1 Peter - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 1:1-13: Introductory

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The first thirteen verses are introductory and set forth the position and portion of the believer in the Lord Jesus while yet in this world. This position forms the basis of all the practical exhortations that follow.

In this important introduction believers are viewed as strangers on earth (vss. 1-2) with a home in heaven (vss. 3-4). While passing through this world they are kept guarded by the power of God (vs. 5); tested by trials (vss. 6-7); supported by Christ, the Object of their faith and affection (vs. 8). They have received the salvation of their souls (vs. 9); and wait for the full salvation in glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is surely good for our souls to ponder these introductory verses, seeking to realize afresh our true position in this world, and the blessedness of our portion as believers in the Lord Jesus.

1. Strangers on earth.

1 Peter 1:1. The first verse tells us to whom the apostle addressed his Epistle. He wrote to "the strangers" scattered throughout the province of Asia Minor. "Sojourners of the dispersion" is the better translation. The apostle therefore writes to the Christians among the Jews who had been "dispersed" among the Gentiles. The Pharisees referred to these Jews when they asked, concerning the Lord, "Will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles?" (John 7:35).

The fact that God's ancient people are addressed as scattered or "dispersed" is proof that the nation had completely broken down, and for the time being all is out of order on earth. Man has failed in every position in which God has set him, and lost everything committed to his responsibility. The Garden of Eden, fresh from the hand of God, was committed to Adam to dress and keep. He failed, and was driven out; and his son was driven from God's face to be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (Gen. 4:12- 14). The new world was committed to Noah. He failed, and his descendants were divided and scattered "abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:9). The Land of Canaan was given to Israel; they utterly failed, and were scattered among the nations, even as God foretold (Deut. 28:64). The church, in its administration, was committed to the responsibility of men, and again man has failed, and outwardly the church is divided and scattered. Even so, although we have failed, God in His goodness may recall a few to the original ground of the church, but here also there is failure, division and brokenness.

Let us not therefore forget that, if we are strangers in this world by the call of God, we are "dispersed" on account of our failure.

1 Peter 1:2. Passing on to the second verse, we at once come to the blessings which are the result of God's sovereign electing grace, and in which there can be no failure. This it is that makes these introductory verses so exceedingly precious. Beginning with election in a past eternity we are carried on to glory in an eternity yet to come. Grace begun on earth ends in glory above.

However much we may fail, God has His elect. Election is not national or collective, but personal and individual. This verse gives a beautiful description of each individual believer. As such we were elected in eternity according to foreknowledge of God the Father.

Then we are told to what we have been elected. We are elected unto the obedience of Jesus, and to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. Through sanctification of the Spirit, God has set us apart for these two things. We are set apart to express His life, and to come under the efficacy of His death.

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, which produces an entire change of mind, manifesting itself in a new desire to obey. So the apostle Paul could say, even before he had learned the efficacy of the blood, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" The obedience of Christ is not simply that we come under a new rule and obey Christ, but that we are set apart to obey as He obeyed. We have a new nature that delights to do the will of God, even as Christ could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

The sanctification spoken of in this passage is not the practical sanctification of the believer spoken of in other Scriptures, and which must be relative or a question of degree, but that far deeper sanctification of the Spirit which is absolute. It is that "effectual work of divine grace which first separates from the world a person, whether Jew or Gentile, to God" (W.K.). The order in which the truth is presented clearly shows that it cannot be practical sanctification. Practical holiness follows on being justified by the blood, whereas the sanctification in this passage precedes the blood.

Moreover, the elect are set apart through the Spirit to come under the cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ. By faith in Christ, the believer comes under the shelter of the precious blood which cleanses from all sin, and sets him before God in peace.

When the Spirit of God works in a sinner, it is in order that the life of Christ may be produced in him, and that he may come under the efficacy of the death of Christ that removes everything contrary to God. Thinking only of ourselves, we should have put the blood first, for it is by the blood alone we can approach God. But Scripture first presents the great positive end that God has in view when His Spirit begins to work in our souls, namely, to reproduce the life of Christ.

From this verse we learn that we have come into relations with every divine Person in the Godhead. We have been elected according to the foreknowledge of God the Father; we have been sanctified by the work of the Spirit in us; and the Father's election and the Spirit's work are in view of our obeying as Christ obeyed and coming under the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.

2. Our home in heaven.

1 Peter 1:3-4. The first two verses view the believer as a stranger on earth, set apart from the world according to the election of the Father, the work of the Spirit, and the work of Jesus Christ. Now we learn that the believer's home is in heaven. The hope of the Jew was earthly and, for the time, was closed by the death of Christ. The nation had crucified their Messiah, and thus forfeited their earthly blessing. Nevertheless, in the abundant mercy of God, these believers had been begotten again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead. Every hope of the believer rests upon Christ risen. Our hope is a sure and certain hope because He is risen. It is a living hope because Christ is living. This heavenly inheritance, in contrast to the earthly, is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading; and is reserved for the believer.

3. Guarded by the power of God.

1 Peter 1:5. Not only is heaven reserved for us, but, as we pass along our way, we are kept guarded from all the dangers of the journey through this world. It is indeed the power of God that guards us, and yet the way that power works is "through faith". The power of God sustains the faith of His people, who are thus kept waiting for the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. By faith we look on to the final deliverance by which we shall enter into the full enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance.

4. Tested by trials.

1 Peter 1:6-7. To be kept guarded by the power of God from the dangers of the way does not mean that we shall have no trials to meet. In the prospect of the heavenly inheritance we can greatly rejoice, though in the present we may be put to grief through manifold trials. These trials are for the testing of our faith. In the sight of man gold is counted most precious: in the sight of God the faith of His people is much more precious than gold. If men try their gold in the fire to purify it from dross, shall not God prove the faith of His people by fiery trials in order to manifest the reality of their faith as well as to purify and strengthen faith?

By these trials we are "put to grief". God does not mean His people to be unmoved by trials, and untouched by sorrows; but in the grief and sorrow He would draw out our faith in Himself. For our comfort we are reminded of three definite truths in connection with these trials.

First, we learn that our trials are only "for a season". If the pleasures of the sinner are only for a season, so too the sorrows of the saints are but for a season (cf. Heb. 11:25).

Secondly, we are reminded that there is a need for these sorrows, for these trials are for "a season, if need be". The Father does not cause His children a needless tear. The needs be is to prove our faith. This does not mean to prove whether we have faith, but rather to make manifest the preciousness of the faith we have. Gold is not put into the fire to prove that it is gold, but to bring out the precious qualities of the metal. So God proves our faith by various trials to bring out the precious qualities of our faith. Faith, counting upon God in the trial, leads to submission to what God allows: faith in God enables the soul to wait in patience (James 1:3). Faith in God enables the believer to be steadfast against the attacks of the enemy (1 Peter 5:9). The soul may have true faith, but when the trial comes these blessed qualities of faith—submission, patience, steadfastness, confidence and dependence upon God—become manifest.

Thirdly, we learn that trials have a blessed answer in the coming day of glory. The manifestation of these qualities in the day of trial will lead to praise and honor and glory in the day of Jesus Christ. We are apt to think that a time of deep trial, which may prevent us from taking part in active service for the Lord, is all lost time. No, says God, it will be "found unto praise" at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

5. Sustained by Christ.

1 Peter 1:8. Whatever the trials we may have to pass through down here, we have in Christ an Object for our affections; One in whom we can trust, though we do not see Him; One in whom we rejoice with a joy that is a foretaste of the coming glory. Thus in the midst of trials we have an unfailing resource in Christ.

6. Receiving the salvation of the soul.

1 Peter 1:9. We wait for the inheritance; we wait for the full salvation ready to be revealed; we wait for the honor, and praise, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. We do not wait for the salvation of our souls. By faith in Christ, the One that we have not yet seen, we have already received the salvation of our souls.

