around us. Then, we did whatever they did. Peter then gives us a select list to illustrate the kinds of sins we did.

Lasciviousness, *aselgeia*: This is something we see every day in the West – unbridled lust. It is licentiousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness and insolence. Again I point to homosexuals, who fit this description exactly, their lives of disgust being sold to the world as lives of necessity! The other interpretation of this word is 'filthy', Yes, that sums it up. The sin also applies to men and women who indulge in unmarried sex, even having children outside marriage. And it applies to pornography, though it can also be extended to such evils as violence.

Lusts, *epithumia*, are deep cravings for what God has forbidden. Cravings forbidden by God are exactly those that cause us harm. Again, homosexuality falls into this category, as millions die of AIDS, cancers and other diseases, and their minds go crazy as they tout false and unintelligible lies to the world.

Excess of wine, *oinophlugia*. Drunkenness! The Bible calls it as it is. It does not use softer words, such as 'alcoholism'. Rather, it describes the behaviour as it really is – drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. The people who do this are drunks. They are accountable to themselves, God and others, and drink too much, because they want to. Like homosexuality and other bad habits, drunkenness is a choice. They cannot be 'cured' because they must stop of their own free will. Sadly, much public money is wasted by taking drunks (and drug addicts) into places for treatment – which hardly ever works, because the offenders do not wish to give up.

Of course, an unsaved person is unable to do this, because their will is controlled by Satan. Even so, God holds drunks accountable. They do not require sympathy and large amounts of public money to be 'dried out'. Like all who have bad habits, including homosexuals and drug addicts, they must grow up and stop being childish. They know they are responsible for their own evils and misfortunes, no matter what prompted them to sin this way in the first place.

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

Others enjoy revellings, *komos*. This is being drunk at parties and then getting up to all kinds of wrongdoing in the streets, often praising the 'god' they have a fondness for. Interestingly, this, also, describes the activities of homosexuals when they outrageously take 'gay pride' into the streets, with a great excess of sexual licence, drunkenness, and utterly shameful actions, in favour of their god of sex... themselves! Note that the word 'revelling' is rooted in

keimai

, that can mean being in the grip of Satan. Thus, it is very apt in the case of homosexuals and other habitual addicts.

Then Peter mentions banqueting, *potos*. In an everyday sense I do not know how richer folk can justify or even enjoy constant rounds of banquets; some eat and drink this sumptuously every day! But, Peter means something more, such as drinking too much and carousing. And if we look at the alternative word, *pino*, we see it means to receive into the soul things that do not refresh it or feed it spiritually.

There are people who love to revel and drink continuously. Their actions become sexually provocative, they use foul language, and they make an awful lot of noise. Once again, this describes homosexuals very precisely. Others are just as guilty. And do they enjoy themselves? Most will say "I really enjoyed myself – I can't remember a thing!" The height of intelligence, eh?

Then there are people who indulged in idolatries, *eidololatreia*. There are many forms of idolatry*, including worshiping false gods, accruing money and riches for their own sake, and the huge variety of vices that grow alongside idolatry. The false god of hedonism is rife today...and lo and behold, homosexuals feature in this, too. It is to forget God and to plunge deep into anything that takes our full attention. (*2016 note: today I would add social media websites, because vast numbers use them, posting dubious photos of themselves, and seeking others to 'like' them. This is idolatry, and it should not exist amongst believers).

Very often what we choose ruins us, but we do not care so long as we get whatever we lust after. That is why Peter refers to them as 'abominable', *athemitos*: contrary to law and justice, illicit, or criminal. Remember that what is humanly lawful is not necessarily lawful in the eyes of God. We have already mentioned a variety of sinful lifestyles that oppose God. These are abominable to God, and should be to us.

All Christians have something in their past like the above (if only in our minds). Things we did that we no longer wish to do, because they are sinful and abominable. Now, as believers we

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

must totally shun them all and live holy lives.

