

# **An Abundant Entrance Into the Eternal Kingdom**

*Twelve Seminars on 2 Peter and Growing as a Christian*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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## The Resources for Spiritual Growth

### *2 Peter 1:1–11*

Well now, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to add my own word of welcome this morning to this, the first of our three days of seminars on the second epistle by Peter. Thank you very much for making the effort to come. It is particularly gratifying to see many of those who came last year to the seminars on the tabernacle present again this year. And of course, it is also very gratifying to see new faces joining us on this year's study.

### **A word about study groups**

I am particularly grateful for those of you who have volunteered to lead the study groups for the question times.<sup>1</sup> And, if I may, I will give just a brief word in the ear of those who have so volunteered. First of all, you will find the questions that are issued are a very mixed bag. I suppose in an ideal world we would have different groups that might specialize at different levels and with different interests. That has so far not proved possible. Maybe we shall do that in other years if God wills. But you will find, as it is, that the questions are of different types, difficulties and kinds. I should be grateful if you would manage to work through those questions in the time allotted, taking them at what speed you feel appropriate.

The questions are not there to limit you. If you have time and inclination to go beyond those questions and raise other matters with your groups that are relative to the passage being discussed, of course, you are perfectly free to do so. It will certainly add weight and value to the studies. I hope that at least those of you who lead the groups will find yourself in agreement with what I say from this rostrum over the main thrust of this epistle. It will be, I should think, impossible that you will agree with all the detail of what I shall say. And let me make it clear that we are not expecting you who lead the groups to agree with all the detail that I say. If you find yourself in some particular holding a somewhat different view from what I hold then I would ask you, of your grace and mercy, just to make sure that your group have understood what I have said; and then of course you are at perfect liberty to say, 'But I don't agree with dogsbody on that. I think he's a bit to the left or the right, or above or below; and the true meaning is rather, here.' Let there be open and honest and genuine debate, and seeking together for the meaning of God's word.

You will also find, perhaps, that the questions given for some of the sessions are not enough to fill the time. You may find on other occasions there are too many to get into the time. So, as the seminars proceed, please feel free. For instance, if in the first session you don't

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<sup>1</sup> For the questions given out for these study groups, see [Study Questions](#).

have enough questions to go around, look ahead to the next section, if you want, and begin to prepare your group for what is liable to be coming in the next session. In other words, manoeuvre the questions around as best suits you and as best suits the time.

### **A survey of the epistle**

With that, let us begin our sessions by reading the opening verses of the second epistle by Peter. The version that I am reading from at the moment is the Revised Version, though we shall not stick by its translations everywhere.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue; whereby he has granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust. Yes, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge temperance; and in your temperance patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he that lacks these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins. Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (vv. 1–11 RV)

### **Major interventions by God**

I suppose the first sensible thing to do in coming to the second epistle of Peter is to take a bird's eye view of its contents and then of the relevance of those contents to our experience. This is a very small epistle, yet the things that it manages to mention are literally of earth shaking importance. In the course of its three chapters, Peter manages to talk to us about the following tremendous matters.

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#### **Major Events of 2 Peter**

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1. The creation (ch. 3)
  2. The flood (chs. 2–3)
  3. Destruction of Sodom (ch. 2)
  4. The transfiguration (ch. 1)
  5. The second coming (ch. 3)
  6. The dissolution of present heavens and earth (ch. 3)
  7. New heavens and earth (ch. 3)
-

First of all, he mentions the creation in chapter 3. Then in chapter 2, and again in chapter 3, he talks to us in some detail about the flood by which the original creation of our world was destroyed. He also talks to us in chapter 2 of that catastrophic intervention in human history that was the destruction of the cities of the plain, in particular of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This little epistle is unique among all the epistles of the New Testament. As far as I am aware, it is the only one that talks to us about the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus. Naturally, it is of particular interest to us, and we shall be asking necessarily, 'What is the special significance of the transfiguration of our Lord?' I suspect we see, with some ease, the significance of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus, though the incarnation of our Lord Jesus has been subject to much debate in the public media recently. We also see and commonly speak of the significance of our Lord's death as an atonement for sin. We see, I suspect with ease, the significance of his resurrection, which is the great foundation of the Christian faith. If Jesus Christ is not risen, then there is nothing in Christianity. We see, I trust, the significance of his ascension and often talk of it, and of his coming again. But in my experience of attending hundreds and thousands of sermons in my long years of life (and now in my advanced old age) I have to confess I have not heard all that many sermons on the transfiguration of our Lord and what its significance may be. So this epistle will have special interest for us, and we will spend some time, God willing, in considering the significance of that awesome event.

We notice at least the context in which Peter is led to mention it. We are thinking in terms of our great planet earth, of its creation, of its final dissolution and of the way that, when eternity dawns, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. So in this epistle we are thinking of certain catastrophic interventions of divine power in the course of history: the flood bringing its welter of destruction, the judgment upon the cities of the plain: Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim and the others. And here in the transfiguration of our Lord, if our imagination can be summoned to help us imagine what it was like, we have our blessed Lord standing on our planet earth and yet in open contact with eternity. The whole thing bids us consider the relation of time to eternity, of our present experience here on this earth and how it is related to the other eternal realm. We are thinking, in other words, of the relation of the temporary to the eternal. And of course the transfiguration of our Lord will emphasize to our hearts that our temporary, present and visible world is not the only world there is; there is another world. It is before our world; it is concurrent with our world; it will be beyond our world. And the transfiguration will bid us think that we shall not understand the true significance of life on this temporary planet unless our life here is geared into that eternal world that surrounds us.

So then the transfiguration of our Lord bids us consider, first of all, Jesus Christ: a man as we are, standing with two feet on this present world, and then bids us watch as he is transfigured and taken up into the glory of that eternal world. The transfiguration of Christ is going to talk to us about God's intention for us humans as well. It will tell us how, making those right discoveries and responses to God in the course of our temporary world here, we too may be transformed and made suitable for that eternal world.

In addition to talking of creation and God's interventions in judgment in the past in the flood and the destruction of Sodom, our epistle will also talk to us about God's interventions in the future, that is, about the second coming of our Lord. It is mentioned explicitly in chapter

1: 'We did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus' (v. 16 RV).

As I have said, in addition to talking of the second coming of Christ, this epistle will talk to us about the dissolution of all things: the end of the present earth and heavens. And finally it will talk of the eternal heavens and earth, the new heavens and earth, that great goal for which our temporary planet is but a stepping stone and a preliminary stage.

These then are some of the great events that we shall be considering in the second epistle of Peter.

### **A temporary world and two kinds of progress**

Let us fasten for the moment on the emphasis that Peter will put before us in chapter 3. It is this, that the present world in which we live is temporary. Now of course, that happens to be the reigning theory amongst the cosmologists nowadays. When I was a youth some cosmologists were inclined to the view that the universe around us is eternal. Ancient Greeks also held the view that matter is eternal but, as you will know, of more recent years the theory has gained favour amongst the cosmologists that the scientific evidence, as far as we understand it, proclaims that our world is temporary.

Scientists talk to us about the fact that our sun is moment by moment burning up vast, almost incalculable, stores of energy. And in more recent years we have become alerted to the fact that you can't go on burning energy forever; it runs out. There was concern some years ago about the possibility that fossil fuels would run out and face our modern world with difficulties of finding some alternative forms of energy to use and keep our advanced civilizations going. That is only one little reminder to us that the great sun up in the sky, pouring out its vast quantities of energies constantly every second must, by definition, burn out one of these days. And the picture that the scientists paint is rather uncomfortable. They hazard the guess (perhaps it's more than a guess) that as our sun begins to grow old, one day it will blow up and become a massive *red giant*, as they call it. When it does (or even before) our little planet will sizzle up like a sausage in a saucepan, and all that has been humanity, and all that has been apparent progress, and all that has been achieved, will be burned up.

Now, the Bible has been saying this for a very long while. We are not to suppose that when the Bible talks of the world being burned up it is confining itself to the possibilities that the scientists talk of. The Bible affirms that our present world with all its forces is kept together by God's sovereign will. In Christ our redeemer and creator, all things are held together, be they the strong forces or the weak electrical forces or whatever they are. In him, says Scripture, they hold together (see Col 1:17). And when it pleases his divine majesty to let those forces come asunder, then all things will be dissolved. At any rate, to this extent there is no conflict between what the Bible has been saying for centuries and what now at last the modern scientist is saying. Our world is temporary.

### **Human progress and significance**

When the scientists talk to the general public about this fact, they deem it good and proper and decent manners to comfort our hearts by saying, 'Yes, but it won't happen yet for a while! It won't happen for billions and billions and billions of years, so you're all right.' But that's

facile comfort, isn't it? Because the very fact that our world is temporary raises a very big question, namely: what is the significance of human life on our planet and the whole episode of humanity? You see, it isn't merely that one of these days you will pass away and die, and your life is temporary. You have seen that long since. The fact is that human life, as we have known it on this planet—the whole race—is a temporary thing, a temporary phenomenon in the heavens. Just as we can train our telescopes on certain stars and see them as burnt out, finished, dead worlds, so one day our planet (and humanity with it) shall be a thing of the past. What is the significance of human life? And in particular, what are we to think of human progress?

I hope you are human enough, as you read your history and observe what is going on around you, to feel a certain pride at the tremendous progress that human beings have made on the planet. I have often rejoiced in it here in Belfast that I don't see the gentlemen living in caves and pulling their wives around by the roots of their hair and beating them with clubs. Life, at least in Belfast, is not the nasty old thing it used to be, not only centuries ago, but what it was in your grandfather's time. With what greater ease and affluence we do go about our daily living. When I consider the ingenuity of man: his marvellous inventions and his technological progress, I for one am filled with admiration. What a wonderful story of progress it has been, and is. And now in our decade we observe mankind is making progress not at an arithmetical but a geometrical rate. They tell me that IBM have got so many new editions of computers under wraps because, even though the present ones are marvellous, the ones they have are even more marvellous, and they can't bring them onto the market yet because they wouldn't sell the ones that they've already got for sale.

The progress that promises now in these next decades almost defies description. What of it, if one of these days, however remote in time it may be, the whole thing is going to be burned up? The answer that the Christian gospel has to this matter is, of course, a marvellous, glorious and positive one.

### **Progress and the Christian gospel**

The Bible affirms that all true progress is of eternal significance. We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that our Lord, by whom all things were made, originally, made the ages of human experience; and at its end he will be the heir of 'all things' (1:2). We may hope that all true and genuine human progress will not be wasted; Christ will be its heir and inheritor, and build it into his eternal kingdom. But today, and in our studies, we will find Peter in this letter concerned, not with human progress at the technological level, but with progress at the more important level, and that is moral and spiritual progress. For, according to Holy Scripture, the significance of our human race is not to be found merely in its technological progress but in its moral and spiritual progress.

The question that Peter will address to our hearts is this: 'What am I?' I started as a little bit of a two-celled organism. I grew; I was born. Since then I like to think I have progressed. At least I've progressed physically. I like to think I've progressed in my intelligence. I like to think I've progressed morally. What am I?

I am not a static thing, am I? No human being is a static thing. You are moving even as you sit on those chairs. It is not merely that the chemistry of your cells is moving, but your



personality is moving, isn't it? And today will see us all that little bit changed from what we were yesterday. We are making progress for good, or progress for the worse. Let Peter impress that on our hearts. At the very deepest levels of my being and personality, I am not a static something; I am on the move.

And I live on a planet that is constantly on the move. I sit on this planet earth, and it goes around the sun; and the sun itself is going somewhere, and we are following it, corkscrewing through space. You will never come back to the same place, not even in space; you are on the move. And what is true physically is true morally and spiritually: we are on the move. Even now at this very moment we are determining, in part, what we shall be.

## Two kinds of progress

It is therefore exceedingly important that we get this notion of progress into our hearts, and make sure that the progress we make is the right kind of progress. For when Peter comes to his second chapter he warns us that there is such a thing as 'bad progress', if you can put it that way. In chapter 1 he is exhorting us as Christians to make sure that we do make positive, deliberate progress, by God's grace. In chapter 2 he will remind us that in his day there were those who advocated a certain kind of progress. They said it was moral progress and that it had a tremendous future in it of freedom, but Peter denounces it as being false and cruelly deceptive. If this is progress, it is progress that will land people in an eternal abysm of corruption.

This false progress to which he refers is what we nowadays would call *permissiveness*. As the first century of our era drew to its end there were people who preached it in the name of Christianity. The old moralities, they said, were old fashioned. If you had the new philosophies, you would see that the old restrictions on sexual morality didn't matter. Now we were free. They said it promised even greater freedom, with much more development of the personality, so that we would become better, healthier people, freed from our inhibitions. It is interesting that we have found in this last, say, twenty to twenty-five years in Western Europe and in the United States of America that same emphasis on permissive morality, preached in the same terms, not as ultimate rights and wrongs, but as 'old fashioned' and 'modern'. Sexual licence is advocated on the grounds that the older restrictions are old fashioned; as though morality was a something that kind of develops, and you would judge it like you would judge a car. You only have to look at some cars to be able to say, 'Oh, that's old fashioned. Dear me. That type of a clutch went out with the ark!' And we're so used to *new cars, new televisions and computers* and the idea that old fashioned is bad, that we get it into our heads that 'old' morality is bad. And the mark of whether a thing is right or not is whether it is 'new fashioned'.

So nowadays homosexuality, instead of being branded as sinful, as it always was in God's word, is counted all right; and that in spite of the diseases that it now gives alarming rise to.<sup>2</sup> Premarital sex and fornication and adultery and divorce are not excused; they are flaunted in front of us as being the mark of the modern man and of the human race making progress. Therefore in this second letter we shall have to listen to Peter exposing why that is false.

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<sup>2</sup> This series of talks was given in 1985 when cases of HIV/AIDS was rising rapidly, particularly among men who identified as homosexual.

## Judgment and preservation

Let's not go further along that line at the moment, save to notice that Peter will not only denounce that kind of new morality as false; he will warn people that God will not put up with it forever, and there will come judgment on our planet for that kind of thing. You may be thinking, 'Yes, judgment may be, but the end of the world is a long, long, long way off . . .'. You may be right, but chapter 2 of Peter's epistle will remind us that, long before this present world disappears, there is to be another intervention within history, and that is the coming again of Jesus Christ our Lord. Just as the flood came and intervened in history and destroyed evil men, and when it was over history went on still; and just as the fire and brimstone came from heaven and destroyed Sodom, and when it had done its work of purifying, history went on.

As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be when the Son of Man comes. The Lord will come! He will clear up our old world morally; and history will not necessarily come to an end right then. For the Lord knows how to intervene in history to put down evil, and to keep evil men from doing further harm, and to keep them under punishment 'until' that remote time when it shall please God to finish our planet completely (see 2:4).

I would like to suggest to you then that one of the lessons that we must pick up from our study of this epistle may be put in simple terms as follows.

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### Major Lessons of 2 Peter

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1. This world is temporary
  2. There is an eternal kingdom
  3. Progress here will have eternal consequences there
- 

Number one: this world is temporary, with all that that means. There is no standing still. With its endless and irresistible progress in one direction or another, this world is temporary. Number two: there is an eternal kingdom. And thirdly: all true progress here in this world will have eternal consequences in the next. And in putting before us this lesson, Peter's chief object is to prevail upon us as Christians not to take a fatalistic attitude, but to say to ourselves, 'Yes, if life is temporary, life is the time for change and for progress. If there is an eternal world, and progress here will have eternal consequences there, then God help me, with all the resources of my redeemed intelligence and redeemed emotion and redeemed strength, to cooperate with God for as long as I am in this temporary world, so that I make such progress as will bring me the maximum of benefit and potential in that eternal kingdom.'

## Determined we will not forget

Now, Peter held that it was such a very important lesson that he'd got to do something a little bit drastic about it. At the risk of being an unpopular preacher, or an unpopular letter writer, he tells us in the second part of chapter 1 what he intends to do.

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### Peter's Declared Intention in 2 Peter

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1. To remind you
  2. To stir you up by reminding you
  3. To ensure you will always be able to recall these things
- 

Here is this major lesson: this world is temporary; there is an eternal world; and progress in this world will have eternal consequences. Peter says, 'I'm going to remind you of it. And not only that; I'm not only going to remind you of it, I'm going to stir up your minds by way of remembrance. More than that, I'm going to ensure that you will always be able to recall these things yourselves.'

Notice the threefold intention he has. Let me illustrate it. Suppose I had some lesson to teach you. I'll take a silly lesson as an example. You might remember it better that way, mightn't you? I say to you, 'You know, I'd like to remind you of something.'

You say, 'What's that?'

'It's hot in the Sahara.'

You say, 'It's hot in the Sahara. I see.'

'Oh, I say, I want to remind you. It is hot in the Sahara.'

'So what?'

I can see that you are just taking it casually, so I come up to you, and I get you by the shoulders and begin to shake you and say, 'You don't seem to understand. It's hot in the Sahara! Can't you get hold of it? Get stirred up; get excited!'

So you begin to get excited, and you say, 'It must be important, what this chap is saying. I don't quite understand it, but it's hot in the Sahara. But what's that got to do with me? But anyway, he seems to think it's important. Do you know what? It's hot in the Sahara!'

Oh, you're getting excited now. Yes, so I'm getting somewhere. Even that isn't enough, for I keep on shaking you, and I keep on stirring you up about this. The result is that, when I'm dead and gone, you'll be sitting around your fireside one of these nights, and suddenly the conversation, being a bit dull, will turn to that curious fellow who used to live in Belfast. And as somebody mentions his name, a grin will come over your face. You'll say, 'He was an odd one, wasn't he? Do you remember the way he was always saying, "It's hot in the Sahara"? Ha!'

Oh, it's done its work then, for now even when I'm gone you can recall it.

Well I'm not going to preach to you, 'It's hot in the Sahara'; but I am going to preach to you, 'There is an eternal world. Our world is only temporary. And your place and condition and enjoyment in that eternal world will depend on your progress here.' For Peter says, 'I'm going to tell you that and remind you of that. Oh, I'm going to do more than remind you. I'm going to shake you by the shoulders and stir you up! I'll get you dancing around the place and telling each other, "Do you know what? This world is temporary. And my enjoyment of the eternal world will depend on my progress here."'

'More than that,' says Peter, 'when I've gone and put off my earthly body, I want so to have taught you that any time you like you can recall this message, and you will recall it constantly.'

That is our task in these studies, ladies and gentlemen: not only to be reminded, not only to be moved, but to so get hold of 2 Peter that we could recall it any time we wished. Can you? I'm not going to ask you, Madam, or you, Sir, to get up on your hind legs now and recite 2 Peter. But, could you, if I asked you? Could you give you me a summary of each chapter? You'll disappoint Peter if you get home to heaven and you can't. And let us remind ourselves that if one of these days we found ourselves in a Communist jail, bereft of our Bibles, it would be an incalculable blessing to be able to recall the main outline of 2 Peter.

### **A brief introduction to the opening verses (1:1-4)**

Now I am going to spend a few brief moments starting in those verses that we read in 2 Peter 1, and priming the pump of your thinking so that as you go to your study groups you will be able to begin raising the questions that I have put on the sheet. And then in the second session I shall try to deal with the questions that you have discussed and take the topics further, and then go down to verse 11.

So what I would like you to give your attention to in your classes, if you will, is chapter 1:1-4. Why do you suppose that, whereas in his first letter he just says, 'Peter', in this letter he says, 'Simon Peter'? Is that because he was particularly proud that he had two names, like some people have: James Bartholomew Spink, and they're proud of the Bartholomew bit? Is there any significance in the fact that in this letter he calls himself Simon Peter, using his two names?

What does it mean when he says, 'To them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God' (v. 1 RV)? What do you think that means?

When he says, we have 'obtained a like precious faith . . . in the righteousness of our God' what has that righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ got to do with obtaining faith?

In verse 3 he says that Christ called him 'by his own glory and virtue'. I would ask you to think how *you* were called to the Christian faith. And what do you think Peter means when he says that he has called us by his own glory and virtue?

When he says in verse 4 that we have been granted exceeding great and precious promises, what promises is he referring to?

When in verse 4, again, he says that we are to be made 'partakers of the divine nature', what do you take that to mean? Do all believers, by definition, partake of the divine nature? Is it a something that we get when we are converted, or is it something that we have to get hold of after we get converted, or what is it?

Now, leaders of classes, what I want to do now is simply to prime the pump, if you will. Not necessarily to come to answers, but to begin to think about these phrases. What do they mean to each other? And what do you think they have to do with our general topic? I am myself going to give what I think they mean in the second session, and then you may care to carry on the discussion of those first verses, on down to verse 11, in the second series of question sessions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Questions for the first class session can be found in the [Study Questions](#) section at the end of this series, followed by the questions for all subsequent sessions.

## The Process and Importance of Spiritual Growth

### *2 Peter 1:1–11*

I was suggesting to you in the first session of our seminars that one of the major lessons of this little epistle of 2 Peter is that our world is temporary; there is an eternal kingdom; the purpose of our temporary world is to make progress possible, and that all true progress is of eternal consequence. Therefore, in reminding us of the fact that our world is temporary, leading to an eternal kingdom, Peter is hoping to persuade us to use every resource we have been given in order to make progress for that eternal realm; not only progress in the things that we do and achieve that are external to ourselves, but progress in ourselves, in our personalities, in what we *are*. As men and women that have been born of God, we live eternally. It is open to us to shape, along with God, what we will be as persons in that great eternity. It is open to us in this temporary world of change to develop our potential for enjoying eternity.

Being temporary, this is a world where we are on the move whether we like it or not. We cannot, in any sense, stay still. So we will make progress, but it is possible to make progress of the wrong sort; which will lead, in life, to sorrow and slavery and, in eternity, to disaster. It is possible to be moving but moving nowhere in particular, just meandering, going around in circles and not making any real, positive progress. If as believers we do that, we injure ourselves eternally by failing to develop the potential we would have developed. That is why Peter tends to keep on reminding us that the opportunity is now ours, along with God, to use the resources he has given to make progress and to develop potential so that our enjoyment of the eternal kingdom might be the maximum.

### **The thought flow of 1:1–11**

Peter is determined that we should not only be reminded and be stirred up by being reminded, but be so deeply reminded that we can recall what he has told us. And therefore now I am going to give you a suggested skeleton of a thought flow for the first eleven verses of the epistle.

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#### **Grace and Peace**

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- 1:3 SEEING THAT all things have been given
  - 1:5 FOR THIS VERY REASON add diligence: supply
  - 1:8 For if . . .
  - 1:9 For if not . . .
  - 1:10 THEREFORE give the more diligence: make sure
  - 1:10 For if . . .
  - 1:11 For so . . .
-

The point of this is that we shall try and get the outline, the way the thought is going. Sometimes it is possible not to see the wood, as they say, for the trees, to get bogged down in the detail of what a writer is saying and then fail to see what is the general flow of his argument, what is the point and punch of the big message that he has to get across. So let's not get bogged down in too much detail, important as the detail is, and let's begin by looking at the skeleton thought flow.

### **Diligence to make progress**

He is urging us to make progress. He is going to say in verse 5: 'for this very reason, add diligence', to supply all these extra things and qualities that are essential if we are to make progress as people. And he will return to that great emphasis and repeat it in verse 10. But this time he is even more insistent: 'give the more diligence' to add all these things and thus to make our calling and election sure.

So here, central to these verses, is the doubly repeated emphasis that we are to give 'all diligence'; we are to give 'the more diligence'; to give diligence to add these various things to our character, in order to develop us as persons who are ready for that great eternal kingdom. And we are to give even more diligence, and in so doing to make our 'calling and election sure.'

