

2 Peter

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2 Peter 1

IN HIS SECOND EPISTLE the apostle Peter addressed himself to the same believers — Christian Jews scattered throughout Asia Minor — as in his first. This fact is not directly stated in the opening verses, but 2 Peter 3: 1 makes it quite apparent. In the salutation with which the Epistle opens he simply describes them as those who had received a like precious faith to himself "through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

They had believed the gospel just as he had believed it, and such faith wherever found in the heart is indeed precious. Still the reference here is to the faith of Christianity which is precious beyond all words. The Jews religion could not be called *a faith*. It began with *sight* at Sinai. It consisted in a law of demand coupled with a *visible* system — "ordinances of divine service and a worldly sanctuary" (Heb. 9: 1) — which was a shadow of good things to come. They had turned from this, which looked like the substance but was only the shadow, to embrace the precious faith of Christ which looks to unbelievers like a shadow, but which is really the substance.

This precious faith has only come to us by the advent of the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and He came as the demonstration of the righteousness of *our* God. The word "our" should be inserted as the margin of a reference Bible will show, and it is worthy of being noted. Writing as a converted Jew to converted Jews "our God" would signify "Israel's God" who had displayed His righteousness in His faithfulness to His ancient promises and intervened on their behalf, and on ours, by the sending of the Saviour, as the result of which so precious a faith is ours.

Now the Lord Jesus who came as our Saviour, according to verse 1, also is the Revealer by whom we have the true knowledge of God, as verse 2 indicates and all grace and peace is enjoyed by us in proportion as we really know God Himself and the Lord Jesus. Indeed it is through the knowledge of our Saviour God that all things relating to life and godliness are ours.

It will help to the understanding of this passage if you begin by noting that: —

1. Verse 3 and the first part of verse 4 speak of things which are given by the power of God to each and every believer.

2. The latter part of verse 4 gives us the object God had in view in what He has given.

3. Verses 5 to 7 indicate the way in which we are responsible to work out into practical effect that which we have received, so that God's object is reached. We are to be marked by expansion and growth. That which "divine power" (verse 3) has given, our "diligence" (verse 5) is to expand.

What has divine power given to us? All things relating to life and godliness. We have not merely

received life but with it all these things necessary that the new life may be manifested in practical Christian living and godly behaviour. The Apostle does not stop to specify the things given save to remind us that we have promises of an exceedingly great and precious kind. He really uses in fact the superlative word "greatest," for nothing could surpass the hopes of the Christian which centre in the coming of the Lord. Still a few moments' reflection might serve to remind us of *some* of the gifts that divine power has conferred upon us: — the Holy Spirit indwelling us, the Word of God written for us, the throne of Grace opened to us, to name but three. We have received however, not *some* but ALL things that have to do with life and godliness. Hence we are sent forth thoroughly furnished. Nothing is lacking upon God's part.

All these things have reached us through the knowledge of God as the One who has called us "to" or "by glory and virtue" (See margin). We are of course called *to* glory (See 1 Pet. 5: 10). Here the point is that both glory and virtue characterize our call. We are called to live in the energy of that glory which is our destiny and end, and of that virtue or courage which will carry us through to the end.

These things, one and all, are ours that by them we might be "partakers of the divine nature." Every true believer is "born of God" and in that sense partakes of the divine nature (See 1 John 3: 9); consequently he does righteousness and walks in love (See 1 John 2: 29, 1 John 3: 10). The meaning of our passage however is not that by the things given to us we might be born again, for Peter was writing to those who were already "born again" (1 Pet. 1: 23). It is rather that by these things we might be led into a practical and experimental partaking of the divine nature. In one word, *love* is the divine nature and hence verses 5 to 7 depict the growth of the believer as culminating in love. "Charity" or *love*, the divine nature, is the ultimate thing. The believer whose heart is full of the love of God is truly partaker of the divine nature, in the sense of this passage.

All the corruption that is in the world is the fruit of lust. The word "lust" covers all the desires which spring from man's fallen nature. The law of Moses came in and imposed its restraint upon man's fallen desires, but instead of the law really restraining lust the lusts of men broke through the restraints of law and continued to spread their corruption around. All the corruptions of the world originate in man's fallen nature. We, believers, are brought to partake in the divine nature, whence springs holiness, and hence we are lifted out of and escape the corruption. In the strength of what is divine we are lifted out of what is natural to us as sinners, and there is no other way of escape than this.

Now note the words with which verse 5 begins. "*And beside this.*" That is to say, beside all that is freely conferred upon us by "His divine power" there is needed something on our side. And that something is "*all diligence.*"

The work, even in our hearts and lives as believers, is all God's work, yet we must not because of that drop into a kind of fatalism as though there were nothing for us to do. We must rather remember that it pleases God to use human means in connection with much of His working, and that He has ordained that the way to spiritual prosperity for each individual believer should be by means of that believer's own spiritual diligence. This is not surprising for it is quite in accord with what we see in natural things. In the book of Proverbs we have divine wisdom applied to natural things and there we read, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." (Proverbs 22: 29).

