

Simon Peter- 5 His Letters — 2.

Section 5 of 5 (chapters 25-27 — Part 2b) of:

Simon Peter — His Life and Letters.

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Contents

Simon Peter — His Life and Letters.	1
Part 2 — His Letters	1
Chapter 25 — Partakers of the Divine Nature.	1
2 Peter 1.....	1
CHAPTER 26 — DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM.....	11
2 Peter 2.....	11
CHAPTER 27 — WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?	15
2 Peter 3.....	15

Part 2 — His Letters

Chapter 25 — Partakers of the Divine Nature.

2 Peter 1.

The very care which the apostle takes to write a second time to these Hebrew believers, giving them instructions, as to their own pathway, and warning them of the evils coming, is a striking proof that he did not look for a continuance of the apostolic order. The broad outline of the epistle, and the details also, forbid the thought. Indeed, in the second chapter, he shows the terrible state that is coming in, and then that God is going to judge the whole scene.

Peter's 2nd Epistle resembles that of Jude in some respects. The difference between Jude and this epistle is, that while by Peter the Spirit of God speaks a great deal about corruption, it is

in the world, whereas Jude gives you corruption in the Church — in that which bears the name of the Lord — ecclesiastical corruption. You get apostasy in both, especially in Jude.

The careful way in which the apostle seeks to help and guide these believers, to whom he thus writes for a second time, shows that he did not look for any continuation of apostolic authority; so he throws them on the Lord, and His Word. He then takes up the whole question of God dealing with the earth in a manner, and with majesty that suits God's character.

(2 Peter 1: 1,) "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." He addresses them as "a servant and an apostle," and speaks to Jewish believers as in the 1st Epistle. "To them that have obtained like precious faith," while it has a particular application to those to whom he wrote the 1st Epistle, yet has a little wider bearing than the first.

Peter is fond of the word "precious." "Precious blood," "he is precious," and here, "precious faith." He speaks of faith, the fact that you believe, and he says that you get it on the ground of the righteousness of "our God and Saviour." You have this faith through the faithfulness of Him who was the Jehovah of Israel, and who was likewise the Saviour that came down and walked in this world. God has been righteous and faithful, and as the result, spite of the sin of the nation, you have this faith in God's own blessed Son.

(2 Peter 1: 2,) "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." A very customary salutation. Grace is the present favour of God, and peace, the present standing place of the soul. He wishes those blessings to be multiplied. There is where the soul stands, in perfect peace with God; and in the present acceptance of God, and in favour with God, and Peter wishes their apprehension of it multiplied. It is not mercy here, and why? Because you only find mercy brought in where an individual is addressed, because though I may have grace and peace as an individual, yet I need mercy for my soul day by day, as I go through a scene where everything is against me. When it is the Church that is addressed, mercy does not come in, because the Church is always viewed as in relation to Christ, and as having received mercy because of her connection with Christ.

In the Epistle to Philemon, Paul writes to him and "to the church which is in thy house," and that is why mercy is left out there. What might seem an exception, really proves what I have stated, when carefully noted.

How is this grace and peace to be multiplied? "Through the knowledge of God." The intensification of that grace and peace can only come as we walk with God. You show me a person who is walking with God, and I will show you one who gets grace multiplied day by day. You walk closely by Christ, and you will get the peace that He came to give multiplied day by day. There is nothing so difficult as to walk in grace, for on the one hand there is the tendency to looseness, and on the other the tendency to legality. Going as these believers were through a scene of difficulty, no wonder that the apostle wished that grace and peace might be multiplied.

(2 Peter 1: 3, 4,) "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." See how beautifully you get divine power in verse 3, and divine nature in verse 4. In verse 3 we are the subjects of divine power, a divine operation working in us, and giving us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Eternal life is a life that enjoys God, and is suited to God, and godliness is a character that is like God in all its ways down here, a moral likeness to Him. The first thing is a life that is from Himself, and is never occupied with anything but Himself, and then comes godliness, God-likeness.

"Through the knowledge of him that has called us by glory, and virtue." It is the deepening acquaintance with the blessed One who has given to our souls a distinct call, and if there be one thing we are apt to forget, it is our calling. We do not forget our gifts, our blessings, but the thing we are so apt to forget is our calling; and what is our calling? God has called us to glory. We are called to heaven in the first chapter of the 1st Epistle, and here Peter says the God of glory has come out and called us.

The contrast is very striking between the Christian now, and Adam — in innocence. Adam in innocence was responsible to obey God and stop where he was, but our responsibility is, not to stop where we were, for we were in the world; and sin, and lust constituted our nature, but God says, "I have called you out of that, — called you by glory, and virtue." Abraham was called to be a pilgrim; Moses to be a law-giver; Joshua to be a leader; our call is to glory. See, the apostle says, that you have your faces set thither. Glory is the end of the road, and what is to mark us by the way. Virtue, or spiritual energy on the road, of which glory is the end.

