

# EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE EPISTLES OF JAMES AND PETER

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P E T E R

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## THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

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### INTRODUCTION

**T**HE Epistles of Peter were written primarily—in accord with his special ministry to the circumcision (Gal. 2:8)—to Christian Jews of the dispersion, who dwelt in various provinces in western Asia, where most of the Apostle's labors had been. They have to do with the believer's relation to the Kingdom of God rather than to the Church as the Body of Christ; though, of course, those to whom he wrote were, as are all Christians, members of the Church and subjects of the Kingdom. Both are wilderness Epistles; they contemplate the children of God, not in their heavenly aspect, as in Ephesians (1:3; 2:6), but rather as strangers and pilgrims journeying on through the wilderness of this world from the cross to the Glory. Peter tells us that he wrote the first Letter to testify that "this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1 Peter 5:12). It is not so much the grace that saves (as in Romans 5:1, 2), which gives us a perfect standing before the throne of God; it is rather the grace ministered to us day by day, which enables us to stand against all the wiles of the enemy and despite all the trials of the way. Suffering has a large place in the Epistle. It is looked upon as the normal

thing for the believer while pressing on to the inheritance laid up for him in heaven. In this we are reminded of Savonarola's words, "A Christian's life consists in doing good and suffering evil." He is to rejoice for the privilege of suffering for Him who has redeemed us with His own blood.

The mystery of suffering has perplexed many all down through the ages. It is part of man's sad inheritance because of sin having come into the world, and in this life the child of God is not exempt from pain, sorrow, and anguish. But the suffering of believers is all ordained of God to work out for blessing. Through this ministry of suffering we are enabled to understand better what our Lord went through for us, when in this scene. He was "a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). God uses suffering to keep us from sin (1 Pet. 4:1; 2 Cor. 12:7), and as a means of chastening and discipline (Heb. 12:6-11) whereby we are made more like our blessed Lord. As we suffer because of faithfulness to His name and devotion to His cause, we enjoy a very real sense of fellowship with Him, who is still hated by the world that rejects His testimony. The reward is sure and will make us forget all our light affliction in the enjoyment of the eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).

*Christians are not exempt from suffering.* When one trusts in Christ, it does not mean that he is at once freed from all the consequences of sin. So far

as divine judgment is concerned, he is forever delivered from that (John 3:18, *R.V.*); but he is still in the body from which the Adamic curse has not yet been lifted. Consequently, he suffers with the groaning creation, of which that body is still a part. Then, in addition to this, he now finds that the world to which he once belonged, has now become a scene of hostility because of the place he has taken in association with a rejected Christ. All this involves suffering, but with every trial and affliction there will come needed grace to endure, "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

There is a difference between suffering with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and suffering for Him (Acts 5:41). All Christians suffer with Him because of the very fact that they are partakers of the divine nature, and therefore are quick to feel the adverse conditions through which they are called to pass. But to suffer for Him is to bear shame and reproach—even unto persecution and death—for Christ's Name's sake (Acts 9:16).

The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 2 that after consultation with the leaders at Jerusalem, some time subsequent to his conversion, it was arranged among them that Peter should go especially to the Jews and he to the Gentiles. It was not that either confined himself to one particular class, but He that wrought mightily in Peter to the conversion of the Jews wrought in the same way in Paul to bringing the men of the nations to

Christ. In his Letters Peter still has particularly in view his brethren after the flesh—the dispersed of Israel—scattered among the nations and living in the countries mentioned in the opening verse of our lesson. These were Jews generally known as *the Diaspora*, who, while away from the land of Palestine, yet looked upon it as their native country, until they gave up their earthly standing to become members of a new and redeemed nation, whose inheritance was laid up in heaven. To them Peter wrote, encouraging them to trust in the Lord and go on in patience even in the midst of suffering. Of this he had much to say in his Letter. It is an Epistle for afflicted believers, for, while addressed primarily to Hebrew Christians, it was no more confined to them than Paul's letters addressed to churches among the Gentiles are to be considered as only for those who, by nature, were strangers to the covenant of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, so what is written to one is intended for the help and instruction of all those who are born again.

First Peter is characteristically a Wilderness Epistle. It pictures believers as journeying on from the place of the blood-sprinkling to the inheritance in heaven, or from the cross to the Glory. Many illustrations are drawn from Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan. In Ephesians, believers are viewed as already over the Jordan and in the Land, enjoying their inheritance in Christ in the heaven-



lies; in First Peter, they are seen as a pilgrim people, strangers passing through an unfriendly world, moving on to the Land of Promise.

We are not able to decide exactly when First Peter was written, but it was evidently well on to the close of Peter's life; and, as he himself connects the two Letters so intimately (2 Pet. 3:1), they were probably not written very far apart. The date given by Ussher is A. D. 60, but there is no proof that it was as early as that. The best authorities suggest that the first Epistle was written somewhere about A. D. 66 or 67, and the second somewhat later. It is evident from 2 Peter 3:15, 16 that all of Paul's Epistles were in circulation already and recognized as Scripture before Peter wrote this second Letter, and we may conclude that the first one was not penned very much earlier.

This first Letter readily lends itself to the following outline:

#### IN THE WILDERNESS WITH GOD

- |                |        |   |
|----------------|--------|---|
| Chapter One:   | 1-12.  | The Trials of the Way.  |
|                | 13-25. | Redemption by Blood, and<br>New Birth by the Word<br>and Spirit of God. |
| Chapter Two:   | 1-10.  | A New Nation.   |
|                | 11-25. | The Pilgrim Character.  |
| Chapter Three: | 1-7.   | The Christian Family.   |
|                | 8-22.  | Suffering for Righteous-<br>ness' Sake.                                 |

- Chapter Four: 1-11. The New Life Contrasted  
with the Old.  
12-19. Suffering as a Christian.
- Chapter Five: 1-4. The End of the Way.  
5-14. Grace Operative on the  
Journey.

The following is a suggestive outline on the special theme of suffering:

- Suffering as a trial of faith (1: 6, 7)
- Christ's predicted sufferings (1: 11)
- Suffering for conscience' sake (2: 19).
- Christ's suffering, our example (2: 21-23)
- Suffering for righteousness' sake (3: 14)
- Christ suffered for our sins (3: 18)
- Suffering to cease from sin (4: 1)
- Partakers of Christ's sufferings (4: 13)
- Suffering as a Christian (4: 16)
- Suffering for a limited time (5: 10)

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE TRIALS OF THE WAY

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied"  
—vers. 1, 2.

WE have in these opening verses the apostolic salutation. He who had been commissioned by the risen Christ to feed and shepherd the sheep and lambs of His flock addresses himself to those who in years gone by were as sheep without a shepherd, scattered on every high hill, but who now had come under the loving care of the Great Shepherd who appointed under-shepherds to minister to their peculiar needs.

Peter addresses his Letter, "To the strangers scattered." In accordance with the Lord's instruction, Peter seeks to feed and care for these scattered sheep of the house of Israel, dispersed among the nations. The lands mentioned are all in what we call Asia Minor, north of Palestine and Syria, and south of the Black Sea. In these countries many Jews were living who had been brought to know Christ through the ministries of both Paul and Peter. They had lost their old standing as Israelites in the flesh, part of an elect nation, which however had failed so grievously. Now, through infinite grace they belonged to a new country, all of whom were "elect according to the foreknowledge

of God the Father." There is nothing fatalistic or arbitrary about election as taught in the Scriptures. The gospel is to be preached to all, and all who believe it may be assured that they are numbered among the elect. Through the Spirit's sanctification—that is, His separating work, men are awakened and brought to see their need of Christ. When in the obedience of faith they appropriate the privilege of finding shelter beneath the sprinkled blood of Jesus, like the people of Israel on the Passover night in Egypt, who were safe within the houses, protected by the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels, they are forever safe from the judgment which their sins deserve. God said, of old, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12: 13). So today, all who are sheltered by the blood of sprinkling may be assured that they stand where the wrath of God will never reach them.

It was to such as these that Peter wrote, wishing that to them grace and peace might be multiplied. It was not the grace that saves which he had in view, but the grace that keeps; nor was it peace with God of which he wrote, but the peace of God which garrisons the hearts of all who learn to commit their way unto the Lord.

#### THE TRIALS OF THE WAY

The next section, consisting of verses 3 to 12, constitutes the introduction to the Epistle, and

gives us the key to the understanding of all that follows.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into”—vers. 3-12.

It is noticeable how closely the words of verse 3 are linked to Ephesians 1:3. Both begin in exactly the same way, by blessing, or extolling the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as the passages in the two Epistles continue they unfold altogether different aspects of truth. In Ephesians the believer is seen as seated together in the heavenlies in Christ. This is the New Testament antitype of Canaan, the inheritance which is ours already. On the other hand, Peter shows us the believer as journeying on to Canaan rest which is at the end of the

way. Both aspects are true, and the one never contradicts the other. As to our standing we are in Christ in the heavenlies; as to our state we are pilgrims marching on to glory.

Ours is a living hope, in contrast to Israel's dead hope, because of their failure to fulfil the terms of the covenant entered into at Sinai. Our confidence rests not on any ability of our own to carry out certain promises, but is according to the abundant mercy which God has bestowed upon us, and which is assured to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We are not seen here as already in the enjoyment of our inheritance, but we are journeying on toward it. It is reserved in heaven for us. Unlike Canaan it is incorruptible and undefiled, and shall never fade away. Even after Israel entered the land of promise they defiled it by their idolatry, and it became corrupted because of their gross wickedness, so that eventually they lost it altogether. It is far otherwise with our heavenly inheritance. It is being kept for us, and we are kept for it—"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" in its complete and final sense which will be revealed in the last time—that is, when we reach the end of the wilderness journey. It is not the salvation of the soul of which he speaks here. That is ours already, as we shall see in verse 9. Salvation in its complete sense includes the redemption of the body.

In view of this blessed hope we are enabled to rejoice even though now for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness of spirit because of the many trials to which we are exposed. There is a "need be" (1:6) for every sorrow that the Christian is called upon to endure. Are we willing to trust the wisdom of God and to allow Him to plan our lives as He sees fit? Faith must be tested, otherwise it could not be verified. So we need not fear when our faith is exposed to trial that it indicates any displeasure on God's part toward us. Rather it indicates His deep interest in and concern for us. For just as gold is tried in the fire in order to separate it from the dross, so faith, which is much more precious than gold that perisheth, must be tested *in order that it may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven.*

"Precious" is one of Peter's special words. He writes of the precious trial of faith (1 Peter 1:7), the precious living Stone (2:4, 7), precious faith (2 Peter 1:1), and precious promises (1:4). Do we appreciate all these precious things enough to suffer for them if called upon to do so? Are we as ready to suffer for the sake of our blessed Lord as we are to profit by His sufferings on our behalf? Even the philosophic worldling can endure suffering without complaining, but it is only the regenerated one who can glory in tribulation. Just as gold is purified by the fire that consumes the dross,

so God uses trial and suffering to separate the believer from those things that hinder fellowship with God and growth in the spiritual life.