### **Grace and peace (vv. 2-4)**

If they are the central bits, let's go back to the beginning and see the thought flow. Peter says in verse 2: 'Grace to you and peace be multiplied . . .'. Then, in verse 3: 'seeing that . . .'. In other words, he is giving us the reason for grace and peace being multiplied. Peter wishes that grace and peace be multiplied to us, but on what ground does he say so? Is this just a pious wish? No, indeed. He can issue his prayer and benediction that grace and peace be multiplied because he has substantial grounds for saying so: 'seeing that his divine power has granted us all things' (v. 3). The ground upon which he now wishes us that grace and peace be multiplied is that all things have been given.

That is a glorious connection of thought if you can get it. When he says, 'grace and peace be multiplied' it isn't like we sometimes begin a letter: 'Dear Income Tax Inspector'. Well that is how you begin letters, isn't it? But I don't really mean 'dear' when I write to the income tax inspector. We probably mean anything but 'dear', but we are polite, so we say, 'Dear Income Tax Inspector'. And you might say Peter's words here are like that and apostles have a similar habit of starting up their letters with some pious-sounding phrases such as 'grace and peace'.

No, indeed not. Peter has in mind each one of us as human personalities bound for an eternal kingdom. In one sense that is a solemn thing. With all of its potential, that is a breathtaking thing. In this fallen, difficult world, can he really and sincerely pronounce upon you 'grace and peace' when you face such a vast program?

'I can indeed,' says Peter. 'I can wish you grace and peace on *this* ground: that all you need for that great eternity, all the resource you need to prepare yourself for that great eternity, has in fact been given.'

Therefore, 'grace and peace' is pronounced 'seeing that', or 'on the ground that', all these things have been given.

### **The potential is the reason to be diligent (vv. 5–9)**

‘Well,’ you say, ‘if everything has been given for that great eternity, all I’ve got to do is to get a comfortable chair, sit down, and do nothing. If everything has been given, I can just sit.’

Oh, no, you’ve got the argument the wrong way around. All the *potential* has been given, all the resource is there, but for that very reason we are to contribute on our side all the diligence we can muster in order to add, to supply, this constant increase in quality, in character and in the development of our personalities.

You say, ‘But why should I bother?’

The answer from Peter comes, ‘For if you do this, such-and-such things follow, but if you don’t . . .’ (‘for he that lacks these things . . .’) certain other things follow (see vv. 8–9). It is possible to be a believer in the Lord Jesus and to have all the resources but not to cooperate with God and add what we are meant to be adding. So he is saying, ‘give all diligence, and, in the power of your faith supply these various things, for if you do it, this and this positive will follow; but if you don’t do it, other negative things will follow.’

### **Give even more diligence (vv. 10–11)**

Having thus given us the positive and the negative, he now repeats the lesson, as we see. ‘Therefore give all the more diligence to make your calling and election sure’ (see v. 10). And once more he says, ‘for if you do it, certain things follow, this will be the result’, and this time both of the things mentioned are positive.

That is a very simple little scheme of logic, isn’t it? You could almost remember it. And if indeed you were the kindergarten of the prep school, I should get you all reciting it. After me, ladies and gentlemen, one after the other:

‘Grace and peace *on the ground that* all these things have been supplied.’

‘*For this very reason*, give all diligence, and supply, for if you do . . . for if you don’t . . .’

‘Therefore give all the more diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if you do . . . for in this way, this is what will follow eternally.’

It is an easy scheme, and you would please Peter enormously if, when you see him in glory (if you do) and get anywhere near him (because there will be a lot of folks wanting to talk) you could run through the whole thing in order. You might say, ‘Peter, delighted to see you! Peter, now stop your singing for a minute. Just listen to this: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you, on the ground that . . . And for this very reason add all diligence . . . for if you do . . . for if you don’t . . . Therefore give all the more diligence. For if you do . . . For in so doing . . .”’

And you would see a smile come around the old apostolic beard. ‘Well done, my boy!’ he’ll say, ‘Well done! So you got a hold of it! Well good for you! Bless you my dear brother and sister! Yours will be a happy eternity up here.’

It is good to get hold of the major drift of a passage of Scripture, isn’t it?

### **The detail of 1:1–11**

Now let’s take his advice. We come to our text; and we are to think first of the starting point: where do we make this progress from? Where is our starting point?

## A new name

In answer to my own question, I ask you to notice that he addresses himself to us as ‘Simon Peter’ (v. 1). And I suggest to you that he is being quite deliberate in talking of himself as Simon Peter. He was born and named Simon, but he wasn’t always Peter, was he? He got that second name when he came to Christ.

Jesus looked at him and said, ‘So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter). (John 1:42 ESV)

Cephas, in Greek, is *Petros*; in English: Peter. It was a change made in him when he found the Saviour.

We have what we call in this country, *Christian names*. I don’t know what yours is. Polly, perhaps? Not a very Christian name, is it? Well, let’s say Mary, then. And your Christian name, sir? Do you say it’s Maximilian? That isn’t very Christian, either. Joseph, maybe. But why do we call them ‘Christian’ names? Well, it goes back to an old habit long years ago, when all Irishmen were pagan without exception, and the missionaries came and preached the gospel, and some of our dear forbears trusted the Saviour. And those early missionaries thought it would be a nice thing if these new converts indicated the fact that they had found and trusted the Saviour, had become believers and were now Christians, by taking a Christian name alongside of their old pagan name.

The possession of a Christian name ought to mean that you are a genuine Christian, that you have personally come to Christ, personally trusted him, that you have been born again and become a child of God. I daresay we all have Christian names of a sort. May I ask, in passing, what it means as far as you are concerned?

Peter is about to talk to us about this marvellous aspect of God’s salvation that enables a man to partake of the divine nature, to share it with God. We are not born that way. We are born *creatures* of God. If we are going to make true progress for eternity, this is where we start: by being born again, so that now instead of being just creatures of God, we become *children* of God, with the very life of God. And because it is God’s life, that life brings God’s very nature with it: the divine nature. It would be a cruelly deceptive thing, wouldn’t it, to have a Christian name and not have the life of God, the life of Christ, the new birth?

Simon Peter, then, by his own name, is reminding us of his experience and what our experience can be as we come to Christ. As men and women who are creatures of God, we can come to Christ and receive from him the gift of eternal life, which is the very life of God, and receive with it the nature of God.

## The faith we have obtained

Then Peter says he writes to us who have ‘obtained’. And now for the moment I read the Revised Version:

to them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ (v. 1 RV).



Notice, incidentally, this high title and description given to our Lord: 'our God and Saviour Jesus Christ'. He is not only our Saviour but also our God. He is 'our *God* and *Saviour* Jesus Christ'.

But what does that phrase: 'have obtained a like precious faith' mean? Now here, ladies and gentlemen, as you probably know, serious Christian thinkers disagree as to what these words really mean. So I give you two of the more serious suggestions, and you must take your pick, so to speak.

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### 2 Peter 1:1

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**Not**

You have obtained  
Like precious (= equally appreciated)  
Faith in the righteousness of Christ

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**But**

In (or through)  
The righteousness (= justice) of Christ  
You have obtained  
Faith of equal value  
(which confers equal status)

---

I have indicated which one I think is right. I do so in all humility. If your leader in your study class has told you something different, well, never mind; the good man has probably got very good reasons for it. I must tell you, however, which one I prefer and why.

One view is that Peter means that you have obtained 'like-precious faith', meaning faith that is as precious to you as it is to me; that the precious gospel means as much to you as it does to me.

Well, I hope that is true, anyway. And if we have become Christians, certainly the gospel ought to be as precious to us as it is to the Apostle Peter.

And then some people feel it goes on to say, you have 'obtained like precious *faith*', meaning, 'faith-in-the-righteousness of Christ'. If you ask, 'What is your faith *in*?' those who hold this view would say, 'Oh, my faith is in the righteousness of Christ.' And they could perhaps cite other passages of Scripture that say that kind of thing, if not in those exact words (I don't think you'll find those exact words that we have to believe 'in the righteousness of Christ', anywhere else in the New Testament, at least not stated in that fashion). What the expositors who favour this interpretation feel it means is that when we came to Christ we abandoned faith in our own righteousness. And there is the glory of the gospel, they feel. And instead of putting our faith in our own righteousness for salvation, we put our faith in what Christ has done—his great act of obedience unto death—and thus are ourselves constituted righteous through what Christ has done.

Now, as to the fact that the gospel is equally precious to all believers, and that all true believers have their faith, not in their own righteousness but in what Christ has done, those things are true, and I have no quarrel (or very little quarrel) with that as a statement of what is true. On the other hand, I myself don't think Peter was saying what I have given here as the

first possibility. I think he was saying this second thing I have noted. It is not 'faith-in-the-righteousness of Christ', but 'in (or through) the righteousness of Christ (that, is the justice, the fair play, the fairness) that Christ has shown'. This is saying that Christ, in his dealings with men, is fair; he is just; he doesn't have favourites. And in the fairness, the justice, the righteousness of Christ, Peter is able to say to the believers, 'You have obtained faith, not so much faith that is equally precious to you as to anybody else, but faith that is of equal value as anybody else's faith.'

The word translated 'like precious' or 'of equal value' is in fact, in Greek, a political term. In the cities of the Hellenistic world, you might get citizens in a city who were not of equal status. In Tarsus, where Saul was born and brought up, the citizens there were not of all equal status. Saul, for instance, was a Roman citizen. That carried special privileges. Other people in his city were not Roman citizens. They didn't have the same status, privileges and opportunities; they were of inferior status.

As I understand it, what Peter is now telling us here is that if you have trusted Christ, your faith gives you equal status with all other believers. It isn't the fact, for instance, that Jews, if they believe, are already one rung up and of a higher status than Gentiles who believe. No, in Christ, Jews and Gentiles all enjoy the same status, the same provisions and the same salvation. It is not that some of us are allowed a little bit of salvation, but big important people like Peter are allowed a lot more. No, faith in Christ gives all equal status.

And why is that important as a starting point? Oh, it is indeed, for you or I might be tempted to think, 'Ah, well, yes I ought to make progress, but I don't have a chance compared with Peter.'

Why?

'Well, he has a much better grip of God's salvation; he has got more resources than I have.'

As far as God's salvation is concerned, that is not true. Faith brings him to be of equal status. You are equally a child of God as Peter himself, and nothing less. The eternal life you have is not of an inferior quality to the eternal life Peter has. The justification that you enjoy in Christ is as equally valid as Peter's. The Holy Spirit is the same Holy Spirit. Christ is fair. Yes, there are differences in us. That is another story. But in the salvation available to us, in the resources available to us, faith brings us equal status with all believers.

### **The resources we have**

Now we turn from the starting point to the resources.

Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power has granted to us . . . (vv. 2-3 RV)

What resources do I have for this great campaign, for this great scheme of progress? Well, first of all 'his divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain to life'. And, second, 'his divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain to . . . godliness' (v. 3 RV).

#### *All things that pertain to life*

I submit to you that, in that context, *life* is not just physical life. It is not a question of God having given us houses and warmth and food: carrots, bread, meat, and all we need to get

through this life. In his mercy he does do that, and our great voyage to eternity starts with those humble things, doesn't it? Let's thank God for those provisions that he has given us, which give us the opportunity to think about spiritual things. Whereas some dear souls are so preoccupied at this moment with just staying alive physically that they scarce have time to think about eternal things. How favoured we are in our circumstances. Alas, if it should be that, because we have such wonderful physical resources and blessings, we get so preoccupied with them that we forget that they are only there to help us, as a basis on which to build our spiritual lives for eternity.

No, I rather think that, in this verse 'all things that pertain to life' means something else. You see, the first resource that you will need, if you are going to make this kind of progress for eternity, is *spiritual* life. Some people have the idea that you just start off as a creature of God with physical life and one's natural endowments, and by the grace of Christ you so try to improve yourself that in the end you qualify for heaven. That is a disastrous mistake. They haven't got to the starting point yet, nor to the elementary resource. The elementary resource is to receive spiritual life. It is eternal life that we lead, the life of the ages, the very life of God. Our Lord said, 'Unless one is born again he can never see the kingdom of God' (see John 3:3 ESV). More easily might a cabbage sit with you and enjoy your music by Beethoven, than an unregenerate man understand the conversation of heaven. Our first requirement therefore, and our first resource, is spiritual life. And this is given; we don't have to earn it. This is not a question of development, but this is our resource that is given; it is the *gift* of life.

#### *All things that pertain to godliness*

Once we have received life, then there stretches out our developing experience, which here is summed up under the term *godliness*. All that is required by way of spiritual strength and guidance so that we can now live a godly life as believers, that resource is given to us as well. And it comes, says the apostle, 'through the knowledge of him who called us' (v. 3).

In a moment, we will come back to the phrase at the end of verse three: 'called us by his own glory and virtue' (RV).

### **God's promises and our desires**

Let us now look at the next verse.

Whereby he has granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (v. 4 RV)

I want now to talk about this matter of promises. Why does God make us promises? To some people, when they first encounter Christianity and they have thought about it a while, it seems to them to be all pie in the sky tomorrow. 'It's all promises. Why can't I have it now?' they say. And the temptation is to say, 'I want life now; I want to enjoy it now. All those promises about an eternal kingdom, well, they may be okay, but I want life *now*.' And salvation seems to be all promises for the future.

Well, certainly Christianity does have a lot to say about promises for the future. Why does God deal in promises? I suggest to you that it is because of the way we are made. Examine

your heart, and I think you will agree with me that, as an essential part of our human personality, we have desires. It is quite right we should have. Isn't that so? You just said you *want* to enjoy life. Oh, you have got some desire then? And it's very right, you should have, for that is how we are made. We are not like a milk bottle on the step, just standing there. I have observed that with milk bottles on the doorstep that if you don't take them in, they'll be there tomorrow (unless the dogs disturb them). They haven't got a desire anywhere in them; those milk bottles are just static old things with no desire, and they stay where you put them. We are not like that. At least I hope we aren't. We have desires; and we are not content with the immediate here and now. We are *wanting*. You are wanting to make the best of life, aren't you? Of course you are. And the best of life is not just this split second, right now, is it? It is what you are *going* to do and the future you hope for, and all the enjoyment you will enjoy one day. And that is how God made us—with desires. So when he goes and puts his great promises in front of us, we say, 'Oh, marvellous! I want that!' And like a baby, when mother holds out a big bun or a sweet, and the baby comes, so God holds out in front of us his great promises, because he has made us with desires, and he wants to draw us by those desires and use our desires to get us on the move forward to develop us.

Pity the man or woman who no longer has any desires. They are just sitting in the old armchair, going backwards perhaps. You are nearly dead if you don't have desires, aren't you? The only question is what you are going to focus those desires on. Your desires, by God's grace, will make a saint of you for eternity. Or, if you get them on the wrong focus, they will seem to give you enjoyment but progressively enslave you and, in the end, bring you down to the morass of an eternity without God, to become a human personality that has perished. Oh, what an important thing desire is. And God, in order to get us moving, has given us exceeding great and precious promises, so that they will provoke our desires to go after him and get us moving.

#### *Called by the glory and virtue of Christ*

What is your life's desire, really? Could you sum it up? Do you know where you're going? Or do you have a desire one day, and the desire goes somewhere else the next, and you are a sort of will-o'-the-wisp, going any old where? Have you a central desire? Peter wants to get your desire centred on the promises of God that will bring you eventually to a glorious eternity of fully developed potential.

For that reason, our conversion, says Peter, had this element in it: he 'called us *by* his own glory and virtue' (v. 3 RV). People come to Christ initially for all sorts of reasons. Some people come because they are lonely, in despair and need a friend. And our Lord is a friend and loves to be a friend. Some come out of fear of hell, wishing to escape the judgment of God. That is a good and valid reason for coming—to flee to Christ for refuge. But let's pray that, somewhere along the way in life, God has called us by this thing too, as he called Peter. He gave Peter a sight of Jesus Christ, as a man. And as Peter came in contact with Christ and saw the glory of his personality, it flamed those desires in Peter. One minute, it made Peter feel wretchedly sinful, and he was inclined to say, 'Depart from me!' But the next minute, he wanted to follow Christ and left his nets. If it was possible for a man to be like this, then Peter wanted to be like this.

It is important that, sooner or later, that element shall come into our thinking. It might be possible to come to Christ merely to get deliverance from eternal punishment and not be interested in Christ himself, or even interested in being like Christ, and to be left with no desire to make progress. That would be a disaster, wouldn't it? God hopes that, getting our sights on Christ and getting to know Christ and seeing Christ behave, we should find our desire going out to him, not with mush piety but with manfulness, saying, 'Yes, that is what I would like to be. And come eternity, pray God, I should be more like him than I am at the moment!' This is to be drawn, to be 'called by', his glory and virtue.

But to find him having that kind of effect on our lives, we shall have to get to know him. We shall have to find out what Jesus Christ is really like. That will mean very deliberately courting his company and studying the records of his life. Isn't that so?

### *Escaping desire gone wrong*

So then, we are to escape 'the corruption that is in the world by lust' (v. 4 RV). *Lust* is desire gone wrong. There is nothing wrong with desire itself. But what a world it is around us, and for you young Christian folks particularly. The world, coming through the television, the press, literature, your friends; how it does play on your desires. Be careful. And oh how the world, with all the glittering things in this world, and the desire to keep up with the Joneses, and our desires of what we really want in life plays on us who are middle-aged, until the appeal of Jesus Christ becomes very dim, and we lose our incentive for progress. Desire goes wrong and becomes, in that wrong sense, lust. In the end, it leads to corruption. An old apple on a plate that has gone bad is a funny looking thing, isn't it? It's a bit of a sorry mess. And who shall describe a thing that once was a human personality, but it missed salvation? It exists eternally, but it has perished. It depends on what you do with your desires and where they are focused.

### **Add these things**

If we then have this resource, so that we may escape this fearful pollution in the world through lust and corruption and make for eternity, then what do we have to do? Do you say, 'All things have been given to me that pertain to life and godliness, so I don't have to do anything.'

Oh, come, you do. Suppose I took you to Switzerland, and I said, 'I'm going to make you a lovely present; I'm going to teach you to ski.'

When you take a look at the mountain, you say, 'But I could never get up there!'

I say, 'Never mind. I've provided everything. Here's a chairlift to get you right to the top.'

'Ah, yes,' you say, 'but I haven't got any skis.'

'I'm going to give you the skis.'

You say, 'I still couldn't do it, because I haven't got those flappety things with circles on the bottom that you wave in the air.'

'I've got a pair of those too, so you can wave them in front of the TV cameras.'

'Ah,' you say, 'yes, I still can't do it because I haven't got the big hat and the goggles.'

'I've got them as well. I have given you *all* things necessary for skiing.'

You say, 'That's marvellous. I've got everything I need for skiing, so all I need to do is sit down here on top of the mountain.'

Well, of course not. For the fact is that though I have given you all things that you need for skiing, you will never ski unless you add *all diligence* to use those things. I can't ski for you! If you are going to ski, you will have to ski. And if you are to use those flappety ski poles and the skis and get down the mountain without a broken neck, that is quite an occupation and will take you some hours, days, months or years to learn to do.

God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. We will have to use the resources. I have got to learn to become a saint. You can't do that by just sitting down or lying in bed; it has got to be developed.

'But,' you say, 'when I came to Christ I had the divine nature.'

I'm glad you did. So what? Without that divine nature you couldn't develop as God wants you to develop, but the fact that you've got the divine nature doesn't mean you are going to develop automatically, does it? Take human nature. When I was born (so I am reliably told) I looked a funny sight. Perhaps I still do, but that's beside the point. When I was born, I couldn't say a word (as distinct from my sisters who were good at those things). For some many months I couldn't say anything. Yes but I had the potential for speech. Why? Because I had human nature. Now, had I been a gorilla, I wouldn't have had the potential for speech, would I? The fact that I had the potential for speech was because I was human. I had human nature, but I had to learn to speak; I still had to develop the potential.

If you look at all these things we are meant to add, you will see that they are all things given their potential in the divine nature, but you will have to work at them. You may care to think about them in the study class time.

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### Developing the Potential Given to Us (2 Peter 1:5-7)

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#### In Your Faith Supply:

Virtue  
 Knowledge  
 Self-control  
 Endurance  
 Godliness  
 Brotherly love  
 Love

---

The first is *virtue*, meaning sheer goodness. You say, 'Goodness at what?' Well, goodness at everything. Goodness at your work, for instance. What would you think of me if I stayed stuck in bed and said, 'I'm very good at photography'?

You'd say, 'What photography?'

'Well, I never do any, but I'm very good at photography!'

You'd say, 'Nonsense, man. How can you be very good at photography if you never do any photography?'

To be genuinely good, at behaving, for instance, you will have to get out and live and do some behaving.

The second is *knowledge*. We have the divine nature; we have the Holy Spirit, but you won't get Christian knowledge automatically. Some of it will come through experience of life; some

will come through your fellow Christians; and a great deal of it will come through God's book. You don't get it automatically, simply because you have got the divine nature. You have got the divine nature and the potential to understand God's word, but to actually understand it will take a lot of effort.

And then comes *temperance*, in the sense of self-control. I wouldn't need any self-control, if it weren't for some of my brethren, but then praise God for my brethren because they give me opportunities for developing some self-control!

And then *endurance*, or *patience*, in the sense of 'stickability'. I can't have that in bed, (except perhaps enduring the bed itself). If I have got to develop endurance, I have got to have a job or something, and when it becomes difficult, learn to keep at it and keep at it and keep at it.

All these things, therefore, I suggest to you, are qualities that can only be developed in actual living. And so God sends you to hospital to work, and you to school to teach, and you, mother, to have a family to bring up and me to do I don't know what. Tasks 'sacred' and tasks 'secular' are given to us in order to give the practice necessary to develop our personalities and *add* these things. We don't add them just in church. The dustbin man adds these things to his character as he learns to do the dustbins and carries on with the difficult and unpleasant job, but does it faithfully. God bless the man; he is building character for eternity.

And what if I'm being lazy at work?

'Oh,' but you say, 'this isn't the Lord's work; this is for my boss.'

Oh, come, come. You can't afford to waste those sixty minutes. The week's work for your boss is God's gift to you as the practice ground to develop qualities like this for eternity. Pray, God that we don't put eight hours a day down the drain because we say it's 'secular' work. That work, too, is the exercise we need to add these things.

### **The result of adding these things**

If we add these things, Peter says, they keep us from being unfruitful, where the knowledge of Christ is concerned.

You say, 'Is it possible that my knowledge of Christ should leave me unfruitful?'

Yes, it is.

'But,' you say, 'I know Christ as Saviour. He has forgiven my sins, and that's all I've bothered to know.'

What about progress for eternity, the development of spiritual and moral character?

'Oh, I haven't bothered.'

To the extent that I neglect these things, my knowledge of Christ is unfruitful. If I don't do these things, if I lack these things, well I'm blind, am I not? I can't see the great eternity in front of me (v. 9). I'm fooling around and playing about and getting nowhere with eternity fast coming on. I'm not really preparing. I'm not developing myself for it.

### *Make your calling and election sure*

So let's give all the more diligence to make our 'calling and election sure' (v. 10). Peter is not casting doubt on the calling and election of true believers, but if I am a called man, and if I've been chosen, I shall give evidence of it in my life. Isn't that so? If Jesus Christ has called me by his virtue and glory, I shall show evidence of that by an evident desire to become like Christ.

And if I have no desire to become like Christ, that raises the question: has Christ ever called me?