Hence with all diligence we are to add to our faith virtue and all the other things enumerated in verses 5 to 7. Another version renders it, "In your faith have also virtue, in virtue knowledge" &c. If the former translation gives the idea of building, as though one were adding brick to brick, the latter gives the idea of growth. The bud upon the apple tree in the spring has within it in germ the luscious apple

that hangs in autumn time in the same spot. Yet in the production of the apple many things have played their part, the sunshine and the rain, and the life energies of the tree which have enabled it to suck up from the soil the required moisture and other matter. Without the life energy of the tree all else would have been in vain as far as the production of an apple was concerned.

Now we are to be marked by diligent energy after this fashion. The beautiful traits of Christian character which lie in germ in every Christian are then expanded in us and in our faith is found virtue or courage. If there be not virtue which enables us to stand out clear and distinct from the world our faith becomes itself a very sickly thing.

In virtue we are to have knowledge. Virtue imparts great strength to one's character, but except strength is used according to knowledge, and that knowledge the highest and best of all — the knowledge of God and His will — it may become a dangerous thing.

In knowledge we must have temperance, or moderation. If ruled by knowledge only we may very easily become creatures of extremes. The believer of great intellectual clearness may easily so act as to imperil the welfare of his less discerning brethren, as Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 show us. Hence the need of temperance.

In temperance we are to have patience, or endurance. We are bound to be tried and tested. The believer of endurance wins through.

In patience, godliness, or piety. We learn to live in the consciousness of the presence of God. We see God in our circumstances and act as beneath His eye.

In godliness, brotherly kindness; for we are now able to adjust ourselves fittingly in regard to our fellow-believers. We view them too in relation to Christ and as begotten of God, and not according to our whims and fancies, our own partialities, our likes or dislikes.

In brotherly kindness we are to have charity, or love; that is divine love, the love that goes on loving the naturally unlovely, since now the fountain of love is within and hence love has not to be excited by the presentation without of what may appeal to one personally. The believer who by diligent spiritual growth loves after this fashion is a partaker of the divine nature in a very practical manner, and is fruitful as verse 8 plainly declares.

These things, you notice, are to be *in us* and abound. They are not like garments to be put *on us* for then they might be put *off* on occasions. Like fruit they are the product and expansion of the divine life within, and if they abound in us they prove us to be neither "barren" — or "idle" — "nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Idleness is the opposite to diligence. Which are we, idle or diligent? Some Christians are very diligent in money-making and even diligent in pleasure-seeking, but idle in the things of God. Is it any wonder they spiritually languish? Others while paying the necessary heed to their business or work are diligent in the things of God. No one need be surprised that they spiritually flourish.

Verses 8 and 9 of our chapter present to us a strong contrast. The diligent believer who grows spiritually, and in whom consequently the fruit of the Spirit is found abundantly, is neither idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. On the other hand, it is alas! possible for a believer to be, temporarily at least, both idle and unfruitful and to be consequently in the sad plight that verse 9 portrays. Such are blind and short-sighted, and their spiritual memory is decayed.

The backslider of verse 9 is evidently a true believer. It does not say that he *never* was purged from his old sins; much less does it say that having been once saved he is *now no longer purged* from

his sins; but that he has forgotten the purging of his former sins. *Purged* he was, but he has forgotten it. We must distinguish, therefore, between the backsliding of this verse and the backsliding referred to in Hebrews 6, and in the parable of the sower (See, Luke 8: 13).

In Hebrews, the backslider is an apostate who falls away from the Christian faith into such a repudiation of it as involves the crucifying *to himself* the Son of God afresh, and his case is altogether hopeless.

In the parable of the sower, the backslider is one who receives the word in the mind and emotions, without it ever penetrating to the conscience. Such profess conversion, but without reality, and presently fall away. Their case, though difficult, is not hopeless, for they may subsequently be really and truly converted to God.

Here, however, it is the true believer, and, if any were disposed to question whether these things could ever be true of such, we can point to a sad episode in Peter's own history where he illustrated what he states in this verse. Had we seen Peter's *blindness* as to his own weakness on the night of the betrayal, had we seen him *short-sightedly* running into the most perilous position as he warmed himself by the fire amid the enemies of the Lord, and then when entrapped by the maidservant, breaking out into a painful exhibition of his former sins of cursing and swearing, we should have seen how, for the moment at least, he had *forgotten how he had been purged*.

And we certainly are no better nor stronger than Peter. How often have we each sadly illustrated verse 9?

Our preservation from it lies, of course, in that diligence to which Peter exhorts us. The way not to go back is to go on. Having these things abounding *in us* (verse 8) and *doing* them (verse 10) we shall be preserved from falling, and thus it will be manifest that we are indeed the called and chosen of God.

How did the other disciples regard Peter after his disastrous backsliding? Probably they feared for a moment that he might prove himself to be a second Judas. Evidently they questioned if, indeed, he were really one of themselves. Hence the special message, "Tell His disciples *and Peter*" (Mark 16: 7). They were not at all sure of his "calling and election."

To the earnest simple-hearted Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." How did he so confidently *know*? Read the first chapter of the 1st Epistle and see what amazing progress they had made in the short time since their conversion. It was impossible, therefore, to doubt their election. They had made it sure.

