1 Peter - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The First Epistle of Peter, New Christian Blessings

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(Chapter 1:1-12)

The first twelve verses of chapter 1 form the doctrinal part of the epistle. These verses set forth the present position of believers on the Lord Jesus Christ and form the basis for the practical exhortations that follow.

In carrying out his commission toward his Jewish brethren, Peter instructs and exhorts them as to the new position in which they stood as Christians. He shows them that as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ their blessings were now in a new form. Whether it was election, sanctification, redemption, the inheritance, the house of God, the priesthood, etc. (terms which they were familiar with in Judaism), they were now to be known in an altogether new and different way in Christianity.

The Salutation

Vs. 1—Peter introduces himself as an apostle “of Jesus Christ”—putting the Lord’s Manhood name (Jesus) before His title (Christ). It is of note that Paul reverses the order when introducing himself. He says that he is an apostle “of Christ Jesus.” As a rule, when the Lord’s name is placed before His title in Scripture, as Peter does here, it refers to Him as having come down from heaven to glorify God in His death and resurrection. Whereas, when the Lord’s title is placed before His Manhood name, it refers to Him as having completed redemption and gone back to heaven as a glorified Man. Since Peter received his apostleship from the Lord when the Lord was here on earth (Luke 6:13-16), he calls himself an apostle of “Jesus Christ.” Paul, on the other hand, received his apostleship from the Lord after He had died and was risen. It was from His place on high at the right hand of God in which the Lord called Paul to his apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1). Accordingly, Paul calls himself an apostle of “Christ Jesus.”

The Apostle Peter is one of nine Simons in the New Testament:

- Simon Peter (Matt. 10:2).
- Simon the Canaanite [Zelotes] (Matt. 10:4).
- Simon the half brother of the Lord (Matt. 13:55).
- Simon the leper (Matt. 26:6).
- Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32).
- Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:40).
- Simon the father of Judas Iscariot (John 6:71).
- Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9).
- Simon the tanner (Acts 9:43).

Peter identifies his audience as being the “sojourners of the dispersion” in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia (Minor), and Bithynia.” These are five regions in modern day Turkey, which in those days had a large population of Jews. These Jews had been “scattered” among the Gentiles since the days just after the Babylonish captivity (John 7:35), but the gospel had reached them and many of them had become Christians. The fact that the Jews are seen “scattered” is a proof that the nation had failed in its responsibility in connection with its covenant relationship with Jehovah. It was one of the judgments that Moses said they would incur—the forfeiture of their land and a consequent scattering among the nations (Lev. 26:33-35; Deut. 4:27; 28:64). Thus, these Jews were a standing witness of the fact that the nation had failed and had been stripped of its ancient privileges in its inheritance in the land of Canaan.

Vs. 2—Peter proceeds to show these Jewish converts that while the nation had temporarily lost its earthly blessings and privileges, God had something better for all who would receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. As believers, they now had a new relationship with God and a whole new portion of blessings in Christ. These things were superior to anything that they had possessed in Judaism.

Ten Things in Christ Risen

In these opening verses, Peter mentions at least ten things that they now had in Christ risen that were entirely new:

The Trinity

At the outset, Peter touches on the foremost feature of Christianity—the Trinity. He mentions “the Father,” “the Spirit,” and “Jesus Christ” as three distinct Persons in the Godhead who were involved in their salvation (vs. 2). Having been enlightened by the gospel, these believers would have already known and believed this great truth; nevertheless, Peter reinforces it here as being an integral part of the Christian revelation of truth.

The Godhead, consisting of three distinct Persons, was something new to what a Judaist knew of God. From Scriptures such as Deuteronomy 6:4, the Jews believed that God was “one” Person, known to them as “Jehovah.” It is not that the truth of the Trinity contradicts

what God had revealed of Himself in Old Testament times; it is simply the result of God setting Himself in the light and having now given a full revelation of Himself. In Old Testament times, God dwelt in “thick darkness” (1 Kings 8:12), and hence, the saints in those days had only a partial revelation of Him. But He has now set Himself “in the light” (1 John 1:7), and since “the darkness is passing and the true light already shines” (1 John 2:8), we have a superior revelation of God as being: “the Father,” the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Thus, there has been a progressive revelation of truth in Scripture concerning the nature and unity of the Godhead.

As mentioned, the revelation of the Trinity does not contradict or deny what was known of God in Judaism. For example, the word “one,” in Deuteronomy 6:4, is plural in the Hebrew text. It literally means, “consisting of many parts, but as one.” It is used similarly in Genesis 11:6: “Behold, the people is one....” Furthermore, the usual Hebrew word for “God,” throughout the Old Testament, is “Elohim,” which is also plural. This explains why God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). “Creator,” in Ecclesiastes 12:1, is also plural. Thus, Old Testament Scripture allows for God being more than one Person (Isa. 48:16, etc.), but the truth of the Trinity had not been revealed in those times. It wasn’t until Christ came and “declared” the Father as being a distinct Person from Himself (John 1:18) that it was known that there are different Persons in the Godhead (John 1:1).

Peter then traces a chain of events wherein the three Persons of the Godhead have acted in the salvation of these Jewish saints. The chain begins with God’s electing grace in eternity past and ends with the believer’s heart and conscience being cleansed by faith’s appropriation of the blood of Christ. This progression of divine action is true in the history of every Christian, whether he or she has been saved from among the Gentiles or from among those in Judaism.

Election(Vs. 2)

Firstly, Peter speaks of these Jewish believers as being, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” Elect means to be chosen. Hence, they had been chosen by God to have a special relationship with Christ in heavenly glory, as being part of the new company of blessed persons that God was calling together—the Church of God. This choosing is something that God did “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). We see from this that if blessing is to reach us, it must begin with God who is the source of all blessing.

Divine election was not something new to these Jews; they had been part of the elect nation of Israel. God had “chosen” Israel to have a special covenant relationship with Himself as His “holy people” (Deut. 7:6-8). However, what Peter was speaking about here is a different kind of election. Israel’s election was a collective and national thing, whereas this election is personal and individual. It was not in connection with their father Abraham, as was the case with Israel, but with “God the Father.”

Divine election is probably the most controversial doctrine in the New Testament. Even though it is often a topic of debate among Christians, Peter and the other New Testament writers make no apology for teaching it. They speak of God’s sovereign, electing grace for what it is—a reality known and believed among the apostles. It is something for which every believer is thankful, for where would we be without God setting His love upon us and choosing us for blessing?

The contention lies in the reasoning that if God chose some in the human race for blessing, then, by passing over those not chosen, He has in essence, chosen them for an eternity in Hell. Since this seems derogatory to the very nature and character of God who loves all men and desires their blessing (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4), it is dismissed as erroneous. A popular but mistaken explanation that many evangelicals give for God’s electing grace stems from a misunderstanding of God’s “foreknowledge.” They say that in eternity past God looked ahead through the corridor of time and foresaw who would believe the gospel and who wouldn’t, and chose those who would believe. However, this idea gives man undue credit for his salvation. It assumes that in his lost state man has the power to choose Christ to the salvation of his soul. This is clearly in collision with many Scriptures which teach that fallen man is so depraved that he has absolutely no power in himself to come to Christ for salvation.

The truth is that man in his fallen state can’t even do so much as believe the gospel; God has to give him the faith to do it (Eph. 2:8). Scripture teaches that man in his natural state is “dead,” and therefore, he cannot hear and respond to God’s call in the gospel (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). It teaches that he is unable to “receive” the truth; it is foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). It also teaches us that man in his natural state is “without strength” (Rom. 5:6), and therefore, cannot “come” to Christ for salvation (John 6:44, 65). Left to himself, man will never choose Christ, because “the mind of the flesh is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). Hence, this mistaken idea of election denies the total depravity of man.

Men attempt to reconcile God’s sovereign electing grace in salvation with man’s responsibility to believe the gospel, but in doing so they often get one-sided in their interpretations. The truth is that both lines of truth run parallel throughout Scripture without merging. Like the two rails of a railroad track: in our eyes they seem to join in the far distance, but of course, they don’t. Since God’s ways are “past finding out” (Rom. 11:33), we should not attempt to reconcile these things in our minds, but should leave them as they are found in Scripture. God would have us to know about them, and this is why they are stated in Scripture, but He has not asked us to reconcile them. He knew very well that sinners left to themselves would not choose Christ, so, He went ahead and marked us out for blessing by choosing us. At some point in our history we believed the gospel and we received the blessing of salvation. How these things work together is beyond our human minds.

The doctrine of election is the most humbling truth in the Bible because it shows man to be utterly helpless and unable to do anything for himself. It is also one of the most God-exalting truths in Scripture. Since He has done everything for us in our salvation, He rightly gets all the credit and all the glory! Even though we do not understand these things completely, the truth of divine election should produce praise from our hearts.

The Sanctification of the Spirit

Secondly, in the salvation of every person there is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in setting apart those whom God has chosen by imparting divine life to them through new birth. This is a work of the Spirit in a person before he is cleansed by the blood of Christ and saved. It is a sovereign action of God that results in the elect being enabled to hear and believe the gospel. Without this initial work in men, no one would be saved. Thus, in eternity past God chose us for blessing, and there came a point in our lifetime when God acted by the Spirit and imparted life to us through His quickening power (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). Communicating divine life to the elect sets them apart (the meaning of sanctification) from the mass of humanity that is heading toward a lost eternity.

The “sanctification of the Spirit” is not the practical aspect of sanctification, wherein the believer perfects holiness in his life by removing things that are inconsistent with the holiness of God (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:4-7; 5:23; 1 Peter 1:16). The order in which the truth is presented here clearly shows that practical sanctification is not in view. Practical sanctification follows a person’s being sprinkled with the blood of Christ and thereby saved; here, it precedes it. Thus, it is the primary work of God in souls before they are saved by which they are set apart for blessing by being quickened. Hamilton Smith said, “Sanctification of the Spirit is an actual operation of the Holy Spirit in us, by which we are born of the Spirit, imparting to us a new life and nature” (The Epistles of Peter, p. 5). W. Kelly said, “There is a real and most vital sanctification to God which accompanies the first [initial] quickening of the soul when we are born of water and of the Spirit and cleansed from our natural impurity by His life-giving power, before we enjoy the blessed sense of God’s justifying us through faith in Jesus and His work” (The Epistles of Peter, p. 14). F. B. Hole said, “His choice is made effectual ‘through sanctification of the Spirit.’ The root idea of sanctification is setting apart for God, and the Holy Spirit is He who, by His inward life-giving work, sets apart the one who is the subject of it” (Epistles, vol. 3, p. 98).

Most Christians have never heard of this preliminary action of the Spirit in souls in new birth before a person is saved by faith in Christ’s finished work. They think that new birth and the salvation of the soul are one and the same thing. If asked, they would probably say that a person is born again when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this is putting “the cart before the horse.” The truth is that a person does not believe on the Lord Jesus to get born again, but rather, he believes because he has been born again (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:1). As to the order of these things, God goes before and sovereignly works in a person through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in new birth, whereby he is given life and faith to believe the gospel (Eph. 2:5, 8). Hence, new birth is not the result of a person’s turning to God and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, but the result of God sovereignly communicating divine life to his soul. It is what enables him to turn to God in repentance and to believe on the Lord Jesus for salvation. Commenting on this misunderstanding, J. N. Darby said, "We must not confound manifested salvation and being born of God" (Letters, vol. 3, p. 118). He also said, "The Church has lost the thought of being saved. People think that it is enough to be born anew" (Collected Writings, vol. 28, p. 368).

There are a number of Scriptures that show that the sanctifying work of the Spirit in new birth precedes a person’s believing on Christ for the salvation of his soul. The following references confirm this:

- John 1:12-13—Those who “believe on His name” are they “which were” (previously) born of God.

- John 3:3-8, 14-17—Concerning the order of God’s work in souls, the Lord spoke of being “born again” by the Word of God and the Spirit of God before speaking of being “saved” through believing on the Son of God.

- John 5:21, 24—The Lord spoke of God’s work of quickening souls before going on to speak of their believing on Him for life eternal.

- John 6:44-47—The Lord spoke of His Father drawing people, which is the effect of being born again, before speaking of them believing on Him.

- Ephesians 2:1-5, 8—Delineating the activity of God’s love and mercy toward us, Paul referred to His work of quickening souls first, and then went on to speak of those whom God had quickened being “saved by grace” through faith.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14—Paul spoke of the “sanctification of the Spirit” which is the result of new birth, before a person’s belief of the truth of the gospel.

- 1 Peter 1:22-23—The purification of the soul through obeying the truth of the gospel is mentioned as being the result of “having been begotten again” (W. Kelly Trans.).

For these Jewish believers to whom Peter was writing, this was a new kind of sanctification. The sanctification that they had known in Judaism was an outward thing performed through rituals by which persons and things were set apart and made fit for priestly services (Lev. 8). An inward sanctification through new birth was something that they were not familiar with, even though Old Testament saints were born of God.

The Obedience of Faith

Thus far, Peter has touched on the sovereign side of things in God the Father’s election and the Holy Spirit’s sanctification; now we come to the other side—man’s responsibility to believe the gospel. This results in being sprinkled with the blood of Christ and being saved. Hence, Peter goes on to state a third link in this chain—“obedience.” This is a reference to “the obedience of faith” which every person must have if he or she is to get the blessing of salvation (Rom. 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 15:18; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:17).

Peter says, “Unto obedience,” because the sanctifying work of the Spirit in new birth will result in the person’s obeying the gospel and being saved. The obedience of faith is the appropriate response in one who has been thus wrought with by God. But this obedience is not merely obeying the gospel call. It begins there—and this is why Peter puts “obedience” before the sprinkling of “the blood of Jesus Christ”—but it also includes a life of obedience after the person is saved. Note: he says that this obedience is “of” Jesus Christ—not “to,” as many modern translations mistakenly render it. That is, the kind of obedience that is to be seen in the believer is of the character of the Lord’s own obedience when He walked here in this world. Thus, we are set apart to obey as Christ obeyed.

For these converted Jews, this was a new kind of obedience. The obedience with which they were familiar in the old economy was a legal thing enjoined upon the nation of Israel at Sinai. Christian obedience, of which Peter speaks here, is an obedience that comes from a heart that has been won by the love of God (John 14:15; 1 John 4:19; 5:1-3).

The Sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ

The fourth link in this chain is the application of the blood of Christ to the heart and conscience of the believer, whereby he is purged of the guilt of his sins and saved (Heb. 9:14).

Christ’s blood “shed” (Luke 22:20) is not the same as Christ’s blood “sprinkled” (Heb. 10:22). His blood being shed is a literal thing that occurred at the cross of Calvary almost 2000 years ago, whereas His blood being sprinkled is a figurative expression that refers to the believer’s faith appropriating the finished work of Christ, and thereby, being cleansed from his sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; 7:14). Thus, shed is

the provision that God has made for us in Christ's work on the cross, and being sprinkled is the result of our appropriation of that work by faith whereby we are saved. The difference between these two things is illustrated, typically, in the Passover lamb (Ex. 12). The lamb was killed and its blood was collected in a basin, but the Israelites had to sprinkle it on the doorposts of their homes before they were sheltered from the judgment that fell on Egypt. Thus, the blood in the basin was God's provision for the people and the sprinkling of it on their homes was their personal appropriation of it.

These believing Jews were familiar with the sprinkling of blood at the time of the Passover in Egypt; it was celebrated by the nation every year, being one of their preeminent feasts. But appropriating the work of Christ through faith, by which a person is cleansed from his sins and delivered from eternal judgment, was a new thing to them. (In fact, the death of Christ as the Lamb of God was the fulfillment of the Passover feast – 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19.) A purged conscience, resulting from faith in Christ's finished work, whereby the believer's soul is at rest with God (Heb. 9:14), is also something that the Old Testament saints didn't have. They lived with uncertainty regarding their sins, fearing that they could be brought up for judgment at any time (Psa. 25:7, etc.). Hence, what Peter is speaking of here is something far more blessed than what the saints had before redemption was accomplished by Christ.

This fourfold chain of divine action which Peter has traced in the history of these dear saints is something that is true of all Christians, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

Vs. 2b—Having traced this progression in these believers which had led to their salvation, he then desires "grace" and "peace" to be "multiplied" in them so that they would walk as God would have them to walk, and thus, glorify Christ in this world.

A Living Hope (Vs. 3)

Peter calls for praise to be given to God for the new relationship that they had with Him as Father, and for the hope they had in the Lord Jesus of final glory. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively [living] hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The Apostle Paul begins his epistle to the Ephesians with a similar doxology (Eph. 1:3), but as the epistles continue, they unfold two different lines of truth. In Ephesians, the believer is seen seated above in "the heavenlies," awaiting the redemption of his inheritance, over which he will reign with Christ. Whereas, in 1 Peter, the believer is seen walking on earth in hope of his inheritance, which is reserved for him in heaven.

