

**Principles
From
II Peter**

Faith of the Same Kind

The apostle Peter was approaching the time of his death. “The laying aside of my earthly dwelling,” he averred, “is imminent” (II Peter 1:14). Like his co-apostle Paul, Peter was informed of his being “poured out as a drink offering,” and was motivated to set down in writing the thoughts that were foremost on his mind as final communication to his brethren. Distilled, then, from his thirty-plus years as disciple and apostle of the Lord, his preachments are worthy of careful rumination on the part of all modern disciples. Furthermore, his exhortations call for action on the part of each saint, and motivate each to growth and high performance in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

- **Credentials** - In many ways first among the disciples, perhaps because he was vocal and forward, Peter was a ready vessel for his Lord’s use. “Simon, Simon,” was Jesus’ address to this man, prior to his denial of the Lord before the cock-crowing, “Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31,32). The Lord’s prayer was answered, and “Simon Peter” thus served as “bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:1).
- **Same faith** - This letter is one of what are known as *catholic* epistles. *Catholic* itself means *universal*, and is a Biblical concept. From the Bible’s perspective there is but one church, and this is the universal or all-encompassing church; it is defined by the teachings of the New Testament writings. That the Roman Catholic or Greek Catholic Churches would arrogate to themselves the terminology of *catholicity* does not negate the Biblical truths regarding the true church, and any group claiming to be Christ’s church must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Lord their claims to be following Him. Hence Peter writes to the first century church at large — a *universal* letter — describing the brethren as “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours” (II Peter 1:1). As the apostle Paul said, there is “one Lord, one faith, one immersion,” and those of the first century were so noted by the Holy Spirit’s inspired writings. This is “*the faith* which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Some versions translate the passage out of II Peter as “like precious faith.” Not only is the faith to be of the same kind for each disciple of Christ, but the faith itself is of inestimable value! Each individual therefore must bring his thought processes in line with this system of thought, based on the supremacy of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of power.
- **Righteousness of God** - God is willing to demonstrate His righteousness to the world, and part of that righteousness focuses on what was accomplished by Christ. Peter himself was chosen as an apostle to carry the message of God’s righteousness, and the “like precious faith” is the message that makes God’s righteousness known to the world. The loving God was willing to reach out to lost and rebellious man, sending His own Son to die a substitutionary death in hopes of rescuing somebody. “God,” commented Paul, “was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (II Corinthians 5:19). The Father has truly demonstrated His characteristic that He is *right*, by reversing the punishment that should be meetly dumped upon man, and granting the redeemed undeserved eternal life. “He made Him who knew no sin,” was Paul’s superadded comment, “to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

There is given to man, through the proclamation of the gospel, one system of faith, “a faith of the same kind as ours,” the faith of the apostles. It is exciting to know that modern saints, having this same precious faith, could step back in time and have full fellowship and understanding with their first century brethren. And that, of course, is the same group that will have eternal fellowship in the glories of the eternal city!

The Knowledge of God

“This is eternal life,” asseverated Jesus in His prayer on the west side of the Kidron, “that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). It is easy for people to get caught up in the religious trappings of their times and lose sight of the fact that God is looking for those who want to know Him. Jesus used the example of the Gentiles in their prayers, telling His disciples, “Do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words” (Matthew 6:6). People *suppose* many things about God, and *suppose* that their sundry rituals will get His attention. “In vain do they worship Me,” Jesus quoted Isaiah, “teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (Matthew 15:9). The doctrines and traditions of men accomplish nothing as far as their attempts to influence heaven. Hence mankind needs the written revelation of the scriptures to teach men about God and how to know Him through Jesus Christ. “I am the way,” adverted Jesus, “and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

- **Grace and peace** - Peter opens his letter with the customary Christian greeting of the time: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you” (II Peter 1:2). While the words may be standard, they are not perfunctory. It is important that each saint be constantly aware that all things come from the benefice of God. But what distinguishes the Christian from all residents of earth is that the disciple of Christ has a specific grace applied to him wherein he has eternal life, whereas everyone else is lost and has no fellowship with the Eternal One. But, since it is possible for a one-time follower of Christ to be severed from Him and to fall from grace, the prayer that “grace be multiplied to you” is not minor nor a mere polite greeting. Similarly with peace. The primary peace is the cessation of hostility of the individual toward God, and the acceptance of the terms of peace based on his surrender to the will of the great King. As God grants this peace through the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, the peace that surpasses all comprehension begins to pervade all aspects of the saint’s life during his sojourn on earth. But because the child of God has to live “in the flesh” on the surface of this planet, and is fraught with many a disturbance, the prayer that “peace be multiplied to you” likewise is not mere perfunctory form.
- **Knowledge** - In a discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus asked a poignant rhetorical question, “Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?” (Luke 11:40). And He who made the inside designed it in such a way that inside of man has no peace apart from true fellowship with his Maker. There is no false religion that will grant that peace; there are no meditation techniques or positions that will produce harmony with God and His universe; there is no escape in anti-depressants; there is no running away in drugs, sex, spending, or alcohol. Peace comes in conjunction with grace from God, and these together come “in the knowledge of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:2). But no one can know God apart from the Lord Jesus, as the apostle John noted: “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18).

No one can know God or be known by Him apart from being forgiven, as the writer of Hebrews noted in his quotation from Jeremiah, that saints would “know the Lord” when He forgave their iniquities and their sins He would remember no more (Hebrews 8:8-12). All this requires knowledge coming from God’s inspired revelation to man, with the goal that each saint be certain and conscious that the trappings of religiosity and challenges of earthly life do not obscure what it means “to know God and Jesus Christ”!!!

Everything about Life and Godliness

The Bible is truly an amazing book. In a volume a person can carry in his hand, he has all the necessary general guidance for every person in every situation, in every time frame until Jesus comes, at any location on this planet! This is not just the claim of some modern tel-evangelist, making big talk to hawk his program and wares; this is the claim of the inspired scriptures themselves. And maybe this is not so surprising if a person stops and contemplates that it is all based on “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,” considering the apostle Paul’s statement about Christ: “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). But still, the fact that it is all contained in small volume instead a whole library is absolutely astounding!

- **Divine power** - The apostle Peter notes that grace and peace are to be multiplied to the brethren. But this he predicates off the proposition, “seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (II Peter 1:3). This is one example of the very point of our focus; to have all this wisdom in one little volume requires that the information and motivation be packed in very densely. Just so, then, this verse three, a partial sentence, contains a major mouthful of condensed thought. As is brought forth in the passage, it took the “divine power” of God to get the history arranged, the people in place, the words written and preserved, and its truths disseminated to the likes of us in modern times!
- **Pertaining to life** - *Life* in the scriptures generally means “fellowship with God.” The perspective is that if the individual has this fellowship, he walks “in the light” or “in the day.” “But if anyone walks in the night,” the Lord Jesus informed us, “he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (John 11:9). The saint, by contrast, has “the light of life” (John 8:12), and is therefore able to see clearly where he is to walk. This gives him peace with God, and the confidence and comfort to set in motion the best possible path for his earthly sojourn as well.
- **Pertaining to godliness** - *Godliness* is just a contraction of earlier English *God-likeness*. The perspective is that disciples of Christ are to exhibit the character of God in all their doings. The picture painted for saints, in the Bible as a whole and the New Testament in particular, is that those who walk in the light have *everything* they need in order to be transformed into the image of the One who created them anew in the waters of immersion.
- **Glory and excellence** - The knowledge of God is given by the revelation of His character through the complete presentation of Jesus Christ to the world. This presentation not only includes His birth, earthly life, death, burial, and resurrection; it also includes the painting of His portrait as the glorious One in the courts of heaven! The full glory and goodness of God is thus manifested to man, and the way is opened for those who are honestly spiritually interested to know Him, and to be like Him.

Hence it is that the word of God goes forth upon the land and to the distant coastlands. Imbedded in its words is *the call of God*. This *call*, contained not merely in the preaching of the cross of Christ but requiring the full presentation of God’s glory and excellence, is what draws men out of their darkness and into His marvelous light. Each saint, then, fully appreciative of what God has done for him through this gospel, creatively seeks to influence as many people as possible in any honorable way possible. Each follower of Christ has, by God’s divine power, “everything pertaining to life and godliness!”

God's Plan for Your Life

Followers of Christ often want to know what God's plan is for their lives. "What is God's will for me?" is a question thrown out repeatedly. The word of the Almighty is interesting in this regard; the answer is given directly, and not necessarily what the saint initially might want to hear. "For this is the will of God," Paul wrote to the Thessalonian brethren, "your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (II Thessalonians 4:3). An answer like that sometimes brings the brethren up short; they were expecting some sort of detailed instruction on exactly what they were to accomplish that day, or exactly what their function is to be within the body of Christ. But the wisdom of God bluntly says for the saint to be sexually pure and sanctified, and the saint himself is to figure out how to implement that in his daily living. Similarly, then, there is a blanket statement for God's plan for each saint's life.

- **Promises** - "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift," averred James, "is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). While it is comparatively easy for the Christian to recognize that the food he eats comes from God, he sometimes has a tendency to forget or minimize the tremendous spiritual blessings that are his through Christ. The apostle Peter has emphasized the greatness of God's spiritual gifts, using words and expressions such as "divine power," "everything," "true knowledge," and "glory and excellence." Even a modest contemplation of those concepts would impress the saint as to how much the Creator is committed to helping him enjoy a successful spiritual life. "For by *these*," is the superadded statement from the apostle, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises" (II Peter 1:4). All this POWER, then, is to back the *promises* He has offered His children of faith, amplified by the superlatives "precious" and "magnificent." The faithful disciples of Christ ought to be ready to charge positively into whatever tasks or challenges the Father has for them!
- **Partakers of the divine nature** - What then is the plan of God for the Christian? What is the purpose of all those precious and magnificent promises, backed by the supreme Power of the universe? These are "in order that by them," affirms the apostle, "you might become partakers of the divine nature." Here is the plan! God has made provision that His children might take on His character and behave as He would if He were in their shoes. The expectation is that the children will imitate their Father. "But love your enemies," exhorted Jesus, His thoughts following along this same vein, "and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and *you will be sons of the Most High*; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35). This is the *godliness (God-likeness)* that is to permeate the thoughts and actions of those who love their Dad in heaven. "Therefore," was the apostle Paul's take on this same point, "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1).
- **Escaping corruption** - Satan, by deceit, has successfully drawn all who are old enough to know better into his twisted world of death and destruction. He appeals to the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life" to accomplish his search and destroy mission. But God, the mighty and merciful One, is able, by imparting to His children His divine nature, to have them described as "having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

The saint is truly free! He can pass by the claws of the roaring lion (the devil), knowing that, since he is a partaker of the divine nature by God's awesome power, those claws have no flesh to tear!

Applying All Diligence

There is a basic truism, economically stated, but applying to all aspects of living as a vapor during the earthly sojourn. “On that which cost me nothing,” is a statement of the principle, “I place no value.” The All Wise, knowing how the brain of man works, since He is the One who designed it in the first place, makes provision for followers of Christ to be willing participants in the divine transformation process. “His divine power,” affirms Peter, coupled with all the elements of the “true knowledge” of God’s revelation through Jesus Christ, makes it possible for the disciples to become “partakers of the divine nature.” Some have the perspective that since all that divine power is applied to the saint, there is nothing for the saint to do; God’s omnipotence and sovereignty, from this point of view, are so complete that all the “saved” can do is stand by and watch God do His mighty work in him. A little more complete look at the scripture, however, shows that Christ’s disciples are going to be active rather than passive in being partakers of the divine nature. Thus, while God does that which is humanly impossible in the transformation, the saint is required to have maximum input in the process, and therefore he will place high value on what is being accomplished because it cost him something.

- **All diligence** - God Himself places high value on the saints’ being transformed into the likeness of Christ. As noted, “divine power,” “glory and excellence,” “precious and magnificent promises,” and related terminology illustrate how much God has funneled into the spiritual children’s partaking of the divine nature. “Now for this very reason also,” Peter introduces the next thought in his linear progression, “applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence ...” (II Peter 1:5). Based on God’s purpose and provision, the imitator of Christ is to throw himself wholeheartedly into the stepwise process of following the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. “Applying all diligence,” was Peter’s exordium. *Diligence* by itself is indicating consistent effort, pictured as having enough exertion that there is some sweat rolling. *All diligence* amplifies the picture, requiring a shift of priorities and intensification of effort!
- **Basis of faith** - The whole upward spiral staircase has “faith” as its first step. This is rational, since there would be no reason to apply any diligence if the individual did not believe in Christ or His transforming power. This faith, which of necessity leads a repentant sinner to the waters of immersion, results from a reasoned presentation centered upon Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. *Faith*, according to Paul, grows from a desire to understand the plan and purpose of God, and this understanding arises from analyzing the testimony of God’s witnesses — from Moses to the apostle John — as they make their written proclamations proving beyond any shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that terms of His covenant are inviolate.
- **Faith to move forward** - Once this initial belief system is in place, the follower of Christ begins to take his “risks”; that is, he begins to venture out and do some things for the name of Jesus. Needing some direction, the saint receives his instruction, “in your faith supply moral excellence.”

The Holy Spirit Himself inspired Peter to put this word into the phraseology: *applying!* The disciple of Christ cannot be passive about this. He cannot be perfunctory, or lackadaisical. He must really apply himself to the program of God to become a partaker of the divine nature.

This is one of the major areas where the modern Christian, generally speaking, fails. He fails to apply himself “with all diligence,” preferring to toy minimally with the scriptures, and focusing instead on things of this earth. Modern brethren need to heed the words of this exordium, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, apply all diligence to participating in the character of Christ!

Moral Excellence

Even the world recognizes that if there are not generally high moral standards within a local congregation, or within an individual making a claim to be a Christian, the religiosity exhibited thereby is a complete sham! As a whole, people outside the body of Christ — basic citizenry — understand a person coming out of some “addiction” might struggle a bit to get himself reoriented, and they actually applaud those efforts. But if a man is known as a “deacon” in the church, and is crooked in his business dealings, the citizenry has total contempt for such hypocrisy. Similarly, if a woman is known as one of the “Sunday school teachers” in the local congregation, but runs around on her husband or is recognized as the worst gossip in the neighborhood, they joke about her “Christianity” behind her back and the name of Jesus is trashed all over town. It is interesting (and encouraging, really) that common folks recognize that there is supposed to be a positive connection between a person’s faith in Christ and an uptick in his personal morality.

- **In your faith** - The apostle Peter has built a fairly long list on the expression, “applying all diligence.” The items listed, then, are not going to come into existence automatically; the saint is going to have to work at bringing them on stream in his personal life. The first on the list reads, “in your faith” (II Peter 1:5). Faith, as noted, results from the testimony pertaining to Jesus as contained in the word of God. This belief in Jesus and the attendant eternal things causes the individual to reorient his thinking. Now eternal values and the things of the kingdom of God have the highest priority, and earthly pursuits and priorities drift into the background. Thus the faithful Christian will die rather than deny the name of Christ. He will set aside monetary gain to maintain his faithful morality, because He is conscious that God is the judge. He will reorder his time so that he can assemble with the saints; he will eliminate television to read his Bible. The saint will set aside personal fears to travel overseas with the gospel, or work in an inner city mission. Because of his *faith* in Christ, he will take risks and undergo persecution; he sees Him who is unseen!
- **Supply moral excellence** - “In your faith,” said Peter, “supply moral excellence.” Of first concern to the apostle and to the Holy Spirit is that the new-found Christian develop his personal morality. The New Testament writings are loaded with all kinds of instruction about getting rid of past habits and forming new ones in consonance with the teachings of Jesus. “Therefore do not lie to one another,” was one of the apostle Paul’s sets of exhortation on moral issues, “since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Colossians 3:9,10). That new self is “holy and beloved,” with “a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12). Not just moral, but moral *excellence*.