The vitality and fruitfulness which mark the diligent believer not only give demonstration of his calling and election in the present, but also are full of promise for the future. Ahead of us lies "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," and though every Christian will enter that kingdom, it is the fruitful Christian who will have an abundant entrance, as verse 11 makes plain.

The "everlasting kingdom" is not heaven. No one gains heaven as the result of diligence or fruitfulness; nor do some gain an abundant and others a meagre entrance there. There is no entrance into heaven save through the work of Christ — a work perfect and available alike for all who believe — so that all who enter at all enter in the same way and on the same footing without distinction.

The everlasting kingdom will be established when Jesus comes again, and in connection with it rewards will be given as the parable of Luke 19: 12-27 teaches us, There will consequently be great differences as to the places that believers will occupy in the kingdom, and our entrance into it may be

abundant or the reverse. All will depend upon our diligence and faithfulness. The remembrance of this will certainly stir us to zeal and devotedness.

Knowing this, and knowing also how very easily and quickly we forget even the things that we are well acquainted with, the Apostle Peter, as a diligent shepherd of souls, reminded them of these things again and again. They knew these things; indeed they were established in the truth that had come to light in Christ — the *present* truth — yet what they needed was to be "put in remembrance." How much more do we need these reminders, the object being as Peter said, "*to stir you up.*"

Take note of this! We may listen to addresses or read articles which contain no truth that is new to us. Let us not therefore despise them. The main function of a teacher may be to instruct in the truth of Christianity, truth which however old in itself, is largely new to those whom he instructs. The main function of a pastor or shepherd is to get at the hearts and consciences of believers, applying to them the things in which they have been instructed, stirring them up and keeping them in an exercised and watchful condition. Do not most of us need the latter ministry more than the former? To practise more consistently what we do know is probably for us a more urgent necessity than to enlarge the area of our knowledge.

Now Peter looked on to the hour of his death. The Lord Jesus had hinted at his death and the manner of it, as recorded in John 21: 18, 19. By this time he knew that it was to take place shortly. Is it not striking that Peter should *need* to be told that he is going to die? What a testimony to the fact that not death but the coming of the Lord is really the hope of the Christian.

But see what use Peter made of this knowledge, and how he practised the diligence which in this chapter he has pressed upon others. Verse 15 more literally translated runs: — "But I will use diligence, that after my departure ye should have also, at any time [in your power] to call to mind these things" — and then he goes on to enforce the reality and certainty of the coming kingdom of which he began to speak in verse 11, without stopping to indicate just what he purposed to do. It is very evident, however that what he purposed and accomplished under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was the writing of the Epistle that we are now reading. By means of it we can now at any time call to mind these things, though Peter's voice is long since silent.

Observe that there is here no mention of the rising up of a further race of apostles or inspired men, no apostolic succession. What is indicated as taking the place of the apostles is *Scripture* — particularly the apostolic writings, in other words, *The New Testament*. No teacher can possibly speak with the inspired authority of Scripture. If we neglect our Bibles, we shall listen to the best of men in vain.

We have just had our minds stirred up by the fact that diligence is to have its reward when the day of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord is come. Peter, however, was writing to people who had from the days of their fathers cherished the hope of Messiah's kingdom, and who had lived to see Him rejected and crucified. Were they tempted then to wonder if after all the prophecies of His glorious and actual kingdom embracing both earth and heaven were to be interpreted as but figures of speech — glowing and poetic descriptions of what was after all but a spiritual and invisible estate in heaven? It may well have been so, for we are naturally creatures of extremes. People who once thought everything of Messiah's promised advent in public glory and nothing of His advent in humiliation, are likely, when convinced of His coming to suffer, to think everything of that and nothing of His kingdom and glory.

The power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ so long foretold in prophetic testimony, is, however, no "cunningly devised fable," and Peter is able to bear such a witness to its substantial reality as is conclusive. In verses 16 to 18 he says to us, in effect, "The prophetic testimony is true and the

kingdom foretold is a substantial reality to be displayed in its season, *for we have seen it already in sample form*. He alluded, of course, to the transfiguration scene recorded in three out of the four gospels, and witnessed by himself, James and John.

Not many years ago a few men began to talk of a new kind of silky fabric produced not from the cocoons of a caterpillar, but from *wood* — of all things in the world! Folk were incredulous, it sounded like a fable. Proof was soon forthcoming though, of a quite conclusive sort. The stuff was produced in sample; not tons of it but ounces only. The substantial reality of artificial silk was as fully proved then by those ounces as it is now by the countless thousands of stockings displayed in shop windows all over the world.

The glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus has long ago been seen in sample form by chosen witnesses. Indeed, the manifestation of it appeared not only to their eyes, but to their ears also. They were "*eye-witnesses* of His majesty," and also "*this voice which came from heaven we heard*" — the voice which came from the "*excellent glory*" saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

Some may, however, wish to enquire in what way the transfiguration scene was a sample of the "*power and coming*" of the Lord, and thus confirmatory of His glorious kingdom? It was so, inasmuch as He was the central and glorified Object of all. Saints enjoying a heavenly portion were represented in Moses and Elijah. Saints upon earth were represented by Peter, James and John. The heavenly saints associated with Him, and entering intelligently into His thoughts in conversation. The earthly saints blessed by His presence, though dazzled by His glory. It was a sight of "*the Son of man coming in His kingdom*" (Matt. 16: 28); a sight of "*the kingdom of God come with power*" (Mark 9: 1); a sight of "*the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9: 27).