What we have to manifest and express is what he calls virtue, spiritual energy. There is nothing more difficult, because it calls on us to refuse the flesh, to refuse the world; like Moses, who "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11: 24, 25).

The man who has this spiritual energy, knows how to say No! to the thousand things in him, and about him, that appeal to his flesh. We give way too often; we lack this energy, and the result is we often fall.

Moses refused earth and its delights, refused the highest place in this world, said No! to the allurements of the flesh and the world, and took his place outside with the despised slaves who were God's people. It needs this virtue, this courage, to do this! Moses refused what nature would have chosen, — the palace, the throne, and the crown of Egypt, — and chose what nature would have refused, namely, to be in company with a set of brick-making slaves! But he saw that they were God's people, and that made all the difference.

How much we need this courage to refuse the world in all its shapes and forms, and to fling ourselves in with a little company of those who love the Lord, and are united to Him.

There is nothing more difficult than to break away from the old things that everybody goes on with, for the power that tradition has over us is wonderful, and it needs this courage to break away from it. These Jewish believers had separated from their religion, their temple, their

ordinances, their observances, — from everything that their nation and their forefathers had gone on with — and had gone simply forth unto Jesus, without the camp. They needed encouragement in their outside place, of contempt and scorn, and Peter gives it to them with a lavish hand.

If we do not keep alive in our souls this virtue, this courage and energy, we shall slip back into the things which once we gave up.

2 Peter 1: 4. All the promises are connected either with this life, or with the glory where we shall be by-and-bye. But the promises couple us with Christ, to this end that "ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We are made partakers of the divine nature in conversion, by being born again, but Peter shows us plainly the sweet result of tasting what the Lord is, and walking with the Lord. He gives you to be a partaker morally of the divine nature, i.e., we are brought into the atmosphere that suits God, breathe the atmosphere He breathes, and, as a result, become *spiritual*. The soul gets enlarged in its sense of what He is. We get first the capacity for the enjoyment of God, and then, as we walk with Him, the deepening enjoyment of God.

Just as much as we enter into the words and the things of our Lord Jesus Christ, we become partakers morally of this divine nature. If you live with the Lord, and walk with the Lord, this will be the result; and you escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. What is lust? Man's will. The apostle is talking here of this state, and of the walk of a saint, who escapes it. You have every thought of the heart brought into captivity to Christ; you are delivered from your own will; you are not even carried off by the imaginings of your own heart; you breathe the holy, pure atmosphere of God's presence, an atmosphere where the soul finds its delight in doing God's will. You once were in the world doing your own will; now you have been delivered, and you do God's will. What a sweet thought it is that when we get up home in the glory all taint of sin will be gone! "Oh, but," says Peter, "you may know a great deal of that down here. You have the new nature that delights in God, and this new nature having room to expand, your peace grows, your grace is multiplied, and you escape the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Paul preaches the same thing, "If ye live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit." And if a man lives in the Spirit, how will he walk? Like Christ! Every thought of Christ's heart was Godward. What will it be by-and-bye when every thought, every movement of our hearts will be Godward? When we get to glory we shall breathe the atmosphere our souls delight in, and we shall breathe it freely, without watchful thought, or trembling fear, lest any Philistine or Amalekite action of the flesh intrude. "Well," says Peter, "you may know something of this down here." Thus he gives them what would cheer and refresh their hearts.

(2 Peter 1: 5-7,) "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." The apostle turns here in verse 5 to the practical state of the believers. Having given them what would comfort and refresh their hearts, he says, That is not all, now I look at your own state practically. "Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge." He knew how easy it was to get slothful, and so he exhorts them to give all diligence in thus adding. Virtue is that energy and courage of soul, that knows how to refuse, as well as to choose, like

Moses, who "*refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," and so we read, "Add to your faith, virtue." You have the faith that connects you with God, and you believe in what as yet you do not see, but now you must add virtue, that courage, which knows how to say "No" to the thousand things that come up day by day, and to press on unswervingly in the pathway that is set before us.

This is not addition in the ordinary sense of the word. Verse 5 should read, "For this very reason using also therewith all diligence, in your faith have also virtue, *in* virtue knowledge," etc. Having all the qualities of the perfect thing, is the thought. You are perfect when you do not lack any of these qualities. A person may give you an apple to taste, because you are a good judge of apples; you taste it, and say, It is very nice, but it lacks sweetness. So you may say of a Christian, "He is a nice Christian, but he lacks temperance." The divine nature in all its qualities is to be seen in the Christian.

I think the word *adding* gives the wrong idea; adding conveys the thought of something fresh introduced. It is rather, Do not be without any of the qualities of this divine life — the life of Christ.