7. Waiting for the full salvation in glory.

1 Peter 1:10-13. The apostle proceeds to speak of this salvation in all its fullness. He shows the three stages by which it is brought into manifestation. He speaks in these verses of salvation in its fullness—the entire deliverance of soul and body from all the consequences of sin. This salvation coming to us as undeserving sinners he rightly calls "the grace", both in verses 10 and 13. This grace, or salvation, was first announced by the prophets who, speaking by the Spirit of God, prophesied of the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews and blessing flowing out to the Gentile—the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow.

This salvation has not only been announced prophetically since Pentecost, it has been announced by those who preach the Gospel by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Finally, the grace of a full salvation will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, a salvation that takes us out of all our trials and sufferings and brings us into glory with Christ. This coming glory was foretold by the prophets in days past; it is preached by the Holy Spirit in the present day; it will be fully accomplished in the day of glory yet to come.

In view of this coming glory we are to gird up the loins of our mind, to be sober, and hope with steadfastness for the coming grace that introduces us into glory. Girding up the loins of the mind suggests that the Christian is to be careful that his mind is not allowed to range unchecked over the things of the earth: he is to set his mind on things above. The Christian is also to be sober in his judgment as to all that is passing in this world, not deceived by the efforts of men to bring in a millennium without Christ. Whatever may be taking place in this world, the Christian is to look on and hope with perfect steadfastness for the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We have, then, in the introduction to the Epistle, a very beautiful presentation of the portion of the believer, commencing with the election of God in eternity, and leading to the glory that is yet to come. God's sovereign election is in view of glory. No failure on our side can frustrate the purpose of God. Between the election and the glory there are the trials by the way; but those God elects He guards, and those He guards He brings to glory.

First, let us listen to the exhortation of the Apostle. There came a day in the history of Peter when the Lord had said to His restored disciple, "Follow Me" (John 21:19). Now the Apostle passes on these words to each one of us, as he says, "Follow His steps." In Christendom, and even by true believers, the words "Follow His steps" are often used in a vague and loose way. Even unconverted people will seize upon these words, misusing them to convey the false thought that if men carry out the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount they will be very good Christians, and thereby secure the salvation of their souls. Probably those who speak thus lightly about following His steps, would be at a loss to turn to the Scripture where the exhortation is found, and even so would prefer their own interpretation of the words rather than inquire the meaning with which they are used by the Holy Spirit.

Turning to the passage in which the exhortation occurs, we at once learn from the context that these words are addressed to believers – those of whom the Apostle can say that they have received the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls (1 Peter 1:9). It is evident then that in this Scripture there is no exhortation to a sinner to follow His steps in order to obtain salvation. Apart from the sacrificial death of Christ, and faith in His precious blood, there can be no salvation for a helpless sinner. In Scripture God never uses "His steps" to set aside His work.

The exhortation to "follow His steps" is then addressed to believers, and moreover, is used with a very distinct meaning. What this meaning is we learn from the four distinct steps that are set before us. It is evident that a great deal that the Lord did in His marvelous life we cannot, and are not asked to, do. He did mighty works, even to raising the dead; He spake as never man spake. In these ways we are not exhorted to follow His steps. The four steps we are exhorted to follow are possible for all believers, from the youngest to the oldest.

First, we are reminded that He "did no sin." We know that He went about doing good; and, in this same Epistle we are exhorted, again and again, to "good works," and to "do well." Here, however, the exhortation takes a negative form; we are to follow His steps in this respect that He did no sin. Whatever happens, whatever circumstances may arise, whatever rebuffs we may have to meet, whatever wrongs we may have to suffer, whatever insults we may have to endure, we are to do no sin. It is comparatively easy to do good as a benefactor, meeting the needs of others; but, seeing we have the flesh in us, it is at times difficult to do no sin. It is a greater thing to do no sin in trying circumstances than to do good in easy ones. The Lord was perfect in all circumstances, and, whatever the circumstances we have to meet, our first care should be to follow His steps, and maintain His character, in this respect, that we do no sin. It is better to suffer wrong than sin; better to lose your coat than let go the character of Christ.

Secondly, we read, "neither was guile found in His mouth." However sorely tried by wicked men, no question that He asked, no answer that He gave, no word that fell from His lips, was ever marred by any trace of guile. Alas! with us, at times, malice and envy may lurk behind words that are "smoother than butter" and "softer than oil." With Him no evil motive was ever hidden under fair speech. Guile lurked behind the apparently innocent question of the religious Pharisees when they asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" for we read they were seeking to "entangle Him in His talk" (Matt. 22:15-18). With the flesh in us it is all too possible to seek to entangle one another with smooth speech and innocent looking questions. Alas! we can even covertly attack one another in the very words we address to God in public prayer. How good then, and necessary the exhortation to follow in the steps of the One in whom no guile was found in His mouth.

Thirdly, we are reminded that the Lord was One, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered. He threatened not." In the presence of insults, false accusation, and malicious charges, He remained silent. When falsely accused before the Jewish council, He "held His peace." To the accusations of the Jews, in the presence of Pilate, "He answered nothing." To Pilate himself, "He answered him to never a word." The mocking Herod may question Him in many words, "but He answered him nothing" (Matt. 26:63; 27:12,14; Luke 23:9). How good for us to follow in His steps and, in the presence of the malicious words of men, come from what quarter they may, to keep silence. From other Scriptures it is clear that the Christian may "entreat," "exhort," and even "rebuke," but never is he to revile or threaten.

Fourthly, He "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." To do no sin, to speak no guile, to keep silence in the presence of malicious words, have a negative character. This last step is positive. If we keep silence in the presence of insults, it is not that there is no answer to evil and malice, but rather that the answer is left with God. We are never to attempt to take vengeance upon the wrongdoer. God retains all vengeance in His own hands. He has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people" (Heb. 10:30). Our part then is to follow in the steps of the Lord Jesus, and in the presence of insults to commit ourselves unto Him that judgeth righteously, remembering that word which says, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Again we may recall the words of the prophet, "Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that one should both wait, and that in silence, for the salvation of Jehovah" (Lam. 3:24-26 JND).

Here then we have four steps, taken in perfection by the Lord, that we are exhorted to follow. In all these steps there is no word as to ministry, or any form of service, that would make any show in this world, or bring us into prominence amongst the people of God. This being so we might thoughtlessly say, as we read these exhortations, that to do no evil, speak no guile, to keep silence in the presence of insults, and commit oneself to God, does not seem after all very much, and is a little disappointing. If, however, we put these things into practice, and follow His steps it will assuredly be found that our brethren will not be disappointed in us. Could we but take these steps others would see in us the most wonderful sight that can be seen in this world – they would see a Christ-like man.

God forbid that we should belittle true service for Christ, but let us not forget that we may travel world-wide in service, and preach to thousands, and our names be well known in religious circles, and our service duly recorded in religious papers, and yet all be of little account in God's sight, if these four steps are lacking. Let us remember that we may speak with the tongues of angels and yet be nothing. So that, in the day to come it is possible that a thousand of our fine sermons, on which perhaps we prided ourselves, and for which our brethren may have praised us, will be found to be but dust and ashes, while some little bit of Christ in our lives, which we may have entirely forgotten, will shine out in all its beauty and receive its bright reward. Thus these steps may not take us into the public gaze today, but they will take us far into the kingdom glories in the day to come. It is a word we do well to remember, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10:31).

1 Peter 1:14-2:17. Having in the introductory verses set before us the position and portion of the believer, now and hereafter, the apostle exhorts us as to the practical conduct that flows from this position and is suited to the different relationships in which the Christian is found. Believers are viewed in a sevenfold connection:-

First, as children in relation to the Father (1:14-17): Secondly, as redeemed in relation to the work of Christ (1:18-21):

Thirdly, as brethren in relation to one another (1:22-2:1): Fourthly, as new-born babes in relation to the word (2:2, 3): Fifthly, as living stones in relation to Christ in glory (2:8):

Sixthly, as a chosen race in relation to God (2:9-10):

Seventhly, as strangers and pilgrims in reference to the world (2:11-17).