In his doxology of praise, Peter reiterates the fact that through an act of God's sovereign "mercy" these believers had been "begotten again." But he makes it clear that they had been born again to an altogether different portion of blessing and destiny from that which Israel had in their covenant-relationship with Jehovah. It is not that new birth is something new in the ways of God with men; the saints from the beginning of time were all born of God. What Peter is saying here is that believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, in this present Dispensation of Grace, have been begotten again for an entirely different purpose from what God has in mind for Israel.

This hope that believers have in Christ is "a living hope." It stands in contrast to the hope which believers in the Jewish system had prior to the cross. As belonging to the commonwealth of Israel, they had national hopes which centered in a Messiah on earth. When the Lord came, they rightly received Him as such (Luke 9:20; John 6:69). But the light of those hopes was quenched in their hearts when Christ was rejected by the nation and crucified. The two who went down the road to Emmaus exemplify this disappointment. They were "downcast," and said, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24:17, 21). However, when their eyes were opened and they beheld the Lord as risen, a new hope dawned in their hearts which nothing on earth could quench. It was a "living" hope because it was centered in a Saviour living beyond the power of death. At that point, their hopes were still in an earthly kingdom being set up according to the teaching of the Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:19-21). It wasn't until the Jews rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7) and revelations of new spiritual blessings were given to the apostles to bring to the saints (Eph. 3:4-5) that Jewish believers were instructed as to their proper Christian hope of having a heavenly portion with Christ.

"Hope," is not used in Scripture in the same way that it is in today's language. We speak of hope in regard to something that we would like to see happen, but we have no guarantee that it will take place. In the Bible, hope is a deferred certainty; it has expectancy with assurance connected with it. For instance, in Romans 5:2, Paul speaks of "the hope of the glory of God," which has to do with the believer's future glorification at the Lord's coming (the Rapture). It is something that the believer is looking forward to with certainty. It will definitely happen; we just don't know when. In fact, every hope that the Christian has is contingent upon Christ being risen. They are "living" hopes because Christ is living.

A Heavenly Inheritance(Vss. 4-5)

Peter proceeds to speak of the Christian's portion of blessing which has been secured for us through the death and resurrection of Christ. He refers to it as our "inheritance." He says it is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, 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." These, like the previous things, are something altogether different from what these Jewish believers would have known under the old covenant.

Being in the Church of God, these saints were now a part of a special company of blessed persons in God's family, distinguished from the rest of His children, as being the "assembly of firstborns" (Heb. 12:23 – W. Kelly Trans.). ("Firstborns," or "firstborn ones," indicates that they have preeminence both in their position and in their privileges over all other blessed persons.) Favoured as such, Christians have a special place before God as His "sons" (Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph. 1:5), having their own special blessings (Eph. 1:3). Peter refers to these blessings as our heavenly "inheritance." This stands in contrast to Israel's portion in the land of Canaan, which was an earthly inheritance.

There are, in fact, two aspects of the Christian's inheritance in the New Testament:

The inheritance of the material things of this creation (Eph. 1:11, 14, 18; Col. 3:24).

The inheritance of spiritual things that believers possess in Christ (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Col. 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4).

Viewed as material things, Christ is the "Heir" of all that has been created in the heavens and the earth (Heb. 1:2). It is "His inheritance" (Eph. 1:18) and it is also "our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), because we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). In keeping with

this, Paul said, “All things are yours” (1 Cor. 3:21). This material inheritance is something that is ours now, so far as the title and right to it is concerned (Eph. 1:11). It has been “purchased” for us by Christ’s work on the cross (Heb. 2:9 – “tasted death for every thing”), but it awaits “redemption” (Eph. 1:14). The redemption of the inheritance has to do with Christ’s setting it free (the meaning of redemption) from sin, Satan, and the world, so that it can be used for the display of His glory in the world to come (the Millennium). This will occur at the Appearing of Christ through His warrior-judgments.

Viewed as spiritual things, the inheritance has to do with what believers possess spiritually in Christ—our “spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:3). The J. N. Darby Translation calls this side of the inheritance “a portion,” in Acts 26:18 and Colossians 1:12, to distinguish it from the material aspect. He said, “The inheritance is the inheritance of all things that Christ created. But in 1 Peter, or in Colossians 1, the thing is in heaven” (Notes and Jottings, p. 101). There is one difference between Colossians 1:12 and 1 Peter 1:4; Colossians refers to our present partaking of the inheritance, whereas 1 Peter refers to a future partaking of it when we are with Christ in our proper glorified state. Thus, in Colossians, the saints are viewed as being in possession of their portion in Christ, but in 1 Peter they are journeying toward it.

Contrasts abound when comparing Israel’s earthly inheritance with our heavenly inheritance. Israel’s inheritance could be, and was, forfeited through failure—but ours can’t be! They corrupted and defiled their inheritance by filling the land with groves and shrines wherein they practiced idolatry. As a consequence, God allowed their enemies to conquer them and to carry them away from their inheritance. Thus, it faded from their grasp. In contrast to this, the spiritual inheritance that Christians have is “incorruptible, and undefiled,” and “unfading,” and thus, cannot be spoiled by any failure of ours. It is “reserved in heaven” for us, and is secure on account of God’s faithfulness to keep it for us. The keeping of Israel’s inheritance depended upon their performance, and this is where everything went terribly wrong. They failed in their responsibility, and consequently, forfeited their inheritance. Since our inheritance does not depend upon our faithfulness, but has been secured for us in Christ risen, it cannot be forfeited.

Peter adds that while our inheritance is reserved in heaven for us (vs. 4), we are “kept guarded by the power of God” on earth in view of taking possession of those things in our glorified state (vs. 5). Thus, all is eternally secure! He says that we are kept “unto salvation,” and this is something that is “ready to be revealed in the last time.” To understand this properly we need to see that there are three tenses to salvation in Scripture. The Christian has been saved from the penalty of his sins through receiving Christ as his Saviour (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8); he is being saved daily from dangers within and without (Rom. 5:10; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 7:25); and he will be saved at the time of the Rapture when his body is glorified (Heb. 9:28). Hence, it is equally true to say that we have been saved, and we are being saved, and we will be saved. The aspect of salvation that Peter is speaking of here is the future tense. It will occur at the Rapture, but it won’t be “revealed” before the world until “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” which refers to His Appearing (vs. 13).

It is also important to note that Peter often speaks of the Lord’s coming without distinguishing between the Rapture and the Appearing. This is the case in verse 5. We know from other passages of Scripture that the glorification of our bodies will occur at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-55; Phil. 3:21), but it will not be “revealed” before the world until the Appearing of Christ, when He will come to be glorified in His saints (2 Thess. 1:10). The fact that this salvation is “ready” to be revealed makes these things imminent (Rom. 13:11).

The Wilderness Path Wherein Faith Is Tested(Vss. 6-8)

Having spoken of our inheritance in heaven, Peter goes on to speak of our pathway through this world that leads to our heavenly destiny. He says, “Wherein ye exult, for a little while at present, if needed, put to grief by various trials, that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes, though it be proved by fire, be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation [appearing] of Jesus Christ.” We see from this statement that the Christian’s pathway to heaven is through testings and trials. It is where our faith is verified and strengthened through the adversities that we meet with in life. These things are necessary in the development of our Christian character. Our pathway is similar, in principle, to Israel’s journey through the wilderness. They passed through a “waste howling wilderness” to reach their promised inheritance in Canaan (Deut. 32:10), and the Christian is also making a spiritual journey through this world to his heavenly inheritance. The purpose of this experience, for both Israel and the Church, is to teach us to walk with God (Deut. 8:2-3; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1). The two great lessons of the wilderness are:

- To learn our own insufficiency, and thus, not to trust in ourselves.
- To learn of the Lord’s all-sufficiency, whereupon we cast ourselves on Him in expressed dependence.

These things take a lifetime to learn. For these Jewish saints who were now on Christian ground, this was a new kind of wilderness experience.

In view of reaching their heavenly prospect, Peter says, “Ye greatly rejoice.” This is the normal state of Christians (Phil. 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:16). But since all who profess faith in Christ must be tested, the Lord allowed these dear saints to be “put to grief by various trials.” This shows that while Christians are kept guarded by the power of God, they are not without trials in the path of faith. The problem with these believers was that they didn’t understand why they had such troubles and they needed instruction and encouragement as to the ways of God with His people. Thus, Peter assured them that when a trial comes into a Christian’s life, it is necessary. There is a “need be” for it, for God never allows anything to touch His children for no reason. Since His way is perfect (Psa. 18:30), we can be sure that He makes no mistakes in what He allows in our lives.

The particular trial that these dear believers were facing was persecution from their unbelieving brethren and from the unbelieving Gentiles. They needed to be assured that what they were going through was not on account of disobedience for leaving Judaism (which they were being accused of), but because of their obedience to the Christian faith. Thus, the “trial” of their “faith” was not because they were under God’s displeasure. Quite to the contrary, it was because of their faithful stand for Christ, and this, of course, was something that God was well-pleased with. In fact, this kind of a trial is normal to Christianity. It is unavoidable because the world hates Christ, and by identifying ourselves with Him publicly, we are made to feel the hatred of the world (John 15:18-20).

Peter tells them that the trial which they were experiencing for the Lord’s name sake was “much more precious than of gold which perishes.” God valued it greatly because a witness was being borne for Christ in this world, and through their sufferings something was being formed in them that would ultimately be used for the furthering of Christ’s glory at His Appearing. In that day, it will be found unto the Lord’s “praise and honour and glory.” God will use the saints to reflect Christ’s glory in the day of His public manifestation and in His kingdom

(2 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 21:11). They will not be the object of the praise, honour, and glory; “every eye” will be on Christ—He will be the center of attention and He will get all the praise (Rev. 1:7). F. B. Hole said, “Many a bold confessor, suffering fiery trial––even to death perhaps––may have been tempted to think that their light was being extinguished, and all was lost. The Apostle tells them that, on the contrary, all would be found in that day. Christ being revealed in His glory, everything to His praise and honour will come into the light and be displayed” (Epistles, vol. 3, p. 100).

Let us then remember that every trial that we go through is appointed of God and exceedingly precious to His heart. The Lord goes through it with us in divine sympathy and feels our afflictions with us (Isa. 63:9). Knowing this would have been a comfort to these suffering saints, and it should be a comfort to us too when we are called to pass through fiery trials of this sort.

(Vs. 8)—Peter goes on to speak of a second great thing that trial produces in the saints––the Lord becomes more precious to our hearts. He says, “Whom having not seen, ye love.” When we pass through a trial, even though we can’t see the Lord, He draws near and makes His presence known to us in a very real way (Isa. 43:2). This is exceedingly precious and comforting to us, and as a result, our love and affection for Him deepens. Hence, these experiences, though painful, are necessary for the enlargement of our affection for the Lord.

Peter adds a third thing that results from the saints going through trials with the Lord––they experience an unexplainable joy that renders a bright and glorious testimony to all around. He says, “In whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of [filled with] glory.” Thus, there is a joy that the believer experiences in the time of trial (if he goes through it in communion with the Lord) in which a certain “glory” radiates from him (1 Peter 4:14). It is something that the believer perhaps will not even be aware of at the time, but it will, nevertheless, render a powerful testimony to those who see the believer suffering in this way. This shows that Christian joy is not dependent upon earthly circumstances.

In summary, Peter has given us three positive effects of trials when they are taken from God in a right spirit:

- They will bring “praise and honour and glory” to the Lord in the day of His public manifestation (vs. 7).
- They deepen the saint’s affection (“love”) for the Lord, and this translates into a more intimate relationship with Him (vs. 8a).
- They produce “joy unspeakable” in the saints which results in a testimony of manifested “glory” to all around (vs. 8b).

The Salvation of the Soul(Vss. 9-11)

Peter moves along to speak of another distinctive blessing that Christians have which saints in Old Testament times did not have––the salvation of our souls. He says, “Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning which salvation prophets, who have prophesied of the grace towards you, sought out and searched out; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed out, testifying before of the sufferings which belonged to Christ, and the glories after these [that should follow].” The “end” which Peter speaks of here, is the immediate end of what their “faith” had laid hold of in believing on the Lord Jesus Christ––namely, the “salvation” of their “souls.” Thus, while we wait for our full salvation at the coming of the Lord, when we will be delivered from the effects of sin by being glorified (vs. 5), believers presently have the salvation of their souls (vs. 9).

The salvation of the soul is a New Testament, Christian blessing that results in the believer’s having a conscious knowledge that he has been delivered from the penalty of his sins and by his conscience being purged (John 5:24; Heb. 9:14; 10:22). Part and parcel with the salvation of the soul is: redemption (Rom. 3:24), forgiveness of sins (Rom. 4:7), justification (Rom. 5:1), and reconciliation (Rom. 5:10-11). These things are all ours through receiving Christ as our Saviour and are consequent upon Christ’s work on the cross being accomplished. These distinctive blessings, therefore, could not have been possessed by those who lived before the cross of Christ.

Stating that the Old Testament saints did not have the salvation of their souls doesn’t mean that they didn’t go to heaven. They were truly born of God and blessed in a relationship with the Lord according to the way in which He had revealed Himself to them. However, the only kind of salvation that they knew about was the temporal salvation of outward deliverances from danger and trouble (Ex. 14:13; 2 Chron. 20:17, Neh. 9:27, etc.). What Peter was speaking about was a new kind of salvation of a spiritual character. As mentioned, it has to do with the believer knowing and being assured of the fact that his eternal welfare is secure. This results in the believer having settled peace in his soul. Old Testament saints did not have this knowledge and assurance. They lived with a degree of uncertainty regarding the punishment of their sins and feared that God might bring them up for judgment at some future time (Psa. 25:7; 51:9-11, etc.).

Peter says that this soul-salvation which believers now possess had been prophesied of long before by the Old Testament prophets. We learn from Genesis 49:18, that there was a “salvation” to come that was identified with the coming and work of the Messiah. The saints in those days did not understand what and how it would be, but simply knew that saving grace would somehow be manifested. Many other Old Testament passages spoke of the same thing (Psa. 14:7; 67:2; Isa. 12:2-3; 25:9; 45:8; 49:6; 51:5-8; 52:7, 10; 56:1, etc.). Under divine inspiration, the prophets wrote of this “grace” that would come to believers in this present day (vs. 10), but they didn’t understand what they had written (vs. 11). They “searched” their own writings “diligently,” and “inquired” as to what those things were and to whom they applied. It was “revealed” to them that those things were not for “themselves,” but for saints of another time and dispensation yet to come (vs. 12a).

The “Spirit of Christ” was “in” the Old Testament prophets at the time of their writing, and this made them vehicles of His operations. He gave them feelings and experiences which were, in reality, a reproduction of Christ’s feelings. That is, feelings which would be fully and perfectly found in Christ when He became a Man and walked on earth. (The “Spirit of Christ” is working similarly in this day, producing the feelings and sympathies of Christ in the saints as they live and move in this scene which is under “the bondage of corruption.” We, therefore, “suffer with Him” as we see men and beasts suffering under the effects of what sin has wrought in the creation – Romans 8:9, 17.)

As mentioned in the Introduction, in each of these prophecies, the Spirit of Christ was “testifying beforehand” of the blessing of soul-salvation which would be connected with “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” These are two great themes concerning the Messiah that run throughout the Old Testament prophetical writings. There is that which pertains to the Messiah’s sufferings and that which pertains to His reign in kingdom glory. The order in which these things are found in Scripture indicates that Christ would first suffer before He would enter into His glory. Resulting from the coming of the Holy Spirit and the consequent revelation of truth that has been delivered to us (Jude 3), we know that there are some 2000 years between these two things, during which time God has been calling out of this world those

who would compose the Church.

The Jews dwelt on the passages that pertained to the glories of the Messiah and reveled in them. They would read those passages at their yearly feasts with great enthusiasm. But sadly, they overlooked the passages that spoke of the Messiah's sufferings––e.g. Psalm 22; Psalm 69; Isaiah 50:4-6; 53:1-12; Micah 5:1; Zechariah 13:7, etc. These Scriptures reveal that Christ would be rejected by His own people and "cut off" in death (Isa. 53:8; Dan. 9:26). The Lord pointed out this imbalance in the minds of the Jews to the two with whom He went to Emmaus (Luke 24). He rebuked them for not believing "all that the prophets have spoken" concerning the Messiah. They, like Jews generally, had only believed the parts of Scripture that pertained to the glorious Messiah, and this led them to mistaken and discouraging conclusions when He was rejected and crucified. To meet this, the Lord explained from the Scriptures that He must first suffer before He would enter into His kingdom glory (Luke 24:25-27). Peter explains later in the chapter that the Lord's sufferings and death were for our redemption and eternal blessing (vss. 18-19).