We are left here to manifest Christ, to be the reflection of what He was. This could never be without being made partakers of the Divine nature. Born of God, we receive Christ. Then the life of Christ is be shown — all the qualities of the new nature are to be exhibited — not one trait of Christ's character is to be wanting. We are to be epistles of Christ, read and known of all men. *In* our faith we are to have virtue, etc. These qualities are to exist in us. There should be the full complement — nothing wanting — all the graces present, and showing out. Surely we feel how little we have lived, yea, are living, this divine life. You may find a person who had this energy, but who is a little rough, and so Peter says, There is something else needed, lest this roughness appear, therefore add to virtue knowledge, of God, of the mind and ways of God, and of what suits God, for mere knowledge puffs up, this is the knowledge that humbles.

A man that knows God well, cannot know Him without being in His company, and a person who is near to God is tender in his ways, though there may be energy in him to follow on. We need grace from the Lord for this.

"And to knowledge temperance." Not the mere external restraint, but the cultivation of the inward history of the soul day by day, governing ourselves, keeping ourselves in order: and depend upon it if we cannot keep ourselves in order, we cannot keep any one else. Temperance is that quiet gravity of spirit, that is equable in every circumstance, like Christ, never upset by any trial, or anything that provokes.

"And to temperance patience." Temperance will keep me from saying or doing a thing that will wound you, and patience will keep me from being upset by anything that you may do that is likely to wound me. Temperance is active, patience is passive! If you have not knowledge, you will not know how to meet the mind of God. If you have not temperance you will be sure to do something that will hurt some one else, and if you have not patience you will be upset by what some one else may be doing to you.

"And to patience godliness" — God-likeness. Walking through this scene, and possessing the divine nature, see that you illustrate it, exemplify it! Show me a man's company, and I will show you what sort of a man he is. If you are keeping company with God you will be a godly person, for we all resemble the thing we are occupied with. It comes out in a thousand details of our everyday life.

We have next brotherly kindness, and charity, two things that may seem alike, but are different. Brotherly kindness is a thing that might be merely human, and might degenerate and fade away; for brotherly kindness might only love the lovable sort of people, might be partial, but when I come to charity, it is impartial and unfailing — it is divine. "Charity never fails." In 1 Corinthians 13 there are eight things it does not do, and eight things it does do, and it never breaks down. It is the very thing our souls need as we go through a scene where everything is against us.

Supposing a person repulsed me, and considered my endeavour to show love only as interference; brotherly kindness only might say, "I will not go back to him;" but charity is a divine thing and says, "I think of the blessing and good of the object, and of the glory of God in connection with that object, so I will go back again, and see if I cannot be of use."

Charity is not the love that makes light of evil, but the love that seeks the real good of its object.

We have a perfect guide by which we may learn if we really love the children of God. (1 John 5: 2,) "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments." If you love the Father you love His children. If we love Himself we love His people likewise, and we seek each other's blessing, but are always desiring to meet His mind. We are to act as those who go directly out from God, dependent on Him and obedient to Him, and are to go in grace to seek to help a person, no matter what his state may be. The Lord help us to profit by His Word, and to seek to have these lovely moral qualities in our faith, for there are many beautiful consequences if such be the case.

If there be not this blessed adding, there is sure to be a going back, for there is no such thing as standing still. If we are not progressing, we are retrograding. "Unto every one that hath, shall be given . . . but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." If there be not the desire to press on, to go on with the Lord, what is there? There is only a returning to the things from which the Lord called us out in days gone by. The Lord give us to have diligence of heart in thus adding to our faith, and progressing in the knowledge of Himself.

(2 Peter 1: 8,) "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." From the frequency with which the apostle alludes to the eight things mentioned in verses 5, 6, and 7, it would seem almost impossible to overrate their importance. He brings out the effect of having these things, and the result of not having them.

The end of every dealing of God with our souls is to make Christ better known to us. If a Christian goes on in the exercise of these three verses, you find about that person the savour of

Christ. Peter felt that everything was sheer loss that did not lead the saints to a deeper knowledge of Christ. That which puts us nearer to Christ has this effect, we feel how unlike Christ we are, and also it allures us from the world, so that we are more fit morally to pass through the world.

Many a saint of God feels, I am fit for heaven, but not fit for earth, because I am not sufficiently with the Lord to be equal to the occasions that arise, as I pass through this scene. We feel, our impotence and folly, feel how we have broken down as witnesses for Christ. It is only as Christ becomes better known that there is a fitness to pass through this scene.

(2 Peter 1: 9,) "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." You will say this is a backslider. Not at all! He is confident about his eternal salvation. "But," you say, "he is blind." Quite true; put the things that belong to the Lord before him, he does not see them, he has forgotten too that he was purged from his old sins. What has he forgotten? Has he forgotten that his old sins were purged away? Not a bit! He has forgotten that he was purged away from his old sins, — his habits, and modes of life when unsaved, — and so he has turned back to them again, got back into the world, lost completely the sense of what Christianity is, as being a heavenly thing, and the call of the Christian, as being a heavenly person. There has been a dropping down, and losing sight of the things the Lord has called us to, a dropping down to earth, and its ways, its principles, and its religion likewise. The whole truth has been let go. Bit by bit the standard has been lowered, till there has been a dropping down so far, that the Lord has to awaken the soul in a startling way.