1. Our practical life as children.

1 Peter 1:14-17. The first mark of the child in relation to the Father is obedience. This obedience, as we have seen, is the obedience set forth in all its perfection in Jesus Christ. His path on earth was one of continual obedience to the Father. He could say, "As my Father hath taught me, I speak"; and again, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:28-29). In the days of our ignorance of God we carried out our own wills, gratifying unholy lusts; now, as children, we are exhorted to holiness, or separation from evil. The apostle quotes the law to insist upon holiness (Lev. 11:44). However much the character of the dispensation may alter, the nature of God cannot change. It was true under law, it is still true under grace, that God is absolute in holiness; therefore those in relationship with God, whether under law or grace, must be holy.

If, as believers, we fail in holiness, the very relationship in which we stand to God will bring us under the holy discipline of the Father. Because we are sons the Father will chasten and discipline us as sons in order that we may be partakers of His holiness. This righteous government of the Father will be according to our deeds, and carried out without respect of persons. Let us therefore pass the time of our pilgrimage in holy fear. As children, then, our practical lives are to be consistent with the holiness of the One who has called us, and upon whom we call, and marked by obedience, holiness and godly fear. Do we call upon the Father for protection, guidance and blessing? Let us see that we do not hinder our prayers, and bring discipline upon ourselves, by self-will or unholiness.

2. Our practical life as redeemed.

1 Peter 1:18-21. In our unregenerate days we were far from God, living the vain life of fallen generations before us. From this condition we have been redeemed; and the value God has set upon us, as well as God's horror of that fallen condition, has been set forth by the immense cost of our redemption. We are not redeemed by corruptible things as silver and gold, but by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot". The Lamb was fore-known by God before the foundation of the world, but manifested in time for believers, that through Him we might be brought to God and walk before Him in faith and hope, knowing that God has raised Christ from the dead and given Him glory. Our faith is in the God that can raise the dead, our hope in a God that can give glory. As the redeemed, we are to be marked by faith and hope in God.

3. Our practical life as brethren.

1 Peter 1:22. In relation to the Father we are children; in relation to the work of Christ we are redeemed; in relation to one another we are brethren. As brethren we are exhorted to "love one another with a pure heart fervently". The "pure heart" is obtained by the soul being purified from all evil and selfish motives that would hinder the outflow of love through obeying the truth.

1 Peter 1:23-25. Our relationship as brethren is not traced back to natural birth, as with Israel, but to a spiritual birth, when we were "born again... by the word of God". By this new birth we received a new nature, the very essence of which is love, so that, in spite of many social differences, we are capable of loving one another. The life and relationships that flow from this new birth are as lasting as the word of God by which the soul is born again. The word of God "liveth" and "abideth forever", so that the one born again enters into a life and into relationships which death cannot touch or time end. The natural man is indeed like the grass that withereth, and his glory like the flowers that quickly fall away even before the plant is withered.

1 Peter 2:1. Having been born of the word, and thus having a new nature with new desires, and having the truth whereby we can purify our souls, the apostle warns us against some of the evils of the old nature which would hinder love to one another, as well as our spiritual growth. We are to lay aside malice that entertains evil thoughts of others, guile that seeks to hide what we are, hypocrisy that pretends to be what we are not, and envy that leads to slandering the one of whom we are envious. Guile and hypocrisy ever accompany malice. The one speaking maliciously of his brother may seek to hide his malice under the plea that he is acting for the good of his brother—this is guile; further, he may profess that he has nothing in his heart but love for his brother—this is hypocrisy. Behind malicious words there is envy, which is the real motive for evil speaking. Truly the wise man says, "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Prov. 27:4).

4. Our practical life in relation to the word of God.

1 Peter 2:2-3. In relation to the word of God we are exhorted ever to retain the spirit of a newborn babe that craves and enjoys the milk by which it grows. The word, which is the seed of life, is also the means provided by God to sustain the life. All true desire for the word is the outcome of having tasted that the Lord is gracious. The more we enjoy the company of the Lord the more eager shall we be to sit at His feet and hear His word. To seek Christ in all the Scriptures will sustain loving interest in the word of God, and make many a difficult passage plain and simple. One has said, "The Bible is intended for a child's book...From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures', which are able to make wise unto salvation, and to furnish the man of God unto all good works. He reveals Himself unto babes, because the wise and prudent will not listen to Him".

Mary of Bethany is a striking example of one who tasted that the Lord is gracious, with the result that she delighted to sit at His feet and hear His word. Had we a deeper sense of the goodness of the Lord we should ever retain the babe's delight in the word, welcome every occasion to feed upon the word, and come together to read the word. The result would be that we should "grow up to salvation". We should increasingly be saved from everything that hinders our spiritual progress, until at last we are completely saved at the coming of Christ, when the body of humiliation will be changed into the likeness of His body of glory.

The desire for food is the proof of vitality in a babe. Spiritual vitality thus manifests itself in the desire for the spiritual food of the word, not simply the desire for intelligence in truth, but the desire for the word as that which feeds the soul by presenting Christ, and as making Him more precious to the soul.

5. Our practical life as living stones.

Hitherto the apostle has spoken of individual blessings, and the practice consistent with these blessings. Now he passes on to speak of collective blessings, and the practical united testimony that should flow from believers as a whole.

1 Peter 2:4. Here believers are viewed as "living stones" in relation to Christ, the "living Stone", and, as such, forming a spiritual house. Writing to believers from amongst the Jews, the apostle constantly alludes to material things connected with the nation of Israel. He shows that the material foreshadowed the spiritual; and that, if through the failure of Israel the material things had lapsed, yet the spiritual reality of these things remained. In the rust chapter we learn that, if Israel's earthly inheritance in the Land had been lost, yet in Christianity believers have an inheritance reserved in heaven. In this second chapter we learn that, though the material house at Jerusalem had been set aside, yet God has a spiritual house composed of living stones, in which "spiritual sacrifices" are offered up by "an holy priesthood".

Israel of old was distinguished from all nations by the fact that God's house was in their midst. There God dwelt. From that house praise was to ascend to God, and testimony flow out to the world. That house was material—"a house... made with hands". Men, as we know, corrupted the house, turning the house of praise into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves. The Father's house was turned into the house of corrupt Israel, and, as such, God forsook the house, leaving it desolate, to be thrown down by the Gentiles, so that not a stone was left upon a stone (Matt. 23:38; 24:2).

Nevertheless, the wickedness and failure of man cannot frustrate the purpose of God. Christ, on earth, becomes the temple of God, the One in whom God dwelt, in whom God was glorified, and through whom God in all His love and holiness was set forth before men (John 2:18-21). Alas! men rejected Christ. To have God dwelling in the midst is intolerable to man, even if present in blessing. As the nation of Israel had corrupted the temple at Jerusalem, so they destroyed the temple when set forth in Christ by nailing Him to the cross. But again we see that God does not give up His purpose to dwell among men. Christ, though rejected by men, is exalted by God, and from the place of His exaltation the Holy Spirit comes to build a habitation for God, a spiritual house composed of all believers.

The coming formation of this spiritual house was revealed to Peter by the Lord, when He said, "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Christ is the living Stone, the foundation of this spiritual house. As the living Stone He is rejected of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Coming to Christ as the living Stone, believers as living stones are built up "a spiritual house". It is true that the Christ to whom we come is the living Stone, rejected of men; but we may ask, How many have come to Christ in the realization that He is rejected by man and in reproach? Coming to Him in the consciousness that He is in rejection will of necessity involve that we leave behind the corrupt religious world that in practice denies His rejection. We go forth unto Him, bearing His reproach.

1 Peter 2:5. Having spoken of the character of Christ as the living Stone, the apostle passes on to speak of the character of believers viewed as stones in God's house. They are "living", partaking of the life of Christ, the living Stone, a life that death cannot touch. They are formed into "a spiritual house", of which we know from the Gospel of Matthew that Christ is the builder. Nothing unreal enters into that which He builds. The Builder is perfect; His work is perfect; the stones are living. Throughout the Christian period the building grows, apart from all human instrumentality.