We live today in the time between the sufferings of Christ and His coming glories, when there has been a full report given of the Christian revelation of truth. It is a time of suffering and of faith. Of suffering, because we are identified with a rejected Christ, and when we confess His name, we share in His (martyrdom) sufferings. Of faith, because we are still on our journey homeward, whereupon we must "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

The Holy Spirit Sent From Heaven to Reside on Earth(Vs. 12)

Peter goes on to speak of yet another characteristic feature of Christianity—the Holy Spirit dwelling on earth in the saints (John 14:16-17). This is something that did not occur until Christ rose from the dead and ascended on high as a glorified Man (John 7:39). Peter says that the things concerning the salvation of the souls of believers "are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost [Spirit] sent down from heaven." The Holy Spirit being "sent down from heaven" to reside on earth was also something new and different to the Jewish mind. In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit worked on earth, but never resided on earth. He came "upon" men and "moved" them to perform certain acts for God, and then departed (Num. 11:25-26; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6; 2 Chron. 24:20; 2 Peter 1:21, etc.). In contrast to this, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came to dwell on earth, taking up permanent residence in the saints who compose the Church of God (Acts 2:1-4, 33; 5:32; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:2, 14; 1 Thess. 4:8; 2 Tim. 1:14; James 4:5; 1 John 3:24). By doing so, He has linked believers together in "one body" to Christ, the Head in heaven (1 Cor. 12:13). Today, by virtue of His indwelling presence, believers are "led" (not moved, as in Old Testament times) by Him (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18), if they are "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:17) and "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 25).

The difference between the way in which the Spirit worked in Old Testament times and is now working in Christianity can be illustrated in the difference between a sailboat and a motorboat. A sailboat is moved by the force of the wind coming upon it from without; when the wind blows, the sailboat moves. Whereas, a motorboat has the power on board at all times, and it can be used whenever the operator chooses to engage the engine.

Thus, the same Spirit who was "testifying" of soul-salvation in the Old Testament prophetical writings has now given a full report of it, and of many other Christian blessings, due to His coming to dwell on earth (John 16:13 – "all truth"). It has been "announced" by them who have "preached the gospel" to us and has been delineated with great plainness in the writings of the apostles. We now know the full meaning of salvation, and with it, the full truth of redemption, eternal forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, etc. (Rom. 3:21–5:11). The Messiah's rejection and consequent sufferings have opened the way for soul-salvation to be offered to all who would believe. Peter adds: "Which things the angels desire to look into." This is because angels are fascinated with God's ways in grace toward sinners.

In this passage, Peter has stated three successive stages of the revelation of the grace of soul-salvation:

- There were prophecies given in Old Testament times of the salvation that would come to the saints in this day (vss. 10-11).

- There is the present testimony of the Holy Spirit who has been sent down from heaven to communicate to the saints a full understanding of its blessedness (vs. 12).

- There is going to be a public manifestation of this grace at the Appearing of Jesus Christ (vs. 13).

The First Epistle of Peter, New Christian Relationships

(Chapter 1:13–2:17)

At this point in the epistle, Peter launches into several series of practical exhortations based on the truth that he has stated in the foregoing verses. These exhortations continue through to the end of the epistle. This swing from doctrine to exhortation is marked by a pivotal, "Wherefore." He says, "Wherefore, having girded up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope with perfect stedfastness in the grace which will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (vs. 13). This opening injunction has to do with the saints being in a right state of soul so that they would respond appropriately to the exhortations that Peter was about to give.

"Gird up the loins," is a figure taken from the clothing that they wore in old times. People in those days prepared themselves for work by gathering and tying back their loose clothing with a belt (a girdle) that wrapped around their waist and hip area (the loins). It is used in Scripture, in a spiritual sense, for the saints needing to prepare themselves for action in divine things. The loins of our "mind" being girded, means that we are to not allow our thoughts to fly about in every direction, but to be focused on the interests of Christ and being prepared to serve Him.

Being "sober" is important too; it has to do with recognizing that life on earth is brief, and therefore, we are to be found using our time wisely in view of eternity (Psa. 90:12).

To “hope with perfect stedfastness,” is not to allow our confidence to waver regarding the certainty of our hope of being glorified like Christ and being displayed with Him in the day of His manifestation (His Appearing)—which Peter calls “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” The fact that Peter would give this exhortation shows that there is a real danger of getting distracted in our Christian lives and settling down in earthly things. The “grace” that will be brought to us at the Appearing of Christ (vs. 13) could not be the “grace” of our soul-salvation (vs. 10) because we have that now. Nor could it be the glorification of our bodies when we receive our full salvation (vs. 5) because that will have happened at the Rapture. The grace that Peter is referring to here is the privilege of reigning with Christ in His kingdom (Rev. 20:4), and thus, being displayed with Him before the world (2 Thess. 1:10).

Christian Appellatives

(Chapter 1:14–2:17)

Not only had these believers been introduced into a circle of blessings in Christ risen that were all new to them, but they also had a new relationship with God as Father and new connections with fellow believers in the household of faith. Since they may not have been familiar with these things, Peter addresses these new relationships under various names (appellatives) which believers on the Lord Jesus are known by and exhorts them according to the responsibility connected with each.

Children(Chapter 1:14-21)

Peter begins by addressing them as “children” in the family of God. He says, “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” (vss. 14-16). This was a relationship with God that they didn’t have before they were saved. Prior to believing the gospel, they were children of Israel, but now having received Christ, they were “children of God” (John 1:12). The Apostle John asks us to consider this great blessing and privilege: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God” (1 John 3:1).

Peter then impresses upon them that in the family of God increased privileges bring increased responsibilities. In their case, if they were going to be found in a relationship with God as His children, they would have to walk in holiness, for God is holy. Hence, “the former lusts” of their “ignorance,” to which they were once “conformed,” must be put off immediately. As children in relation to God our Father, we are to be marked by obedience. The character of this obedience was demonstrated in the Lord’s own life when He walked here (John 8:29). It was motivated by love (John 14:31; 15:10), rather than being a legal injunction. Thus, we are to obey as Christ obeyed—“from the heart” (Rom. 6:17).

Two Strong Motives for Walking in Holiness

In verses 17-20, Peter brings in two strong motives for walking in holiness. One has to do with our consciences and the other concerns our hearts. At all times, we are to be:

- Conscious of the fact that we could displease our Father and incur His governmental judgment (vs. 17).

- Conscious of the fact that we have been redeemed with a great price—the precious blood of Christ—and thus, our lives are no longer our own (vss. 18-20).

As to the first of these, Peter says, “If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourn here in fear” (vs. 17). This shows that if we carry on carelessly in unholiness, it will bestir our Father to action, and in faithfulness He will exercise judgment in our lives (in the form of disciplinary chastening) to correct us. We might ask, “Does God really judge His children?” This verse clearly shows that He does. But as we have indicated in the Introduction (pp. 13-15), it is governmental judgment, which pertains only to our life on the earth. It has nothing to do with our standing before God in Christ, which is eternally secure. Governmental judgment in God’s family has to do with the dealings of a loving Father correcting His children. He works behind the scenes in our lives in a negative way, frustrating our purposes and plans in order to arrest us in our waywardness. He will allow trouble to touch us in the way of problems, sorrows, sicknesses, etc., all with a view to producing repentance. When there is genuine repentance with us, God will often exercise governmental forgiveness and lift the discipline that His hand has placed upon us (Matt. 18:26-27; Luke 7:48; John 5:14; James 5:15; Psa. 103:10-11; Psa. 130:3-4).

The “fear” that Peter says that we should have is not a fear of losing our salvation and our relationship with God as our Father. If we fail in holiness, our relationship with God does not change, but it may bring His hand upon us for correction. The fear that Peter is speaking about here is a reverential fear—a healthy respect for the faithfulness of God to chasten His children, if necessary (Heb. 12:5-11). Peter says that the Father judges “without respect of persons.” This means that God has no favourites in His family. None of His children can live carelessly and not feel His chastening hand in some way (Heb. 12:6-7).

The second motive for walking in holiness is the great cost of our redemption. Peter says, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition [handed down] from your fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (vss. 18-19). We have been redeemed at a great cost, and as a result, the Lord has a claim on our lives. Due to what He accomplished at Calvary, we now belong to Him; our lives are His to use in whatever way He chooses. The Apostle Paul said, “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). When we think of the price that He paid to redeem us, we should gladly surrender our lives to Him.

L.F. #16 App.

In view of Calvary, the logical rationale is: “How can I go on living an unholy life when Christ has paid so great a price to set me free from all that? From this day forward, I’m going to acknowledge His Lordship authority in my life, and with His help, I’m going to do the things that will please Him and glorify Him.”

To press home to our hearts the value of Christ’s great work on the cross, Peter contrasts the redemption money that Israel paid in old times with the price Christ has paid to redeem us. The children of Israel who were over twenty years of age were to give a half shekel of “silver” as a

“ransom” for their souls (Ex. 30:11-16; 38:25-26). They also gave “gold” to make “atonement” (Num. 31:48-54). In contrast to that, Christ’s sacrifice as the “Lamb” of God was of infinite value. He gave HIMSELF as a ransom for our souls! (Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Tim. 2:6: Titus 2:14) Therefore, His Person (chap. 2:7) and His work, signified by His blood (chap. 1:19), are both “precious” to the saints. The practical effect this has on us is that we want to do things that please Him (Psa. 116:12). In this context, it is to live a holy life. As the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for sin, Christ was “without blemish” inwardly (1 John 3:4) and “without spot” outwardly (1 Peter 2:22). Compare Numbers 19:2.

Lest any should think that the entrance of sin has upset God’s plan to bless man, Peter shows that redemption was not an afterthought with God. He says, “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for you” (vs. 20). Thus, God fully anticipated the fall of man and its consequences, and pre-ordained that Christ would be sent into the world as the great Redeemer in Israel’s last days. The “last times” of which Peter speaks is in connection with God’s dealings with Israel; it is not to be confused with the “last days” of the Christian testimony, which we are in today (2 Tim. 3:1). The cycle of Daniel’s seventy weeks which will conclude with Israel’s restoration and blessing (Dan. 9:24-27) was broken between the 69th and 70th week when the Jews rejected their “Messiah.” The New Testament teaches us that during this suspension of God’s dealings with Israel, He has directed His energy towards the calling of the Church, which is a special company of blessed persons distinct from Israel and who have a heavenly destiny with Christ as His body and bride. And thus, we will be with Him when He reigns in His millennial kingdom. Therefore, the Church period of almost 2000 years has come parenthetically between the 69th and 70th week (Rom. 11:11-32). Skipping over this present period, we see that Daniel’s prophecy indicates that Christ, the Messiah, would be “cut off” in death seven years (one week – Gen. 29:27; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6) before God’s promises regarding the restoration and blessing of Israel would be fulfilled (Dan. 9:24). Thus, He died in Israel’s last times.

The culmination of Christ’s redemptive work is not the cross and the grave, but what God has secured by raising Him from the dead and giving Him glory. This is God’s pledge that He will complete what He has purposed for our blessing in our glorification. Therefore, Peter says, “Who by Him do believe in God that raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (vs. 21).

Brethren(Chap. 1:22-25)

Peter passes on to another appellative. Believers on the Lord Jesus Christ are not only children in relation to the Father (vss. 14-21), but they are also “brethren” one of another in the household of faith (vss. 22-25). He says, “Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth to unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another out of a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.” Since these believers were now in a relationship with other believers of “like precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1), their responsibility was to “love one another with a pure heart fervently.”

Peter tells them that there was no reason for their love not to flow out to their brethren with “unfeigned” sincerity, because their souls had been “purified” of every evil and unclean motive. Their purification was a result of their “obedience to the truth” of the gospel wherein they were saved by faith (vs. 22), and their obedience of faith had been affected by their “having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through God’s living and abiding Word (vs. 23 – W. Kelly Trans.). Thus, the very life and nature of God which delights to love had been communicated to them. This means that they had the capacity to love their brethren with divine affection. Since the new life delights in love (1 John 4:8), all we need to do is “let” it express itself according to its inherent desires (Heb. 13:1).

Christian love has a completely different reference point from what these converted Jews were familiar with in the old economy. Under the legal covenant, the point of reference was themselves. They were told, “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19; 22:39). But in Christianity, the reference point is Christ. We are to love each other as Christ has loved us. He said, “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

Vss. 24-25—Due to the divine life that we possess, our relationship with God and our brethren is eternal. The precious “seed” of the “incorruptible” Word which communicated divine life to us in new birth, will live and abide in us forever. Thus, we have an abiding and an eternal relationship with God and our brethren. In contrast to this, the natural man of this world who doesn’t have this life is like “the grass that withereth.” His life quickly passes, and if he has gained some worldly glory along the way, it falls with him like a “flower” that wilts. Such is the transience and emptiness of human life without Christ (Job 14:1-2).

Newborn Babes(Chapter 2:1-3)

Peter goes on to speak of another thing. Christians are also viewed as “newborn babes,” and as such, they are to have a healthy appetite for the Word of God which will result in spiritual growth. He says, “Putting away therefore all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the intelligent milk [of the Word], that by it ye may grow unto salvation, if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good.” (W. Kelly Trans.).

In the last few verses of chapter 1, Peter spoke of how we received our new life—by being born again through the operation of the Word of God in our souls. Now in these verses, he speaks of how that life is sustained by that same instrument. The communication of life in our new birth was a sovereign act of God; we had nothing to do with it. But sustaining that life is something we have a responsible part in—by taking time to read the Word prayerfully.

It is interesting, and significant, that Peter begins by warning us of things that will hinder the natural desires of the new life which longs for the Word of God. He addresses this first because if we don’t deal with these things in self-judgment, they will hinder us from profiting from the Word, and this will stunt our spiritual growth. The things that he mentions in verse 1 are like weeds in our garden that choke out the growth of the plants. “Malice,” is harboring ill feelings towards others. “Guile,” is hiding our evil motives. “Hypocrisies,” are pretending to be something that we’re not. “Envies,” are outright hatred. “Evil speakings,” are purposely putting someone in a bad light when referring to him or her in the presence of others. Note: Peter speaks of these things in plurality. This shows that if we allow these evils in our lives, they will multiply, and it will not be long before we are characterized by them. They, therefore, absolutely must be put off in self-judgment if we expect to make spiritual progress. These things don’t drop off like autumn leaves; they must be cut off. Peter’s repeated use of the word “all” tells us that when judging ourselves as to these things, we need to get at the root of the evil, which may well be embedded in our hearts.

These sins are mentioned together because they are true bedfellows; in life they rarely appear alone (Titus 3:3). For instance, we may have hard feelings (malice) toward someone, but we hide it with guile. However, concealing something like this without judging it only means that it's going to grow. While harbouring these bad feelings, we may carry on outwardly with an air of godliness before others, which is hypocrisy. With the thing left unjudged, our dislike of that person will turn into hatred that will manifest itself in speaking evil of them. These verses furnish us with one great reason as to why we don't grow in divine things as we should. But we can be sure that when these ills are put out of our lives, the desires of the new life will quite naturally manifest themselves in fruit for God. One of the ways the new life will express itself is in having an appetite for the Word of God.

Peter uses the word "mental" here, because he is emphasizing the need for us to engage the rational faculties of our beings in quest of an "intelligent" understanding of the truth (vs. 2). Some decry a study of the Scriptures because it could turn into a mere intellectual approach to the truth. While there is a danger of this, it should not be used to excuse our lack of diligence in the Word. Let us never disparage a study of the Scriptures; observing and distinguishing the things that differ in the Word is how we grow in our understanding of the truth (2 Tim. 2:15). W. Kelly said, "It is needful to heed the distinctions made and given in Scriptures. Fear not to believe the Word. Cavaliers may and do say that these are fine-drawn distinctions ... ..We are bound to distinguish where and as God does; and if we fail to follow, we shall find out too late to our loss. The truth is that there is a great deal of latent unbelief in those who cavil at the distinctions of the Word of God, for all progress in real knowledge is tested by, as growth in true wisdom largely consists in, distinguishing things that differ" (A Study of the Minor Prophets, p. 260). Peter couldn't have been encouraging a mere intellectual approach to the Word without the heart and conscience being engaged, because he speaks of it as being "milk," which has to do with the soul being fed by it.

In speaking of "newborn babes," Peter is not suggesting that we should be content to remain spiritually infantile for the rest of our lives; the whole point in the passage is that we might "grow up" and reach Christian maturity. He is not drawing our attention to the infancy of a baby, but rather, to a baby's desire for its mother's milk. It has a determined, almost aggressive craving for it. Likewise, we are to have that same craving for the mental milk of the Word. Peter's point here is quite simple; as milk is the proper food for a newborn baby, so is the Word of God for the believer. Thirsting for the Word is something that should continue throughout our lives. Peter is not using the term "babes" in the sense in which Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 and Hebrews 5:11-14, where he speaks of spiritual babyhood as an undesirable state to be in due to carnality and the interference of earthly religion. Paul uses the term in a negative sense, whereas Peter uses it in a positive sense.