(2 Peter 1: 10, 11,) "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Here the apostle comes in again with the solemn exhortation, Give diligence," and it is a thing we need, this holy diligence of soul to keep up, with purpose of heart, to the thing the Lord has called us to. Peter again alludes, doubtless, in this verse to the terrible fall he had had himself.

"But," you say, "how can we make our calling and election sure?" Who called us? Our Father. Who chose us? Our Father. But this does not do for other people. Who are you to make your calling and election sure with? with the One who called you? the One who chose you? Not a bit, but to yourself, and to every one who watches you, every one who could say, "*You* a called person? You do not look a bit like it. *You* a chosen person? No one would think so." You are to make it manifest to the eyes of every one else that you have been thus called of God. To make our calling and election sure is to be conscious that we are the possessors of eternal life, as John would put it, and to be in the enjoyment thereof. Paul designates it as "laying hold of eternal life" (1 Tim. 6: 19). We may make our calling and election sure by doing the "things" of which Peter speaks, and thus shall not fall, as he once, yea twice, did; and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be assured.

2 Peter 1: 11. That is more than the soul being sustained, and kept of the Lord, though that in itself is a wonderful mercy, for there is many a fall in the history of a child of God, that God and his own heart alone knows of.

But is there not something very beautiful about the path of a Christian of whom, you could say, from the day of his conversion until the Lord took him home, "He never took a backward step, there was not a trip; nothing was manifest but a pathway of beautiful devotedness from first to last." There is no reference here to forgiveness or pardon, but Peter reverts to his great subject of the government of God, and he says, if you have these things and abound, not only will you be kept from falling, but you will have a fine entrance into the kingdom. There passes before his mind the thought of the place, and the portion, and the reward that the saint of God has in the coming kingdom of the Lord; for though the grace of God gives us each a common place in heavenly glory, there is such a thing as the kingdom, and a place in the kingdom, as a reward for the service rendered to the Lord down here. Grace gives us a common place in heavenly glory, but the government of God gives us a distinct, a righteous, and consequently an unequal place in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to service.

It is a question of the reward that each saint gets from the Lord by-and-bye. There is the same difference in this, as there is between two vessels that go abroad to the same port, and encounter the same storms by the way. One has been badly rigged, badly manned, and badly commanded, and though it gets into port, yet it reaches there, with cargo gone, and with sails and masts blown away — a derelict hulk tugged by a steamer. The other vessel comes into port with all sails set, colours flying, everything in order, and cargo safe.

Peter says, If you do not "have these things in remembrance," you will fall down by the road, and there will be a sense of loss at the end. There comes a moment when the soul deeply feels, Would to God I had been devoted to Christ, instead of being worldly, cold, trivial, half-hearted! Most beautifully Peter guards the sheep, lest they should fall into the thing from which he would fain protect them.

(2 Peter 1: 12-14,) "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." We may sometimes think it not worth while to be going over the same things again and again. Not so Peter. And if our hearts are only put in remembrance of these things, God be thanked. It will be blessed fruit to our account in the days to come. Do we not need stirring up? We do. Satan does his utmost to hinder our souls. The Lord lead us to be more watchful, more on our guard against the wiles of the enemy.

(2 Peter 1: 15,) "Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." How persistent Peter is. "To have these things always in remembrance." "These things," are five times spoken of. It is impossible therefore for our souls to over-estimate the value, and the worth of verses 5, 6, 7, to which the apostle thus alludes five times over. The Lord grant we may have them always in remembrance, yea, have them engraven upon the tablets of our hearts. Peter felt there was no apostolic succession, no one to do the work he was doing, after his death. I therefore leave you, he says, in my epistle, that which may always be a blessing and a help to your souls.

In all ages the people of God have clung in a peculiar way to Peter's Epistles. Why, do you think? I believe it is because they come right down to where we are in the world, and meet us so beautifully with a presentation of Christ, which comes to us, and suits us in our need in this world. We have Satan presented as a roaring lion in the 1st Epistle, and as a snake in the grass in the 2nd Epistle, and we have what meets him in both these characters, and preserves us from his devices.

(2 Peter 1: 16-18,) "For we have not followed cunningly, devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." The Jews' idea of the kingdom was the Messiah coming in glory and majesty and power, and their foes all cast out, but the Lord Jesus did not come in that way, and so they rejected Him, and, as far as they were concerned, He was dead, and buried: not gone up into glory. But, says Peter, we have actually seen that very kingdom of the Lord, and been "eye witnesses of his majesty."