The glorious and everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus is then a blessed and substantial reality. It is certainly coming. We shall enter into it as called of God to its "*heavenly*" side (2 Tim. 4: 18). The question that remains to be settled is — in what way shall we enter it? Will your entrance and mine be an abundant entrance? Shall we enter like a trim and well-appointed ship entering port in full sail? Shall we enter rather as a battered and tattered wreck? The answer to that is going to be given by us each in the spiritual diligence or spiritual sloth and carelessness that marks us day by day.

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus was not only a special and particular confirmation of the reality of His coming kingdom, but it also in a general way was a confirmation of the whole prophetic testimony of the Old Testament. This is what the opening words of verse 19 state, "*and we have the prophetic word made surer*" (N.Tr.). This is not difficult to understand if we search the Old Testament and observe how all its glowing predictions centre in the Messiah's Kingdom on earth, so that to establish the reality of His glorious coming Kingdom, was to establish the whole prophetic witness of the Old Testament.

These early Jewish Christians were perhaps somewhat inclined to ignore Old Testament prophecy, as though it were superseded by the developments as to the sufferings of Christ, so unexpected by them. The Apostle Peter here assures them of its value and importance for it is as a "*light [or, lamp] that shineth in a dark place.*" The word in the original translated "*dark*" is one which means "*squalid*" or "*filthy.*" This world with all its clever inventions and elegant splendour is only a squalid place in God's estimation, as also in the estimation of every Christian who is taught of Him. The only real light shed in the squalor is that which comes from the lamp of prophecy. Men indulge in vain imaginings as to the "*millennium*" which they will evolve from the present filth. Such imaginings are just a Will-o'-the-wisp. The lamp of prophecy brings us into the light of God's purpose and God's

coming work of both judgment and salvation, and it enables us to see the squalor of the world that is, as well as the glory of the world to come.

We are to take heed to the light of the prophetic lamp "until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." "The day" is of course *Christ's day* — the day of His glory — then the lamp will be no longer needed. Before the day dawns however the day star arises, and before it actually arises, it is to arise in our hearts.

The "day" or "morning" star is an allusion to Christ coming for His own, who wait for Him, before He appears publicly to the world as "the Sun of righteousness." As the day star He is distinctively the Christian's hope, and when the day star arises in a believer's heart, that believer is in the joyful expectation of the coming of his heavenly Saviour. We are to take heed then to the word of prophecy until the day of Christ's glory dawns, and until we are led thereby into the full enjoyment of our proper Christian hope, for New Testament prophecy has brought into view that which was never mentioned in the Old Testament. To put the matter into other words, the end of prophecy is twofold: — First, to shed its beams in the darkness until the day of Christ's glory actually arrives. Second, to conduct the believer's heart meanwhile into the full realization and enjoyment of his proper hope.

As a matter of fact many Christians fight shy of prophecy altogether because, they say, it has become a mere battleground of rival schools of interpretation amongst true Christians, and too often a kind of hunting ground to the leaders of false religious systems, wherein they pursue their heretical notions. There is all too much truth in this, but the remedy is not to ignore prophecy but rather to take heed to it well, paying all attention to the first rule for its proper use as given in verse 20.

"No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" or, more literally, "of its own interpretation." This does not mean as the Romanists pretend that no private person has any right to concern themselves as to what Scripture means, but only to trustfully accept what the Romish "church," as represented by Pope or council, declares its meaning to be. It is rather a warning against treating each individual prophetic utterance as though it were by itself, a kind of self-contained saying to be interpreted apart from the mass of prophetic teaching. All prophecy is connected and inter-related and to be understood only in connection with the whole. It was never uttered by the will of man but by inspiration of the Spirit of God. He used different men in different ages, but His one mind pervades it all. Each individual prophetic utterance will only therefore be properly understood and interpreted as it is seen in relation to the whole, of which it forms a part.

If an artist in furniture designed an exceptionally fine wardrobe and entrusted the work in twelve sections to twelve different joiners, anybody who endeavoured to "interpret" any one of the resulted pieces of joinery *by itself* would surely reach some strange conclusions. No reliable or satisfactory interpretation would be found until it was seen as related to the whole design. Thus it is with every prophecy of the Scripture, and here is found the reason of the many opinions and even heresies which we have to deplore.

Notice how inspiration is spoken of in verse 21. "Holy men of God" spake and wrote "moved by" or "borne along by" the Holy Ghost. They put their pens to paper under His power, hence He is the real Author of what they thus wrote.

2 Peter 2

YET EVERYTHING OF GOD, and therefore good, is counterfeited by Satanic power, consequently chapter 2 begins with a warning. When in old time the Holy Ghost was moving holy men

to give us utterances from God the great adversary moved and brought in among the people false prophets. We have many examples of this in the Scripture. In the days of Ahab things had reached such a pass that Elijah could say, "I, even I only remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men" (1 Kings 18: 22), and even after the destruction of the prophets of Baal there were about four hundred prophets luring Ahab to his death against one prophet, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, who told him the truth; and all these prophets spoke not in the name of Baal but said, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper; for the LORD shall deliver it unto the king's hand" (1 Kings 22: 12).