Faith endures, we are told elsewhere, "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27); so, although we have never seen our blessed Lord with our mortal eyes, we love Him, and believing in Him we rejoice with unspeakable gladness and exalted joy. The expression "full of glory" is a peculiar idiom suggesting an exaltation beyond our power to express. What rapture fills the heart that is really taken up with the unseen Christ, in whom we have put our confidence, so that even here and now we know we have the salvation of our souls! We know this on the authority of the Word of God.

Of this salvation the prophets of ancient times spoke and wrote; but it was not given to them to know the fulness of grace as it has now been revealed to us. They wrote as the Spirit directed concerning "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," but they had no way of knowing the exact time when these things were to be fulfilled; nor could they see the long period (this entire present age) that was to elapse between the cross and the glory of the Redeemer.

It was revealed to them that their message had to do with a future day. What they reported by the Spirit's inspiration is now the basis of our confidence and the first source of information for those who have preached the gospel in our day in the



energy of the Holy Spirit who was sent down from heaven at Pentecost to bear witness to these truths—things that had been hidden even from the angels, and which they now delight to look into. They are learning the wisdom of God in us, as we are told in Ephesians 3:10.

### REDEMPTION AND NEW BIRTH

Just as Israel was redeemed by the blood of the lamb on the night of the Passover in Egypt, and that date became to them the beginning of months, when they were born as a nation, so Peter now asks us to consider the marvelous realities of our redemption and our new birth.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you”—vers. 13-25.

God's word to Israel, as given in Exodus 12, was that they were to eat the passover with their loins girded and their shoes on their feet, ready to begin their journey to the promised land the moment the signal was given to evacuate Egypt. So, here, in addressing these sojourners in a world to which they no longer belonged Peter bids them gird up the loins of their minds—that is, bring every thought into subjection to the revealed will of God, for we are to have the loins girt about with truth (Eph. 6:14). Sobriety is to characterize such, for it is a serious thing to be called out of this world to live for God in the very scene where once we dishonored His name. The hope is to be the guiding-pillar that leads us on to the end of the journey which will come when Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven.

No longer are we to conduct ourselves, or fashion our behavior as we once did when, in the days of our blindness and ignorance, we were under the domination of carnal desires. Like the Israelite about whose garments was to run a fringe of blue, the reminder that he was linked up with the God of heaven, and upon which he was to look and remember that he was called to exhibit the heavenly character, for God had said, "Be ye holy; for I am holy," so we, too, are to manifest holiness in all our words and ways as becomes a heavenly people passing through a world of sin.

Neither carelessness nor indifference becomes those who, through infinite grace, are privileged to

call God, Father, but reverent fear, lest we grieve His heart and reflect discredit upon His name.

We have been redeemed, not like Israel when they paid down the half-shekel of silver, as in Exodus 30:12-15, as a ransom for their souls, nor with gold so often demanded as a ransom by some victorious leader when he dictated terms of peace to a conquered people; but we have been purchased and freed from judgment by the precious blood of Christ, and should no longer be conformed to the empty behavior of the past, which, while in accordance with ancestral customs, was opposed to the ways that glorify God. Christ was the true, unblemished and spotless Paschal Lamb—free from sin or fault of any kind, either inwardly or outwardly. Him God had foreknown before the universe was created, because redemption was no after-thought with Him, hastily arranged to patch up a wrecked world, ruined by man's sin and rebellion against his Creator. All had been foreseen and prepared for beforehand. God had not been outwitted by Satan. It was not however until man had been tested fully under various dispensations, and proven to be utterly helpless so far as delivering himself is concerned, that the remedy God had provided, the Saviour He had foreknown, was manifest. Through Him the Father is now made known in the fulness of His grace, and by Him we believe in God who, after Christ had finished His redemptive work, raised His blessed Son from the dead, and glorified

Him by seating Him as Man at His own right hand, that our faith, or confidence, and our hope might be in God—the God of resurrection.

Redemption is a work which was accomplished by Christ Jesus on Calvary, and is therefore, so far as we are concerned, entirely objective. We could have no part in it except that we committed the sins that made it necessary, unless we had been left to die in our iniquities. But regeneration, or new birth, is subjective. It is a work done in us by the Word and the Spirit of God. Of this Peter next speaks.

A great change has taken place within the hearts of all those who have obeyed the truth through the Spirit. The Word of God has been brought home to their souls in the convicting and convincing energy of the Holy Spirit, thus producing a new life and nature, the characteristic feature of which is love—the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, as Paul tells us, by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us (Rom. 5:5). This produces love for our brethren in Christ, a love that is unselfish and pure, not contaminated by the evil desires of the flesh. For all who thus believe in Christ are born again, not a birth according to the natural order, not of corruptible seed; for “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” as Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:6). But this new birth is, as we have seen, the result of believing the Word of God which liveth and abideth

forever. And this Word, we are told in verse 25, is that which is proclaimed by the gospel.

The intervening verse, 24, and the first part of verse 25 are parenthetical and emphasize the contrast between that which is human and that which is divine. Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6, 8, declaring that all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass, which appears beautiful and verdant for a brief season, and then is gone forever. For the grass soon withers, and the lovely flowers fade and fall; but the Word of the Lord endures forever.

Theologians may wrangle about the necessity of a new birth by the sovereign act of God whereby the elect are first quickened and then enabled to believe unto salvation; but Scripture is clear that new birth is by means of the Word, which the Spirit of God brings to bear upon the heart and conscience. Apart from this there is no divine life. James also tells us that, "Of His own will begat He us by the Word of truth" (James 1:18). Believing the gospel we become children of God, and are responsible to walk as such, in the place of realized dependence upon the Lord from day to day as we pursue our pilgrim course from the cross to the glory yet to be revealed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A NEW NATION

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy"

—vers. 1-10.

**J**UST as Israel, who went down into Egypt as a family of seventy souls, emerged from that land of bondage a new nation, under the divine leadership, so now believers in Christ, having been born of God, are constituted a new nation, whose citizenship is in heaven; and who, though living in this world, are not of it, nor to be fashioned according to it. Their habits and motives are of an altogether different order to what once characterized them as walking according to the flesh.

It was this that was symbolically emphasized in the imperative command to put away all leaven out

of their houses and to eat only unleavened bread with the bitter herbs and the lamb that had been roasted with fire. We are told in 1 Corinthians 5:7, 8 to "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." This is that of which Peter exhorts as this new section opens.

One of our hymns says:

"Lord, since we sing as pilgrims,  
Oh, give us pilgrim ways;  
Low thoughts of self, befitting  
Proclaimers of Thy praise.  
Oh, make us each more holy,  
In spirit pure and meek,  
More like to heavenly citizens  
As more of heaven we speak."

Even so are we admonished to lay "aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings." What a clearing out of the old corrupt leaven is suggested here! How tightly these things cling to us even after we have been saved! With what readiness do we yield to the dictates of the old nature, giving way to unholy feelings, engendering evil humors, and forgetting we are to speak evil of no man. A thorough searching of our

hearts for leaven such as these words describe, and burning it in the fire of self-judgment is most important as we begin the heavenward journey.

In order to obtain strength for the way we need nourishment, and that of a divine order. So, just as newborn babes desire milk we should thirst for the genuine milk of the Word, the revealed truth of God that, feeding upon it, we may grow *unto salvation*, as the Revised Version adds; not in order to obtain salvation in the sense of deliverance from the guilt of sin, but that salvation which means complete conformity to Christ to which we shall never attain until we see Him as He is. In the meantime, the more we meditate upon the Word the more like Christ we shall become, provided of course we have tasted already that the Lord is gracious. If we do not yet know Him we have not taken the first step in the pilgrim way.

Peter's two Letters were based upon two great events in his life, two high and precious experiences which he was never able to forget. The First Epistle links definitely with that confession of Christ as the Son of the living God which Peter made in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus declared, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter (a stone), and upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 17, 18).



The Second Epistle is linked just as definitely with the glorious vision on the mount of transfiguration, as we shall see when we come to consider it.

Whatever man may think, and however theologians may wrangle about the meaning of the Lord's words to Peter regarding the Rock on which the Church is built, there can be no room for doubt as to how Peter himself understood them. He writes, "To whom (referring to the Lord of whose grace he had just spoken) coming, as unto a living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." The house is the Church. The Rock upon which it is built is Christ Himself, the Living Stone. Every believer is also a living stone (made such by grace), builded upon Christ and cemented to his fellow-members by the Holy Spirit. So, too, teaches the Apostle Paul in the closing verses of Ephesians 2.

"View the vast building; see it rise.  
The work how great; the plan how wise!  
Nor can that faith be overthrown  
Which rests upon the Living Stone."

But not only are believers viewed as stones builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit, we are also "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." How different this from Rome's claim to have authority to appoint a special priesthood who offer material sacrifices as they present a wafer

before God and pretend it is changed into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ, and is again immolated on their altars as a perpetual sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead. The blasphemy of it all chills one's blood even as we pen the words!

In Israel of old there were three special groups: the priesthood, the Levites, and the warriors. In the Church, or assembly of God, all are priests, to go unto God as worshipers; all are Levites, to serve their brethren in holy things; all are soldiers, to fight the good fight of faith. There is no separate priesthood now, no clerical order recognized by God as distinct from and with authority over those who are content to be called and call themselves mere laymen, or the laity.

All believers are a holy priesthood, as we learn in verse 9, a royal priesthood also. We offer up the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15). This was the real sacrifice, even in the days of types and shadows (Jer. 33:11).

Reverting to the Rock foundation Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16 where of old God declared, "Behold, I lay in Sion a chief Corner Stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." He who in God's eyes is the infinitely precious One is the Elect Stone, the Head of the corner and the solid Rock upon which the spiritual edifice is builded. To those who believe in Him,

He is indeed, not only precious, but also the preciousness; but unto the disobedient He is the rejected Stone whom God nevertheless has made Head of the corner (Ps. 118:22). Disowned by Israel and crucified, God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to this high place. But despite all the many witnesses to His resurrection there are myriads who refuse to believe. They stumble at the Word because of their disobedience, and to this they are appointed. Do not misunderstand; they were not appointed, or predestined, to be disobedient. God does not so deal with any man. The supralapsarian theologians dishonor His name while imagining they are defending His right when they so teach. But when men are determined to go on in the path of disobedience, God gives them up to strong delusion, thus appointing them to stumble.