Spiritual growth is a lot more than academic learning—the amassing of Bible knowledge. It requires mental energy to "study" and to learn the truth (2 Tim. 2:15), but it also involves moral transformation through the Spirit's work in us by which we are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Learning the truth in the sense that Peter is speaking of will have a moral and practical effect on our lives. He says that our spiritual growth will lead "to salvation"—that is, practical salvation. The principles we have learned in the Word are applied to our walk, and this results in practical deliverances from spiritual dangers in the path of faith (Psa. 17:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). Salvation, in its fullest sense, is complete conformity to Christ—in spirit, soul, and body. We will not attain this until the Lord comes. In the meantime, if we feed on the Word, we will grow morally toward that ultimate end.

Vs. 3—Peter adds, "If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is good." This statement shows how appetite is developed. We first "taste," not exactly the Word, but "the Lord" in the Word (in the sense of fellowship with Him), and having experienced that He is indeed "good" and "sweet" in our meditation (Psa. 104:34), we will want more of Him, and will go to the Scriptures to find Him (Psa. 119:103). Thus, our spiritual appetite grows quite naturally when we judge ourselves (vs. 1) and when we give our new nature its proper food—the Word of God (vs. 2).

The secret to getting spiritual food from the Word is to see that the Object and Center of it all is Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39). This is "the key of knowledge" (Luke 11:52). As we read the Word, we must keep in mind that it all pertains to Him and His glory in one way or another. Christ personally may not be in every verse, but the subject of every verse ultimately pertains to His glory.

Living Stones & a Holy Priesthood(Chapter 2:5-8)

Peter goes on to speak of another thing—Christians are viewed as living stones and holy priests in God's house today. He says, "To whom coming, a living Stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious, yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." God has ordained that even though Christ has been rejected by men, He would be the foundation of a new company of believers that God has purposed for blessing—the Church of God. Peter does not speak of this new company as such, but rather, as a "spiritual house" that Christ is building in this world. As the "Living Stone," He is building upon Himself a spiritual house composed of believers who are themselves "living stones" in the structure. This, again, would be something completely new to the Jewish mind.

Peter hastens to add that while Christ is rejected of men, He is "precious" indeed to God (vs. 4). (He is "precious" to the saints too vs. 7.) The fact that the "Corner Stone" of the structure is rejected of men (vs. 6), indicates that everything to do with this house will not be popular in this world. All who are a part of the structure will be rejected as Christ is rejected. Consequently, every believer needs to be prepared to suffer reproach and persecution for the name of Christ (2 Tim. 3:12). It is normal Christianity.

We can see from verses 4-5, that Peter never forgot what the Lord taught him at Caesarea Philippi concerning the building of His Church (Matt. 16:16-18). On that occasion, the Lord spoke of Himself as the "Rock" upon which this new building would be fitly framed. A number of other New Testament passages also confirm that believers on the Lord Jesus Christ constitute God's house in this present dispensation (1 Cor. 3:9-17; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:20; Heb. 3:6; 1 Peter 4:17). This means that God's house today is not a material building, built with brick and mortar, as was the case in the old economy, but a spiritual building composed of believers. The stones are "living" because they partake of the life of Christ, who is the "Living Stone."

Moreover, the priests in this spiritual house are believers on the Lord Jesus Christ—the same persons as the living stones. Peter calls them "a holy priesthood." We learn from this that all Christians are "priests" in this Dispensation of Grace (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). As such, we have access into the presence of God with a liberty that no son of Aaron ever had in the old economy (Heb. 10:19-22). Moreover, the kind of sacrifices that we offer are altogether different from what the priests in the Old Testament offered. Those priests presented animal sacrifices, and certain grains and fruits; whereas, in Christianity, the priests offer up "spiritual sacrifices" aided "by Jesus Christ," our High Priest (John. 4:23-24; Heb. 10:21). The fact that He is a "High" Priest indicates that He has a caste of priests who function under Him.

We might ask, “What exactly are these spiritual sacrifices that believers offer today?” The New Testament epistles indicate that there are three different kinds of Christian sacrifices:

- The sacrifice of “praise” (Heb. 13:15).
- The sacrifice of our “substance”—our possessions (Heb. 13:16).
- The sacrifice of our “bodies”—signifying the giving of our lives—our time and energy (Rom. 12:1). (Acts 15:26 – J. N. Darby Trans.)

Sadly, the churches of Christendom have misunderstood these New Testament passages that teach that God’s house in this day is a spiritual building. Consequently, men have built magnificent cathedrals and temples for Christian worship—and they call those buildings “God’s house!” They have also set up a caste of men (the clergy—so-called Ministers and Pastors) to conduct the services on behalf of those who attend the meetings. This order may be well-intended, but it is a practical denial of the true priesthood of all believers. This is an order that has been borrowed from Judaism and not at all what Scripture teaches for Christian worship.

Vss. 6-7a—Peter then quotes from the prophet Isaiah to show that it is God’s intention that Christ would be the foundation of blessing for all His people—whether it is Israel, or the Church of God, or the Gentiles in the millennial kingdom. He says, “Behold, I lay in Sion a chief Corner Stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded” (Isa. 28:16). Thus, Christ is the Center and Foundation of everything that God is doing (and will do) in this world for man’s blessing. All who “believe on Him shall not be put to shame.” They prove through the experience of walking in fellowship with Him that “He is precious” indeed.

Vss. 7b-8—Peter then speaks of those who will not believe. He adds, “But unto them which be disobedient [disbelieving], the Stone which the builders disallowed [cast away], the same is made the Head of the Corner [the Corner Stone], and a Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto they were appointed.” Thus, we see that Christ is viewed as a Stone in two ways. To those who “believe,” He is the “Corner Stone” of blessing in this new work of God’s grace going on today. But to the “disbelieving,” such as the Jewish builders who disallowed Christ as the nation’s Messiah, He is a “Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence.” Those who stumble in unbelief will have that Stone fall upon them in judgment (Matt. 21:44). This would be the sad portion of the fellow countrymen of these believing Jews to whom Peter was writing, if they remained in unbelief.

A Chosen Race & a Royal Priesthood(Chapter 2:9-10)

Peter passes on to consider another thing; believers on the Lord Jesus Christ are also viewed as a chosen race and a royal priesthood. He says: “Ye are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might set forth the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness to His wonderful [marvelous] light; who were not a people, but now God’s people; who were not enjoying mercy, but now have found mercy.” This, too, would be something new to those who had converted to Christianity from Judaism. Under the old covenant, Israel was God’s chosen race (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; Amos 3:2), but now, with the coming of Christianity, those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are God’s “chosen race,” His “holy nation,” and His “people for a possession.” What is most striking about this new company of blessed persons is that it is composed of both Jews and Gentiles! (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6) How strange and different this must have been to these Jewish saints, for under the old covenant they were to keep themselves separate from Gentiles!

God’s plan was to have the Israelites as His “witnesses” on earth (Isa. 43:10, 21; Jer. 13:11). Had the builders received Christ as their Messiah, He would have showered the nation with millennial blessings as stated in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. But since they rejected Him, the nation had been temporarily set aside (Dan. 9:26; Micah 5:1-3; Zech. 11:10-14, etc.) and believers on the Lord Jesus Christ have taken Israel’s place as God’s vessel of testimony on earth (Rom. 11:17). As His chosen race, Christians are now His witnesses (John 15:27), and as such they are to “set forth the excellencies [praises] of Him” who has called them “out of darkness to His wonderful [marvelous] light.”

This does not mean that the Church is the new Israel, or a new phase in Israel’s history. This is an erroneous doctrine of Reformed (Covenant) Theology. The Church and Israel have not merged into one company, as those theologians teach. In the purpose and ways of God, the Church and redeemed Israel are two entirely different companies of blessed persons. Their portions of blessing and their respective callings and destinies (earthly and heavenly) and their relationships with God are distinctly different. In God’s present dealings in grace through the gospel, Jewish believers on the Lord Jesus Christ have been “taken out from among the people” of Israel (Acts 26:17) and made part of the Church of God—but Israel still remains as a distinct company of people on earth. Likewise, God, by the gospel, is visiting the Gentiles to “take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14); those who believe have also become part of the Church—but the Gentile nations still remain intact on earth. Thus, believing Jews and Gentiles have been taken out of their former positions and are no longer such in Christianity (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

In Romans 11, Paul states that the setting aside of Israel is neither full nor final (vss. 1-5). It is not fully set aside because there is “a remnant according to the election of grace” which is getting saved today, and thus, is now part of the Church of God. Paul points to himself as being an example. The nation’s setting aside is not final either; Israel will not be cast off forever. God has not been thwarted in His purpose regarding them; He will take up with them again in a coming day, and they will be blessed according to the writings of their prophets. When “the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”—which is God’s present work among the Gentiles in calling believers out of them by the gospel to form the Church (Acts 15:14)—“all Israel” (that is, those who have not only Abraham’s blood, but His faith also) “shall be saved” (Rom. 9:6-8; 11:25-27).

This new company of believers is not only a chosen race and a holy nation, they are royal priests. Connecting verses 5 and 9, we see that Christians have a double priesthood. It is a “holy priesthood” in reference to our liberty to approach God in praise and prayer, and it is a “royal [kingly] priesthood” in regard to our testimony before the world. Melchisedec exhibits this double priesthood. He was fit to enter the presence of God with offerings as a holy priest and he was also a king who reigned in Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1).

Some modern translations render the words “show forth,” as “proclaim,” which implies gospel preaching, but that is not really the thought in the passage. W. Kelly says, “It is not, of course, preaching the gospel to the lost that they might be saved” (The Epistles of Peter, p. 141). J. N. Darby says that it has more to do with us reproducing in our walk and ways the “virtues” of Him who has called us—which is the marginal reading in the KJV. (The Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Loizeaux edition, p. 441). Note: Peter says that the state which these Jewish believers were in before they believed the gospel was that of “darkness.” Even though Judaism was a divinely ordained system, in the hands of evil men it had deteriorated into a religion of darkness. The nation had rejected Christ, the Light of the world (John 1:7; 8:12; 9:5), and as a

result, they had become governmentally benighted (Psa. 69:22-23). With the coming in of Christianity, the darkness is past, and the true light is now shining (1 John 2:8).

Verse 10, indicates that since the nation of Israel is presently in the state of “Lo-ammi” (Hosea 1:9), that these Jewish believers who have “pre-trusted” in Christ before the remnant of the nation believes in a coming day (Eph. 1:12), can, in principle, apply Hosea 2:23 (which views believing Jews as “My people”) to themselves. They were once among those who are “not a people,” but now they are “the people of God.” It is interesting that while Peter applies the passage in Hosea to believing Jews today, Paul applies the same passage to believing Gentiles today (Rom. 11:24-26). Hence, believers from both the Jews and the Gentiles have been called out of their previous positions to be part of a new company of blessed persons, known as the Church of God (Acts 15:14; 26:17). Such is the present position on earth of Jewish and Gentile believers.

Verses 9-10, simply teach that God has a new vessel of testimony on earth—the Church. It is not an extension of Israel; it is an altogether new thing. These things are important for Jewish converts to know, both then and now.

Strangers and Pilgrims(Chapter 2:11-17)

Lastly, Peter speaks of believers on the Lord Jesus Christ as strangers and pilgrims. He says, “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.” A “stranger” is a foreigner; one who is not indigenous to the place where he dwells. Accordingly, the Christian’s home is not here on earth. We are “in the world,” but we are not “of the world” (John 16:33; 17:14-16). A “pilgrim” is one who is on a journey. In our case, we are passing through this world on the path of faith on our way home to heaven. Hence, a stranger is one who is not at home and a pilgrim is one who is on his way home.

Peter proceeds to give three short injunctions pertaining to the conduct that is required of strangers and pilgrims.

The first is to “abstain from fleshly lusts.” As Christians, we must be careful not to adopt the morals of the lost people among whom we live. It is imperative that we judge ourselves in this regard, because these lusts not only “war against the soul” and hinder our communion with God, but they also spoil our testimony before the world. Needless to say, having our “conversation honest among the Gentiles” is extremely important. If the lusts of the flesh are manifested in a believer’s life, the world will be quick to pick up on it and use it to cast reproach upon the name of Christ and to “speak against” Christians as “evildoers.” We must, therefore, live in such a way that we are consistent inwardly with what we profess to be outwardly, so that the world can find no spot on us with which to accuse us (Eccl. 9:8).

The garments of the priests in the Old Testament typify this consistency (Ex. 28:39-43). They were to be dressed in fine linen, which speaks of practical righteousness in one’s walk and ways. Their coats (outer clothing which people would see) were to be made of linen, but their breeches (under garments which people wouldn’t see) were also to be of linen.

As mentioned, the best way to answer the accusations and criticisms of the world is to live a godly life that cannot be justly spoken against. Peter says that if we live a life of consistent “good works” before men, they will take note that we genuinely care for the welfare of our fellow man. And, when trouble comes into their lives by way of a governmental “visitation” from God, they may turn to a believer for help and comfort, and in doing so, they in a sense, “glorify God.” This does not mean that they will necessarily turn to Christ and get saved (though some do), but by turning to God’s people for answers and help, they are acknowledging that God’s favour and blessing is with Christians, and this brings glory to God. See Matthew 5:16.

Vss. 13-17—The second injunction for those passing through this world as strangers and pilgrims is submission to civil authorities. Peter says, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether 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 cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” This exhortation has to do with the Christian’s responsibility to live peacefully, honourably, and lawfully under “the powers that be”—the civil governments (Rom. 13:1). Christians are not part of this world, but this does not mean that they don’t have to “submit” to the ordinances (the laws and by-laws) established by the governments of the world in the lands in which they live. They still live in the world, and therefore, must obey “every ordinance of man.” This would be everything from paying taxes to obeying the speed limit signs on the highway, etc.

Human governments have been established by God to check and restrain evil (Gen. 9:5-6; Rom. 13:1-7; 2 Thess. 2:6). Peter states this in verse 14. The fact that some rulers may act contrary to the divine ideal does not mean that we are absolved of our responsibility to obey “the powers that be” (Rom. 13:1). If they demand obedience in something which violates the Christian’s conscience, then that is a different matter. When that is the case, we must obey a “higher” power yet—God Himself (Eccl. 5:8; Acts 5:29). All human government has some imperfection, but without its restraint, anarchy would prevail; therefore, we should be thankful for whatever kind of government we have. The governments of men in various countries are generally helpful to those who wish to do what is right. Peter states this in verse 14b. The reason why it is important for us to submit to every ordinance of man is to take away any occasion that the world might otherwise have to accuse us of wrongdoing. We are, therefore, to be loyal subjects of the state “for the Lord’s sake,” and should remember at all times that we bear His name before the world.

Since Christians are merely passing through this world as strangers and pilgrims, there is no exhortation in the New Testament that encourages us to take a position in government or to involve ourselves in the political affairs of this world. We are citizens of another country above (Phil. 3:20), and this makes us strangers and pilgrims here below. We, therefore, should leave the political struggles of the world to the men of the world (Isa. 45:9).

Vss. 15-16—As Christians, we will inevitably be criticized by the world through which we pass, but as mentioned, if we live in subjection to the civil authorities, we can “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” Like Daniel in Babylon, the world will have nothing in which to justly condemn us (Dan. 6:4). We have been set “free” from the whole course of the world through our redemption in Christ (Gal. 1:4), but we are not to use our “liberty” as a “cloak” for the flesh. “Free” does not mean that we are free to sin; Christian freedom is not a pretext for Christians to do evil. Rather, we are free to use our energies to serve the Lord as “the servants of God.”

Vs. 17—The general tendency of the Jews dispersed among the Gentiles was to resent the heathen authorities over them. In view of this, Peter brings in a third injunction: “Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king.” As believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to live honourably and peaceably amongst the lost persons with whom we live and work (Rom. 12:18; 1 Tim. 2:1-2). We must be careful not to “speak evil of dignitaries” (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8). If God is feared, the king will be honoured, the brethren will be loved, and men generally will be respected. This is how we are to pass through this world as strangers and pilgrims. J. N. Darby said, “Say little, serve all, and pass on. This is true greatness; to work unnoticed, and to serve unseen.” Summarizing our responsibility toward the powers that be, we are to pray, pay, and obey.

- We pray for all in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-2).
- We pay our taxes to those in authority (Rom. 13:7).
- We obey the ordinances set up by those in authority (1 Peter 2:13).

Summary of the Christian Appellatives

- As Children—we are to walk in holiness.
- As Brethren—we are to love one another with a pure heart fervently.
- As New-born Babes—we are to desire the mental milk of the Word that we may grow spiritually.
- As Living Stones & a Holy Priesthood—we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.
- As a Chosen Race & a Royal Priesthood—we are to exhibit the moral excellencies of Christ before the world.
- As Strangers & Pilgrims—we are to pass through this world obeying its rulers and submitting to their earthly ordinances.

The First Epistle of Peter, Natural Relationships

(Chapters 2:18–3:7)

Peter goes on to address the conduct that Christians should have in their natural relationships in the household. What he has touched on, thus far, have been the new things that Christianity has brought into the world. But what is now before us is not new; these natural relationships have been in existence long before Christianity.