The scene to which Peter alludes is narrated in Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9. In these chapters the Lord had been unfolding to the disciples the truth of His rejection. "I am going to suffer and be cast out," He says, "and he who follows me, must expect to share the same fate." But He is coming back again with three-fold glory. His glory as Son of God which He had from all eternity, His glory as the Messiah, King of the Jews — and His glory as Son of Man, according to Psalm 8. Then after telling His disciples of His rejection, He says, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God," and He shows to them on the mount of transfiguration a little miniature picture of the kingdom, and it is to this Peter alludes in this epistle. He had seen this wonderful picture, the Messiah, Moses the lawgiver, and Elias the reformer on that mount, and his heart was full. "Oh," he said, "let us perpetuate this scene." That was the thought in his mind, but that was putting the Messiah, the lawgiver, and the reformer on the same level, and God could not have that, and the voice comes, as Peter says, "from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is to be noticed that in the Gospels, God added the words, "Hear him." Peter needed these words then, as he was lowering his Master, while uplifting Moses and Elias. He learned his lesson, however, and here, in quoting the Father's words, he omits "Hear him." The truth was that by this time he had learned that no other voice but Jesus' was to be listened to.

There was the lesson to Peter of the personal glory of the Son, but likewise the introduction to his mind of the heavenly, as well as the earthly side of the kingdom. Moses and Elias are figures of the heavenly side; Moses had died, and Elias had gone up without death, just as it will be when the Lord comes for His people; He will raise those who have died, and will take up without dying those who are alive. Peter, James, and John are a picture of those saints on earth, who though they see Christ's glory, yet are on the earth all through the millennium.

Peter had seen this picture of the coming kingdom, and he sweetly confirms the faith of the Jewish believers by putting them in mind of what he had seen.

(2 Peter 1: 19,) "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts." Prophecy always relates to the earth. It describes the future dealings of God with the earth, when He sweeps the scene of all that is ungodly, and prepares it for the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Church is a heavenly thing, does not belong to earth at all, and Peter says, You do well to take heed to prophecy, because, if you look into prophecy, it will tell you that the world through which you are passing is going to be judged, and therefore, by the light of this, you will go through the world, as through a judged scene, without being mixed up with it at all.

What I find given in Scripture is, that the Lord will reign over the earth, but He sets the earth right first, and therefore I find I cannot do without prophecy. It is a very good thing, because it tells me what God is going to do with the earth, viz., sweep the whole scene with the besom of destruction, and fit it for Christ; but to have prophecy only before our hearts would be a great mistake, because prophecy is not Christ, and nothing does for the heart but Christ.

The Old Testament prophecies did not give what Peter gives now, "till the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." I do not think the apostle means till Christ arise as "Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings," as Malachi puts it. That is the day of the Lord, not the Gospel, as many think and preach. The *day* is not come yet, but let me ask you, Has not the day dawned in your heart yet? Do you not belong to the day? Yes, of course you do, if you are a Christian; the day has dawned in your heart, and along with that, the Morning Star, Christ Himself, the object of the saint's hope in heavenly glory. It is Peter bringing in for a moment the coming of the Lord. He says, as it were, prophecy is all very well, but the Lord Himself is coming; that is the thing for your hearts. He is "the root and the offspring of David" for the Jew. He is the "bright morning star" for our hearts. As He says to the remnant in Thyatira, — to the overcomer — "I will give him the morning star." That is, for the overcomer is the portion sure, heavenly joy with Christ above, before the kingdom comes. This is what you and I are looking for now, the day having dawned in our hearts, we know that our portion is with Christ up there, and we know that before He comes to judge the earth, He is to come for us to be with Him for ever. We do not expect a single event to take place before the Lord comes for us; we do not wait for anything but the morning star, the coming of the Lord. He is to come for His people, and this is to be the pole star of the saint's life.

(2 Peter 1: 20, 21,) "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We must not limit Scripture. The value of Scripture is this, it is all connected with Christ, and prophecy has not its full scope till everything has been brought in that is connected with Christ in His coming kingdom and glory. Those who are looking for the fulfilment of prophecy before the Lord comes for us, miss the joy of waiting for Christ. They see some close similarity between prophecy and some passing event, but they do not know what it is to watch for the bright and morning star.

When the Lord has taken us out of the scene, what will take place? Every prophecy of Scripture will be fulfilled, and when He gets His right place, by-and-bye, you and I will be by His side, reigning with Him over this earth where He died for us, where His precious blood was

shed for us. What a blessed thing for us to know Him now, and to be true to Him now, in this scene of His rejection, knowing that the time is soon coming when He shall have His rightful place on this earth again. But before that day comes He will have come first for us, and have taken us up to be with Himself in the Father's house, and this is what we look for, and therefore I say that our portion is the best, for though prophecy is good, Christ Himself is better, and Christ Himself is our portion.

The Lord give us to be waiting and watching for Him who is "the bright and morning star!"

CHAPTER 26 — DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM.

2 Peter 2.

IN the two following chapters of this epistle, we have the apostle drawing our attention — the attention of all believers — to two forms of evil that characterise the last days. Chapter 2 presents to us the false and bad teaching of evil men; unsound doctrine coupled with wicked practices. Chapter 3 indicates the rapid growth of infidelity and scoffing, which we see all round about us in the present day, — the unbelief which denies the return of the Lord, on the ground of the stability of the visible creation.