“They baptized Jesse Taylor in Cedar Creek last Sunday,” were the words of one of the songs that made the popular charts in the 1970’s. “Jesus gained a soul and Satan lost a good right arm. They all cried ‘Hallelujah!’ when Jesse’s head went under, ’cause this time he went under for the Lord.” Yep, ol’ Jesse Taylor went from being a drinkin’, gamblin’, fightin’, womanizer to being a good church goin’, family man, walking in the ways of the Lord. Even the common folks recognize that’s how it should be. And that is why the scripture emphasizes that the first thing the new saint should do is in his faith is to “supply moral excellence.”

Acquire Knowledge

When Jesus first issued what is called “The Great Commission,” He put major emphasis on teaching. “Make disciples,” He said, “... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20). One of the primary names for followers of Christ is *disciple*, and it is clear that these followers begin by learning, and continue to learn all their days. The apostle Paul, for example, in writing to the church in Ephesus, appealed to the brethren to no longer walk as the Gentiles walked, noting that “you did not learn Christ in this way” (Ephesians 4:20). *Knowledge*, then, is the glove that fits on the hand of *learning*, and together form the process by which the saint might reach for the upward call of God. The apostle Peter, having listed first *faith*, then *moral excellence* as steps on the spiral spiritual staircase, now adds, “in your moral excellence, [supply] knowledge” (II Peter 1:5). What sort of knowledge, therefore, would the saint be supplying to himself?

- **General knowledge of the Bible** - The Bible is truly an amazing book, the perfectly written and complete communication from God to man. This Word tells the story of man’s beginning, his sin, and the fallibility of the first family. As the history is recorded, the major relevant lessons are impressed upon the reader. In the events leading up to the Flood, it is evident that man’s conscience by itself is not sufficient to make man do right, and that lawlessness will prevail under those conditions. Fifteen hundred years of Israelite history, recorded on fifteen hundred pages, also establish that a system of law is likewise not sufficient to produce a people who truly desire to please God. The Bible thus records how the stage was set for Jesus to come into the world, for that to be believable to the questioner, and for the system of faith based upon Jesus now to be implemented in the world. Indeed, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).
- **Knowledge of the Son of God** - The story of Jesus is the purpose of the prophetic utterances collected in the volume known as the Bible. The types and foreshadows of the Old Testament writings prepared mankind to believe the statement of John the Immerser: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The sacrifices of the old covenant impressed upon the reader the signal importance of his own sin, and increased his awareness of the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice and attendant priesthood. The reason for all this, of course, is to bring the seeker to a knowledge of the Lord. “And this is eternal life,” said the Lord Himself, “that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).
- **Knowledge of the system of faith** - The conscience failed, and the system of law failed. Hence, through Jesus Christ, God brought into existence the system of faith, which does work in transforming the character and producing a people who can and will worship God in Spirit and in truth. The saint needs to *know* the elements of this faith, and to *know* why the system of faith succeeds while all other systems fail.
- **Attendant knowledge** - It is pretty clear that God expects the disciple to be a student of history as well. The significance of the prophecies cannot be at all apprehended without a knowledge of the history of Rome, Greece, Persia, Babylon, and the like. The geography is important, and sometimes the ability to be somewhat conversant about Hebrew and/or Greek. Some science ends up being helpful in foundational discussions, and likewise a knowledge of how languages work.

A little reflection establishes that *knowledge* is important in increasing the faith and moral excellence of disciples of Christ. The saint, then, should continually be in the process of acquiring knowledge!

Add Self-control

Many a man has “built his house,” carefully and cautiously, only to lose it all in a moment of losing *self-control*. The moment of anger, the situation when the mouth spoke words that cannot be recalled, the occasion when booze was imbibed, the day when despair took over ... these are those times that must be guarded against and when self-control must be implemented unflinchingly by the process of “mind over matter.” Thus in the spiral staircase of character improvement, now comes *self-control*. “Applying all diligence,” said Peter. First comes faith, then moral excellence, then knowledge, then self-control.

- **What is self-control?** - There is a children’s song that says, “Self-control is just control of myself.” While that is obviously a truism, it does make a point of emphasis that is helpful. And it does go to the very root of mankind’s and Christian’s existences and lives: each person can control himself. In the first place, God is just in condemning a person who is old enough to be accountable for the commission of the first sin; it is inexcusable because it was choice. That was loss of self-control. God is willing to work with Christians — children of favor — to help them gain control over every aspect of their lives, control that was to some degree lost when the individual committed that first sin and became a slave to sin.
- **How is self-control developed?** - God, who designed the mental “wiring harness” of mankind, knows that the inner picture of the person is the key to his performance. From the beginning of the new covenant’s work with the individual, the emphasis is on a new picture; the old self is buried in the waters of immersion, and a new self arises to walk in newness of life. The power of God backs the words of the scripture, that this new creation now has the capacity to develop self-control. Sure enough, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit, right alongside of love, joy, and peace, is “self-control” (Galatians 5:23). The new creation therefore has the belief picture that he can, with the strengthening help of the Holy Spirit in his inner man, develop this elusive self-control. (If he does not believe that he can “exercise self-control in all things,” he is defeated before he starts!) Once he truly believes in the possibility of taking control of himself, now he can implement the scriptural technique of retraining his thought processes, one thought pattern at a time, replacing bad thoughts with new channels for the courses of his thinking to flow through. “Let him who steals steal no more,” is one example of how the process works, “but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28). The result of the saint’s partnership with the word of God and the indwelling Spirit is that he is “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5). This, of course, is the final development of self-control; control of thoughts produces control of words and deeds.

When the faithful follower of Christ is able to add *self-control* to his spiritual arsenal, he simplifies his life greatly. Gone from his life are the thrown wrenches, cuss words, and holes punched in the wall. Gone from her life are jabs with the tongue, spending sprees, and manipulation games. A life governed by self-control is a life without the self-recriminations of someone who knows he is guilty and has really messed things up, wishing they had “do overs.” This is a life of joy and peace where, because of self-control, the Christian has the spiritual power to perform when he wants to and when he needs to! Praise God that *self-control* can be added to faith, moral excellence, and knowledge.

Developing Perseverance

Even the non-Christian world recognizes the value of perseverance, the ability to keep moving forward. One of the more famous poems is entitled, "Don't Quit," and contains the lines, "Often the struggler has given up/When he might have captured the victor's cup." This, of course, is opposite of *perseverance*, and is the mark of losers. The poem continues, "So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit — It's when things seem worst that you must not quit." Perseverance, then, is a mark of winners, and it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit, working through the apostle Peter, would see fit to add *perseverance* as another step on the upward spiral staircase, placed on top of faith, moral excellence, and self-control.

- **The first step to perseverance** - The toughness required for perseverance is not acquired overnight. Sometimes life in general produces perseverance in people who are not Christians; those who were survivors on the American frontier were a tough and hardy race whose circumstances gave rise to a perseverant populace who had the ability to stick through to the end. But many of those who become disciples of Christ come from a dysfunctional, undisciplined background who have little ability to persevere; often they quit when they encounter the slightest obstacle. So how is the All Wise going to work in their lives to help them develop perseverance? First, the saints are going to have to make efforts themselves. The admonition from Peter is, "applying all diligence ... supply ... perseverance" (II Peter 1:6). The person who really desires to walk in the footsteps of Jesus must equally desire to add perseverance to his repertoire; if that desire is not there, there will be no development of the gritty determination to finish.
- **The road to perseverance** - God, as a loving Father and intelligent disciplinarian, is also involved in helping the saint to become perseverant. He devises a special plan of discipline for each of His children of faith, and that plan is tailored to develop the individual as well as serve the purposes of God. "We exult in our tribulations," affirmed Paul, "knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance" (Romans 5:3). If life in general has not provided the necessity for the saint to have developed perseverance, then God specially allows the tribulation that brings about the desired toughness in children of light. The disciple of Christ, thus instructed, "exults" in the challenging circumstances because he knows that everything is working together for good! What is important, then, in each of those tribulations, is to be able to press on through to the resolution of that particular challenge. If the saint does not persevere to that resolution, then that challenge has not produced the desired toughness, and the child of God is going to have to go through it again to develop the required level of perseverance.
- **The power of perseverance** - The ability to keep doing the right thing and going the extra mile for people, especially when they do not show a lot of gratitude, is encouraged by the word of God. "Glory and honor and eternal life," noted the apostle Paul, are for those "who by perseverance in doing good" demonstrate the sincerity of their seeking. Being able to work with all kinds of brethren from all kinds of backgrounds and perspectives requires the "let's press on to the finish" attitude, as Paul again commented, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus" (Romans 15:5). Perseverance is the power to keep the individual saint moving forward regardless of external circumstances or issues inside the congregation.

The scripture is replete with warnings for those who may want to quit too soon. "Be faithful until death," was the Lord's exhortation to the brethren of Smyrna, "and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). That is the ultimate goal of perseverance!

Brotherly Kindness

When David's son Absalom rebelled, David was forced to flee Jerusalem with his entire household. The distress of David is imaginable. Conscious of his being driven from his home because of his own sin with Bathsheba, and hurting over the rebellion of his son Absalom, the "man after God's own heart" walked up the Mount of Olives barefoot and with his head covered in shame. Adding to his distress was that a man of the tribe of Benjamin — Shimei — was cursing David and casting stones at him as he made his ascent to the summit. After resting at the crest of the ridge, the contingent with David made their way down to the Jordan, reaching the river's edge by nightfall. But a trusted carrier brought a message from David's spies posted inside Absalom's circle, warning David and explaining that his entourage must ford the Jordan before stopping or Absalom's men would destroy them. "Then David and all the people who were with him arose and crossed the Jordan; and by dawn not even one remained who had not crossed the Jordan" (II Samuel 17:22). After fording the Jordan — tired, cold, disheveled — the people came to the estate of a man of great substance, Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim. He and others of means provided bedding and food for David's company, numbering in the thousands, saying, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness" (II Samuel 17:29). Furthermore, Barzillai continued to support David's household until the death of Absalom and the time that David could return to Jerusalem. In exchange for this great sacrifice of kindness, David kissed Barzillai, blessed him and took his son Chimham as an honored personage to the court in Jerusalem.

God's goal, according to the apostle Peter, is for the saints to "become partakers of the divine nature." Applying all diligence, says he, in addition to the other qualities mentioned in a description of an upward spiraling staircase, in "your perseverance" add "godliness, and your godliness, brotherly kindness" (II Peter 1:6,7).

- **Godliness** - The apostle has already stressed godliness. God's "divine power," he noted, "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness." In the spiral staircase, godliness appears again, with the exhortation, "applying all diligence." God really desires that our character mirror His.
- **Brotherly kindness** - Barzillai's kindness to David exemplifies the "brotherly kindness" that we are diligently working to add to our repertoire of positive character traits. First, there was a consciousness of the needs of others. Barzillai, his partners, and his people recognized that the thousands associated with David would be in serious need following the ordeal of being dispossessed from their homes, trudging through the wilderness, and sloshing through the Jordan. Second, they deliberately made plans to provide a means of assisting David. It took some thought to organize and prepare "beds, basins, pottery, wheat ..." for these thousands. Third, it took sacrificial action. All these materials cost money initially, and the tab for Barzillai's continued maintenance of the refugees must have been immense. Barzillai, records the sacred word of God, "sustained the king while he was at Mahanaim, for he was a very great man" (II Samuel 19:32).

To apply all diligence in adding kindness to our list of positive character traits, initially we have to train ourselves to look for opportunities to go the extra mile in helping others. Then we have to develop the habits of inconveniencing ourselves, taking extra time, giving of our resources. Only when these are entrenched as deeply rooted habits will "random and thoughtless acts of kindness" occur.

Christian Love

“Love is all you need,” is a line from the now extinct Beatles singing group, part of the bilge from the United Kingdom surfacing on America’s shores. Coca Cola — which has so much power in its advertising clout that it caused Santa Claus to shift his colors from green-and-white to red-and-white in order to color coordinate with Coke — feted the long-running commercial with the theme “I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony.” In that commercial, the opening line was, “I’d like to buy a home and furnish it with love.” The point is: there is a deeply rooted and instrumental need in mankind to be loved and to love, and the mass marketers are willing to play on these strings in order to carry out their often twisted and selfish agenda. By contrast, the *agape* love of God is unselfish and concerned about the needs of others, driven by honest affection and appreciation. “In your godliness,” says Peter, add “brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness” supply Christian “love” (II Peter 1:10).

- **Love is learned** - Because “God is love,” the Adversary of darkness has done everything he can to twist the meaning of love and throw the human race into a state of confusion concerning its application. Hence, in coming out of a broken world, the saint must learn what love really is. “We know love by this,” is the simple and straight-forward instruction from the apostle John, “that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I John 3:16). Nearly everyone learns by imitation, and the brethren are exhorted to learn love by imitating Christ’s sacrifice.
- **Love motivates** - Love is the most powerful motivating force there is. The words, regardless of how oft-repeated, are foundational and true: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...” (John 3:16). The only driving force powerful enough to escort Jesus through heaven’s portals and thrust Him into a search and rescue mission to the savage and alienated earth is love. That same love, then, is poured out in the hearts of true believers, and they likewise carry on that same search and rescue mission.
- **Love is a decision** - Love is commanded! “A new commandment I give to you,” affirmed the Lord Jesus Himself, “that you love one another, even as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Because love is commanded, then it is clear that love is a decision that the follower of Christ can make. That is why Peter is insistent that we disciples apply “all diligence” and supply love to the other steps of the spiral staircase of the great qualities delineating those who follow the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Faith, hope, and love are the deep and foundational bases for the Christian life. But at Jesus’ coming, faith becomes sight and ceases, hope is now realized and fades. Love, however, continues on forever, fulfilling the statement, “the greatest of these is love.”

Useful and Fruitful

There is a direct relationship between character and performance. God, then, is in the process of upgrading the character of His children of faith, that they may become more useful tools in the execution of His eternal purpose. “By His own glory and excellence,” is the way that Peter begins to lay out his premise, “He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature.” But this participation in the positive characteristics of God requires action on the part of the recipient; “applying all diligence,” is the operative description. As the saint progresses through moral excellence, knowledge, and on up to Christian love, he is now becoming like his heavenly Father, and is increasingly fit for bigger and bigger spiritual projects. “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:8).

- **Increasing** - Once the disciple of Christ has worked through the steps beginning with faith, then adding moral excellence, etc., then he is — with all diligence! — to work through the cycle again. Thus there is a spiritual spiral staircase that continues to wind upward, with a continuous set of specific steps that the disciple can focus on as he seeks to become an imitator of Christ. The apostle’s point that these qualities are to be increasing establishes the truthfulness of oft-made statement that if a person is not moving forward, he is drifting backward.
- **Useful** - One of the biggest challenges for Christians is for them to be useful in the kingdom. There are some things that are easy to do, such as being in charge of bulletin boards or keeping the building sidewalk free of snow, and in these physical areas nearly every saint can be useful. But in the spiritual aspects of the kingdom of Christ — such as teaching, working with children’s and youth camps, leading women’s groups, or making disciples — character is a major issue in determining the usefulness of the saint. A person who has not yet developed moral excellence, for example, cannot be placed in charge of a group of teen-agers. A brother who has not developed perseverance cannot be the point man for a project that is going to extend for several months or a year. There is as simple saliency here: if you want to be useful to God, develop the qualities Peter has listed. And if you are not willing to be diligent in supplying these to your character, don’t complain about not being used in the local congregation!
- **Fruitful** - “By this is My Father glorified,” adverted Jesus, “that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). In using the illustration of the vine and fruit, the Lord clearly was pointing out the necessity of the plant’s reproducing itself. Christians thus are to be fruitful, to be out there making disciples, immersing those disciples, and helping those disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded. If the saint does not develop the type of *agape* love demonstrated in the word of God, he is not going to be fruitful; he will not be effective in reaching the lost on a personal basis. If the brother or sister is not kind or godly, or demonstrating self-control, no one will listen to them, and they will be unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord.

