

Study 25

BEING A CLEAR MINDED PRAYER HEAD

First Peter 4:7-9

Prayer is the believer's focus on God. At times it requires maximum self-control. Being sober allows a person to pray. Being drunk robs a person of self-control, and consequently hinders them from praying. Even mild intoxication clouds the mind. Peter has been urging the believers there to stand out from the world and its practices. While they may not want to listen to their message, if the believers live godly lives, their lives will do the preaching for them. But they must live self-controlled lives.

THE END IS NEAR

Peter now introduces the concept of "last days". This is a concept that was an essential part of his very first gospel message.

1. In Peter's first message, what did he say would happen in the 'last days'? (Acts 2:17)

If it was the last days on the day of Pentecost, then it was certainly the last days when Peter wrote to these believers. The great event linked to the last days, would be "the coming of Christ". This expression has caused confusion in the minds of modern readers. In the mind of the Jew, the expression "the coming of the Lord" or "the Lord is coming" was an Old Testament expression of God's impending judgment. It should not be thought of as "the *return* of the Lord" (which is a different Biblical teaching).

2. Consider Psalm 96, especially verse 16. How does the Psalmist describe the purpose and the result of the Lord's "coming"? (Note Psalm 98:9)

Peter knew that the "coming of the Lord" was at hand. That is, the Lord was about to once again judge Jerusalem just as He had done in the time of Jeremiah. The Prophet Isaiah even used the expression "the Lord is coming on the clouds" to describe His judgment against Egypt which was fulfilled in the time of Jeremiah (Isaiah 19:1).

Peter's declaration to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost that this was now the "last days" needs to be understood in relation to the *last days of the Old Covenant* - not the last days of "the world". Everything that had been predicted as leading up to the *coming* of Christ appeared to have been fulfilled. There was a cruel dictator who had set himself up as God (Caesar), the church was going through tribulation (massive persecution), the Chief Priests (the "False Prophet" of the Book of Revelation) were colluding with Rome (the "beast from across the sea" described in Revelation 13) to persecute Christians. The gospel had been taken to nearly every nation in the empire (Colossians 1:5-6, 23). All of this seemed to point to the immanent coming of Christ to end the Old Covenant and its elements (the Temple, the priesthood, sacrifices and ceremonies). If Christ was coming soon, then believers should prepare themselves!

3. What does Christ instruct His followers to do while they wait for His return in Matthew 25:13 and how does this correspond to First Peter 4:7?

In Matthew 25, Jesus gives the parable about The Ten Virgins. These virgins are typical of the church. Half of them are described as falling asleep and having no "oil" in their lamps.

4. What was *oil* typical of in the Old Testament? (refer to First Samuel 16:13 and Isaiah. 61:3)

5. What then might Christ be warning His followers about in the Parable of The Wise and Foolish Virgins of Matthew 25?

The Church today needs to be full of the Holy Spirit! It's no longer good enough for just one or two representatives of the church to have this anointing - the true Church must rise up and together seek the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

BEING SELF-CONTROLLED

Self-control is perhaps the greatest indicator that there is a difference between believers and the world. And the greatest vehicle for reaching deeper self-control is prayer. Prayer is our communication with the invisible God. Being invisible, it is easier to be distracted by the visible. Urgent things press in on us. Thoughts pop into our minds. Time is over-committed. All of these things must be dealt with, and this requires self-control.

6. Note the condition of people described in Second Timothy 3:3. What warning is there for us in this description?

LOVE ABOVE ALL

Another way that the Christian community should stand out from the world is by how they relate to each other.

7. In what way did Jesus say that the world would know who His disciples were? (Jn. 13:35)

8. How did Paul say that Christians should relate to each other? (Rom. 12:10)

9. What will loving one another result in? (Prov. 10:12; 17:9)

DEGRUMBLIZED HOSPITALITY

The first church was characterised by continual hospitality (Acts 2:46). Hospitality was regarded as entertaining strangers. Therefore it is the means by which people get to know each other.

7. What do these passages say in regard to hospitality?

a) Rom. 12:13 _____

b) 1Peter 4:9 _____

c) 3John 7-8 _____

Amen.