Such a person is not only blind, but he has ‘forgotten the cleansing from his old sins’ (v. 9). When the Israelites came out of Egypt they began to make good progress towards the promised land, and then after half a dozen things happening here and there, they suddenly forgot where they were going and meandered around and around in circles in the wilderness, fast getting nowhere, and forgot that they were meant to come out of Egypt. In fact, some proposed going back again. And others were just content to wander in the wilderness without stretching out to the promised land.

It is possible for me as a believer, redeemed and pushing ahead towards the great eternity, to forget the cleansing of my old sins and presently to go back into the world from which I came, to forget that the whole scheme of salvation was not merely to free me from guilt but to deliver me from my faults of character and make me more like Christ. That is what the scheme is, and if I am not making that progress, then I have forgotten what the scheme was about.

So, ‘give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure’. If you do it, you will ‘never stumble’ (v. 10 RV). That doesn’t mean you will never sin. ‘In many things, we all offend’ (see Jas 3:2). It means you will never come a cropper. And what ‘coming a cropper’ means in this context (theologically explained of course) we shall see when we come to chapters 2 and 3. Some dear believers get carried away by the false teachings of false teachers and really suffer a disastrous defeat, even though they are true believers.

#### *An abundant entrance*

If you do these things (in so doing, in so adding, these things) what shall be ‘ministered unto you’ (v. 11 KJV)? Well, it is not entry into the kingdom, for entry into the eternal kingdom is guaranteed to every believer simply because he is a believer. But entry will be ministered (or provided) ‘richly’.

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (v. 11 ESV)

The ‘rich’ bit depends on our making progress. What do you think entry into the eternal kingdom is going to involve?

You say, ‘I’m going to be inside the door, “safe and secure from all alarms” eternally.’

So you are, my brother, my sister, if you are a real believer. But how do you picture heaven? Is it a kind of a big palace with 437,000 rooms? And you’ll be content to get inside the front door and sit on a stool or something? Is it merely a spatial thing? Well, certainly it will be spatial. Will it not be more? Will it not be the enjoyment of it, and all the wonderful activities that God will lay on? How much shall I be able to enter into those things? You will be able to enter into them in proportion as you have added these things to your characters.

When I try to illustrate that to myself, I find myself very hard up for analogies that are suitable. So with the permission of my friends, I will bore them once more by using the analogy that I commonly use to help myself understand this idea.

I liken the eternal kingdom to some marvellous Christmas party. Well, you can see how naive I am, can’t you? But I like parties, anyway. I remind myself that God doesn’t have to



work for a living; what he does he does for sheer fun! All his glorious and marvellous schemes that he has for all eternity he does for the sheer joy of doing it! And oh to be able to enter into them!

At my Christmas party, there were present his nibs, nine months old, sitting up in a highchair, a nine-year-old boy, and a seventeen-year-old—a beautiful young lady; and, of course, Mother and Father. They were all at the party, and they all enjoyed it immensely and to the full. There was the nine month old, sitting in the highchair, and he'd managed to get hold of the soup spoon, and he was dipping it in the cream and hurling it all around his chair and around his hair and on the floor. Oh, he had a marvellous time! And when he'd exhausted all his potential, Mum took him off to bed. He'd been at the party. Occasionally while he was in his chair, he'd looked over the edge and had seen his brother on the carpet doing he didn't know what, and wasn't interested anyway.

Actually, the brother was playing trains with Father (Father doing all the playing, really). But nine-year-old wasn't messing around with cream! He was playing trains! He was at the party. He was a bit *more* at the party than the nine-month-old, wasn't he?

Then the sweet seventeen-year-old daughter, now very beautiful, was there. She wasn't sitting on the floor. I tell you, she wasn't! She'd bought the very best dress out of the shop down town. She wasn't going to just crumple that by sitting on the floor playing trains, because they were expecting guests, and seventeen-year-old had found out that life had potential beyond playing trains, and she was in for this potential. She was at the party.

Oh, tremendous things happened there at the party. And Mum and Dad, who had seen all those things, and could enjoy them, they had a deeper enjoyment, brought about by long experience and the development of love for their children and love for one another and patience and kindness and self-control. Oh, how they enjoyed the party in a way that their children didn't. But they were *all* at the party.

We who trust the Saviour shall all be in glory. But whether we are there, just there and enjoying the minimum, or whether the entrance into all that is going on is ministered to us 'richly' will depend in part on how we have developed our personalities by God's help in this present age.

## The Significance of the Transfiguration

*2 Peter 1:12–21*

I hope by now I have been able to persuade you that one of the major lessons conveyed to us by the second epistle of Peter is that this present world is temporary. It is a time of change, where change is possible, a world designed of God so that, in it, we should make progress according to the plans that he has in mind for us and in view of the great eternal world that lies beyond.

This world then is temporary; there is an eternal kingdom; and because there is an eternal kingdom, all true, genuine progress has eternal consequences. And Peter writes so as to persuade us to use all the God-given resources that lie to our hand to cooperate with God and develop our personalities so that, when we enter that eternal kingdom, we shall not simply enter and be secure eternally, but that there shall be ministered to us an abundant entrance into that eternal kingdom.

### **Our studies so far**

When we concluded our last talk, we were thinking together of what entrance into the kingdom means. Of course, to enter is, in one sense, to enter the Father's house; to be at home with the Lord; to be eternally secure; to know that there is no more death, crying, tears or sorrow, and no more curse. But on the other hand it is not a question of entering merely into a place, but entering into an experience. And not only entering into an experience, but entering into all those glorious activities that God has designed, with which to fill eternity. And because of the very glory of those coming experiences and activities, it is essential that we are properly prepared, so that we may not only enter but enter to the full. All true believers will enter the eternal kingdom, but the extent to which we enter, in the sense of the extent to which we are fitted to enjoy and make the most of that eternity, will depend upon the progress that we have made here. That is the practical importance of the things that Peter is bringing before us.

So just let's recap for a moment and refresh our minds on the thought flow of the first eleven verses briefly, before we move onto the second half of chapter one.

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### **2 Peter 1:1–11 Thought Flow: Grace and Peace**

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- 1:3    SEEING THAT all things have been given
  - 1:5    FOR THIS VERY REASON add diligence: supply
  - 1:8    For if . . .
  - 1:9    For if not . . .
  - 1:10   THEREFORE give the more diligence: make sure
  - 1:10   For if . . .
  - 1:11   For so . . .
-

In order to encourage us to prepare ourselves properly for eternity, that there might be ministered unto us an abundant entrance into that eternal kingdom, we start off with grace and peace, on the basis that all things pertaining to life and godliness have been *given* to us. Now, it is important that we start there. There are some people who feel that, in order to get to heaven, they must indeed make moral and spiritual progress; but they attempt to make the progress without first coming to the right starting point. Life, in the sense of eternal life—acceptance with God, eternal life here and now, is given to us. We don't have to develop it. And if I gave you the impression in our last session that eternal life is simply a potential (that is, we can't really have it, but it could be *potentially* ours) then let me make it abundantly clear that eternal life is the present possession of every true believer. The moment we trust Christ, that moment we receive the gift of eternal life. 'The free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom 6:23).

To put it another way around, if we are to make progress in the Christian life, we must first of all receive that life. As you'll see, I was a very late starter in life. My progress has been very poor and I've not got on very far. But then, I couldn't start making any progress until I was born, and I wasn't born until 1925. Some of you have been around since 1880! Of *course* you've made a lot more progress!

You can't begin to progress in physical things until you are born, can you? You can't begin to make any spiritual progress until you have been born again. And the glorious thing is that that is why we can have grace and peace. We can have grace and peace right at the very start, on this basis: that eternal life, the very life of God and with it divine nature, *has been* (not *will be*) given to us. And through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, we receive it. Through personal contact and faith in him, we receive the gift of eternal life.

With that eternal life comes a divine nature. We have it already, if we are believers. But just as physical life, when we receive it, is a present possession, yet it has potential for the future and that potential has to be developed; and so it is with the life of God we receive through faith in Christ. It is a present possession carrying the potential that needs to be developed. Hence the great exhortations that fill this first paragraph. *Therefore*, because we have these gifts we are (on that very ground) to add all diligence to supply, on our part, all diligence and that long list of Christian qualities and characteristics that we were thinking about in our last session. If we do it, we shall be fruitful; our knowledge of the Lord Jesus will make us fruitful. If we don't, we are blind; and we are going around in circles, forgetting what the whole thing was really about when we first came to Christ and were saved. The whole idea was not merely to deliver us from the wrath of God and give us eternal security. The idea was that, being delivered from the wrath of God and being born again, we should now develop. And it is possible, of course, for true Christians to forget what the scheme is really about and to settle down to wander and to make little progress.

Therefore, if we have been called and chosen, then we are exhorted all the more to give all diligence to show in the way we live the earnestness with which we seek to make progress, and to demonstrate and to put beyond doubt that we have been called and have been chosen. If we do this, we shall not stumble. It does not mean we shall be sinless; in many things we all offend and go astray. But what Peter is concerned does not happen to us, as believers, is that we shall suffer a disastrous defeat.

Peter himself had an unfortunate experience, didn't he? He was unprepared when he could have been prepared. Unprepared for the tests of life, he fell and denied his Lord. He was brought back by God's good grace. And he did as our Saviour said to him before it all happened, 'And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers' (Luke 22:32). So now he does that in this letter. He wants to establish us, so that we should be strong to face life's disciplines, examinations, trials and lessons, and make genuine progress, without coming grievously unstuck at one stage or another. And we shall see how that can happen, particularly when we come to consider, God willing, some of the opposition there is against our making progress.

In the goodness of our Lord, Peter's failure was turned, in the end, to his benefit and to ours. It doesn't do away with the sad thing that happened when he denied his Lord. He never forgot it, and I think he'll never forget it for all eternity. It is better not to have experiences like that. So how can I avoid them? The only way to avoid them is to make progress. Just to stand still is a very dangerous thing. If we give this diligence to make our calling and election sure then, Peter says, you will not merely enter the eternal kingdom, as all believers will, but there shall be ministered to you an abundant entrance to all the experience and activities of that eternal kingdom.

Thus far then the thought flow of the first half of chapter one. We have already seen how the second paragraph opens. And I put it here just once more for completion's sake.

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### **Peter's Declared Intention in 2 Peter**

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1. To remind you
  2. To stir you up by reminding you
  3. To ensure you will always be able to recall these things
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We have got to get this lesson. Peter says he is determined to remind us of it, and not only to remind us of it, but to stir us up. It won't do for us to read what he says, or to study it today, and to leave it at that. It won't do to say, 'Oh, yes, I remember hearing what that preacher said about it that one day, thirty-five years ago', and then leave it like that. Peter would *stir us up!* This is serious business. This is life's *real* business.

It is why you go to work, gentlemen and ladies. I hope you are not a pack of old Gentiles. You know what the Gentiles go to work for, don't you? They go to work to get food and clothes.

You say, 'Well, come now, half a minute; that's why I go to work!'

You do? You old Gentile, you! Wow! You go to work to get food and clothes?

'Well,' you say, 'what man in his right mind goes to work for any other reason? I wouldn't go work at all if I didn't have to get food and clothes!'

You wouldn't? Well, now you do surprise me, for you are a veritable old Gentile. That's what the Gentiles do, that is, it is what the unconverted man does.

You say, 'But I do need the food and clothes.'

Of course you do, but food and clothes are only the secondary dividend, aren't they? The first reason for going to work, the reason why God sends us to work is, as he puts it, to 'seek his kingdom', his rule in our lives (see Matt 6:33). Now as I am faced with my daily

responsibilities, and I have to decide how I am going about them, I have got the chance to do a little thinking. What am I doing it for? Is it primarily to make money? I hope not. Primarily, it should be for the sake of pleasing the Lord. Primarily, it is as an opportunity to develop goodness, patience, self-control and godliness.

You will not need me to tell you how complicated life can be, will you? A man says, 'Now, I have got to make a go of the business; my wife's health and children depend upon it. I must provide things honest in the sight of God. These are difficult times to keep the business afloat. I've got to work all the hours that there are.'

Yes, we mustn't escape responsibility. But then it would be a disaster, wouldn't it, to keep the business afloat and to be successful and never take any time for the development of spiritual life: the reading of God's word, prayer with God, my church responsibilities and (for the sake of keeping alive physically) lose the spiritual progress that was the whole point of living?

Let alone when it comes to questions to morality. What shall I do in my daily work when I'm tempted to cheat?

You say, 'But if I don't cheat, I shall lose the order. I'm a commercial traveller, you know. And if I don't cheat, well, the other chap will cheat, and he'll get the order!'

So you're obliged to cheat? Oh, I see. But having a job was, as God understood it, to give us the opportunity to put true Christian morality into practice. So if I go and cheat, I've lost the prime purpose for which God sent me to work.

That is what life is all about, primarily. Of course it is about getting food and clothes, but primarily it is about seeking God's rule in my life, and therefore his righteousness and the righteous character it will build up in me as, in all of life's departments, I try to be godly. That doesn't mean to walk around with a long face and look pious. Godliness means that, in all my affairs, I am constantly practicing consulting God. I am to ask: 'Now, how does this affect God? How does this affect his interests? Where does this fit into God's scheme for me, and God's purpose for my life?' This is godliness!

So we have to be stirred up, and then not only stirred up, but Peter wants to keep on reminding us so that we shall presently be able to recall it without his help. That is how thoroughly he wants us to get hold of 2 Peter. And because these matters are tremendously important, he now cites to us his authority for telling us about this eternal kingdom.

### **The transfiguration and the eternal kingdom**

Peter now says, 'For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty' (1:16). And so he goes on to talk to us about the transfiguration of our Lord, and he is citing it as the authority for this idea that there is an eternal kingdom. He says, 'This is no myth. We were with him on the holy mount. We saw with our eyes. We actually heard with our ears. We are relating to you, something that actually happened. This was an historical happening. This is not a myth!'

In a later session, we shall have to consider the whole idea of myth. It has been much in the air recently with a very prominent cleric in England telling the world that the story of the incarnation and the virgin birth is a myth, and that the story of the resurrection is a myth. So

it is currently in the air. It is interesting to find that Peter denies it outright. Talking of the transfiguration, he says, 'We have not followed cunningly devised myths.' Peter knows what a myth is, and he says that the story of the transfiguration isn't one. So we shall have to think about that later on. But for a few moments now, I want to take liberty to consider with you the transfiguration in and of itself. It is one of those momentous events in the life of our Lord, so let's spend some time thinking about its possible significance.

### **The same narrative pattern in the Gospels**

You will find that the transfiguration is recorded in three of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—and the narrative in which it is recorded takes this form.

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#### **Format of Transfiguration Narrative in Three Gospels**

1. Promise
  2. Transfiguration
  3. Incident of father and son
- 

On each occasion, the narrative first records a promise. And then the narrative records that about a week later our Lord took three of his disciples up a mountain, and there he was transfigured before them. And then the narrative records, in each of these three accounts, that when they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, a father met them with his son, and the son was demon-possessed. And the father asked the Lord if he would heal his son, because he had brought that son to the nine disciples left at the bottom of the mountain, but they had not been able to cast out the demon. This is the pattern and sequence of the narrative in all three Gospels; you might care to notice that by turning to those passages.

### **The promise in each narrative**

Let's look at the promise as it occurs in those three Gospels.

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#### **The Promise**

Luke 9:27: The kingdom of God

Matthew 16:28: The Son of Man coming in his kingdom

Mark 9:1: The kingdom of God come with power

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Let's first look at the passage in Luke.

'But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.' Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. (9:27–28)

I wonder if you would notice the exact phrase that Luke uses: 'there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see . . .'. Now, what shall they see? According to Luke, what they see is the kingdom of God, full stop. Put your thumb into that passage in the New

Testament, and turn over to Matthew's account. Now, what, according to Matthew, did they see?

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man *coming* in his kingdom. (16:28)

If you've got a finger and a thumb, put them both in and turn over now to see what Mark says in his narrative.

And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come *with power*.' (9:1)

So all three evangelists record the same event, but they invite us to look at different particular things within that event.

### **The emphasis in Luke's account**

First of all, Luke says that, if we watch our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration and what happened there, what we shall see is the kingdom of God. We shall see, in the first place, that it really exists, that it is there. It is not only something that will come one day; it already *is*. Now, that is very important, because some learned commentators and theologians have doubted whether the promise: 'there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God', refers to the transfiguration. They have said to themselves, 'No, it can't refer to that. When the Lord made that promise, the transfiguration was only a week away. What sense would it make to say to Peter, James and John, "Look here, gentlemen, you will not taste death until you see the kingdom of God", if they were going to see it in a few days' time?'

Allow me to ask you, my good man, are you going home to dinner? You are? Good. Right then, what sense would it make for me to say to you, 'You shall not taste death until you have had dinner tonight at eight o'clock?'

Well, you are not expecting to die so soon, are you?

And some have said likewise of this event, 'If this transfiguration was going to happen within a week, why would our Lord say, "Well, you won't taste death until you see it"?'

So they suppose the promise refers to some much more distant thing.

I humbly submit that they are not quite right. Consider this kingdom of God. It will come in the future day, but it already exists; look at it. There was our Lord. His two feet were on earth on top of the mountain in Palestine, and yet, while Caiaphas was going about his daily job and Annas was going about his, and the fishermen were fishing and the women were washing their clothes and baking the bread, yet while all that was happening, there was that eternal realm. There was Moses; there was Elijah. There they were in glory, says Luke, talking with the Lord Jesus. That eternal kingdom was already there; it was already real. It was possible for the Lord Jesus to be in both at one and the same time, so demonstrating himself to be the link between man and that eternal kingdom, and its reality.

The point of the promise to the disciples that, 'You will not taste death until you see it,' is this. Normally, ordinary human beings like ourselves enter that eternal kingdom by one of

two methods. We either die, and then we enter it, or else we wait until the Lord comes, and when he comes he'll take us there. For Peter, James and John to be allowed to see it before they died, and without dying and without waiting for the Lord to come, was a remarkable privilege. That is what happened. And Peter wants to tell you and me, 'Look, that eternal kingdom is real! I've *seen* it. This is not a myth or a fairy story.' It is not like *Little Red Riding Hood*, to put us to bed at night to keep us from being afraid of the dark. 'It is *real!*' says Peter. 'I was there. I saw it. And I *heard* the conversation, literally heard it.'

Right marvellous it was, and we haven't time now to talk about it in detail. But there was Moses and Elijah. They lived in widely different centuries when they were here on earth. Here on this occasion they were together. As they were there, says Luke, they talked of our Lord's 'exodus' that he must accomplish at Jerusalem (9:31). They were looking forward to his cross. Down on earth, the disciples had just been told that our Lord was going to die, and to them it was a tremendous shock. They couldn't take it in, and some of them didn't want to take it in. Up there on the mountain, it was talked about as the eternal plan of God, known in advance. And Moses and Elijah talked with our Lord about it.

Luke points us then to the present reality of that eternal kingdom.

### **The emphasis in Mark's account**

What does Mark talk about? Well, according to the promises he related, they would not see death until they saw 'the kingdom of God after it has come *with power*' (9:1). So he is not interested merely in the kingdom itself, but in the kingdom as an exhibition of power.

Well, now we want to ask Mark a few questions. In what particulars did they notice anything to do with power when they were up that mountain? The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, of course. Was it such a great exhibition of power? 'Tell us,' we say, 'what was it that impressed them about the power of that eternal kingdom? Did they see some gigantic heavenly volcanoes or something? Did they see a supernova explosion in the heavens, or some other gigantic expression of power, Mark? What did they see? Tell us about the power of that place.'

'I will,' says Mark.

he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. (vv. 2-3)

'What about that for power?' he says.

'Oh, Mark, well, OK,' we might say. It isn't my idea of eternal power, being able to outdo the laundrymen in Belfast. Power to make people's garments white? What's there in that, Mark?'

Ah, now, that's a point, isn't it? In his epistle, Peter is interested because he's been talking to us in his first paragraph about something related: 'His divine *power* has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness' (1:3). It's about time we here on earth revised our ideas of power, isn't it? In fact, our civilization stands teetering on the edge of potential complete destruction. Why? Because we have developed almost unlimited technological power. We can split the atom. We can go to the moon. We can get back messages from space.



We have power! And yet we can't control our own tempers. We can't control our own lusts. And our modern civilization wallows in its uncontrollable lusts, violence and vice. What is going to become of our civilization? The more physical power we get into our hands, the more perilous it becomes unless we can learn to control *ourselves*. How shall I, (allow me the phrase) whiten my garments?

Ah, there is a power, you know. Let Peter tell us. 'I went up the mountain and I saw it. I am not telling you a myth when I make known to you the power of our Lord Jesus.' The power that Mark is interested in, along with Peter, is that power that made Christ's garment so spotlessly white that he glistened with an almost impossible-to-look-upon brightness. If that is what the kingdom of God is like, is that how they dress up there? And I am talking in metaphors. If that is the purity of their behaviour in heaven,

Oh, how shall I, whose native sphere  
Is dark, whose mind is dim,  
Before th' Ineffable appear,  
And on my natural spirit bear  
The uncreated beam?<sup>4</sup>

There is a power available to make us holy. There is a power that has its origin in that eternal kingdom.

And Mark follows his story, doesn't he? For when he comes down from the mountain to tell us of that father and his boy, he fills in more details than the others, and he says, 'You know, when the father came to Christ, he said to the Lord, "Have mercy on us. Lord, I brought him to your disciples, and they couldn't cast out the demon. But if you have the power to do anything," he said to Christ, "if you have the power to do anything . . ."' (see 9:17-22).

'Now, wait a minute, my man,' says Christ. 'Now stop there. What do you mean, "if you have the power to do it"? It isn't a question of whether I have the power to do it; it is a question of can you (have you the power to) believe? All things are within the power of him who believes' (see v. 23).

And the man, perceiving that the responsibility lay with him, and realizing in that moment how desperately weak his faith was, did what all wise men and women do. 'Oh, Lord,' he said, 'I do believe. You know I do believe, Lord, but my faith is wobbly. Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!' (see v. 24).

And mercifully Christ did not say, 'No, you don't count. That's only forty percent achievement. You don't get anything until you learn to get a hundred percent, my boy.'

No, no. Forthwith, however wobbly and insufficient the faith was, our Lord began to meet the man's need. So will Christ do for every one of us. If you have committed yourself to him he has taken you on, knowing everything about you, knowing exactly where you start. I don't mean physically now; I mean emotionally and temperamentally, morally, spiritually, just where you are. He knows us, each one, through and through. Now that he receives us, he's got to bring us home to glory. And there is power for it! And he must train us to lay hold of that power by developing our faith.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Binney (1798-1874), 'Eternal Light! Eternal Light!' (1826).

In Mark's account then, he is interested in power.

### **The emphasis in Matthew's account**

What is Matthew interested in? According to Matthew, our Lord promised them 'there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man *coming* in his kingdom' (16:28). Oh, what a glorious sight that will be, for the kingdom is already, and one day that kingdom shall come.

Don't we pray that? I hope you do. 'Your kingdom come,' and then, if we are good Christians, we add, 'on earth.' I hope we believe it. Or is your concept that you are really saying, 'Good Lord, don't make it come on earth but take me home to heaven'?

'Your kingdom come . . . on earth' (6:10). Yes, one day it will. And what it will be like when the Lord comes!

What will he look like? Matthew says, 'This is what he'll look like when he comes. His face will shine as the very sun in the heavens' (see 17:2). And I must leave your imagination to work around the details that Matthew supplies us. Matthew has it that that it is a forevision of what the Lord shall be like when he comes. But Matthew is showing us how this answered a problem that the apostles had. For in the context the Lord had just revealed to Peter that he (our Lord) must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be: crucified, killed, buried and rise again. Peter said, 'No, no, Lord! That isn't going to happen like that! No, Lord, excuse me, but you've got it wrong there' (see 16:21–22).