Then we learn that God's great object in forming a spiritual house is to have an holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Believers, in contrast to an earthly and carnal order of priesthood, form "an holy priesthood". It is not only that they are priests, which might imply praising individuals; they are a priesthood, involving a praising company.

1 Peter 2:6. The apostle quotes the prophet Isaiah to show that it was ever God's purpose that Christ should be the sure foundation for all blessing for His people. He is the chief corner Stone that carries the whole weight of the superstructure. As He is chosen of God and precious, we may be sure that none that believe in Him will be confounded.

1 Peter 2:7-8. This leads the apostle to draw a contrast between believers and rejectors of the living Stone. Unto those who believe is the preciousness; all the preciousness of Christ, all the blessing He secures, is made good to the believer. Alas! there are those who are disobedient, and, being such, they cast away as worthless the One who has been exalted by God as the Head of the corner. To such He becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Men stumbled at His word. They would not believe the truth, and therefore to this end they were appointed. They were not appointed to sin or to disobey, but being rebellious and disobedient they were destined by their unbelief to stumble at the humiliation of Christ.

6. Our practical life as a chosen race.

1 Peter 2:9-10. Had Israel obeyed the voice of God and kept His covenant they would have been to God "a peculiar treasure", a kingdom of priests and an holy nation (Ex. 19:5,6). They failed, and, the nation having been set aside, believers are now viewed as taking the place of Israel as a witness to God before the world. The apostle quotes the prophecy of Hosea, which tells us that in a day to come Israel will again be taken up. In the meantime, the prophet's words are applied to the believing remnant of the Jews. Such, under the eye of God, form a royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests, to show forth the excellencies of God, who hath called us out of darkness into the marvelous light of the full revelation of Himself.

We have thus a beautiful picture of the Christian circle composed of all believers drawn to Christ, the One whom the world has rejected. In the outside place of reproach they are formed into a spiritual house for the dwelling place of God, constituted an holy priesthood to offer up the

sacrifices of praise, and formed into a kingdom of priests to set forth the excellencies of God before the world.

Christendom, entirely failing to answer to the picture, proceeds on the false assumption that Christ is in honor in the world. Men have again erected magnificent temples after the pattern of the material temple, and have lost the truth of the spiritual house. A humanly-ordained priestly class has been instituted in contrast to the holy priesthood composed of all true believers; worship has become ritualistic, in place of worship in spirit; and again Christendom has set up so-called Christian nations in contrast to a chosen race of believers.

It is difficult, if not impossible, in this day of ruin to find any collective setting forth of the Christian company as described in these verses. Nevertheless, the truth still remains in the Word, set forth in all its beauty; and it is still our privilege and responsibility to obey the Word. Obeying the Word, we should be set free from all the great religious systems of men that, in their constitution and practice, are a total denial of the truth. Those set free could not claim to be the "holy priesthood", nor the "royal priesthood", but in simple faith they could follow righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart, seeking to walk in the light of these great truths.

7. Our practical life as strangers and pilgrims.

1 Peter 2:11. In the first verse of the Epistle the believing Jews are addressed as strangers, as they are outcast from the land of Israel, and scattered among the Gentiles. Here, in common with all believers, they are viewed as strangers and pilgrims because they belong to heaven. In one case, they are strangers as the result of the judgment of God that had driven them out of their earthly inheritance; in the other, they are strangers as the result of the grace of God that had called them from earth to heaven. The man of the world is a stranger to heaven because he knows not the Father and the Son. The believer is a stranger in heart to the world because he knows the Father and the Son. He is a stranger, out of touch with this world, and a pilgrim going on to another world. Nevertheless, the flesh in the believer wars against the spiritual progress of the soul. We are therefore exhorted to "abstain from fleshly lusts". We are not called to "war" against these lusts, but rather to abstain from them. It is hardly our business to wage war against drink or impurity or other evils in the world, but rather to show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called us out of darkness into light.

1 Peter 2:12. Having warned us against fleshly lusts within, the apostle proceeds to exhort us as to our outward conduct before the world. We are to be careful to act in all honesty, so that by our good works we may give the lie to hard words, by which we are spoken against as evildoers.

The day of visitation refers to God's present dealings with the world. Men may speak evil of the Christian, but when trouble overtakes them, through yielding to their lusts, they will have to admit that God blesses those who quietly and patiently pursue a life of good works.

1 Peter 2:13-14. The following exhortations view the believer in relation to the institutions and authorities of this world. It would be wholly inconsistent for those who take the place of strangers in this world to attempt to form these institutions or appoint the authorities. We are, however, to be subject to them, and this with the highest motive, for the Lord's sake. We are to be subject to subordinate as well as to supreme authorities, and, again, for the reason that we view them all in relation to the Lord. Whether they exercise their authority in the fear of God or fail to do so, we are definitely to view them as sent by God for the maintenance of the government of the world.

1 Peter 2:15-16. By subjection to authority, and by well-doing, the Christian would put to silence the ignorance of senseless men, who charge the believer with rebellion against authority (Luke 23:14,15; Acts 24:12,13). We are free from the world, but are not to use our freedom to speak evil of this world's authorities, but rather to devote ourselves wholly to the service of God.

1 Peter 2:17. As to the social positions of the world, we are to be careful not to treat men with contempt or disdain. We are not to treat a poor man with disdain, nor a rich man with servility. We are to honor both. Very specially are we to honor all in that circle in which our happy lot is cast, the brotherhood which binds us together in Christian bonds. In this circle we can do more than honor, we can love one another.

Other Scriptures clearly show that the only limitation to our subjection to men is the fear of God. When men insist upon direct disobedience to God, we must set God first (Acts 4:19). So here the order is, "Fear God. Honor the king".

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 2:18-3:17: Conduct Suited to the Individual Relationships of the Christian

The apostle has exhorted us as to conduct consistent with relationships in which all Christians are found. He now refers to the conduct proper to particular relationships in which many are placed. First, he speaks of servants 18-22); then of wives (3:1-6); and, finally, of husbands (2:7).

1. Household servants.

1 Peter 2:18-20. Christian servants are first addressed. The Greek word, we are told, implies household servants, though not necessarily slaves. All Christians have already been exhorted to be in subjection to every human institution. Now the Christian servant is exhorted to be subject, as later subjection is pressed upon the Christian wife, the younger brethren, and finally upon us all in relation to one other. Evidently, as one has said, subjection "is the very quality that suits strangers. If I am a king in my kingdom, I may exercise authority and dominion; but if I am a cast-out stranger, the temper that suits me is a spirit of subjection all my life through. Put the stranger in company with what relationship you please, the Spirit of God expects this spirit of subjection".

The servant is to be subject whether the master be gentle or ill-tempered. The ill-temper of a master may involve suffering for a Christian servant. This gives occasion to introduce the second form of suffering of which the apostle speaks in this Epistle—suffering for conscience' sake. The servant, while subject, is to keep a good conscience before God by refusing to do evil. If this leads to suffering wrongfully, let the believer remember that to "do well", "suffer for it", and "take it patiently" is acceptable to God.

1 Peter 2:21-23. In a life of patient suffering for well-doing God sees the setting forth of the life of Christ. This explains many of the trying circumstances in which the Christian may be found. God allows them to give us the opportunity to express the excellencies of Christ for His pleasure and our ultimate glory.

If we are called to be with Christ in glory, we are also called to follow His steps on the way to glory. The apostle gives us three of His steps. First, He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Secondly, He suffered, being reviled and threatened. Thirdly, when reviled, He took it patiently; He neither reviled nor threatened. In the presence of all His accusers His resource was in God. He committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. When falsely accused before the Jewish council, He "held His peace" (Matt. 26:63). To the accusations of the Jews in the presence of Pilate, "He answered nothing". To Pilate himself, "He answered... never a word" (Matthew 27:12-14). The mocking Herod questioned Him in many words, "but He answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9). He was silent before men because He had a resource in God.