If I had any doubt about the truth of Scripture, I should have that doubt removed by reading the 2nd Epistle of Peter, because we have all round about us now, the very thing which the Spirit of God warns us here about.

(2 Peter 2: 1,) "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." "Denying the Lord that bought them" is denying the claims of Christ, who is the Lord that bought them. This must not be confused with the thought of redemption, because redemption and purchase are very different. Every child of God is *redeemed*, every *man* is not redeemed, but every man is *bought*. Matthew 13 says, that the merchantman bought the *field*, because of the treasure hid in it, and explains too that the field is the world. By His death Christ, as man, has obtained authority over every man.

Thus Christ is the master of all the "Despot." The figure is taken from a man going into the slave market, and buying slaves. Thus too, Peter, when speaking in Acts 10, says, "He is Lord of all," and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 says, "The head of every man is Christ." So here Peter says He is "the Lord that bought them." If I go into the slave market and buy a slave, my *purchase* only makes the slave change masters. *Redemption* knocks the shackles off the slave, and leaves him free. Purchase perpetuates bondages, redemption brings into perfect freedom.

(2 Peter 2: 2,) "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Alas, we know well that what Peter says would take place has been fully enacted in Christendom. There has been a throwing off of the claims of Christ, even by those who profess His name; and the way of truth is evil spoken of by those outside, because of the evil ways of those who profess to know the Lord.

(2 Peter 2: 3,) "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." Here he lays bare to the core ecclesiastical pretensions. Babylon sells the souls of men (Rev. 18: 13). It is a solemn thing to be connected practically with such a state of things. By covetousness and hypocritical words these false teachers would make merchandise of Christians for their private gain. What is known as simony — the sale of souls — is here indicated. But God's judgment should overtake all such.

(2 Peter 2: 4-9,) "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of, righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." Here he cites the dealings of God in bygone years, and shows what the Lord will yet do. Here (ver. 4) is a very remarkable statement about the angels. The connection is plain between this verse, and Jude 6, but the contrast is striking. Peter speaks of "the angels that sinned"; Jude says, they left "their first estate." Peter speaks of self-will; Jude speaks of apostasy; for Jude is describing the terrible corruption in the Church, out of which the saint of God is to pick his way.

It is important to see what apostasy is. It is leaving first estate, the place in which God has put you. That is what Adam did. He was an apostate, and there is the difference between Adam and Christ. What was apostasy in Adam, was perfection in Christ. Adam's leaving his first estate was apostasy, for it was self-will and disobedience; whereas in Christ it was perfect obedience and doing the will of God His Father. He humbled Himself, and God exalted Him, and to you and me the apostle says by the Spirit of God, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

Peter is perfectly clear as to what the judgment of God must be upon these wicked men. Faith quietly waits on God, and has its resource in Him, assured the day will come when He must vindicate His own character, let scoffers say what they will; and, in the meantime, He looks for His people to be godly in the midst of the evil.

The Lord looks that we should be like Lot in this respect: our righteous souls vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. In contrast with everything that we see around us, the Lord looks that we should be godly; for" the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

(2 Peter 2: 10, 11,) "But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord." That which is given us in these verses is the very thing that is coming up now in our own day, the principle of self-will. That which would characterise this

class of evil-doers would be the allowance of unbridled license in their conduct. They fling off, first, the authority of Christ, and then every other kind of authority likewise, and that is just what we see around us at this present time. We live in a radical day, and religious radicalism I believe to be the most offensive of all to God.

He has ordained government in the world, and in the Church, but Peter shows us what the world comes to. It comes to this, that all authority is despised.

There is not to be any place for the will of the flesh in the presence of God, and there is a certain order in God's government which we cannot traverse without doing very great and serious damage. Subjection is greatly pressed on us in Scripture. The reverse of this is rampant.

On every hand this despising of authority is rising up: it is the fatal principle that is ruining families, nations, and the Church, and which will be headed up in the "man of sin" who will fall, by-and-bye, under the swift destruction of Christ.

(2 Peter 2: 12-19,) "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." It is a very solemn state which the Spirit of God shows us here. These verses describe the persons who get into this line of things, and show what their end is.

The description is most dreadful. It contemplates this character of things even among the teachers. They prophesy for gain merely, like Balaam, and the effect is, "they allure through the lusts of the flesh, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error," because, you must remember, for every form of temptation there is some distinct response in our nature, there is something in us to answer to what Satan presents. We could not have believed this could come in among professing Christians, unless God Himself had said so. But He has warned us that we may have our eyes open to it, and be on our watch to guard against it day by day. Those spoken of here call themselves Christians, yet indulge their lusts, and despise authority in a way angels would shrink from. They would feast with the real Christians — taking part, I suppose, in their love-feasts — deceiving themselves, while corrupting others. They yield themselves unreservedly to evil, and while promising others liberty, become themselves the very slaves of moral corruption. Such would Christendom become, Peter tells us. Such has it become, we know. The best thing is always the worst if it become corrupted.