These people who live in sin find it very odd that we do not live the same way. They find it 'strange', *xenizo*: they are surprised to see such a novelty. This suggests that most people were living sinfully, so it was indeed a novelty to find someone living an holy life! This is the way things are going at the start of this 21st century, and how widespread pro-homosexual laws are gaining ground. In such an atmosphere, Christians are a (hated) novelty. But, as in the days of Sodom, the novelty will turn to aggressive hatred aimed at Believers, who will be regarded as *xenos* – strangers, alien, in such a vile and sinful environment.

We will be counted as strangers and alien, because we do not join in with the "*excess of riot*", the same *anachusis*, or pouring out (like a flood) of a dissolute lifestyle. 'Riot', *asotia*, is to be abandoned to profligacy, as many are today. People who are given over to such evils cannot understand why everyone else does not 'enjoy' the same evils. For this reason, they "(speak) evil of you." That is, they will *blasphemeo*, tell lies against you, say awful things against you, rail at you. (2016 note: Is this not the actuality today, where evil people demand we are punished by law for being Christians?)

None of us should deliberately make ourselves a target for evil people, but Christians today tend to be cowards, remaining silent when there is a crying need to speak out, or to be different. Instead, they cower behind silence and allow the evil to proliferate until it fills the land.

They have been so used to living easily over the past several decades, that they now are afraid to be true to God for fear of men. They also have become used to easy living and will shun Christians who bring their ease into danger. They will even speak against them, to distance themselves from the fray, thinking they will be able to live in ease again. Life does not happen that way.

When believers become cowards, those who speak out will naturally become the first victims of evildoers – but then these wicked men will turn on the cowards, rightly despising them for their

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

turncoat actions and words. As the saying goes, it is better to go down fighting than to die as a coward!

The way we act on this earth is known to God and we will be reminded of the actions at the last day. An account, *logos*, will be given so that God will be made ready to judge the “quick and the dead”. The quick, *zao*, are those still alive when Christ returns. In context it also includes the meaning of having true life, salvation. The ‘dead’, *nekros*, are those who have died, but includes the idea of being spiritually dead, unsaved. Thus, the text is talking about the saved and the unsaved.

Verses 6-10

1.

“For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

2.

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

3.

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

4.

Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

5.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

No, there is no mistake. Verse 6 begins with two instances of the word 'for', one after the other. Though translated as 'for' in both cases, each is a different Greek word. The first 'For' is *gar*, meaning simply, 'for'. The second 'for' is

eis

, meaning into, unto, to, towards, for or amongst. Thus, the beginning could be paraphrased as 'For toward this cause'. The second 'for',

eis

, refers to something already done in the past, so it is fixed... referring to the judgement of the 'quick and the dead'.

This is interesting, because, in the human mind, the judgement is in the future, at the end of time. We must bear in kind that, for God, everything that needs to be done has already been done, because He made His decisions in eternity. Therefore, as far as God is concerned the Judgement has already occurred, hence use of the word '*eis*'.

Because God is going to judge both the saved and unsaved, the Gospel was preached "to them that are dead". This *does* not mean Jesus went into hell to preach, as many fondly believe though there is no scriptural evidence to support the idea! It simply means that men, by nature, are already 'dead' spiritually, so they need God to bring them alive again (regeneration).

Some might argue that 'dead' here means physically dead. This would be a ridiculous interpretation, for how can preachers speak to those who are physically dead! We are told that the Gospel was "*preached also to them that are dead*". Obviously, this means those who are dead spiritually, otherwise they would be unable to listen. (Even then, they can only hear the words; they will not understand or agree with them until they are born-again).

They heard the Gospel so were made ready for their judgement by God. Their bodies would be judged, because they belong to the 'old man' and are sinful ("*according to men in the flesh*"), but accepted because they

"live according to God in the spirit."

This is why our bodies must be renewed when Christ returns. Our new bodies will be acceptable to God and will enter Heaven, because they 'match' our renewed spirits.