There is a direct relationship between character and performance. Because God is interested in the ability of each Christian to be useful spiritually and to be able to make disciples, He sets forth the character qualities He sees as being necessary for the positive performance of the saints. And the results are guaranteed! “If these qualities are yours, *and are increasing*, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful!”

Blind or Short-sighted

What sight is to the physical realm, reason is to the spiritual realm. The scripture uses this parallel regularly in communicating the truths of the word of God and the nature of the spiritual battle that goes on all around us. Regarding those who are perishing, the apostle Paul noted, "in whose case the god of this world has *blinded the minds* of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:4). Again that same apostle quoted the Old Testament writings concerning his desire to preach where the gospel had not yet gone, "They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand" (Romans 15:21). Even in our customary vernacular, when we come to an understanding of a point another is making, we say, "Oh, I see." The apostle Peter, then, after illustrating what positives result from the saint's climbing the upward spiral staircase of God's divine character qualities, states the negative in terms of sight or blindness. "For he who lacks these qualities," the apostle emphasizes, "is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins" (II Peter 1:9).

- **Blindness** - When a person is blind, he is in perpetual darkness. "He who walks in the darkness," stated the Lord Jesus Himself, "does not know where he goes" (John 12:35). The person who sees, then, is one who walks in the light, who fixes "his eyes on Jesus," seated at the throne (Hebrews 12:2). Satan, the god of this world, has as his goal the distracting of the saints, that they lose their spiritual focus and turn away from the light of Christ. The diligent application of the child of God to the adding to his faith, moral excellence, and to moral excellence, knowledge, etc., is what is necessary in the spiritual warfare for the individual to maintain his attention on Christ in glory. The person who loses these qualities steps into the darkness and becomes blind. When he is spiritually blind, his mind cannot see where he is to go, and he stumbles over all the destructive roadblocks hidden in that darkness. His spiritual life becomes shambles, all the important aspects of Christian life disappear, and he eventually plunges into the pits of hell.
- **Short-sighted** - If the saint does not totally sink into blindness due to his neglect of diligence in pursuing the positive character qualities Peter lists, then he at best drops into being short-sighted. As a short-sighted individual, he cannot see very clearly or very far. Thus he is constantly making mis-judgments in the spiritual realm; he bases his decisions on the wrong information, has his priorities all mixed up, and his spiritual life is a mess. And these misjudgments not only affect the individual, but they also have perturbations that really impact others also.
- **Forgotten purification** - When the disciple of Christ fails to work diligently in moving forward, he goes backward. And when he goes backward, he forgets the tremendous value of the price that Christ paid for his spiritual freedom. This forgetting is wrenchingly costly; in forgetting his purification from his former sins, all the guilty-conscience issues come back, the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension is gone, and our saint is in danger of being in worse condition than he was before he became a Christian.

When a person becomes blind or short-sighted, he cannot be as rational as he should be. Because he cannot focus clearly, all sorts of extraneous issues begin to cloud his thinking, he operates in a fog or spiritual daze, and is easily guided into all sorts of traps. The master of these traps is the prince of darkness, who delights in the spiritual destruction of those who wander off the highway of holiness.

When all these things are taken into consideration, it is clear that it is certainly worth the saint's time to spend some quality time every day diligently working on the positive characteristics that will enable him to be a partaker of the divine nature!

Calling and Choosing

The scripture indicates, from beginning to end, that man chooses. Adam and Eve had their choices in the Garden of Eden, and they chose foolishly. Not only were they banished from the Garden, but they also lost their fellowship with God. They weren't allowed flippantly to say, "I've made a bad choice," and then have everything revert back to the way it was without consequences. No, their banishment was real, and their loss of fellowship with God was spiritual death. The nation Israel likewise had to choose: "I have set before you life and death," said the Lord Almighty, "the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). And under the new covenant, the choice is also clear. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life," adverted John the Immerser, "but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

It is important to nail down the concept that man chooses eternal life or eternal death; the philosophy of Calvinism confuses the issue by promulgating the idea that man cannot choose, that he is so totally depraved that God has to choose him without man's willing participation. The general picture is this: God confronts man with the gospel, and man chooses either to believe or disbelieve the message from heaven. "Therefore, brethren," appeals the apostle Peter, "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things you will never stumble ..." (II Peter 1:10).

- **His calling** - God calls men through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. "How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?" asked the apostle Paul. "And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14,15). "We preach Christ crucified," stated the same apostle, "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness; but to those who are *the called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:23,24). Those who have obeyed the gospel, then, constitute the body of those who are *the called*, and are to be diligent to preserve that calling.
- **His choosing** - God is not arbitrary in His selection process. He has the same plan for all men, as He stated through His servant the apostle Paul, "There is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11). Peter affirmed the same point in his message to the first Gentiles to become disciples of Christ, "I most certainly understand now that God is not One to show partiality," was his statement, "but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34,35). Everyone who will obey the call of God becomes part of *the chosen*. But he has to do his part to remain in the ranks of the chosen. Not everyone who becomes a Christian stays faithful in his Christianity; there is an attrition that takes place as some become disinterested, or some in fear return to this present world. "Many are called," said Jesus Himself, "but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

"Be all the more *diligent*," were Peter's words, "to make certain about His calling and choosing you." Satan, the roaring lion seeking someone to destroy, is trying to get inside the thought processes of the saints, and pull them back into his orbit. But the follower of Christ has the solemn assurance that if he will increasingly in his faith supply moral excellence, and in his moral excellence, knowledge, etc., he will never stumble! This is an awesome promise, and should provide powerful motivation for the child of faith to increase his diligence in developing these characteristics in his life.

The Eternal Kingdom

“Many shall come from east and west,” inculcated the Lord Jesus, “and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:11,12). While the expression, “kingdom of heaven,” or “kingdom of God,” usually means the church that Jesus built during the years of earth’s existence, it can be a reference to church in eternity as it does in the above-quoted passage. In Jesus’ interpretation of one of His own parables, after describing the angels’ gathering the stumbling blocks out of His kingdom at Judgment Day, He notes, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). This would be “the eternal kingdom” that the apostle Peter mentions. “As long as you practice these things,” states Peter, referring to the positive character qualities such as perseverance and brotherly kindness, “you will never stumble; and the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (II Peter 1:10,11).

- **Eternal kingdom** - The eternal kingdom, then, is what remains after the passing of the present heavens and earth. This is what is generally termed *heaven*, the eternal and final place of rest in the eternal city of God. Our desire to reach that eternal kingdom needs to be upgraded to match that of the apostle Paul: “One thing I do,” he emphasizes, “forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13,14).
- **Entrance** - There is but one entrance to the eternal kingdom. Jesus stated that He personally was the only way to the Father, and described Himself as the door of the sheep. All who enter by that door are in the kingdom of Christ, as the apostle Paul affirmed: “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness,” he noted in referring to the Father, “and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13,14). Picture a city, with a wall and a moat outside the wall. Through immersion, the sinner now leaves the world behind, has crossed the moat, and now finds himself in the tunnel passage through the wall. While he is in this passage, he can turn around at any point and go back out over the moat to the world. And there are plenty scary apparitions appearing in the lighting on the tunnel wall, and anyone who focuses on those will turn back. But the Father is powerfully interested in our successful passage, and has given us the assurance that if we will continually work the spiritual spiral staircase, we will never stumble and the entrance will be “abundantly supplied to you.” Safe passage guaranteed!
- **God’s part** - While the saint must be active in implementing these qualities in his life, he is not operating without help. The exhortation from the Holy Spirit instructs the saint, “Applying all diligence, in your faith *supply* moral excellence ...” The Christian *supplies* his part. But the statement is also made that the entrance into the eternal kingdom “will be abundantly *supplied* to you!” God *supplies* His part! The Father is helping each saint succeed if He can get a little cooperation.

The eternal kingdom will be awesome, beyond earthly description. The scripture uses symbolism, and symbols of symbolism, in the book of Revelation to communicate how wonderful the glories of eternity will be. But for those pictures to have the proper powerful appeal, a spiritual people has to be prepared who can recognize their upward pull. “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places,” encouraged the Lord Jesus. “If it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2,3). Come, Lord Jesus!

Need for Reminders

Very rarely do we learn anything new. Most of the time, we just need reminders of what we already know! The Lord, knowing our minds very well, thus instituted memorials in the past age, such as the Passover, to keep His people in remembrance of His great and mighty deeds. Under the terms of the new covenant, even the people upon whom the ends of the ages have come need their reminders, the Lord's Supper being the most prominent. Jesus' words in instituting the Supper are instructive; "Do this," He said, "in remembrance of Me" (I Corinthians 11:25).

The apostle Peter has spent the opening portion of his second epistle talking about the importance of being partakers of the divine nature, and listing some repeatable steps for the saints' ability to continue to move forward in faith. He knows that these points are nothing new to his readership, but he is so concerned about their abilities to fight the fight of faith that he wanted to remind them.

- **Always ready** - Peter preached the gospel for the first time in history as recorded in Acts chapter two. By the time that he writes his second epistle he has been preaching the gospel for more than thirty years, has seen the gospel go to the Gentiles, has been involved in the beginnings of many congregations, and has watched the church grow from twelve to numbering in the millions. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he knows what is paramount in his final written communication to the brethren. "Therefore," he writes, referring back to the development of the qualities that will make a Christian's calling and choosing secure, "I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you" (II Peter 1:12). The brethren had been established in the truth, which Peter does not question, and they already know the things he is writing. Hence the importance of his always being ready to remind them is clearly exhibited.
- **His departure** - Both Peter and Paul were permitted to have foreknowledge of the times of their physical deaths, and both were permitted to pen one last epistle prior to their departures. "And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling," he thus begins to reference his physical death, "to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me" (II Peter 1:13,14). What an encouraging word picture in dealing with death: just a *laying aside* the earthly dwelling. Used, done, gone! "And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind" (II Peter 1:15). Again a great positive word picture; the apostle is simply going to depart.
- **Diligence in reminders** - Peter labored mightily, suffered persecution, and put his whole life into the initiation, development, and growth of the church. He is interested in its successful continuation, and earnestly desires that the brethren maintain those first principles, for their own salvation and the salvation of those that would follow the next layer of teachers. As they were to be diligent in developing the qualities that would ensure their salvation, so Peter was diligent in providing the reminder.

Peter was crucified upside down, according to secular history, and loosely referred to by Jesus as recorded in John's gospel account (John 20:18,19), in about 66 AD. He was not "the Church's longest reigning Pope" as the Roman Catholics would have us believe, but he was one of the thirteen apostles of Jesus Christ. Considering that very shortly after the apostles' deaths, these first principles were forgotten, and the church for the most part went out of existence, we would do well to put the appropriate weight on Peter's reminder!

No Cleverly Devised Tales

The story of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and subsequent ascension really is almost in the realm of fantasy. This is why many of the "rational" types such as Thomas Jefferson had trouble with the miracles, and why many doubt that the accounts are more than stories merely rooted in untenable legends, and intelligently presented fantasies for the mindless masses. The apostles, of course, having to be on the cutting edge of declaring the almost unbelievable accounting of His resurrection from the dead, would have encountered this skepticism at every turn. Imagine the challenges Peter faced, as he did before the Sanhedrin, as he tried to convince a hostile world that he was a witness, not only of Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead, but also of His exaltation to the heavenly throne. As he approached his departure from this earth, his earnest desire for his hearers to believe the truth of Jesus' glory shines through.

- **Eyewitnesses** - The apostles were tested men. They were selected from the first because they were interested in spiritual things, and were in fact already disciples of John the Immerser. Of the original twelve, eleven stood as incorruptable, and faithfully committed to following Jesus wherever that pathway led. "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials," was the Lord's great commendation (Luke 22:28). But having seen His death and His bodily resurrection, they had to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in order to receive the complete revelation of Jesus' accession to the throne in glory. "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," he asseverated, "but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (II Peter 1:16). Those are interesting words: "eyewitnesses of His majesty." While Jesus was on earth, those words were not yet true, as the prophet Isaiah foretold concerning His earthly sojourn, "He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him" (Isaiah 53:2). So when Peter speaks of "His majesty," he is speaking of the coronation of King Jesus, His anointing in heaven as the great Messiah. This event could not be seen by the physical eye; it was revealed to the apostles' spiritual eyes by the Holy Spirit!
- **Power and coming** - Both the first and second coming of Jesus are "on the clouds of heaven." In this manner His second coming is described by John in his apocalypse (Revelation 1:7). But that is actually a quotation from Daniel referring to what the scripture calls "His coming," which a reference to first coming, His accession to the heavenly throne. "And behold," stated Daniel prophetically, "with the clouds of heaven, One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom ..." (Daniel 7:13,14). The Lord laid the groundwork for the meaning of His coming, remarking to the apostles when He first sent them out two by two, "You shall not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 10:23). Jesus anticipated His first coming in His words to the high priest at His condemnation before the Sanhedrin, "Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). And the "good thief" on the cross somehow understood this picture, petitioning the Christ, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" (Luke 23:43).

What Peter and the other apostles proclaimed were not "cleverly devised tales." The "power and coming" of the Lord Jesus to the heavenly throne was witnessed by them in the Spirit. It was confirmed by the miracles the apostles could perform. It was backed by all the Old Testament prophecies. The message of the gospel is true and verified. Believe and obey!

Precursor to Heavenly Glory

The Father is, as expected, a perfect teacher, preparing His students adequately for the next lesson. Specifically, for example, Jesus sent the apostles out two-by-two early on in His ministry to prepare them for the time coming when He was no longer on earth. A couple of years later, after Jesus had already instituted the Lord's Supper but prior to His arrest in Gethsemane, He reminded the apostles of that previous preparation and set the stage for the next aspect of their lives. "When I sent you out without purse and bag and sandals," He queried, "you did not lack anything, did you?" Upon their answering in the negative, He responded, "But now, let him who has a purse take it along, likewise also a bag, and let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one. For I tell you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment" (Luke 22:35-37). He had prepared them to trust Him in things large and small, so that they could continue to go forward, carrying out His mission.

On an earlier occasion, the Lord had taken just three apostles — Peter, James, and John — up on a mountain with Him to pray. Suddenly, His appearance became bright and shining, and Moses and Elijah appeared with Him, radiantly shining also, in the presence of these disciples. When Peter suggested that they make three tabernacles in honor of these three awesome personages, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of heaven, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" (Luke 9:35). Moses, representing the Law, had spoken; and Elijah, representing the prophets, had spoken. But now, in these last days, God would speak through His Son! After things quieted down, Jesus commanded them, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead" (Matthew 17:9). He was preparing them for the glories to come.

- **Eyewitnesses of Jesus in glory** - Peter and the other apostles were "eyewitnesses" of Jesus' ascension to the power position at the right hand of the Father on high; they could not see these events with the physical eye, but they were revealed to the apostles by the Holy Spirit. Jesus, said Peter and the others when on trial before the Sanhedrin, "is the One whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior ... And we are *witnesses* of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:31,32). Thus we have Peter's statement that "we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- **Reference to an earlier glory** - Peter then takes his readers back to the time when Jesus was glorified in a preparatory manner, to make the final glory more understandable. "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father," recalled the apostle, "such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased' — and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (II Peter 1:17,18).

