

The Second Epistle of Peter

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1.

Introductory

In his second Epistle the apostle Peter, led by the Spirit of God, predicts with great plainness of speech the appalling present-day conditions of the Christian profession. Furthermore, he not only warns us of the corruption of Christendom in these last days, but, for our comfort and encouragement as believers, he sets before us the practical life of godliness which will alone enable us to escape the corruptions, and gain an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The divisions of the Epistle are very definite:-

First, in 2 Peter 1 we learn the rich provision of God in order that the believer may live a life of godliness, having before him the certainty of the glorious kingdom to which this life leads.

Secondly, in 2 Peter 2, in opposition to the life of godliness, we are warned against the false teachers that will arise in the Christian circle, teaching heretical doctrines destructive to Christianity, bringing in the lawlessness and worldliness that has characterised Christendom throughout the ages.

Thirdly, in 2 Peter 3 we are warned that in the last days of Christendom there will arise mockers, who, by the grossest materialism, will deny the coming of Christ. This will be followed by the intervention of God in judgment.

2.

Life and Godliness

(2 Peter 1)

The first portion of the Epistle is occupied with two great themes: first, the life of practical godliness that will enable the believer to escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust; secondly, the certainty of the Kingdom of Christ which lies at the end of a life of godliness.

It is of the first importance that believers, young and old, should clearly recognise that the real safeguard against the corruptions of Christendom will be found, not merely in a life of great outward activity, still less in seeking to combat evil, but in living a life of godliness in communion with divine Persons and in the enjoyment of divine things.

(Vv. 1, 2). We learn from the first two verses that the apostle is definitely writing to those who have obtained “like precious faith” with the apostles. He is not appealing to sinners or mere professors, but to believers in the midst of the profession. “The precious faith” is the faith of Christianity, in contrast to Judaism with which these believers had been connected. This precious faith has come to us in perfect righteousness; and God can act in righteousness through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

He desires that grace and peace may be multiplied to us “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”. The grace that enables us to escape the corruptions of Christendom will not be found in the mere knowledge of the evil, but in the knowledge of God and all we possess in Him. The peace that we need in the midst of lawlessness will not be found in seeking to combat and crush the lawlessness, but in being kept under the sway of Jesus “our Lord”, the One to whom we owe allegiance. The sheep escape the foils of the stranger by knowing the voice of the Shepherd. “A stranger will they not follow”, not because they know all the evil devices of the stranger, but because “they know not the voice of strangers”.

(Vv. 3, 4). It is possible for the believer to escape the corruptions of the world, which is under Satan's power, because “divine power” has given us “all things which relate to life and godliness”. We are also reminded that “all things” needed to live this practical life of godliness are linked with the “knowledge of Him that has called us by glory and virtue”. We have been called by the attractive power of the glory that is set before us, and by the virtue, or spiritual courage, that enables us to overcome the enemy on the way to glory. The glory before us is here viewed as being reached in the spiritual energy of a life of practical godliness.

In connection with this call to glory, God has given unto us “exceeding great and precious promises”. Calling and promise are ever found together. If God calls it is in view of some purposed blessing. Later in the Epistle the apostle refers to these promises, the promise of the Lord's coming, and the exceeding great promise of the “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3: 4, 13). With these great and precious promises in view we have before us what God has before Him, and, in this way, partake of the divine nature. We look on to a scene where love and holiness will be in display in contrast to the lust and lawlessness of this scene. We partake of the divine nature in hating the evil of this scene and in delighting in the coming scene of holiness, love and joy. Thus we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

In these verses the apostle is not pressing the great fact that we have life — as he is writing to believers this is hardly necessary — but he is insisting upon the deep importance of living the life we have. Every believer has a new life, but we may well challenge our hearts with the question, Are we content to know that we have that life, or are we seeking to live the life? The fact of having life, blessed as this is, will not in itself enable us to escape the corruptions of this world. If we are to be preserved from lust and lawlessness we must live the life of practical godliness.

(Vv. 5-7). In these verses the apostle sets forth in order the qualities that mark this life of godliness. It is a life marked by faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love and love.