Peter said the "*end of all things is at hand.*" The end, *telos*, ordinarily would mean the end of our sinful life. However, given that the previous texts speak of God's judgement at the end of time, the word must refer to that moment. Thus, the 'end' refers to the summation and aim of

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

our existence. The end, then, is 'at hand',
eggizo

, drawing nearer, to 'join one thing to another'. Join what? Our everlasting soul with the heavenly existence, our true home.

Some scoff and say we are fools, because the Apostles 'got it wrong' by saying 'the time is nigh'. But, let us put this into perspective. They were saying that the end draws nearer, not that the end is tomorrow! It is factually logical that with each step we get nearer to our destination. Likewise, with each moment, we get closer to the end of time. The closer we get the more we must look out for it. That is, the longer time continues the nearer we get to the point where time will be ended.

For this reason Peter advises us all to live as we ought. He did not know, any more than the angels know, when the end of the world would be. Therefore, he said we ought to be ready at *al /*

times. We must be 'sobre',
sophroneo

, of 'sound mind', with self-control. Everyone around us is giving themselves over to sinful excesses, but we must be careful, living as people worthy to bear the name of Christ, able to resist the temptations that arise more and more.

The idea given is that people who give in to their excesses are insane and cannot control their minds. It means those who live to excess are insane by God's estimation. Today, certain groups of people, who managed to be rid of a former label of 'mental imbalance', prove by what they do and say that they are indeed insane.

We must "*watch unto prayer*", be *nepho*, spiritually calm and collected in our prayers, not swayed by the moment or the circumstance. It must be admitted that this can sometimes be very hard to do, but it is necessary and good. As with many things in the Christian life, we can attain to much by practising our faith, by continually doing what is right. Then, when circumstances appear to be falling apart, our continual attitude will enable us to stay calm and to do what is right, rather than what is forced upon us.

Even more importantly, "*have fervent charity among yourselves.*" Charity is agape, love; brotherly love and good-will, showing affection and benevolence. This encompasses all aspects of our earthly existence, emotional, physical, spiritual and circumstantial. It is very easy to show

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

'love' once and to move on, but it is more convincing when such love is shown in all ways in all times. Few Christians can sustain this love when it is constant! That is why far-distant tribes fare better from Christian involvement than do people living in the same town or country.

It is worth repeating the 'holy order' of love or concern to be shown by Christians. Our first concern should be to God. Next comes our parents, then our immediate family (reversed order when we marry). Then come Christians in need, those we know of, and after that, Christians farther away. Lastly, come those who are unsaved, but whose need is given to us spiritually by the Holy Spirit for ends we know nothing about. God, parents and family are prime. Then other Christians. The unsaved come last, and only in rare circumstances, when actually called by God to help them for a special purpose.

There is really no limit to this love for the brethren. It must be 'fervent', *ektenes*: 'without ceasing', intense, 'stretched out'. Do we practise this kind of care for each other? I do not think so. As I have said many times, based on observation over years, most Christians will help other Christians, so long as the demand is short and they do not live nearby.

A broken leg attracts far better attention than a chronic illness! In 1978 when I was suddenly struck down by a crippling illness, I had three visitors (one was the pastor, just once) in the first few weeks. After that, for the next nine months, I had no visitors whatever from our church, except for one man, who came not to visit but to ask me to proof-read his proposed book! No-one asked if we were coping financially or physically, and no-one bothered to find out how I was. Yet, my doctor was unsure whether or not I would live, given the symptoms. That, friends, is reality in our churches. A quick help is okay, but something requiring longer attention is suitably forgotten. This applies whether the help needed is money, chores, a lift, prayer, or anything else. And it is very far away from the love urged by Peter.

The love is meant to 'stretch out' or to *ekteino* – stretch forth. This includes the idea not just of responding to need, but of watching out for your brethren, rather than waiting to be asked for help. Sadly, few Christians will ask for help from their brethren, because they are embarrassed or know they will find an uncomfortable response, an awkward silence. In my own experience when folk ask me how things are in a general sense, I tend to say 'Okay', because few folk want to actually hear about anything wrong!