Now once again God was giving prophetic testimony by inspired utterances through the apostle and others, and the adversary was preparing to repeat his tactics. Peter therefore warned these early Christians that they must be on their guard against false teachers who would bring in privily "damnable" or "destructive" heresies. Satan is never more dangerous than when he works privily or by stealth; when instead of delivering a frontal attack, boldly denying truth, he creeps in on the flank, making merchandise of the people of God with feigned words, as verse 3 puts it. Indeed the very word translated "privily shall bring in" means literally "shall lead in sideways."

The flank attack invariably succeeds in much larger measure than the frontal attack. Illustrations of this are common. Many years ago, a bold direct attack on the Deity of Christ was launched, and a Unitarian body was formed. It remains to this day a comparatively insignificant movement. Of more recent years unitarian doctrine has been brought sideways into professedly orthodox denominations and the plague has spread like wildfire.

Be on your guard then against these false teachers. They will have a wholly pleasing exterior and their words will be "feigned" or "well-turned" — cleverly adapted to throw the simple believer off his guard. They will tell you how they believe in "the divinity of Christ" — but then of course they hold every man to be more or less divine. They accept the truth of "the atonement" — as long as you permit them to print it, "at-one-ment." They can juggle marvellously with the word "eternal" and show you that it merely means "age-long" when it stands in connection with punishment. And so on.

They go even to the length of "denying the Lord that bought them." He *bought* them for by His death He bought the whole of the world for the sake of the treasure hid therein (see, Matt. 13: 44). It does not say that He *redeemed* them, for redemption applies only to the true believer. Revealing thus their true character they bring upon themselves swift destruction — which means, not that destruction will reach them in a very short time, but that when it comes it will fall upon them swiftly for their guilt admits of no question, and no lengthy judgment process will be necessary to establish it. Their judgment will not slumber. Yet alas! many will follow them, as we see; and the effect of their heresies is not merely the ruin of themselves and of their dupes but the bringing of the way of God into disrepute so that it is blasphemed. This is ever Satan's way. In his blind hatred he may desire to ruin souls, but he even more ardently desires to discredit God and His truth.

God, however, is more than equal to dealing with the situation thus created. He is perfectly able to disentangle all the confusion, as verses 4 to 10 tell us. Read those seven verses, and notice that not one full stop comes until the last word of verse 10 is completed. They are one tremendous sentence. "If God spared not the angels . . . and spared not the old world . . . and . . . condemned with an overthrow [the cities] . . . and delivered just Lot . . . the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly . . . and to reserve the unjust . . . to be punished." A most consoling fact this for the believer, however fearful it may be for the ungodly.

The "god" created mentally by "modern theology" who being too weak or too indifferent, spares everybody and everything, that thereby he may show himself to be "love", is no more the God of the

New Testament than he is of the Old. The God of the New Testament is the God of the Old as this Scripture emphasizes. When of old the angels sinned He did not spare them, but holds them in chains reserved for judgment. When the ante-diluvian world had filled up the cup of its iniquity God did not spare them though He saved a little remnant of eight souls in the ark. Later He overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah yet He delivered righteous Lot. So it shall be again. He will deliver the godly and reserve the unjust to judgment, and this specially when they are marked by licentiousness and the despising of authority.

However much destructive heresies are brought in, and consequently people are deceived and the way of truth blasphemed, the Lord will know how to disentangle His people and judge the ungodly. We usually find it impossible even to discern, and much less can we disentangle. Who of us, reading only the story of Lot as unfolded in Genesis could discern with any certainty what was his true state before God? He shared Abraham's path for a while, but did he at all share in Abraham's faith? His subsequent history did not look like it, so who of us could tell? Our Scripture however sets all questions at rest. He is pronounced to have been a righteous man, though sadly enmeshed by the world and living a life of continual vexation in consequence. God knew him and delivered him by angelic hands.

What a voice this has for us. How pitiful for us if we get so entangled that, though true believers, it would not be possible for our fellows to decide that we were such except God Himself made a pronouncement on the point. It is intended on the contrary that we stand out from the world clear and distinct as epistles of Christ, "known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3: 2, 3). This will be profitable for us in the day that is coming. It will deliver us too at the present time from much of that vexation of soul, that mental torment, that Lot suffered. The worldly believer is well nigh the most miserable of all men.

The two evils mentioned in verse 10 seems always to accompany "damnable heresies" as their natural result. The flesh finds an attraction in the heresies, because it loves to gratify itself and to do its own will and to despise and speak against all that would hold it in check. The truth puts the sentence of condemnation on the flesh; the heresy on the contrary fosters it.