Peter, along with James and John, were eyewitnesses of Jesus shining with a glory that was preparing them to testify of what was to come. They saw this glory with their physical eyes and heard the voice with their physical ears, and they were prepared to bear witness to that under any conditions. There were three witnesses, and their testimony was unshakable. How much more, then, their testimony concerning Jesus when He ascended to the glory of heaven itself! The apostles, then, with a few others added along the way, were indeed solid and secure witnesses of His "power and coming" on the clouds of glory as He took His rightful position as Lord and Christ.

Morning Star Arising

Peter, along with other apostles, was certain that Jesus was transfigured on the holy mountain, and the Majestic Glory verified the Son's authority to speak on all issues. He was equally confident that Jesus ascended to heaven, exalted as the great King. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know *for certain*," he animadverted in his first preaching of the gospel, "that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). In connection with the baptism with the Spirit, poured out upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, there was given to them the revelation of the events in heaven connected with Jesus' glorification. "But when the Spirit of truth comes," Christ had promised, "He will guide you into all the truth." As the Lord continued His discourse, He noted the nature of this guidance: "He shall glorify Me," stated King Jesus, "for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you" (John 16:13,14). The Holy Spirit, then, established the truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, 1) by the Old Testament prophecies which He wrote by the hand of inspired men, 2) by His disclosure by revelation to the apostles of what happened with Jesus in the courts of glory, and 3) by the apostles' ability to perform attesting miracles through the Spirit.

- **Pay attention** - Those Old Testament prophecies were complete and in wide circulation at the time of Peter's writing. But as the aged apostle prepares his readers for continuing faithfulness following his death, he wants them to focus on the written revelations that would become the writings of the New Testament. "And so we have the prophetic word made *more sure*," was his averration, "to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (II Peter 1:19). Those of us who live by the completed revelation of God have a significant spiritual blessing in comparison to those who lived in the previous age; we have that word made more sure! In this picture of a friendly lamp casting its light into the gloom of a darkened alley or dismal basement, it is obvious that the saints would do well to pay attention to its teachings and warnings.
- **Dawning day** - The Lord's second coming is presented at the coming of day. "The night is almost gone," affirmed Paul, "and the day is at hand." Referring to our redemption as the day of our resurrection at Christ's coming, the apostle stated, "It is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer to us than when we believed" (Romans 13:11,12). The Christian era is thus presented as the dawn just before sunrise. Peter therefore speaks of the entrance of the new believer into this age as "the day dawns."
- **Morning star arises** - "I am the root and the offspring of David," said Jesus as recorded in John's revelation, "the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16). In the physical sky, Venus appears as the third brightest object behind the sun and moon, and shows itself just after sunset as the evening star, or just before sunrise as the morning star. Hence Peter pictures the dwelling of Christ in our inner person beginning at our immersions when "the morning star arises in your hearts" (II Peter 1:19).

"Christ in you, the hope of glory," is another name for the indwelling Spirit. "God," said the apostle Paul, "sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" or guarantee of our proper resurrection from the dead (Colossians 1:27; II Corinthians 1:22). So as long as it is the time denoted as "Today," the time when it is dawn before the full blast of the daylight of Christ's glory at His coming, we would do well to pay attention to the lamp of God's revelation — the Bible — and make certain that the Morning Star has arisen in our hearts!

An Objective Book

The modern era, is the one in which time is measured, generally speaking, from the birth of Christ. Hence BC stands for “Before Christ,” and AD represents “Anno Domini,” translated as “in the Year of our Lord.” The earthly “powers that be” anticipate the end of Christ’s influence, and have already designated The New Age as “the Post-modern Era.” As they slaver over the prospects of a diminished Christ, they have already begun designating time in terms of BCE and CE, meaning to them “Before Current Era,” and “Current Era.”

Characteristic of post-modern thought (using the term “thought” generously) is that there are no absolutes; there is no truth. A natural and designed corollary of those processes is that words do not have specific meanings; a word means something to one individual and something else to another individual. Hence there are no “documents of authority”; for example, the Constitution of the USA is a “living, breathing document,” in which it is impossible to determine the original intent of the framers of US liberty. Likewise, it is impossible to determine the meaning of any passage of scripture. Thus many modern Bible studies sink to the level of a discussion, centered on “this is what this scripture means to me,” while it can mean exactly opposite to another person seated at the same table, and they can experience some sort of unity in diversity. In terms of religiosity, then, the Bible becomes a “subjective book,” and all that a person can know about God is what he personally experiences. Movers and shakers, developing and expanding their market share of the religious marketplace, craftily design “experiences with God” in their “worship services,” and people are thus programmed to think that they are now walking with Christ when in fact they are being shuttled down the road to hell. They are thus trained, because of the underlying philosophy of post-modern thought, to seek for “personal experience” rather than looking at an objective document of authority like the Bible.

- **First of all** - In communication, as in all other matters where something positive needs to be accomplished, there must be a beginning point. God, in having dealt with pagan man’s lack of belief in absolutes, and in anticipating the coming of post-modern thought, lays a foundation of absolute thought and the idea that it is possible to find out truth. The Lord Jesus, in appearing before Pontius Pilate, bluntly stated the point, “Everyone who is of *the truth* hears My voice”(John 18:37). The apostle Peter introduces us to the big picture in these words: “But know this first of all,” he emphasizes, “that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (II Peter 1:20). The foundational point is laid in place; there is one set of truth, and it is not going to vary depending on one person’s perception being different than another’s. And it is the point that must be made “first of all.”
- **Objective not subjective** - When the apostle and the Holy Spirit stated that no prophetic utterance of scripture “is a matter of one’s own interpretation,” the principle is laid down that there is only one correct understanding of God’s word. That correct understanding, of course, is God’s understanding, and it is therefore each individual’s responsibility to bring his apprehension of God’s truths in line with God’s. The fact, then, that God’s word is objective and says the same thing to every person is the foundational point in coming to know what the will of God is.

In the times in which we live, in which the philosophy of post-modernism is subtle but rampant, saints seriously have to consider the words of Peter about there being only one correct interpretation of scripture. In our personal work and in our public proclamations, we must recognize the need to establish this principle of reasoning in the minds of each hearer, or they will be subject to whatever emotions the charlatans of this age can generate in them. They will be looking for feelings and signs to guide them, rather than the pure milk of the word of God!

Author: The Holy Spirit

The charge often leveled against scripture is that its teachings are man-made, and that it is a product of man alone, just like the other religions of the world. Those who level such charges are either hostile to the word of God, or shallowly looking for an easy way of not dealing with themselves and their accountability to God. Those who are hostile provide the excuses; those who are shallow accept the excuses. The Holy Spirit, in fact, is the author of the scriptures, as the apostle Peter affirms, "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Peter 1:21). This is a bold statement, but the question in modern times is: Is it provable? The answer is: Yes! And in an extremely brief format, here is how the scriptures are demonstrated to be divinely authored rather than humanly conjectured.

- **Direct prophecies** - There are hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament. Some of these are prophecies of coming history, such as the prediction in Genesis that Abraham's descendants would be enslaved in a foreign country for four hundred years, or Daniel's prediction of coming world empires covering a time span of more than 600 years. There are also detailed prophecies in the Old Testament writings of a coming *Messiah*, describing His virgin birth, His crucifixion, His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension to a heavenly throne. And there are prophecies of a coming kingdom of the *Messiah*, a kingdom that would be world-wide, and would be for all the Gentile peoples. This kingdom is also known as the *church* in the New Testament writings.
- **Types and antitypes** - The Old Testament also contains amazing physical templates for New Testament events and spiritual principles. These foreshadows are called *types*, and their realizations are called *antitypes*. For example, Abraham was told to sacrifice his only son of promise, Isaac, on the mountains of Moriah. At the base of the mountain, the wood of the sacrifice was loaded on Isaac's back, and up the hill they trudged. At the top of the mountain, they built an altar, Isaac was stretched out on the wood, and, as Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, God stayed his hand. Twenty centuries later, God sent His only Son up that same mountain, with the wood of the sacrifice on His back. Only this time, God did not stay His hand, and Jesus was crucified. The sacrifice of Isaac served as a cleverly designed template for the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. Similarly, the Old Testament tabernacle and temple (since they had the same basic floor plan) served as a foreshadow of the church and heaven. These foreshadows are clearly not accidental, and evince a mega-plan to be carried out through the ages.
- **Movement from physical to spiritual** - All other religions of the world leave man as the same rotten, physical being that he always has been. But the Bible uses a physical people — the Israelites — to set the stage for the development of a spiritual people — Christians. The physical people had physical circumcision, a physical temple, physical sacrifices, a physical priesthood, and physical worship. The people of the new covenant are a spiritual people, with a spiritual circumcision, spiritual temple, spiritual sacrifices, a spiritual priesthood, and spiritual worship in the courts of glory. What human being could have conceived such a movement, much less carried it out?
- **Scope and scale** - Early in Genesis, Abraham was promised that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). This is clearly an "un-Jewish" thing to write, yet it is a theme that runs through the entire Old Testament. All elements of the Law of Moses were designed from the beginning to self-destruct, and to be replaced by a superior system. Who could have executed such a plan, working for over 2000 years to bring it to fulfillment? No human, that is for certain!

Anyone, then, who would take more than a shallow look at the scriptures, would have to come to the conclusion that they are divinely written. The words of Peter are true: "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

The Arising of False Teachers

So long as earth exists, the war for the souls of men will go on. The battle is fierce, and it encompasses all aspects of man's existence during the years of his sojourn. The temptations work inside; the mass pressure works from outside. The "prince of the power of the air" is at war with the "Prince of peace," and there is no place on this planet where a person can run and escape from this warfare. If you are breathing, you are involved!

The saints know, of course, that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (I John 5:19). But what about inside the church? Shouldn't this be a place of refuge, a walled and impregnable city where no influence from the forces of darkness can penetrate? That is true of the eternal city pictured in the closing pages of the book of Revelation, but while "cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night" remain, the warfare will continue inside the church as well, as the scriptures make major efforts to warn us.

- **False teachers** - The Old Testament writings came into existence as a result of "men moved by the Holy Spirit" who "spoke from God." But the historical record shows that these men were universally opposed by their contemporaries, and were ridiculed, persecuted, and executed for their stand for God and His word. "Which one of the prophets," Stephen asked that august and objective body of judges, the Sanhedrin, "did your fathers not persecute?" (Acts 7:52). The obvious and implied answer is that all the prophets were persecuted by the Israelites. "Blessed are you," were the words of one of the beatitudes of Jesus Himself, "when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11,12). When the groundwork of the people is such that they persecute the spokesmen of God, that same soil is fertile for the arising of false prophets, who will speak words — openly or subtly — that are hostile to the message of God but words that the people want to hear. "But false prophets also arose among the people," is Peter's added commentary, "just as there will also be false teachers among you ..." (II Peter 2:1). The picture here is not pretty; those false prophets of old were those who were Israelites, from among the people themselves, which made it more difficult for the children of Israel to distinguish between the true message of God and the messages from Satan's heart. In the same way, is Peter's point, the false teachers will arise from inside the church itself. Hence the severity of Peter's warning, and his concern that they remember his teachings after he departs from earth.
- **Secret introduction** - These false teachers are sneaky! Peter notes that they "will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them." These destructive heresies offered the brethren an easier way rather than the right way, pandering to the flesh rather than emphasizing the discipline necessary for godliness. These are parallel to the antichrists that the apostle John spoke of, who basically stated that the flesh could not be controlled, and therefore had to deny that Jesus had a body. "This is the antichrist," said the aged John, "the one who denies the Father and the Son" (I John 2:22).

But these false teachers inside the church had to do their work *secretly* at first. They first had to appear as upstanding brethren, holding fast to the apostles' doctrine as they worked inside to create a following and a groundswell of support for their false and questioning positions. Once they had successfully introduced their heresies, and created a significant faction within the church, then they could position themselves as leaders of the "true church," at the same time as they were running counter to the direction originally given by Peter and his fellow apostles. The message of the apostle is clear: the price of eternal liberty is eternal vigilance!

Destruction of False Teachers

As long as earth exists, there will be warfare within the church. In a way it is unfortunate, that the place of peace and refuge from the storm should have its traitors who walk among the brethren, its wolves in sheep's clothing who steal and kill and destroy. But that is how it is, and that is how the new testament writings present it to the brethren, that the brethren might live eternally rather than dying like Old Testament Israel. The false teachers come from either the side of "the law" or from the side of "the lawless." Each is equally destructive, because both deny "the faith of Christ," which is the only belief system that leads to eternal life. And both "law" and "lawless," in one way or another, as systems of doctrine promoted by false teachers, grant legitimacy to fleshly desires and quench the thrust of the Spirit of God.

- **Sensuality** - Everything presented has to appeal to something. The *truth*, for example, appeals to those who "receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (II Thessalonians 2:10). Those who are looking for something other than the truth "take pleasure in wickedness," according to the apostle Paul (II Thessalonians 2:12). The false teachers, then, as per Peter's discussion, introduce their destructive heresies by finding some fleshly desire among the brethren and "pitching" their presentations accordingly. "And many will follow their sensuality," is the way the apostle described the appeal (II Peter 2:2).
- **Trashing the truth** - Because these false teachers operate within what is perceived by outsiders to be "the church," their pandering to the flesh under the guise of the gospel results in people's confusing Christianity with that which masquerades as Christianity. "Because of them," Peter informs us, "the way of the truth will be maligned." As Satan works in the minds of the sons of disobedience, he is able to twist the thinking of the world such that the world uses the immorality and sensuality exhibited by those who are not truly followers of Christ to trash the truth, and to give them the excuse for continuing not to look at the claims of the Bible.
- **Exploitation** - False teachers are "users." They have no intention of helping their hearers on the road to heaven; rather, they use the covering of Christianity as a means of lining their pockets, establishing themselves as the largest fish in their ponds, and propping up their positions as those who are pillars in their communities. "In their greed," says the Holy Spirit through Peter, "they will exploit you with false words." Those words are carefully crafted to "sell"; they are finely designed to put the proper "spin" on the positions expostulated, and to provide false comfort for those who might have a few twinges of concern. But the result is that unsuspecting brethren are slowly shuffled into groups that provide the false teachers the means of their exploitation, and the ability and finances to carry out their hideous agenda.
- **Destruction** - Life, as the new testament writer James describes it, is "just a vapor," a blip on the screen, a short dash between the dates of birth and expiration on a tombstone. These false teachers, then, in their scramble for prospects of finances, positions of influence, and popularity among the masses, forget how short-lived such earthly benefits are. They are "bringing swift destruction upon themselves," is Peter's description. The faithful saint, who holds to the word of God and walks with Jesus in white, is encouraged to continue in his faithfulness, reminded as to what happens to those who abandon the truth for earthly gain. "Their judgment from long ago is not idle," affirms Peter, "and their destruction is not asleep."

Pressures to "go with the flow" can be great. If the saint becomes lax, he will find himself drifting with the downstream currents rather than putting in the effort to maintain true doctrines and following the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The sacrifice to stand for the truth is great; but "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

What God Can and Will Do

The popularity of false teachers can seem overwhelming. How is it that even in the church in Ephesus, begun by no less than the apostle Paul, it was said that “savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them”? (Acts 20:29,30). How is it, that even in modern churches of Christ, that the writings of Augustine can be venerated, and the writings of Pelagius (what remained from what was burned by Augustine) be discounted? How is it in Christian churches that Billy Graham and his false plan of salvation can be honored, and that those who hold to the way of salvation as first proclaimed by the apostle Peter be regarded as “controversial?” That is the way of the world, that is the way it is within the church. But God is not fooled, and Peter has a list of His judgments prepared to encourage the saints to hold fast the teaching of Christ and the words of the apostles.