The first great quality of this overcoming life is faith, so the apostle John can say, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”. Moreover, faith must have an object, and John goes

on to show us this object, for he says, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5: 4, 5). So, too, the apostle Paul can say, “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2: 20). Faith turns from everything of sight and sense and looks to Jesus, in the realisation that He knows “all things” about me, and that He alone can keep me (John 21: 17).

Secondly, with our faith we shall need virtue, or spiritual courage, and energy (as the word implies). By this moral energy we shall be enabled to refuse the working of the flesh within, and to resist the devil without. To live a practical life of godliness in a world such as this will demand spiritual energy to deny ourselves, refuse the world, and resist Satan.

Thirdly, with virtue we shall need knowledge, by which we acquire divine wisdom to guide us in all our practical ways. Apart from the knowledge of God and His mind, as revealed in His word, our very energy may lead us into paths of self-will.

Fourthly, knowledge may puff up; therefore with knowledge we need temperance, or self-restraint. Without this self-restraint, knowledge may be used to exalt ourselves.

Fifthly, with self-restraint, by which we govern ourselves, we need patience with others. Without this patience, the very temperance by which we restrain ourselves may lead to irritation with others who are less restrained.

Sixthly, our patience is to be exercised with godliness, or the fear of God, otherwise patience may degenerate into compromise with evil. Godliness supposes a walk in communion with God by which our life is lived under His guidance and direction. Do we take all the changing circumstances of life that test our piety, whether prosperous or adverse, from God and to God?

Seventhly, with godliness that thinks of what is due to God we are not to forget brotherly love, or what is due to our brother. Godliness will lead to the affections flowing out to those who, being God's children, are our brethren.

Lastly, with brotherly love we are to have love — divine love — otherwise our love may be limited to our brethren, instead of flowing out in the largeness of the love of God to the world around. Moreover, brotherly love may easily degenerate into partiality and mere human affection. One has said, “If divine love governs me, I love all my brethren; I love them because they belong to Christ; there is no partiality. I shall have greater enjoyment in a spiritual brother; but I shall occupy myself about my weak brother with a love that rises above his weakness and has tender consideration for it”. Brotherly love makes our brother the prominent object. “Love” is a deeper thing, and has God in view, even as we read. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments”.

(Vv. 8, 9). In these verses the apostle sets forth on the one hand the blessed effects of having these qualities and on the other hand the serious consequences to the one in whose life they are lacking. A life marked by these qualities would be a full and abundant life, according to the Lord's desire that His sheep should not only have life but have it abundantly (John 10: 10). So too our knowledge of the Lord Jesus would not be barren and unfruitful. The life of practical godliness is one in which there is fruit for God and usefulness and blessing for man.

The one who lacks these qualities of the life of godliness, even if possessing life, will fall into spiritual blindness. Suffering from shortsightedness, he will only see the present things of this world and its lusts. He will not be able to see “afar off”. A heart occupied with its own will and the gratification of its lusts will no longer see “the King in His beauty” and “the land that is very far off”.

Not only will such lose sight of coming glories, but he will forget the mighty work by which he has been purged from his sins. If we fail to live the life of godliness, we shall lose sight of the coming glory, we shall slip back into the world around, and fall into the very sins from which we have been cleansed.

(Vv. 10, 11). With this solemn warning, the apostle exhorts us to give diligence to live this practical life, and thus make our calling and election sure. We keep the consciousness of our election fresh in our souls, while giving no uncertain testimony to the world around. Moreover, thus living, we shall pursue our path without stumbling, and thus have an abundant entrance into “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”.

(Vv. 12-15). The apostle is evidently conscious of how quickly we forget the great practical truths of Christianity, for three times in these four verses he speaks of putting the saints in remembrance. Possibly he is thinking of the experience on the resurrection day of the disciples, to whom the angel said, “Remember how He spake unto you”. Then we read, “They remembered His words”, showing that, though the Lord Himself had spoken of these great events, they had forgotten His words (Luke 24: 6-8).