As I related before, I remember when I was in dire poverty, I used to attend church in all weathers, often arriving soaked to the skin or freezing. My pastor used to drive past me and

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

wave as I walked the several miles back and forth, three times a day on Sunday and also during the week. My coat at that time was worn and useless, and my shoes had huge holes in the soles, so that my feet were scraped by the ground.

On one occasion during this dire period, I took courage to seek prayer. As a family we had literally no food, and as we had two small children, things were desperate. I had walked, as usual, to the meeting and was soaked when I reached the church. In the meeting I sat next to the radiator and put my feet on the pipes, in an effort to dry out. Steam arose all around me.

After the meeting I waited in the pouring rain for half an hour before knocking on an elder's door. I needed prayer support. At that time I never, ever asked for any other kind of help, because I saw the glances and felt the distancing. As I stood at his door, I could see into his living room, with its roaring fire, and his wife putting a cooked dinner on the table.

The man opened his door and by his face I could see he was visibly uncomfortable. Indeed, he greeted me but in a halting and almost stuttering way. I told him that things were dire and before I could ask for prayer help, he said "I'm sorry, but we only have enough for ourselves! I can't offer you anything. But, I can pray. Remember, God will hear your prayer." As we spoke, awkwardly, he kept me standing at the door in the torrential rain, soaked to the skin.

He assumed I stood there to ask for money, but it was the farthest thing from my mind. I simply needed the support of those who were my brethren. I said 'thanks' and walked away. Though he had a car he did not offer to drive me home – his meal was ready. So I again reached home soaking. In such weather my shoes and coat remained damp all the time, as we could not afford coal for the fire, either. That elder is, even today, thought of as a holy man, but his response to me that night reinforced what I already knew about Christian helps. It is also why, many years later, and even today, I find it very hard to let anyone know my circumstances. Often, I only give a truncated bland version.

I give these accounts because we must live out our beliefs. This is what Peter was talking about. We all repeat the same items of faith, but how many of us live it out in reality? How loving is our love for the brethren? How long do we give that love for? Do we try our best to avoid certain circumstances so we can claim we never knew? Or, do we follow the advice of Peter, not just to react, but to reach out and discover the truth for ourselves?

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

What I have added above is by no means a judgement. It is merely an observation from actual life. Questions I have asked of others I ask of myself, because I am one of the brethren. Let us all care for each other and give love, even when we have not been asked for it.

When this kind of love for the brethren abounds, it shall “*cover the multitude of sins.*” What does this mean? It does not mean we can disregard sins simply by being loving. To ‘cover’ is to *kalupto*

. This can mean to hide, but it also means to hinder knowledge of something. It is my opinion this means that if all Christians gave unstinted love and care to their brethren, then many sins would not arise, and that even if they did arise, each would know that sin is common to us all, so we should deal carefully with it, with compassion. Continued sin, especially public, must be rebuked, or may even lead to casting out of fellowship for a season, but rebuke does not prevent us giving love.

As part of this general love we must treat guests generously, *philoxenos*. This includes strangers (*xenos*).

Note that ‘stranger’ in this context is to be understood as Christians, not just anybody. And such hospitality should be reciprocal or mutual,

allelon

, and “without grudging”,

goggusmos

, murmuring, muttering, secret debate, secret displeasure but with an external smile! Recognise any of this from the above real-life accounts? How often do we give help, but inwardly wish the person would go away? How often do we groan when faced with the needs of another Christian, because we know we have to give a suitable response and appear to be willing? How often do we turn away, pretending we have not seen or heard anything?

Everyone who has “*received the gift*” is included in these responses (verse 10). What is this ‘gift’ and who has received it? The ‘gift’, or *charisma*, is a favour received freely by divine grace without merit. It is the gift of faith, knowledge, holiness. It is to be pardoned of our sin and to receive eternal life. In other words, because no other specific gift is mentioned, it refers to those who have been saved. Therefore, Peter is speaking of all Christians, for all have received the gift of salvation.