- **Angels who sinned** - Angels are greater in power and might than men. Hence if God could execute judgment upon rebellious angels, He certain can bring swift destruction upon false teachers. Hence Peter makes this point: “For if God did not spare angels who sinned, but cast them into [Tartarus] and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment ...” (II Peter 2:4). These fallen angels had access to heaven until the events connected with the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. At that point, somewhere before Christ’s accession to the heavenly throne, Satan and his fellow spirits were cast out of heaven in a losing war with Michael the archangel and his hosts. That’s when they ended up in Tartarus as Peter describes. “And angels who did not keep their own domain,” adds Jude, “but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). This, then, is the *abyss* of the book of Revelation. These evil spirits — demons — have access to earth, even though their headquarters are in Tartarus. Thus the temptations and trials for Christians and non-Christians alike continue. But at Jesus’ second coming, these darkened angels will be cast into *Gehenna*, the lake of fire. This is the judgment for which they are currently reserved.
- **Sodom and Gomorrah** - “Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13). Sodom and its surrounding cities (Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar) were noted for their homosexual proclivities, and “the Lord rained on Sodom and Gormorrah fire and brimstone [sulfur] from heaven” (Genesis 19:24). “He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction,” is Peter’s inspired commentary, “by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter” (II Peter 2:6).
- **Rescuing Lot** - Lot was Abraham’s nephew, having traveled with him from Ur of the Chaldees into the promised land, and having jointly shepherded his flocks with Abraham until they grew too large to be pastured together. Lot, being weaker in character than Abraham, had ended up living in Sodom and needed to be rushed out of the city before the fire and brimstone fell. The Almighty therefore sent two angels and “rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men” (II Peter 2:7).

The apostle’s main point in this passage is that God has tremendous power to exert on behalf of Christians. Not only were those first century brethren suffering physical persecution, but the false teachers were working in their midst. To an honest-hearted individual, this could be discouraging. Peter brings everything into the proper focus: “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (II Peter 2:9). The message, then, is that the brethren can continue to move forward with excitement and confidence!

The Lord Knows

The word of God continually reinforces the concept that the saint must choose heaven or earth. Israel of Old Testament times was entrusted with the oracles of God, “but false prophets also arouse among the people.” Similarly, “there will be false teachers among you,” the apostle warns us, “who will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” “Many will follow their sensuality,” he says, “and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” And this, remember, is inside the church! This scenario can cause the saint to despair of ever being able to accomplish anything; if much of the work of the apostles turned to ashes, so to speak, how can we modern Christians ever hope to have any of our work be of “gold, silver, or precious stones?” But it does not depend upon us! God is working through all the confusion, and the ones that are interested in truth will be rescued. God, for example, “did not spare the ancient world,” when those residents deliberately turned against the principles of the Holy Spirit of God, but He did preserve “Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly (II Peter 2:5). The words of Joshua to Israel ring through the ages: “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.” (Joshua 24:15)

- **Rescuing the righteous** - One of the statements written on the seal of the firm foundation of God is this: “*The Lord knows* those who are His” (II Timothy 2:19). In the angelic realm, the Lord knew which angles were righteous, and He dealt firmly with those who sinned. Noah, not only a righteous man, but “a preacher of righteousness,” was thus rescued from the flood waters. “Righteous Lot,” affirmed the apostle Peter, was rescued from the fire and brimstone that inundated Sodom and Gomorrah. “*The Lord knows*,” Peter then adverts, “how to rescue the godly from temptation.”
- **Lot’s Commendation** - Lot is not one of the Old Testament greats that would normally stand out as someone particularly righteous from a human perspective. But Peter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, describes for us the struggle and victory of Lot, offering him as a source of encouragement for sincere brethren fighting the good fight of faith in the midst of those causing confusion inside the church. “Righteous Lot,” he states, was “oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men.” Lot apparently did not like living in Sodom (but maybe his wife did!). “By what he saw and heard,” is Peter’s analysis, “that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds” (II Peter 2:8). The saint of Peter’s day, or the modern saint, can relate to Lot as he watches the false teachers ravage the church. He can feel his soul being oppressed and tormented as he sees the false prophets of today appealing to the sensual side of the brethren, and successfully working them into a “numbers game,” while destroying the foundation doctrines of biblical Christianity. But he can be encouraged, because *the Lord knows!*
- **Destruction of the unrighteous** - The saint can feel like it is a never-ending battle for truth, sound doctrine, and righteous living amongst the brethren. But he is not to despair, those who exploit the church with false words have their judgment coming, and – from the Holy Spirit’s perspective – coming swiftly! They are “bringing swift destruction upon themselves,” is one statement. “Their judgment from long ago is not idle,” is another, “and their destruction is not asleep.” “*The Lord knows* how to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment!” (II Peter 2:9)

Yes, the saint needs to choose to come out of the world, to choose heaven over earth. But the saint also needs to choose inside the church to follow the teachings of Christ. It is pretty clear from the scripture that the prince of darkness takes his warfare inside the confines of the body of Christ, and works every fleshly angle there to draw the brethren into his realm. Once again, however, there is no excuse for the saint to choose wrongly; *the Lord knows* how to rescue the godly from temptation!

Exposing the Unrighteous

"I consider it right," said the apostle Peter, knowing that his earthly death was imminent, "to stir you up by way of reminder." What was clearly on his mind was that the church be able to move forward with the momentum and the sound doctrine which the apostles laid as a foundation. "I will also be diligent," he explains, hoping the brethren would hear the earnestness of his appeal, "that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind." And a significant portion of what he wanted the disciples to call to mind were his warnings about false teachers. One of the problems with the false teachers was that their doctrines lead people away from the holiness and righteous conduct that the Lord desires in His children of faith. "Many will follow their sensuality," Peter had proffered, "and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned."

- **Unrighteous under punishment** - "There's a great day coming," says the old spiritual, "when the saints and the sinners will be parted right and left. / Are you ready for the judgment day?" The Lord knows, asseverated Peter, how "to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." There is a place for the unrighteous until the day of Jesus' second coming and the judgment before the throne of God, and that place is *Hades*. Hades is described by Jesus, in the illustration He used in telling about the rich man and Lazarus, as a terminus of torment, where the rich man was "in agony in this flame" (Luke 16:24). This, then, is the destination for all who walk contrary to the will of God, where they await the resurrection from the dead and final judgment.
- **Indulging the flesh** - There is a war, affirmed the apostle Paul, going on between the Spirit and the flesh. "The flesh," he stated, "sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). If a person does "what he pleases," he will yield to the flesh and follow its downward course to destruction. Peter informs us that God will not tolerate such unrighteous persons, "especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority" (II Peter 2:10). The warning is unmistakably clear: The saint must, in the words of the apostle Paul, buffet his body and make it his slave lest he be disqualified (I Corinthians 9:27).
- **Despising authority** - Satan is the ultimate anarchist. In the very presence of God, he himself led a rebellion in the courts of heaven, persuading multitudes of angels to join him in his attempt to overthrow the rule of God. Thus men who refuse to walk in the ways of God end up being vitriolic and contemptuous of order. "Daring, self-willed," affirmed Peter, "they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord" (II Peter 2:10,11). Like the "bad thief" who railed against Jesus while the three crosses pierced Jerusalem's skyline, all the evil in their blackened hearts pours out of their corrupt mouths, cursing men and blasting the good angels. Even Michael the archangel, stated Jude, "when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" (Jude 9). Where there is no evil in the heart, there is no reviling in the tongue.

God is a God of goodness and order. Those who are pulled into the corruption of Satan increasingly end up exhibiting his character, and they are disorderly anarchists and hateful revilers. No one of these shall escape the judgment of God; "the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the Day of Judgment."

Ultimate Destruction

“The mouth speaks,” noted Jesus, “out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34). The record, then, of those who have sinned against God and have not found reconciliation through Christ, is not stellar. “Their throat is an open grave,” the apostle Paul quotes from the Old Testament inspired analysis, “and with their tongues they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:13,14). Man, originally formed in the image of God, comes under the control of Satan and plunges into savagery and bestiality of the worst forms. “Destruction and misery are in their paths,” added Paul, “and the path of peace they have not known” (Romans 3:16,17). Self-willed, conniving, and brutal — unless rescued and reformed — these “walking dead” are worthy of damnation in the eternal garbage heap.

- **Descent to the level of animal** - When man refuses to have God in his knowledge any longer, God gives him over to a “depraved mind.” Driven by inner fleshly impulses and programmed by would-be herdsmen of totalitarian stripe, they become like cattle maneuvered into pens of slavery and squalor. “But these,” says Peter, become “like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed” (II Peter 2:12). That which should have been upright and walking with God has sunk to groveling on all fours and subject to “herd instinct.”
- **Terror of the tongue** - “The good man,” said Jesus, “out of his good treasure brings forth that which is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil” (Matthew 13:35). When the hearts of mankind turn away from God, they “become callous,” giving themselves “over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:19). Lacking moral excellence, they have to “trash” anyone who walks in the ways of God, engaging in name-calling, slurs, and slander. They are “reviling where they have no knowledge,” is Peter’s contribution. “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” said the Pharisees of Jesus, and “He casts out demons by the ruler of demons” (Mark 3:22). Typical!
- **End of the line** - When an animal dies, it is the end. The soul of the animal is in its blood, and when the light of life goes out of the creature’s eyes, it is gone for good. This is a picture of the terrible ruination that happens to people who die in their sin. They “will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong” (II Peter 2:12,13). Other scriptures let us know that people, however, are more than animals and have eternal souls. Hence their destruction is actually much worse. “The wages of sin,” stated Paul, “is death” (Romans 6:23). And the death he is talking about is not the mere perishing of the body. “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life,” are the words coming from the apocalypse of John, “he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Because it is the final separation from God, it is given a special name: “This is the *second death*, the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15,14).

The apostle Peter is greatly concerned about the spiritual future of the brethren. He knows that false teachers were arising and will arise within the church itself, “bringing,” as he said, “swift destruction upon themselves.” But his overriding concern is for the brethren who might get led astray by such teachers. False teaching leads to false concepts, and false concepts lead to bad decisions and poor judgments. Thus Peter is extensively warning against these teachers and their teachings, knowing that such will bring about, in the brethren, the blackening of their character, the ruination of their souls, and their eternal destruction in the lake of fire. This would be the terrible and ultimate destruction of those who wander away from the truth of the apostles’ doctrine!

Exposing the Unrighteous

"I consider it right," said the apostle Peter, knowing that his earthly death was imminent, "to stir you up by way of reminder." What was clearly on his mind was that the church be able to move forward with the momentum and the sound doctrine which the apostles laid as a foundation. "I will also be diligent," he explains, hoping the brethren would hear the earnestness of his appeal, "that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind." And a significant portion of what he wanted the disciples to call to mind were his warnings about false teachers. One of the problems with the false teachers was that their doctrines lead people away from the holiness and righteous conduct that the Lord desires in His children of faith. "Many will follow their sensuality," Peter had proffered, "and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned."

- **Unrighteous under punishment** - "There's a great day coming," says the old spiritual, "when the saints and the sinners will be parted right and left. / Are you ready for the judgment day?" The Lord knows, asseverated Peter, how "to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." There is a place for the unrighteous until the day of Jesus' second coming and the judgment before the throne of God, and that place is *Hades*. Hades is described by Jesus, in the illustration He used in telling about the rich man and Lazarus, as a terminus of torment, where the rich man was "in agony in this flame" (Luke 16:24). This, then, is the destination for all who walk contrary to the will of God, where they await the resurrection from the dead and final judgment.
- **Indulging the flesh** - There is a war, affirmed the apostle Paul, going on between the Spirit and the flesh. "The flesh," he stated, "sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). If a person does "what he pleases," he will yield to the flesh and follow its downward course to destruction. Peter informs us that God will not tolerate such unrighteous persons, "especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority" (II Peter 2:10). The warning is unmistakably clear: The saint must, in the words of the apostle Paul, buffet his body and make it his slave lest he be disqualified (I Corinthians 9:27).
- **Despising authority** - Satan is the ultimate anarchist. In the very presence of God, he himself led a rebellion in the courts of heaven, persuading multitudes of angels to join him in his attempt to overthrow the rule of God. Thus men who refuse to walk in the ways of God end up being vitriolic and contemptuous of order. "Daring, self-willed," affirmed Peter, "they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord" (II Peter 2:10,11). Like the "bad thief" who railed against Jesus while the three crosses pierced Jerusalem's skyline, all the evil in their blackened hearts pours out of their corrupt mouths, cursing men and blasting the good angels. Even Michael the archangel, stated Jude, "when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" (Jude 9). Where there is no evil in the heart, there is no reviling in the tongue.

God is a God of goodness and order. Those who are pulled into the corruption of Satan increasingly end up exhibiting his character, and they are disorderly anarchists and hateful revilers. No one of these shall escape the judgment of God; "the Lord knows how to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the Day of Judgment."

Ultimate Destruction

“The mouth speaks,” noted Jesus, “out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34). The record, then, of those who have sinned against God and have not found reconciliation through Christ, is not stellar. “Their throat is an open grave,” the apostle Paul quotes from the Old Testament inspired analysis, “and with their tongues they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:13,14). Man, originally formed in the image of God, comes under the control of Satan and plunges into savagery and bestiality of the worst forms. “Destruction and misery are in their paths,” added Paul, “and the path of peace they have not known” (Romans 3:16,17). Self-willed, conniving, and brutal — unless rescued and reformed — these “walking dead” are worthy of damnation in the eternal garbage heap.

- **Descent to the level of animal** - When man refuses to have God in his knowledge any longer, God gives him over to a “depraved mind.” Driven by inner fleshly impulses and programmed by would-be herdsmen of totalitarian stripe, they become like cattle maneuvered into pens of slavery and squalor. “But these,” says Peter, become “like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed” (II Peter 2:12). That which should have been upright and walking with God has sunk to groveling on all fours and subject to “herd instinct.”
- **Terror of the tongue** - “The good man,” said Jesus, “out of his good treasure brings forth that which is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil” (Matthew 13:35). When the hearts of mankind turn away from God, they “become callous,” giving themselves “over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:19). Lacking moral excellence, they have to “trash” anyone who walks in the ways of God, engaging in name-calling, slurs, and slander. They are “reviling where they have no knowledge,” is Peter’s contribution. “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” said the Pharisees of Jesus, and “He casts out demons by the ruler of demons” (Mark 3:22). Typical!
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Hidden Motives, Positive Pretense

Salesmen can be deceptive. Now there is nothing wrong with sales and salesmen *per se*, because no one makes any money anywhere unless goods are moving from the producer to the consumer through the agency of sales. But the salesman can pretend to be interested in the consumer, while he in fact is only interested in making the sale. That is deceptive.

It is not only in the realm of goods and services that salesmanship is taking place; it is also true in the realm of ideas. Ideas have to be “sold,” or propagated. Whether it is the gospel or whether it is Communist propaganda, whether it is the truths of God or the twists of denominationalism, these ideas are spread as people are persuaded rightly or wrongly to follow their courses and believe their world-views. Hence those with a vent toward the telling of tales and spreading of lies will often cover their destructive ideas with a veneer of “caring.” They have hidden motives, but disguise them in positive pretense.