So alas! how quickly we forget “the present truth”. The devil cares little how much truth we know, if only he can prevent us being established in “the present truth” — the truth of our present position before God, and all things that have been given to us that pertain unto “life and godliness”, together with the kingdom glories to which this life leads. In these things the apostle would have us established; and to the remembrance of these things he would stir us up. He knew that shortly the Lord's words, as to putting off his earthly tabernacle, would be fulfilled (John 21: 18, 19), and therefore commits “the present truth” to writing, so that after his decease we would have the truth in a form always accessible. It is noticeable that he appoints no apostolic successor to maintain the truth, nor does he throw the saints upon the church: he gives them the written word of God as the sole authority for their belief.

(V. 16). Having, in these parenthetical verses, given us his motives for writing, he passes on to remind us of the reality of the kingdom glories to which we are going. In speaking of these glories he had not repeated fables cunningly devised by some visionary mind. He had spoken of things seen as well as of things heard. The apostles Peter, John and James were eye-witnesses of the majesty of Christ, the three forming a complete witness to His glory. They had known Christ in circumstances of weakness and humiliation: they saw Him too in His power and majesty. The scene on the mount of transfiguration was a foretaste of His coming, for His coming will be in power and majesty, a power that will change our bodies of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory according to the working of the power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself (Philippians 3: 21). Thus, on the mount, they not only saw the glory of Christ, but they saw the power of Christ by which Moses and Elias appeared in glory with Him, representatives of all the saints that will yet be with Him in the glory.

(Vv. 17, 18). Further, the apostle reminds us that in the mount they saw in Christ One who was to the delight of God the Father, One who was suited to the glory and greeted by heaven. In contrast to the dishonour and shame that men heaped upon Christ, He received from God the Father honour and glory. In contrast to all others who have come short of the glory, here was One who was greeted by “the excellent glory” as the beloved Son of the Father. Moreover, the voice which the apostle heard came from heaven; all heaven is in accord with the Father's delight in Christ. The whole scene lets us into the secret of heaven's delight in Christ, and of the preciousness of the Son to the Father. The honour and glory He receives comes “from God the Father”, “from the excellent glory”, and “from heaven”.

Well, indeed, may the apostle speak of such a spot as “the holy mount”. Above the earth, and apart from the world, we are permitted to share with the Father in His delight in Christ. It is not what Christ is to sinners: we learn that amidst the sorrows of the plain and the sufferings of the cross. Nor is it what Christ is to His tried saints: we learn that in the upper room. In the holy mount we learn what Jesus is to the Father, to glory, and to heaven.

(V. 19). We are now told that this wonderful scene on the mount makes the prophetic word more sure. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the kingdom glories of Christ; and to such, the apostle says, we do well to take heed “as unto a light that shineth in a dark place”. Morally, the world is in utter ignorance of God and of all that is coming. Prophecy gives us God's mind about the darkness, and of all that He is going to do to dispel the darkness, and that keeps us from losing our way amidst the darkness. It is well then to take heed to prophecy “as unto a light” for the present, and not simply as that which interests the mind by unfolding the future.

The prophetic word is filled out by the revelation on the holy mount. Prophecy tells us of earthly glories; the mount, while speaking of the same kingdom, tells us of its heavenly glories. Taken in conjunction with the scene on the mount, and rightly used, the prophecies of Scripture will lead to “the day dawn” and “the day star” arising in our hearts. The apostle does not speak of the actual day dawn upon the earth, nor of the day star appearing in the sky, but rather of the glory of that day and the glory of that Person having their rightful place in the heart. We do well to emphasise the three words “in your hearts”.

The time is soon coming when the morning without clouds will dawn and when the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings; but, before the Sun rises, the watchers of the night are cheered by “the day star”. While passing through a dark place it is our privilege to know Christ in the affections of our hearts before He is revealed to the world.

(Vv. 20, 21). In order that we may give due heed to prophecy, the apostle reminds us of its true character and origin. First, he tells us that prophecy looks beyond the immediate circumstances that called forth the particular prophecy. Were it not so, it would simply be of historical interest, with such moral warning as history can give. But we are told that the immediate historical fulfilment of prophecy by no means fulfils the scope of prophecy. The historical fulfilment often looks on to a larger fulfilment in the future. Further, any particular prophecy must be read in connection with other scriptures to learn its full meaning.