(2 Peter 2: 20,) "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." These have been for the moment practically delivered from the pollution of the world; not by conversion, not by having been born again, but through the outward knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now, to be thus re-entangled in evil, after having once escaped it through the professed knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, was infinitely worse than if they had not known the way of truth at all.

Those who refuse and despise Christianity forget to tell you how much man owes to Christianity. The world has benefited morally, civilly, and socially from the light God has given in His Word, and by the effects of Christianity; but now-a-days all this is forgotten, and it is the fashion to pooh-pooh the whole thing, as an old-world fable.

The effect of Christianity has been to deliver people from the pollutions of the world. The truth has been mentally received, and thus has delivered them, but it has not been received by the conscience, else it would have remained, and worked by divine grace in the heart.

When people have given up the truth they once have known, if even intellectually only, they become always the bitterest enemies of the truth of Christ, therefore let us beware of giving up one bit of the truth God has given us. Here it runs the length of open apostasy from God. It is a far worse thing to have known the truth and given it up, through flesh being allowed, and the world pandered to, than never to have known it.

(2 Peter 2: 21,) "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." In the early part of the chapter it was the godly and ungodly who were spoken of. Here it is the holy commandment, in contrast with what these evil teachers tried to bring in, and did bring in.

(2 Peter 2: 22,) "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Who vomited? The dog. And who went back to the vomit? The dog. It was a dog all the time, not a clean beast ever. And though the sow was washed, it was still a sow, only washed, and never made a clean beast, never anything but a sow, not a sheep. You cannot wash a sow into a sheep. Before the sow was washed, she was a dirty sow, and after she was washed she was a clean sow, so long as she was restricted by some external influence, as a rope, for instance. That rope she soon gnawed through or broke, and back she went to wallow in the mire, just because she was still a sow. Her nature was unchanged. So is it with the unconverted, but only externally affected professor of Christ.

He is not a person born of God, or renewed, but is merely externally affected by the truth of Christianity. It is man as man, and as soon as the restraint is taken off, back he goes to the thing he likes. If a Christian gets away from Christ, and gets mixed up with the pollutions of the world, he is miserable. Take a sow to the mire, what will it do? Wallow in it again; it has no shrinking from the mire. But take a sheep to the mire, does it desire to get into it? No, it is only too thankful to be taken out, if through accident it has fallen in. So is it with the real Christian.

He may, and alas! often does fail and sin; but, like Peter, he is never happy till he has got back to his Lord, and been washed, and restored and forgiven.

CHAPTER 27 — WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?

2 Peter 3

IN this chapter Peter says men will assail all the truth of revelation, on the ground that creation has been always what it now appears. This is mere materialism. It is man's trust in what he can see, rather than trust in God's Word, which assures us that the Lord Jesus will yet come back to this scene.

(2 Peter 3: 1-4,) "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." It is always when people want to follow their own lusts that they begin to scoff. It may not be outward and gross lusts, but man wants to be independent, to gratify himself, and therefore he thinks he must get rid of God, get rid of His authority; and he would be glad to get rid of God out of the scene altogether if he could.

These scoffers say, The only thing that is durable and abiding is creation. It began far away in remote space; how it came we do not know exactly, but it came, and it goes on, and as for the promise of the coming of the Son of God, it is absurd. "Where is the promise of his coming?" they say scoffingly. Judging by appearances, they say that there is no change since the beginning. This is false. The eye of man may not have detected any change, but the Word of God assures us that there has been.

But if they scoff at the Lord's coming, they are obliged to let in creation, and if creation comes in there must be the Creator, and who is the Creator? There they are silenced.

(2 Peter 3: 5, 6,) "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." There are some of the wise men of this world who tell you that you must not believe in the flood. They will tell you it is impossible, and that to believe that there ever was such a thing as the flood is a great mistake. Ah! says Peter, you like to believe that there was no flood, and I will tell you why? Because, if you admit the flood, you admit the judgment of God upon wickedness, and if you admit the judgment of God upon wickedness once, then it is more than probable He will judge a second time. So men will not have it: their will is in question again. They are wilfully ignorant of the solemn fact that the world has once been judged. Emerging as it did by the word of God from the waters, these same waters at His bidding swallowed it up and all on it, save those in the ark of His providing.

(2 Peter 3: 7-9,) "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." It was God's own word that called these heavens and this earth into existence as they now are, and by the same word the yet existing heavens and earth are reserved for the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise of returning, but He is long-suffering in grace, not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance.

We understand God's gracious slowness. There is but one thing God is always slow about; and that is judgment. He never judges till He has warned, and given space for repentance. How swift He is to save! How quick to bring peace to the troubled conscience! He is only slow to judge. He has not come because He wants souls to be saved! His long-suffering is salvation.

He wills that every soul that trusts the blood of His Son should be saved, but He is not willing that any should perish, for He desires that all should come (or go forward) to repentance.

(2 Peter 3: 10,) "But the day of the Lord will. come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." This is coincident with the great white throne, and the heaven and the earth fleeing away, as spoken of in the 20th chapter of the Revelation.