- **Revelers** - Throughout the world, and throughout the ages, mankind has looked for any excuse to party. In Peter’s first epistle, he noted that the Gentiles “pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (I Peter 4:3). From the bacchanalia of the ancient Greeks to the excesses of modern *mardi gras*, the revelers roll on. Descending ever downward, they at first party at night, counting on the cover of darkness to shroud their shame. But increasingly callous, they move the partying into the sun. “They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime,” Peter emphasizes (II Peter 2:13).
- **Stains and blemishes** - Man is made in the image of God, and every child comes into the world pure and white, innocent and without sin. But for a multitude of reasons they get twisted; raised in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, they themselves take the perversities of their parents to deeper lows. “They are stains and blemishes,” affirms Peter, “reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you...” The whiteness is stained with blackness and blood. That which was innocent is now blemished and worthy only of the discard heap.
- **Eyes full of adultery** - Underlying the reveling is the lust for the next sexual conquest or escapade. Married or single — opposite sex or same sex — they are “hooking up and hanging out,” looking for the next bedchamber. “Having eyes full of adultery,” observes Peter, “and that never cease from sin,” these tarnishes on the shine of God’s creation relentlessly pursue that which never satisfies. From bed to bed, relationship to relationship, plot to plot, conniving to conniving, they are constantly looking around the next corner or glancing at the next table to make the next connection for their next nefarious interlude. Eyes *full* of adultery, said Peter, that *never* cease from sin.
- **Enticing unstable souls** - Whether it is bed or business, plot or politics, the search for the next appropriate victim goes on. “Enticing unstable souls,” is the Holy Spirit’s analysis, “having a heart trained in greed,” these are “accursed children, forsaking the right way” (II Peter 2:14,15). But these who entice unstable souls are themselves unstable: the one who uses others in the bedchamber at some point gets “burned” by someone else; the greedy individual gets outsmarted by someone more greedy; the plotter finds himself a pawn in a much larger swirl or scheme.

The apostle is engaged in an extensive listing of the bad conduct of the unrighteous, and that generates the question as to why he is so doing. He is obviously concerned about the future of the church after he makes his exit from earthly life, and he knows that the behavior of the outside world will tend to carry over into the church. Thus he warns of those who use the cover of Christianity to mask their execution of their lustful desires. And the extensive listing in his comments serves to emphasize the seriousness of the secrecy surrounding those who bring their destruction into the confines of the faith.

The Way of Balaam

The prospect of the diviner's fee caused preliminary itching in Balaam's palm. Called from the west bank of the Euphrates River to curse Israel by Balak, king of Moab, the false prophet was first told by God not to go. But the itching continued, and the Lord knew that the hireling would go to curse God's people. Hence the Lord squeezed him down step by step, so that when the time came to curse the children of Israel, the prophet could only bless Israel and prophesy of the Christ who was to come from among them. An important part of God's pressure on the diviner involved Balaam's donkey. The donkey could see the angel of the Lord (one of the Old Testament appearances of Jesus) standing and blocking their way, whereas Balaam was blind to the real spiritual realm. The donkey at first turned off the trail, but was beaten back on track by her master. Next she pressed her rider's foot against the wall, but the beating continued. Finally, as she approached the angel who was occupying the narrow way between two walls, the donkey just lay down on Balaam. When he continued to strike the poor donkey, God opened her mouth and had her speak to the diviner, still driven by the prospects of Balak's reward. Balaam – angry and focused on the prospects of the diviner's fee – did not even notice that he was carrying on a conversation with the donkey! The Lord then opened the false prophet's eyes so that he could see the angel, and would therefore not curse Israel.

Three times, then, altars were set up at separate locations overlooking the vast horde of Israel camping on the land near Moab and Midian. But three times the Lord would not allow Balaam to do anything but bless Israel. The diviner, however, was not willing to return to his home without some sort of fee for his trouble. Thus he proposed to Balak and the elders of Moab and Midian that their daughters traipse through the camp of Israel. This, in his estimation, would cause Israel to intermingle with the Moabites and Midianites, would cause the sharing of Israel's flocks and herds, and would result in Israel's worshipping the gods of these two neighboring nations. One of the last plagues from the Lord swept through the remaining Israelites who had been over twenty at the crossing of the Red Sea, and Israel learned clearly, at this point, to remain separate. Israel, under the direction of the Almighty, "killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain ... they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword" (Numbers 31:8).

- **Forsaking the right way** - The "accursed children" who worm their way into the associations of the church really do have hidden and destructive motives; they don't just accidentally mess up. "Having eyes full of adultery," is part of Peter's description, as well as "enticing unstable souls." Hence it is not surprising if they should be compared to one of the all time twisted bad boys, Balaam son of Beor. "Forsaking the right way," Peter continues in his description, "they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (II Peter 2:15).
- **Rebuke for transgression** - The Lord's rebuke did not stop the false prophet in Israel's day; the rebukes of the Lord probably will not stop most of those invading the church for greedy purposes. Of Balaam's example, Peter notes, "But he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a dumb donkey, speaking with the voice of man, restrained the madness of the prophet" (II Peter 2:16).

The apostle Peter, in penning his last reminder to the church, in line after line shows his concern for the future of the church and her ability to recognize modern false prophets. They are sneaky, greedy, and immoral, and will eventually pull the local congregations into false and destructive doctrines if they are not recognized. There is only one "right way," and they have forsaken that to follow the way of Balaam!

Empty Promises

The driest desert in the world is the Atacama Desert in Peru. It generally doesn't rain more than one-half inch every fifty years, and what plants grow in that locale have adapted and get their moisture from the fogs off the Pacific that occasionally blanket the landscape. Picture, then, the pilgrim — the poor wayfaring stranger — traveling through that land and trying to sustain himself from what the surroundings supply. It would be a tough trip, but parallel to what happens in local congregations when the accursed children take control, exploiting the saints with false words, and enticing unstable souls.

- **Nothing for the thirsty** - The obvious need for food and water in the physical realm is often used in scripture to depict the need saints have for spiritual sustenance. The pilgrim, thirsting for the good word of God, expects to slake that thirst in participating in the good teaching and preaching down at the local church meeting. But instead of hearing from sincere brethren, the pilgrim finds in their places men who are “springs without water, and mists driven by a storm” (II Peter 2:17). The pilgrim arrives at the wellhead of teaching, but it's dry. He looks for water from the clouds, but they are mists that pass him by. The great God — who spent millennia preparing the word of God, who sent Christ into the world to fulfill and illustrate its teachings, who distributed that word, and who brought the church with its teachers into existence to sustain the famished — is not happy with these pretenders who squander precious opportunities because of their selfish desires. They are those “for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.”
- **Arrogant words of vanity** - Those who have “tasted the good word of God” and have their tongues trained to enjoy its wonderful teaching look forward to enduring sound doctrine and appreciate learning of the whole counsel of God. But the “false teachers among you” stray from such solid foundations. “For speaking out arrogant words of vanity, they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error” (II Peter 2:18). The words of these false teachers sound with swelling greatness, but they are in fact empty; under the fluff there is nothing of substance. But the enticements are there; the appeal to the flesh is imbedded craftily in their presentations, and they are working on those hanging on the edge, those who are in close proximity to the people who still live in error and are thus lost.
- **Deadly promises** - The apostle Paul commented that saints “are under obligation,” but not an obligation to the flesh. The obligation is to be “putting to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:12,13). This is not an easy task; in fact, as the apostle described his own victories he used this terminology: “I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (I Corinthians 9:27). Some weaker brethren are tempted to give in or give up under the stress of fighting the battle, and the false teachers are there to take advantage of that opportunity, “promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves to corruption” (II Peter 2:19). It is a false freedom offered, and it is one which pulls people back into the slavery of sin. But it works, because it offers “the easy and convenient way.”

Just as the fallen angels worked to be lying spirits to put lies into the mouths of the false prophets in Old Testament times, so these false teachers work on behalf of Satan in the church. The earnest warnings of the apostle Peter are so that the followers of Christ will be able to recognize these deceptive types and not fall into the snare of Satan. The promises stemming from the dark lord are appealing, but in the end they are terribly empty!

Better Not to Know

We have long maintained that Satan had the original website! Like a giant, massive spider, he has been enticing people into his realm and entangling them in a sticky, stringy mess from which they have insufficient human power to extract themselves. It is a spiritual web, the threads being people who are linked together in intermeshing chains, and the sticky goo being the demonic forces of the devil's darkness. Key players in this system are the false teachers who influence so many. They turn those who come under their spell away from God and do their part to entrap their victims in fleshly-satisfying, self-justifying false doctrines. Against such teachers and against such systems Peter strenuously warns in his final message to the followers of Christ.

- **Enslavement** - The false teachers which arise within the church are “springs without water,” empty shells who parade about with big banners offering living water but whose wells consist only of crumbled dust. They promise those they influence freedom, but the proffer of *liberty* is shifted to *libertine*. The first is true freedom; the second is a subtle slavery to corruption. Thus the warning from the apostle Peter is very clear and straight-forward: “For by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved” (II Peter 2:19). The saint who cannot buffet his body and make it his slave is enslaved by the very lusts from which he has been promised freedom.
- **Last state** - “Everyone who commits sin,” said Jesus, “is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). Through His gospel message, however, the Christ offers hope and freedom. “If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Satan, not content to let his former slaves go free, like Pharaoh of Moses’ day chases after them, stretching the threads of his web near the territories occupied by the Lord’s church, entrapping those who have wandered outside her safe confines. “For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” Peter informs us, “they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first” (II Peter 2:20). What a blessing to be delivered from the defilements of the world! Only the Great Deliverer from the sky could accomplish that. But how sad, when the one once free gets entangled again in Satan’s web. His last state is worse than it would have been than had he never come into the light of Christ.
- **Turning away** - “For it would be better for them,” intones Peter, “not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them” (II Peter 2:21). Once the chains of slavery have been broken, and the new creation tastes the freedom in Christ, he needs to move forward. But if he wanders again into the slavery of sin, entangled again in the sticky mess, the chains he forges for himself this time are not as easily snapped. “It has happened to them according to the true proverb,” is Peter’s serious comment, “ ‘A dog returns to its own vomit,’ and, ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.’ ” (II Peter 2:22). Yucky pictures! But undoubtedly less graphic than what is happening in the entrapped’s spiritual realm.

The mind of the saint is programmable; hence the exhortation comes to be transformed by the process of renewing the mind. But this reprogramming process is difficult and requires consistency. Thus the siren song of the false teachers who have crept into the church has great appeal, offering a mental bailout for those whose desire for transformation wanes. How great a destruction it is, then, for one who once participated in the right way, and turned from it. When he burns in the eternal fires of hell, the knowledge of what good things could have been will torment for all eternity. Truly, it would have been better for him not to have known the way of righteousness!

Another Reminder

Peter, a little brash and bold, was the first among the apostles. First to state that Jesus was the Christ, first with the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane, first to step into the empty tomb, first to preach the gospel to the Jews, and first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, Peter had seen the church grow from its first beginnings to its stretching across the globe. But he was concerned, and rightfully so, about the future of the church and desired earnestly to communicate his warnings to the brethren. Even though he had earlier in his epistle mentioned that he was writing this letter as a reminder, he goes back to this theme. Twenty-first century brethren would do well, then, to pay heed to his warnings!

- **Second letter** - Peter had written his first letter to the brethren in what is now northern Turkey. His theme, "How to be Happy though Suffering," was beneficial to the saints, helping them to focus on the rewards of entrusting "their souls to the faithful Creator in doing what is right" (I Peter 4:19). "This is now, beloved," he states, "the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder" (II Peter 3:1). The minds of the brethren had possibly become complacent; the apostle, knowing his death is imminent, wants to shake them loose from any slackness in their spirituality, and awaken to the seriousness of sound doctrine and the dangers of the false messages promulgated by the false teachers.
- **Remember the words** - The Lord placed the apostles and the New Testament prophets at the foundation of the church, "Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). The apostles and new covenant prophets were the ones who transmitted the inspired teaching of God to the lost and to the saved, whose Holy Spirit-directed teachings ended up in the written documents termed "The New Testament." Peter, in stirring up the brethren by way of reminder, appeals to the disciples to follow the teaching that was not only his, but what was uniform throughout the churches. "You should remember," he stated, "the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles" (II Peter 3:2). These words are indeed "the wonderful words of life."
- **The apostles' doctrine** - From the time of the formation of the church as recorded in Acts chapter two, the basis for the church has been "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). The system of teaching — "commandment" — flowed from Christ through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and from the apostles to those whom Peter designated as "holy prophets." This system of doctrine, also called "the faith of Christ," is the key to eternal life, and without an understanding of its doctrines and practices, the individual is doomed to the eternal fire. On the other hand, the "words spoken beforehand," the "commandment of the Lord and Savior," are, as Peter had stated following the feeding of the five thousand, the "words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

The false teachers, then, would be working to confuse and corrupt those doctrines, and to pull the brethren back into the realm of darkness. The apostle knows that these forces are already at work within the church, and he also knows that the only way the saint can keep his faith intact and move forward with the gospel is to "apply all diligence" in climbing the spiritual spiral staircase. Understanding human nature, and the tendency of the flesh to take the easy path rather than the right and diligent path, the apostle is making a long appeal to the brethren to be aware of their circumstances. "I am," he said, "stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder." May our minds be sincere!

The Uniformitarian Mockers

Peter, an apostle inspired by the Holy Spirit, not only was reaching out toward his generation, but was also looking to ours. False prophets arose among the people of Israel, false teachers arose in the first century church, and false doctrines would propagate in the future. Welcome to that future!

The most important factor in the first century church was to hold to the doctrines taught by the apostles and the New Testament prophets, such as Mark and Luke. “We are no longer to be children,” averred the apostle Paul, “tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). The same forces are at work today; hence there is the superlative need to return to the doctrines and practices favorably recorded in the pages of the New Testament writings. This will be for the preservation of our own souls, and for the souls of all those we may influence.

- **First of all** - Earlier in this epistle, the apostle had noted that the first thing the brethren needed to know is that the scripture is objective; it is not “a matter of one’s own interpretation” (II Peter 1:20). Now he adds to that first point, stating, “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts” (II Peter 3:3). The raucous cries of the first century mockers still echo into present times, joining with the cacophony of the moderns who jeer at the word of God. Their motive is clearly exposed, however, by the Holy Spirit. “Following after their own lusts,” is His delineation of their underlying reasons for denying even the basic truths of God’s Holy Word.
- **“All continues just as it was”** - Well, what is it that these mockers are predicted as saying? “Where is the promise of His coming?” is the first portion of their mocking challenge to God’s eternal truths. “For ever since the fathers fell asleep,” they point out in their accusing fashion, “all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation” (II Peter 3:4). These are known in modern terms as *uniformitarians*; that the processes of the past occurred at the same rate as the processes of the present — the evolutionists, in other words. As Michael Ruse said, as recorded in a Nova presentation, “Science operates against a backdrop or presupposition of unbroken regularity.” If the Colorado River, for example, is carving the base of the Grand Canyon deeper at the rate of one-fourth inch per hundred years, then we can calculate how many millions it took to chew downward through the 6000 feet of sediment that form the current walls of the canyon. Remember, Peter said nearly 2000 years ago that these uniformitarians were coming!
- **Escaping their notice** - These mockers miss two important points: the Creation, and the Flood. “For when they maintain this,” explains Peter, “it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water” (II Peter 3:5,6). For anyone doing serious thinking, it is clear that life and the physical universe necessary to sustain it could only have been created; for the mockers to miss that point means that they deliberately missed it in order to keep following after their lusts. The Flood also was massive, totally altering the surface of the earth, and the evidence of its destruction is also plain to anyone except those who have an agenda of denying their accountability to God.

The mockers have been catapulted into the lead and visible positions in the educational, scientific, and media establishments. They are demonstrably hostile to even entertaining a sensible discussion concerning intelligent design or creation, and are a part of the anti-God forces at work on a massive scale in the modern world. Christians need to pay attention to Peter’s reminders, and hold on to the apostles’ teachings about Jesus Christ!