Believers are a chosen generation, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; they constitute a royal priesthood who, like Melchizedek, go out from the presence of God to bless mankind, and magnify the name of the Most High God; they are a holy nation, thus taking the place of that polluted nation which God has, for the time being, disowned. This new nation of pilgrims is now His peculiar people—that is, a people for His own possession, whose high calling it is to show forth His praises who has called them out of the darkness of nature, of sin, and of unbelief, into the marvelous light and liberty of the gospel.

In time past, as Hosea predicted (chap. 2:23) they were not a people; now they are recognized by God as His own. They who were once *Lo-ruhamah* ("not having obtained mercy") now have obtained mercy through faith in Christ Jesus the Lord.

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again: when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"—vers. 11-25.

The Spirit of God now gives us important details concerning what should characterize the pilgrim band as they travel on through the wilderness of this world to the Canaan rest that awaits them when they reach the end of the way. Let us notice carefully each verse:

Verse 11.—“As strangers and pilgrims.” Notice the order. Men often reverse it. But no one is really a pilgrim in this Biblical sense who has not first become a stranger in this world. As such, he is to be careful to avoid contamination with the evil that is all about him. He is to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” Just as Amalek came out and fought against Israel (Exod. 17:8), so these carnal desires would tend to turn the believer aside from the path of devotion to Christ, and so hinder his progress as he journeys on toward that which God has prepared for him (1 Pet. 1:8,4).

Verse 12.—“They may by your good works . . . glorify God.” Just as Daniel’s enemies had to confess they could find nothing against him (Daniel 6:4, 5) except “concerning the law of his God,” which was contrary to their accepted heathen practices, so consistent believers shut the mouths of those who would deride and vilify them, making these very foes of the truth bear testimony to the consistency of their lives.

Verse 13.—“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” As loyal subjects of the State, Christians are to be obedient to the laws passed, even though they may feel that in some instances they are unnecessarily arbitrary and even actually unjust. By their submission they honor Him whom they recognize as their Lord and Saviour. Whatever form of government may prevail, so long as it is recognized as the constituted

authority of the country, we are to be in subjection, whether to a king or by whatever name the supreme executive is known.

Verse 14.—“Unto governors . . . for the punishment of evildoers.” Human government has been established by God that evil may be checked and righteousness encouraged. The fact that some rulers act contrary to the divine ideal does not absolve the believer from obedience to the powers that be. All human government manifests imperfection, but without its restraints society would be shipwrecked and anarchy would prevail. In principle, all constituted authority is intended to prevent crime and encourage honesty and good living.

Verse 15.—“With well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” Nothing is a better answer to false and malignant accusations than a godly, upright life, against which no charges can be brought truthfully. Samuel is a good example of this (1 Sam. 12:3, 4). There have not been wanting evilly-disposed men in all ages, who have sought to impugn the motives and malign the conduct of God-fearing people. The best answer to all this is a blameless life, and this involves obedience to law.

Verse 16.—“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness.” Christians have been called unto liberty (Gal. 5:13), but this must never be confounded with license to obey the dictates of the flesh. He who makes of his Christian profession

a cloak to cover unrighteous behavior is a hypocrite who dishonors the worthy name of the One he professes to serve. Note the vivid contrast here. Those who, through grace, are free from the slavery of sin and free from the principle of legality in Christian service are nevertheless the bondmen of God, purchased with the precious blood of Christ, and so responsible to render glad, loving obedience to His Word. They are not to make their liberty an excuse for fleshly license.

Verse 17.—There are four admonitions in this verse. The third really covers all the rest. He who fears—that is, stands in awe of—God will not dishonor any man, and will love his brethren, and give due recognition to constituted authority. “Honor all men.” No man is to be despised. All are among those for whom Christ died. “Love the brotherhood.” This refers, not to the world in general, but to those who have been saved out of the world—those born again into the family of God. “Fear God.” Reverence Him whom we now know, not only as Creator, but also as Redeemer. “Honor the king.” Show due respect to the head of the government as one set by God in that very place, who is therefore accountable to God for the right exercise of the authority committed to him.

Verse 18.—Servants are exhorted to obedience to their own masters, and that “not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.” It is easy to obey a master who is kindly disposed and consider-

ate. But the grace of God is seen in yielding obedience to those who are harsh and needlessly severe. This verse has added force when we remember that in Peter's day servants were generally slaves. The consistent behavior of Christians in bondage was used of God to lead many of their masters to Christ. Self-vindication is ever to be avoided on the part of the follower of Christ. He is called to imitate his master, who endured uncomplainingly the false accusation of sinners and lived His pure and holy life as under the eye of the Father, content to leave it with Him to justify Him in due time (Isa. 50: 5-8). The believer is to be subject to the laws of the land wherein he dwells, and to be a loyal citizen and an obedient servant in his particular calling. Thus by his good behavior he will show the falsity of the charges of malicious men, who would seek to make him out a menace to the State and an enemy of mankind. The early Christians were often so charged, but their consistent lives silenced their accusers.

Verse 19.—“This is thankworthy.” The real theme of Peter's first Letter is the grace of God as manifested to and in the saints (5: 12). The word rendered “thankworthy” here is really “grace.” It is grace active in the life, enabling one to bear up under false accusations and to suffer in silence when conscious of one's own integrity.

Verse 20.—“If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, . . . this is acceptable with God.” Anyone can



endure reproof when he knows it is deserved. It takes grace to enable one to accept undeserved blame without complaining; but to God it is acceptable, or well-pleasing, for this is to follow Christ's blessed example. "It is hard to be blamed for what you did not do!" So said a troubled young Christian lately. But in this portion of God's Word we are bidden to take our blessed, adorable Lord Himself as our example in this as in all else. He was falsely accused and bitterly persecuted for wrongs He had never done. As He left everything in the Father's hands, so should we. Nature will rebel when we have to say, as He did, "They laid to My charge things that I knew not" (Ps. 35:11). But grace will enable us to triumph and to rejoice when men speak evil of us and persecute us (Matt. 5:11). If we endure patiently, as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27), we shall be vindicated in His own way and time, and reward will be sure at His judgment-seat (1 Cor. 4:5).

Verse 21.—"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example." He has trodden the path ahead of us. We are called to follow His steps. The word here rendered "example" suggests a top line in a child's copybook. We are to reproduce Christ in our lives.

Verse 22.—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." He was pure outwardly and inwardly, God's unblemished, spotless Lamb; therefore a suitable sacrifice on behalf of sinners, as He

would not have been had He Himself been in any way defiled.

Verse 23.—“When He was reviled, reviled not again.” Jesus endured patiently all the shame and indignities to which wicked men subjected Him. Their evil accusations brought no answers from His holy lips. He left it to the Father to vindicate Him, in His own good time.

Verse 24.—“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” We dislike being blamed for other people’s faults, but He took all our sins upon Himself—bore all the judgment due to us—and so we are healed by His stripes, as depicted in Isaiah 53: 5, 6. Shall we then live in the sins for which He died? Rather, let us live now “unto righteousness” that He may be glorified in us.

Verse 25.—“The Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” Once we were all like straying sheep, but through the grace of God we have been brought to know Christ. He is now our Shepherd, feeding and sustaining us, and our Bishop, or Overseer, guiding and directing us as we pursue our onward way through the wilderness of this world.

Having been saved by Him whom the world rejected, His pilgrim people have no reason to expect better treatment from that world than what was meted out to their Lord. When incarnate Love was here on earth, few received Him and many rejected Him. His followers need not be surprised therefore if their testimony is spurned by the majority

and accepted by the minority. The Christian is not to think it strange that he, and that for which he stands, is not highly esteemed by the world. He is here as a light to shine for Christ in a dark scene. When Jesus our Lord returns He will estimate aright all His people have done and suffered for His sake, and He will reward accordingly. In the meantime it is better far to have the approval of the Lord than the approbation of the world which crucified Him.

We may epitomize the conduct which is inculcated in this section of the Epistle as follows:

#### STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

Purity of life (ver. 11).

Honesty in word and deed (ver. 12).

Subjection to law (vers. 13-15).

Walking in liberty, not license (ver. 16).

Reverence for God and consideration for men  
(ver. 17).

Obedience to masters (ver. 18).

Enduring grief (ver. 19).

Patient under false accusations (ver. 20).

Following Christ's footsteps (vers. 21-23).

Dead to sins and living unto righteousness  
(ver. 24).

Owning Christ's authority, and under His care  
(ver. 25).

These are the characteristics of the new life which we who are saved have received by our second birth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered"—vers. 1-7.

THE new life does not run counter to natural relationships. It is no sign of grace but rather quite the opposite to be without natural affection. So the Holy Spirit now proceeds to admonish wives and husbands as to their attitude each to the other.

There are few experiences more difficult than to be united in marriage to an unbeliever. The Christian young man or young woman should never go voluntarily into such a union. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . and what communion hath light with darkness? . . . or what part hath he that believeth with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14,15). But where one member of a family already formed is brought to know the Lord while

the other remains in the darkness of nature, the most serious misunderstandings and perplexing circumstances are apt to arise. If it be the wife who has been converted, while the husband remains out of Christ, peculiar wisdom and grace will be needed on her part. If she takes a superior attitude toward her unsaved husband she will only stir up his opposition to the truth and render conditions increasingly difficult. She is admonished here to be in subjection to her own husband, manifesting such grace and humility of spirit that even though he resents the Word he may be won without the Word—that is, without the wife saying much to him—by her discreet behavior as he observes the beauty of her Christian character. We say that, “Actions speak louder than words,” and this is in accord with the teaching of Scripture. An imperious, dominating woman will drive her husband further from God instead of drawing him to Christ. But a gentle, gracious lady, whose life is characterized by purity and whose adorning is not simply that which is outward but that which is inward, will have great influence over even a godless husband.

Here let me point out that the Scriptures do not forbid a measure of adornment of the person, but rather that the wife should not depend on this to make her pleasing and attractive. A slatternly woman only repels. But one may be tastefully attired and immaculately groomed, and yet spoil

everything by a haughty spirit or a bad temper. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in God's sight priceless, and will commend her to her husband, family and friends.

It was in this way that the holy women of old were adorned who lived in dependence on God and were in subjection to their husbands instead of domineering over them. Sara is cited as a beautiful example of this. When the angel announced that she was to become the mother of Isaac, though at a very advanced age, she wonderingly inquired how it could be when she was old and, she added, "My lord being old also," referring to her husband Abraham. Those who obey this instruction become manifestly her children morally, and need not be terrified by trying and difficult experiences.

To the husbands there is also a word of serious admonition. Let them give all due honor to the wife, not trying to lord it over her conscience, but recognizing her physical limitations as the weaker vessel; let them be the more considerate, dwelling with her according to knowledge and as being heirs together of the grace of life; and the Spirit adds what is most important: "That your prayers be not hindered." Quarrels and bickerings in the home stifle all fellowship in prayer. It means much for the husband and wife to be able to kneel together in hallowed communion and mingle their voices in prayer and intercession.

## SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him"—vers. 8-22.

Verse 8 begins with the word "Finally," which suggests that what follows is not to be divorced from what has gone before but rather is the natural result of it. Believers generally, not only husbands and wives, now are exhorted to manifest oneness of spirit, sympathetic consideration for each other, with brotherly love, the product of a gracious heart

and a lowly mind. Anything like retaliation for injuries is to be sedulously avoided. In place of returning evil for evil and reviling for reviling we are to bless even our worst opponents, for in so doing we ourselves will be doubly blessed.

Peter quotes a part of the thirty-fourth Psalm, using verses 12 to 16, but he stops in the middle of the last sentence, and that for a very special reason.

The Psalmist speaks to all who love life and would enjoy it at its best, bidding them keep the tongue from evil and the lips from speaking guile—that is, anything of a dishonest character. He exhorts them to turn from evil and pursue righteousness, to seek peace and pursue it—that is, ever follow after that which is for the good of mankind. And all this is in view of the fact that the all-seeing eyes of Jehovah are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. There Peter stops. When we turn back to the Psalm we find the sentence continues by adding, “To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” But that will not be in this age. It will have its solemn fulfilment in the coming day of the Lord. So exact and meticulous is Scripture! We might think that it made little difference, but Jesus put a whole dispensation into a comma when He read in the synagogue at Nazareth, “He hath sent Me . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book” (Luke 4: 19, 20). The next words are, “And the day of ven-



geance of our God" (Isa. 61:2); but that will not begin until the day of grace is ended.

No matter how evil men, motivated by Satanic hatred for the gospel, may seek to injure believers, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" There can no evil happen to the righteous, for, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). This includes persecution, sickness, financial distress—anything that men think of as evil, but all of which God sanctifies to the good of the subject Christian.

If called upon to suffer for righteousness' sake let it be counted a joyful privilege. There is no need to fear nor to live in dread of threatened terror, for God is over all, and none can go beyond that which He permits for our blessing. He who stopped the lions' mouths and protected Daniel, and walked in the furnace with the three Hebrew youths, will ever keep a watchful eye upon His saints, yea, and upon their enemies too, lest they go beyond His permissive will.

Only give God His rightful place in the heart. Let it be separated to Him, and when called to witness before men be ever ready to give an answer to all who inquire concerning the basis of your faith, with becoming lowliness and reverence; being careful to maintain a good conscience so that there will be no truth in their charges if accused of evil be-

havior by wicked men who give false testimony regarding your upright manner of life in Christ.

Verse 17 declares that it is better, that is, preferable, if it pleases God to allow it, that one suffer for doing the right rather than for doing what is wrong. In this our blessed Lord is our supreme example. He suffered at the hands of evil men who misrepresented Him and bore false witness concerning Him. Then on the cross He suffered once for all for sins—not His own but ours—He the Just, we the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God. And this He has done. We have not yet been brought to heaven, but we who believe in Christ Jesus have been brought to God.

On the cross He was put to death in the flesh, but in God's due time He was made alive by the Holy Spirit in His physical resurrection from the dead. Observe, it is not His human spirit that is here in view. It could not properly be said that He was quickened or made alive in that, for His spirit never died. But after the body and spirit had been separated in death He was raised again by the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:11). In that same Spirit He, in ages long gone by, preached through Noah to spirits with whom He declared He would strive for more than an hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3). Noah was a preacher of righteousness and suffered for righteousness' sake, as we are called to do, and as Jesus did (2 Peter 2:5). So it was "when once the longsuffering of God waited in the

days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing," that Christ by the Spirit preached in or by the patriarch. What was the result of this preaching? "Wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." And just as those who entered the ark passed through the flood of judgment to a new earth so in baptism the obedient believer is saved in symbol. It is not the going into the water that saves but that of which baptism speaks and which a good conscience demands: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He who went down into death, who could say, "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Ps. 42:7), has now emerged in triumph, bringing over to new creation all who trust in Him. He has gone into heaven and sits as the exalted Man on the right hand of God, in token of the Father's full satisfaction in the work of His Son. To Him all angels, authorities and powers are subject.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE NEW LIFE CONTRASTED WITH THE OLD

**C**ONVERSION to God involves an inward and an outward change. When born again one receives a new nature with new desires and new ambitions. The whole behavior is changed from that of a selfish worldling to a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. The great importance of this is emphasized in the opening verses of this chapter.

"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; 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. 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: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. 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. But the end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 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"—vers. 1-11.

With Christ Himself as our example of patience in suffering how can we, who owe all to Him, do

otherwise than arm ourselves with the same mind and so endure as beholding Him by faith? Many times God uses suffering to keep us from going into that which would dishonor Him. And when exposed to severe temptation it is as we suffer in the flesh that we are kept from sin. In this we may see the difference between our Lord's temptations and those which we have to face. He was tempted in all points like as we, apart from sin. He did not have a sinful nature as we do. He was from His birth the Holy One. He could say, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." With us it is otherwise. When Satan attacks from without there is an enemy within, "sin, the flesh," that responds to his appeal, and it is only as we reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God that we are enabled to mortify the deeds of the body. This means suffering, often of a very severe character. But, we are told, Jesus "suffered being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). So infinitely pure and holy was He that it caused Him intense suffering even to be exposed to Satan's solicitations. He overcame by the Word of God, and the devil left Him for a season, to return in the hour of His agony as He was bearing our sins upon the cross.

Let us therefore resist every temptation to gratify the flesh, cost what it may, for it is our new responsibility to live no longer in the flesh according to carnal desires, but in the Spirit to the glory of God. A careful consideration of Galatians, chapter

5, will help to make clear what Peter here presents to us as to our responsibility to refrain from ways that once characterized us. In their unsaved days these whom he addresses wrought the will of the Gentiles when they fellowshipped with the ungodly in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and the abominations connected with idolatry. Although after the flesh, the Jews sought to curry favor with their pagan Gentile neighbors by participation in these evil things, even as Israel of old failed so grievously at Baal-Peor (Numbers 25: 1-3). Since their conversion to God all this was changed. Their former companions could not understand why they so suddenly and completely turned from lives of self-indulgence to what seemed to them great abstemiousness and austerity. They who applauded them before, now spoke evil of them. But they were to live as those who should give account not to men, but to Him who is about to judge the living and the dead when He returns in power. In that day those who despised them for their holy lives would answer to God too. "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." Those who had preceded them in the path of faith were obliged to contend with similar conditions. The good news preached to them who, though now dead, once had to face the ridicule and even persecution of wicked men who had no understanding of spir-

itual things, was revealed to them that even while living as men in this scene and judged by their fellows as fools and fanatics, they might actually live unto God in spirit. There is no thought or suggestion here of the gospel being carried to men after death as Romanists, Mormons, and others, would have us believe.

Verse 7.—The Christian is ever to keep the end in view. He is to live not for the passing moment, but as one who knows that the end of all things—that is, all things of this present order, is at hand. It will be ushered in at the Lord's return; therefore, the importance of sobriety and watchfulness unto prayer.

Verse 8 emphasizes that upon which Paul lays so much stress in 1 Corinthians 13, the importance of fervent love among those who are of the pilgrim company. The world hates believers. This is all the more reason why they cling to one another in love, even though they cannot be blind to the faults of others, but love covers the multitude of sins, rather than exposing and holding them up to censure. This does not mean that we should be indifferent to evil. We are taught elsewhere how to deal with and to help those who are overtaken in a fault or who drift into sin. See Galatians 6:1; James 5:19, 20.

It is incumbent on those who love Christ to be gracious to one another, using hospitality ungrudgingly, as verse 9 tells us.

Verses 10 and 11 have to do with the exercise of spiritual gifts and Christian service generally. Each is responsible to use the gift he has received to minister for the blessing of the rest, "as good stewards of the grace of God." A steward is held accountable to fulfil faithfully the trust committed to him by his master.

They who speak, addressing the church when assembled together, are not to give out their own or other men's theories, but are to speak as the oracles of God, declaring only that which He has revealed. Those who minister (or serve) in any capacity are to do it according to the ability God gives, so that in all things He may be glorified through Christ Jesus to whom all praise and dominion eternally belong.

### SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN

The name "Christian" is not found very often in the New Testament, but is the distinctive title of those who belong to Christ. We read of it in Acts 11:26 where it was conferred upon the Gentile believers at Antioch by divine authority; for the word "called" there literally means "oracularly called," and therefore it was not the Antiochians alone who bestowed this name upon the believers, but God Himself who so designated them. That it has become their well-known appellation is evident from Acts 26:28, where we read that King Agrippa ex-



claimed, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!" When Peter wrote this letter some years later he uses it as the commonly recognized name of the pilgrim company, and he tells us that it is praiseworthy to suffer as a Christian.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 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. 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. 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. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 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? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 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"—vers. 12-19.

In verse 12 he writes of "the fiery trial which is to try you." Primarily, the reference was to the great suffering that the Jews—whether Christian or not—were about to undergo in connection with the fulfilment of our Lord's prophecy concerning Jerusalem's destruction, shortly to take place (Luke 21:20-24). But it also has reference to the horrors of the Roman persecutions, which were to continue for two terrible centuries. The words are applicable to every time of trial and persecution.

Verse 13.—"Partakers of Christ's sufferings." The believer suffers in fellowship with his Lord. Our Lord has told us to expect this (John 15:18:

21). We cannot be partakers of His atoning sufferings. They stand alone: none but He could endure the penalty for our sins and so make propitiation, in order that we might be forgiven. But we share His sufferings for righteousness' sake.

Verse 14.—“Reproached for the name of Christ.” No one can be true to Christ and loved by the world-system, for everything that Jesus taught condemns the present order and leads ungodly men to hate Him and His people. But he who suffers for Christ's sake now is assured of glory hereafter, which will fully answer to the shame now endured. “On their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified.” The reproach of the world should not deter the Christian. He need not expect the approval of those who reject and misunderstand his Saviour. It is his responsibility so to live as to give the lie to the false reports of the ungodly and so to glorify the One whose name they spurn.

Verse 15.—No believer should ever suffer as “a busybody in other men's matters.” Notice the company in which the busybody is placed. He is linked with murderers, thieves, and evildoers of every description, and that for a very good reason; for the busybody steals men's reputations, seeks to assassinate their good names, and by his calumniations works all manner of evil. The follower of Christ is called upon to be careful never to misbehave so as to deserve the ill-will of the wicked. He is not to be dishonest or corrupt in life, nor to be given

to gossipy interference in other people's affairs. Thus by a holy and righteous life, he will adorn the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27, 28).