There were, according to Peter, places where Christ got it wrong, now and again. 'And that's one of them,' says Peter. 'No, no, you mustn't think defeatist thoughts like that, Lord. You want to use the power of positive thinking, you know. You want to say to yourself every morning when you get up, "I'm going to Jerusalem, and I'm going to be successful! I'm going to be successful! The crowds are coming around." And they will! You'll not be rejected. No, no, Lord!'

And of course Peter had a vested interest, didn't he? For the Lord's sake, he'd left his boat and his job and followed him. He'd put hours of time into it, praying and preaching and giving out tracts and goodness knows what else. And if the Lord was going to be rejected, that's all gone down the drain as far as Peter is concerned; he's lost the lot. 'No, he said, 'you're not going to be rejected, Lord.'

Ah, but Peter was reckoning without something, wasn't he?

'You know, if you're going to keep your life, you've got to lose it,' our Lord said. 'And if you manage to keep it, you will lose it' (see v. 25).

What did he mean? The riddle is solved by the fact that there are two worlds. If you live for that world, sooner or later you will find how much it costs in this one. In the course of following the Christ, taking your cross and being prepared for sacrifices, and in the course of developing a godly life, you will lose your life here, as men count it. But you will keep it in the other world. If you keep it in this world, well, okay; you stand to lose it in that world.

You here today are a lot of chumps, if you don't mind me saying it. Here is a lovely Saturday afternoon with the sun shining. Think what you could have been doing. But you've chosen to come and spend six hours or more in a stuffy old hall, reading the Bible when you could be out playing football or golf or driving those dodgem machines. The world thinks

you're crackers, you know. You've just lost this whole Saturday, and there aren't all that many Saturdays in life.

'No,' you say, 'we haven't. Well, we've lost it as they count it. But we've kept it! Oh, we shall praise God eternally for this Saturday, for this little six hours brought an eternal harvest in that eternal world.'

And the other Christian, he went out and played his football, well, perhaps he needed it for his health (and there's nothing wrong in doing that if you need it for your health). Or he did this, that and the other. He kept it, as the world counted it. I wonder if he's lost it.

You see, there are two worlds, and when it comes to investing the whole of life—a redeemed life given us by Christ and bought by Christ—ponder well where you invest it, which world you invest it in, for this is a temporary world. That world is eternal.

### *The coming of Christ*

'We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,' says Peter (1:16).

Oh, so the transfiguration not only has to do with the power of Christ, but it also has to do with his coming?

It does indeed, says Luke.

'What makes you think that the transfiguration is a pledge of the second coming?'

'I'll tell you,' he says. And here Luke relates Peter's experience (9:28–36). They were up the mountain, and up that mountain as Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ in glory, they began to talk, and they began to talk of Christ going. He was to come down from the mountain. He was to go on to Jerusalem. He was to go to Calvary and the cross with all its shame and suffering to redeem mankind. And Moses was talking of it, and Elijah was talking of it, how that the Lord Jesus must go, how it had been planned from all eternity that the Lamb of God must go to Calvary.

Peter was asleep (it gets stuffy in some places at a quarter to three of a Saturday afternoon) and he suddenly woke up; and you know how it is when you wake up. You're embarrassed, and you think, 'Oh, I must say something unless they think I was asleep!' So Peter, waking up, has got to say something! And at that moment they were beginning to go. 'Lord, let's stay,' he said, 'it's nice up here. Why not stay?'

Why not stay? Can you answer the question? If he had stayed, there would have been no eternal kingdom for you, nor for me either. And from the glory of that mountain, and indeed from a greater glory of the Father's house, he'd come down to our wretched planet, and now had come the crucial moment when he must face the reality of what it would mean to go to Calvary. And Peter was saying, 'Stay.'

No, even as Peter made the remark, Elijah and Moses turned to go; and Christ turned to go. Now this was it; now Calvary, and against all temptations to stay, he would go. And at that moment there came, now listen to Peter, 'there came to him such a voice from the excellent glory' (see 2 Pet 1:17 KJV). At the moment of going, a cloud descended and God couldn't contain himself. Now his Son was going to the bitter shame and hurt of Calvary, and God couldn't constrain himself any longer. As he saw him go, he came with a cloud and he said, 'This is my beloved Son.' Oh wonder of all wonders in all God's universe that the man Jesus was prepared to go to Calvary to redeem the likes of us to God. And God gave him at that

moment a tremendous accolade of glory: 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Matt: 3:17).

In that, you will see the guarantee that one day Jesus Christ, who suffered Calvary, will come in glory. The argument is simply this: 'He obeyed even to death, therefore God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name' (see Phil 2:8–11). God will see to it that the Christ who went to Calvary will be vindicated. He shall come one day in glory.

The transfiguration story is about such things, and much more beside. I trust now we begin to see how it relates to this question of the relation of time to eternity and the plan of God, and our need as redeemed people to believe in the reality of that eternal kingdom; to look forward to its coming and, by God's grace, to lay hold of the power of that kingdom that shall transform us ever more nearly into the image of God's dear Son.

## The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture

### *2 Peter 1:12–21*

Let's begin by reading the second half of 2 Peter 1.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased', we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (vv. 12–21)

I don't need to detain you very long in this session. Though the thoughts that are left for us at the end of chapter 1 are important, nevertheless they can be expounded comparatively briefly.

### **Our studies so far**

As I have observed before, Peter tells us that in this epistle he is determined to remind us, and having reminded us, to stir up our minds by reminding us, and to go further still and so to remind us and get us stirred up that we may thereafter be able to recall what he says ourselves. If that is Peter's intention, I had better be sure that I don't lag behind. And, at the risk of seeming to remind you too many times, I will say this again.

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#### **Major Lessons of 2 Peter**

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This world is temporary

There is an eternal kingdom

Progress here will have eternal consequences there

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The message of 2 Peter is that this world is temporary. Not only is it temporary, it is a world of change. Thank God for that, for that gives us opportunity for change and development. It gives us opportunity for that fundamental change that is conversion—radical repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus. It gives the opportunity for salvation. Thank God for a world that permits of change, where wrong choices can in some part be put right; and upon that fundamental of all things—our relationship with God. We can come to reconciliation and peace with God.

It is a world of change in which we are all progressing in one direction or another. Not only is the world on which we live moving incessantly and travelling through space, but we ourselves, as personalities, are changing. You are not exactly what you were ten years ago, are you? Nor am I altogether the same as what I was last year, I hope. I hope I have made some progress and am nearer to becoming conformed to the image of Christ. It is not merely what we do that changes but we ourselves change.

We will know change of some kind; we can't stop still. And therefore this world of change is the time when we make progress, and God puts before us his great promises of what is possible for us in the future, so that the desires he has placed within us may home in on those promises, and draw us towards eternity. That is why our Lord said, 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth' (Matt 6:19). He didn't say, 'Don't lay up money on earth.' There is a difference between money and treasure. Treasure is what I put my heart on, where my value is. Why not put up your treasure on earth? Because your treasure will draw your heart. Where your treasure is, your heart is. It is that power of treasure over our desire that is the important thing. Therefore, in this temporary world, we are to lay up our treasure in heaven so that, our treasure being in heaven, our treasure may pull us toward heaven through our desires.

In further sessions, God willing, we will see what happens to people when they are deceived and their desires are diverted to false and wrong things as a result of listening to deceptive promises. We will consider the terrible slavery in this life that overtakes them, and the indescribable doom that awaits them in the world beyond. For this world is temporary. The eternal kingdom is coming. All of us must one day, by one means or another, pass out into that eternity. God has no magic wands. It is no good hoping that, even if I'm not converted in this life, and I haven't trusted the Saviour, and I have lived without God that, somehow, when I die and go out into eternity, God can wave a magic wand over me and, hey, presto! I am formed into a saint overnight. You don't believe in magic any more than I.

It is no good, my fellow believer, arriving in eternity and wishing I had spent more time sincerely cooperating with God to develop my Christian character. God has no magic. When we see Christ, the Bible says, we shall be like him, and every believer will be like the Son of God (see 1 John 3:2). Thank God for that. We shall all be like him, that is, *what there is of us*. A little baby is like his father. So is the eleven year old. So is the twenty-one year old. There will be no age in eternity, but there will be different sizes of personalities; and all of them, from the tiniest to the largest, will be like Christ. What determines whether we shall be small or large in that day? This emphasis of Peter is a part of the answer. This is a temporary world where change is possible, where development is God's idea. All true progress made here will have eternal consequences.

So let me now just remind you once more of the thought flow as we have found it in the first part of the letter. Let's go over the first paragraph, for we have got to remind ourselves so that we can recall it tomorrow without the help of the overhead projector.

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**Thought Flow: Grace and Peace**

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1:3	SEEING THAT all things have been given
1:5	FOR THIS VERY REASON add diligence: supply
1:8	For if . . .
1:9	For if not . . .
1:10	THEREFORE give the more diligence: make sure
1:10	For if . . .
1:11	For so . . .

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*1:3-7*

First is, 'Grace and peace'. On what ground? On this ground: seeing that 'his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness'. That is the starting point for all true progress. Eternal life is the gift of God. The gracious Holy Spirit is the gift of God. All we need has been given. But that doesn't mean that therefore we can sit down and do nothing alongside of that life and that Holy Spirit that have been given. Now we have to add, and bring to bear, all our diligence so that we may 'supply'<sup>5</sup> certain qualities. We do so by active practice in the art of Christian living, by actually living and making a practice of referring everything to God and, in life, laying hold of our resources to develop those Christian qualities and graces that Peter enumerates for us.

*1:8-9*

And if we do that, Peter says these things keep us from being idle or unfruitful. Instead, our knowledge of the Lord Jesus will become fruitful and lead to progress. And I'll tell you something else: not only will our knowledge of the Lord Jesus become fruitful and lead to progress, but our progress will lead to knowing the Lord Jesus.

I wonder if you have ever had the experience of a close friend who has been wrongly treated by somebody. And to your amazement, when your friend has been grievously wrongly treated, he has forgiven the people that mistreated him. And you say, 'I don't understand that; I wouldn't have done it. Whatever made him do that?'

Well, then you don't understand your friend, do you? Why don't you understand your friend? Because you haven't developed that same attitude that would lead to the forgiving of those folks when they are repentant. What must you do, then, to understand your friend? You must develop that same attitude, or else you shall never understand him.

How am I going to understand the blessed Lord? There will be things about our blessed Lord I'll never understand unless, by his grace, I begin to develop a character like his and begin to look at things like he looks at things.

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<sup>5</sup> Or, 'supplement' (ESV); 'add' (KJV).

**1:10-11**

So if I add all diligence and supply these things, it makes me to be fruitful and not barren. If I don't, I am blind and forgetful of what the whole thing is about. So for that reason let me add even more diligence to make my calling and election sure. If I do it, I shall never stumble. And in doing it that way, I shall not only get into the eternal kingdom; my entrance will be 'abundant' (KJV).

### **The need to remember**

That is the first half of chapter one. The second paragraph in that chapter begins with Peter's declared intention to remind us progressively and more intensively, as we have seen. But let us notice now the phraseology he uses.

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#### **Peter's Declared Intention in 2 Peter**

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1. To remind you
  2. To stir you up by reminding you
  3. To ensure you will always be able to recall these things
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### **The body is a temporary tent**

Dear old Peter appeals to our hearts, doesn't he? Perhaps that's because he's a little bit more like us than some other of the apostles: always putting his foot in it. And then, after all, he did fall hard. And so he teaches us with a certain sympathy, and we find we can take it from him. But now he's elderly, and he writes: 'I'm going to remind you, even though you know it. And what is more, the putting off of my 'tabernacle' comes quickly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ told me' (see vv. 12-14).

What terminology. Now that he is getting older, he begins to realize things about this body that maybe he hadn't so vividly before. What is this body but a tent? Oh, you strapping young maids and men! You are like mountains for strength! But we who are elderly can now begin to see the facts. This body of ours is but a temporary thing, made so that it can easily come down. Isn't that so? A puff of wind would blow some of us over. Yes, but you see, this is a temporary world.

You know, it took me a long while to get to twenty. And even when I was twenty, a year seemed a long time. I'll tell you why. It's because a year was only one twentieth of my experience, so it seemed a long while. When you're ninety-six, a year seems a very short time. Why? Because it is only one ninety-sixth of all your experience. It's gone like that. Let the old grey-heads tell you. Don't get mournful, for life is temporary; it will be gone sooner than you think. I must shortly 'put off my tabernacle.' He isn't getting down in the mouth; he's going home to glory! And the Lord had told him by what death he should glorify God (John 21:22-23). Oh, isn't that delightful!

They say, 'Put on meetings for the young folks. They're important; they're the people of tomorrow.'

Well of course they are, and therefore they are important. But life's biggest battle is at the end, you know. To die well, to die still a believer, to get old with the grace of Christ and the



mellowness of Christian years instead of dying disagreeable and crotchety. My older brethren and sisters, allow me to say it: we are looking to you. You carry the flag. To you we look not just for the theory but to see the reality of Christ as you come to the great issues of life and soon pass to the great and eternal kingdom beyond. To begin life well is good. But to live triumphantly, what a thing that is! To glorify God as you put off your tabernacle and show us who come behind the reality of God's salvation. Peter says, 'I must soon put off my tabernacle. . . I must soon go out', or in other words 'after my decease' which is literally, 'after my exodus.'

You say, 'Now, Mr Lecturer, tell me: when a believer dies, is it his spirit that goes to be with God, or is it his soul that goes to be with God, or what is it?'

Well, I wish I knew. According to Peter, what's going to happen is this: he says, '*I* am going home. *I* will put off the tabernacle.' And there is a sense in which that almost satisfies me, since I have such a shallow mind and way of thinking. *I* am going home anyway. It isn't just my soul that is going, nor my spirit. It is *me* going! Thank the Lord for that. Absent from the body will mean *me*, present with the Lord (see 2 Cor 5:8). Peter says '*I* must put off my tabernacle.' And if you are a believer, that is what will happen to you. It is the *you* that will go home to be with the Lord.

Of the other matters about soul and spirit we don't speak on this occasion. They are interesting and profoundly important things; and I don't know if I have the real answer. This afternoon let's content ourselves with what is, after all, the most important thing. Have we got hold of this? Our bodies are but tents. The real me is bound for eternity. If at home in the body, in that sense, I am absent from the Lord. If absent from the body, I am at home with the Lord. And when he comes, I shall be given a body 'like his glorious body' (Phil 3:21), able to express perfectly the redeemed character and personality that I have, by God's grace, been able to develop.

### **Evidence for the reality of the eternal kingdom**

If we are going to take Peter's advice, we have got to be persuaded that this eternal world is real, that the eternal kingdom is actually there. How can we be sure of it? Our modern world pours scorn on it and, sad to say, some professedly Christian theologians likewise cast doubt upon it. So now, in these final verses of chapter one, Peter is at pains to assure us of the absolute reality of that world, and the reliability of what he tells us about it.

As evidence for the reliability of what he says about the reality of this eternal world he cites two major pieces of evidence. The first is this. 'We did not follow cunningly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, but speaking what we speak on the grounds of eyewitness, we saw and we actually heard' (see v. 16). What is the point of that remark? Well, as Peter tells us, this is not a made up story in which somebody speaks, but it was only a story after all. No, it was an event, a literal event. Peter says they actually saw this with their eyes. It wasn't some kind of a vision inner to his soul when Peter was asleep one morning or snoozing in the noonday sun and had visions within his head. He actually saw it with his two eyes. There was Jesus. You could touch him. And he saw him transfigured. He heard, not merely Moses and Elijah speaking with the Lord, he heard what was even more important: a voice come out of that 'Majestic Glory,' which is

another way of referring to God. With his own two ears he heard *God speak*. Therefore, what he is saying is that he is not following myths (and we will come back to that word in a moment); he is recording an actual event that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration when our Lord was transfigured.

Then he says that there is a second piece of evidence. He says, 'We have the word of prophecy, the prophetic word, to which you would do well to take heed because there are certain features about that prophetic word that guarantee its validity' (see vv. 19–21).

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WE DID NOT FOLLOW MYTHS, WE WERE eye-witnesses (1:16)  
 He received **from** God a voice borne **by** the Majestic Glory,  
 this voice borne **out of** heaven (1:17–18)  
 We heard: WE HAVE THE PROPHETIC WORD (1:19)  
 No prophecy is **of** the prophet's own interpretation. Men  
 spoke **from** God being borne along by the Holy Spirit (1:21)

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There are, then, two pieces of evidence that Peter's account of this eternal world is reliable. Let's try and get hold of them and see their point.

### **We did not follow myths**

The modern liberal theologian is given to telling us that the major stories concerning our Lord in the New Testament (including his incarnation and his resurrection) are myths. It is important that we understand what the liberal theologian is saying when he says it is a *myth*. He is not necessarily saying that the story is unreal, false or untrue. But what he is saying is this. The apostles, the evangelists, the disciples, they all had a spiritual experience of Christ. It was real. They did their best to take in this experience of Christ, and they did quite well but, then, they were of course merely men; and perhaps they didn't altogether, one hundred percent, manage to grasp this experience like they ought to have done. But they did well on the whole. Then came a problem: how were they to convey what they had learned through that experience to the likes of us? So they racked their heads and they made up some stories, some myths, for that is the meaning of the term *myth*: a story. They were a kind of parable, if you like. It was the best way they could think up to express and embody this experience that they'd had. So, for instance, the Bishop of Durham<sup>6</sup> would tell us that these apostles had an experience of the Lord Jesus, and they said, 'You know, he is very special.' That's the impression they got. Then they said, 'Well, how shall we express what we have discovered to the general populace?' So, having thought a while, they came up with an idea, and they made up a story of a virgin birth. Well, of course, that wasn't historical fact, so we are told. It was a story they made up, a kind of parable, a way of saying that Jesus was somewhat special. And they say the same thing about the stories of the resurrection.

Superficially, it all sounds very intellectual. When you look at it more closely, the thing becomes a nightmare, because what we start with are the stories, and now we are told that

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<sup>6</sup> The reference is to David Jenkins (1925-2016) who was Bishop of Durham from 1984-1994 and whose views on these issues were being widely discussed in the UK at the time this series of talks were being given.

they are not literally true; they are not events that actually took place. 'Our Lord wasn't born of a virgin,' they say. 'He didn't rise from the dead the third day. The stories were merely the stories the apostles made up to tell us their impression.'

I see. So now you have got to do some sorting. You have got to get rid of the literal bits and come to the impression. Well, what was the impression? And how will you decide what the impression was? And how would you know, when you got to the impression, that *you* had got it right? And what about the impression the apostles had? Was *that* a hundred percent true?

'Oh, no,' they say, 'because they were only men.'

I see. So even if you could manage to get the impression, that wouldn't be a hundred percent true, either. Well what a pickle you'd be in. What would the ultimate truth be?

This is a horrible heresy. Here, intellect that has tried to make progress has gone astray from God's revelation. How many a young man and woman in the pulpit and in the school has been taught this kind of nonsense in their theological faculties, and when they get up to preach, they are no longer certain of what they can preach. They have no gospel then. They would like to preach the story of the transfiguration but then they say, 'But that's a myth, so I can't preach that it actually happened. This is merely a story made up to convey the impression that the apostles had of Jesus. But then what was the impression they had?' And they have no confidence to go and preach that, nor the virgin birth, nor the resurrection of Christ, so they fall to preaching morality and politics. No wonder Peter called it a 'damnable heresy' (2 Pet 2:1 KJV); that is, a heresy of destruction, for it destroys people's faith.

Listen to Peter. He says, 'No we did not follow myths. This isn't a story that we made up out of our own heads to convey our general impression of Christ. This is a narrative of an historical event. We went up the mountain. We *saw* his majesty. We *heard* the voice.'

Notice his repetition of the emphasis that this was the direct communication of the Father to his Son: 'he received . . . from God' and, 'the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory . . .' (v. 17). And then a third time over to emphasize the source of it: 'we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven' (v. 18).

Notice the source. It was not a voice made up, not a story made up, but an historic event with a message coming from that eternal kingdom, coming from the living God himself, borne to Christ, and heard and then reported by the apostles. That is the account the apostles give. They were not following a *myth* but relating an historic *event*.

Well, if you must, turn around and say that they are all mistaken and liars to boot, but then do have the common sense to say that you cease to be a Christian, because the apostles, knowing what myths are, tell us that they have *not* followed myths. And if your theology is that they did follow myths, well tell Peter to his face that he doesn't know what he's talking about then; and set yourself up as an apostle, perhaps, and start a new religion. But pray don't call it Christianity.

## **We have the prophetic word**

*A word that is more sure*

Now, there is a little difficulty of translation in the phrase that, in many of our English Bibles, reads, we have the word of prophecy made 'more sure' (v. 19). That is because there stands in

the Greek an adjective that means 'sure,' only it is in the comparative form. And that to an ordinary Irishman, let alone an Englishman, seems as though it demands a translation in comparative fashion, so it is translated: 'more sure.' And many people have therefore scratched their heads and wondered what on earth that can mean. In what sense is the prophetic word 'more sure'? And some people have said that the prophetic word was sure to start with, but after Peter had this experience, that made the prophetic word even more sure.

But if that is what the Greek meant, it would have said it differently. The Greek does not say that we have the prophetic word 'made more sure', that it was 'made sure by what went before up the transfiguration mount'.

So some people have said, 'Well, it simply means that, when all is said and done, important as Peter's experience on that mountain was, more important still is the prophetic word of Scripture because this was the experience of one single occasion whereas the written word of God has lasted for centuries.'

Actually, our difficulties proceed, in great part, from our ignorance. The kind of Greek that Peter was writing (or, more likely, his amanuensis was writing for him) was very sophisticated Greek such as you would expect in that part of the world at that stage in history. It was not the kind of Greek Peter spoke in Galilee (if ever). But in that kind of Greek, the comparative of the adjective is often used without any comparative sense, not meaning 'more sure' but used rather in the superlative sense: 'we have the prophetic word as something that is *utterly* sure.'

'Now,' you say, 'that is a funny way of talking. If Hellenistic Greeks wanted to say "very sure", why didn't they say "very sure" instead of saying what appears to be "more sure"?''

Well, yes, why didn't they? Do accept that there are nations abroad on the face of the earth that do things a little bit oddly to our way of thinking, and there are many nations that use the comparative of the adjective where we in English would use the superlative.

What Peter is actually saying, therefore, is not 'we have the prophetic word *more* sure' but, 'we have the prophetic word that is something *utterly reliable*,' in the sense of, 'more sure it could not be!'

Why is the prophetic word something utterly reliable? He says,

no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (vv. 20-21)

The first simple answer comes when we consider the source of the prophetic word: 'men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'. Do you notice the repetition of the vocabulary: the 'carried' or 'borne along' bit and the repetition of the preposition 'from'? Men spoke from God, and the connection between God and them was that they were carried along by his Holy Spirit. What they spoke, therefore, was the voice of God coming to us through them.

But the first clause: 'no prophecy is . . .', has proved a little bit difficult and remains so. Let's be sure we have understood and translated it right.

*Rightly interpreting 'someone's own interpretation'*

Many English translations have it, 'no prophecy is of private interpretation'; and then you have to decide what that means. And some people have said that means simply that the ordinary individual Christian can't hope to understand it. He must accept the interpretation that the church as a whole puts on it.

That can't be true, can it? Because as we read our epistles, we find the apostles constantly appealing to us to judge what they say, to think it through for ourselves, to prove all things and decide what is good and what isn't good; and to hold fast that which is good.