First Water, Then Fire

The old proverb is, "There is none so blind as him who will not see." Sin hardens the heart and blinds the mind to the truthfulness of God's testimony in the Creation, as well as in the written word. Mankind as a whole has been in rebellion against God since Genesis chapter three, and the forces of darkness foment and agitate that rebellion, bringing it to a more intense ferocity than would have been accomplished by man alone. "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth," Moses recorded, "and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The true history, passed from Noah to Shem to Abraham to Moses, continued, "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:6). The result was that the antediluvian world perished before the Lord. The Almighty then promised not to destroy the earth with water again, saying, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). But the lesson of the Flood stands, communicating to anyone willing to strip the blindness from his mind, and see the judgment of the Lord against sin.

- **First water** - So the flood waters came. "For as in those days which were before the flood," said Jesus, "they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away" (Matthew 24:38,39). Because of the sin of mankind, they perished in the waters, and the present surface terrain of the earth is a constant reminder of their judgment for the watchful saint. "The world at that time," affirmed Peter, "was destroyed, being flooded with water" (II Peter 3:6).
- **Then fire** - God was able, in the new world that came out of the Flood, to create some positives in the midst of man's fresh downward spiral. First came Abraham, father of the faithful, with whom the Lord was able to covenant in order to set the stage for the ages to come. Then came the Law and the establishment of the nation Israel as a beachhead in God's offensive thrust against idolatry and its immoral practices. Finally came the Christ and His church, carrying the torch of the gospel into all the world. But as the human race once again reaches the same rebellious point as it was in the days of Noah, so Jesus will come again and the material universe will vaporize. "But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire," is Peter's addendum, "kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (II Peter 3:7).
- **Ungodly men** - Man can, in his separation from God, become brutish. "Realize this," stated Paul to Timothy, "that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (II Timothy 3:1-4). That statement nearly covers the possible adjectives that could be used in the depravity of man as they come increasingly under the influence of Satanic forces.

"They did not understand," said the Lord Jesus of those rottenly corrupt individuals in the days of Noah, "until the flood came and took them all away." To which He added, "So shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:39). When the level of mankind sinks to what it was before the Flood, then Jesus will come to execute His judgment. This time it will not be water; it will be fire!

Certainty of Judgment

The recent statement of Jesus' coming on May 21, 2011, by Harold Camping, is typical of those who refuse to believe Jesus' comment that no one knows the day or the hour of His return. But "Adventists" of all kinds have been making such predictions all along, with destructive results. The idea of Jesus' second coming is thusly discredited, and mankind as a whole plunges deeper into the abyss of depravity rather than repenting. However, the Day of Judgment will come, even though the deceptive forces of darkness work diligently in convincing mankind that prospects of such a judgment are holdovers from an earlier age, an age where people could be fooled by such "fairy tales."

- **Certainty of the Flood** - Even though moderns do not acknowledge the Flood and its effects upon the earth, as predicted by Peter, the deluge did happen, and its aftermath is very apparent to any who have eyes to see. Noah, "preacher of righteousness" and survivor of the Flood, warned those of his day about God's impending judgment. Knowing what we know about human nature in general, we have a picture of Noah's being scorned and ridiculed during the construction of the ark, and we can hear their jeers as his family boarded the boat laden with supplies and animals. But seven days after God closed the door of the ark behind Noah, forty days of rain came, coupled with the floodgates of the deep being opened. The water rose to fifteen cubits above the highest mountain, and man and beast perished from the surface of the earth because of the massive sin of mankind. The Flood happened!
- **Certainty of fire** - "The world at that time was destroyed," said Peter. And the destruction of that world is to serve as a reminder that this present world will be destroyed by fire. Every green field is a graveyard, covering over the bodies of the millions that refused to hear the call of God to repentance. Every mountain peak is a tombstone, a marker lifted up — a memorial of those who turned away from Noah's preaching. "The present heavens and earth," affirmed Peter, "are being reserved for fire." The certainty of the ancient Flood establishes the certainty of the future fire.
- **Confused by apparent delay?** - Noah preached for 120 years while in the process of building the boat. However, as Jesus explained, "they did not understand until the Flood came and took them all away" (Matthew 24:39). The preaching of Judgment to come, accomplished through the name of Jesus, has been going on for 2000 years, and that long time span perhaps has caused confusion in some about whether He is really coming. Peter, under inspiration of the Spirit, helps us to put things in perspective: "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved," he encourages, "that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (II Peter 3:8). What is a long time span to man is nothing to the Lord; He is not concerned about the time so much as He is concerned about man's turning.
- **The patience of God** - God was patient in the days of Noah, as Peter noted in his first epistle, using this terminology: "the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark" (I Peter 3:20). He affirms this same patience in regard to the second coming of Christ, informing us that "the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God really desires the salvation of every possible person, and is willing to be patient with the earth until every person who will repent does so.

The Flood happened when God was ready, when the time of His patience ran out. The destruction of the earth by fire will happen likewise, when the time of His patience runs out. No one should be confused by that patience, as Peter confirms, "But the day of the Lord *will come!*" (II Peter 3:10).

All to Come to Repentance

Children need to be trained in the ways of righteousness. Left to themselves, they become spoiled, self-willed, lazy, and incorrigible. Thus their approach to life becomes one in which they throw temper tantrums and engage in manipulation techniques to get their own way. But while such behavior is somewhat understandable in a child, it is sickening and destructive in an adult. “Accursed children” is the terminology of the Holy Spirit in describing such as should be mature (II Peter 2:14). But such is the human race, and God’s plan is to rescue as many as possible from the dysfunctional family, and bring them into existence as new creatures in Christ, with a new family, a new environment, and a new potential.

- **Casting fire** - When Jesus came down off the Mount of Transfiguration, a man with a demon-possessed son met Him and pleaded with Him to cast out the demon. Jesus’ response is interesting: “O unbelieving and perverted generation,” He cried, “how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?” (Matthew 17:17). There was something about this situation that was taxing even Jesus’ patience, and He was clearly exasperated with the human race. On another occasion He commented, “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled” (Luke 12:49). Clearly His desire is to execute His judgment upon sinful man, and move on. But His patience keeps Him waiting.
- **All to come to repentance** - “The Lord,” confirmed Peter, “is not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.” This reaffirms the teaching of the Lord Jesus during the days of His earthly sojourn that each person has a choice — to repent, or to perish! The message of repentance is carried on the wings of the gospel; the love of God for each person is demonstrated through the sacrifice of Christ, and that a change of mind and heart is what the Father wants for each of His children. Do you not know, the apostle Paul challenged the brethren in Rome, “that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). The ways of the world, though appealing on the surface, are destructive, but the way of the Lord is the fruitful, happy life.
- **The Lord will wait** - Even though the Lord’s inclination is to cast fire upon the earth, He will wait until the last straggler comes to repentance. It is apparent from an overall look at the scripture that it is worth it to God for Him to witness the everlasting destruction of the many who entered on the broad path in order to have the opportunity for eternal fellowship with the few that will find the narrow way that leads to life. Thus, as the earth careens toward its final destruction, if billions have to bite and devour one another, and in general tear up the planet, God will let it continue until the last living stone is moved into place in the eternal temple of God, until the last lost sheep is brought into the fold of the Great Shepherd.

But what about those of us already rescued? What about those of us who cry out, “Marantha (O Lord come!)” on a regular basis? Well, we also will just have to wait. Just because we have had the opportunity to enter into eternal life does not mean that we should slam the gate closed behind us. It is true that the word of God does not paint a very pretty picture of earth as time nears its end, “men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world” (Luke 21:26). But if we can develop the same perspective that God has — that all should come to repentance — then we can have the patience to persevere until Jesus comes!

Coming Like a Thief in the Night

The saint is to take courage from this certain fact: “The day of the Lord will come!” The forces of darkness are at work trying to confuse the issue of Jesus’ coming by having certain charlatans give their predictions of the exact day. Other forces are at work trying to convince people that the Second Coming will not happen at all. In a lecture on the Montana State University campus I attended as a guest of a student participating in a philosophy class, the professor wowed the students with this impressive opening statement: “The *kerygma* of Jesus Christ is essentially unbelievable because the *parousia* never occurred in the manner expected.” Those early saints, he postured, expected Jesus’ second coming — the *parousia* — to occur in their lifetime, and when He didn’t show, they changed their story to the idea that the second coming is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. Because of that, he maintained, the *kerygma* (the proclamation) of the gospel of Christ is not believable. The ultimate conclusion, of course, is that the story of the Christ is all mythology, and that there will be no such thing as the Lord’s return in judgment. But the saint is to take courage from this certain fact: “The day of the Lord will come!”

- **Like a thief in the night** - The Lord Jesus Himself is the One who introduced the concept of His second coming as a parallel to a thief in the night. “Therefore be on the alert,” He exhorted, “for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will” (Matthew 24:42-44). The apostle Paul uses the same parallel, describing the day when “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God” as “the day of the Lord” which “will come just like a thief in the night” (I Thessalonians 4:16;5,2). Peter, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, concurs: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (II Peter 3:10).
- **Destruction of the physical universe** - The nature of the glory of God is such that it will vaporize the material universe. He describes Himself as wrapped in a canopy of thick darkness (Psalm 18:11); this prevents His glory — His face — from obliterating the present heavens and earth until such time as He has completed His plan for man. Jesus, then, is described in His return as the One “from whose presence [face] earth and heaven fled away” (Revelation 20:11). Peter, then, depicts the return of Christ in these terms, noting that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” It will be gone, and it will never be back again!

When Jesus returns, there will be no rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and there will not be any seven years for an “Antichrist” to reign over earth. There will be no 1000 year reign of Christ upon the earth, for there will be no earth to reign over. When Jesus comes everything physical is vaporized. Hence it is that both the faithful follower of God and the unbelieving infidel will both receive a resurrection body. Those who transgressed against God will leave earth to stand judgment, receiving as their punishment eternity in the lake of fire. The saints will be resurrected to stand judgment, and will pass on into a heavenly eternity in a glorified body. The material universe burns, but there will be no people in that burning; each will have gone on to his reward.

What Sort of People

Everyone has to stop and analyze where they should put their time and effort. On a theoretical basis, at least, people recognize that it is not smart to invest in a failing venture, especially when it is clear that the venture will die. On the other hand, it is prudent to throw all possible resources into a guaranteed, profitable, honorable, and important success. So why, in general, do people waste most of their time and energy in that which is temporal at best, and destructive at worst? Answer: deception! “Sin,” said the apostle Paul, “deceived me” (Romans 7:11). Coupled with “the deceiver” — Satan himself — and the capacity of the human race for self-deception, the deceptiveness of sin puts the vast bulk of the populace on the broad road that leads to eternal destruction in the lake of fire. But there is no need for the Christian to put himself back on that path. He has been enlightened; has been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit; he has tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come; and he can fix his hope and attention on things eternal. Apparently, however, he must be warned.

- **Coming destruction** - At Jesus' second coming, three general categories are destroyed: first, the heavens will pass away with a roar; second, the elements will be destroyed with intense heat; and, third, the earth and its works will be burned up. When the earth burns, all the things that mankind has had a tendency to hope in will be burnt with it. The houses will be gone; the great buildings will be gone; ships, power plants, forests, farms, mountains, rivers, and the ocean will all be gone. “Since all these things,” writes Peter, “are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be...” (II Peter 3:11). I have seen a man labor at building a business to the neglect of his family, only to have his wife divorce him, take the kids, and take one-half the business assets; result, he had no family and he had no sustainable business left. I have seen a woman bind her children so tightly to her that they were in a sense suffocating; result, when they turned eighteen, they said good-bye to mom and essentially moved out of her life. In both cases, they wasted their efforts and their years. Similarly, if a person focuses on building a life for himself on earth, all of his energies are wasted. Those things are going to burn.
- **What sort of people!** - Peter is not really asking a question; he is preaching. “What sort of people,” he says, “ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness!” It is the things of earth that pull a person's attention away from heaven. When the saint fully recognizes that all the earthly things will burn, he can more easily focus on the things of heaven, “fixing” his “eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2). When the “things of earth grow strangely dim” in the light of Jesus' glory and grace, then the temptations of the world begin to lose their power. The conversation of the saint will take on an edifying tone as he uplifts others and points them in the direction of heaven. His interests and focus are on the great truths of the word of God, as he meditates day and night on the law and the gospel. His intensity for learning increases; his desire to memorize the precious words of Jesus is magnified; and his love of the lost occupies more and more of his heart.

God spent most of earth's time in history preparing for the special people called *Christians*. The inspired word was “written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (I Corinthians 10:11). As those who have been born again, strengthened by the Spirit, walking in faith, directed by the word of God, truly “what sort of people ought we to be!”

Hastening the Day of God

Can disciples of Christ really change the history of the world? Can the prayers of the saints really redirect the flow of the order of mankind? Can the actions of the brethren impact the timing of God's events? The scripture gives many examples of how, in the Lord's divine spiritual economy, the prayers and participation of God's people altered the course of history. The prayer of Moses, pleading with God not to destroy the fledgling nation just freshly delivered from Egypt, and the repentance of Nineveh following the preaching of Jonah, come to mind as such cases in point. What about the time, then, of Jesus' second coming? The apostle Paul, preaching at the open forum on Mars Hill near Athens, Greece, closed his message with this appeal: "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30,31). That there is such a day is fixed; but can the timing of that day be altered?

- **Looking for** - The saints are to be exhibiting holy conduct and godliness, predicated upon the destruction of anything physical and earthly. In order to have the proper mindset for holy living, the child of the King must be ever conscious of the second coming of His Lord. In the words of the apostle Peter, he must be "looking for ... the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat" (II Peter 3:12).
- **Hastening** - Not only is the saint to be looking for the return of the Lord Jesus, but he is actually to "hasten" that Day. Clearly, then, if the brethren are to speed up the day of Christ's coming, then the fixation of the day is not so much that there is a time fixed as there is a *result* fixed. One of the consistent pictures the word of God uses is that of "harvesting." The beginning of the church on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost, 30 AD, was pre-figured by the actual grain harvest in Israel. The feast was known as "beginning of the harvest" in Israel as ordained by the Lord, and they were to bring the first-fruits of the harvest to God and present the appropriate offering at the Temple. So when God started to bring in the Harvest of Souls, it was fitting that such a harvest should begin on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Even at the end of time, the concept of the harvest is in place, as Jesus stated in one of His parables, "the reapers are angels" (Matthew 13:39). Of Jesus Himself, John the Immerser noted, "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). Thus the way the brethren can "hasten the coming of the day of God" is to bring more of the harvest in. When we come rejoicing, bringing in the last of the sheaves, the Lord Jesus will come.

"You are," said the apostle Paul, "God's field, God's building" (I Corinthians 3). Having adroitly switched the metaphor, the apostle then compared the spiritual church to a physical temple. "Do you not know," he queried, "that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (I Corinthians 3:16). Anticipating the involvement of the Gentile Christians in moving the "living stones" into place in the spiritual building, Zechariah prophesied, "And those who are far off will come and build the temple of the Lord" (Zechariah 6:15). At some point, then, the last living stone, "the top stone," will be emplaced with shouts of "Grace, grace to it," the true temple of the Lord will be complete, and the plan of God will be finished. Let us "look for and hasten the coming of the day of God"!

New Heavens and a New Earth

Thus begins the word of God: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Here we have the creation of the physical universe; here we have the formation of the first natural laws: the law of gravity, the first law of thermodynamics (that the total combination of matter and energy can neither be created nor destroyed), the laws of momentum. But it was destined to be only temporary. When Adam chomped down on the forbidden fruit, the law of death and decay entered in. "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth," the writer of Hebrews quotes the psalmist, "and the heavens are the works of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they all will become old as a garment, and as a mantle You will roll them up; and as a garment they will also be changed" (Hebrews 1:10-12). The sin of Adam set in motion the destruction of the physical universe! And the moral decay which became endemic in the human race set in motion the motive of God for destroying the physical creation, ushering in the day of judgment, and the ultimate rescue of those who would successfully claim faith in Jesus Christ.