These twin evils — *self-gratification* and that of the lowest character, and *insubordination* under the plea of obtaining a larger liberty — are very prominent in the latter part of this second chapter. The contrast between verses 11 and 12 is very striking. These false teachers are but men. Angels who are greater than man in their power and might would never impeach those in dignity or authority, however much they might deserve censure, in the reckless way these men do. But as a matter of fact these teachers, who speak of dignities in a way that would suggest that they themselves were greater than the angels, are really just like — not angels — but "natural brute beasts made to be taken and destroyed." The poor animal *without reason* — for that is what the word "brute" means — may heedlessly destroy what it is not capable of understanding, like the proverbial bull in a china shop. These men are like that; they violently attack and destroy, as far as words can do it, what they do not understand.

Many teachers there are of "modernist" persuasion who exactly exemplify this. How trenchantly they attack the old foundations of the faith. What is the authority of a Paul, a Peter, a John or even indeed of Jesus Himself before their slashing words and pens? As a matter of fact however the simplest person, who being born again has become a child of God, is conscious that they have not the least comprehension of that which they attack. The most costly china is to a bull just what the truth of the Scriptures is to them.

Are some of us, who are old-fashioned believers in Christ, to tremble and be intimidated by these assaults? There is really no need for it. It may look as if nothing can stand before them in their mad career, but it is only so because God is very patient and has plenty of time in which to settle accounts.

We remember a nursery picture and rhyme book which amused us in childhood's days. There was the story of the bad dog who ran amuck and bit a large slice out of a man's leg. The last words of the rhyme however were:

The man recovered from the bite

The dog it was who died!

We are irresistibly reminded of this by the closing words of verse 12. The faith of God survives in unbroken health; the false teachers "perish in their own corruption," and receive the due reward of their unrighteousness.

How terrible is the indictment laid against them in verses 13 and 14! The adultery laid to their door may not be *literal* in all cases, but in its *spiritual* significance it certainly applies to all false teachers, for they all either teach or sanction *unholy alliance with the world*. Hence not only do they sport themselves in their own deceits — the foolish ideas engendered in their own minds — but they beguile unstable and unestablished souls. They destroy themselves, but they also bring themselves under the curse of destroying others.

In verse 15 their secret motives are unmasked. They have followed the way of Balaam. There is then nothing original about their performances. They follow in a well beaten track first trodden by Balaam of infamous memory, who sold his prophetic gifts for money. He was not the first person to prophesy for hire, for this has always been a custom in idolatrous religions, but he appears to have been the first to offer to prophesy *in the name of the Lord* for hire. With Balaam the supreme question was "Will it pay?" If a paying proposition he would prophesy to order — as far as he could. This was terrible madness involving terrible moral degradation. In verse 12, notice, the false prophets are *on a level* with the "natural brute beasts"; in verse 15 Balaam is *below* them. A dumb ass was able to rebuke him.

What then is the secret motive behind the many and various onslaughts of the modern false teachers? It is the same old story. The real drive behind them is in this — IT PAYS.

Generally it *pays financially*. When years ago the late "Pastor" Russell conducted a great campaign in London, hiring the most expensive halls and advertising on lavish scale, he was reported by a daily paper to have said, that he really did not know what to do with the money that poured in upon him.

It always pays if fame *and notoriety* is the desired thing. The sensational newspaper always patronizes the man retailing a false novelty. Thoroughgoing modernism is alas! a high road to preferment in ecclesiastical circles.

And when preferred and in high office, what have they to give? Just, *nothing*. They are "wells without water" and so no spiritual thirst can ever be slaked by them. They are as "clouds carried by a tempest" which deposit little or nothing to refresh the weary earth.

Do they accomplish anything? Yes, alas! they do. They speak "great swelling [or, high-flown] words of vanity" to the ensnaring of many souls. Oh! with what deadly accuracy are the inspired words of Scripture aimed. Certain secular papers have recently been making merry over the amusing medley of scientific jargon used at the recent meetings of the British Association. "Great high-flown words" were in plenty of evidence; and "words of vanity" they were also, wherever they touched upon "the things of God" known by no man "but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2: 11). By these vain words they capture some "who have just fled those who walk in error" (N.Tr.), promising them liberty.

Liberty! That word has a very familiar sound. Has not someone said to you in effect. — "Why be enslaved by blind adherence to a Bible which you imagine to be inspired? Why not adopt the enlightened modern view? Treat it as an ordinary book, classical and interesting of course, but of no supernatural authority. Thus you will emancipate your mind from its trammels and begin to move with full *liberty* in the vast fields of modern speculation." Oh, how enticing the proposition! How fatally it works amongst well-meaning folk of unsettled minds, just fled from those walking in error and from the gross pollutions of the world, yet though thus reformed not born again. It opens up before them a way, quite high class and scientific, right back into the old corruption from which they had just emerged.

The poor victims of these false teachers, who are thus freshly and finally entangled in the world's pollution so that their latter end is worse than their beginning, are not truly converted souls, but merely people who through a certain knowledge gained of the Lord are outwardly reformed in their ways. They are consequently likened to the dog and the sow, both unclean animals. Such is dog nature that it has the unpleasant habit of returning to its own vomit. Such is sow nature that however well washed it loves the mire and plunges into it at the first opportunity. The person who may be intellectually enlightened and consequently reformed in outward actions, yet without that fundamental change of nature produced by the new birth, falls an easy victim. The false teacher promises him liberty and by his great high-sounding words of vanity cuts the slight mental leash that held him in restraint, and there he is back again in the old ways of sin, whether vomit — uncleanness generated from within, or mire, — uncleanness from without.