Other people have said, 'No. "No prophecy is of private interpretation", that is, literally "of its own" interpretation. If you are going to understand a prophecy correctly, you can't take that one prophecy; you must take it in the context of the whole of Scripture. Otherwise, if you try and explain it just by itself, all by its lonesome, you are liable to go astray. You must take it in the context of the whole of Scripture.'

Well, now, that is certainly good advice, and maybe that is what it means. I myself think, however, it means something a little different, as I have indicated by putting in the notes the words: 'the prophets'. I think it is not talking to us about *our* interpretation of prophecy. I think it is talking about the prophet's *own* explication of *his* experience.

You say, 'What do you mean?'

Let me take an example. Read the prophet Daniel chapter seven. He said he had a vision, and he saw four beasts come up out of the sea, one after the other, and a motley crew they were, fierce and terrible. And he saw what happened: he saw the throne set, and God Almighty hold judgment, and the final beast was consigned to destruction, and the kingdom was given to one like unto the Son of Man and the saints.

Daniel saw the vision; he heard the words spoken. Daniel said to himself, 'Well what does that vision I've just had *mean*?' Well, now he tells us a very interesting thing. He didn't go away home and say, 'I wonder what that means?' and try and make up what it meant. In the vision, he *asked* and he was *told* what the vision meant (v. 16). So not only the description of the vision came from God, but the *explanation* of the prophecy came from God.

Now this is very important if this is what our verse is saying, and I personally think it is. It is once more contradicting those who say these things are myths. Do you remember what they say? They say the apostles and the prophets had an experience of God. And that was good, but they didn't take it in completely. What they did take in, *they* then tried to explain by making up stories.

'No they did not,' says Peter, 'that is not how it happened!' Certainly they had the experience, but they didn't turn around and make up stories to try and explain it. Along with the original vision and communication, the explanation of what the prophecy meant came from God. And if that is true, then the whole notion of what is called the 'myth theory' is ruled out of court. The story of the virgin birth, the story of the resurrection and the story of the transfiguration are not stories made up by the prophets and apostles to explain what God was saying to them. The prophecy came from God. The *meaning*, as they give it to us, came from God as well.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to these things. These are the true sayings of God. Alas for those destructive heresies that in this critical time of human history

destroyed men's faith in God's holy word. Of all crimes, this ranks surely among the first few. 'Rather than stumble one of these little ones that believes in me,' said our compassionate Lord, 'rather than break a man's faith or stumble him in his faith,' (just in case you were proposing to do it) 'it would be better that a millstone be hung around your neck and you be put in the depths of the ocean' (see Luke 17:2). At least you'll be out of the way of doing any harm to anybody. To break a man's faith in the reality of these great, divine events: in the reality of that eternal kingdom, in the certainty of the coming again of our Lord, is to have done him the biggest possible injury you could ever do to a fellow human.

But let's not end on gloomy things. We have the word of prophecy as something absolutely reliable. It comes from God, and the explanation comes from God as well. And we have the witness, the eye-witness and the ear-witness of the apostles who, when our Lord was here on earth were favoured to actually *see* and *hear* that eternal kingdom, even without dying.

And so Peter, not one to lose an opportunity to remind anybody of anything at all, tells us what I now again tell you. This world is temporary. There is an eternal kingdom. All progress here will have eternal consequences there.

## The True and False Ways

### *2 Peter 2:1–22*

Now we come to study together the second epistle of Peter, chapter two. So let us begin by reading some verses from that letter.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit<sup>7</sup> you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgement; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and wilful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgement against them before the Lord. (vv. 1–11)

Reading now from verse 15:

Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord

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<sup>7</sup> For 'exploit you', RV has 'make merchandise of you.'

and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.' (vv. 15-22)

God give us good understanding of his holy word.

### **Our studies so far**

In the course of our studies, we have discovered Peter's declared intention in this epistle. He was determined, he said, to remind us of things even if we knew them. Not content with that, he was determined to stir up our pure minds by reminding us of these things that we already knew. And not content with that either, he was determined so to stir up our pure minds by way of remembrance that, ever thereafter, even when he himself had gone home, we should be able to recall what he constantly reminded us of by ourselves without having to be reminded anymore. And therefore you will excuse me if we begin this morning by doing precisely what Peter wanted us to do.

Of course, by this stage, you all know chapter one. We could wake you up in the middle of the night, knock you on the head with a brick and say, 'Start reciting 2 Peter 1!' And off you would go, knowing every word perfectly all the way through the chapter. No? Oh dear. Because if the Communists get a hold of you one of these days, and they put you in their jail and they knock your head with a lot of bricks and take your Bible from you, you would be thankful to God if you could recite 2 Peter 1 off by heart, wouldn't you?

Anyway, Peter is going to remind us whether we like it or not, so let's begin by just recapping what we found in previous sessions. By the time we had finished our last day of study, we had reason to think that one of the major lessons of the second epistle of Peter is that this world is temporary; there is an eternal kingdom; all true progress here will have eternal consequences there. Then we went on to look at the thought flow of the epistle, and we saw that the first eleven verses had this kind of argument behind them. We are to make spiritual progress; it will affect our eternal condition.

#### *1:1-7*

First of all, therefore, Peter says, 'Grace and peace be multiplied to you . . .', in prospect of that great eternal kingdom, in prospect of the tremendous things that hang on our progress now; namely, eternal consequences. In prospect of that, we may have grace and peace on this ground: that God's divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. He has given these things to us as a gift: eternal life; and with it the very nature of God; and with it his divine power; and with it his gracious promises of things that he guarantees to us in the future. He has given all the things that are necessary for us, not only to enter the eternal kingdom but to have an abundant entrance into that kingdom. Here then we start, and we start on the basis of what God has given to us: eternal life, the divine nature and all things that pertain to godliness.



*1:8-11*

For that very reason, Peter says, we are not to sit still, fold our hands and twiddle our thumbs. For the very reason that God himself has given us all things that are necessary, we on our part have to supply all diligence to use, develop and exploit those resources that God has given us, and to apply all diligence. We are to supply the Christian graces, qualities and characteristics that Peter lists in the following verses.

To enforce his exhortation that we are to give diligence to add these things, Peter says that if you do them certain things will follow. And if you don't do them, certain other things will be true of you. And we considered what those things were. And having pointed out those positives and negatives, Peter comes round once more to his exhortation: 'Therefore give diligence'. But the exhortation is stepped up a degree: 'be all the more diligent' to add these things, and by adding them 'make your calling and election sure' (v. 10).

Then once more he enforces what he has to say. Why should I give more diligence to make my calling and election sure? Well, if you do so, *this* will happen; and in this way, if you do these things, you will not merely enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord (for all believers will enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord) but there shall be ministered to you an abundant entrance 'into the eternal kingdom' (v. 11).

*1:12-15*

Then, so important did Peter regard these matters that (as I have just reminded you) he declared his intention in the next verses to keep on reminding us, stirring up our minds, getting us excited about it, getting us to feel their importance; and then so to keep on reminding us that, after his decease, we should ourselves be able to recall what he had to say for ourselves. And then, having said that, he went on to deal with what is a fundamental matter in this connection.

*1:16-21*

Peter exhorts us to give all diligence in view of that eternal kingdom. How do I know there is an eternal kingdom? How do I know there is another world? What if the whole thing he talks of is merely a myth? We need to be absolutely, unshakeably certain that there is another world, if we are thus to give all diligence so that we get an abundant entrance into it. And in the final verses of chapter one, Peter turns to give us the assurance that we need of the absolute certainty of his testimony that there is this eternal world. He says, 'we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 16).

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a myth. That is, it is not a story that the early church invented to encourage us to think that, in some vague way, if we try and live decent lives, we shall find that to be of great benefit to everybody. It is not a myth made up by the church. 'First of all,' says Peter, 'we were eyewitnesses of what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, and what happened there was a literal historical event; and we saw it happen with our eyes, and we heard what was said. Please, it wasn't a myth. It was an historical event.' And on the authority of what happened on the transfiguration mount, Peter says, 'we affirm the power and the coming (that is, the second coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is an event that will take place in the future. It is not a myth' (see vv. 16; 19).

And then, in addition to the apostolic testimony of what they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter says we have the prophetic word that spells out the same message and gives us the same promise. The Messiah shall come again. This also is not a myth. His second coming will be as much an historical event as his first coming was.

### **Opposition to the eternal kingdom**

Now with those things ringing in our ears, we come to Peter's second chapter, and its main burden is going to be this. Peter says, 'We have given you our apostolic affirmation that there is an eternal kingdom and that your progress as believers here on earth will determine whether you merely get an entrance into it or you get an abundant entrance into it.' And then he warns us, 'Alas, there will come opposition to what I am now teaching you. For just as there were false prophets in the Old Testament time, so there will be false teachers in these days, and they will oppose this message that I preach.'

You might expect opposition to the teaching of our Lord and of his apostles from the outside: from atheists, from humanists and from agnostics. The sad thing is, as Peter warns, that this opposition that we are going to consider today will not just come from the outside; it will come from the inside.

In the Old Testament, there were prophets who urged upon Israel that, being redeemed by God, they must live godly lives; and if they did not live godly lives, their nation would be shattered and it would have eternal consequences. And there rose up within Israel prophets in Israel (and not just laymen but men professionally proclaiming to be prophets) who said, 'Nonsense! That's very grim stuff! You want to take a more liberal attitude to these things. And, do you know what? It's about time we recognized that there are excellent features in the Moabite religion, and we have been rather too strict on our morality. Well, perhaps Moses was all right for his time, but in those days in the desert people were awfully strict. But nowadays, of course, we must learn to take a more liberal attitude to sexual morality. And all this rather cold and negative stuff in Moses: "you shall not commit adultery", and "you shall not commit fornication", and "you shall not bow down to idols", and all this kind of thing, just isn't in fashion anymore. And, you've got to help the people and come where the people are. If you're going to attract them to religion, you have jolly well got to make it a bit more attractive.'

These were the voices that were heard in Israel in the name of religion, and they were coming from professional prophets. The disasters it brought upon Israel when many of Israel followed their teaching is open for us all to read in the historical sections of the Old Testament, and in the prophets themselves.

As it happened in Old Testament times in Israel, now Peter warns us that there will come similar opposition to the teaching of our Lord and of his apostles, and it will come not merely from the world outside; it will come from within the church. In the name of professional teachers and leaders in the church, there shall also be false teachers among you, teaching permissiveness, Peter says. The thing that concerns Peter here is not so much doctrinal matters (though of course he does deal with them) but he is concerned about the kind of false morality that these false teachers will encourage. And he is concerned about it, of course, for its own

sake, for the disastrous effect it can have on people's lives here, and also for the disastrous affects it will have on people eternally.

So now just to have a look at this next section, we will first of all take the thought flow of the whole of chapter two.

## The thought flow of chapter 2

Here is a brief set out of the thought flow of the whole chapter.

<b>2 Peter 2: Thought-flow</b>	
2:1–3	<b>False teachers (1):</b> 'their destruction soon'
2:4–9	FOR GOD KNOWS HOW TO: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deliver the godly</li> <li>2. Keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment</li> </ol>
2:9–17	<b>False teachers (2):</b> 'For them the blackness of darkness has been reserved'
2:18–22	FOR THEIR EFFECT ON THE HALF-CONVERTED IS DISASTROUS: 'the last state is worse than the first'

He says there shall come false teachers, and in verses 1–3 he describes to us what their ways are. We shall look at that in detail in a moment. But very quickly he comes to the point that their false teaching is so serious that 'their destruction is not asleep' (v. 3); it will come very soon. And now he gives you the reason: '*For . . .*' (v. 4).

Then in verses 4–9 he gives us some historical examples to teach us the lesson that God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and, at the same time, to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment. And because God knows how to do these things, God isn't hard up for ideas or methods of dealing with this kind of false teaching. And he will deal with it, Peter says. He knows how to and, therefore, the destruction of these false teachers is coming soon.

Having cited these examples of God's interventions to judge within history, he comes back to a description of the false teachers. And in verses 9–17 he lists certain other things about their characters and their doctrine. He comes once more to the theme of the judgment that shall overtake them. He says that for these false teachers, 'the blackness of darkness has been reserved' (v. 17 RV).

Then in verses 18–22 he has another *for*. After speaking of the blackness of darkness that has been reserved, he says, '*For . . .*' (v. 18), but this time he explains why God has reserved the blackness of darkness for them. For consider the effect of their teaching on what I have here, for sake of space, described as the *half-converted*. The effect of their false teaching on the half-converted is disastrous, or is potentially disastrous; for under the influence of this false teaching, certain people he describes here are in danger of having this happen to them: 'the last state has become worse for them than the first' (v. 20).

There then are the four major parts of the second chapter of the second epistle of Peter. Two passages are given to a description of the false teachers with particular emphasis on the judgment that shall overtake them. Here in the second part (vv. 4–9) is an explanation of *how*

God can do it. In the fourth part (vv. 18–22) is an explanation of *why* their judgment shall be so severe; it is because of the serious effect of their teaching on people's lives.

### **Gloomy but necessary reading**

This chapter in 2 Peter is perhaps one of the most solemn, serious and gloomy parts of the whole of the New Testament. And if today you go away with the impression that it's been a very gloomy Saturday, and that we have been considering very gloomy things, pray have the kindness to remember that I didn't write 2 Peter 2! And don't blame me; I can't help it! I can't make it any happier than it is.

I could, of course, make this day gloomy for you by talking about cancers that destroy people's bodies. That would be a gloomy subject, wouldn't it? But now and again we have to consider such things. And if you will smoke, perhaps it is kind to be a little bit gloomy (for an hour at least) and show you horrible pictures of lungs ruined by smoking, in order to try and stop you. Just consider the effect of smoking, and the people who make money out of producing the cigarettes that kill you.

The sad thing about these teachers, and what merits God's severe judgment is that they don't just sin themselves. That would be bad enough, and you might in the end feel sorry for them. If they must destroy themselves eternally; well, I suppose they must, and you would feel sorry for them. But they are not content with that. The solemn thing is that, by their teaching, they destroy other people. This teaching leads to the fact that true believers can get stumbled, and their eternity be not so glorious as otherwise it would have been. Their teaching has the effect that some folks that nearly got converted, in the end don't get converted, and go back worse than ever into sin, and perish eternally. It is that that makes false religious teaching so solemn, because it destroys other people's lives. The most solemn words our blessed Lord ever spoke were spoken in denunciation of false religious teachers because of the damage they do to other people.

This chapter shall not be all unrelieved gloom, because if this chapter tells us about the false teachers and their false doctrines, against that gloomy background the apostle will be able to show us more radiantly than ever the glory of God's salvation. You will see the colour of the daffodil strongest against the darkness of the black cloud. You will see what is right and true as all the more glorious for being shown against the background of what is false. Oh, the terrible forces of false religion! How they are aligned and gathered to destroy people's souls. Does that make you feel a bit wobbly? Well, it shouldn't. Look at this second paragraph (vv. 4–9). God not only knows how to destroy the wicked and keep them under punishment until the day of judgment, he knows how to deliver the godly. Oh, thank the Lord for that! Let the temptations be never so fierce; God knows how to deliver the godly. So against that gloomy background, we are going to have a glorious statement of God's ability to save and to keep and to deliver.

Consider one other thing. Against the background of false religion, it will be borne in upon us by this second chapter how important it is to rest content with nothing less than what is true. For that will stand the test of life, the storms of life, and the test of eternity. And if this second paragraph tells us of God's ability to save the godly, with its glorious exhibitions of his salvation, and Noah and Lot are cited as examples of it, this last paragraph (vv. 18–22) will

tell us, by vivid examples, of how it is possible to have an experience that looks like salvation and yet is not the real thing. And if it only looks like salvation, but isn't the real thing, it will come to disaster in the end. So what is the real thing?

### **Major features of the false teachers**

So now let us continue by looking at paragraphs one (vv. 1–3) and three (vv. 9–17) for a moment. These are the two paragraphs that deal with the false teachers. And I have listed for you their major features.

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#### **1. False Teachers (2:1–3)**

1. Deny the Master that bought them
2. Permissiveness; popularity; WAY OF TRUTH gets bad reputation
3. They make money out of you

#### **2. False Teachers (2:9–17)**

1. Despise dominion; rail at dignities; like mere animals
  2. Permissiveness; adultery; spots; blemishes
  3. Forsake the RIGHT WAY; follow the way of Balaam; love the hire of wrongdoing
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There is first the fact that they deny the master that bought them. There is, secondly, the fact that by their lascivious ways they become very popular. Many shall follow them. Their permissiveness leads to great popularity and has the result that the way of truth gets a bad reputation; the way of truth is 'evil spoken of' (v. 2 RV), or 'blasphemed' (ESV). And, thirdly, Peter says, they make money out of you. It isn't the worst thing you could say, but it is a consideration, isn't it?

And then in the third paragraph when he comes to talk about these false teachers again and describe them in more detail, he has three major things to say about them. First, they 'despise dominion' and 'rail at dignities' (v. 10 RV). Just as in the first paragraph, they deny the Lord that bought them and deny his authority, so here they despise dominion; and they behave like mere animals. Next, he talks in great detail about their permissiveness, their adultery. He says they are spots and blemishes in your love feasts. They cannot cease from sin. And, finally, they forsake the right way, and they go after the way of Balaam (v. 15). And remember the thing that activated old Balaam, Peter says. He loved the petty cash. Well, it was more than *petty* cash, in his case. He loved the cash that you make by writing a bestseller, or by other methods. And we shall have to think about these things in some detail later on.

Notice if you will, for our immediate purpose, the fact spoken of in the first section on false teachers. Peter says the way of truth is brought into disrepute by their teaching. Notice then in the second section dealing with false teachers what they do in regard to the *right way*. Peter says they forsake it.

## True Christianity is a gate and a way

Now, just for a few moments, I want to concentrate your attention on this matter of *the way*. I am going to ask you to have in mind what our Lord Jesus taught in the Gospel of Matthew. And I want to demonstrate to you, if I can, how well Peter is conveying to us what the Lord Jesus taught him. So, if you can have your Bible open to Matthew 7:13 onwards, you will see that there our Lord Jesus likewise talks of Christianity in these following terms.

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Mistake 1: To try to follow *the way* without first entering *the gate*

Mistake 2: To enter *the gate* and then not follow *the way*

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True Christianity, our Lord says, is a gate and a way; it is both things. It is a gate at the very beginning through which you have to pass, or else you'd never start to be a true Christian. After passing through the gate, there is a way that you have to follow for the rest of life. So true Christianity is a gate and a way.

There are two mistakes that can be made about it. The first mistake is to try and follow the Christian way without ever having entered through the gate.

You say, 'What do you mean?'

Well, there are lots of people that do it. They are earnestly trying to live as Christians, to follow the road of true Christian discipline and living. They made one terrible mistake: they never come in through the gate.

You say, 'What is the gate?'

The first chapter of 2 Peter can tell us. It is receiving the gift of life from Christ; it is being born again; it is coming to partake of the divine nature (v. 4). We shall never follow the way as we should follow it if, first of all, we do not come through the gate. 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born [again] . . . he cannot enter . . .' (John 3:5). There is a gate, and it is a sad and a sorry thing to be trying to follow the Christian way if first of all we have not come through it.

There is an opposite mistake. That is to come through the gate and then forget that the gate was meant to lead onto a way. It is to say, 'You know, I was converted forty years ago. I can tell you the very night I trusted Christ, and I was born again.'

'Well, jolly good. How far have you gone since then, my good sir?'

'What do you mean? I was ready for heaven the night I was saved.'

'So you were, in a sense. But how far have you progressed along the life of Christian discipline and progress?'

'Ah, I don't think it really matters how we behave, does it? Because, once you've been saved, you're eternally secure.'

'Oh my dear good man. If that's how you think about Christianity then you haven't got hold of Christianity. Christianity is a gate, and it is a way. If we are not following the way, there could be some doubt as to whether we have come through the gate, couldn't there?'

Therefore, the lesson from Matthew, first of all, is *beware of imitations*.

'What do you mean, beware of imitations?'

Well, our Lord Jesus said it like this. True Christianity is a gate and a way, but there are other systems that are imitations. They have a gate, and they have a way; but whereas the gate in Christianity is very narrow, the gate in these other systems is very wide. And whereas in Christianity the road is narrow; the road in these others systems is very wide. Do perceive that our Lord is not describing the world at large. I don't know that it is true to say that 'all men are on the broad way'. To get on the broad *way*, you've got to come through a gate. Our Lord is talking about imitations. 'Beware of false prophets,' he says (Matt 7:15).

'How would you know whether they were false or not?'

Well, of course, there are prophets, and some of them claim to be Christians. They have got a system of religion to put in front of you. It has a gate. Oh, but it is so wide you could get a horse and cart through it. Even an elephant could get through it. Some of the gates are so wide that you could get through them without knowing it. That is not a true entrance into the kingdom.

How desperately clear we need to be in our minds as to what the gate is by which we become Christians. How do I get hold of the divine nature? How am I born of God? What gate is it? May I ask you: what gate did you come through to become a Christian? There are imitations, you know. People have gone through very wide gates and think they are Christians, but it was a wrong gate. And beware of imitation roads. The true road is a narrow road. The false road is as wide as wide can be. Hear our Lord's warning: 'Beware of false prophets; beware of imitations.'

### **The test of true/false prophets and true/false disciples**

How would you know a false *prophet* when you saw one? Our Lord said you will know them by their fruits (v. 16). I remember as a young student being disturbed by reading the words of a leading professor of Christian theology. He belonged to the 'God is dead' school of thought. He made a tremendous impact. His books sold by the thousands. Then I heard that his moral life was an absolute shambles. Do you know what I said? 'By your fruits you shall know what their prophecy is. By their fruits you shall know them.'

How would you know a true *disciple* from a false one? Our Lord was very careful to point out that it is not by the fact that the man has prophesied. That is no guarantee a man is a Christian. It is not by the fact that he has cast out a demon from somebody. That is no guarantee a man is a Christian. It is not by the fact that he has done a miracle or two. That is no guarantee a man is a Christian. It is not because he constantly sings or says, 'Lord, Lord!' That also is no guarantee a man is a Christian. What is the sign that a man is a genuine believer? The genuine believer is a person who *does* the will of Christ's Father and does the actual words of Christ (vv. 21–23).

It is possible to build a house, and it looks as good as any other house; but the house is built upon the sand; and when the storm comes it is broken. It is possible to have an imitation Christian life not built on the right foundation; and when the storm comes it will disintegrate.

## The false teachers

Finally, I want to say a word about the thing that is said about the false teachers. They deny 'the Master who bought them' (2 Pet 2:1). This is the first, key feature about these false teachers. And let us notice the terms carefully.

Our Lord is described as the master, or 'slave-master', if you like: a master that has absolute authority over us. How did he come to have that authority? Because, says Peter, he bought us. Now, the mark of a true believer is that he accepts our Lord's authority in that fashion. He admits that he is not his own. The master has bought him. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is talking to the Corinthian converts, and they came from a background of extreme permissiveness. The modern world of Northern Ireland and Britain would be shallow, perhaps, compared with the extreme sexual permissiveness of the ancient Greek world. Some of the converts of the early church had been brought up in that way of thinking. And Paul has to write to them to correct them. 'It won't do,' he says.

'Why not?'

'Well, your body,' he says, 'is a temple of the Holy Ghost. And, what is more, you are not your own.'

'What? Not even my body?'

'No, not even your body,' Paul says. 'You are not your own.'

'How's that?'

'It is because you have been bought with a price' (vv. 18–20).

It doesn't matter what the fashion is in sexual morality. The issue is that my body no longer belongs to me, if I am a believer. It has been bought by the Lord Jesus; it is no longer my own, for I have been bought with a price.