You have the effect of this mighty conflagration given you in Revelation, whereas you have what produces that effect given you by the apostle Peter here. Man's infidel thought is, that everything is so stable that it can never be moved.

Man says mere materialism is the right thing. Stop, says Peter, the thing that you are resting upon, the eternal continuance of all things, is a delusion, it is all going to be dissolved. Everything on which the hopes of the flesh are founded will disappear for ever.

(2 Peter 3: 11) "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" The very fact of the mistake of the scoffer, and that everything is going to be dissolved, leads the child of God into soberness and a godly walk, seeing what is coming upon the world. The consideration of these solemn facts should lead the children of God to occupy a very distinct place, and maintain complete separation from all evil, as they look for and hasten on the day here spoken of. "Holy conversation" is to mark them.

It is very noticeable how Peter refers constantly to our conversation. In his 1st Epistle he tells us we have been redeemed from "*vain* conversation" (1 Peter 1: 18), i.e., religiousness which has its spring in flesh, and its attempted satisfaction in forms. Then he bids us have our "*conversation honest* among the Gentiles" (1 Peter 2: 12). All is to be above board, and fair in our dealings with men of the world. Thereafter he directs the wives to win their unconverted

husbands by "*chaste* conversation" (1 Peter 3: 2). Following on this he enjoins on us all that our "*good* conversation in Christ" (1 Peter 3: 16) should put to shame, and silence all false accusers. Coming now to the 2nd Epistle, he holds up Lot as a warning not to mix with the world, as its "*filthy* conversation" (2 Peter 2: 7) vexed him, and must assuredly act similarly on us. In contrast with this he urges, in the verse under contemplation, that which is to mark the child of God, viz., "*holy* conversation."

What an immense mercy the knowledge of Christ confers on the soul! It delivers us from conversation that is "vain" and "filthy," and begets in the soul that which is "honest," "chaste," "good," and "holy." What a contrast!

Nor is Peter alone in his estimate of careful conversation, and by this word I understand, not only speech, but ways, habits, and manner of life. James tritely says, "Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? Let him show out of *a good* conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3: 13). Paul illustrates in his own history the importance and secret power of all this as he says, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3: 20).

(2 Peter 3: 12, 13,) "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The day of the Lord lasts a long time, and this conflagration is at the end of the day of the Lord, but we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, i.e., the eternal state.

There are but three passages that allude to the eternal state — 2 Peter 3, Rev. 21, and 1 Cor. 15. Christ rules as Son of God, and Son of Man, all through the Millennium, but when the Millennium has closed "then cometh the end," when death itself is destroyed. How does He destroy death? By bringing all the wicked dead to life again, and casting them into the lake of fire (Rev. 20: 14). He then has put every enemy under his feet, and gives up the kingdom to God. Every other king has had his kingdom taken from him by death or by violence; Christ alone gives up His, kingdom, after reigning a thousand years. There are three spheres of righteousness; *now* righteousness *suffers*; in the Millennium righteousness *reigns*; in the eternal state righteousness *dwells*. It has found repose, it dwells where God is for evermore.

Now, says Peter, you who are looking for all this in eternity, you must take care to be now without spot and blame, till He comes.

(2 Peter 3: 15, 16), "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." A beautiful touch is this about Paul's writings. Peter forgot how Paul had withstood him to the face at Antioch, and been compelled to put him to shame before all. This is what grace can do. Grace is a fine thing, and this is a fine touch of it, as the curtain drops on the Apostle Peter. Every ruffle in his heart that the scene at Antioch may have produced had

been stilled for ever, and he only loved Paul, and loved him the more deeply, because of his faithfulness.

In connection with Paul's writings, it may be noticed here that, beside the occasion already referred to at Antioch, he thrice mentions Peter in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Some at Corinth were saying "And I of Cephas" (1 Cor. 1: 12), This sectarian speech I can quite well Believe Peter would not approve of. Again, where apostolic right to be supported is spoken of, Paul says, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas" (1 Cor. 9: 5). From this one would gather that Peter's wife accompanied him on his missionary tours. The third mention of Peter is that which cites him as a witness of the Lord's resurrection, "And that he was seen of Cephas" (1 Cor. 15: 5).

(2 Peter 3: 17,) "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." We are surrounded by these elements, by doubt, and scepticism, and infidelity, and, "Beware," God says, "lest ye fall."

(2 Peter 3: 18,) "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Oh, let Christ be the One that is kept before your heart and mind, growing daily in the practical knowledge of what His favour is! The special truth of any dispensation is always the chief point of attack on Satan's part. Let us remember this, for the devil detected is always the devil defeated. What then can keep our hearts? Christ, and nothing but Christ. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, says Peter. They are good and holy words.

The Lord fix in our hearts His own truth, and give us to be watchful and prayerful, lest we fall from that steadfastness which He looks for in His people, but let us grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Christ till the day of His return. "To him be glory, both now and for ever Amen."