- **Re-emphasis** - Man is pretty clearly attached to earth and its appearance of physical security. The Almighty, then, has to emphasize repeatedly through His servant, the apostle Peter, that the material creation is only temporary — even to Christians! "The earth and its works will be burned up," he stated. "All these things are to be destroyed in this way," he added. Saints are "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God," he points out, "on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat" (II Peter 3:12). "Okay, okay, okay; we get it!" might be our response. And heaven's rejoinder might be, "Do you, really?"
- **New spiritual universe** - The expression "the heavens and the earth" is a reference to the material universe. But material universe will vaporize at the return of Jesus, who is described as the One "from whose face earth and heaven fled away" (Revelation 20:11). Currently "clouds and thick darkness surround Him," to protect the material universe from going up in smoke until the Lord is ready to execute His judgments (Psalm 97:2). But when He appears, and the mortal bodies of the saints shall have put on immortality, the physical universe will be destroyed and the new totally spiritual age will be ushered in. "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (II Peter 3:13). Just as the expression "the heavens and the earth" was a description of the entire physical creation, so the expression "new heavens and a new earth" refer to the entire spiritual creation, what we would generally call "heaven." This does not mean that there will be an earth, or heavenly bodies in that new realm; the expression "new heavens and a new earth" simply refers to the total new spiritual universe that Jesus is preparing.

The Creation at first was described as "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But once the sin of Adam entered in, the picture is drastically altered. "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth," Moses recorded, "and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:6). Since that time every institution has been corrupted by the sin that works in the human heart in general, and by the influence of the prince of the power of the air. The saint then comes to the recognition that there is no justice on earth, that nearly everything is unfair, and that, while corruption, crookedness, and scandal is rewarded, the good and honorable is trashed and persecuted. According to His faithful and sure promise, then, we who are truly justified by faith look to the upcoming new spiritual universe "in which righteousness dwells."

How to Be Found

“Who then is the faithful and sensible steward,” asked Jesus, using His parable-type of teaching, “whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?” (Luke 12:42). The Lord is discussing His second coming with His disciples, trying to help them understand the necessity of constant vigilance. “You too, be ready,” He had stated, “for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect” (Luke 12:40). The saint, then, in our time, if he truly possesses the faith, believes that Jesus could come at any instant. He knows that he has been entrusted with the stewardship of faithfully shepherding his life, and is continually to be executing his responsibilities. “Blessed is that slave,” commended the Christ, “whom his master *finds* so doing when he comes” (Luke 12:43).

- **Looking heavenward** - The key to putting things of earth in their proper perspective is to be in constant expectation of the Lord’s return. Thus God’s people of every age have had information about God’s coming for judgment. Enoch, seventh generation down from Adam and before the Flood, is recorded as prophesying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all ...” (Jude 14,15). Isaiah spoke of what is called “a day of reckoning,” and Malachi prophesied the coming of “the day that will set them ablaze” (Isaiah 2:12; Malachi 4:1). The New Testament writings, including those of the apostle Peter, really bring to the forefront the picture of Jesus’ return. “Therefore, beloved, since you *look* for these things,” was Peter’s continuing thought (II Peter 3:14). The saint, then, is to be ever conscious of the nearness of Christ’s coming.
- **Diligence again** - *Diligence* is one of the watchwords of Peter’s second epistle. He begins with an emphasis on diligence and closes with the same exhortation. The premise is that if the saint is truly looking for the second coming of Christ, then he will exercise all the due diligence of a good steward, having his life “ship-shape” and ready for the Master’s inspection. “Be diligent to be *found* by Him in peace,” stated the apostle, “spotless and blameless.” Since the time of the Master’s return is not known, and since He will come very quickly when He comes, the faithful follower of Christ will be in the process of bringing every thought, word, and deed into conformity with the holiness of Christ.
- **Seeing things properly** - When Jesus was describing His return as recorded in Matthew’s gospel account, He knew that some — in listening to His exhortations to be ready at an instant — would draw the conclusion that, since His return was imminent, they would only need to be diligent for a “short haul.” To counter that predisposition, He told the parables of the wise virgins who took plenty of oil with them, and of the slaves who were given talents (lots of money in silver!) to do business with “for a long time.” “The Lord is not slow,” stated Peter, “about His promise.” He is patient, waiting for every possible person to come to repentance. The saint, then, needs to maintain his diligence for as long as it takes, and adjust his perspective accordingly. “Regard the patience of our Lord,” Peter redirects us, “to be salvation” (II Peter 3:15). While we earnestly yearn for the Lord to come and end this corrupt earth, we also recognize the value of other people’s souls; hence we adjust our attitudes and are thankful for the Lord’s patience in waiting for the last straggling sheep to come into the fold.

The most important question for the one properly immersed into Christ is this: how will Jesus find him when He returns? Will he be diligent in becoming “spotless and blameless?” Will he be at “peace” with his Lord? Or will he begin to “beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards?” One thing is for certain: he will be found!

Commending Paul

The apostles Peter and Paul were in agreement in their doctrine and practices. This unity was described by the apostle Paul in a discussion he had with the churches of Galatia. Referring back to a meeting which occurred in Jerusalem as described in Acts 15, Paul sets the stage for this encounter with the apostles Peter and John. “For I would have you know, brethren,” he initiates his conversation, “that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11,12). So when problems developed in Antioch over the acceptance of the Gentiles as Christians by those of Jewish background, Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders of the congregation there. After submitting to them the gospel which he preached, Paul remained unchanged, noting “those who were of reputation [meaning specifically Peter and John] contributed nothing to me” (Galatians 2:6). The result was that Peter, John, and James (elder in the church of Jerusalem, and half-brother of Jesus) “gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised” (Galatians 2:9). Later, in Antioch, Paul had to correct Peter in the presence of the whole congregation because of his being carried away into hypocrisy — refusing to eat with the Gentile brethren. To Peter’s credit, and as a recorded example of how brethren need to work through difficulties, Peter accepted Paul’s rebuke rather than splitting the church, and obviously highly respected Paul’s efforts and teachings. Now, at the time of Peter’s “imminent departure,” both of these awesome apostles had been working in Rome.

- **Writings of Paul** - The brethren were exhorted to prepare for the Lord’s second coming. “According to His promise,” is Peter’s wording, “we are looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwell” (II Peter 3:13). “Regard,” is his command, helping the brethren to acquire the proper perspective, “the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you” (II Peter 3:15). Peter and Paul were, as previously noted, in agreement, and Peter was willing to indirectly quote Paul’s writings to verify the unity of their positions. Given Peter’s concern for the purity of the doctrines which he espoused, and which occupy a good portion of this epistle, his appeal for the brethren to give equal weight to Paul’s writings is highly significant for the future of the church as a whole.
- **Wisdom of Paul** - Early in this epistle, Peter had noted that “we have the prophetic word made more sure,” referring to the revelations which he and the other apostles had received concerning Jesus and the glories connected with His ascension. “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,” he had intoned, “but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Peter 1:19-21). Part of the implication of this statement is that the apostles were also inspired, and that their preserved writings were part of the Holy Spirit’s completed revelation. Paul’s “wisdom,” then, is preserved in what Peter himself called “scriptures”!

One of Peter’s great final closing statements is his commendation of Paul. Paul had made it plain that he had the same preaching and same practices everywhere he went. “For this reason,” he stated to the church at Corinth, “I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church” (I Corinthians 4:17). Peter’s recommendations of Paul’s writings establishes that all the true first century congregations all taught the same doctrines and all practiced the same essential practices. This basic and powerful truth is the beacon for how we are to conduct ourselves today!

Twisting Paul

The apostle Peter was greatly concerned about the coming of false teachers into the church after his physical death on earth, which he termed his “departure.” It needs to be re-emphasized: “There will be false teachers among,” was his warning, “ who will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” “Many will follow their sensuality,” he continued, “and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned” (II Peter 2:1-3). Unfortunately, those who were to follow did not pay enough attention to Peter’s admonitions, and by approximately 50 years after Peter’s departure, most of those who claimed to be disciples of Christ had been led off into the very heresies that this great apostle was pouring out his heart and soul in warning against. Not only would they reject the pleadings of Peter, they would also twist the teachings of Paul.

- **Difficult passages** - Every ten years or so, the publishing houses come out with a new English version of the scriptures. Many of these try to make the teachings of the New Testament easier to understand by using simplified words and syntax. The problem is not in the wording; the problem is in the elevated logical processes that the Holy Spirit uses through men such as Peter, John, and Paul. Words only have any depth of meaning when they are arranged so as to communicate a flow of logic; when the logical stream is complex, simplified words and context may actually obscure the meaning rather than clarify it. Peter, then, in referring to the inscribed wisdom of Paul, notes that Paul “wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand” (II Peter 3:16). If the inspired apostle Peter’s analysis is that some of Paul’s writings are hard to understand, then they are hard to understand! And no “dumbed-down” version or paraphrase is going to simplify that complex flow of logic.
- **Scripture twisters** - The word of God is authoritative; it sets forth the principles and perspective of God, as Jesus Himself said, “The word I spoke is what will judge [you] at the last day” (John 12:48). Because it is authoritative, then those who use the covering of scripture to carry out their own agenda have to twist the difficult passages in order to deceive the undiscerning. Peter animadverts concerning Paul’s letters, “in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the scriptures, to their own destruction.” It is a form of pride for a person to think that he knows more than he does; or for him to make great swelling pronouncements about which he knows little. The untaught, then, if they have this weakness, will be carried off into false doctrines because they distort the scriptures in not reasoning clearly about them. The unstable likewise gravitate to these truly unscriptural positions. Some want to go to a form of law, “even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (I Timothy 1:7). Others bring in lawlessness, a spiritual anarchy. “For certain persons have crept in unnoticed,” asserted Jude, “ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). In either case they are distorting the scriptures, and they will end up in the fires of a Christless hell.

The word of God is a perfectly designed instrument of judgment. It, in the words of Hebrews’ author, can discern “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Of Jesus, John the Immerser said, “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor” (Matthew 3:12). If the untaught and unstable distort the word, it is because they are not honest before the Lord. It is incumbent upon us, then, as those who are honest in the sight of the Almighty and All Knowing, to make certain that we do not twist scripture, but that we “rightly divide the word of truth”!

“Be On Your Guard”

Our time on earth is clearly nothing more than a testing ground. Since earth is all we have ever known, based on our five senses, it is a challenge to put physical life in its proper perspective based on the word of God, revelation from heaven. But it must be done. “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it,” Jesus Himself informed us, “but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it” (Mark 8:35). And this point is a continuing theme of the Christ: “He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal,” He added, near the end of His own earthly life. “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:25,26). Not only is there the concept of preserving self for all eternity if a person serves Christ, but there is added benefit of being honored by the Father as a positive motivation for those desiring to lose earth in order to gain heaven.

But Satan is at work, trying to pull the saints’ attention back to the things of this world, and obscuring their view of heaven. In so doing, he can drag the brethren back into the destruction he, his angels, and those who never knew God or never obeyed the gospel reap. Hence he has his false teachers who appeal to sensuality, greed, and adultery. And against such Peter warns again and again.

- **Foreknowledge** - The apostle who was given the keys of the kingdom by the Lord is leaving this earth knowing that his brethren have no excuse for falling away. “You therefore, beloved,” he writes, “knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men ...” (II Peter 3:17). These servants of Satan, disguising themselves as ministers of righteousness, are “unprincipled”; they are dishonest, conniving, deceitful, schismatic, and destructive. The saint is to beware, being forewarned, so that they do not suck him and his family into the hole of false doctrines that appeal to the flesh in one form or another.
- **Be ye steadfast** - It is amazing, when you think about it, how crafty and deceitful Satan is, and how pervasive the forces of darkness are. In the words of the apostle John, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (I John 5:19). But even inside the church, those who have “been called out of darkness into His marvelous light,” the ministers of the devil are working nonstop to confuse, conflict, and conflagrate. “Be on your guard,” says Peter, “lest being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness” (II Peter 3:17). The saint could have his senses appealed to by these men, and he has the possibility of losing his salvation because he chose to listen to the sneaky false teachers. The exhortation of the apostle Paul comes to mind: to “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

The love of the apostle Peter for the church, for the movement of which he was a major part, is evident. He himself was a victim of Satan’s destructive activity more than once. “Simon, Simon,” said Jesus, just prior to His arrest in Gethsemane, “Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:32). That sifting occurred, but through Jesus’ prayer, Peter was able to turn back again to serve the Lord. Later, Satan was able to incite Peter not to eat with the Gentile brethren in Antioch of Syria, and thus set the stage for a lot of dissension and confusion in the church at large. But the Lord was able to use the apostle Paul to correct the misunderstanding. So Peter’s words are straight out of his own experience and straight from his heart: “Be on your guard!”

Grow!

When Jesus preached in His home synagogue of Nazareth, He read from the passage in Isaiah about “good news for the afflicted,” “liberty to the captives,” and “freedom to the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1,2). In this prophetic passage, clearly about the church built on Jesus Christ, those who hear the trumpet sound announcing the year of the spiritual jubilee are “called the oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:3). From the seed of the gospel, planted in the good and honest hearts of the hearers, these mighty oaks grow. But they need proper nutrition and a good growing environment.

- **Grace** - Peter had warned about “error of unprincipled men.” These teachers, while having the appearance of faithfulness and good standing within the church, actually were destroyers, using sensuality and appeals to greed as subtle motivators to those who would come inside their orbit. The solution, he says, is to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18). *Grace* is the good growing environment for these oaks of righteousness. *Grace* itself is a word embodying huge concepts, including everything that God gives. *Grace* is how Peter opened this letter, and *grace* is how he is closing it. The context of the closing is *grace* is God’s willingness to let saints keep trying to do things God’s way but allowing for many mistakes in the process. As God’s revelation proceeded from, for example, Abraham to Christ, sin was more clearly defined, and consciousness of sin increased accordingly. “And the Law came in that transgression might increase,” was the way the apostle Paul put it, “but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20). God’s grace is big enough to handle the transgressions of man, if those transgressions are honestly acknowledged, and honest efforts at renewing the mind are taking place. In this way, saints can grow in grace; they are not afraid to try things for fear of making mistakes, but they are willing to take some risks of faith in order to become more experienced and effective.
- **Knowledge** - False teachers actually hinder the increase in what Peter would call “true knowledge” (NASB), blocking or misdirecting key pieces of information or application of those concepts. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” excoriated Jesus, “because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:14). Those who block the entrance into the kingdom did not die with the scribes and the Pharisees; it was going on at the close of the first century, AD, and it is going on now. The saints need knowledge to grow: personal reading of the scripture itself, Bible studies, a track-to-run-on, assemblies of the saints, time for answering questions, discussion of great spiritual truths ... And they need to know that the focus is on knowing Jesus, based on what the word of God reveals concerning Him during the days of His flesh, and as He is in the realm of eternity. “I count all things to be loss,” wrote Paul to the Philippian brethren, “in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). It is important to know the Jesus revealed in the Bible, and not some Jesus that is a figment of a person’s imagination.

The scriptures of II Peter open and close with grace; but that grace is closely tied to knowledge. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you,” is Peter’s opening prayer, adding “in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord” (II Peter 1:2). The apostle closes with the exhortation to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” What a blessing it is to have received a faith of the same kind as those of the first century Christians! What a blessing it is to have the word of God communicating the truths concerning Jesus our Lord! And what a blessing it is to function under the grace of our Father and the Jesus our Savior! “To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”