The salient point in this section of the epistle is that the new life does not negate or run counter to natural relationships and responsibilities. What Christianity has done is to set these natural relationships in a new light. Hence, the exhortations that follow address the conduct that should be found in believers who are in one or more of these natural stations of life, and this is in view of rendering a godly testimony for Christ in this world.

Household Servants

(Vss. 18-25)

The first of these natural relationships is household servants. Peter says, “Household servants, be in subjection with all fear to your masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the crooked [ill-tempered]. For this is grace if for conscience toward God one endureth griefs, suffering unjustly [wrongfully]. For what glory is it if when ye sin and are buffeted ye shall endure? But if when ye do well and suffer ye shall endure [take it patiently], this is grace [acceptable] with God” (W. Kelly Trans.). The Greek word for “servants” here is not the usual word used in the New Testament, which is “bondmen” (slaves). The word used here refers to those who were servants, but not necessarily slaves.

Having addressed the need for subjection to the governmental authorities in the lands wherein we live (vss. 13-17), Peter insists on similar “subjection” in the household (vss. 18-20). The great point here is that the servant is to be subject to his master, but at the same time, he is to maintain a good conscience before God. This is particularly challenging when the master is “crooked” and he asks the servant to do something morally or ethically wrong. Refusing to do something evil will oftentimes lead to the servant suffering “wrongfully.” Peter says that it would be no credit for us to suffer for wrongdoing. But, if we suffer “patiently” for refusing to do evil “for conscience sake,” it glorifies God and bears witness to the fact that we have something (our faith in Christ) that is worth suffering for. There has been many a master who has been converted through their servants living by upright values in the name of Christ.

Living in the western world where having masters and servants in a household is not customary, we might be inclined to think that this passage has no application for us today. However, when we are gainfully employed at some firm, we are, in principle, in the same position as these Christian servants. During the hours of our employment, we render our services to the firm that has hired us, and in doing so, the injunctions given to servants here, and elsewhere in the New Testament, have a practical application to us (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Tim. 6:1). Likewise, employers who manage a company and have employees, in principle, are in the position of masters, and they are to run their companies in a way that would honour the Lord (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:2).

Vss. 21-25—To help servants meet these trying circumstances in the workplace in a right way, Peter brings in two things:

- The example of Christ’s life (vss. 21-23).
- The sacrifice of Christ’s death (vss. 24-25).

As to the first, he says, “For even hereunto were ye called: Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example [model], 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." The trying and difficult circumstance of working under an overbearing master affords the servant a golden opportunity to show forth the excellencies (virtues) of Christ. But this is not easy to do when we know that we are suffering wrongfully. As a "model" for all right conduct under such circumstances, Peter points us to Christ, the perfect Servant. No one suffered wrongfully more than He did, and no one ever took the suffering with such a wonderful spirit of meekness and grace! Servants suffering for injustices in the workplace are to "follow His steps" and His "example" of patient submission when they have to suffer in this way. The setting of this exhortation is that of servants suffering in their station of life, but Peter's words of encouragement here, apply to anyone who suffers wrongfully.

Christ suffered, but not for His own sins, because He had no sins. Scripture says, "He did no sin" (vs. 22), He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), and "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Yet He suffered patiently under the false accusations that were hurled at Him. When He was falsely accused before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council), He "held His peace" (Matt. 26:63), and then before Herod, He demonstrated the same restraint—He "answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9). And, He exercised the same restraint again before Pilate—He "answered him never a word" (Matt. 27:12-14). He made no attempt to defend Himself, or to retaliate. Peter says, "When He was reviled" with abusive words, He "reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." There was no "guile" in His mouth; He never said a word in a wrong tone of voice! Instead of exonerating Himself, He "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously," and thus, fulfilled Isaiah 53:7 perfectly. The Lord's conduct shows us how we are to behave when we are maligned and persecuted for doing what is right before God. We learn from this that we mustn't allow ourselves to get drawn into word fights when we are reviled or to make threats to get even, etc.

As to the second thing, Peter says, "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 [Overseer] of your souls" (vss. 24-25). We might wonder why he would bring in Christ's work on the cross wherein He made atonement when it is not possible for us to follow Him in that kind of suffering—only He could make atonement for sins. But taking a closer look at the passage we will see that Peter is not asking us to imitate the Lord in atonement, but rather, to be cognizant of what He accomplished in atonement. His suffering for sins is not set before us as a model here, but as a motivation to cease from sinning. Peter's rationale is that since Christ suffered so dearly to put away our sins, we cannot rightly go on in those things that cost Him so much. To carry on in those sins is a heartless mis-consideration of what He went through to put them away.

Putting this in context; by responding in a fleshly way to wrongs done against us, we are doing something that cost the Lord unmeasureable suffering! How can God approve of that? All such fleshly actions are not God's way of behaving when we are persecuted, "for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). The flesh feels justified in sinning when it knows that it has been wronged, but if we have truly been "healed" by His "stripes" (spiritually), we will not want to respond to injustices against us with a sinful display of anger, railing, etc. Peter states that the purpose of Christ's death is to sever believers from the course of sins that they once pursued (which is what "dead to sins" means) in order that they would "live unto righteousness." Therefore, the only right thing to do when tested in these difficult situations is to seek grace from God to behave in a way that would glorify the Lord (James 4:6).

Verse 24, has to do with what Christ did for us in the past on the cross, but verse 25, has to do with what He is doing for us at the present—caring and keeping us in the path of faith. His eye is ever upon those whom He has redeemed, watching over them as their "Shepherd" and "Overseer." As our Shepherd, He feeds us with spiritual food (vs. 2); as our Overseer, He guides and guards us from spiritual attacks from the enemy (chap. 5:8). If we keep close to Him, we will be delivered from the pitfalls in the way (Deut. 33:12). Before these Jewish saints were saved, not having the Lord to help them in this practical way, they were "going astray" in the darkness of empty Judaism, but now, having received Christ, they were on the path of faith under His care and keeping.

Wives

(Chap. 3:1-6)

Peter passes on to address the marriage relationship, supposing a situation where the wife is a believer and her husband is not. He shows that through quiet, godly living she can testify of Christ and win her husband to Him. He says, "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 [manner of life] of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation [manner of life] coupled with fear" (vss. 1-2).

For a believer to be united to an unbeliever in marriage is exceedingly difficult. No one should voluntarily go into such a union; it would be pure disobedience (2 Cor. 6:14). Peter is not speaking of that here, but of a situation where the gospel has reached two unbelievers in a marriage, and one (the wife) gets saved. God may use the difficulties of an unequal yoke in marriage as a discipline for the one who has willfully entered into that unscriptural union, but in the case in which Peter is speaking, He will give grace to meet the situation. When such a case exists, much wisdom is needed on the part of the believing partner. The answer is not divorce, but to remain in that calling and to be a bright testimony for Christ in it (1 Cor. 7:13-16).

Peter's line of thought here is simple; since the husband rejects the Word, the wife is to win him "without the Word"—that is, without preaching at him. She is to display the character of Christ, and over time, the Spirit of God will use it to convict him and win him to Christ (Prov. 11:30). This shows that actions often speak louder than words. The thought of a woman submitting to a man is repugnant in today's society, yet it is God's principle of blessing and healing in a marriage. Such is the power of a quiet, submissive spirit that God identifies with, and blesses. On the other hand, a strong, dominating woman will often drive her unbelieving husband further away from Christ.

Peter adds, "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" (vss. 3-4). This shows that the beauty the wife is to have is an inward moral thing, rather than an outward display of worldly adornment. The point here is that it will not be her outward appearance in hair and apparel that will win her husband to the Lord, but her inner life of holiness and submission. Ornate clothing and hairstyles tend to attract attention to the person rather than to Christ. The Spirit of God will not identify with worldliness in a wife, but He will identify with her godliness and will use it to convict her unbelieving husband. Peter is not encouraging slovenliness in women's dress; there is no virtue in that. What he is saying is that God appreciates "a meek and quiet spirit," and that is what every Christian woman should be concerned about.

Peter then points to the character of holy women in Old Testament times. They didn't have Christ before them as a motive as Christian women do today, but they displayed a spirit of submission to their husbands that was commendable. He says, "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 [consternation]." Sarah "obeyed" Abraham, and Peter sets her example before us as a model for Christian wives. The Apostle Paul lifts Christian marriage to a higher plane in keeping with the revelation of the Mystery which was committed to him. The model he sets before us is not that of Abraham and Sarah, but of "Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:32). Accordingly, Paul tells children and servants in the household to "obey" (Eph. 6:1, 5), but wives, having a different relationship with the head of the house, are to "submit" (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18). Submission is slightly different from obedience, having to do more with the attitude of the heart and the will. Whereas, with obedience, one could obey but not have his heart engaged at all. Demanding obedience from the wife reduces Christian marriage to a legal arrangement, and this spoils the picture that it is supposed to exhibit of Christ and the Church.

Sarah referred to Abraham as "lord." Peter is not suggesting that Christian women should literally call their husbands "lord" when speaking to them. Sarah said it "within herself" (Gen. 18:12); thus, it was the attitude of her heart by giving Abraham his rightful place as head of the household. She is the example for all "holy women." Christian wives who follow her example are morally her "daughters." The Christian testimony needs holy women more today than ever.

Husbands

(Chapter 3:7)

Peter says, "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." Husbands are not told to claim submission from their wives and to insist upon it; they are to win their respect by dwelling with them "according to knowledge." The knowledge that he is referring to here is that which is required of each partner in the marriage relationship. H. Smith said that it is "the knowledge of the relationship as instituted by God" (The Epistles of Peter, p. 21). Hence, the principles of Christian marriage are not based on the customs and culture of the land in which we live, but on what God has ordained in Scripture concerning marriage. This means that husbands cannot treat their wives in some untoward way, and excuse it by saying, "It's the custom in our country." The husband also needs to know the natural limitations of his wife, physically and emotionally, as being the "weaker vessel," and to be considerate in all things. He is to recognize what his wife is able for—in work, in travel, even in child bearing—and not to demand of her more than what she is physically and emotionally capable of handling.

Thus, the wife is to give her husband "subjection" (vs. 1) and the husband is to give his wife "honour" (vs. 7). Being the "weaker" vessel does not mean that she is inferior. Note: she is called the "weaker" vessel, not the "weak" vessel, which implies that he is the strong vessel in the marriage. Stating that she is "weaker" implies that the husband is weak too; but that she is just the weaker of the two. This means that both need to be cast upon the Lord in dependence to ensure a happy and successful marriage.

"Heirs together of the grace of life," is not referring to the believer's eternal heritage of spiritual blessings in Christ (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Col. 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4). Rather, it is referring to the natural benefits that come with marriage in this life. If a Christian couple follows the simple principles of marriage as laid out in God's Word, they will have the smile of the Lord's approval, and they can expect to have His blessing in a practical way. They are not to allow anything to come between them that would hinder them from bowing their knees together in the Lord's presence and expressing their dependence upon Him for their needs. This is what Peter means by saying, "That your prayers be not hindered." Quarreling and bickering will certainly do this.

The First Epistle of Peter, Various Aspects of Suffering in the Path of Faith

(Chapters 3:8–5:14)

Since the Christian is called to walk in a path that is counter to the course of this world, suffering persecution in some form or another cannot be avoided. Since suffering is inevitable, Peter devotes this final section of the epistle to giving counsel and encouragement to the saints who were passing through affliction—particularly the suffering of persecution. He has given a special word to various groups of individuals within the Christian community, but now he broadens out his remarks to take in all the saints. This is indicated in the words, "Be ye all … ."

His use of the word, "Finally," indicates that he has reached a climax in his instructions and is now going to address a subject that was of much concern to him—the sufferings of the saints. He had touched on it already when he exhorted the household servants (chap. 2:19), but now he addresses the subject as it applies to all of the saints. He exhorts them concerning:

- Suffering for righteousness' sake (chap. 3:14-22).
- Suffering in the flesh and ceasing to sin (chap. 4:1-11).
- Suffering for Christ's name's sake (chap. 4:12-19).
- Suffering from the opposition of the devil (chap. 5:1-11).

In each of these aspects of suffering, Peter applies "the sufferings of Christ" to the saints in their circumstances of suffering to encourage them. As mentioned in the Introduction, Christ's sufferings are brought in either as a model or as a motivation.

The Christian Company—A Haven

Chap. 3:8-9—Peter begins by exhorting the saints that there would be a happy state of unity among them. This is important because the Christian community is to be a haven of rest to the saints from the coldness and hostility of the world. "Being let go" from our earthly responsibilities in secular employment, we should be able to retreat to our "own company" and find comfort, love, understanding, sympathy,

help, and spiritual instruction there (Acts 4:23). Peter recognizes this and exhorts: “Be ye all of one mind, having compassion [sympathizing] one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous [humble minded].” When these things are found in action among the saints, happy conditions will prevail in the Christian circle, and it will truly be a haven of rest where a believer can find solace from the troubles he faces in this world.

Being under persecution, as these saints were, Peter exhorts them to resist any thought of retaliation. He says, “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but on the contrary, blessing others, because ye have been called to this, that ye should inherit blessing” (vs. 9). Our practical life is to be governed by the fact that we are called to inherit blessing. With a conscious sense of the grace that has so richly blessed us, we should be ready to bless others—even if they have been abusive to us.

The Government of God

Vss. 10-13—To further comfort and encourage the saints who were passing through persecution, Peter brings in the working of the principles of God’s government. He quotes from Psalm 34:12-16 to establish this point: “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 [avoid] evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue [pursue] it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers [supplications]: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” Thus, these suffering saints would have God’s providential help in the persecutions they were facing. This does not mean that they would escape the persecution; it may be that God would allow a martyr’s death for some of them. Peter’s point here is that those who were being persecuted could count on having God’s support in the time of trouble. H. Smith remarked that in “the unchanging principles of the moral government of God, the essence of government, whether human or divine, is to protect and bless those who work good and punish those who do evil” (The Epistles of Peter, pp. 22-23). This applies to believers as well as unbelievers.

The fact that he says, “He that will love life and see good days,” shows that the Christian life is not all hardship. The smile of God’s approval will be enjoyed by those who do good. This is an underlying principle of God’s government; we reap what we sow, either for bad or for good (Gal. 6:7-9). This should be an encouragement for those who do good (Gal. 6:10). Those who do evil may look like they are getting away with it, but the working of God’s governmental judgment always catches up to them in the end (Psa. 73:1-19). The government of God is nothing to be feared if we are walking uprightly. Conversely, it is something to be feared greatly, if we do evil.

Vs. 13—Peter breaks off his quote from Psalm 34 just before the words, “To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth,” because those words refer to a coming day when the Lord appears. His great point, in these verses, is that with God’s providential hand working on behalf of His people, there is nothing that can touch us that He hasn’t appointed (Job 23:14). In view of this, Peter asks, “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” This is the language of one whose confidence is in God. These verses show that the easiest or simplest passage through life is found in doing the will of God. If we do what is right, we will have the comfort of knowing that the Lord is on our side—even in times of persecution.

Suffering for Righteousness’ Sake

(Chapter 3:14-22)

Vs. 14—Peter proceeds to address the various aspects of suffering in the path of faith, beginning with suffering for righteousness’ sake.

There will be times in life when we will do what is morally and ethically right in a certain situation, and consequently, suffer for it. Peter’s response is: “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy [blessed] are ye.” This might sound a little strange. We might have thought that he would have said, “If ye suffer ... sad will ye be”—but he says, “Happy are ye!” We might wonder how a believer could be happy when he is persecuted? Peter shows that if we are called upon to suffer for righteousness’ sake, we will have an inner joy that is known only by those who suffer in that way (1 Thess. 1:6). It is an enigma that cannot be explained. Peter’s conclusion, therefore, is that there is no need to live in fear or dread, because if we are called to suffer in this way, we will be happy. This being the case, he says, “Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.” Similarly, Hebrews 13:5-6 says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” Again, this is the language of faith.

Giving an Answer for the Reason of Our Hope

Vs. 15—Peter goes on to show that if we behave properly, especially under the trial of persecution, those who oppose the things we stand for might even inquire as to our faith. This shows that when we suffer for righteousness sake and are happy, it renders a powerful testimony to those around, and they may want what we have. Since this is a real possibility, he says: “Sanctify the Lord God [Christ] in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason [to give account] of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” This is a partial quote from Isaiah 8:12-13. Sanctifying the Lord Christ in our hearts is to give the Lord His rightful place in our lives by putting His interests first. It would include being in a proper state of soul through judging ourselves (1 Cor. 11:31) and living in communion with the Lord (John 15:4). Then, if we are going to be effective in giving a right answer as to what we believe, we will also need to have a working knowledge of the truth. We cannot expect to teach the truth to those who inquire after it if we don’t know it ourselves. Those who lived in the early days of Christianity, before the New Testament Scriptures were written, acquired the truth through the oral ministry of the apostles and other servants of the Lord (Acts 2:42; 11:26; 14:22; 18:24-28; 20:20). But since the New Testament has been completed, we have divinely inspired Scripture to refer to—but even this requires an acquaintance with it, which only comes through diligent study (1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Peter says that our answers are to be given “with meekness and fear.” Meekness and lowliness go together (Matt. 11:29; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12). Meekness has to do with the way in which we approach others, not giving offence (1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 3:2). H. Smith said, “Acting in a spirit of meekness we shall not offend” (The Epistles of Peter, p. 25). Lowliness, on the other hand, is not taking offence when we meet someone who is not meek in spirit. Moses is an example of lowliness; he was criticized for marrying a black woman, but he didn’t take offence (Num. 12:3 – J. N. Darby Trans. footnote). The word “answer,” in the Greek, is “apologia,” which is where we get our English word “apologetics” from. This refers to a doctrinal defense of the Christian faith. Thus, we are to act in meekness, but also in the “fear” of God when facing questioners. We must maintain a right spirit as we give an answer of the “reason of the hope” in us. This will be difficult when we are being persecuted, but the Lord will give us the grace to say the right thing if we look to Him (Matt. 10:18-20).