If we have had this gift, then we should “*minister the same one to another*”. To ‘minister’ is to *di akoneo*

; to wait upon, to serve each other, to give food and necessities of life, including money where required, to take care of the sick and poor. We know, from experience, how many people try to

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

avoid coming face-to-face with such things. But, it is how we must be as believers.

When we act this way, without grudging the time, effort or cost, we are “*good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*”

This latter phrase is interesting because it uses a plural term (manifold) to describe a singular action (grace). The reason is simple – all that God does is of His ‘grace’ or choice and favour. But, that grace can be manifested in many different ways,

poikilos

, ‘of various sorts’, in ‘various colours’.

There is an oblique illustration of this in the way we are told to treat strangers kindly because they may be angels. When we act lovingly we are showing God’s grace, and are dealing properly with the gift (of salvation) given to us. None of us is better than each other and whatever we have has been loaned to us by God anyway, so we must learn to manage whatever we have in this light.

Verse 11

1.

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

This letter is from Peter to fellow Believers. Therefore “*any man*” refers to any Christian. If any Christian man speaks he should be

“*as the oracles of God*”

. The word ‘speaks’,

laleo

, can mean to speak ordinarily, but it also means to disclose thoughts, or to preach. The man who says he speaks from God, then, should be ‘as’,

hos

, or like, the oracles of God. Do you know many Christians like this?

In this text ‘God’ is *theos*, referring to the Father, or to Christ, or to the Holy Spirit, or even to all three as the Trinity. It can also mean the things of God and what He teaches. It is this latter

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

meaning we must use here, for 'oracles',
of God', and includes the idea of
logios
; to be rational or wise.

logion, means the 'utterances

There is only one way a man can speak what God says, and that is God, through the Holy Spirit, gives him the words to say. During the times when disciples went out to preach, they came back to Jesus and complained that men not called of God were declaring the Gospel, Jesus said to leave them alone, because what they declared was the truth. It is a fact that though they declared the true Gospel, they were nevertheless either zealous new Christians who were uncalled to preach, or unsaved men who wanted to appear important. The former would enter heaven, but the latter would not.

It is true that men who are unsaved can tell others of the Gospel. This is because the Gospel is made clear, e.g. 'Ye must be born again', etc. But, the deeper the theology goes the less likely it is such men can continue to speak with any kind of force, because they do not have the Holy Spirit within. The Christian man may only preach if the Holy Spirit has called him to do so. And when he does speak he must only say what God says. That is, as the 'oracles of God'. The 'oracles' refer to short periods of speech... not to the overlong flowery sermons we are all familiar with!

Note that though unsaved men can indeed preach a passable Gospel, this is no excuse for local churches to deliberately employ an unsaved man as pastor, whether for wages or freely. This would be to bring a wolf into the fold and to encourage bad teaching. Nor should Christian men be used as preachers if they have never received a prompting from God to preach. How can such men speak as the oracles of God, if they have no authority from God to speak?

And, "if any man minister" he must do so as God has given him ability. The word 'minister' is *diakoneo*

(the root,
diakonos

, is the one we use today for 'deacon'). Every true man of God is also a minister, but in this text it means those who supply what is needed to others. This can be money, or food, or services. It can mean to wait on them at table, or it can refer to women who prepare food. It can mean to collect money for the poor and to distribute it properly. In other words, a 'minister' is not necessarily a pastor or preacher,

per se

. in essence we are ALL 'ministers'.

1 Peter 4

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This is why such a man (or a woman preparing meals) is said to have ability to perform such duties from God. That is, *ischus*, meaning strength, or might, or ability. Thus, it does not involve a spiritual gift, but a physical and possibly mental talent. Whilst it may not be a gift, it is still given by God, *choregeo*, meaning that God acts as a 'chorus leader' who conducts everyone in their tasks and roles. Or, as a choreographer leading a dance troupe, *choros*.