How good for us to follow in His steps and, in the presence of the malicious words of men, come from what quarter they may, to keep silent in the realization that the Lord is our resource. Well for us to take up the words of the prophet and say, "Jehovah is my portion... therefore will I hope in Him. Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that one should both wait, and that in silence, for the salvation of Jehovah" (Lam. 3:24-26). It is noticeable that it is only in this particular relationship that the Lord can be cited as an example, for He Himself has taken the place of the Servant. From other Scriptures it is clear that the Christian may entreat, exhort, or even rebuke; but never is he to revile or threaten.

1 Peter 2:24-25. Moreover, the Christian has another incentive to do right, or "live unto righteousness". Christ has borne our sins in His own body on the tree, not only that we should be justified and saved from the judgment of sins, but that we should live unto righteousness. Having been healed by His stripes, can we go on with sin that cost Him so much to remove? Christ having suffered for our wrong-doing, it is to our shame if we suffer for wrong-doing. It is our privilege to be allowed to follow His steps and suffer for well-doing. Only by having Himself before us can we follow His steps; as His sheep, we are only safe as we follow the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

2. Wives.

1 Peter 3:1-2. The apostle proceeds to exhort believers in the marriage relationship. The outstanding mark of the Christian wife should be subjection to her husband. In carrying out this exhortation we may learn how greatly a consistent Christian life can influence the unconverted. The unbelieving husband, who refuses to listen to the word of God, may be won by beholding the life of his wife lived in all purity and the fear of God.

1 Peter 3:3-4. If, however, the wife is to live rightly with the husband, she must live in spirit before God. Her adorning is not to be after the passing fashions of this world, which only seek to make the woman outwardly attractive in the sight of men, while of necessity having nothing to say to the moral character, which is of great value in the sight of God. The Christian wife is to think rather of that which God sees—"the hidden man of the heart"—and adorn herself with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. This is the opposite of the vanity and self-assertiveness of the flesh which ever seeks prominence for self. Moreover, this meek and quiet spirit is to be cherished in the heart, in the sight of God. If cultivated there, it will surely form a meek and quiet character before God and men. There may be at times the affectation of a meek and quiet manner, but this is of little value unless it is the outcome of a meek and quiet spirit. Only that which comes from "the hidden man of the heart" will rightly affect the life.

1 Peter 3:5-6. Holy women of old are cited as examples for Christian women to-day. They trusted in God, adorned themselves with meekness and quietness of spirit, and were in subjection to their husbands. Sarah proved her obedience and subjection to her husband by calling him lord, according to the custom of that day. Wives that trust in God, obey their husbands, and do well without fear of consequences, are characteristically children of Sarah.

3. Husbands.

1 Peter 3:7. The Christian husband is to dwell with his wife according to the knowledge of the relationship as instituted by God, and not simply according to human thoughts or customs. He is to honor her as the more fragile being, and therefore requiring greater care and protection. Whatever differences there may be as to constitution, they are heirs together of the grace of life. The husband is therefore to pay all honor to the wife, so that no cloud may arise between them to hinder their prayers.

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 3:8-9: The Christian Circle

1 Peter 3:8. Having given special exhortations for Christians in their individual relationships, the apostle finally exhorts us as to the qualities that should mark the Christian circle in which all believers have their part.

The world around is full of discord, but in the Christian circles there should be unity: "Be ye all of one mind". From other Scriptures we learn that "one mind" in the Christian company can only be attained by each individual having the lowly mind -the mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:2-5). Nearly all the discord among believers can be traced back to the unjudged vanity and self-importance of the flesh that ever seeks to be prominent and accounted great (Luke 22:24). Apart from having the mind of Christ we shall either be in conflict or form a false unity after our own ideas.

Having one mind, and that the mind of the Lord, will naturally lead us to have "compassion one of another". The Lord's "corn-passions fail not they are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22, 23). Very small differences between brethren may be allowed to wither up our compassions. If, then, our compassions are not to fail, the motive behind them must be love. Therefore the exhortation follows, "Love as brethren". This is not love after a human fashion as in natural relationships, however right in their place, but love as linked together in the divine relationships of the family of God.

Divine love will lead the Christian to be tender-hearted and humble-minded. In human love there is often a strong element of selfishness. Divine love will lead us to feel the sorrows of others while forgetting self. So Christ, not thinking of His own comfort or safety, can go into Judaea where men sought to kill Him, to weep with the two sorrowing sisters (John 11:8,35).

1 Peter 3:9. If, alas, one may seek to harm us, or rail against us, we are not to render evil for evil, or railing for railing, but, contrariwise, blessing. Our practical life in the Christian circle is to be governed by the fact that we are called to inherit blessing. In the sense of the grace

that has so richly blessed us we should be ready to bless others even if they have railed upon us.

If these simple injunctions were carried out, there would be the setting forth of the excellencies of Christ in the circle of His people. What are these injunctions but the setting forth of the loveliness of Christ! He walked through this world with the lowly mind; His hand was ever stretched out in compassion, moved by a heart filled with divine love. No one was ever so tender-hearted and humble-minded as Christ. Never did He render evil for evil; on the contrary, He dispensed blessing to those of whom He had to say, "They have rewarded Me evil for good, and hatred for My love" (Psa. 109:5).

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 3:10-13: The Moral Government of God

1 Peter 3:10-13. Having enjoined upon us the beautiful Christ-like character that should mark the Christian company, the apostle encourages us to embrace whole-heartedly the Christian life, and refuse evil, by reminding us of 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. With man corruption and violence may too often mar his government, so that the good may suffer and the wicked escape. With God all is perfect; His government is exercised without respect of persons, rendering to every man, believer or unbeliever, according to his deeds.

The grace of God does not set aside the government of God; we do not escape the government of God by becoming Christians. Though the subjects of grace, it is still true that we reap what we sow. We cannot use Christianity to cover evil.

Christianity sets before us a life of blessedness lived in communion with God. This life was lived in perfection by the Lord Jesus, as set forth in "the path of life", traced in Psa. 16, a life which has its deep spiritual joy, for the Lord can say of this life, "The lines have fallen unto Me in pleasant places". If, then, the believer would live this life and "see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it". In so doing, he will find, in the government of God, that he is blessed, whereas the one that does evil will suffer, for, according to the immutable principles of God's government, "the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil". Moreover, "who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Even the world can appreciate the man that quietly pursues his way doing good.

It may, however, be asked, if doing good leads to prosperity and doing evil to punishment, how is it that in this world so often the godly suffer, and those who do evil appear to prosper? How is it that in this very Epistle that tells us that God's favor is upon the righteous we have the sufferings of God's people brought before us in greater detail than in any other Scripture? How is it that, immediately following the passage that promises "good days" as the outcome of doing good, we read of the possibility of suffering for doing good?

Such questions are answered if we remember that during this day of grace the government of God is moral, and not generally direct and immediate. It is truly a moral government in the sense that good is rewarded by spiritual blessing rather than by material prosperity, so that, while the apostle puts before us the possibility of suffering for righteousness' sake, he can still add, "happy are ye".

God's government is not now generally direct, for the sorrow and punishment that are the consequences of evil are not always immediate and visible. To see the final outcome of God's government—whether in the blessing of those who work good or in the punishment of the evildoer—we must look beyond the present time and wait for the world to come.

While the government of God goes on in all its absolute perfection, it is at the moment largely hidden, and one has said, "It needs faith to accept the fact that God's moral government prevails above all the confusion". Let the believer remember that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, it ever remains true that doing good will lead to blessing and sorrow. Both the blessing and the sorrow may be experienced in measure now, but the blessing will be fully known in the world to come.

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 3:14-4:7: Suffering for Righteousness' Sake

In the first chapter we are reminded that the believer may suffer under the chastening of God for the trial of his faith. In the second chapter we further learn that he may be called to suffer for conscience' sake (2:19). This portion of the Epistle has the great theme of suffering for righteousness' sake.