That is precisely what these false teachers would not have in practice: 'Oh that's only Jesus. If he were living around here now, he'd say something different.' Or, 'That's only Paul, and we must move with the times.' They deny the authority of the Lord, for they deny the basis of redemption.

What else they do, I am not now going to comment. So now we will have a short time on these difficult old false teachers in your question time.



## The Lessons to be Learned From the Angels, Noah and Lot

*2 Peter 2:3–9*

One difficulty we must face lies in the lesson being conveyed by the next verses we now come to study. Therefore, as we begin, let us remind ourselves and reaffirm in our minds that this is the inspired word of God. So let us start by believing it, whether we understand it or not; then let us have the wisdom to observe that different Christian people—good, honest, serious students of the word of God— would perhaps come to slightly different views on these verses and what they teach. And therefore we have need of patience with one another. We are not to grow cynical, or unduly dogmatic, but to be patient with one another and try to progress in the understanding of what God is telling us here.

It is with that attitude I shall now proceed. If I sound unduly dogmatic you will know it is simply my age or my temperament or the fact that it's Saturday morning, or something else, and make due allowance for these things. Shall we read the verses in 2 Peter 2 that will be our particular concern in this session.

Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgement; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement. (vv. 3–9)

Those then are our verses, and we may care to notice where they come in the thought flow of chapter 2.

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2:1–3	<b>False teachers (1):</b> 'their destruction soon'
2:4–9	FOR GOD KNOWS HOW TO:
	1. Deliver the godly
	2. Keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment
2:9–17	<b>False teachers (2):</b> 'For them the blackness of darkness has been reserved'
2:18–22	FOR THEIR EFFECT ON THE HALF-CONVERTED IS DISASTROUS: 'the last state is worse than the first'

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We observed in our first session that chapter 2 begins with some verses on the false teachers (vv. 1–3). It characterizes them under three special headings, and then comes quickly to say that their destruction does not slumber: it is coming very soon; it has been determined of old, and it will soon be executed. And then it goes on to explain how it shall be done and how God can do it.

We might ask why the apostle should think it necessary to explain that God is able to do it. Isn't it obvious that God could do anything he wants to? Well, we shall have to think in a moment why Peter cites all three of these examples from the Old Testament to show that God can deal with these gentlemen very soon. But this second section (vv. 4–9) is there to explain to us how God will be able to bring their destruction upon these false teachers.

We also noticed that when he has drawn the lesson he recurs to the topic of the false teachers, and once more he gives us a detailed description of them. But then he comes to the solemn declaration again: 'For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved' (v. 17). We are once more back at the theme of God's judgment upon them. In the fourth section we read another 'for', but this time it is not telling us *how* God will do it, but *why* he will do it. It is because of the disastrous effect their false teaching has on the lives of others that God has reserved for those false teachers 'the blackness of darkness' (v. 17 RV). What they showed to the world was not light; what they showed to the world came from the very prince of darkness himself. So there is a certain poetic justice that God has reserved for them 'the blackness of darkness forever'.

Let it move us to thank God in this very instant (if it be true of us) that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of his Son (Col 1:13). And let us show forth the virtues of him that has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet 2:9). But if men will have darkness and spread moral darkness in this life, it is not to be wondered at if God reserves for them the blackness of darkness forever.

## **God knows how to deliver**

So now we are going to concentrate on this second passage. You may notice, simply as an interesting way of beginning to remember the thought flow of chapter 2, that there are two sections on the false teachers—one in the first paragraph and the other in the third. And you will notice that there is a certain similarity between them.

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### **1. False Teachers (2:1–3)**

1. Deny the Master that bought them
2. Permissiveness; popularity; WAY OF TRUTH gets bad reputation
3. They make money out of you

### **2. False Teachers (2:9–17)**

1. Despise dominion; rail at dignities; like mere animals
  2. Permissiveness; adultery; spots; blemishes
  3. Forsake the RIGHT WAY; follow the way of Balaam; love the hire of wrongdoing
-

We are going to leave the false teachers now for a while, at least the detail about them, and we are going to look at paragraph numbers two (2:4–9) and four (2:18–22). Among other things, paragraph two contains examples of God’s deliverance of the righteous, and it cites Noah and Lot as the examples. Paragraph four is going to deal out warnings of the possible end of those you may well describe as *the reformed but not regenerate*.

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**Examples of God’s Deliverance of the Righteous**

1. Noah
2. Lot

**Warnings of the Possible End of the Reformed but Unregenerate**

1. The dog that vomited
  2. The sow that took a bath
- 

You will notice the very big difference between the two groups of people being considered. The Lord knows how to deliver the one group. The other group doesn’t necessarily get delivered at all. Instead of being delivered by the Lord out of temptation, the other is kept under judgment. You won’t confuse the two groups, will you?

Why aren’t the others delivered? I think we shall find, when we come to consider the detail, that those in the first group are the righteous; they are the regenerate, in spite of all their mistakes, failings and fallings. The others are reformed but not regenerate; therefore they fall to the teachings of the false teachers, and the last state becomes worse than the first.

But now, as you see, Peter refers us to Noah and Lot as examples of salvation. And referring us to Noah he mentions the flood.

### **The flood in the New Testament**

I’m going to turn aside now from 2 Peter for a while and consider other places where the New Testament talks about the flood. The first reason I do so is that the flood is obviously a significant story to the writers of the New Testament. In 2 Peter it is cited twice. It is cited here in chapter 2, and it will be cited again at great length in chapter 3. And it is cited in several other places as well. The flood, according to the writers of the New Testament, is an exceedingly important event, and for that reason I want to dwell a moment on it.

Secondly, I want to demonstrate, if I can, that the flood is used as a lesson book from which to draw several different lessons. And what the difference in those lessons is we shall find as we proceed. The differences in the lessons do not contradict each other, of course, but they are different. I emphasize this fact because when we come to 2 Peter 2, I want us to concentrate on the lesson that it is teaching, and not to get ourselves a little bit muddled up by bringing into that chapter lessons that are taught from the flood in other parts of the New Testament but are not the particular point for which Peter cites the flood in 2 Peter 2.

We do sometimes allow ourselves to be just a little bit confused on a topic so large as the flood, by wanting one passage to teach simultaneously all the different lessons that are taught from that topic all through the Scripture; and that perhaps is a mistake. What we are going to try to do in the end is to focus very precisely on the lesson that the flood teaches us in 2 Peter

2. So let us get rid of some of our surplus intellectual energy by taking the mass of biblical knowledge we have and putting it into its compartments so that it will clear our minds for our chief job in that chapter.

### **Luke 17 – Unbelieving and unprepared**

In this passage, our blessed Lord quotes both the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulphur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:26–30)

It is easy for us to pick up the lesson that our Lord is teaching. If we read the account in the Old Testament we shall read that the generation alive at the time of the flood were exceedingly wicked. That is not what our Lord calls attention to here. If we read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis we shall find that the men of that city behaved in an abominable fashion. That is not what our Lord calls attention to here. He calls our attention to the fact that in those days men were engaged in their ordinary activities. In themselves there was nothing wrong with those activities: they ate, they drank, they built, and so forth. All these are innocent, good, healthy, wholesome occupations in themselves. But, alas, they went about those occupations as though there was no judgment coming. And right to the very last moment they went about their ordinary occupations with no thought of the judgment in their heads. Therefore they were caught utterly unaware by the coming of the flood, and by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Right up until the last point that the flood came, and right up unto the last point that Lot went out of Sodom, the people in each place were engaged in their ordinary avocations and were found utterly unprepared.

So shall it be when the Lord comes again, says our Lord Jesus. And he concentrates our attention, not on the wickedness of the world that then shall be, but on the fact that multitudes will be caught utterly unprepared.

You say, ‘How was it that the people were caught unprepared by the coming of the flood? Were they not warned?’

Oh yes they were warned. But they didn’t believe Noah, so they were unprepared.

‘Why was it that the men of Sodom were caught unprepared? Were they not warned?’

Yes, they were warned by Lot and by angels; they just didn’t believe, that’s all. And the New Testament talks everywhere about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, so why will thousands of people be caught unprepared? It is for the simple reason that our Lord gives: first he must be rejected (v. 25). This world has examined the claims of the Lord Jesus, and multitudes have repudiated them. Alas, even those who in some sense will nominally admit that Jesus is the Son of God have failed to take seriously the announcement of his second coming in the New Testament.

In theological circles when I was a youth, the doctrine of the second coming was dismissed as belonging to the lunatic fringe of Christianity. It was thought that if you had any sense in your head you would have sort of apologized for it and said, 'Well yes, you know, you can't expect the dear old apostles to have got everything completely right. On the whole they were jolly good chaps, but they did have some curious notions, God forgive them.'

Things have improved somewhat in academic circles in that regard as people have come to see that the doctrine of the second coming is absolutely central to Christianity. But it is one thing for the doctrine to be on the page of holy Scripture; it is another thing for people to believe it and thus to be prepared for that coming.

So the reference to the flood in Luke (as in Matt 24:37–39), is a reference to urge us and all people to be prepared for the coming of Christ and not to be so taken up with life's ordinary duties and activities as to leave no time to be preparing oneself for the coming of the Saviour.

### **Hebrews 11 – Believing so acting**

Now let's look at the lesson drawn from the flood in Hebrews.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (11:7)

Here the writer takes a very practical turn. He says that Noah was warned of God of things that were not yet seen. There was a flood coming, and because it was not yet seen it required faith on Noah's part to believe it was going to come. How genuine was the faith? Did he really believe it? 'Oh yes,' says the Holy Spirit, 'you can see Noah believed what he was told about the coming flood.'

Why?

'Because he did something about it.'

Noah said, 'I've got a family here. They'll need to be saved. If the flood comes tonight, they won't be prepared, and I want to see my family saved.'

His faith that there was a flood coming moved him to do something practical about it and to prepare an ark for the saving of his family.

Is your family saved yet? Are all the members in your church saved? Do you believe the Lord is coming? Are you doing anything about it?

'Well,' you say, 'I can't save them.'

Of course you can't.

You say, 'The ark is Christ.'

Yes, I know that is true in another sense, but no, let's stay with Hebrews. We'll come to Peter soon enough, and he will use the ark as a picture of the salvation that is in Christ. But let's stay with Hebrews for the moment and get the lesson that it is giving. Hebrews doesn't say the ark is a picture of baptism or a picture of Christ. It simply puts before us Noah who believed, and the evidence that his faith was a genuine faith is that he did something about it: he prepared an ark to the saving of his household.

If I believe Christ is coming, and that for those who are unprepared there could be disaster, God help me that my faith in his coming shall lead me to take practical steps, as best I can by God's grace, to do something about the salvation of those of my family and friends that are not yet saved.

### **1 Peter 3 – Repentance and baptism**

Then we come to 1 Peter 3. Let us read the verses that are particularly relevant.

For it is better, if the will of God should so will, that you suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing. Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but [made alive] in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which [formerly] were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was [being prepared], wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness does now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the [answer] of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (vv. 17–22 RV)

Those verses are famous for their difficulty, particularly in relation to 'the spirits in prison'. And if you have come to see the fun of this David going down to meet that Goliath, I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed, at least in this session. I shall not be discussing these spirits in prison, interesting as they are and important. Let us for now fasten on two of the details at the core of the matter.

#### *The flood and repentance*

First of all, here Peter remarks upon the nature of the salvation that Noah and the others experienced. They were saved 'through the water'. It is an interesting expression, because it becomes, as Peter is about to say, a vivid illustration of the principle upon which our salvation works. You could sum it up like this. Noah was not saved *from* the judgment of the flood. He was saved *through* the judgment of the flood. He was saved through the water.

That is a very interesting thing. You see, actually, the water came down on Noah just as it came down on everybody else. The difference was that, while the water came down on him and on everybody else, he had an ark that took him through it and they did not.

Noah believed what God said. Do notice what it was. He was asked to believe God's words, 'the end of all flesh is come before me' (Gen 6:13 RV). Here was God's judgment on flesh—rebellious, sinful, corrupt and corrupting flesh. God had decided to end it, not to try and improve it but to finish it.

That was God's judgment. Perhaps it took a lot of faith. The thought may have come: 'Are they so bad?'

'Yes, so bad,' God says.

Noah's faith showed itself, first of all, in that genuine repentance that accepted the judgment of God that the end of all flesh is come before God—it deserved his judgment. The storm was coming from beneath and from above. The end of flesh had come.

In that particular we, like Peter, may well see an illustration of the basic principle of our salvation. Salvation begins with repentance, and repentance is not simply agreeing with God that murder is wrong and adultery is wrong. Repentance is more radical than that. Repentance is admitting that all flesh is so impossibly corrupt that all God can do is to destroy it—to bring it under his judgment.

I was reading a book not so long ago. It professed to be talking about salvation. The author says, ‘You know, when we come to die, few of us will think we’ve ever done anything bad enough to be damned. On the other hand, perhaps none of us will believe that we’re good enough to go to heaven just as we are.’ What a horrible book. I had to be restrained from putting it on the fire. Few of us will believe we’ve ever done anything bad enough to be damned? Well, I can tell you if you don’t believe that, you’ll never be saved. Why is it that some people lack the assurance of salvation? It is because they have never repented.

Doing enough to be damned is precisely what we have done. According to Paul, in Romans 3:19–20, every one of us—Jew and Gentile, philosopher, moralist and ordinary fellow in the street—stand with our mouth shut, guilty before God. Deserving of his wrath and displeasure, we stand under the judgment of God.

‘Damned?’

Of course. That is precisely where we do stand. Until I really agree with God that my flesh is that bad, I shall not lay hold of the salvation that God has prepared. I shall imagine that Christ has come to save me by just improving me a little bit here and there, and I shall miss the very gate into salvation. It is a very narrow gate; it demands radical repentance: the admission that I, with the rest of humanity, am so sinful that I stand condemned by God’s law, under his judgment. Left to myself, I must perish in that storm of God’s wrath.

When Noah believed that, then God’s gospel message was ready at hand. There was a salvation. How did that work? Notice what Peter remarks. The nature of the salvation was that the ark took Noah *through* the judgment. The waters came up; the waters came down; the ark was surrounded by the judgment waters of the flood—before, behind, beneath and above—and the ark went through it! Noah was saved because the ark could come through it and survive to the other side. And thinking of our Christian salvation, you might say, ‘Christ has saved me from the judgment of sin.’ And in a sense, you’re right. I tell you, he’s done something more. He’s saved you *through* it! For by God’s mercy, our blessed Lord in whom we have salvation went through the judgment, and all the wrath of God descended upon him and he bore it all: ‘bore in love unbounded | What none can know’.<sup>8</sup> He came through it into the new world of resurrection. All who enter that door, and God shuts them into the ark of his salvation, may come through to the other side absolutely saved of the Lord, knowing that the judgment *has* passed and is forever ended as far as they are concerned.

That is why for the believer there is ‘now no condemnation’ (Rom 8:1), no penalty ahead, no wrath of God. ‘God has not appointed us to wrath’ (1 Thess 5:9 KJV). The wrath has finished; it finished when Christ went through it. And you are counted as being in him.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘The Victory’, Author and date unknown. The entire verse runs, ‘Yes, Jesus bore it, bore, in love unbounded, | What none can know; | He passed through death, and gloriously confounded | Our every foe.’

*The ark and baptism*

Peter then draws another analogy for our learning. He says there is a certain analogy between that ark and what went with it, and baptism. Baptism, he says, is 'not the putting away of the filth of the flesh' (1 Pet 3:21 KJV). So now let's see what it is.

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**Baptism: 1 Peter 3:21**

NOT the answer of a good conscience towards God  
 BUT the answer to God of a good conscience

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To follow Peter's Greek is not the easiest thing that anybody could be called upon to do, but the order of his words in Greek makes it quite plain that this is what he is saying. He is not saying that baptism is 'the answer of a good conscience towards God'. If he were saying that, what it would mean would be as follows. It would mean that when you've got a good conscience then you ought to get baptized. How do you get a good conscience towards God? Well, through the blood of Christ. All right, then if you've got a good conscience towards God by the blood of Christ then you ought to get baptized.

Now, that is perfectly true as to the fact. And if that is what you think the verse means, okay; what you think is true in itself anyway, whether this verse is saying it or not. It is the fact that you do not get a good conscience (in the sense of a conscience free of guilt before God) by getting baptized. Of course, if you are a believer and you haven't been baptized you may have a niggling conscience about that (or you ought to have), and the only way to get rid of that would be to get baptized. Yes, I admit that bit. But if we mean in the fundamental sense of, 'How do I get my sins forgiven, how do I get peace with God?' the answer is you don't get that by being baptized. You get a good conscience, in that sense, through faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

To be more exact, Peter is not saying that baptism is 'the answer of a good conscience towards God'. He is saying that baptism is 'the answer to God made by a good conscience'. Baptism is my answer to God.

Watch Noah, who was told by God a flood was going to come. He believed it. His faith was in God: in God's word and his salvation. How did he show it? Well he made his response to God, didn't he? Watch him.

There stands the ark. 'I believe,' says Noah.

You do, Noah? Well show it then, good man.

He walks up into the ark, and the ark takes him through the flood.

*My answer to God*

Baptism is my answer to God. The word 'answer' in the Greek tongue is a difficult word and for a long time foxed many translators, but now from their consultation of the papyri many have come around to see that it is a legal term. It really means the formal answer to a formal question. In the ancient world it was used in the law courts. If two farmers had a dispute about a cow the facts of the case would be determined by a magistrate or his official before they came to court. He would summon the two farmers, and he would put formal questions to them and get their formal answers: 'Giles, do you say it's your cow?'



And Giles would say, 'Yes, I say it's my cow.'

'How do you say that Brown got it?'

'Well, he stole it.'

The magistrate would note it down.

'Brown, do you say it's your cow?'

'Yes, I say it's my cow.'

How do you say you got it?'

'I bought it.'

And so forth and so on. There would be formal questions with formal answers that would be noted down and brought before the judge.

I don't know if we have that system nowadays in the law courts, but there is another area of experience where we still have it, as you will know. We have it at weddings.

Maximilian and Emelina come to be married. They stand before the minister. The minister says, 'Maximilian, will you have Emelina?'

There is a formal question if ever there was one.

And he says, 'I will.' He makes his answer.

And turning to the aforesaid Emelina, the minister says, 'And Emelina will you have Maximilian to be your wedded husband?' It is again a formal question, and she makes a formal answer.

When the minister asks Maximilian, 'Will you have Emelina?' Maximilian doesn't say, 'Don't be so silly, I told you that before, and Emelina knows I will, because one night I plucked up the courage and I put the question to her as we were standing by a five-barred gate. Of course, it wasn't without her encouragement, but I plucked up courage and I popped the question, and she said yes! And it's a matter of the heart, so we don't need all this formal business. What do you ask me again for? I've already said yes.'

Is that how ladies talk about weddings? No, not quite. They may have had the five-barred gate experience, but most of them insist on this other business, and real and formal it is. And the formal question is put: 'Will you?' And the formal answer is given: 'I will.' And these are serious, if delightful, matters, aren't they?

God has pronounced us sinners. He has given his Son to be our ark and our Saviour. You told him personally: 'Yes I will.' Now God wants something more from you. He wants you to get baptized, of course. Why? Because baptism is the formal answer that we publicly make to God. When a person is baptized it is as though the God of heaven is formally putting the question: 'Do you, John Brown, or Margaret Smith, take my Son as your Saviour?' And whether we speak words or do not speak words, as we get baptized we are making our formal reply to God: 'I do.'

You say, 'I don't see the need for it.'

Oh really? Let me ask, who commanded it?

You say, 'Christ'.

Just a minute. Did Christ buy you? Do you admit that you are not your own, but he bought you? You do? And that he has become your slave master and Lord? Well, that's an end of it, isn't it? Whether you see any sense in it or not, if the Lord and master that has bought you commands it, then you do it, don't you?

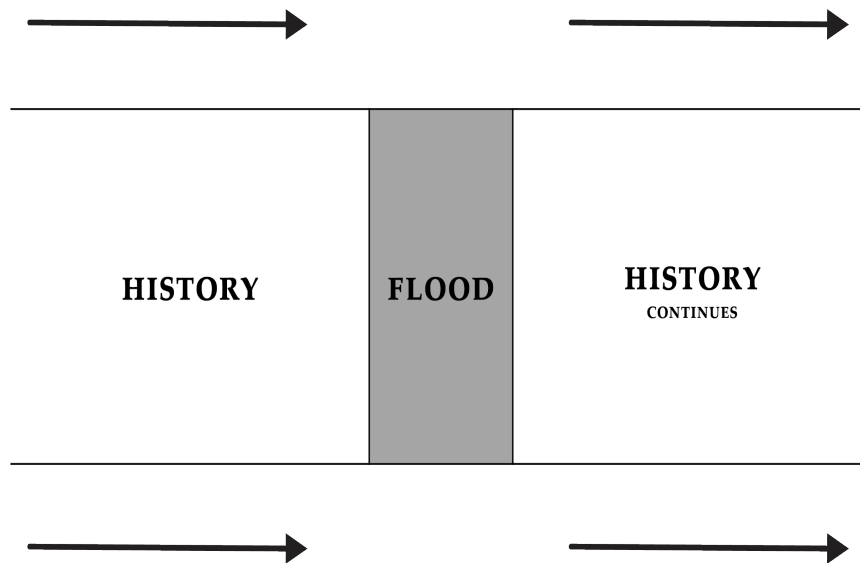
## 2 Peter 2—Deliverance and punishment

What shall 2 Peter 2 say about the flood? Here, as I promised you, we come to a little difficulty. The general problem is as follows. Certain historical instances are cited and then Peter draws a lesson from them.

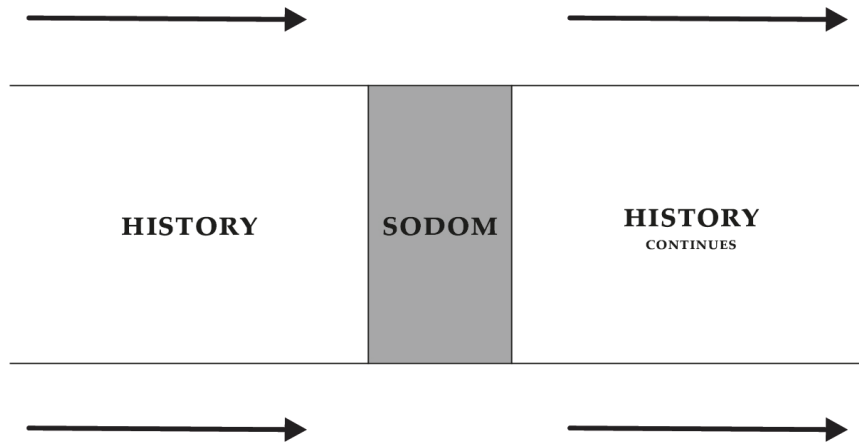
The first one is easy enough. If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to destruction, well then it is obvious and you scarce need say it: he won't spare evil men when they sin either (v. 4).

Now a problem arises and particularly with the false prophets that were around, or were about to come, in Peter's day. Their destruction comes, but how will God be able to arrange it? The day of judgment, the end of the world, is a long, long way off. How will God arrange this business? Can he, and does he, know how to intervene so as to destroy the wicked and somehow save the righteous? That is the problem.

Notice how he saved them at the time of the flood, according to Peter. And notice the nature of the flood. Before the flood came, history was proceeding, as we all know. The world got exceedingly wicked. God didn't say, 'Well that's a pity because I hadn't intended to have the end of the world just yet, not for many, many centuries. The world's got so wicked now, whatever shall I do? Have I got to wait until the end of the world before I bring judgment on the wicked?'