Verse 16.—“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” None needs to be ashamed to suffer because of his faithfulness to the hallowed name he bears. The disciples, as we have noticed already, were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:26), and this name has clung to them ever since. It signifies their union with Christ, and therefore is a name in which to glory, however the world may despise it! Let us therefore never be ashamed of this name and all that it implies, but be prepared to suffer because of it, knowing that we may thus glorify the God who has drawn us to Himself and saves us through His blessed Son, who bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).

Verse 17.—“Judgment must begin at the house of God.” Our Father-God does not pass over the failures of His people, but disciplines them in order that they may be careful to walk in obedience to His Word. If He is thus particular in chastening His own, how solemn will be the judgment of “them that obey not the gospel,” but persist to the end in rejecting the Saviour He has provided!

Verse 18.—“If the righteous scarcely be saved,” that is, if the righteous have to endure chastening at the hand of God and persecution at the hand of the world, what will it mean for unsaved and im-

penitent men to answer before the judgment-throne for their persistence in refusing His grace?

Verse 19.—“Commit the keeping of their souls . . . in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” However hard the way and however perplexing their experiences, the suffering Christian may look up to God in confidence, knowing he can rely upon the divine love and faithfulness, and assured that all will work out for blessing at last.

Throughout the entire Christian era, which is that of the dispensation of the grace of God (Eph. 3:2), believers in Christ are called out from the world and are responsible to live for the glory of Him who has saved them. But though separated from the surrounding evil, they are not to shut themselves up as in a monastery or convent in order to be protected from defilement, but are to go forth as God's messengers into that very world from which they have been delivered, preaching to all men everywhere the gospel, which is God's offer of salvation through the finished work of His beloved Son. Whatever suffering or affliction this entails is to be borne cheerfully for His sake, knowing that He will reward abundantly for all endured, when He returns in glory. His Church is to be in the world, but not of it, witnessing rather against its evil, and offering pardon through the cross. Tertullian declared that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. This has been demonstrated over and over again. Persecution can never de-

stroy the Church of God. The more it is called to suffer for Christ, the stronger it becomes. It is internal strife and carelessness in life that endangers it. But so virile is the life it possesses that even this has never been permitted to destroy it, for although its outward testimony has at times been ruined by such things, God has always kept alive a witnessing remnant to stand for the truth of His Word.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE END OF THE WAY

THE path of suffering, both for Christ and for His followers, ends in glory. Peter has a special word for his fellow-elders, to whom was committed the care of the flock of God, and who were, as we know, specially exposed to the assaults of the enemy.

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away"—vers. 1-4.

Note the expression, "the elders which are among you." There is no suggestion here of a clerical order ruling arbitrarily over the laity. These elders were mature, godly men, upon whom rested the responsibility of watching over the souls of believers, as those for whom they must give an account (Heb. 13:17). Peter links himself with them, "who am also an elder," or "who am a *co-presbyter*." If Peter was ever a Pope he never knew it! He took his place as one with his elder-brethren in sharing the ministry for the edification of the saints, even though he was one of the original twelve, and so a witness of the sufferings of Christ; and he was yet

to be partaker of the glory that shall be revealed at the Lord's second advent.

He admonishes the elders to feed, not fleece, "the flock of God which is among you." They were to feed the people by ministering the truth of God as made known in His holy Word. What a grievous thing it is when men, professing to be servants of Christ, set before the sheep and lambs of His flock, unscriptural teachings which cannot edify but only mislead!

Not as pressed unwillingly into a service which was a hard, unwelcome task, were these elders to take the oversight; nor yet for what money was to be gained thereby, but as serving the Lord with all readiness of mind. Neither were they to become ecclesiastical lords, dominating over God's heritage. Think of the hierarchy that has been developed in the professing body, with its priests, lord-bishops, cardinals known as "princes of the church," and all the other dignitaries who rule as with an iron hand those under their jurisdiction! Could anything be more opposed to what Peter teaches here? Yet some call him the first Pope!

Whatever authority the elders have springs from lives of godliness and subjection to the Lord. They are to be examples to the flock, those whom the sheep of Christ may safely follow.

Their reward will be sure when they reach the end of the way. Then they shall give account of their service to the Chief Shepherd at His glorious

appearing, and His own blessed hands will bestow upon each faithful under-shepherd an unfading victor's wreath of glory—the token of His pleasure in the service they have done as unto Him.

#### GRACE OPERATIVE ON THE JOURNEY

We have seen that throughout this Epistle Peter dwells on the grace of God as that which enables the believer to triumph in all circumstances. He stresses this most definitely in the concluding section of this Epistle.

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen”—vers. 5-14.

It is as we walk in subjection to Him who is meek and lowly in heart that we can appreciate the preciousness of that grace which He gives to the humble. Pride is a barrier to all spiritual progress. In the Christian company it should have



no place. None should ever be puffed up against others. All are to be submissive to one another, not only the younger to the elder, as is befitting, but each to his brethren, and all clothed with humility; for God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but ministers all needed grace to enable the meek to overcome, no matter what difficulties they are called upon to face.

Verse 6.—“Humble yourselves therefore . . . that He may exalt you in due time.” We are to take the lowly place of unquestioning submission to the will of God now, knowing on the authority of His Word that in the day of manifestation He will take note of all we have endured for His name’s sake, and He will then give abundant reward.

Verse 7.—“He careth for you.” It is of all-importance to realize that God’s heart is ever toward His own. He is no indifferent spectator of our suffering. He feels for us in all our afflictions and bids us cast every care upon Him, assured that He is concerned about all we have to endure. Weymouth has rendered the last part of this verse, “It matters to God about you.” How precious to realize this!

Verse 8.—“Your adversary the devil . . . walketh about.” Satan is a real being, a malignant personality, the bitter enemy of God and man. But when we refuse to give place to the Devil, standing firmly at the cross, he flees from us, and his power is broken.

Verse 9.—“Whom resist.” We are to stand against all the Devil’s suggestions, “steadfast in the faith,” battling for the truth committed to us. Nor are we alone in this: our brethren everywhere have the same enemy to face.

Verse 10.—“After that ye have suffered a while.” We grow by suffering. Only thus can God’s plan of conformity to Christ be carried out. But all is ordered of Him. He will not permit one trial too many. When His purpose is fulfilled we shall be perfected and stablished in His grace.

Verse 11.—“To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” The victory will be His at last. All evil will be put down; Satan will be shut up in his eternal prison-house. Suffering then will be only a memory, and God will be glorified in all His saints, and His dominion established over all the universe.

In verse 12 Peter mentions the name of his amanuensis, Silvanus, whom Peter regarded as a faithful brother to them and to himself. He may be the same Silas, or Silvanus, who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey; or he may have been another of the same, not uncommon, name. The theme of the entire Epistle is here declared to be “the true grace of God wherein ye stand.” As intimated in our introduction, while these words are much like those of Paul in Romans 5:2, “This grace wherein we stand,” the meaning is different. Paul writes of our standing in grace before God; Peter testifies to the power of grace

which enables us to stand in the hour of trial, neither giving place to the devil nor disheartened by suffering and persecution. There are abundant stores of grace from which we may draw freely for strength to meet every emergency as we pursue our pilgrim way.

This Letter was written at Babylon, which Romanists claim was pagan Rome, but it seems more likely it was, as the Nestorian Church has held from the beginning, Babylon on the Euphrates, where many Jews dwelt to whom Peter ministered; or as the Coptic Church holds, with apparently less evidence, a new Babylon in Egypt, near to the present city of Cairo. Wherever it was, the church there joined Peter in salutations to the scattered Christians throughout Asia Minor. Mark, too, participated in this. He is identical with the John Mark who was the companion for a time of Paul and Barnabas, and who, though unfaithful at first, became accredited later to Paul's own satisfaction (2 Tim. 4:11). According to some very early writers Mark accompanied Peter in later years and wrote his Gospel in collaboration with the venerable apostle, under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

The Epistle closes with a benediction quite different from those which bring Paul's letters to an end. Paul always wrote of grace: Peter bids the saints greet one another with a kiss of love, and prays that peace may be with all that are in Christ Jesus. These three final words are significant. We ordi-

narily think of them as characteristic of Paul's writings. He uses the expressions "in Christ" and "in Christ Jesus" with great frequency. Peter joins with Paul in speaking of the saints in this blessed relationship. They are no longer in the flesh or in Adam; they are new by new birth and the gift of the indwelling Spirit in Christ Jesus, and so a new creation.

## THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER

### INTRODUCTION

**H**OW much time elapsed between the writing of the two Petrine Epistles we have no way of determining. But certainly when one says, "This second epistle . . . I now write unto you" (3:1), it implies that the first one had been sent on just a short time before. This was true in regard to Paul's two letters to the Corinthians, those to the Thessalonians, and the two pastoral letters to Timothy.

Paul was, in all probability, already with the Lord when Peter wrote, or else he was enduring his last imprisonment just prior to his martyrdom; for Peter mentions "all his epistles" as being in circulation already. This is important, inasmuch as some have sought to minimize the importance of Peter's written ministry in order to enhance the value of Paul's letters. But God does not set one apostle against another in this way. All Scripture is divinely inspired, and all is profitable. And as Peter was led of God to write these letters possibly after Paul's ministry had come to a close we dare not under-estimate their value. They contain precious and important truth which the Church can neglect only at its peril.

It is true that in early days some sought to cast doubt on the authenticity of this Second Epistle, but there can be no question now as to this. It bears every mark of inspiration and, as such, has been accepted by the Church since the second century at least, and by many reliable witnesses from the first; beginning, that is, from the time when it was first circulated, somewhere about A. D. 66 to 70.

Like all Second Epistles it is corrective. In the First Epistles we hear the voice of the teacher. As a rule in Second Epistles it is rather the prophet or the exhorter who speaks.

The theme of this letter is "Faithfulness in a Day of Apostasy." The three chapters form three distinct divisions.

**Chapter 1.**—The blessings bestowed upon believers through the righteousness of God.

Section 1: Vers. 1 to 11.—Blessings received and growth in grace.

Section 2: Vers. 12 to 21.—The hope of the coming kingdom.

**Chapter 2.**—Increasing apostasy, and the call to faithfulness.

Section 1: Vers. 1 to 10.—Lessons from the past for the present age.

Section 2: Vers. 11 to 17.—Characteristics of apostate teachers.

Section 3: Vers. 18 to 22.—Turning away from the truth to the false philosophies of the world.

Chapter 3.—Looking on to the culmination.

Section 1: Vers. 1 to 7.—Forgetting the past and denying the future.

Section 2: Vers. 8 to 14.—The day of the Lord and the day of God.

Section 3: Vers. 15 to 18.—A final warning.