Vs. 16—Peter adds: “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 [manner of life] in Christ.” Thus, we are not only to have a knowledge of the truth and a right spirit in replying to those who inquire, but we must also have a “good conscience.” A good conscience is maintained by judging ourselves if and when we fail. Peter himself is an example here. He “denied” the Lord (Matt. 26:72), but when he judged his failure and was restored to the Lord, he could with good conscience preach to his fellow countrymen: “Ye have denied the Holy One and the Just!” (Acts 3:14). The danger is to lose a good conscience by not behaving rightly when we are falsely accused. When that is the case, our ministry will lose its power.

Vss. 17-18—Peter concludes: “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.” Christ’s sufferings in atonement are brought in here as a motivation for the believer not to sin. Thus, it is totally inconsistent for a believer to be found suffering for wrong-doing, because Christ has already suffered for such sins at Calvary. Since those sins caused Him unfathomable agony to put away, how then can we return in the smallest degree to that which caused Him so much suffering? Since He has saved us from all that, it is not right that we should be found practicing those sins for which Christ died; it is not being true to our confession of being Christians. J. N. Darby said, “It may be that God may see it good that we should suffer. If so, it is better that we should suffer for well doing than for evil doing. The Apostle gives a touching motive for this: Christ has suffered for sins once for all; let that suffice; let us suffer only for righteousness. To suffer for sin was His task; He accomplished it, and that forever, being put to death as to His life in the flesh but quickened according to the power of the divine Spirit” (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Loizeaux edition, pp. 444-445).

There are three things stated in verse 18 in connection with Christ’s work on the cross:

propitiation. "The just for the unjust"

substitution.

us to God"

reconciliation.

The order in which Peter speaks of these things is significant. Propitiation and substitution (the two parts of atonement) precede reconciliation. This indicates that God had to take up matters that pertained to His holiness before He could concern Himself with man's need. The claims of divine justice in regard to sin had to be settled first. This was done in propitiation (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Propitiation is the Godward side of Christ's work on the cross which has rendered a full satisfaction to God in regard to the whole outbreak of sin; it vindicated His holy nature. Substitution is the believer's side of Christ's work on the cross. It has to do with what Christ did for believers in bearing the judgment of their sins (chap. 2:24). As a result, the sin question has been settled at the cross, and God is able to reach out to man with a message of redeeming grace, and reconcile believers to Himself (Rom. 5:10-11; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:21).

Noah’s Example

Vss. 19-20—Peter then brings in Noah’s day and the people who rejected his preaching who are now in prison. He says, “By which also He (Christ) went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime [heretofore] 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.” We might wonder why Peter would mention this because it seemingly has nothing to do with the subject in discussion. The simple answer was to encourage those suffering for righteousness sake that they were not alone in their sufferings; others before them had suffered in a similar way. Noah is an example. He was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5) who suffered “for righteousness’ sake” at the hand of those who were “disobedient” to his preaching. Even though the results of his preaching were small, as far as souls that were saved, he continued faithfully and steadfastly in his witness, and was a real overcomer in his day. He patiently witnessed for 120 years while “the ark was a preparing” and became an “heir of righteousness” (Heb. 11:7).

Christ Preaching By the Spirit

A closer consideration of this passage of Scripture reveals many correlations between those antediluvian days and the days in which these Jewish believers were living. Christ was not personally present in those days, but He “preached” to the men of that time “by the Spirit,” through Noah. Similarly, in these Christian times Christ is no longer present on earth, but the Spirit has come, and Christ has been preaching to men by the Spirit through His servants (Eph. 2:17). To rightly understand this, it is necessary to note the way in which Peter uses the expression “the Spirit of Christ” (chap. 1:11). Christ, by the Holy Spirit, was in the prophets of old testifying to men. Likewise, with the people who lived before the flood; in those days, the Spirit of Christ was in Noah, striving with men through his righteous preaching (Gen. 6:3; 2 Peter 2:5).

The great mass of the people in Noah’s day were “disobedient” to the preaching. Similarly, in Peter’s day, the mass of the Jewish nation had rejected Christ (Acts 3:13-16) and resisted the testimony of the Holy Spirit speaking to them through men like Stephen (Acts 7:51). When judgment fell on those antediluvians, and they died in the flood, their disembodied “spirits” were cast into the “prison” in Hades to await the great day of judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). So also, with the unbelieving Jews who rejected Christ; when they died, their souls would be “brought down even to Hades” (Matt. 11:21-24). This shows the seriousness of disobeying the testimony of God.

Moreover, the days before the flood were the time of “the longsuffering of God” when He waited to save any who had faith before the judgment fell (Gen. 7:4). At the time of the writing of this epistle, God was waiting similarly in longsuffering patience for any of the Jews to turn to Christ before His judgment fell on the nation. This occurred in A.D. 70 when the Roman armies destroyed the city of Jerusalem and slaughtered the Jews (Matt. 22:7). Just as a small remnant of mankind escaped the judgment of the flood (just “eight souls”), so also a small remnant of the nation was spared from that judgment by fleeing to Christ for refuge (Heb. 6:18-20). Historians tell us that the Jewish Christians in and around Jerusalem took to heart the Lord’s exhortation in Luke 21:20-24, and the call of Hebrews 13:13, and moved to the remote area of Pella beyond the Jordan river, which the Romans left untouched, and thus, escaped the judgment.

Did Christ Descend into Hades to Preach to the Lost?

Some think that these verses teach that after Christ died, but before He rose from the dead, He went in spirit into the regions of the damned to proclaim to them His victory over sin at the cross. This idea is erroneous for several reasons:

Firstly, the prison house of lost souls is a condition of “torment” (Luke 16:23). If Christ went there, He entered into a state of suffering! This means that He not only suffered on the cross (vs. 18), but He also suffered among the damned in Hades! (vs. 19) Scripture nowhere teaches this.

Secondly, since “gospel” preaching always announces blessing of some kind (1 Peter 4:6), if Christ went to the prison house of the damned to preach, He had to have been there offering some kind of blessing to those lost souls! What blessing could there be for them? This implies that they were given a second chance to be saved, and if so, they were not in a “fixed” state of damnation which Scripture teaches all the departed lost are in (Luke 16:26). This idea lends itself to the Catholic error of Purgatory—that it is possible to retrieve the lost who have died in their sins from their condition of damnation. Again, Scripture teaches no such thing. The truth is that the Son of Man has “power on earth to forgive sins;” He does not have power to forgive the sins of those who have passed from the earth and are in Hades (Matt. 9:6).

Thirdly, if Christ truly went into the regions of the damned to preach to those who died in the flood, it leaves us with the question as to why He would preach to them only, and not give others among the damned a second chance to be saved too. It presents God as being unfair. Again, the Bible does not teach this.

It may be replied, “But Christ did go into Hades after He died” (Acts 2:27). This is true; but He was in “paradise” (a state of bliss) when He was in Hades (Luke 23:43). He was not in the “prison” (a state of torment). A careful look at this passage shows that the preaching Christ did was “in the days of Noah” through the medium of the Holy Spirit; it was not in the interval between His death and resurrection. It is regrettable that the division between verses 19 and 20 separates the act of Christ’s preaching from the time of His preaching, and this has led some to their mistaken idea.

Saved by Water—A Figure of Baptism

Vss. 21-22—Noah and his family were, “saved by water” (vs. 20b). This fact sets forth a picture of what baptism does for Jewish believers. Peter says, “The like figure whereunto 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.” The flood cut off Noah and his family from the world that overflowed with water. Those waters “saved” Noah’s family by removing them from the old world and placing them on a new world that was beyond the judgment of the flood. Thus, the very waters that saved Noah’s family were those which took the unbelievers away! What was blessing for one was judgment for the other. Similarly, the ordinance of baptism dissociates a person symbolically from his old life in the world and it associates him with a new position on earth wherein he lives with Christ “in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27). Hence, it was imperative for Jewish believers to be baptized; it dissociated them from the guilty nation that crucified Christ and formally identified them with the new Christian position of privilege on earth (Acts 2:38). “Us,” in this 21st verse, refers to Jewish believers.

By saying, in a parenthesis, “Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh,” Peter clarified that he was not referring to Old Testament “baptisms” of ceremonial washings which the priests underwent to cleanse their bodies in preparation for their service in the sanctuary (Heb. 6:2). He was referring to Christian baptism, which signifies our identification with the death of Christ, which is “the demand as before God of a good conscience.” L. M. Grant explained this as follows: “It expressed a desire or demand of a good conscience; it does not itself give a good conscience, but since baptism is unto Christ, it points to Him who gives a good conscience. This is intimated in the last phrase of verse 21—'by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’ Baptism would be meaningless if Christ had not risen from the dead” (Comments on the Books of First and Second Peter, p. 33). Thus, baptism saves believing Jews (outwardly) from the governmental judgment of God that was on the nation (Psa. 69:22-27; Acts 2:40). Noah came out of the flood to begin a new life in a new world; it speaks to us of the new position on earth in which baptism places us, wherein we are identified with Christ in resurrection.

Peter does not stop at Christ’s resurrection, but goes on to speak of His ascension too. He says, “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God: angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him” (vs. 21). He mentions this to show that those baptized unto Christ are brought directly under the authority and control of Christ on high. The baptized believer, therefore, is to live in the good of what his baptism signifies and to cut off his links with the world, practically, with which he was once associated. This would involve bidding a formal goodbye to the old Jewish position on which he stood as a Jew in Judaism, which was under impending judgment.

Suffering in the Flesh

(Chapter 4:1-11)

Vss. 1-2—Peter proceeds with another aspect of the saints’ sufferings—suffering in the flesh. He says, “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.” As we have noted, through the course of this epistle, Peter brings in Christ’s sufferings either as a model or as a motivation to encourage the saints to live a godly life. In this fourth chapter, His sufferings are set before us as a model. This passage couldn’t be referring to Christ’s atoning sufferings (as in chapter 3:18) because we are exhorted to imitate Him, and we would never be asked to imitate Him in making atonement—only He could accomplish that great work.

Peter’s point here is that since Christ “suffered” in doing the will of God, we should be prepared to do so also. We need to have “the same mind” that He had. As far as His mind was concerned, He would rather suffer than sin; He would rather die than disobey. But as far as His holy constitution is concerned, He couldn’t sin, because He didn’t have the fallen sin-nature (the flesh). Hence, there was never a struggle in Him whether or not to sin. The J. N. Darby translation places the article “the” before “flesh” in square brackets, indicating that the word is not in the Greek text. Hence, Christ suffered in flesh, but not in the flesh—that is, the fallen sin-nature.

This passage does not teach that the Lord had sinful desires, but He overcame them. Such doctrine is blasphemous. In order for a person to sin, he must have a sin-nature. The sin-nature is the evil tree that produces its fruit in evil deeds—sins. But that evil tree was not in the Lord. He didn’t have a sin-nature; He had a holy human nature that could not sin (Luke 1:35; John 14:30).

Doing the Will of God

“The will of God” ought to be the spring of every Christian’s moral life. Doing His will must be a commitment within our hearts and minds. The Lord is our great example here. He said, “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7). He also said, “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). But doing the will of God cost the Lord dearly. Concerning the cup of judgment which He desired to pass from Him and not drink, He submitted His will to God’s, and said, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). He took the cup from His Father’s hand and in perfect obedience went to the cross and drank it (John 18:11)—and we are thankful that He did, for without Him doing it, God couldn’t save us!

For us, suffering “in the flesh” involves refusing sin’s lusts and enticements, and this results in ceasing from sin. If we gratify the flesh, we do not suffer, but we sin, and that displeases the Lord and gives us a bad conscience. Hence, this kind of suffering is different from the sufferings touched on thus far in the epistle. Suffering for conscience sake (chap. 2:19) and suffering for righteousness’ sake (chap. 3:14) are sufferings that come upon us by the ill-will of evil and injurious persons—but here the suffering is self-inflicted, so to speak. We elect to do the will of God and this involves refusing the sinful desires of the flesh; as a result, we suffer. This should not be taken to mean that suffering in the flesh is a monastic lifestyle wherein are no joys. On the contrary, walking in the path of faith in the service of the Lord (wherein we face suffering from without and within) is the happiest life that a person can have. This may seem paradoxical, but it is a fact.

Verse 2, shows that God has a very good reason for us ceasing to sin—it is so that we can be used in the Master’s service. Suffering in the flesh sets us free to do God’s will. Thus, the Christian is to spend “the rest of his time,” no longer chasing sinful pleasures which are only for a season (Heb. 11:25), but in doing “the will of God.”

The Rest of Our Time

Vss. 3-4—In their unconverted days, these Jews lived no differently than the Gentiles, as far as the gratification of the natural desires of the flesh is concerned. Peter says, “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 [drinkings], and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot [corruption], speaking evil of you.” As Israelites, they were in an outward covenant-relationship with God that demanded living a holy life (chap. 1:16). But they disregarded that covenantal commitment and lived “in time past” according to the unholiness that characterized “the Gentiles”—and this dishonoured God (Rom. 2:17-24). Thus, in the Jews’ religion, they had been ceremonially “nigh” to God, but sad to say, they were morally “far” from Him (Eph. 2:17; Matt. 15:8).

These Jews sought to curry the favour of their pagan Gentile neighbours in whose lands they dwelled by participating in their corrupt ways. But the call of God had changed everything. They had been saved by God’s grace and they began marching to the beat of a different drum. The Gentiles among whom they lived couldn’t understand why they had turned so suddenly and completely away from the corrupt lifestyle they had once pursued. Having no knowledge of God, nor of the holy desires of the new nature, their old friends assumed that they were acting on some evil motive, and consequently, spoke “evil” of them. Likewise, all who have been converted to Christ should be prepared for similar treatment from their unsaved cronies. When they cease from the sinful things they once pursued, and they begin to follow Christ, there will be considerable repercussion from the world; this will lead to criticism and speaking evil of the believer.

We learn from verses 2-3, that every Christian has two parts to his life on earth. There is:

- “the time past” (vs. 3).
- “the rest of his time” (vs. 2).

Every truly converted believer will readily admit that his life prior to his conversion was nothing but self-will, self-pleasing, and the pursuit of vanity, and that all such is lost time. We can’t do anything about the time past in our life; it is “water under the bridge” which we cannot get back. But we can do something about the rest of our time! Every living Christian stands on the dividing line between these two parts of his life with a choice as to what he is going to do with the portion of his life that remains. A searching question we can ask ourselves is: “What am I going to do with the rest of my time?” In 2 Corinthians 5:15, the Apostle Paul says that there are only two ways in which Christians can live their lives. They can either be lived “unto themselves” (for their own interests), or they can be lived “unto Him” (for furthering the interests of Christ). He also says that the love of Christ constrains us to surrender the rest of our time to His interests, and thus, to make an impact in this world for Him. Since no one knows how long he or she has to live, no one knows how long the rest of their time will be. This being the case, we need to pray Moses’ prayer: “Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa. 90:12).

The Judgment of the Quick and the Dead

Vss. 5-6—Peter assures us that all (Jew or Gentile) who pursue a godless life will one day “give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick [living] and the dead” (Acts 10:42; Rom. 14:12). The judgments of the quick and the dead are two distinct things involving all who are wicked in the human race. These two judgments will be executed at two different times in the future. The Apostle Paul indicates that the judgment of the living begins “at His Appearing” (2 Tim. 4:1), when “the Lord shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-8). It will include the Harvest judgment (Rev. 14:14-16; Matt. 13:37-42; 24:36-41), the Vintage (Winepress) judgment (Rev. 14:17-20; Isa. 63:1-6), and the Sessional judgment—before the millennial kingdom of Christ is established (Matt. 25:31-46) and during its session (Psa. 101:8; Zeph. 3:5). In that same verse (2 Tim. 4:1), Paul also indicates that the judgment of the dead will occur at “His kingdom,” without being specific as to when in His kingdom. The Apostle John gives us the actual time; it is at end of Christ’s 1000-year kingdom reign, at the “great white throne” (Rev. 20:11-15; Isa. 24:22).