The Christian is viewed as following in the steps of Christ (2:21), and, so doing, he walks as a stranger and a pilgrim through this world; he abstains from the fleshly lusts that war against the soul; he refrains from speaking guile; he avoids evil and does good; he seeks peace. Thus walking, according to the government of God, he will be in favor of the Lord, and escape in large measure the troubles that men bring upon themselves through their evil ways. Nevertheless, in an evil world the Christian may have to suffer for righteousness' sake, clearly indicating that the government of God will not always be fully manifest until righteousness will reign in the millennial days. The devil is not yet banished from the world, and evil still prevails, so that, while the pursuit of righteousness will ever meet with the favor of God, it may entail opposition from man if, by doing right, the Christian interferes with the interests of the men of the world.

1 Peter 3:14. If, then, we are called upon to suffer for righteousness' sake, we are not to bemoan our lot, but rather rejoice, even as Paul and Silas, when persecuted at Philippi, could at midnight sing praises to God, though unjustly cast into prison because they had crossed the interests of some evilly disposed men. There is, however, the danger of yielding to an unrighteous course through fear of consequences. We are therefore warned against the fear of man, and being troubled by the dread of what may happen if we do right.

1 Peter 3:15. Our safeguard against yielding to unrighteousness will be found in sanctifying the Lord in our hearts. By giving the Lord His rightful place in our hearts, we shall be conscious of the presence of the Lord to support us in the presence of men. We shall thus not only escape the temptation to yield to what we know to be wrong in order to escape trouble, but we shall be enabled to render a positive testimony to the truth, giving a reason for our hope with meekness and fear. Acting in a spirit of meekness we shall not offend by seeking to assert ourselves and our opinions; acting in fear before God we shall be bold to maintain the truth. While we are not to be afraid of man's fear

(verse 14), it becomes us to walk in the holy fear of God.

1 Peter 3:16. Moreover, to suffer for righteousness' sake, and witness a good conscience before men, demands "a good conscience" before God and men. If with a bad conscience we attempt to stand before the enemy, it will only be to court shame and defeat. With a conscience void of offense we shall, by our consistent Christian conduct, put to shame those who falsely accuse us.

1 Peter 3:17-18. It is clear, then, that believers may have to suffer for well-doing, but, even so, let us remember it is "the will of God". The evilly-disposed will of man may cause the suffering, but the will of God allows the suffering. Our concern should be to learn God's mind in the suffering, remembering that it is better to suffer for "well doing" than for "evil doing". If we fail and do wrong, it is surely right that we suffer for it, rather than that it should be passed over. There can, however, be no excuse for the Christian doing wrong, and having to suffer, seeing that "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". Being brought to God, justified from all our sins, it is our privilege to live a new life in the Spirit, and thus do good, even though at times we may have to suffer for "well doing".

1 Peter 3:19-20. In order to sustain these Jewish believers in their special sufferings, the apostle draws a parallel between their day and the days before the flood. Christ was not personally present then, yet He preached to men by the Spirit of God through Noah (Gen. 6:3; 2 Peter 2:5). To-day Christ is no longer present on earth, but the Holy Spirit has come, and the Gospel is being preached by the servants of the Lord (Acts 1:8). In Noah's day the great mass was disobedient to the preaching, and their spirits are now in prison awaiting the yet greater judgment of the dead. So too the great mass of the Jewish nation entirely rejected the preaching of Christ by the Spirit (Acts 7:51-53). In the days before the flood, it was the time of "the long-suffering of God", in which God waited to bless men before the judgment fell; so the present time is the day of God's grace that precedes the coming judgment.

In the days of the flood a few were saved from the judgment that came upon the world; so to-day a remnant is saved from the governmental judgment that has overwhelmed the nation of Israel, and the yet greater judgment that is coming upon the living and the dead (4:5).

The few who escaped the judgment in Noah's day were saved "through water". The whole world of Noah's day was under the judgment of death by the deluge. Noah, and those with him, escaped the judgment by passing through the waters of judgment. Christ has passed through death and is risen, and the believer is clear of judgment as having passed through the judgment in the Person of his substitute. Noah came into a new world, free of judgment so Christ is risen and beyond judgment, and the believer's conscience is relieved of all dread of the judgment he deserves by seeing that he is as clear of all his sins before God, and of their judgment, as Christ Himself.

1 Peter 3:21. This separation from a guilty world, and escape from judgment in passing through the waters of judgment, is clearly set forth in picture in the story of the flood. Further, the apostle tells us that these great truths are also set forth in figure in baptism. We have, then, in this passage the picture in the flood, the figure in baptism, and the fact in the death and resurrection of Christ. In baptism we pass through the water, and thus in figure are separated from the world under judgment, to come into a new sphere beyond judgment. Alluding to the ceremonial washing under the law, the apostle warns us that, in his reference to baptism, he is not using it as a figure of the outward ceremonial cleansing of the body by Levitical washings, but as a figure of the death of Christ by which we obtain a good conscience before God.

1 Peter 3:22. In the closing verse of the chapter we see how complete is the salvation that is ours by the death and resurrection of Christ. It is set forth in Christ as a Man in heaven set in the place of supreme power—the right hand of God—with every other power made subject to Him. Christ has been into death and judgment, and has so perfectly triumphed that no power in the universe can prevent His taking a place in glory.

In the early verses of chapter 4 the apostle continues his theme of suffering for righteousness' sake. Enlarging upon the statement that it is better to suffer for well-doing than for wrongdoing, he draws a contrast between the Christian and the men of this world. He shows that the Christian is to have done with sin, and live the rest of his time to the will of God. Thus his life as a Christian will be a complete contrast to his past life when unconverted, as well as to the life that men are living in the world—the life dominated by sin, or the will of the flesh.

1 Peter 4:1. In order that the Christian may be strengthened to have done with sin, or the gratification of the will of the flesh, the apostle sets Christ before us as our perfect Example. Christ came into the world to do the will of God; and though He never had to meet sin within, as we have, yet He was tempted to the utmost by sin without every conceivable adverse power was arrayed against Him, the contradiction of sinners, the power of the devil, the claims of natural relationships, the ignorance of disciples, and at last the power of death, all brought to bear upon Christ in the endeavor to move Him from the path of perfect obedience to the will of the Father. He resisted every temptation, and chose death rather than disobedience, and that too when, as it has been said, "death had the character of wrath against sin and judgment. Bitter as the cup was, He drank it rather than not fulfill to the uttermost His Father's will and glorify Him". Suffering death rather than yielding to the principle of sin, He has by dying done with sin forever.

It is ever the great effort of the enemy to entrap believers into sin by tempting us to gratify the flesh in some form or other. He knows the particular form of gratification that will appeal to each one, and tempts us accordingly. To meet his temptations we are instructed to arm ourselves against sin by having the same mind as Christ—the mind to suffer rather than yield to sin. If we yield, the flesh does not suffer; on the contrary it is gratified: but we sin, and in due course suffer the governmental consequences of sinning. If we refuse to yield to sin, the flesh suffers, but we cease from sin, and live to the will of God, enjoying the blessedness of so doing.

1 Peter 4:2. To cease from sin, however right, is only a negative virtue: the apostle therefore passes on to speak of the positive side of Christian life. Conversion divides the life here into two distinct periods: first, "the time past of our life"; secondly, "the rest of his time in the flesh". As to the time that is left, it is only consistent, as the apostle says, that we should no longer live to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. We arm ourselves against Satan by making up our minds to suffer rather than sin, and by setting our faces toward God with the desire to do His will.

1 Peter 4:3. The time past of our life was marked by doing our own will, and the character of that will was shown by our walk. In the case of these Jewish believers they had walked according to the will of the Gentiles, committing the same excesses, clearly showing that the will of an unconverted Jew is the same as that of an unconverted Gentile.