We should be very grateful to God that He has given such a faithful portrayal of conditions which He foresaw from the first, in order that we might not be disheartened when these things actually developed in the professing Church.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE BLESSINGS BESTOWED UPON BELIEVERS THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

**A**S we begin our consideration of this Second Epistle it is well for us to remember that it is in the nature of a final message from Christ's venerable servant, the Apostle Peter, who wrote in view of his forthcoming martyrdom, in order to warn believers of the oncoming flood of error and apostasy which was to sweep over Christendom, and which would necessitate real confidence in God and His Word on the part of those who were to be called upon to meet such disturbing conditions.

In a very blessed way the Spirit of God first puts before us the blessings that are ours as Christians, and the importance of growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ that we may have strength to stand against the evils threatening the Church.

### BLESSINGS RECEIVED AND GROWTH IN GRACE

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having



escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"—vers. 1-11.

Peter addresses himself to the same scattered saints as mentioned in his first letter, but without indicating them according to the lands of their dispersion, as before. But verse 1 of chapter 3 makes it clear that this second letter was sent to the same persons as the first one.

He simply writes to them as those "that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Verse 1.—Note the word "precious," which we have seen is one of frequent occurrence in his letters. He writes of faith through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. This stands out in remarkable contrast to the theme so frequently dwelt upon by the Apostle Paul—"The righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3: 9). This expression refers to that righteousness which God imputes to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who has met every claim of the throne of God in regard to the sin question. But Peter dwells on an altogether different aspect of things:

since Christ has died for all men, God, in His righteousness, has opened the door of faith to everyone who desires to enter. It would be unrighteous of God to refuse to save anyone who desired to avail himself of the result of the work of the cross. The very righteousness of God demands that faith be extended to all men. This is the very opposite of what some High Calvinists teach. They would have us believe that faith itself is a gift which God grants only to a limited number; that all men have not faith because it is not the will of God that they should have it. This is the very opposite of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. God desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The reason that some men have not faith is that they will not give heed to the Word, and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Where men are ready to hear, God can be depended upon to see that they obtain this precious gift of faith. It would be unrighteous in Him to do otherwise.

In the second verse we have again the apostolic salutation, in which Peter prays that grace and peace might be multiplied unto the believers through the full knowledge, or super-knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord. This is a completeness of knowledge which only the Holy Spirit Himself can give. It is interesting to observe how frequently Peter uses mathematical terms in both his Epistles. The word "multiplied," for example,

is found not only here but also in 1:2 of the First Epistle, where it is used in a similar connection. There is an abundance of grace and peace available for all who rest in simplicity of heart upon the testimony God has given. His divine power has bequeathed to us everything that is necessary for spiritual life and piety, but this can never be divorced from the knowledge of Him who has called us, not exactly *to* glory and virtue, but by His glories and virtues. In other words, it is as we become better acquainted with God revealed in Christ that we grow in grace and become more like Him with whom our souls are occupied.

In verse 1 the Apostle is speaking of precious faith; in verse 4 he reminds us that God has given us His surpassing great and precious promises. As we lay hold of these and dare to act in accordance with them we, who have been born again by believing the gospel, manifest the divine nature in our practical lives, having thus found deliverance from the corruption into which the whole world has been brought through lust: that is, through unlawful desire; for the word "lust" should never be limited simply to fleshly concupiscence, but includes covetousness and every sort of yearning after that which God, in His infinite love and wisdom, has forbidden. As we thus act upon the truth of the Word we will be prepared for that which follows in verses 5 to 7. Here again, according to our Authorized Version, Peter writes from a mathematical standpoint as he

tells us of the graces that should be added to our faith. A better figure perhaps is that of a growing tree: an acorn, for instance, falls into the ground; the seed germinates, strikes its roots downward, and its branches shoot upward; and that acorn becomes an entire oak-tree with all its various parts. Faith is like the acorn—a living faith, that should characterize us as devoted Christians. So Peter says, "Have in your faith virtue." The virtue of which he speaks here is not simply chastity, as some might think, but it is really valor, which is the outstanding virtue of a soldier, and we are called to be soldiers of Christ. Then he adds, "And in virtue knowledge." There can be no proper growth without a deepened understanding of spiritual realities. "In knowledge temperance," or self-control. A Christian who gives way to evil tempers, or careless habits of any kind, is not growing in grace in self-control. "In temperance patience"—that which enables one to endure without complaining, even though exposed to circumstances that are very distasteful to the natural man. "In patience godliness," which is really "God-likeness," or true piety, as we have seen in considering the First Epistle. In godliness we will have brotherly kindness—consideration for all who belong, through the grace of God, to the Christian brotherhood. Last of all he adds, "In brotherly kindness charity," or "love." This is the full fruitage of faith, for Paul tells us that faith worketh by love (Gal. 5: 6).

If these things are found in a believer, and that not in scanty measure but in abundance, the effect is to make him neither idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Authorized Version renders it, "Neither barren nor unfruitful," but these terms are synonymous as ordinarily used. "Idle" or "inactivity" is a better rendering of the original than the word "barren." One who does not manifest these fruits of faith is designated here as blind, or myopic. He is unable to discern spiritual things; and though once truly born of God, he forgets the sins from which he has been purged and is likely to lapse into them again, thus coming under the government of God because of failure to go on with the Lord.

Peter concludes this exhortation in verses 10 and 11 by urging those to whom he writes to give diligence to make their calling and election sure; that is, in the sense of manifestation. No one has any reason to believe that one is numbered among the elect of God unless he is characterized by faith which brings forth fruit unto God; but where this is true there will be constant victory over tendencies toward evil, "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." A promise is given that the final result will be an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Observe, it is not an entrance into heaven as such that is here put before us. Heaven is the Father's house, and to that all believers have exactly the

same title; it is the home of the Father's children, and the weakest and feeblest of saints will be as welcome there as the strongest and most useful. But the everlasting kingdom is another sphere: it speaks of reward, and our place in the kingdom is determined by our devotion to Christ in this scene.

#### THE HOPE OF THE COMING KINGDOM

In verses 12 to 14 Peter refers to what the Lord had told him concerning his martyrdom.

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me"—vers. 12-14.

Jesus had made it very plain, in speaking to Peter on that morning by the seaside when He publicly restored him to the place of apostleship, that in his old age he should die for Christ's name's sake. Many years had passed since that memorable conversation, and Peter was now well advanced in years. He knew he could not remain much longer in this world; therefore, he was desirous of leaving behind what written ministry he could in order that the saints might be helped by it and established in the needed truth for the present hour of testing.

Notice how he puts it in verse 12, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and

be established in the present truth." He was not writing to young believers who were ignorant of the precious things of which he desired to remind them. But he knew the value of repetition because of the fact that we forget so easily. He considered it suitable or important, therefore, as long as he remained in his fleshly tabernacle—that is, in his body, to stir up the saints by bringing these things to their remembrance. And he knew well that in a very short time he would be obliged to put off his tabernacle in accordance with what the Lord Jesus had revealed to him. Observe that he had no thought of going to sleep in his tabernacle as some modern materialists, masquerading under the Christian name, would have us believe. While alive on the earth Peter himself, the real man, dwelt in the body which he calls his tabernacle; when death came he would move out of the tabernacle, and, as Paul puts it, go home "to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). A comparison of this passage with 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 will prove most illuminating in connection with the truth concerning the believer in life and in death. Scripture leaves no room whatever for the doctrine of the sleep of the soul, but only the sleep of the body until the Lord Jesus returns, when the dead will be raised and the living changed (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

We have seen already that these two Epistles of Peter's were linked with two great experiences in his life during the earthly ministry of our blessed

Lord. We have considered the first one in connection with the Lord's declaration as to the building of His Church upon the truth that He was the Son of the living God. Now Peter refers to that other great experience which took place on the Mount of Transfiguration.

"Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount"—vers. 15-18.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter was unfolding truth which the Lord could use in after days for the comfort and sanctification of believers. He speaks of his own death as an exodus. The word rendered "decease" is really the same as the title of the second book of the Old Testament. This agrees with what we have pointed out already. At death Peter would be moving out from the body and going into the presence of the Lord. In view of the imminence of this event he endeavored to make certain things clear which would be for the enlightenment of the saints. He denies having followed cunningly devised fables when he and other inspired apostles had made known the power and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were eyewitnesses of His majesty when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, He was metamorphosed before them, and the glory



from within shone out through the very raiment which He wore. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him at that time, as we know, and spake of His decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. When Peter suggested making three booths or tabernacles that they might tarry there, a cloud covered the scene, and a voice came from the Excellent Glory, saying, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). This was not a dream, nor was it the effects of a wrought-up imagination; but Peter said, "This voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." It was there that God vouchsafed to Peter, James, and John a view of the kingdom in miniature. They beheld the Lord as He will yet be when He returns to take His great power and reign.

What they saw and heard on the Mount confirmed the word of prophecy given in the Old Testament. To that, Peter refers in the closing verses.

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"—vers. 19-21.

As we have it in the opening clause of the nineteenth verse in the Authorized Version we might suppose that Peter was telling us that the word of prophecy was even more sure than the Father's

voice or the glory that the disciples beheld; but that is not exactly what he says. We might better read, "We have also the word of prophecy confirmed, and to this prophetic word believers do well to take heed in their hearts, for the lamp of prophecy is as a light that shineth in a dark place." It is intended by God to illumine our paths and give light in our souls until the day dawn, and the day star arise at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is all important, then, that we give heed to that which has been revealed in the prophetic scriptures; but on the other hand, we need to be careful lest we take some of these scriptures out of their connection and endeavor to interpret them according to specific incidents, rather than in accordance with the entire plan of God, as revealed in His Word. No prophecy of the Scripture is of its own interpretation; none can be fully understood apart from the rest. Rome takes this condemnation of any private interpretation as forbidding the individual believer to study the Word of God for himself and being guided by it directly, rather than through the interpretation put upon it by the church and its councils. But it is not that at all that Peter had in mind, but rather the folly of taking some portion of the prophetic Word and endeavoring to apply it to some special circumstances, while failing to note its context and its connection with the general trend of prophecy as a whole. This is a snare to which many students of prophecy have been ex-

posed, and numbers of them have failed at this very point. It means much to see that prophecy is one whole, and "known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18); and "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved (or borne along) by the Holy Ghost." While it has not pleased Him to give in any Old Testament book a complete unfolding of the future concerning the glorious kingdom of Messiah and the events leading up to it, yet by searching the writings of all the prophets and comparing scripture with scripture one is able to see, with at least a measure of clearness, the wonderful harmony of the prophetic Word and the marvelous way in which God is unfolding that purpose of the ages, which will result eventually in heading up all things in Christ, when, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He will be manifest as King of kings and Lord of lords.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INCREASING APOSTASY AND THE CALL TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

**F**ALSE doctrines had begun already to make serious inroads into the churches scattered throughout the world, as Paul's later letters give evidence, and as that of Jude also bears witness. Peter had this in mind when he gave his final message to the saints; but he foresaw even greater apostasy in days to come, and so gave an inspired word of warning in order that the believers might not be carried away by the personality and persuasiveness of false teachers masquerading as servants of Christ.