Moreover, we do well to take heed to prophecy because it came not by the will of man, but “holy men of God” spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It is true that, on rare occasions, the Holy Spirit may use a wicked man to utter a prophecy, as in the case of Balaam in the Old Testament and Caiaphas in the New; but if so, He will make it plain that the prophet is a wicked man, who seeks to oppose, but is compelled to utter the truth. It is, however, the way of the Spirit to use “holy men”.

Summing up the great truths of this first chapter, we have set before us:-

First, the life of practical godliness with its different qualities:

Secondly, the practical effects that follow from living this life, as well as the serious consequences of failing to live the life of godliness:

Thirdly, the importance of having “the present truth” in remembrance:

Lastly, the coming power and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious end of the practical life of godliness.

3.

False Teachers and Destructive Heresies

(2 Peter 2)

Having, in the first part of the Epistle, set before us the practical life of godliness whereby we can resist the corruptions of the world, the apostle passes on to expose, and warn us against, these corruptions. Having sought to establish us in “the present truth” (2 Peter 1: 12), he can proceed to warn us against present error. In the remainder of the Epistle, therefore, we are definitely warned against the two forms of evil that characterise Christendom in the days in which we live. First, in 2 Peter 2, the apostle warns us against the destructive errors of false teachers; secondly, in 2 Peter 3, we are warned against the unbelief of scoffers who deny the return of the Lord, and the setting up of His kingdom.

(V. 1). In this chapter the apostle exposes and warns us against the appalling conditions arising in the Christian circle through false teachers. The first verse describes the character of the evil which arises, not from opposition without, but from corruption within the Christian profession. As in the days of old there were false prophets among the people of God, so we are warned, “false teachers” will arise in the Christian circle “among you”.

These men profess to be teachers, and so deceive the simple, as one has said, by “weaving error and truth together so that the truth shall attract true souls, and thus put them off their guard against the error mixed with it”. They are “among you”, says the apostle. Evidently they had made a fair profession of Christianity that had deceived those who had admitted them into the Christian company. If, in the days that followed the apostles, such arose in the Christian circle, need we be surprised if, in our day, false teachers arise in the most enlightened companies of believers?

The errors of these false teachers are brought in secretly, or “by the bye”, a statement that intimates that false doctrine is always introduced insidiously, not openly. This secrecy carries its condemnation, for there is no need to cover up the truth. There may indeed be times when certain companies of the Lord's people are not in a condition to appreciate the deep truths of God, as in the case of the Corinthian assembly (1 Corinthians 3: 2); but there was no secrecy as to the truths for which they were not prepared.

These errors secretly introduced are “destructive heresies”. They are not simply defective views of the truth, but denials of the truth, errors that are fatal, or destructive of Christianity, which lead to the denial of “the Lord that bought them”. This is lawlessness that throws off the authority of the Lord and opens the door to every form of self-will. The apostle does not say, The Lord that redeemed them: he does not admit that these false teachers are among the redeemed. The simile refers, it is said, to “a master who has purchased slaves at the market, and they disown and refuse to obey him”. These men had professed the Lord's Name, and had been received into the Christian circle, but now taught errors that deny the Lord. They are not really the Lord's, and their end will be swift and overwhelming destruction. They had taught destructive heresies and they themselves meet “swift destruction”.

(Vv. 2, 3). We are next warned of the terrible effect produced on the mass of the Christian profession by the errors of these wicked men. “Many”, we are told, “shall follow their dissolute ways”. Connected with destructive heresies there will ever be found the grossest worldliness, for bad doctrine leads to bad practice. The mass may not understand or be able to follow their evil doctrines, but worldly ways the flesh can appreciate and follow.

Leavened with evil doctrine, Christendom has sunk into the gross worldliness that marks the Christian profession of the day, with the result that “the way of truth” is “evil spoken of”. The world may not be able to discern between error and truth, but it can at least see and condemn the dissolute lives of these professors. Judging of Christianity by these men, and their evil lives, it naturally speaks evil of the way of truth.