Peter goes on to explain that the grounds of all judgment is the testimony that God has given to men; this makes them responsible. He says, “For to this end were the glad tidings preached to the dead also, that they might be judged, as regards men after [according to] the flesh, but live as regards God after [according to] the Spirit” (vs. 6). Some have been given more light (truth) than others, and are, therefore, more responsible, but all men have had some light from God, and thus, are “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

The “gospel” that Peter speaks of here is not the Gospel of the Grace of God that is preached in this Christian era, which announces the finished work of Christ on the cross and salvation through faith in Him (Acts 20:24). It is the glad tidings that was proclaimed to men in past ages through the Lord’s servants, such as Noah (2 Peter 2:5). “Them who are dead” are those who lived in those times. They are dead now, but they weren’t dead when the gospel was preached to them (chap. 3:19-20). Sufficient testimony from God had been given to them, but sadly, they rejected it. They, therefore, will stand before God to receive their just punishment in that coming day (Rev. 20:11-15).

There has always been a gospel testimony from God to man in some form. It has separated the human race into two great classes: those who refuse it and prove their faithlessness by living “according to men in the flesh,” and those who believe it and prove their faith by living “according to God in the Spirit.”

Things We Should be Doing in The Rest of Our Time

Vss. 7-11—Peter then speaks of the present effect that this should have on us. The fact that Christ is “ready to judge” (vs. 5), makes it clear that “the end of all things is at hand.” (Compare James 5:9.) If there is any delay, it is because God does not wish any to perish, but that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). For this reason, He has lengthened out the Day of Grace. Just as God delayed the judgment from falling in Noah’s time “yet seven days” (Gen. 7:4), He is holding back judgment today to give men an opportunity to be saved at this “eleventh hour.”

In view of the fact that the end of all things is at hand, Peter proceeds with several short exhortations that outline what every Christian should be doing with the rest of his time.

Be Sober(Vs. 7)

Sobriety is enjoined upon us first. He says, “Be ye therefore sober.” (Compare chapter 1:13.) This does not mean that we should go about with a long gloomy face, but to realize that with final and eternal issues before us, and only a little time left to live for the Lord, what time is given to us should not be wasted in the frivolities of the world. To engage in such things when we are on the verge of stepping into eternity is not being sober. We need to remember that everything that is material in this world is going to be burned up one day (2 Peter 3:7), and only what is done for Christ will last. As brands plucked from the burning, our purpose on earth is to further Christ’s interests.

Be Watchful(Vs. 7)

He also says, “Be watchful unto prayers.” Since we are pilgrims passing through an enemy’s land, we need to be watchful and on our guard at all times. (Compare chapter 5:8.) There are many dangers in the path, and an ever-present enemy who has designs on tripping us up. “Prayers” are encouraged because they bring us into the presence of God where there is safety (Deut. 33:12; Matt. 26:41).

Have Fervent Love Toward One Another(Vs. 8)

In contrast to the coldness of the world, the Christian circle is to be marked by the warmth of genuine love for one another. Peter says, “Above all things have fervent charity [love] among yourselves: for charity [love] shall cover a multitude of sins.” In saying, “Above all things … .” he meant that we should give this a priority. This exhortation shows that all believers have a responsibility to contribute to this happy condition that is to prevail in the Christian company by loving one another fervently. Love covers “a multitude of sins.” This does not mean that we should protect evil in the assembly and prevent it from acting responsibly in cases of discipline, but that the shortcomings and failures of Christians are not to be blazed abroad. Love doesn’t advertise the sins of fellow believers, and especially not before the world (Prov. 10:12; 19:11; James 5:20); such will only give the haters of Christ a chance to “cast a stone” at the Christian testimony (Compare 2 Samuel 1:20.)

Be Hospitable(Vs. 9)

To promote love and fellowship within the Christian community, we should have our homes open to the saints, as opportunity arises (Prov. 9:4-5; 3 John 5-7). Thus, Peter says, “Use hospitality one to another without grudging [murmuring].” Hospitality is exemplified in Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:1-7). He and his wife took advantage of the opportunity to “entertain strangers,” and in her case, to “entertain angels unawares!” (Heb. 13:2) It is sad indeed when the saints in a particular locality haven’t seen the inside of each other’s homes. “Grudging,” is to carry out this service with complaining (Luke 10:40).

Minister the Word(Vss. 10-11)

Peter then addresses the subject of ministering the Word among the saints. This is another important thing that we should be doing with the rest of our time on earth. He says, “As every man [each] hath received the [a] 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 [to the ages of ages].” The expression “every man,” indicates that every Christian has been given a spiritual gift to exercise (Matt. 25:15; 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7), and therefore, we all have something to do for God in His kingdom (Mark 13:34). There are no drones in God’s beehive! The kind of gifts that Peter is focusing on here are those having to do with ministering the Word—either in preaching, or teaching, or in practical exhortation (Rom. 12:6-8a).

Peter distinguishes “gift” and “ability.” Ability has to do with a person’s natural powers of intellect and personality which are formed in him from birth; whereas a gift, in the sense that it is used in Scripture, is a spiritual thing given to a person when he believes the gospel and receives the Holy Spirit. We learn from Matthew 25:15, that when the Lord gives a believer a spiritual gift, it matches the person’s natural ability. The man gave his servants “talents” (which answers to these spiritual gifts) “to every man according to his several ability.” We see the wisdom of God in this. The Lord doesn’t give a person a spiritual gift and call him to a particular work without that person having some natural ability for it. His natural ability will complement his spiritual gift “like a hand fits in a glove.” For instance, a person with an out-going personality might be given the gift of an evangelist, because that gift requires one being able to reach out to people and to speak to them freely, which would be difficult for a naturally reticent person. Or, a person with naturally acute intellectual powers might be given the gift of teaching, which requires an orderly mind.

Commenting on Matthew 25:15, W. Kelly said, “There are two things in the servant—both of them of importance: He gave them gifts, but it was according to their several ability. The Lord does not call any one to special service who has not the ability for the trust committed to him. The servant must have certain natural and acquired qualifications, besides the power of the Spirit of God ... .It is plain from this that there are certain qualities in the servant independent of the gift that the Lord puts into him. His natural powers are the vessel that contains the gift, and wherein the gift is to be exercised” (Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 472).

Note: there is not a hint here, or anywhere else in Scripture, of a person who has a gift for ministering the Word, being trained and ordained in a seminary before he exercises his gift. The Bible teaches that if a person has a certain gift, the very possession of it is God's warrant to use it. Peter teaches this in verses 10-11. He says, “As every man hath received a gift, even so minister the same one to another” (vs. 10). He doesn’t say, “As every man hath received a gift, let him be trained and ordained by a seminary, and then so minister.” And again, he says, “If any man minister, let him do it in the ability which God giveth” (vs. 11). He doesn’t say, “Let him go to school and get a certificate, and then let him speak in the assembly.” The Apostle Paul confirms this: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation” (Rom. 12:6-8). See also 1 Corinthians 14:26. What is required in ministering the Word is speaking “as the oracles of God.” This is ministering with a conscious sense that we are speaking on God’s behalf, as His mouthpiece, and therefore, it should be done accurately and reverently so as to properly represent Him.

A mistaken idea in connection with gifts that is common in Christendom today is the idea that a person’s natural ability is his spiritual gift. People with natural talents (in sports, or music, etc.) are encouraged to pursue those things and to make them their career in life, because it is their gift with which they are to glorify God. So-called “worship services” are arranged to accommodate the performance of these natural talents. However, this tends to promote human glory and the seeking of the praise of men, rather than bringing glory and praise to God. Oftentimes the so-called “church services” are reduced to being not much more than a talent show. Such activity makes the Church a worldly institution. In Scripture, spiritual gifts are for promoting spiritual things that help the saints on in the “most holy faith” (Jude 20). J. N. Darby said, “It is wholly a false principle that natural gifts are a reason for using them. I may have amazing strength or speed in running; I knock a man down with one and win a prize cup with the other. Music may be a more refined thing, but the principle is the same. This point I believe to be now of all importance. Christians have lost their moral influence by bringing in nature and the world as harmless. All things are lawful to me. But as I said, you cannot mix flesh and Spirit” (Letters, vol. 3, p. 476).

Stewardship

As “good stewards of the manifold grace of God,” we are to use for the Lord’s glory whatever He has put into our hands—both materially and spiritually. If some amount of material wealth has come into our hand, we are to use it with the realization that we can’t keep those things forever, and therefore, they should be placed on God’s altar (so to speak) and used to further His kingdom. By doing this, we are “laying up in store” that which can be taken into the next world in “the future” (1 Tim. 6:17-19). Similarly, with spiritual things; we are to “trade” with the truth that we have acquired by teaching it to others and causing them to understand it (Luke 19:13). Thus, we help them on spiritually in the path of faith. Christian stewardship, therefore, is twofold. It involves:

- Handling material things for the Lord (Luke 16:9-12).
- Handling spiritual things for the Lord (1 Cor. 4:1).

Peter’s salient point in this passage (vs. 10-11) is that the Church desperately needs ministry from the Word in the sense of spiritual teaching and exhortation. Those who have a gift for helping the saints in this way are to be exercised about using the rest of their time in this important service. Peter adds that the object of all such ministry from the Word is that “God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” This will result in “praise and dominion [might]” being given to Him “for the ages of ages,” which is the Eternal State. This shows that spiritual gifts are not for the glorification of ourselves, but for the glorification of Christ.

Suffering for the Name of Christ

(Chapter 4:12-19)

Peter proceeds to speak of another aspect of suffering that faithful saints will encounter—suffering for the name of Christ. He says, “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 [blessed] are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of [blasphemed], but on your part He is glorified.” Peter has already spoken of suffering for righteousness’ sake (chap. 3:14-16), but this of which he now speaks is a higher character of suffering, because it involves confessing Christ’s name. J. N. Darby said, “That which is for His name’s sake is a higher kind than for righteousness’s sake” (Collected Writings, vol. 28, p. 186).

Thus, it’s possible to suffer for doing what is right, without publicly connecting the motive to Christ. But the moment we confess Christ and bring Him into picture, as being the reason why we do what we do, then the persecution escalates. We might say to someone that we don’t want to do something because it wouldn’t be right, and as a result, we suffer a measure of reproach for it. But when we say that we don’t want to do it because we are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ and we don’t want to displease Him, then the persecution and reproach intensifies. This is the aspect of suffering that Peter refers to in this passage.

Vs. 12—Telling these dear believers that they shouldn’t think that the trial of suffering which they were experiencing was a “strange thing,” shows that suffering for “the name of Christ” is normal to Christianity. Hence, “the fiery trial” of persecution shouldn’t be considered something that is a surprise. It is quite simple; if the believer confesses Christ who is rejected, he will be rejected too. It is something that is to be expected because the world through which we pass is naturally opposed to Christ, and any witness for Christ cannot be tolerated (John 15:20). The world can tolerate drug users, immorality, false religion, etc., but it cannot tolerate Christians who confess Christ. The more faithful the witness for Christ is, the more the believer will suffer. They were, therefore, told to “rejoice” because by suffering in this way, they would be “partakers” of the martyrdom “sufferings of Christ” (vs. 13)—and this is a privilege (Mark 10:39; Acts 5:41; Phil. 1:29).

Two Aspects of Joy

Vs. 13—To encourage them to confess Christ boldly, Peter speaks of two aspects of joy that would be theirs. They would have a future joy "when His glory shall be revealed" at His Appearing. At that time, Christ will come with His heavenly saints (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14) and their reward for identifying themselves with Him in the time of His rejection will be displayed before the world. They will be "glad" then "with exceeding joy." Thus, every bit of suffering that we endure for the name of Christ in this day will be compensated in that day.

Vs. 14—They would also have a present joy in the midst of their trial. Peter adds: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." This is because Christ is "glorified" through our confession of Him and there is a special joy in confessing Christ that is known only to those who do it. Paul and Silas are an example here. When they were at Philippi, they preached Christ, and consequently, were beaten and cast into prison—yet they sang praises to God in the jail! (Acts 16:22-25)

In such situations, the "Spirit" of God rests approvingly "upon" the believer and renders a powerful testimony to all around. This is something that the believer himself may not even be conscious of. Compare Exodus 34:29—"Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone." Stephen is the New Testament example (Acts 6:15). J. N. Darby aptly said, "Never shrink from confessing Christ; it'll make your face to shine." This passage shows that the Spirit of God not only dwells in believers (John 14:17; Acts 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:14; James 4:5), but He also rests upon believers.

It is not advisable, but suffering of this kind can be avoided by not confessing Christ before men—but our power in testimony and our joy will be lost. We see from this that the fire of persecution does not destroy the Church of God. In fact, the more the Church is called upon to suffer for Christ, the stronger it grows spiritually! (2 Thess. 1:3-4) Compare Exodus 1:12. Sad to say, it is internal strife, not persecution that destroys the Church's testimony.

God uses the pressure of trials to enlarge us spiritually (Psa. 4:1 – J. N. Darby Trans.). It has been said that the saints prosper spiritually in three main trials:

- Poverty.
- Persecution.
- Sickness.

Vss. 15-16—Peter says that on the other hand, if we suffer as an "evildoer," there is good cause to be ashamed; we have dishonoured the name of Christ. But if we suffer "as a Christian" (that is, for being a Christian), we shouldn't be ashamed, for it is an honour to suffer for Him. It may seem strange that Peter would speak of a "busybody" alongside that of a "murderer," etc. But it just shows that a Christian can commit any sin in the catalog if he gets out of communion with the Lord, because he still has the fallen sin-nature in him; it does not improve by his being born again (John 3:6).

The Government of God

Vss. 17-19—Lest any would think lightly of the child of God practicing evil, Peter brings in the subject of the government of God again, as a warning for careless Christians. He says, "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?" God surely doesn't want to see His children doing wrong. But if we are self-willed or careless about our walk, He has His ways in His government to get our attention—and this sometimes can be painful. As our loving Father cares about our moral and spiritual development (Heb. 12:5-11); He doesn't pass over these things, but works through His disciplines and chastenings to teach us to walk in holiness and in dependence upon Him (Psa. 119:67, 71). He may use any kind of distress and trial in the discipline of His children—even the unjust persecutions of the world.

Peter explains that God's governmental "judgment" always begins with those who have had the most light (Ezek. 9:6). The principle is this: the greater the privileges that have been granted, the greater the responsibility (Luke 12:47-48). This is true on a personal level, as well as on a collective level. The professing Church (Christendom), which is "the house of God" today, has definitely had the most light from God of all people on earth. Therefore, it is far more responsible than the heathen world which has not had the same exposure to the gospel.

He then raises the question as to what "the end" will be of those who "obey not the gospel of God." He says, "And if the righteous scarcely be [difficultly] saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" His point here is that if God doesn't spare those in His house who are professedly in a relationship with Him when they do wrong, how much less sparing will He be with those outside His house who have no relationship with Him? He not only judges them governmentally now, but they will also be judged eternally in a coming day—a solemn thought indeed!

The aspect of salvation that Peter speaks of here is that which is affected in our pathway as we move through this world, and it will result in our full salvation at the end of the journey when the Lord comes (chap. 1:5). The difficulties he refers to are the spiritual dangers and trials connected with confessing Christ, and also, the chastenings that our Father may bring upon us if and when we walk in paths of unrighteousness. The J. N. Darby Translation footnote states: "Saved here on earth, as through the trials and judgments which specially beset the Jewish Christians." Vs. 19—Peter concludes the subject by offering a word of encouragement to all who suffer in this way. If they are found suffering "according to the will of God"—that is, for their confession of Christ—they are to commit themselves to God. Note: they are not told to appeal to the civil authorities for protection (as did the Reformers when they were persecuted by the Catholics), but to "commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing." He is "a faithful Creator" and is the "Preserver of all men, especially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). We can always turn to Him in our suffering and find a solace there (Psa. 91:1-2). It is only the power of God that can sustain us when we are under these trials (Psa. 18:29.

Suffering From the Oppositon of the Devil

(Chapter 5:1-14)

Peter concludes his exhortations in the epistle by touching on one last aspect of suffering which the saints face in their pathway—suffering from special attacks of the devil. Satan is at all times set against the spiritual progress and blessing of God's people; however, there are certain occasions when he makes a special assault on them to harass and oppress them, and ultimately, to try to get them to give up in the

path of faith. The Apostle Paul speaks of these occasions as an “evil day” that may come upon us (Eph. 6:13). These attacks are not the result of our going on carelessly in the flesh, but rather, from going on faithfully for the Lord. It is, therefore, normal Christianity.

A Pastoral Setting

The context in which these closing exhortations are given is that of “the flock” (vs. 2), “the chief Shepherd” (vs. 4), His under-shepherds—“the elders” (vs. 1), and an evil predator—the “roaring lion” (vs. 8). Clearly, Peter’s words of counsel and encouragement in this passage are cast in a pastoral setting.

