

Life and Godliness

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In the Second Epistle of Peter the Spirit of God addresses believers, who, with the Apostle, are marked by "like precious faith." The Apostle warns us against "false teachers," that will be found in the Christian circle; for he says, "**among you;**" and he foretells the corruption, that will mark Christendom "**in the last days**" (2 Peter 2: 1; 2 Peter 3: 3).

Let us remember that the Apostle is not describing heathendom, but the condition of Christendom, in which our lot is cast, and as it exists in our times; for who can doubt that we live in "the last days"? — the awful condition of which is so vividly portrayed.

The terrible nature of this corruption is brought home to us by the illustrations and figures used to set it forth. We are carried far back to "the angels that sinned" to find a parallel to the rebellion against God of Christendom. The world of the ungodly before the flood, is used to illustrate the violence and corruption in Christendom. The wicked lives and "filthy conversation" of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah are used to set forth the moral degradation that exists in Christendom. The history of Balaam is referred to as setting forth the "covetous practices" that prevail in these last days. To find figures, that adequately set forth the return of Christendom to the conditions of heathendom, the Apostle uses the figure of a dog returning to its vomit, and the washed sow to her wallowing in the mire.

But there is another side to this solemn picture. The Apostle not only warns us of the evil but, for our comfort and encouragement, he shows that in the darkest moment of the last days it is still possible for the individual believer to escape the corruptions around and live a life of godliness. Moreover, he encourages us to live this life by setting before us the **promises of coming glory**, to which the path of godliness will lead.

So that we may say, the two great themes of this second epistle are; **first**, setting before us the life of godliness, by which the believer passes on to glory; **second, warning** us against the awful corruptions of Christendom, which are leading on to judgment. A brief consideration of the way these things are presented in the epistle will make this clear.

In 2 Peter 1, the Apostle first sets before us the life of godliness and the glory of the kingdom to which it leads. In 2 Peter 2 and 2 Peter 3, down to verse 10, he brings before us the different forms of corruption and the judgment to which they lead. Also, in chapter 3, we are warned not to be carried away by scoffers, who, taking advantage of the longsuffering grace of God, pursue their lusts and deny that any judgment is coming. Finally, having been thus warned, we are again exhorted to live the life of godliness and to grow in it.

In his Second Epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul wrote in the same strain. He warns us that "in the last days" Christendom would have "a form of godliness" but "denying the power thereof." If he presses upon us the path of separation, he also warns us that, having taken that path, we are to "flee youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace."

Some centuries ago, Protestantism judged the gross evils of Romanism and separated from them. Again, Nonconformity may deplore certain evils in Protestant nationalism, and separate from them. The Brethren, so-called, may rightly condemn evils found in Romanism, Protestantism and

Nonconformity, and take a path separate from them; but let us remember that neither Protestants, Nonconformists, nor Brethren will escape the governmental judgment of God simply because they have separated from what is evil, because contrary to truth. Unless the inner life of godliness, consistent with the outward path of separation, is maintained, all outward position, however correct, will be of no avail.

If then we desire to escape the corruptions of Christendom, and live the life of godliness, we shall do well to consider the rich provision that God has made to enable the individual believer to live this life in the midst of the appalling evils of the last days.

Firstly, let us note that the solid basis for the life of godliness has been laid in the cross of Christ. To this reference is made when the Apostle speaks of "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." At the cross the rights of God were maintained by our Saviour giving Himself a propitiation for "the whole world" (1 John 2: 2). God has thus been so satisfied and glorified, that now in perfect righteousness He can proclaim forgiveness of sins to all, and pronounce the one who believes "justified from all things." So we may say that at the cross the righteousness of God is **satisfied**, the love of God is **gratified**; God Himself is **glorified**; the believer in Christ is **justified**.

Secondly, we learn that not only are we as believers saved, but that God by "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." We have to face the power of the flesh within, the power of the world around, and the power of the devil against us; but the power of God, which is far above every adverse power, is for us, and in this power it is possible to live the life of godliness.

Thirdly, to encourage us to live the life of godliness, we are told that connected with it are "exceeding great and precious promises." In the course of the epistle we learn that these promises connect us with the "everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" and the "new heavens and a new earth."

Fourthly. There are unrolled before us the beautiful moral qualities that mark the life of godliness. The Apostle speaks of faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, endurance, godliness, brotherly love, and love. We are exhorted to have these qualities together, each one effecting the other, so that in result there may be an even, balanced life of godliness.

Faith naturally comes first, for it is by "the door of faith" (Acts 14: 27), that we enter into blessing; and in our practical lives as believers, "without faith it is impossible to please" God (Heb. 11: 6).

Virtue sets forth moral excellence, and is to be resident in our faith. In 1 Peter 2: 9, we learn that we are chosen to "show forth the praises [**excellences**, New Trans.] of Him," who has called us. This is the same word in the original as here translated, "virtue." The reality of the faith is proved by a change of life that exhibits some of the moral excellences, seen in perfection in Christ.