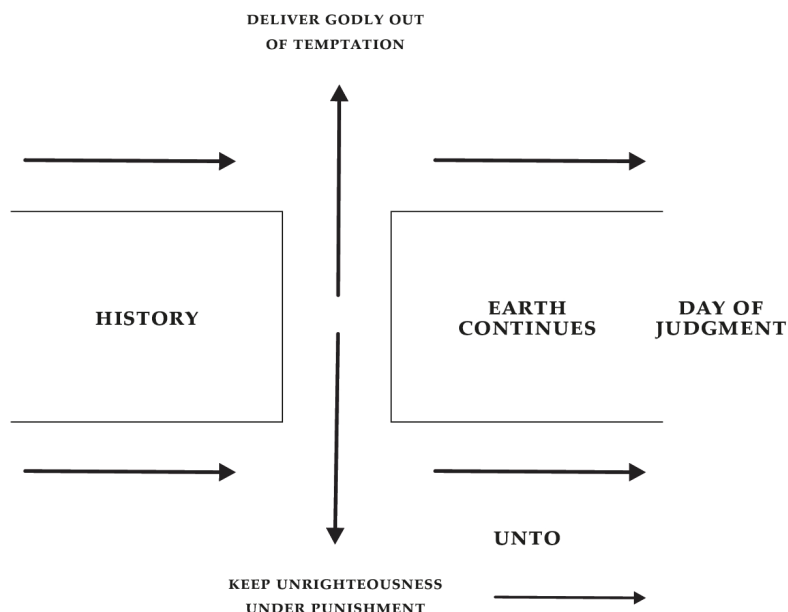
No, God was under no compulsion to wait for the end of the world. He intervened, and he did so catastrophically. That wasn't the end of the world, was it? History went on. In spite of what some modern theologians hold, God knows how to intervene, even catastrophically so, *within* history. The flood was one of those occasions, and history goes on; it wasn't the end of the world.



What happened with Sodom? Well those particular cities got very wicked as history had gone on. God didn't say, 'Well I can't do anything about this because the time for the end of the world and the day of judgment isn't here yet, so I shall have to let them be.'

No, God knows how to intervene within history. He doesn't have to wait until the end of the world. He intervened catastrophically with those cities, and history went on. At the flood, Noah was delivered. And when Sodom was destroyed, Lot was delivered, and history went on. The wicked were taken to the prison house, under punishment, to await the great judgment.

With those examples in mind, now Peter assures us that God can do the same thing still. What will he do, and how will he do it? Well here is what he is going to do.



There are the facts, and we may all agree about those. How you are going to interpret them now when you see it is another thing, but they are the facts.

History is going on with these false teachers. And God is saying, 'Look, I don't have to wait until the day of judgment before I deal with them.' The Lord knows how to so intervene that he delivers the godly out of temptation. Simultaneously, he keeps 'the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement' (2:9). This intervention then is not the day of judgment. The intervention consigns these people to the prison house where they wait in God's custody *until* the day of judgment.

What event is Peter talking of? It is an intervention in human history comparable to the flood, comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. And now I submit how I understand it. He is referring to nothing other than the coming of our Lord.

### **The coming of the Lord**

Now, if you cannot see how that suggestion could possibly be true at least have the kindness of heart to consider how Paul talks about these matters, and I quote you him from 2 Thessalonians 1. He is writing to believers that here were suffering, not temptation so much as persecution. And he says,

It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed. (vv. 6–10 RV)

Paul is preaching the second coming of our Lord as a great intervention that will put a stop to the persecution of believers by consigning the wicked to their doom; and it will simultaneously give the believer rest and relief. When our Lord comes, according to Revelation 19–20, what he shall do is to take the beast and the false prophet and put them in the lake of fire. Is that the end of history? No. There they await while our Lord proceeds to reign on this earth, and they wait until the coming of the great day of judgment.

As I understand these verses, then, they are pointing us first to our great deliverance that comes. We look for the Lord to come.

You say, 'I'm a little bit disappointed with that.'

You are?

'Yes, I'd hoped for deliverance from temptation long before then.'

Well, yes. You'll never be guaranteed freedom from temptation until the Lord comes, will you?

You say, 'Am I liable to be tempted by one thing and another, right until the Lord comes?'

You are my brother; you are my sister.

You say, 'That makes me wobbly at the knees.'

It makes me a bit wobbly as well. And then I say, oh, but then look at it! 'The Lord knows how to deliver . . .' I am glad he does. How I am going to get through, I don't know, but if the Lord knows how to deliver, I shall be delivered.

And then I might say to myself some wicked things. I say, 'Well, Noah was a great man. He was a preacher of righteousness, and I don't know if I'd like to compare myself with him, altogether. But there was that Lot chap. The Bible says he was righteous, so we have to believe it. Yes, but there is a big question mark over some of his behaviour, isn't there? And in the end Lot was saved, so as by fire, but he was saved. Oh, thank God the man was saved! The Lord knew how to deliver him! As the angel hurried him out of Sodom he said, "Lot, get out, man, for I can't do anything until you're clear".'

So is it with the believer. God has not appointed you to wrath, my brother, my sister. Yes, the day of wrath is coming. God has not appointed you for wrath. No drop of wrath will ever fall upon the head of a believer. Courage; the Lord is coming! Our temptations will be at an end, and the Lord knows how to deliver you, and to consign the wicked to where they shall wait for the eventual end of the earth and the day of judgment.

You say, 'Can't it have another application?'

Well, perhaps it can. Perhaps they are right who would point you to 1 Corinthians 10 and say, 'The Lord knows how to deliver you out of temptation because with every temptation he makes the way of escape so that you can bear it' (see v. 13).

That is blessedly true anyway, isn't it? It is not temptation all the way home to glory. Oh thank the Lord it isn't. And he has measured each of the temptations to our ability to bear them; the Lord makes the exit. He is not interested in testing his people's faith to destruction but to preserve their faith; and he will make the exit from each particular test.

That is blessedly true. But in my humble opinion it means more than that. There will come tests right until the Lord comes. Take courage. The Lord knows how to deliver you and will deliver you, and no wrath of God in that great day shall ever descend upon your head.

## The Story of Balaam

*2 Peter 2:15–16*

Let's begin by reading from 2 Peter 2.

Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (vv. 15–16)

### **Our studies so far**

Now, just to remind you, this morning we noticed the contents of 2 Peter 2.

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#### **2 Peter 2: Thought-flow**

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2:1–3	<b>False teachers (1):</b> 'their destruction soon'
2:4–9	FOR GOD KNOWS HOW TO: 1. Deliver the godly 2. Keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment
2:9–17	<b>False teachers (2):</b> 'For them the blackness of darkness has been reserved'
2:18–22	FOR THEIR EFFECT ON THE HALF-CONVERTED IS DISASTROUS: 'the last state is worse than the first'

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First of all, we have some verses that deal with the false teachers and briefly indicate the main features that mark those false teachers. Then very swiftly the apostle comes to announce that their judgment does not slumber and will not linger; God will intervene to deal with them.

There follows a passage explaining that statement that 'their judgment lingers not' (see v. 3 KJV), and its explanation tells us how God will do it. We are told how he will intervene to deliver the godly out of temptation, finally and once and for all, and how he will simultaneously take the unrighteous and keep them under punishment, waiting in his custody, until it should please him to bring them forth to the final judgment.

Then we notice that after that explanation 2 Peter 2 reverts once more to the false teachers, and again gives us details of the features that mark these people and their teaching. Once more, it ends up with an announcement with the judgment that is reserved for them. Not only will their destruction come but when it comes the judgment will take this form: for them 'the blackness of darkness has been reserved' (v. 17 RV).

There follows a fourth passage in which the apostle explains that judgment. This time it is not to say how God will do it, but why he will do it. The severity of their judgment comes because of the fearful results of this false teaching on what I have called the 'half-converted'. Now, that, I must admit to you, is a new term. I invented it, and I have not yet had time to patent the term so don't you go and borrow it. But what I mean by the half-converted is people that in their attempt to escape the corruption of this world through lust have experienced some kind of moral reform, but alas their reform has stopped short of regeneration. They are in peculiar danger from the false teaching of these evil teachers. And Peter says the effect on some of them is that their last state is worse than the first. It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to have departed from it (see vv. 20–21). They put themselves beyond hope, and God's wrath and indignation must fall consequently and proportionately strongly on the people whose teaching is responsible for the sad effects upon these people.

If that then is the content of 2 Peter 2, we are now going to look once more at these false teachers, and learn one or two more lessons Peter brings before us.

### **Marks of a false teacher**

We notice that in the second paragraph devoted to these false teachers Peter repeats broadly what he had said in the first.

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#### **1. False Teachers (2:1–3)**

1. Deny the Master that bought them
2. Permissiveness; popularity; WAY OF TRUTH gets bad reputation
3. They make money out of you

#### **2. False Teachers (2:9–17)**

1. Despise dominion; rail at dignities; like mere animals
  2. Permissiveness; adultery; spots; blemishes
  3. Forsake the RIGHT WAY; follow the way of Balaam; love the hire of wrongdoing
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### **They deny the master**

The first thing said here is that they deny the Master that bought them. The word that Peter uses for 'master' is not the word master that means 'teacher'. In the Gospel of John chapter 13, for instance, our Lord refers to himself as our Lord and Master. There he means 'master' in the sense of 'teacher' (v. 14 KJV). Not so here. The word here indicates master in the sense of 'owner'. It means 'slave owner', if you like, though his slavery is of course perfect freedom. He bought us by his blood. When these false teachers are faced with the wrongness of their teaching, they are not prepared to repent and submit. They show their true colours, and they deny the authority of the apostles, and they deny the authority of the Lord who appointed the apostles, and they reject his mastership over their lives.

You can hear them any day of the week you wish, telling us that this and that part of the New Testament is not authoritative: 'Oh, that was only what Paul said', or, 'That was only

what Peter said', or, 'Oh, that's what Jesus said, but he doesn't know our conditions nowadays, and if he were around now he would put it differently.' They are denying the sovereign authority of the Lord that bought them.

I remind you that, according to Christ's own parable, the man bought the whole field (that is, the world) that he might get the treasure within it (Matt 13:44). These men are obviously not true believers, but he who bought the whole field to get the treasure within it has rights over them. It is the solemn fact that they deny those rights and show exactly what kind of men they are.

### **They fail certain tests**

Allow me now just to make a few remarks answering a question that was brought to me earlier. You may remember we looked at Matthew 7, where our Lord warns us about false prophets, and he says that by their fruits you shall know them (vv. 15–20). The question that was put to me was as follows: 'Is it true that if some teacher or other, or some good person who professes to be a believer, behaves in his life in an exemplary fashion, does that automatically follow that their teachings are correct?'

It does not, of course, automatically follow. In Matthew 7 our Lord is giving us a test by which we can recognize a false prophet. Moreover, he only gives us one test. If you look at the first epistle of John, John will give you a whole series of tests. He will tell you that the mark of a genuine believer is first, of course, the way he behaves. If a man constantly does unrighteousness, he is not of God (3:6). You must consider how he behaves. You must also consider whether a man is a loving man. He that does not love his brother but constantly, intentionally, hates his brother, is not of God (4:20). But likewise John will apply a doctrinal test. For instance, he says that he who denies that Jesus is the Christ is not of God (2:22). His life may be moral in the extreme, but if in these fundamental matters of doctrine about the person of the Lord Jesus he is not loyal to the truth about the Lord Jesus and his person, then he is not a believer, however morally good his life may be.

What our Lord was doing, then, in Matthew 7, was giving us a test by which we may recognize a false prophet. If a prophet's teaching leads to corrupt practice and condones immorality, then the man can say what he likes, but he is false. You don't get thorns off grapes. Decent trees don't produce thorns. Forgive the metaphor, but there can be no beating about the bush: if a man's teaching leads to corrupt behaviour, that man is a false prophet.

But now let's go over some of the other details that are given about these false prophets.

### **They despise the spirit realm**

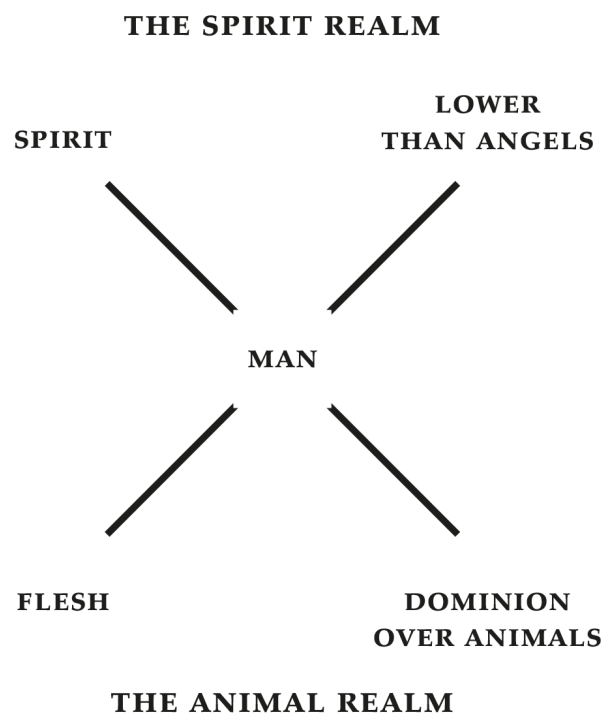
Look at what is said in the second paragraph. They 'despise dominion', they 'rail at dignities'. Now it is true that some commentators have supposed that these dominions and dignities were the officers in the church. It seems to me however from the context here and from Jude (the other epistle that similarly talks of these matters) the dignities and the dominions that Peter is referring to are the high-ranking spirit beings in the spirit realm. And these false teachers are not afraid; they 'do not tremble to rail at dignities'. They have no sense of the solemn authority and the power and the reality of that spirit realm.



Now, that is a very serious matter. If you were to talk to these false teachers and rebuke them because of their permissive doctrines, and tell them that they were sadly influenced by Satan and were doing the devil's work, they would as likely as not laugh in your face: 'Oh, the devil? You believe in the devil, do you—Old Nick and all that? Dear me, he went out with Father Christmas.' That is how they are likely to talk. They are not afraid to talk lightly, blasphemously, if you like, of serious, solemn, spiritual entities, realities and personalities.

Of course, we should not go to the other extreme. It is possible for Christian people to become obsessed with the devil and demons. Some have become so obsessed that thousands of books have been written about converted witches and demonism and casting out demons until people get more concerned with demons than they do with the blessed Lord himself. It is a mark of the sanity of Scripture that it does not constantly focus our attention on spirit beings, either good or evil, but mentions them in their due place and in their due proportion. Beware of those that would concentrate and obsess our thoughts with over exaggerated emphasis upon spirit beings.

That said, it is important that we notice the reality of the spirit realm, because of what man is. If man loses his sense of the reality of that spiritual realm he is likely to descend, as Peter says here, to the level of a mere animal. Man is a complex being. The Bible says he was made 'a little lower than the angels' (Ps 8:5 KJV). On the other hand, when God made him, as Psalm 8 observes, God put man over all the works of his hands. Man is above the animal. Man is part spirit in that he has connections with the spirit realm. Man is part animal in that he has certain connections with the animal world below him. That is obvious, isn't it? A great deal of our physiology is very similar to the animals: our desires, our appetites, and the way our life is propagated.



Scripture would have us be healthy men and women. We are not, by an excess of spirituality, to forget that we are, in part, animal. Please, you won't be offended, will you? I didn't say that we are *animals*. I said that we are, in part, *animal*. We are made of flesh; we have got stomachs and innards and all sorts of marvellous works, and therefore we have appetites and desires. We are truly human. These appetites are not to be treated as though they were somehow wrong. They are God-given, healthy parts of what it means to be human.

And in particular, since we are at this topic, let me remind you that not to be married, for Christian gentlemen, is an abnormal thing. You will need a special gift from God if you are called to remain single. Paul, who advocated what a lovely thing it was if you can remain single for various reasons that we won't go into, is also heard reminding Timothy, and telling Timothy to remind his fellow believers, that the doctrine that commands people to abstain from marriage is not a highly spiritual doctrine. It is a doctrine of demons, in fact (see 1 Tim 4:1–5). It was a grievous thing that happened to the medieval church when it took over certain ascetic ideas from the heathen Greek world and came to regard marriage as something unholy, unworthy and something to be run away from. We are not to try to be so wonderfully spiritual that we deny or suppress the fact that, in part, as human beings we are animal. And on that part of us God's blessing rests. He designed it and its appetites, and gives us instructions to how those appetites are to be satisfied in all honour and holiness and beauty.

But if in part we are animal, in part also we are spirit. Unlike the animal, which as far as I know never says its prayers, we are conscious of that spirit realm and conscious that somehow we ought to be related to it. And the unregenerate man is filled with a certain vague dread of that world. It is true of course that we come from the 'Father of spirits' (Heb 12:9). Sin has caused a breach, and while we are not morally dead nor physically dead, the unregenerate man is spiritually dead but aware of the unease that comes because he is not right with that spirit realm.

Now man has to be very careful. Man can make a terrible idolatry out of that realm by his superstitions that will lead to ghastly rites such as you will find among the heathen—propitiating the evil spirits galore. Oh for the gospel to go and deliver people that sit in such bondage to such terrible superstitions. On the other hand, man can deny its existence, and in denying that existence cut off a certain part of him.

But when we talk of man being spirit we are not talking of his aesthetic sense in the sense that you can enjoy beautiful music and fine art. We are talking of the spirit world in the true and strict sense of that term, in that God is a spirit, and angels are spirits. Deny that realm and you are denying to man one of his major dimensions; and if he loses that side of him, man is in danger of becoming a mere animal. He will be a very highly intelligent animal, but an animal nonetheless.

I don't wish to say more about it. I simply point out to you that Peter warns us about these false teachers as they pour scorn and mockery on that spiritual realm, and are all for unrestrained licence in the animal direction. They become, he says, just like mere animals. And I don't need to remind you how much popular entertainment to be seen on television and in our theatres, and in some of the ballet, portrays man as a very poor and sometimes disgusting animal. Perhaps it is time some Christians began to protest.

Our New Testament tells us that the glorious gospel is this. We who began life as fallen men and women, and were dead in our trespasses and in sins and astray from the Father of spirits, have now been redeemed and have received the Holy Spirit and become children of God and are one day going to be raised in God's universe above the angels. And oh the wonder of this magnificent message! Our blessed Lord Jesus, who became for our sake human, he who was spirit uncreated, equal with the Father and God his Spirit, the very second person of the Trinity, became flesh. He became human, with all that that means, with a sinless but truly human nature. Risen from the dead now, he has gone back to heaven, not as some disembodied spirit, but with a body he has gone back into heaven and is a true man. At this moment as you sit here, he is seated above principalities, mights and dominions and every name that is named. You are already in contact with him, seated with Christ in the heavenlies, above principalities and powers. And your inexpressibly and indescribably glorious dignity is that one day with your blessed Lord you shall judge the very angels as you share in his supreme place in God's universe.

The Bible teaches us true morality. It teaches us far more than true morality; it bids us consider this element of the spirit, and what the regeneration of the spirit will eventually accomplish for all that are joined to the Lord Jesus. Oh what an eternity there is ahead for men and women made a little lower than the angels, but in Christ raised above them! To share with Christ, as Adam with Eve, the administration of all God's great enterprises in the ages yet to come. What a shame it would be if we allowed false teaching to dim our vision and to pervert our attitudes that in any way limited our potential in eternity.

With this therefore we come to an Old Testament illustration with which Peter drives home his exhortations to us to discipline ourselves, and beware of false teachers who will from time to time try to corrupt the people of God.

## **Balaam**

To understand the point of what Peter says about Balaam we ought perhaps to turn to Numbers 23. Allow me to remind you of the following elements in that very ancient story of what happened to Israel at one stage in their wilderness journey.

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**Balaam's Attempt to Curse Israel: A failure**

**Balaam's Attempt to Stumble Israel: A success**

**Israel's Recovery**

1. God's discipline
  2. Israel's self-discipline
  3. Israel's war against Moab
  4. Spoils of victory
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First of all we notice Balaam's attempt to curse Israel. The glorious record is that it was a complete and a miserable failure; he was not able to curse Israel. Secondly, we read of Balaam's attempt to stumble Israel. That was not a failure. That was all too great a success, and he did stumble them. Then, thank God, that is not the end of the story. Let us notice what

the record contains about Israel's recovery. We shall find there are at least four elements in that recovery. First is God's discipline of them. Second is Israel's self-discipline of themselves. Third is Israel's consequent war against Moab. And finally we read of their bringing of the spoils of victory.

Israel were slogging it hard across the wilderness. They had been redeemed from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb. As far as they knew, according to the promises of God, way out there in the future there was an inheritance flowing with milk and honey, and now they were trying to make their progress along the way. (The story will do as an analogy for us who are trying to make progress so that an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom shall be given to us.)

That was the setting when their enemy, Balak, king of Moab, called Balaam and asked him to stop the progress of these people, by hook or by crook. And Balaam, being a prophet (but a false prophet) and very much interested in the cash and the promotion and the office that the king of Moab promised to give him if he would do what he was told and lend his priestcraft to the establishment of the state of Moab, tried as his first device to stop their progress by cursing them.

### **Balaam failed to curse Israel**

'Come, curse Israel for me,' cried Balak to Balaam. Well, Balaam had a go and had to own his miserable defeat. He was not able to do any such thing. And why wasn't he? He says, 'How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? And how shall I defy, whom the LORD has not defied?' (Num 23:8 RV). And then again in verse 19 of that chapter,

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: Has he said, and shall he not do it? Or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: And he has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has he seen perverseness in Israel: The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. (vv. 19–21 RV)

The first lesson is one of glorious comfort and encouragement. Here we are, walking across our wilderness, and all the powers of hell (seen and unseen) are there to try and stop us.

Should all the hosts of death,  
And powers of hell unknown,  
Put their most dreadful forms  
Of rage and mischief on,  
I shall be safe, for Christ displays  
Superior power, and guardian grace.<sup>9</sup>

Why? Because God is not a man, that he should lie or the son of man that he should repent. Has he said it, and then will he not do it? Is he one of those people? There are some people who will promise you the earth but then they don't do what they've said. Is God like that?

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<sup>9</sup>Isaac Watts (1674-1748), 'Join All the Glorious Names.'

Does he say and then not do? Has he sworn and then failed to keep his oath? Indeed not. Heaven would go black if that were so. God is not a man like that to change his mind, nor will God go back against his word. He cannot lie; and I shall be in glory because of it.

What a wonder it is in the battle of life, with all the forces of temptation around us, to know that, if God be for us, who can be against us? In subsequent centuries, God himself called Israel to remember it. I read to you now from Micah 6 where God pleads with his wayward people.

O my people, what have I done unto you? And wherein have I wearied you? Testify against me. For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him; remember from Shittim unto Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD. (vv. 3–5 RV)

Oh what a lovely thing. Here is God pleading with his people (and pleading with you perhaps). And he is reminding them of that occasion when they were in the wilderness and half of them didn't know what was happening. Unbeknown to them, as they were trying to make their way through the wilderness there were two dark and sinister figures walking up on the hills on the other side of the wilderness, scouting out Israel. With their fell powers and magic and divinations, they were determined to curse Israel. And if God had then grown weary of his people they might have succeeded. 'Remember it,' says God, 'and what I said to them.' God stood faithfully by his people because God cannot lie. Nor is he a man, to change his mind.

What a glorious comfort. Sum up if you can those great and precious promises that Peter called our attention to in chapter 1. You will need every one of them before you get home; you will indeed! You don't have one too many promises. But however many be the promises of God, in him is the 'yes', and in him is the 'amen', to the glory of God (see 2 Cor 1:20). God cannot lie.