Moreover, this worldly-mindedness opens the door to worldly methods. Moved by covetousness, these false teachers by “well-turned words” make merchandise of the Christian profession. As of old the Jews turned the temple of God into a house of merchandise, so these false teachers use their profession of Christianity, and their natural eloquence, to make a living.

Under the influence of these false teachers, the great mass of Christendom has become lawless, denying the Lord, worldly, dissolute in its ways, and indifferent to the way of truth. Such a condition must inevitably call down the judgment of God upon these wicked men. It is not an idle tale that of old judgment fell upon the lawless and rebellious. For a time evil may appear to prosper without being judged, but God is not indifferent, as one in slumber, unconscious of all around. Judgment is surely coming!

(Vv. 4-8). The apostle gives three solemn illustrations from actual history to prove that lawlessness and rebellion call down the overwhelming judgment of God. First, the angels that sinned have been cast into the deepest pit of gloom, held in chains, awaiting their final judgment. Secondly, in the days of Noah, the old world of the ungodly was overwhelmed by the judgment of the flood. Thirdly, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned and overthrown. These solemn judgments, by which God intervened upon the ordinary laws of nature and the course of the world, are ensamples for the ungodly that come after. Heedless of these warnings, Christendom, falling into the same lawlessness and rebellion, will meet the same overwhelming judgment.

Nevertheless, the judgments of old that are a warning to the ungodly have in them encouragement for the godly. They plainly tell us that, in the midst of fearful evils, God had His elect who were saved from judgment. Nor is it otherwise today, for in the midst of the increasing corruptions of Christendom God has His true saints. Even so, the Spirit of God indicates that there will be a great difference between the separate saint living the life of practical godliness and the worldly-minded saint who, lacking the qualities of the godly life, slips back into worldly associations, only to vex his soul and bring sorrow upon himself.

Noah is an example of the separate saint bearing testimony to the world. We read that “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6: 9). Peter tells us that he bore witness for God as a “preacher of righteousness”. Lot is a picture of that large class of believers who, without faith for the separate path, settle down in the world and, though ultimately saved, are no testimony to God while passing through it. The apostle Peter tells us indeed that Lot was a “righteous man”, yet, through “dwelling among” the wicked, he “vexed his righteous soul from day to day” hearing their filthy conversation and seeing their unlawful deeds. He knew nothing of a walk in peace and nearness to God.

(V. 9). The apostle thus concludes that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of trials and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment. Already the apostle has set before the believer “the day dawn” of the coming glory; now he warns us of “the day of judgment” for the wicked.

How solemn and searching is this picture of the condition of Christendom since those days. First, we are reminded that there will be false teachers bringing in destructive errors, lawlessness and worldliness. Secondly, the great mass will follow their worldly ways, being lured on to destruction by

their well-turned words. Thirdly, we are encouraged with the knowledge that, in the midst of all the corruption, there will be those who will be preserved from the evil and be a witness to the truth. Fourthly, there will be those who are truly righteous and saved from the judgment, and yet by reason of their associations are no witness for God.

The remainder of the chapter presents in greater detail the terrible characteristics of those who, in the Christian profession, come under judgment.

(Vv. 10-12). Walking after the flesh in its unbridled lusts, these lawless men are naturally impatient of every form of restraint that would hinder the gratification of lust; they “despise lord-ship”. Being marked by lust and lawlessness they are “bold” and “self-willed”. The lust of uncleanness makes men bold in wickedness; lawlessness makes them self-willed. Their tongues are unbridled, for they “speak evil” of dignities in a way that angels would not dare to do. Like beasts without reason they “speak evil of the things that they understand not”. Such will perish in their own corruption. Lust and lawlessness have in them elements of corruption that lead to the destruction of those walking in these things.

(V. 13). The unbridled lust, lawlessness, boldness, self-will and corruption of the last days will be more terrible than any outbreak of evil in the past, inasmuch as it is found in the Christian profession, and exists in the full light of the truth. Men, usually, for very shame await the darkness of night for their evil deeds. These men, without shame, “riot in the day time”. As one has said, “They have learnt to face the light and defy it”. They take their place with Christians; in reality they are only spots and blemishes on the Christian name. Without shame they make sport of the fact that they are deceiving others.