Knowledge is needed to set forth these excellences, therefore it must be present in virtue. However true and sincere the heart may be, if there be ignorance as to the commands of the Lord, there will be failure in obedience. As one has said, "A true heart is of vital importance; but an **instructed mind** as to what the will of God is, is needed to regulate and guide the warmest heart." . Martha's service for the Lord exhibited many excellent qualities, but it was not tempered by the knowledge of His mind — the knowledge that Mary obtained by sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His word. We may well pray with the Apostle Paul to be "filled with the knowledge of His will" (Col. 1: 9); and again, that our "love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment," in order that

we may "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1: 9, 10).

Temperance is needed in our knowledge. In Galatians 5: 23, this word is rendered "self-control" in the New Translation. The possession of knowledge apart from self-control may lead, as with the Corinthian saints, to our being puffed up with a sense of self-importance. We are warned in 1 Corinthians 8: 2, that if a man uses knowledge to exalt himself, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. How important then to judge ourselves, so that with our knowledge there may be temperate thoughts of self; not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, "but to think soberly" (Rom. 12: 3).

Endurance is the word used in the New Translation for "patience," and this we need together with sober thoughts of self. If by grace we have a sober estimate of ourselves we may be in danger of being impatient with a self-assertive person, who may "think himself to be something when he is nothing" (Gal. 6: 3). All such pretensions we have to endure, considering ourselves lest we be tempted.

Godliness, or the fear of God, is to be found in our endurance. Otherwise there is the danger of making endurance with the weaknesses and failures of one another an excuse for passing over actual evil in ourselves or others.

Brotherly love must be there, so that, while ever seeking to give God His place, we may not forget what is due to our brother. With godliness we are to remember to show brotherly love.

Love comes last, for we are to beware lest our love to a brother may degenerate into mere partiality or natural friendship. It is to be **love after the Divine pattern**. Commencing with faith, we come at last to Divine love, and thus partake of the "divine nature," of which the Apostle speaks in verse 4. These then are the beautiful qualities that make up the life of godliness.

Fifthly. Having brought before us the life of godliness, the Apostle, in the verses that follow, encourages us to live the life by setting before us its blessedness and warning us of its neglect. We are told that if "these things" be in us and abound, our lives will not be unfruitful. Where these beautiful, Christ-like qualities are found there will be fruit for God. The Father will be glorified, and we shall be manifested as the disciples of Christ, as John 15: 8 tells us. Then we are warned that the lack of "these things" will result in spiritual blindness, that cannot look afar off to the glory to which godliness leads, nor look back to the cross, where all ungodliness was judged.

Sixthly. We are encouraged to "do these things," and thus be preserved in the present from falls, and in the future have an "abundant entrance" into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. Every believer will be in the kingdom, but only those who live the life of godliness will have **an abundant entrance**. The Apostle is not speaking of preaching or teaching or the exercise of gifts, which are not given to all, and which may give prominence before others. He is speaking of the secret life of godliness, which is open to all. We all have to beware lest we estimate ourselves falsely through any little service we render. Those specially, who are gifted, and much before the public eye, have to beware lest amidst constant engagements, constant preaching, and public work **before men**, they neglect the secret life of godliness **before God**. Does not Scripture warn us that it is possible to preach with all the eloquence of men and angels, and yet be nothing? That which bears fruit for God, and will have its bright reward in the day to come is the life of godliness, from which all true service must flow, and without which no amount of religious activity will carry blessing for the soul, even if, in the overruling ways of God, it may be used for the blessing of others, as indicated in Philippians 1: 15-18.

Seventhly. To encourage us to live the life of godliness the Apostle sets before us the glory of the kingdom to which it leads. He with two other disciples had been eyewitnesses of this glory on the

"holy mount." There they saw the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, which will introduce the kingdom. There too they saw the "majesty" of Christ, that will be displayed in the kingdom, when the One, who had received dishonour and shame at the hands of men, "received from God the Father honour and glory." Further, they realized that believers will be "with Him" in the day of His glory. In the closing chapter, the Apostle, still having in view the manner of persons we ought to be, marked by holy conversation and godliness, carries us in spirit beyond the kingdom, where righteousness **reigns**, into the "new heavens and a new earth," where righteousness **dwells**.

To sum up the truth as to godliness, so blessedly brought before us in this portion of the word of God; we learn,

1. The **basis** the life of godliness in the Cross (2 Peter 1: 1).
2. The **Divine power**, that enables us to live this life (2 Peter 1: 3).
3. The **precious promises attached** to this life (2 Peter 1: 4).
4. The **moral qualities** that form the life (2 Peter 1: 5-7).
5. The **present fruit for** God that flows from this life (2 Peter 1: 8).
6. The **abundant entrance** into the kingdom that the life secures (2 Peter 1: 11).
7. The **glory of the kingdom and the eternal state, to** which it leads (2 Peter 1: 11-21; 2 Peter 3: 11-14).

As these things pass before our souls, we are made to realize the truth of the words of the Apostle Paul: — "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4: 8).