We can see, then, that though the deacon/minister does not have a particularly spiritual role to fulfil, his role is nevertheless led by God, as he is given the strength and natural ability to minister. In other words, a man who is good at handling money can be called to work with gifts and their distribution, a man (or woman) who has culinary skills can cook and welcome guests, another who is able can serve food and provide hospitality, a carpenter can keep the fabric of the local church building safe, and so on.

Interestingly for reformed Christians who do not accept female deacons, we see that the term 'minister' or deacon may apply to women preparing food. Perhaps if churches saw the word simply as one referring to a task, it might help, so that those who perform such tasks are not given a higher status than the word implies!

The important thing, whether preacher or deacon, is that we all glorify God in everything we do. It is to Him that all praise and power (dominion) should be given, not to preachers and deacons, no matter how good or useful they are! Many preachers today give dominion or power and might to themselves. The deceitful Alpha Course gives the power to its own self, as do charismatic pastors, etc.

Yet, all is in the hands of Almighty God, not men. Amen! 'Amen' is directly transliterated from the Hebrew, *amam*, meaning 'believe' or 'faithful'. In New Testament days it therefore came to mean 'truly' or 'sure', referring to total trust or confidence in God.

Verses 12-15

1.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

2.

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

3.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

4.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.”

Peter then reminds them not to be alarmed or surprised if they suffer 'fiery trials'. It is not so strange, he says. Rather, they must rejoice, for Christ suffered before them, and when they remain faithful even though suffering, they will rejoice when Christ comes again. And if they suffer because they are trying to preach or teach the truth of God, they should be very happy for it shows that God is with them.

Though other men (including Christians) might speak badly of them (many Christians think constant suffering is proof of God's departure, when it actually means the exact opposite), God is praising them. On the other hand, no Christian should suffer for murder, stealing, doing any kind of evil, or meddling. These causes will not bring praise from God at all.

You will note from verse 12 that ALL the Christians in Turkey (the modern name) will be tested ("which is to try you"). Does this necessarily mean all modern Christians will be tried? Yes, if they have any beliefs to speak of. This is why we should wonder why anyone who says they are believers never suffer or are never attacked by sinful people. They will always be spiritually untested.

Why do I say that the trials promised to Christians 2000 years ago will also affect us? The

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

reasoning is simple: sinful men (including Christians who side with heretics and wrongdoers) hate Christians who stand for what is true. Whenever a Christian sheds the pure light of truth on any person or situation, the keeper of the darkness will strike out in viciousness and fury. It is inevitable. If a Christian remains quiet, for whatever reason, he or she will not be disturbed by evil people... but those silent believers will be seared by conscience and the Holy Spirit! This is why Christians who just 'tick over' loathe Christians who 'cause waves'... it shows up their own inadequacies.

I am not talking about the meagre 'trials' so often espoused by weak Christians! Oh, the trite 'trials' some have told me of with a great deal of sighing and barely hidden pride! *"I know what a trial is – the union leaders in my works are always arguing for more pay"*. What! A Christian dares to compare this to the sufferings of Christ? And what about *"Some people I talk to laugh at me."*
Eh? Is this Christian seriously calling that a 'trial'?

Peter is not talking about small inconveniences, but real and genuine ongoing trouble, maybe even death! It is shameful to call our inconveniences 'trials'!

The 'trial', *peirasmos*, Peter refers to is far more than a temporary or occasional inconvenience. These trials rock us to the very core of our being. They send shocks through our entire systems, as if our very mind will explode with trying to face their wrath. They cause our entire body to shake with fear and dread. They cause our stomachs to churn and our throats to dry up. They cause us to stumble in terror. And not just for moments but for long periods. These terrors can also be joined with actual physical attacks and injuries. Now look again at what you call a 'trial', and weep that you dared to pretend!

Temptation of any kind, if overwhelming, will bring about the above trials. Temptation is not just a comfortable and vague enticement to be naughty. It is a call by Satan to cast off our purity and to embrace his evil regime. For the true Christian it brings real devastation as it tries to drag us down, to perform what we know is wrong. At times this can be in the form of enduring attacks, wave after wave of unrelenting evil.