1 Peter 4:4. The men of the world wonder that believers abstain from the indulgences of the flesh, refusing to join with them in pouring their life into the sink of corruption, such as the world without God has become. Having no knowledge of God, nor of the desires and affections of the new nature, which make the lusts of the flesh repellent to the believer, they can only impute some evil motive as actuating those who refuse to join with them in their life of self-indulgence. So the devil, incapable of appreciating goodness, suggested to God that the piety of Job was not real—that he refrained from evil, not because he hated evil or loved God, but simply because he found it paid to refrain from excesses.

In the former chapter we learned that the world falsely imputes evil to the believer, and then condemns him for doing evil (3:16). Here the world condemns the believer because he refuses to do evil. Thus apart from what the believer may do, or not do, the fallen nature of man is convicted of being in opposition to all that is of God.

1 Peter 4:5. Men may indulge the flesh and speak evil of those who fear God; but God is not indifferent to their godless lives, nor their treatment of His people. They will have to give an account to God, who is ready to judge the living as well as those who have already died.

1 Peter 4:6. For this cause the Gospel was preached to those who are now dead, so that, on the one hand, judgment may take its course on those who, having been warned, refuse the Gospel and continue to live as regards men after the flesh, or, on the other hand, by receiving the Gospel they might be blessed, and, abandoning their old life, live as regards God, according to the Spirit. God proclaims grace but does not give up His government whereby evil is dealt with in righteousness. The verse does not imply that the Gospel was preached to men after they were dead. It was preached to living men who are now dead. There would be no sense in suggesting that dead men could live, either after the flesh's lusts, or in the power of the Spirit.

1 Peter 4:7. In this verse the apostle sums up the Christian attitude to the world that he is passing through. It is a world of excess and riot in which men do their own wills, gratify their lusts, and speak evil of the Christian, who is made to suffer for righteousness' sake, who suffers patiently, and who suffers in the flesh rather than yield to sin. In the presence of the world's evil and his own suffering, the Christian is to remember that the end of all things is at hand. The end, with all that it involves, whether of judgment for the unconverted or blessing for the Christian, calls for sobriety and watchfulness with prayer, sobriety in view of the end to which all is leading, watchfulness as to all that is around, and prayer in relation to God.

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 4:8-11: The Christian Circle

In the preceding portion of the Epistle we have had a solemn picture of the world abandoning itself to the gratification of the flesh, in contrast to those who do the will of God and suffer rather than sin. In these verses we pass within the Christian circle to learn the conduct that becomes believers among themselves.

1 Peter 4:8. If lust marks the world sphere (verse 2), love is the outstanding mark of the Christian company. Other qualities will shine in that circle, but the crowning quality—the one without which all else is vain—is love; therefore, says the apostle, "above all things have fervent love among yourselves". For the third time in the course of his Epistle, the apostle presses love as the outstanding quality of the Christian company. (See 1:22; 3:8).

Love is far from being indifferent to sin; but love does not necessarily expose sins, or gloat over the failure of others. If possible, love will deal with sins privately, so that they do not needlessly become public. When they are dealt with, and judged, love will no longer speak of them or spread them abroad. Love does not make mischief, or lead people to act as busybodies. Love covers a multitude of sins, as the wise man says, "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins" (Prov. 10:12).

1 Peter 4:9. Moreover, in a circle where we are no longer strangers to one another, but drawn together by the bonds of Christ, love will delight to use hospitality, as the opportunity arises, and, where fervent love prevails, the hospitality will be without murmuring.

1 Peter 4:10-11. Passing from the use of temporal means, the apostle gives practical directions as to the use of spiritual gifts. Each one, as he has received a gift, is responsible to use it in relation to God as a steward of the grace of God. If any man speak, it is to be as the oracles of God, with the conviction that he is ministering a message that conveys the mind of God for the moment. It is not simply that he speaks the truth according to the oracles of God, but he gives the mind of God "as the oracles of God".

The apostle further distinguishes between ministry and speaking. Prejudiced, it may be, by what obtains in Christendom, we are inclined to limit ministry to speaking, whereas ministry includes much service to the Lord's people in which speaking has little or no part. It is not, indeed, that the spoken word is not ministry, but that ministry is more than speech.

Whatever form the ministry takes, it is to be exercised according to the ability that God gives. Thus natural ability is recognized as given of God. In grace God gives spiritual gifts, but He does so "to every man according to his several ability" (Matt. 25:15). It is true, as one has said, that "no ability constitutes a gift; but the spiritual gift does not supersede natural ability". As we can see, in giving Paul his gift, God recognized his natural ability, so that he is able to present doctrine in an orderly way. Peter, probably more fitted by his natural ability to deal with everyday practice, is given a gift in accord with this ability; his ministry, therefore, is almost wholly practical.

Whatever the spiritual gift, whatever form the ministry takes, whatever the natural ability, all is to be used for the glory of God "that God in all things may be glorified". We are to beware of the vanity of the flesh that would seek to use these things for the exaltation of self.

This beautiful picture of the Christian circle presents a company of believers marked above all by love for one another, where hospitality meets temporal needs, and where the varied gifts of the manifold grace of God are used for the spiritual blessing of the company and the glory of God in "all things", all being bound together "through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen".

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 4:12-19: Suffering for the Name of Christ

Already the apostle has spoken of suffering for conscience' sake (1 Peter 2:19), and suffering for righteousness' sake (1 Peter 3:14). Now he speaks of suffering for the Name of Christ. The confession of Christ in life and testimony had brought upon the Jewish believers the fire of persecution.

1 Peter 4:12-14. That the world, living according to its lusts without fear of God, should come under judgment is manifestly righteous; but that the believer, who refrains from lust, seeks the will of God, walks in sobriety and watchfulness, seeking in all things that God should be glorified, should be allowed to pass through a fiery trial, might appear as a strange thing. It would, however, only appear strange to those believers who viewed the trial in connection with themselves. Viewing the trial in connection with Christ, the One in whom they believed, who had become precious to them, and whom they loved, it would no longer appear some strange thing that could not be explained. For the Christ that the believer follows is a rejected Christ who suffered in this world, and whose Name is reproached by men. The fire of persecution these believers were passing through was because they confessed the Name of Christ, and above all showed forth in their lives the excellencies of Christ, as the apostle says, "On your part He is glorified". In these believers there was an answer to the Lord's prayer when He said to the Father, "I am glorified in them" (John 17:10).

It is this that calls forth the opposition of the devil and the world. Any witness to the glory of Christ is intolerable to the world and the devil. The more faithful the witness to Christ and His excellencies, the more believers will suffer.

As the suffering is for Christ's sake, it should be a matter of joy rather than wonder. "Rejoice", says the apostle, "inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings"; and again, "If ye be reproached for the Name of Christ, happy are ye". Moreover, even as the sufferings and reproach of Christ have an answer in glory, so those who suffer for His Name's sake will share His glory in the day of His revelation. This coming glory, if realized in its blessedness, would lead the saint in the midst of trial to "be glad also with exceeding joy". Every bit of suffering that God may allow His people to pass through for Christ's sake is a pledge of coming glory. The Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God who had come from glory, rested upon these suffering saints, and was the earnest of the coming glory. The world may speak evil of Christ, but, in the power of the Spirit of God, He is glorified on the part of the saints.

Some might argue that such persecution could easily be explained in the days of the apostle, when believers were faced with the deadly opposition of Judaism and the awful corruptions of heathenism, but that all is changed today, when we are living in Christendom where Christ is owned. This argument could only be advanced by those who view Christendom in outward appearance. It is true that Christendom has erected many magnificent buildings, professedly in honor of Christ, and carries on vast benefactions under His Name, and we might be deceived into thinking that Christ is in honor, and no longer in reproach. We know, however, that Christendom has become wholly corrupt, and that the great profession is nauseous to Christ. As in the day of the apostle, so now, "He is evil spoken or by the mass of the religious world. Any true witness of Christ is obnoxious to the officialism of men's ecclesiastical systems, to the gross materialism of Protestantism, as well as to the superstition of Rome. The mere profession, whether papal or protestant, always has been, and always will be, a persecutor of the true witness for Christ. It is still true that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution".