They had a "knowledge of the Lord and Saviour," they knew "the way of righteousness," they "escaped from them who live in error," yet back they went to their own eternal loss. Sad, sad for them, but what pen can portray the judgment that will overtake the false teachers who have encompassed their ruin? In due season it will not slumber, as verse 3 states.

2 Peter 3

CHAPTER 2, THEN, is a very dark one. It introduces by way of parenthesis a very necessary warning. With the third chapter the apostle Peter returns to his main theme, the immense importance of *true* prophecy. The true believer, being born again, has a *pure* mind. Yet though pure it needs to be stirred up to constant mindfulness of what God has said whether by the holy prophets of Old Testament days or by the apostles and prophets of the Lord Jesus in New Testament Scripture. The chapter plainly shows us what is the effect of bringing prophetic truth to bear upon the pure mind of the believer; he is thereby separated in heart and life from the world that must come not only spiritually but also materially under judgment and so disappear (see, verses 10-14).

This, be it noted, is exactly the opposite of what is found in 2 Peter 2. There it is the iniquitous teaching of the false prophet with the inevitable effect of *entangling* its votaries in the world and its corruptions. Here it is the light of truth given through the prophet raised up of God, which has the effect of *separating* those who receive it from the world and its corruptions.

This distinction stands true everywhere and always. So much so, indeed, that we may be able to judge of the truth and soundness of any teaching set before us by asking ourselves this simple question, — if I receive this teaching as truth will it have the effect in my mind of separating me from the world or of confirming me in it? There are other tests, of course, which we must not ignore, but this one alone is quite conclusive.

It would seem that immediately the apostle Peter returned to the subject of true prophecy he was conscious of the fierce antagonism to it on the part of adversaries. Hence first of all he issues a warning and that especially as to the opposition to be expected in the last days from scoffers, walking after their own lusts. Wishing to give free rein to their carnal desires they deride that which most would put a check upon them.

There have always been scoffers of this sort. Verse 4 however predicts that in the last days they will base their scoffing upon the steady continuity of all things from time immemorial, which, they will assert, makes any sudden catastrophe, in days to come, such as the coming of the Lord, an unthinkable thing. Verse 5 follows this up by stating that to fortify their denial they will also deny that such a catastrophic intervention as the flood could ever have taken place in times past. They "willingly [*i.e.*, *wilfully*] are ignorant" of it. The thing is hid from them because they will to have it so.

This prediction of verses 3 to 6 is really most cheering for us. Here is a prophecy of the Scripture the fulfilment of which is being dinned into our ears almost every day. During the last century there has been a greatly revived expectation of the coming of the Lord amongst true Christians, and during at least the last half century the idea of His coming has been resisted with increasing scorn, for it cuts right across the evolutionary theories which are all the rage. To a mind obsessed with evolution the flood of the past, as recorded in Genesis, and the personal coming of Christ in the future are equally unbelievable. They remain wilfully ignorant of the one and they scoffingly deny the other. For over nineteen centuries scoffers have scoffed. Only during the last half century have they scoffed *on these grounds*. But the scoffers are to scoff on these grounds *in the last days*. Therefore the conclusion is definite and unmistakable: *we are in the last days*. This is indeed most cheering. We may well praise God! This day is this Scripture fulfilled in our ears (see, Luke 4: 21).

How did the flood take place? The answer is, "by the Word of God." By "the same Word" the existing heavens and earth are reserved unto fire in the coming day of judgment. The Word of God overthrew the flimsy unbelief of men in the past and it will do so again. The eye of faith sees written upon the finest construction of men's hands, the ominous words,

"RESERVED UNTO FIRE.

The mocking question of the scoffer springs of course out of the fact that many centuries have elapsed since the Lord left this earth with the promise that He would come again quickly. We have therefore to recognise the fact, stated in verse 8, that God's ideas of time are very different to ours. A thousand years are as one day to Him, as indeed Psalm 90: 4 had told us, one day is also as a thousand years, as is illustrated in verse 10 of our chapter. We must not therefore count Him slack if much time has elapsed to our way of thinking.

The reason for the long waiting time is not slackness but long-suffering. The second advent will mean the striking of a tremendous blow in judgment. This though necessary is no joy to God. He does not desire that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. The alternative is very clearly stated in these words. It is *repent or perish*.

Yet the judgment blow *will* be struck when the time arrives. The Lord *will* come when men do not expect Him, as a thief in the night, and thus usher in His day. That "day" will comprise a thousand years as other Scriptures show. It will commence with His coming and not close until the passing away of the earth and its surrounding heavens, dissolved by fire. This will not take place until the end of His thousand years' reign is reached, as stated in Revelation 20: 7-11. That same destruction of the heavens and the earth will usher in the "day of God" of which Revelation 21: 1-8 speaks, — the eternal state. The "day of the Lord" and the "day of God" are like two circles touching each other and just

overlapping at the point where the heavens and earth are destroyed, so that their destruction may be said to be in both of them.

