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Live down the accusations (1 Peter 2:4-12)

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that we are not to attack those who attack us. Rather we are to show by our lives that the accusations are not true.

Getting started

1. How does the world around us shame us for our faith in Christ today?

This can take many different forms. It may be by suggesting that followers of Christ are foolish, or wicked (or both). For example, you may have read Richard Dawkins' recent book 'The God Delusion,' or seen the TV mini-series 'Root of All Evil,' in which he says that religious faith is foolish, and that religion is the major cause of suffering and evil in the world.

2. How do we react to these accusations?

The Bible

3. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. Why does Peter describe Jesus as 'rejected by men but chosen by God' (verse 4)?

Peter is writing to people who face rejection and hostility from the society around them. People also rejected Jesus. But just as Jesus is chosen by God, we as his followers are also chosen by God and special to him.

4. Read 1 Peter 2:9. How does Peter describe us in verses 5 and 9? Why?

When he says that we are living stones in God's building, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, he is encouraging us to see what a great privilege it is to belong to Jesus Christ, whatever the people around think of us. In a world where followers of Christ are shamed, Peter shows us that God has honoured us.

5. Verse 6 is a quotation from Isaiah 28:16. Why do you think Peter quotes this verse here?

Peter's readers were being shamed because of their faith in Christ. Isaiah points to the value of God's Messiah, and says that whoever trusts in him will not be put to shame. This is a timely reminder that God sees things differently.

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: Most English versions translate verse 7 as if it is Christ who is highly valued, or honoured. For example, the NIV says 'To you who believe this stone is precious.' However, the original simply says 'For you, therefore, who believe (is) the honour.' It may be *us*, rather than Christ, who receives the honour – the honour of being united with Christ. This makes more sense of verse 7 within the flow of Peter's argument.)

6. What point is Peter making through the two Old Testament quotations in verses 7-8 (Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14)?

Although Christ was at the centre of God's plan, the world rejected him. As followers of Christ, we are also rejected because we are united with him.

7. Why did God save us?

He saved us for his own praise and glory, 'So that (we) may declare the praises of him who called (us) out of darkness into his wonderful light.' (Verse 9).

8. In verse 12, how does Peter say we should deal with the accusations we face?

We are meant to live good lives so that people can see that the accusations are false. In other words, we are supposed to *live down* the accusations.

Real life

9. What does living down the accusations look like in practice?

Think in terms of *doing the opposite* of what people expect. It could mean that although they accuse us of being racist, we go out of our way to show love to immigrants and people of other ethnic groups. It could mean that although they accuse us of being sexist, we go out of our way to affirm positive roles for women. It could mean that although people accuse us of being homophobic, we go out of our way to show love to gay people. In whatever way, we have to show by our lives that the accusations are not right. This certainly means that we do not attack those who attack us (something we have not always been very good at).

10. Read Acts 22:23-29 and Acts 25:9-12. Do you think there are circumstances where we should defend ourselves using our legal rights? What are those circumstances?

To do

What specific situations do I face this week where people are likely to think badly of me because I am a follower of Christ? How should I respond? How can I show by my life that their accusations are false?

Going deeper

'The God Delusion' by Richard Dawkins, Black Swan 2007

'Deluded by Dawkins: A Christian response to The God Delusion,' by Andrew P Wilson, Kingsway, 2007

'The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine' by Alister McGrath, SPCK 2007

The following page has links to a wide range of reviews of 'The God Delusion,' not all by Christians:

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2. How do we react to these accusations?
3. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. Why does Peter describe Jesus as 'rejected by men but chosen by God' (verse 4)?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:9. How does Peter describe us in verses 5 and 9? Why?
5. Verse 6 is a quotation from Isaiah 28:16. Why do you think Peter quotes this verse here?
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