1 Peter 4:15-16. We are then warned against the possibility of the believer suffering as an evildoer. Though Christians, if we do evil, we shall suffer under the government of God, indeed, all the more so because we are Christians. We may escape the grosser evils and yet suffer "as a busy-body in other men's matters". This will only bring shame upon ourselves. To "suffer as a Christian" is no shame, but rather an occasion of glory to God.

1 Peter 4:17-18. The solemn possibility of a believer suffering for wrong-doing is a proof that the government of God is not confined to the world. As we have seen, the world will have to give an account to God, who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Here, however, that judgment begins even now at the house of God. It would be contrary to the nature of God to allow evil to pass unnoticed in His own house. This judgment of God, in connection with His house, is wholly governmental and applies to the present time. It has reference to believers, for the apostle does not contemplate any but "living stones". We have a solemn instance of this governmental dealing in the case of the Corinthian assembly. On account of the unworthy ways of some, God acted in chastening, as we read, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30).

Further, if God does not spare His own people, "what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" If the righteous are with difficulty brought through the trials, the opposition, and the dangers of this world, into the full salvation of glory, what possibility of escape is there for the ungodly and the sinner?

1 Peter 4:19. If such are the difficulties, the dangers, and the opposition in the path of the believer, it is evident that in his own strength he never can come safely through this wilderness world. Only the power of God can sustain him. Well it is for us to reach this conclusion, and, in the presence of every form of suffering, commit the keeping of our souls to Him. But let this be accompanied with "well doing", even if it involves suffering; only as we are doing well shall we have the confidence that can cast all upon God. It is here a question of being preserved in this world, and therefore we turn to God "as unto a faithful Creator", One who is "the preserver of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10).

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 5:1-7: The Christian Circle

The apostle returns to the Christian circle with special exhortation to two classes, the elder and the younger. The fact that he addresses the younger would clearly indicate that he uses the term elder, not in an official sense, but as characteristic of those who by age and experience are elder brethren.

1 Peter 5:1-3. Peter himself was an elder, and in addition had the marks of an apostle, for he had been a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory about to be revealed (Acts 1:21,22). He can thus exhort us with the experience of an elder, combined with the authority of an apostle.

The elders are exhorted to shepherd the flock of God. Shepherding is more than feeding; it implies guidance, and every form of care that is needed by the sheep. It is evidently the Lord's mind that His people should be visited and cared for. When on earth He was moved with compassion as He beheld the sorrowful condition of His earthly people, "scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). Alas! It is still evidence of the low and weak condition among the people of God that there is so little of this shepherd care.

It is the "flock of God" that is to be shepherded. Scripture knows nothing of an elder speaking of any of God's people as his flock. What a privilege for an elder brother to be allowed, in any little measure, to care for God's flock! How solemn if the privilege is abused and the flock, instead of being shepherded, is used for selfish ends. The exhortations imply that it is possible to take up oversight as an irksome necessity, or for base gain, or in a domineering spirit, as if dealing with our own possessions. The elders are, therefore, exhorted to exercise this privilege with a ready mind, as models for the flock, rather than as lords of the flock.

The apostle is passing on to the elders the Lord's own word to himself, for had not the Lord said to Peter, "Shepherd My sheep"? (John 21:16). Moreover, this was said at the very moment the apostle had been brought to realize his own weakness and utter dependence upon the Lord. One has remarked,

"At the moment that the Lord convinced him of his utter nothingness, He entrusted to him that which was dearest to Himself'. It is evident that the one who attempts to take up oversight for gain or in a domineering spirit has never learned his own nothingness. It is only as we have learned by experience our weakness, and therefore our need of dependence on the Lord, that we can in any true sense take the oversight of others. Age and experience are needed for oversight &the flock of God. Moses must spend forty years in the desert to learn his own weakness and the greatness of God before, at the age of eighty, being sent to shepherd the people of God.

1 Peter 5:4. For the encouragement of all who take up this happy service, we learn that faithfulness in its performance will have its reward. It is a service that may not bring the servant into prominence down here, and oftentimes meets with little appreciation from the Lord's people, but at the appearing of the Chief Shepherd will receive the "unfading crown of glory". The apostle has been speaking of "the sufferings of Christ", and of the glory that shall be revealed, so he implies that the spirit of self-sacrifice, with the necessary measure of suffering that shepherding the flock brings, will be rewarded with a crown of glory. Other Scriptures speak of a crown of righteousness in answer to a walk of practical righteousness, but "glory" is ever presented as the answer to suffering and self-denial.

1 Peter 5:5-6. The younger are to be subject to the elder, and all are to bind on humility towards one another. The working of pride that would lead us to exalt ourselves, and seek a place of prominence amongst the people of God, is destructive of true fellowship in the Christian circle. The allowance of pride leads to strife and division, but humility binds the saints together. Humility would keep the elder saints from lording it over God's flock, and hold the younger in subjection to the elder.

The proud man will ever find that, in the governmental ways of God, he is opposed, for God resisteth the proud. In taking a low place the humble will find that they have the support of the grace of God. The flesh loves to assert itself and seek a prominent place. If, however, we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt us in due season.

1 Peter 5:7. In the Christian circle God would have us free of care. This can only be as we cast all our care upon Him in the blessed consciousness that He careth for us. We, alas, may fail in our shepherd care of one another, but the compassion of God will not fail; "they are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22,23). If the under shepherds fail, and the sheep feel they are neglected, let each take comfort from this word, "He careth for you".

The Epistles of Peter, 1 Peter 5:8-14: Suffering From the Opposition of the Devil

1 Peter 5:8-9. The last form of suffering to which the apostle alludes is suffering from the opposition of the devil. He is the adversary and slanderer of God's people, but "the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil". Though the devil's power has been annulled at the cross, he is not yet cast into the lake of fire. As a restless and roaring lion he is still "going to and fro in the earth... walking up and down in it " (Job 1:7; 2:2). His aim as ever is to destroy. With God's people his efforts take the form of seeking to destroy their faith in God. Peter can speak from experience, for the time was when Satan desired to have Peter. He was, indeed, allowed to sift Peter as wheat, but was not able to touch his faith, for the Lord said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not". Now Peter can tell others that the secret of resisting Satan is found in being "steadfast in faith".

This opposition of the devil is not exceptional, or confined to the believers from amongst the Jews. In some form or other all the Lord's people while "in the world" are exposed to this form of suffering.

1 Peter 5:10-11. Whatever the opposition of the devil, we have "the God of all grace" to sustain us, and "eternal glory" lies before us. The devil may oppose, but grace has called us to glory by Christ Jesus, and no power of Satan can thwart the call of God. Grace will surely end in glory, though in the meantime we may have to suffer for "a while".

The devil by his opposition may seek to destroy the faith of the saint. Nevertheless, as in the case of Peter, God uses the attacks of Satan to perfect, stablish, strengthen and settle the saint. His efforts are thus not only frustrated, but are used for the blessing of the saint and the glory of God: "To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen".

Throughout his Epistle, the apostle presents the glory as the answer to the suffering, whatever form that suffering may take. In chapter 1 the suffering from trials allowed of God will have an answer in glory (1:7); in chapter 2 suffering for conscience' sake carries glory with it (2:19, 20); in chapter 4 suffering for the Name of Christ will have its reward in the day of glory (4:13, 14); and in this last chapter suffering from the opposition of the devil will only strengthen the saint in view of eternal glory.

1 Peter 5:12-13. The apostle, in concluding his Epistle, reminds us that his object in writing this brief letter is to testify to the true grace of God in which believers stand. Silvanus, who carries the letter, was apparently but little known to the apostle. He is, however, credited with being "a faithful brother". He writes from Babylon, sending greetings from some well-known sister.

1 Peter 5:14. The Epistle closes with a final appeal that love may mark the Christian circle, and with the desire that peace may be found in their midst.

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