The close connection between this chapter and the Epistle of Jude has been noted often, and has given rise in some quarters to the idea that one is but a mutilated copy of the other. What we need to keep in mind is that the Holy Spirit Himself inspired both of these writers to portray conditions which the Church of God would have to face in years to come. While they cover the same ground to some extent, there is one very striking difference between them: Peter emphasizes the spread of unscriptural theories; whereas Jude dwells more particularly upon the effects of these, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness; thus they give a twofold warning designed to save the elect of God

from being misled. When once we realize that the Holy Spirit Himself is the Author of all Scripture we will not be surprised to find that He speaks in similar terms through different servants; in fact, we should naturally expect this. "The testimony of two men is true," we are told; and by this double testimony God emphasizes those things which we need to keep in mind.

### LESSONS FROM THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT AGE

In verses 1 to 10 Peter turns our minds back to conditions that prevailed in former days which have important lessons for us. Let us look at this passage with particular care.

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities"—vers. 1-10.

After God brought Israel out of Egypt false prophets rose up from time to time to controvert the truth which He revealed through His specially anointed servants, from the days when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram opposed Moses right on down to the period immediately preceding the captivity of Israel and Judah under Assyria and Babylon respectively. God's true servants were opposed by these false prophets who sought to foist their own dreams upon the people instead of the truth as declared by those who were divinely enlightened. Similar conditions had begun already to prevail in Christian circles even in apostolic times, and God foresaw that false teachers would rise up throughout all the centuries prior to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. These false teachers come in under cover. They bring in heresies privately or secretly. It is never customary for teachers of error to declare and oppose the truth openly in the beginning. As a rule they work in an underhanded way, seeking to gain the confidence of God's people before they make known their real views. Such false teachers often hide their doctrinal peculiarities by using orthodox terms to which, however, they attach an altogether different meaning than that which is ordinarily accepted. Once having wormed their way into the confidence of the people of God they go to the limit, even denying the Lord who bought them, and so exposing themselves to the judgment of God. If they alone were thus dealt

with it would be comparatively a small thing, but the sad result of their unscriptural ministry is that the weak and uninstructed readily follow the pernicious ways of these misleading representatives of Satan, and because of this the way of truth—that is, “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”—is derided and evil spoken of.

We could instance many such cases today in various circles where the greatest and most precious things of God are spurned and held up to ridicule by those who have imbibed false views through giving heed to these heretical teachers. Heresy is like leaven. As the Apostle Paul tells us when combating Jewish legality which was spreading among the Galatians, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9). Leaven is corruption, and its nature is to corrupt all with which it comes in contact. So it is with false doctrine.

Back of every system of error is the sin of covetousness. Men seek to draw away disciples after themselves in order that they may make gain of them, and so as Peter here explains, “Through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.” If it were not for the money question one wonders how long many systems of error would survive. Alas, that any should be so sordid as to seek to enrich themselves through the credulity of the souls whom they lead astray. The judgment of such is like a Damocles sword hanging over their heads, and though it seems to slumber

for the moment it will not be long before it falls with terrible effect upon all such blind leaders of the blind.

In verse 4 we are referred to the apostasy of angels. These who were created innocent, followed the lead of Satan and sinned even in heaven. God has spared them not, though they were beings of so high an order; but He cast them down to Tartarus, which is the lowest depth of hell. There they are held in chains of darkness, awaiting the final judgment. It seems very clear that Scripture contemplates two distinct angelic apostasies. While Satan is the leader in both, yet they did not each occur at the same time. Satan himself is not yet bound in Tartarus, nor will he be until he is cast into the bottomless pit, which is prior to the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we learn from Revelation 20:1. The angels that followed him in his first rebellion seem to be identical with the demons who have ever been the opponents of the truth of God and who were specially active in opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth. Satan is called the Prince of the power of the air, and he and his cohorts are still at large and are described as wicked spirits in the heavenlies. They are thus able to carry on constant warfare against the saints. The sin of the angels mentioned here in Second Peter, and also in the Epistle of Jude, seems to be of a special character and may be that which is referred to in Genesis 6:2, where we read,



"The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." This is admittedly a very mysterious passage, but many have understood it to mean that certain angelic beings, such as are referred to in the book of Job as "sons of God," forsook their own habitation and came down to earth and took possession of the bodies of men, stirring them up to unlawful lusts, which resulted in that corruption and violence that brought about the deluge.

When that flood spread over all the world of the ungodly, destroying those who persisted in their opposition to the truth, God saved Noah and his family, making eight persons in all. Noah is spoken of here as a preacher of righteousness. He preached, doubtless, not only by word of mouth but also by his actions. It has been well said that every spike that Noah drove into the ark was a sermon to that ungodly generation, declaring that judgment was about to fall.

Next we have reference to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrha. These cities gave themselves over to such vileness that God could no longer tolerate their inhabitants, and so He overthrew them, destroying them with fire from heaven, making them an example or a warning unto those who should in after days live in the same ungodly manner. When God overthrew these cities of the plains He delivered just Lot, who, for years, had dwelt in

Sodom, though distressed by the filthy behavior of the wicked. We might never have thought of Lot as deserving to be called a righteous man, but the Holy Spirit so speaks of him here. He was a righteous man living in a wrong place; as a result he was in a constant state of vexation; his righteous soul was disturbed continually by what he heard and saw among the people with whom he dwelt. It is noticeable that though he is here designated as "just" and "righteous" we do not find his name in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It never could have been said that "by faith Lot dwelt in Sodom": it was rather lack of faith that took him there. He hoped thereby to better his worldly circumstances. Finally, when the judgment fell he was saved out of it all but so as by fire. The conflagration destroyed everything for which he had labored during all those years that he had lived in Sodom.

Even as the Lord delivered Noah and Lot before the judgments fell, so now He never forgets His own; and He knows how to deliver the godly out of trials and temptations, persecutions, and tribulations of every kind, and to reserve the unjust until the day of judgment to be punished. Often it seems as though the more wicked men are, the more they prosper in this world; whereas the righteous suffer almost continuously. But God permits trial to come to His own for their discipline; whereas He allows the ungodly to have their fling now, as we say, but

they will be judged according to their deeds when at last they appear before Him.

In verse 10 we have certain characteristics brought before us that mark out these false teachers. As there is no power to hold the flesh in check in the untruths which they proclaim, they secretly and often openly live in the lust of uncleanness, making excuses for their evil behavior. They despise authority and do not desire to be subject to anyone. They are presumptuous, venturing to attempt to explore mysteries which even the most godly dare not look into; they are self-willed, determined to have their own way, and are not afraid to speak evil of those of highest rank, so lifted up are they in their own pride and conceit.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF APOSTATE TEACHERS

In verses 11 to 17 we have further evidence of the true nature of these apostates.

"Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever"

—vers. 11-17.

While these ungodly men vaunt themselves against all authority, human, angelic, or divine, the elect angels—those who have been preserved by God from falling into sin, who are greater far in power and might than men here on the earth—do not presume to bring railing accusations even against those of their own order who have apostatized from God. Jude tells us that Michael the archangel did not bring against Satan a railing accusation but simply said, "The Lord rebuke thee." But these apostate leaders behave like natural brute beasts who are made to be taken and destroyed. These brutes, not possessing intelligence, act in accordance with their own vicious appetites and are imitated by the false teachers against whom Peter warns, who rail against things which God has made known in His Word but which they do not understand. In refusing the truth they, of necessity, will be left to perish in their own corruption, and in due time will be rewarded according to the unrighteousness of their lives. They have lived as though their greatest object was to satisfy the desires of their own hearts. They have counted it a pleasure to riot in the daytime: the night will find them utterly unprepared for the judgment which they have so richly deserved.

As these teachers of error mingle among the people of God they are spots and blemishes, marring and disturbing the fellowship of the saints, giving themselves over to self-indulgence as they feast

with Christians as though they belonged to the family of God. Because there is no power in error to subdue nature's sinful lusts they are described as having eyes full of adultery; they cannot cease from sin. It is only the might of the Holy Spirit which can subdue and hold in check the lusts of the flesh. False doctrines never do this. While beguiling or leading astray unstable souls—that is, those who are not well-grounded in the truth of God, they prove themselves to be an accursed generation whose hearts are exercised not unto godliness but with covetous practices.

Verse 15 tells us that having forsaken the right way they have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. While pretending to be subject to the Lord, Balaam craved the riches which Balak offered him if he could curse Israel for him. As Balaam hastened on his way, lured by the desire of gain, even the beast on which he rode rebuked him, as it beheld an angel of God in the way who sought to turn back the covetous prophet from his path. Men may ridicule and sneer at the idea of an ass speaking with a man's voice, but he who knows the Lord will remember that with God all things are possible.

While the propagators of unholy and unscriptural theories profess to have just the message that men need, they actually have nothing that can give victory over sin or relief to a troubled conscience. They

are like wells without water which only disappoint the thirsty who go to them, or like clouds that look as though they might soon pour down refreshing showers but are carried away by gales of wind, and so the land is left as dry and arid as ever. The doom of these misleading teachers is sure. The mist of darkness is to be their portion forever. The sad thing is that even among professing Christians so many are ready to listen to these pretentious vendors of false systems only to be destroyed at last when they find that they are left without anything upon which the heart and conscience can rest for eternity.

#### TURNING AWAY FROM THE TRUTH TO THE FALSE PHILOSOPHIES OF THE WORLD

“For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”—vers. 18-22.

It is one thing to accept Christianity as a system; it is quite another to know Christ as Saviour and Lord. Of all who are truly born again it can be

said that "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). These are kept from error as they go on in dependence upon the Word of God as it is opened up to them by the Holy Spirit. But those who have merely taken up with a system of doctrines, however sound, are always in danger of giving them up for some other system and so becoming apostates, ensnared by the vain-glorious language of false teachers who allure through the lusts of the flesh by presenting doctrines that appeal to hearts already turned wanton. Those who at one time had seemingly been completely delivered from sin and its folly are easily misled, and made to think that they are taking up with something superior to that which they already possess. But while these teachers promise their dupes liberty they themselves are slaves of corruption, because they know nothing of the liberty of grace, but rather are given to license instead. Overcome by sin they are brought into bondage.