His exhortations in the opening verses of the chapter are directed particularly to “the elders” who have the bulk of the responsibility in shepherding God’s people (vss. 1-4), but in the latter half of the chapter his exhortations broaden out to “all of you,” and are directed to the saints generally (vss. 5-14).

The Elders

Vs. 1—One thing that stands out in this work of shepherding the flock of God is that it is “the elders” who are enjoined to do it. The word “elder,” implies experience and maturity, which is so necessary for this work. When counsel and encouragement come from one who has experienced the vicissitudes and trials of the Christian life, it has moral weight with the saints, and as a result, they will be more inclined to receive it. Needless to say, this work is not for a “novice.” Paul warns of such getting carried away with self-importance and being “inflated” with pride and falling “into the fault of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6; Prov. 16:18; 29:23; Acts 15:6). A novice is a new convert, but it could perhaps include one who has not matured in the faith as he ought to have, and consequently, is a “babe” (Eccl. 10:16; 1 Cor. 3:1; Eph. 4:13-14; Heb. 5:12-14).

Before exhorting the elders as to the specifics of this work, Peter mentions two things that every under-shepherd must keep before him if he is to be effective—“the sufferings of Christ” and “the glory that shall be revealed.” Peter has alluded to these two things a few times already in the epistle, but for different reasons. Here, it is in connection with sustaining the elders in their work.

“The sufferings of Christ” here, are not the Lord’s atoning sufferings, but rather, His martyrdom sufferings which we all share in some degree if we serve God faithfully. This is set before the elders as a model, because, as surely as when the Lord shepherded the flock of God in His day and was unappreciated and rejected for all the good that He did (Zech. 11:4-14; John 10:1-18), they too would meet similar opposition. The Lord’s sufferings are the perfect example of how the elders are to handle the misunderstandings and the wrongs that they may encounter as they tend the flock. Those who do this work need be prepared for this because Satan makes those who shepherd God’s people a special object of his attacks. In the Lord’s case, Satan came against Him in the garden of Gethsemane in a special assault (John 14:30; Luke 22:44, 53 – “being in a conflict”). It was an all-out effort to turn Him away from doing God’s will in going to the cross. When the Jews apprehended Him and turned Him over to the Roman authorities, He submitted to their ill-treatment and gave His “back to the smiters” and His “cheeks to them that plucked off the hair” (Isa. 50:5-7). He would not defend Himself, but let God justify Him in His good time—which took place at His resurrection and ascension (Isa. 50:8). When they crucified Him, He “endured the cross” patiently and despised the shame (Heb. 12:2). Such was the perfect example of “the good Shepherd” who gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11). He is the model for all who shepherd God’s people.

“The glory that shall be revealed,” refers to the time of Christ’s public exoneration at His Appearing. Thus, the under-shepherd who does his work faithfully, even though it is often little appreciated, in that day he will be fully compensated in “glory” (vs. 4). The servant, therefore, must keep his eye on that which is ahead; it will sustain him and give him motivation to carry on in faithful service.

The role of an elder/overseer is not something that men appoint themselves to, nor is it an office which the assembly appoints them into. Rather, they are raised up by the Holy Spirit to do this work for the Lord (Acts 20:28). These men will be known by their moral qualifications and by the work that they do. The assembly is to “know” them (1 Cor. 16:15; 1 Thess. 5:12), “esteem” them highly (1 Thess. 5:13), “honour” them (1 Tim. 5:17), “remember” them (Heb. 13:7a), “follow” their faith (Heb. 13:7b), “obey” them (Heb. 13:17a), “submit” to them (Heb. 13:17b), and “salute” them (Heb. 13:24). But nowhere in Scripture is the assembly told to choose and ordain them! This is simply because the assembly has no authority from God to do so. Yet in spite of this fact, Christian churches everywhere choose and appoint their elders! Such is the confusion that exists in the ruins of the Christian testimony. When elders were chosen and ordained in Scripture, they were always chosen “for” an assembly by an apostle (Acts 14:23 – W. Kelly Trans.), or by a delegate from an apostle (Titus 1:5). Herein is the wisdom of God; this prevents the assembly from choosing leaders that favour the inclinations of the people, and thus, having control over those in oversight.

The Work of the Elders

Vss. 2-3—Peter mentions three things that the elders are to do:

Shepherd the Flock(Vs. 2a)

The first thing was to “shepherd the flock of God.” In exhorting the elders (Peter includes himself as one), it is clear that he never forgot what the Lord said to him: “Shepherd My sheep” (John 21:16). Knowing that there was a great need fo r this work among the saints, he exhorted these elders to engage in this labour of love. Sad to say, this has not been followed in Church history. The ruin of the Christian testimony that exists today can be traced largely to the elders going astray and not doing their work faithfully (Acts 20:29-30; 3 John 9-10; Rev. 2-3 – “the angel”). We can affirm that the need for shepherding God’s people is greater today than ever before. May the Lord raise up many such shepherds.

The KJV renders this phrase: “Feed the flock of God,” but “feed” is too narrow. Shepherding is more than feeding—giving the saints spiritual food (teaching). It includes feeding them, but it also involves guiding them, counselling them, visiting them, and helping them with their temporal problems and needs. Having gained experience in the path of faith, the elders are to discharge their wisdom to the saints with the aim of helping them to go on spiritually together in peace. This work requires discerning “the state” of the flock, so as to minister to their needs appropriately (Prov. 27:23).

Exercise Oversight on Behalf of the Flock(Vs. 2b)

The second thing is “exercising oversight.” This refers primarily to administrative responsibilities in a local assembly. Shepherding the flock may be done in any place where the saints are found, but administrative oversight is purely a local work. That is, it is to be carried out in the assembly in the locality where the elders live. They are to take the lead in spiritual matters involving reception, discipline, etc.

This is a work that the elders are to do “willingly,” not by “constraint.” Hence, it is not to be carried out through a sense of obligation, but is something done for the Lord and motivated by love and compassion for the saints. Nor should it be done for “base” financial “gain,” even though they may at times receive monetary help from the assembly (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Thus, they were to feed the flock, not fleece it!

Be Models for the Flock(Vs. 3)

The third thing is that the elders are to be “ensamples [models] for the flock” in moral character. The saints need to be taught the truth, which God does through gifted teachers (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11), and if need be, through the elders (Titus 1:9). But the saints also need to be shown the truth practically. The elders, therefore, are to take the lead in this and are to demonstrate proper Christian conduct before the saints, and thus, give them an example to follow. The Apostle Paul said, “I have showed you, and have taught you” (Acts 20:20, 35).

Peter cautions the elders of the danger of “lording” over the flock and treating it as one of their “possessions.” The J. N. Darby Translation footnote says: “Viewing the saints as something belonging to you ... .the flock was not be treated as the ‘possessions’ of the elders.” Elders should always keep in mind that it is “the flock of God” that they are shepherding. The flock is God’s; it is not theirs. While clergymen (the so-called Pastors and Ministers in Christendom) often speak of a congregation of Christians as “their” flock, Scripture knows nothing of an under-shepherd having such a position. There is no suggestion here, or anywhere else in Scripture, of a clerical order ruling arbitrarily over the laity. Peter’s simple point here is that the elders are not to rule over the saints in a domineering way. The elders are to be respected, but they are not to demand this respect; they are to win it.

In Scripture, when the work of the elders is in view, they are always mentioned in plural (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17-18, etc.). (When their moral qualifications are in view, it is in singular – 1 Timothy 3:1-8; Titus 1:6-9, etc.) This is because when there are several men involved in the work in a locality, those men can check and balance one another. Thus, there is a greater immunity against one man rising up and leading the saints after himself in a wrong direction. One man presiding over the saints is unscriptural and potentially dangerous. As mentioned, he could get carried away with his own importance and do damage to the flock. This was the case with Diotrephes (3 John 9-10). Besides being full of compassion and of self-sacrifice—as seen in the good Shepherd (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34; Acts 20:35)—a shepherd is to be humble (vs. 5).

Vs. 4—For the encouragement of all who undertake this work, which at times can be a thankless job, Peter reminds them that the faithful performance of this service will have its happy reward. He says, “When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Shepherding, done in God’s way, will not bring one into prominence in this day—it is by and large a quiet work done among the saints on a personal level—but its reward in a coming day will most certainly be a public thing. Peter’s statement here, seems to be saying that the rewards (crowns) will be received by the saints at the Appearing of Christ, but Scripture clearly teaches that the rewards for faithful service will be given at the judgment seat of Christ, which will take place after the saints are taken home to heaven at the Rapture (Matt. 25:19-23; Luke 19:15-19; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 4:4 – the saints have their “crowns” before the Tribulation woes begin). Peter surely wouldn’t be contradicting this; therefore, he must be referring to the public display of our rewards in “glory,” which occurs at the Appearing of Christ and during His millennial kingdom reign, in what is called “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16, etc.).

The Flock

Vss. 5-11—Peter turns to address the flock. He exhorts them regarding the need for humility and expressed dependence upon God. He says, “Likewise ye younger, be subject to the elder, and all of you bind on humility towards one another; for God sets Himself against the proud, but to the humble gives grace. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the due time; having cast all your care upon Him, for He cares about you.” If the flock is to prosper spiritually, there must be a happy condition of peace and love existing among the saints. Peter tells us that this is achieved through binding on “humility.” We all have a part to play in contributing to this happy condition that should be amongst God’s people by being “clothed with humility.”

The “younger” brethren are told specifically to be “subject” to their older brethren. The KJV rendering implies that the older ones are likewise to be subject to the younger, but this would be unseemly. A better rendering of the passage shows that Peter is exhorting “all” of the saints (which would include the older brethren) to “bind on humility.” The whole Christian company should be marked by this great moral trait that was so perfectly displayed in the Lord Jesus. He is the only Man who ever had a right to exalt Himself—yet Scripture says, “Being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself” (Phil. 2:8). Some seem to think that humility is thinking badly of oneself and go around deprecating themselves, but really, it is not thinking of ourselves at all! A truly humble person has himself out of the picture—whether it is in self-importance or in self-pity.

Since pride is hateful to God, a proud man will surely meet with God’s governmental judgment. Peter says that God “sets Himself against the proud” and resists those who have designs to lift themselves up among their brethren. To guard against this evil in our hearts, Peter says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God” (vs. 6). This is something that we are all to do, and if we won’t, God will do it by ordering a humbling circumstance in our lives. Peter assures us that those who humble themselves will be exalted in “due time”—when the Lord comes and establishes His kingdom. If suffering is to be answered by glory in that coming day (vs. 4), humility will be answered by exaltation at that time (vs. 6).

Besides binding on humility, Peter says that we also need to cast “all” our “care upon Him” (vs. 7). The path of faith has its ups and downs, and we will surely meet with something discouraging along the way. But since the compassions of God are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23), all of our troubles and trials can be taken to the Lord in expressed dependence, and He will help us through them. The Psalmist said: “Cast thy burden [assigned portion] upon the LORD, and He shall sustain thee” (Psa. 55:22).

The trial that Peter is particularly alluding to here is persecution. The saints in that day were passing through the fires of affliction in this regard and needed comfort and consolation. These trials were not sent by God, but they were, nonetheless, permitted by Him. Peter says that they were to avail themselves of the provision that God had made for them by casting their burdens on the Lord. While the context is

persecution, we know that discouragement can come from any quarter. When it does, the solution is the same—we are to roll it over onto the Lord and let Him carry the burden of it for us.

Thus, Peter has touched on two opposite dangers that we must guard against—being puffed up with pride, or being cast down in discouragement. These things are to be met by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God (vs. 6) and by casting all our cares upon Him (vs. 7).

The Roaring Lion

Vs. 8—He goes on to show that if we refuse to humble ourselves under God's hand, and we don't cast our troubles and trials upon the Lord, that we become vulnerable to the attacks of the roaring lion—the devil. He says, "Be vigilant, watch. Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom he may devour." Thus, he would have us to be consciously aware of the movements of this enemy. The watching here, is not watching for the Lord to come (which we certainly are to do – Luke 12:37; Titus 2:13, etc.), but watching against the enemy's attacks. We are not to be occupied with the enemy—our occupation is with Christ—but we are to be on alert and wise concerning his tactics (2 Cor. 2:11). The words "humble" (vs. 6), "vigilant" (vs. 8), "watch" (vs. 8), and "resist" (vs. 9), are all in the aorist tense in the Greek, which is to be in a state of having done it once and for all (see J. N. Darby Trans. footnote). Thus, readiness concerning our adversary is to be an abiding thing; it is not something that we take up with the moment Satan pounces—that could be too late!

Peter makes it clear that Satan's aim is to "devour" Christians. We might ask, "In what sense does the devil devour a Christian?" He certainly can't take our soul-salvation away from us; it is eternally secure through what the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross (John 10:28-29). But Satan can destroy our lives as far as our testimony is concerned. He can terrorize the believer to the point that the believer gives up in the path and all who see it will mock Christianity and the Lord (Luke 14:29-30). Satan's chief way of terrorizing the saints is through persecution. He works as "a roaring lion" to persecute them, but that is not the only way he works. As Peter shows here, he takes away proud men and he pounces on discouraged people too.

Vs. 9a—Peter says, "Whom resist stedfast in faith." We are to resist the devil, but not in the energy of the flesh. We are not called upon to fight the devil, nor are we to carry on a dialog with him. We "resist" the devil by standing fast in faith on our convictions that are founded upon the Word of God. When we stand fast under these special attacks of the devil, he will "flee" from us! (James 4:7).

Satan trembles when he sees,

The weakest saint upon his knees!

We are to commit our lives to God in prayer and remember that He is over all circumstances, and if the devil stirs up men to persecute us, they can only do to us what God allows in His mighty providence (Lam. 3:37). And if we are called upon to die as a martyr for Christ, we are to follow the example of the saints who have gone before who were "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10; 12:11). By refusing to recant, we "overcome" this foe and we get the "victory" for the Lord, because all his evil attempts to get us to give up in the path of faith have failed (Rev. 15:2).

Comfort for Saints Suffering Persecution

Vss. 9b-11—Peter concludes his remarks on the subject of suffering by giving a few words of comfort and encouragement to these saints who were passing through the fires of persecution. His intention was to motivate them to carry on for the Lord in their trial.

Firstly, they were not alone in their suffering. He says, "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (vs. 9b). Thus, they could take courage in the fact that if others could endure this suffering, so could they (1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:3; 4:5, etc.).

Secondly, "the God of all grace" had called them "unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus" (vs. 10a). Thus, they had been "called" by God to a glorious end with Christ, and there was nothing that could frustrate His purpose. If they kept their eye on the "eternal glory," to which they were traveling, it would motivate them to endure the trials they encountered along the way. Moreover, Peter reminds them that our God is the "God of all grace," and thus, He will supply us with the grace needed to carry on through the sufferings that we face (Phil. 4:13; James 4:6).

Thirdly, this time of suffering is only for "a little while" compared to the eternal glory that is coming (vs. 10b). It will soon be over. Knowing this would give them purpose of heart to continue on in the path.

Fourthly, Peter says, "Himself shall make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, ground [settle] you." They also needed to keep in mind that these sufferings were being used of God to build Christian character in them. Thus, it was important for them to see God's hand in their trials; it would give added incentive to carry on.

Vs. 11––It is fitting that Peter would end with a doxology of praise: "To Him be the glory and the might for the ages of ages. Amen." The ages of ages refers to the Eternal State when Satan will be in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10) and the saints' time of suffering will be over (1 Cor. 15:24-28; 2 Peter 3:12-13; Rev. 21:1-8).

Closing Salutations

Vss. 12-14—In closing, Peter mentions "Silvanus;" (Silas) apparently, he was the carrier of the epistle. He had been a co-worker with Paul (Acts 15-18), but since Paul had been incarcerated, he is found serving with Peter. It is significant that he would be mentioned in this letter that has so much to do with suffering. He was one who could certainly empathize with these brethren, having himself been beaten and jailed when he and Paul were at Philippi (Acts 16:23).

Peter restates his purpose in writing to these brethren: "I have written to you briefly; exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which ye stand." He includes greetings from his wife: "She that is elected with you in Babylon salutes you." It was Peter's habit to take his wife with him in his labours (1 Cor. 9:5). It is noteworthy that in fulfilling his apostolic commission toward the circumcision (Gal. 2:8), Peter is found in Babylon. This is where many thousands of Jews had been deported in the Babylonish captivity, hundreds of years before

(2 Kings 24-25). Only 42,000 returned to the land of Israel in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah—the rest stayed in Babylon and settled there. In seeking the blessing of his fellow countrymen, he went there to preach the gospel and to shepherd those who were saved.

Peter also sends along greetings from “Marcus” (also called John Mark – Acts 12:12; 13:5; Col. 4:10). By adding, “My son,” he reveals that John Mark had been converted through him. Thus, Marcus was his spiritual son. Paul speaks of Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus in the same way (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phile. 9).

He enjoins upon these saints the “kiss of charity” and gives them a final word of “peace.”

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