The day of the Lord is the period especially characterized by the exaltation of Christ, as Lord and Administrator of the will of God, when righteousness will reign. It lasts for 1000 years. The day of God is the succeeding eternal state in which God shall dwell with men in a new heaven and new earth and there righteousness shall dwell without a solitary foe to challenge its peace.

These things are plainly declared in the prophetic Word and we know them. But to what end are they made known to us? The answer to this question is found in verse 11 and in verses 14 to 18. All is designed to have a present effect upon our characters and lives.

We know that the dissolution of the earth and all its works is decreed by the Word of God. Then we shall be marked by "holy conversation" — *i.e.*, a separate manner of life — and godliness. We shall be as those who expect and hasten the coming day. The Christian who spends all his energies in making the best of *this* world may affirm that he knows these things, but he hardly *believes* them in the true sense of the term. Lot struck his roots deeply into the soil of Sodom but it was because he did not know its doom was decreed. What would he have done had he known it? In very deed the light of true prophecy has a separating and sanctifying effect.

We know too that we shall enter into the blessedness of the eternal state in the new heavens and the new earth. Then we shall be *diligent* — here Peter returns to the word he had used in 2 Peter 1: 5 — to walk now in peace, spotless and unblameable. The eternal state will be a scene of peace because no spot nor blame shall be there. Well, we shall aim at the characteristics of the new heavens and new earth before they actually arrive.

Further, we shall account that the present longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, consequently we shall not chafe under the waiting time it imposes upon us. We shall know that every day of waiting and perhaps suffering which is entailed for us means the salvation of multitudes. And not only this — for the "accounting" will not stop with a mere mental recognition of the fact but express itself in action — we shall bend our energies to the setting before men of that which is ordained for their salvation, until the Lord comes. The gospel of God is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1: 16).

As Peter opened his first epistle (1 Peter 1: 12) it appears as if he referred to Paul's labours amongst these dispersed Jews. Now at the close of the second Epistle he specifically names him and not only "all his epistles" in a general way but also some special writing or epistle which he had addressed to them, according to the wisdom given him from on high. So evidently Paul wrote to the Hebrews. It may of course have been a writing not intended for preservation as part of the Scriptures, and hence not extant today. It is much more likely to be that wonderful Epistle to the Hebrews that we possess for our soul's rejoicing. In that Epistle he does indeed "speak of these things." See particularly Hebrews 12: 25-29. He speaks of them in his other epistles too.

Notice how Peter writes of Paul, the man who had to withstand and rebuke him once at Antioch (See Gal. 2: 11). Not a trace of bitterness is there, nor a trace of that Judaizing spirit which Paul had to withstand. Martyrdom was approaching for both of them, and it is, "*our beloved brother Paul.*" Delightful — is it not? The freest flowing forth of Christian affection and the fullest acknowledgement of the grace and gift bestowed upon another than himself. We can see the warm and loving heart that beat in Peter without the taint of egotism, which marred it when he was young, and thought he loved more than all the other apostles.

Yet he had to say that in Paul's epistles there were things "hard to be understood." In so saying he wrote doubtless as the apostle to the circumcision identifying himself with the believers of his own nation. All the truth concerning the church, its place in the purposes of God, its privileges, its composition of an election gathered from Gentiles as well as Jews, all that which Paul speaks of, in short, as "the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3: 4) was bound to be "hard" to a Jew. It cut across every fibre of their national feeling which had been fostered for centuries. The truth was simple enough from an intellectual point of view but the eyes of their *hearts* needed opening to see it. This was recognized by Paul in Ephesians 1: 18, where the word "understanding" should be "hearts". Except we too have the eyes of our hearts opened we have to sadly confess when we read God's Word it is hard to be understood.

Scripture too may be wrested or distorted to the destruction of those who so treat it. Those who do so are "unlearned and unstable." "Unlearned," or "untaught," means of course untaught, not in the wisdom of the world, but in the things of God. Here Peter may have been especially referring to a Gentile danger, the sort of thing that Paul himself warns Gentiles against in Romans 11: 13 to 29. If Gentiles misunderstand and misuse God's truth so as to become "wise in their own conceits" they are very near destruction. Still even if Peter did especially refer to this his words are capable of a much wider application. Let us all beware of twisting the Word of God!

Now, we have been forewarned. Thus we are forearmed against the error of the wicked, lest we should fall. The error of the wicked was fully exposed in 2 Peter 2. It is not enough however to be warned against evil; we must be in the positive enjoyment of truth. The way not to go back is to go on. Like a man on a bicycle, the Christian must go on if he would avoid falling off. Hence we must "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This word just summarizes the main teaching of the Epistle. Spiritual growth was the great theme of 2 Peter 1 and to it the apostle returns in his closing words. All true growth is in grace, *the grace of God*. Then as we expand in grace we grow in graciousness of spirit. All true growth too is in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, in whom the grace of God has reached us.

Who shall set a limit to our expansion in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord? Both are alike illimitable. Planted here, we are like trees that have struck their roots down into a subsoil of fertile richness that is without a bottom!

"To Him be glory both now and for ever, Amen."