Verses 20 and 21 have been taken by some as teaching that after people have been truly born again they are in danger of ceasing to be children of God and becoming once more the seed of Satan. It is well to observe that the Spirit of God is not contemplating reality here but simply profession. He speaks of those who have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; that is, having accepted the doctrines of Christianity they have professedly

given up the world, its sins and its folly, but there has never been a new nature imparted. They have not been born of God. Consequently, there is always the desire to gratify the lusts of the flesh, and when they come in contact with these false teachings they are easily entangled therewith and overcome, and so their latter end is worse with them than the beginning: that is, having given up the profession of Christianity and taken up with some false and unholy system of teaching they throw off all restraint as to their lusts and live even more vilely than they did before they made a profession of conversion. Of these Peter says, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Anyone who becomes acquainted with the teachings of Christianity knows the way of righteousness. Men may give adherence to that way for the time being who do not actually know Christ for themselves. Of those who have thus apostatized we read, "It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Charles H. Spurgeon well said on one occasion, "If that dog or that sow had been born again and had received the nature of a sheep it never would have gone back to the filth here depicted." The dog is used as a symbol of false teachers on more than one occasion in Scripture.



The sow is the natural man who may be cleansed outwardly but still loves the hog-wallow, and as soon as restraint is off he will go back to the filth in which he once lived.

### LOOKING ON TO THE CULMINATION

**A**S Peter looked forward to the day when he should seal his own testimony for Christ by laying down his life, as the Lord had foretold, he was the more anxious to arouse the saints generally to the importance of maintaining their confidence in what God had revealed concerning the prophetic future, or as we say, "the last things." He had already reminded those to whom he wrote that prophecy is a lamp to lighten the pilgrim along the dark road as he pursues his way through this world to the Canaan rest which will be his at the end of the journey.

Now Peter stresses the importance of keeping the testimony of the prophets and apostles in mind, when many will spurn them entirely.

### FORGETTING THE PAST AND DENYING THE FUTURE

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men"—vers. 1-7.

In writing this Second Letter, guided by the Spirit of God, Peter was not endeavoring so much to open up new vistas of truth as to stir up the minds of the saints to the tremendous importance of keeping in memory what they had learned already. The words which were spoken in Old Testament times by the holy prophets, and the additional revelations communicated through the apostles of the new dispensation, should never be forgotten. Peter himself wrote as one of the latter group, having been definitely commissioned as an apostle by the Lord Jesus, and recognized by his brethren as being peculiarly adapted to make known the gospel to the Jews. When Paul tells us in the Epistle to the Galatians that the brethren at Jerusalem acknowledged that the gospel of the uncircumcision had been committed to him as that of the circumcision had been committed to Peter (Gal. 2:7) we are not to suppose that he meant thereby that there was any fundamental difference in the messages themselves. It was rather that God had fitted Paul in a very definite way to carry the gospel to the Gentiles; whereas Peter was more adapted to minister the Word of grace to the Jews. As a result of his ministry many of the dispersion had been brought to know the Lord. And in obedience to the command given Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee he undertook to feed these sheep and lambs of Christ's flock both by word of mouth and in these Epistles. He puts before them, therefore,

in the strongest possible way the necessity of keeping in mind the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament had been complete for centuries, but the New Testament was not yet complete; nevertheless many of its books were in circulation already, and among them were all the Epistles of Paul, as we shall see later in considering the closing verses of this same chapter. Recognizing in these books the testimony of God Himself who, by the Holy Spirit, had inspired the human authorship of each portion of the Word, Peter urges the saints not to neglect the Scriptures but ever keep them in their hearts, in order that they may shed light not only on the present pathway but also on the future to which they were hastening.

It had been predicted again and again by both prophets and apostles that in the last days there would be those who would utterly repudiate the truth of a divine revelation as to the return of the Lord. These scoffers would hate the truth because it interfered with their own selfish desires, and would sneer at the very possibility of the second advent of the Saviour. That of which Peter spoke as being in the future and as that which would be manifested in the last days we now see fully developed all around us. Everywhere we find men walking after their own ungodly lusts, deriding the doctrine of the imminent return of the Lord as though it were something utterly ridiculous and not to be considered for a moment by sober-minded

people. Even in the pulpits of professedly orthodox churches there are many ministers today who take this stand, either denying that the Bible itself teaches the second coming of Christ, or else maintaining that even though predicted by Christ and taught by His apostles, it is all to be looked upon as an idle dream. These men ask contemptuously, "Where is the promise of His coming?" They declare that "since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"—that is, they insist that there is no evidence whatever in the history of the past or in conditions prevailing at the present time that indicate the fulfilment of any prophetic declarations. Though wise as to the things of this world, they are absolutely ignorant of the signs of the times—signs which spiritually-minded and godly men discern readily, but which these carnal and sensual leaders of religious thought ignore completely. As in the days before the flood the men of Noah's day refused to give credence to the testimony of the Lord in regard to a coming judgment and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so will it be with many in this generation who contemptuously discard all that Scripture teaches in regard to the coming day of the Lord; while all the time the world is rushing forward into the fearful vortex of that day of wrath.

Many have forgotten that "by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing

out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." The men who lived in antediluvian times said unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job 21:14). As Eliphaz reminded Job when he said, "Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood: which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them? Yet He filled their houses with good things: but the counsel of the wicked is far from Me" (Job 22:15-18). So it will be with many in this age. They are willingly ignorant of God's dealings with men in the past, and therefore refuse to believe in any predictions of judgments to come.

There is something very striking in the expression, "Kept in store, reserved unto fire." The passage might be translated "the heavens and the earth are stored with fire, awaiting the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." We might have some conception of what this means as we think of the fearful catastrophe produced by the atomic bomb, which was, even to those who discovered it, a terrible revelation of the powers for destruction which are reserved in the heavens. When earth's long day has run its course there will come not another flood but a universal conflagration which will sweep this globe clean of all that men

have built up during the millennia of the past, and prepare for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

### THE DAY OF THE LORD AND THE DAY OF GOD

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless"

—vers. 8-14.

Because these wilfully ignorant men do not see the evidences of this they deny what they do not understand, and, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," as we are told in the book of Ecclesiastes (8:11). If judgment seems to tarry it is not because God has forgotten, but rather because of His deep concern about lost men whom, in His loving-kindness, He still desires to save. Our thoughts are not His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways, but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His

ways above our ways, and His thoughts above our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). A thousand years may seem a long time to men whose span of life very seldom reaches a century, but one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Not two days have passed, therefore, according to the divine reckoning, since the Lord Jesus went away after giving the promise, "I will come again" (John 14:3). It is not, then, that the Lord is slack regarding His promise, as men are disposed to think, but His heart still goes out to those who are persisting in rebellion against Him; and He waits in grace still proclaiming the gospel message, and offering salvation to all who turn to Him in repentance, because He is not willing that any should perish.

But when at last the day of grace is ended the day of the Lord will succeed it, and that day will come to unbelievers as a thief in the night. The day of the Lord is not to be confounded with the day of Christ, which refers to the return of the Lord in the air to call His saints to be with Himself, when they will appear before His judgment-seat to be rewarded according to the measure of their faithfulness to Him while they have been pilgrims here below. The day of the Lord follows that. It will be the time when the judgments of God are being poured out upon the earth. It includes the descent of the Lord with all His saints to execute judgment on His foes, and to take pos-



session of the kingdom so long predicted, and to reign in righteousness for a thousand glorious years in this very world where He once was crucified. As that great day of the Lord closes the heavens and the earth shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. This last expression is far easier understood today than it ever has been in past centuries, because of recent discoveries in connection with the explosive power of certain elements, such as uranium, when brought under terrific pressure. Following the destruction of the created heavens and this lower universe as we now know them, will come the fulfilment of the prediction of Isaiah (65:17) concerning a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness will dwell forever. This eternal condition is the day of God, in view of which the present created heavens and earth will be destroyed. The day of God is unending; it includes all the ages to come when sin will be forever banished from the universe, and righteousness will be everywhere manifest. Righteousness suffers during the present age. Those who would walk in obedience to the Word of God often are persecuted by those who seek to maintain the present order of things. In the millennium righteousness will reign: the authority of the Lord Jesus will be everywhere established, and evil will be held down; but in the eternal state righteousness will dwell, for all evil will have been banished to the lake of fire.

## A FINAL WARNING

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen"—vers. 15-18.

So then God's patience and long-suffering with mankind throughout all the centuries of human history are ever with a view to the salvation of any who will turn to Him, confessing their sin and believing the message of His grace.

Peter adds, "Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you." This is very clearly an authentication of the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There can be no other writing to which he refers in this verse. As we have seen, Peter himself was addressing converted Jews or Hebrews. He tells us that the Apostle Paul had written a letter to the same people. There is no other of Paul's letters addressed to converted Jews but the Epistle to the Hebrews. And in that Epistle to the Hebrews Paul corroborates the testimony of Peter in regard to these eschatological truths which he has just been unfolding. In Hebrews 12: 25-29 we get this corroborative testimony: "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped

not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." Here we have set forth exactly the same truths that the Apostle Peter has been stressing. There should be no question, therefore, but that Peter was declaring that Paul was the author of this particular Epistle.

Then Peter goes on to say that in this special letter to the Hebrews, as also in all his Epistles, Paul had spoken of these things; and in these letters there are "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." In this way Peter acknowledges Paul's letters to be accepted by all believers as the very Word of God. There are, in the Epistle to the Hebrews particularly, a number of passages which have caused untold distress to those who have but a feeble understanding of God's great plan. Take such passages, for instance, as Hebrews 6:4-8 and

10:26-31. How often has the devil used these scriptures to trouble unstable souls with the awful thought that perhaps they have committed some unpardonable sin and so are hopelessly beyond the reach of mercy! While the passages themselves suggest nothing of the kind, yet they have been used of the enemy to disturb many. In others of Paul's writings there are passages which have been misused in the same way, but more notable in Hebrews than in any other Epistle.

Peter closes with two admonitions. In verse 17 he says, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." No one will ever thus fail who keeps his eyes on Christ and his heart fixed on those things that are above where Christ sits at God's right hand. Doctrinal error of a serious character is almost invariably connected with some moral failure. As we walk before God in holiness of life we will be preserved from destructive heresies, and as we walk in the truth we will be kept from sin in the life.

The final admonition is found in the last verse: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is the unfailing panacea for all spiritual ills. As we go on to know Christ better and become increasingly like Him, and as we feed upon His Word, and it has its sway

over our hearts, our progress will be consistent and continuous.

The final doxology is a very brief but a very precious one: "To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." How Peter's own heart must have been moved as he wrote these words! He had known Christ intimately in the days of His flesh; he himself had failed so grievously on the night of the betrayal; he had been restored so blessedly, both secretly and publicly, by the Lord Himself: so that Christ had become the all-absorbing passion of his soul. He alone deserved all the praise and all the glory, and that to the age of ages—the uttermost limits of that day of God, the day of eternity of which we have been reading.