

340 Prejudiced bigots

Last week we reflected from Deuteronomy 30 on Moses setting two clear paths before God's covenant people, the path of blessing and life, to be achieved by obedience to the Lord, and the path of cursing and death, to come about by disobedience to the Lord.

Unfortunately for decades political leaders in Britain have taken this country firmly along the second path, further and further away from the Lord and His Word, (and the churches must bear some responsibility in this for not speaking out more firmly). The consequences of this folly are all around us, exemplified not least by the extraordinary situation that has arisen over Brexit. No wonder people are "astonied" (to use an old word from the KJV) at what is happening to this once respected Christian country, and the awareness that God's judgment is beginning to set in on this nation is surely well-founded.

One result of this dogged wrong direction is that a distinct gulf now exists in Britain between wider society, (which used to be at least nominally Christian with leadership to match), and the Christian people within that society. Thus anything "Christian" is nowadays, shall we say, "not welcome" in public debate. Instead, those four ugly sisters who sometimes crop up in these Reflections – Liberalism, Atheism, Secularism and Humanism - carry the day in their various guises, while those honouring the Bible, Almighty God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in public life or the media, can be quickly dismissed as "prejudiced bigots" or as something equally terrible!

But the reality is very, very different. God the Holy Spirit tells us through Peter that those "in Christ" - those pesky Christians - are "lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ ... a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (from I Peter 2.5 and 9a, KJV). They, we, are granted this status and these blessings - "that ye (we) should show forth the praises of him who hath called you (us) out of darkness into his marvellous light" (v 9b). We discover from our Concordance that the Greek word translated here as "peculiar" in the KJV has to do with our being obtained, purchased, possessed by the living God in Christ, making us indeed therefore "peculiar" and set apart, entrusted with particular privileges and responsibilities.

So there is no whiff here of Christians being told to keep very quiet and pretend we are not here! First we are told, "Dearly beloved, I beseech

you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (v 11). Biblical morality still applies in the Christian life, for its own sake, and for its beneficial effect in witnessing to Christ; for while "God is love", He is also holy, and is not mocked (egs., Joshua 24.19 / I John 4.8 / John 17.11 ... Acts 4.27 & 31 / Galatians 6.7).

Second, the words "having your conversation honest with the Gentiles" (2.12a) emphasise our calling to live friendly, decent, upright lives among the many people among whom we live, be they family, neighbours, colleagues or strangers: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and [be] ready always to [give] an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (3.15b, KJV). Such Christian lives may well still attract false accusations of evil doing (2.12), but by God's grace they can play their part, perhaps more than we realise, in proclaiming the reality of Almighty God within a sick, sin-ridden society.

Thirdly, we are to remain as good citizens living in submission to those in authority (vv 2.13-16). We know that this submission does have its limits, for if and when, through the God-denying decisions of those in authority, the crunch comes and Christians are forced to choose, we are to stand with "the goodly fellowship of the prophets" (as they are described in the "Te Deum") and with Peter and the other apostles in proclaiming, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 4.29). So be it if necessary. Such a stand is already the case for our brothers and sisters in Christ in many parts of the world, and is becoming more necessary in Britain also.

But in Christ we stand tall, firm and cheerful, even remaining happy and rejoicing if suffering and reproach come our way "for the name of Christ" (I Peter 4.12-19)! For there is nothing prejudiced or bigoted in our proclaiming the two great, central truths of the Holy Bible and all that flows from them - "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (I Timothy 2.5-6).

The confident fans of those four ugly sisters have always hated these twin truths, but thanks be to God, when that "due time" is upon us, "the game will be up".