(Vv. 14-17). Carried away by the lusts of the flesh, they have eyes that cannot cease from sin, hearts filled with covetousness, and feet that have forsaken the right way. As with Balaam of old, God uses the very beasts to rebuke their madness. They are wells without water, to whom men turn for help and refreshment, only to find they have nothing to meet the need of the soul. They are “mists driven by storm” of their own passions, which obscure the light of heaven. For such the gloom of darkness is reserved for ever.

(Vv. 18, 19). In greater detail the apostle describes the effect of these false teachers upon others. Appealing to men with “great high-flown words of vanity” that throw a glamour over worldliness and the lusts of the flesh, they allure those who have just escaped from evil. It does not say that such have come under the convicting power of the truth, or that they have been drawn to God, but at least they have a conscience as to evil. Such, coming under the influence of these wicked men, are promised liberty by those who, themselves, are the servants of corruption.

(Vv. 20-22). In spite of the profession that they are the servants of the Lord, these false teachers with their swelling words of vanity are the servants of corruption. They had made a profession of Christianity and, through the knowledge of the Lord, had escaped for a time the pollutions of the world; but again being entangled and overcome, they prove that though they had known “the way of righteousness”, they had not followed in the way, and after all their profession and high-sounding words, they are not truly among the sheep of Christ. They can only be likened to a dog that returns to its vomit, or to a sow that, though washed, is still a sow, and when occasion arises returns to her wallowing in the mire.

4.

Scoffers and Materialism

(2 Peter 3)

In the previous division the apostle has warned us against the false teachers that will be found in the Christian circle. With the passing of the apostles, these false teachers arose speaking perverse things and bringing in destructive heresies (Acts 20: 29, 30; 2 Peter 1: 14, 15; 2 Peter 2: 1). In result, the mass of professing Christians fell into the worldliness, lawlessness and corruption that has marked Christendom throughout the ages.

Having then spoken of the false teachers that would arise amongst those to whom he was writing, the apostle passes on to warn us as to the special evils that will mark the Christian profession “in the last days” (verse 3). He tells us that these last days will be marked by scoffers and materialism.

(Vv. 1, 2). Before speaking in detail of these evils, the apostle prepares us to meet them and fortifies us against them by taking us back to the word of God. He thus opens this last division of the Epistle by saying that he writes to stir up our pure minds “by way of remembrance”. Then he plainly tell us what we are to remember — “the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets” and “the commandment ... of the Lord and Saviour” by the apostles. He does not turn us to the church for guidance; still less does he lead us to look for any fresh revelation, the word of God being complete. He tells us to “be mindful” of what has already been given by inspiration. In the word of God we have the revelation of the truth that exposes all that is false and enables us to refuse the errors of false teachers as well as the gross materialism of scoffers. The word is the sword used by the Spirit to enable us “to stand against the wiles of the devil”. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3: 15, 17).

(Vv. 3, 4). Having thrown us on the word of God to meet the errors of men, the apostle proceeds to warn us against the special evils of the last days of Christendom. He tells us that there will arise within the Christian profession a class of infidel scoffers. As ever, infidelity is associated with a low moral condition. Infidelity has its spring in lust, and these men are described as “walking after their own lusts”. The man that cannot believe what God says is doing what God forbids. Then we learn what they say, “Where is the promise of His coming?” They raise questions about an event which they realise will interfere with the gratification of their lusts.

We are first told what these men are — “scoffers”; then what they do — “walking after their own lusts”; then what they say — “Where is the promise of His coming?” Finally, we are told the arguments they use. They assert that it is manifest the Lord will not come to interfere in the affairs of men, “for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”. This argument is a gross piece of infidel materialism, known in these days as modernism. These men are not merely careless scoffers of the world; they are deliberate scoffers, who advance carefully thought-out arguments in the endeavour to prove that the warnings of the word of God are mere fables and traditions.