Do not be shocked when you are thus attacked, for Christ received far worse than any ordinary human being. If we fail and allow a temptation to trip us up, at least we can repent. But, if Jesus Christ failed, and fell to Satan's lies, there could be no turning back for Him, for His failure would have sent us all to hell. Yet, we can rejoice if we are tempted or attacked in a trial, for we can at

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

least follow in His footsteps, even if we could never remove the sins of all elect men since time began.

When 'His glory shall be revealed', that is, when the end of the world comes, we shall then be glad with exceeding joy, for we will have stayed faithful and shall see the reward promised by God to those who are His.

So what if we are called all kinds of names for preaching Christ Jesus? Be joyful you have been awarded such privilege by the Lord! Those who continually teach the truth, even when attacked, receive glory from God, Who will be with them always, no matter what their critics tell them! The fact that they are being hounded is proof enough that they are doing God's will. Others call them awful names and shun them, but God is with them!

Verses 16-19

1.

"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

2.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

3.

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

4.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

No Christian should be discovered in sin, let alone a public sin attracting punishment by

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

magistrates (this does not include punishments given for ungodly pseudo-crimes, invented to cause distress to Christians). But, if he is punished or suffers because he has spoken the truth, he should not feel alone or dishonoured ('ashamed', *aischuno*). Today, genuine Christians are being ridiculed and dishonoured publicly for opposing the heinous homosexual lifestyle/sin, but they should ignore such ridicule, for in God's eyes they are honourable. Sadly, even Christians join in the baying after their blood, or they remain silent. Thus, they become like the world – but far worse.

No matter, let the badgered Christian remain true to God and let him praise God for allowing him to be pressed hard by the enemy. The same can be said of those true Christians who proclaim the truth from scripture, only to be battered down again by sin-ridden believers who have fallen far from God's word.

In Peter's day the time had come for judgement to begin with God's family, the Christians (verse 17). That is, in his day, the Church was at a crisis point, *kairos*. What did he mean? He meant that Jesus Christ had brought in a new way and the transition from Judaism to Christianity had started. Today, we are past that transition point. Even so, judgement must continue to be with us, *krima*, examination by God to see that we live as we ought.

The judgement of God does not start with unbelievers, but with those who belong to Him, 'with the house of God', the *oikos* or Church. And, adds Peter, if judgement begins with the Church, what chance is there for people who are not part of God's family? It means that Christians are saved by the skin of their teeth ('scarcely... saved'; *molis sozo*), so the position of the unsaved is dire.

What does Peter mean by this? He means that unless God has elected us to salvation, and unless Christ saves us, we are unable to enter heaven. As election and predestination are the keys to salvation, no-one else can enter Heaven by any means. Thus, the line between saved and unsaved is the thinnest imaginable, and yet the gulf between saved and unsaved is so vast as to be immeasurable and unconnectable.

For this reason we should live as we ought, in gratitude for so great a salvation. If we suffer for the sake of Christ (this is real suffering not people simply laughing at us, or pointing fingers), it is because it is the will of God, a test of our faith. Therefore, we must hand over the well-being of our souls to the Lord, so that He can deal with our problems in His own way.

1 Peter 4

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 25 August 2016 14:54

As we do so we must continue to do what is right and good, knowing that no matter what happens to us God will show us mercy, for He is a “faithful Creator”. That is, a trusty *ktistes*, or founder. He founded not just the world and the universe, but He lives in Heaven, to which we will one day go with rejoicing. As the founder of everything He can be trusted with our souls and our earthly existence. This is because whatever He has founded He will bring about to perfection, whether we live or die, have ease or suffering, pain or sorrow, unhappiness or joyful, wondrous times. All is in His hands and, at the end, there will begin heavenly joys beyond our wildest dreams. If God founded something then all that follows it must be perfect. In this we trust!

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