It is well to remember that the apostle, in the course of his Epistle, clearly shows that there is a future for the godly, the ungodly and the material creation. In the first chapter he tells us that the godly are passing on to the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: in the second chapter he tells us that the ungodly are passing on to judgment and perdition; while in this third chapter he foretells that the material creation will end in dissolution. All these great events await “the power and

coming of our Lord” (2 Peter 1: 16). Thus we can understand, on the one hand, why this great event has such a prominent place in Scripture, and, on the other hand, why this great truth is the special object of the enemy's attack. To none is the truth of the Lord's coming so obnoxious as to those in the Christian profession who are walking after their own lusts. Such will seek to deny an event that they dread by arguing that it is contrary to all experience, and therefore unreasonable and impossible.

(V. 5). In the verses that follow, the apostle exposes the folly of the infidel arguments of these materialists. Already he has prepared us to meet these infidel objections by the word of God. Now he falls back upon the word to expose their foolish reasoning. In asking, “Where is the promise of His coming?”, they admit that the promise of Christ's coming exists. So oft repeated is this promise in the word that it would be folly to deny it is there. Hating the truth of the promise, and not being able to deny its existence, they are driven to give up the word to get rid of the promise. They acknowledge it is there, but refuse to believe what God says.

They go even further, for they deny that God has said it by calling in question the inspiration of the word. Turning from the word, they draw conclusions from the material creation. They speak of “the beginning of the creation”, thus admitting there was a beginning, but, their wills being opposed to God, they seek to account for creation by natural causes. The believer, however, knows that “by the word of God the heavens were of old” and that the earth emerged from the waters to become the habitation of man.

(V. 6). Moreover, these scoffers say that all things continue as they were since the fathers fell asleep. Reasoning from what they see, they draw conclusions as to what will be. Turning from things seen, and taking its stand upon the word of God, faith knows that such arguments are utterly false. So far from things continuing as they were from the beginning of creation, there have been striking interventions of God in judgment. The flood is the outstanding witness of the intervention of God upon the ordinary course of nature. When the wickedness of men came to a head, and after they had refused to listen to His word preached through His servant, God intervened in the judgment of the flood by which the world that then was perished.

Accepting God's account of the flood, faith knows with certainty that God can and has already intervened upon the ordinary course of nature, and that what God has done, He can and will do again in regard to the heavens and earth which now are.

(V. 7). If God brought the world into being by His word, He can surely end it by His word. If God has intervened in judgment, He can do so again. Thus the apostle tells us, “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”.

To sum up the apostle's statements, we learn:-

First, that by His word God created the heavens and the earth.

Secondly, by His word God intervened in a judgment that brought the flood upon the world of the ungodly, so that the world that then was perished.

Thirdly, by His word the present heavens and earth are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment of the ungodly men of the present generation.

In the light of the facts revealed by Scripture, we can understand that the unbelieving modernist denies the inspiration of Scripture in order to get rid of the witness of the flood and the promises of the coming of the Lord with its consequent divine intervention in the course of the world and judgment of

the ungodly.

(Vv. 8-10). The apostle has exposed the foolish arguments of the scoffing materialist who, willingly ignorant of the word of God, takes occasion by the delay in the fulfilment of God's promise to deny that the Lord is coming. He now entreats the beloved of the Lord not to be ignorant of the reason for this delay. First, let the believer remember that what may seem a long delay in our eyes is but a brief moment with the Lord, for "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day". Secondly, let us never forget that the promise of His coming is "His promise", and that His word cannot fail. Thirdly, there is a reason for the delay. It is not that the Lord is slack in the fulfilment of His promise, but that He is longsuffering, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance". In His grace God gives space for repentance before the judgment falls; in his unbelief man take occasion by the delay to deny that judgment will ever come.

Nevertheless, in spite of the delay in the fulfilment of His promise, and in spite of what scoffers might say, "the day of the Lord will come", in which the heavens will pass away and the works of the earth will be burned up. The apostle does not speak of the coming of the Lord for His saints, or of the appearing of the Lord with His saints; he speaks of "the day of the Lord" that will be introduced by these great events. It is the day when the Lord will be supreme on the earth and rule with a rod of iron, putting down all opposition to God with a strong hand. This day is introduced by the appearing of the Lord, but will stretch on through the thousand years' reign, finally introducing the eternal state by the last great intervention of God in judgment. Then the whole face of nature will be altered, for "the elements shall melt with fervent heat" and all trace of the great works by which men have sought to glorify themselves through the ages will disappear, for "the works that are therein shall be burned up". The apostle takes up the language of prophetic Scriptures which, he has already told us, are as a light shining in a dark place (See Psalm 102: 26; Isaiah 34: 4, Isaiah 66: 22; Micah 1: 4; Zephaniah 3: 8).

To listen to these scoffers and deny the promise of His coming is to be left in darkness, hopelessly drifting on to eternity, not knowing how all the evil of an ungodly world will be dealt with or how the godly will be brought into eternal blessing; for, be it remembered, whether it be the judgment of the ungodly, or the blessing of the godly, all will be reached by the coming of Christ. Let go the promise of His coming and all is lost to our souls!

(Vv. 11-13). Faith, however, clings to the promise of His coming and, doing so, knows with certainty that all the seen things of the present order of the world will be dissolved. As ever, faith in activity must have an effect upon our lives. It will lead to a life of holy separation from the world around that is going to be dissolved and separation to the life of godliness which the apostle has so blessedly unfolded in the beginning of his Epistle. Thus walking, we shall be looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, when every form of evil will disappear for ever.

Moreover, faith does more; it has a long outlook and carries us beyond judgment into "new heavens and a new earth". As we take heed to the prophetic word, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, the dawn of a glorious day begins to arise before faith's vision, and "the day star" — the One whose coming will introduce the day — will get His rightful place in our hearts. "We", says the apostle, "according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth". It is not according to our imaginations, or according to our feelings, but according to His unfailing word — "His promise". For the second time the apostle reminds us that it is "His promise" and, being His, will surely be fulfilled (verses 9 and 13).

Further, we learn the character of the new heavens and the new earth. It will be a scene "wherein dwelleth righteousness". Every form of corruption and violence, lust and lawlessness characterises the

present world; abiding righteousness will mark the new creation. It will not be the reign of righteousness as in millennial days, which implies the presence of evil to be held down. In the new scene, evil having been dealt with, righteousness will dwell.

(Vv. 14-16). Again the apostle appeals to believers to let this glorious future have a present effect upon their lives. The knowledge that this present world is devoted to judgment should lead to a separate walk in godly fear. The knowledge of the coming blessedness of the new heavens and the new earth should keep us in peace, without spot, and blameless. The appalling condition of Christendom in the last days, as depicted by the apostle, might in itself distract and disturb the soul. The prospect of this new scene will keep us seeking so to walk that when Christ comes we shall “be found of Him” walking in calm peace, unspotted by the present world, blameless in our lives, and waiting in patience, knowing that the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation. We may well challenge our hearts with the question, How will He find us when He comes? (See Luke 12: 37, 38, 43; 2 Peter 3: 14).

In terms of affection the apostle links Paul with himself as a witness of “these things” to the Hebrew believers. He speaks of Paul's writings as forming part of the Scriptures and warns us that there are those “untaught and ill-established” who wrest his writings, as well as other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

(Vv. 17, 18). Having put us in remembrance of these things, and warned us against false teachers, against scoffers of the last days, and those who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction, the apostle finally warns us against being led away by “the terror of the wicked”, thus losing our assurance by falling from the steadfastness that is proper to the believer.

We are to seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For the fifth time in this short Epistle our blessing is connected with the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1: 2, 3, 8; 2 Peter 2: 20). The apostle has pressed upon us the value of the prophetic Scriptures, the commandments of the apostles, and the deep importance of resting upon the Word of God, but he realises that mere know-ledge of the letter will not keep us. Scripture is only rightly used as we gain through the word a deeper knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him is the “glory both now and for ever. Amen”. Let us not forget that little word “now”. We all admit that glory will come to Him for ever, but we may well challenge our hearts by asking, Is He getting glory from our lives even now?