Paul was writing at one stage to his fellow missionary, Titus, who he'd left behind in the assemblies in Crete. And between you and me and the gatepost, I'll tell you something about the ancient assemblies in Crete. They were in a bit of a pickle, for naturally the people there were 'slow bellies', that is, lazy (1:12 KJV). I don't know what time they got up in the morning. And they were liars. When they got converted they'd got a long way to make up, hadn't they? (How far had you got to make up when you got converted?)

And you might say, 'Well if they started so far back it would take the grace of God some time to deal with them, wouldn't it? They got converted, but that's not the last time they told a lie. They'd got so used to it, after all. We get shocked sometimes at what believers fall into, but do consider where they started. Before God has them perfect in his glory, well, there is some wilderness to be crossed, some battles to be fought, and sometimes they'll despair of ever getting there. 'Oh when shall I overcome this sin? Could it be that God eventually will despair of me before he gets me home to glory?'

'Come curse Israel,' Balak says.

'No,' says God. God is not a man that he should lie. And Paul, writing to Titus, reminds him of the gospel devised before the worlds were by the God who cannot lie (1:2). 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' (Rom 8:31 KJV). Every believer will be home in Glory at last.

### **Balaam succeeded at stumbling Israel**

He couldn't curse Israel, but Balaam was able to stumble them. He taught Balak a dastardly cruel thing. They were tired, weary, footslogging. No one pretended it was easy. How they craved for a little ease. And then one day the girls of Moab came out and invited the young boys to a dinner. The boys weren't quite sure whether they ought to go, but then they went. And they found out that these girls of Moab were beautiful, delightful girls. They said, 'Do you know, old Moses used to tell us about these Moabites and make out they were so bad, but they're jolly decent girls.' So they got invited home to dinner, and then they got invited to take part in the little religious ceremonies in Moab. And one thing followed another, and before they knew where they were they were bowing down to the idols. It wasn't long after that (with a little drink taken) that they were doing what Moabite religion said was okay to do. And they committed fornication.

It succeeded. Balaam taught Balak to put a stumbling block in their way. And our blessed Lord thought it wise to warn one of his churches: 'You've got people in your church like Balaam who taught my people to commit fornication and to worship things offered to idols' (see Rev 2:14).

You say, 'Could it happen in an assembly?' I'm afraid it could. It did particularly in these ancient assemblies, as we noticed Peter saying about these false teachers: 'they are spots and blemishes in your love feasts' (see 2:13). In some of the early Christian churches, as well as the Lord's Supper, they had a fellowship meal together. Such times are delightful, but they can be dangerous, can't they? For you can get folks together in a very close atmosphere when their hearts are opened and everybody is feeling kindly and loving (how would they not?). Then you've got to watch it. I'm not telling tales out of school, but there have been conferences of Christian young people where, in the course of weekends devoted to Bible study, some of those attending have given in under the pressure of modern day standards. And it is the same kind of thing: 'It's the fashion. And why shouldn't you? And we're modern now, and we don't have to listen to old Moses (his beard was too long anyway). And everybody does it. And we shall be odd if we don't do it.' Woe betide those modernist preachers who have said it doesn't matter. And some young people in these situations have stumbled.

### **How Israel recovered**

Thank God Israel recovered. How? Well, if you'll read the text closely, their recovery came by four things. God brought them to their senses by judging them; he brought a plague on them. Oh, he wasn't against them; he was for them. But if they must be brought to repentance and this was the only way to do it, God was prepared to use a plague to bring them to repentance. Twenty-four thousand people died.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul talks to us Christian folks and says, 'You know, all Israel were baptized under the cloud to Moses, but with some of them God wasn't well pleased and they fell in the wilderness under God's discipline' (see vv. 1–5). It could happen to us.

How else did Israel recover? Israel disciplined herself. At one point during the outrage there rose up a man called Phineas, and with his spear he executed God's judgment on Israel. And the plague was stopped (Num 25:6–9).

My brethren, we are called upon to do similarly, if not on others, certainly on ourselves. Paul reminds us that if we would judge ourselves we would not be judged. But if we won't judge ourselves, and we go on carelessly, then God will judge us. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep, he says, for allowing unjudged sin (see 1 Cor 11:30–32).

When they were brought to their senses by the discipline of God and the discipline of their fellow Israelites, then they went on the offensive and, to use the biblical term, they *mortified* the flesh (see Rom 8:13 KJV). They put it to death. They went out, because that's the way they had to do it in those days, and fought with literal swords and hacked old Moab to pieces.

You say, 'That was a bit vulgar.'

Well, perhaps it was, but it was a long time ago. We can't proceed with literal swords, but we are to *mortify* the flesh and wrong passion and ungodly desire and immoral acts. By God's good grace we have got to get the sword out and put the flesh to death.

Finally, when they got victory over Moab they brought in the spoils. I like that little bit of the story. It had started off as a disaster, and in a sense remained so, yet eventually they got the victory and out of that victory there came valuable spoils.

I wonder if perhaps I am talking to somebody who in his or her Christian life has made some terrible blunder of whatever kind. You feel you've blotted your copybook. You have wished ten thousand times it had never happened, and you say, 'What's the good of going on?' Oh, courage my brother, my sister. If you are genuinely the Lord's, God is still for you. If he must discipline you, he is still for you. There is forgiveness. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. He will strengthen you now to go and fight and become strong where before you were weak. And out of those victories there shall come valuable spoils that can be used to enrich your fellow brethren and sisters here on earth. Those things that are won will grace the very splendour of the King's court above.

Do you think heaven will forget what we now know? That Peter fell and denied his Lord? I think it impossible. What shall we make of it when we get home to heaven? We shall make out of it this glory, that poor old Peter, weak like the rest of us, went and fell. That was a pity, but oh the magnificent grace of God that enabled the man to get up and fight again, and in the end to triumph in the very thing in which at first he fell! And heaven will be the richer for it.

He was a bad boy, Balaam. But do you know what? He was a prophet. He couldn't see an angel as well as his donkey could. And that is coming to something, isn't it, when an old *animal* has more perception of the spiritual realm than a supposed prophet? Never let my old donkey have to rebuke me.

## Moral Apostates

*2 Peter 2:18–22*

If, at the close of this meeting, there is anybody that would want to know the way to Bangor, you might find plenty of people here to help give you some idea. There might be people (certainly not I, myself) that could tell you the name of every street, road and alleyway that you would have to go through to get from here to that city on the coast of County Down. I have never bothered to learn every name of every road from Apsley Street to Bangor. I find a much easier way. I might say to you, 'Well, you can go down the road past the City Hall and do a bit of a squiggle and go along that old bypass by Shorts Brothers, the aeroplane factory.'

And you say, 'Well, where will that bring me out?'

'That will bring you out along the main road, then you'll have to go over the hills a bit. If you don't know that way, then go up along by Shorts Brothers and stay along the coast road, and then turn to the right, and that will bring you to where you want to go.' Or, I could say, 'If you don't want to go that way, go out from here and turn left, and go up the Malone Road and stay on it until you come to the Knock bypass.'

You say, 'Where will that bring me out?'

'Well, that depends which fork you take, but if you go round to the right you will come eventually to Newtownards. And when you get to Newtownards, go left and you will come to Bangor.'

So, what I am doing is giving you broad notions of how you get from here to there. And that is the easiest way to remember it, really. I might think to myself, 'Now, here I am, and I've got to get to Bangor. By what routes could I possibly get from here to there?'

Here in our study of 2 Peter we are in the second chapter. The chapter begins with false teachers, and it ends up with dogs and pigs. How on earth does Peter get from here to there? To answer that question, you can, if you like, remember every word in the chapter, and that's not a bad thing to do. An even better way, perhaps, is to understand how you get from here to there so that, even if you can't remember every word, you can work out logically in your mind what are the steps of the argument that get you from here to there, and why on earth following on from false teachers you should end up with pigs and dogs. If you understand the flow of the argument, then you'll see how you get from here to there.

### **Our studies so far**

We have noticed you start off with a description of the false teachers and their bad characters and their bad doctrine, and the fact that judgment is coming. Then the apostle describes how



it will come, for God knows how to bring it and simultaneously to relieve the godly from temptation. Then, once more, we return to thinking about the false teachers, and the judgment that will come upon them; and this time it is explained to us not how the judgment will come, but why it will come. It will come because of the terrible effect of their doctrine on those who are reformed but not regenerate.

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### 2 Peter 2: Thought-flow

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2:1–3	<b>False teachers (1):</b> ‘their destruction soon’
2:4–9	FOR GOD KNOWS HOW TO: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deliver the godly</li> <li>2. Keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment</li> </ol>
2:9–17	<b>False teachers (2):</b> ‘For them the blackness of darkness has been reserved’
2:18–22	FOR THEIR EFFECT ON THE HALF-CONVERTED IS DISASTROUS: ‘the last state is worse than the first’

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In our last session, as we were thinking of these things, we thought together in some detail of the false teachers, their character, motivation and doctrines, and we ended up by talking about Balaam who is mentioned there in the third division, in the second paragraph. And we noticed that the story of Balaam encouraged us with a sense of the faithfulness of God: that God cannot lie, and that therefore God’s people will be saved. No enemy will ever be allowed to curse them or bring upon them their destruction, because God is faithful.

On the other hand, we noticed in the story of Balaam how Israel fell, tripped and stumbled by Balaam’s crafty ways, and how they came under the discipline of God. We were reminded that, as believers, we are expected to discipline ourselves and, if we don’t and live carelessly in sin, then God will discipline us.

That is a sad and a sorry thing. We thought earlier of two examples of salvation, of Noah and Lot, both of them righteous men. We noticed that though Lot was saved from the wrath of God, as all believers will be saved from the wrath of God (for God has not appointed us to wrath), yet Lot was saved, as it were, so as by fire. Contrast him with Abraham and the contrast is sad. Because of the decisions that Lot made in his life, righteous man that he was—justified and secure—nonetheless, one cannot help feeling that a great deal of his life was wasted. He started out from the great, glorious city, Ur of Chaldees, along with his uncle Abraham. Lot too, perhaps, set out looking for the ‘city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ (Heb 11:10 KJV). He ended up as a caveman in a cave, and living like one (Gen 19:30–38). If the Bible had not called him righteous, we perhaps would not have dared to.

So it is important in thinking about these things that we maintain a balance in our hearts and in our lives, rejoicing in the security that we have in God and the promise of his word that we shall not perish, neither shall any man pluck us out of the Father’s hand (John 10:29). ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1). ‘We may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us’ (Heb 6:18 RV), because of this great and glorious fact that ‘God cannot lie’ (see Titus 1:2). And while

we cannot lose our salvation, we can waste life, lose our reward and end up in eternity lesser people than otherwise we would be. Therefore before I proceed, let me say a little word about this need to hold a balance in our thinking, and not to go too far to one side or the other.

### **Learning what is unconditional**

When I was a young man (and that's a terrible long while ago, but not so long as you think) and began, as young men do, to get keen to know the Lord and to stop just fooling around and playing about with spiritual things, I came to the decision that if God was real and his word was real, there is no sense in fooling about. It's got to be one hundred percent or nothing, so by God's grace I decided to make it one hundred percent. And, being interested, among other things, in the preaching of the gospel and also in serious study of the word, I nearly went over the precipice. (Some people think I did, but I say I nearly did.) I will tell you why I almost did.

I was talked to, and given books, by certain good Christian men who were very keen for my spiritual development. These were men that grieved over the laxity of many of God's dear people. And they urged upon me that the reality of the situation is that there are only two unconditional gifts that God gives us, only two things that a believer is given and can never lose. And they said that those two things were *eternal life* and *justification*. They said those were unconditional gifts, and everything else was conditional. And they further warned me that if I didn't really maintain rigorous and devoted service to the Lord I could be left behind when the Lord comes. I could be excluded from reigning with him in his kingdom, and from his kingdom altogether. And, do you know, as they applied their Scriptures to me, it seemed to make sense, though it worried me not a little.

Studying the word of God as best I could to see whether these things were so, I was first alerted that there was something unsatisfactory in what they were saying because, whereas they said that the only things that were unconditional gifts to faith were justification and eternal life, and that a believer could lose everything else if he didn't behave properly, I discovered that the Apostle Paul says that that is not so. Here is Paul's list of unconditional gifts in Galatians 3.

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#### **Galatians 3: The Unconditional Gifts to Faith**

3:6	Justification
3:11	Eternal life
3:14	The blessing of Abraham
3:16	The promises
3:17	The covenant
3:18	The inheritance

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There is the question of justification. How are we justified? Even as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, not by works, but by faith (v. 6). So here is an unconditional gift indeed. It is not given on the basis of behaviour and of works, but of repentance and faith.

In that same chapter, Paul reminds us that, likewise, eternal life is a gift (v. 11). And, of course, there are many Scriptures that talk about that same thing all over the New Testament.

But look what Paul says is also given to us through faith: that the blessing of Abraham should come upon the Gentiles through faith (v. 14). And it is not only the blessing of Abraham, but the promises are given, he urges, on those very same grounds (v. 16). Indeed, to ram home the fact that justification is by faith, Paul goes on to point out that the covenant itself is by faith (v. 17). And along with the covenant, the inheritance that is guaranteed by the covenant is given to us on the grounds of faith (v. 18). Now that, of course, is exceedingly important because that covenant guarantees universal dominion to Abraham's seed, which is Christ. That was an unconditional covenant made by God to Abraham and his seed. And Paul says, 'If you are Christ's, then you are heirs of that promise. You are Abraham's seed because you have been incorporated in Christ, and he is the seed to whom that great inheritance is covenanted and guaranteed by God' (see vv. 25–29).

How did you get into Christ? Was it by your good behaviour? Certainly not. Paul tells us we are all the sons of God through faith in the Lord Jesus, on exactly the same terms as the terms upon which we receive our justification. Therefore, by a very tight, careful and legal argument throughout chapter 3, Paul is pointing out to us the glorious fact that here are unconditional gifts to faith. It is not just justification, and not just eternal life, but these things too.

So I mustn't go over the edge, and by God's grace, I didn't then; or, if I did, I got back again! I mustn't teach that the only two gifts that are unconditional are justification and eternal life, and that a believer can't lose these, but can lose all the rest. Because if I were to teach that, Paul would be after me with some very strong words such as he uses to those who preach a wrong gospel, words that he uses against those who tell people that things that God has made to depend upon faith depend upon their works. We mustn't do that. We shall not promote holiness in people by telling them that things God has given them unconditionally in Christ depend on their behaviour.

### **What we can lose**

Having said that, let us not go to the other extreme. We can't lose the things we've just discussed, but there is a lot we can lose, isn't there? First Corinthians 3 says we can lose our reward. If we, in this life, have built unworthily out of wood and stubble, we can see life's activities go up in smoke. With nothing to show for life as a believer, we can lose our reward; so that's two losses. Though, of course, we ourselves, if we are believers, shall be saved, yet so as by fire (v. 15).

And in this his second epistle, Peter is reminding us that, while all believers shall be in that eternal kingdom, there will be a very big difference between just getting in and having an abundant entrance into that kingdom (1:11). It is certain that when we see the Lord, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. Every believer will be like the Lord, *what there is of us*. And what there is of us will, in part, depend on how well we have progressed, how diligently we have, by God's grace, used our resources to 'add . . . add . . . and add' (see vv. 5–7).

## **The dangers of being reformed but not regenerate**

Now as we come to the final part of our study today, we come to make another distinction in our thinking. Here, let me put up again the basic ideas of the second and the fourth paragraphs in 2 Peter 2.

### **Major Features of the False Teachers**

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#### **1. False Teachers (2:1–3)**

1. Deny the Master that bought them
2. Permissiveness; popularity; WAY OF TRUTH gets bad reputation
3. They make money out of you

#### **2. False Teachers (2:9–17)**

1. Despise dominion; rail at dignities; like mere animals
  2. Permissiveness; adultery; spots; blemishes
  3. Forsake the RIGHT WAY; follow the way of Balaam; love the hire of wrongdoing
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In the course of Peter's argument, this second paragraph gave us two illustrations of God's deliverance, of God's final salvation. First we see how Noah was saved when God intervened with the flood, then how Lot was saved when God intervened with the destruction of Sodom. These illustrations are encouraging us to think of our final salvation when the Lord comes and God will deliver the righteous, finally and for ever, from temptation.

Now we come to the fourth paragraph, which presents very serious, sad and solemn warnings of the possible end of people who have been reformed, in some sense, but are not regenerate.

You say, 'Is there a difference?'

There is, indeed! And it is exceedingly important that we understand the difference ourselves, and make sure that we are not just reformed, but we have been regenerate. And it is also exceedingly important that we understand it so that we can help our fellow men and women, and with all kindness when we preach, or in our personal work and our pastoral care, and do our very best to make sure that the persons we are talking to understand the difference, and are not just religious, not just reformed, not just decent, but are positively regenerate. There is a difference, and it is fundamentally important.

God was able to save those noted in 2:4–9, so why didn't he save those discussed in the surrounding paragraphs? Well, for a beginning we could start by considering what the passage says about the false teachers and so leads on into our topic. It says of these false teachers, 'For, uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by [sensual passions] . . .' (v. 18 RV). Now, notice how the true reading should continue, 'those who are just escaping'. It is not, as some other translations have it: 'those that have completely escaped'. No, that is the point. They have not completely escaped. They are beginning to. They are just beginning to escape; conscience is beginning to work. They see the filthiness of this world. They hear the moral claims of Christianity; they can see their lives need to be cleaned

up, and they take a few steps in that direction. They are beginning to escape. And along come these teachers, and they say, 'You don't need to take things so seriously, you know, you'll get religious dementia or something. If you go on like that you'll become a religious maniac. No, no, you don't want to be so strict!' And they promise them liberty (v. 19).

Well, now it is the fact that our Lord Jesus promises us liberty. He says, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (John 8:31). He promises liberty. These people promise liberty too. What's the difference? They promise you liberty to do as you like, to live indulgently, immorally, if need be; and they say it doesn't really matter, and that is freedom. Is it freedom? You watch them in the end and see them become utter slaves to their passions.

Verse 13 says something more. In some English translations, it reads 'they suffer wrong as the hire of wrong doing'. We know our Greek just a little bit better these days, from the papyri, and what Peter actually says there is not 'they suffer wrong' but, they are 'cheated out of the hire of their wrongdoing.'

Let me tell you young folks that sin is like that. It comes to you, promising you freedom from restraint: 'What a lovely time you're going to have. You're going to kick over the traces with impunity and, oh, what thrills you're going to have!' And it has a promise. 'You're not going to be held by the old fogies, the fuddy-duddies that have been around you. Why shouldn't you be modern?' It has a promise, but in the end it will cheat you. You get the first thrill, and the next, and then just as you are going to get the prize, instead of getting better it gets worse, and you have got to work at it a bit more, and heighten it to get the same sensation. And bit, by bit, by bit, it goes sour, for you cannot pervert God's ways and suppose, in the end, it is going to bring you great reward. In the end, it will cheat you. 'And look at them,' Peter says, 'they are themselves slaves; and they cannot break free.'

I remember when I lived a long way away from here and used to go along to the local YMCA in the days of the Teddy Boys (that's a long while ago).<sup>10</sup> What marvellous jackets they did wear, nearly down to their calves. They were beautiful jackets, I must say. They wanted to be free, but you couldn't even get them to play a decent game by that stage. They couldn't abide anybody's rules. They just about bashed the YMCA to bits.

I remember one of them coming up to me when he'd had enough drink to make him tell the truth. He said, 'Mister, you know, we're going away to Blackpool tomorrow. I know what's going to happen. As soon as the pubs are open we shall be in. It's like putting your money down a drain. My father died a drunkard — killed by drink. And I know what it's going to do to me, but I don't dare not go.'

How about that for freedom? I am free to put a hammer through my TV set if I want to. Perhaps it would be a good thing to do sometimes, but it would make a mess of it, wouldn't it? The only way to get the best out of the TV set is to make it go according to the book and the rules of the man who invented it. And we do have the power to abuse our bodies and to abuse our relationships. It will destroy us. True freedom is using ourselves and our lives according to the rules of him who made us, the one who, when we had spoiled ourselves, died to redeem us and so set us free.

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<sup>10</sup> A subculture of the 1950s largely confined to the United Kingdom.

And he would have done it for these other people, but learn what happened to them. Peter says, 'The last state has become worse for them than the first' (v. 20). Peter is quoting a saying of our Lord Jesus, which is given us in two Gospels. And I'm going to ask us to read both of them so that we get the full account of it.

First we'll read in Luke 11, where our Lord taught this lesson that, doubtless, Peter learned from him.

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first. (vv. 24–26)

That is Luke's record. Matthew has the same story, and he records certain other tiny features that are nonetheless important. So let us read Matthew 12 this time.

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house *empty*, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation. (vv. 43–45)

What a picture. Our Lord pictures the human personality as a house. In it there had been an unclean demon, but now the unclean demon has gone out. And you say, 'That's marvellous; the man has been converted.'

No, he hasn't.

You say, 'He has. The unclean demon has gone out, and the man is much improved, and now he's respectable.'

Ah, yes, but since when is respectability the same as salvation?

You say, 'But what is salvation, then?'

Well, let's notice first what it is not. Our Lord says that the unclean spirit, having gone out, comes back. He finds the house much improved; it's no longer a filthy old den now. The place had been scrubbed and beautifully swept. It's clean as a pin, and you could eat your food off the floor. No old takeaway cartons over the carpet. And it has beautiful wallpaper. What a lovely, delightful design! You say 'This place is saved.'

Ah, but now did you notice what Matthew says? The evil spirit finds it swept, decorated and *empty*. The evil spirit has gone out, but no Holy Spirit has come in its place. We see the unclean things have been booted out, but Christ has not come in. And it is tragic to have the one half and not the other, to have the negative but not the positive, to have the unclean spirit gone out but the Holy Spirit not having come in; to have the place cleaned and decorated, but *empty*. It is a vivid picture of a reformation that is short of regeneration. That can be disastrous. A state like that continued in can be disastrous indeed.

It needn't be always so perhaps. I remember some years ago reading the story of a prison visitor. He was, under God, a genius for visiting people in their prison cells, and graciously,

gradually bringing them to the Saviour. He tells a story of two young men he found in jail that were there for blackmail, and he got to know their past. They were once leading members of the church in the north of England. But temptation had come their way, and the chance of big money came, and they fell. Now they were in prison, and after wise and careful, and kindly speaking, he led those two young men to Christ. It was a marvellous time when eventually they got home and they went back to their village and, of course, the church where they had been members had to welcome them. They invited the prison visitor too, and the prison visitor records the moving scenes in that church when two of the grey-headed elders got up and confessed with tears: 'It was our fault. We were content to Christianize them without making sure that they were born again.'

It could happen, couldn't it? In this matter, we cannot be sentimental. If we love people's souls we must be absolutely clear in our thinking to know the difference between mere reform and positive regeneration, between mere cleaning up, and the receiving and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Oh, let us be utterly sure that our lives are not just reformed empty homes, but are houses in which the blessed Lord himself abides.

After all, we mustn't forget the gate. We were talking in another session about the fact that true Christianity is not just a way; it is a gate, and you have to start at the gate, and if you don't come through the gate, you'll fall by the way. And the gate is this: 'unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). Nothing short of regeneration will do.

### **The dog and the sow**

Then, finally, Peter uses two analogies: the analogy of a dog, and the analogy of a sow. The very analogies he chooses seems to me to be eloquently significant. That is because Peter, when all is said and done, wasn't an Irishman who was used to having dogs for pets. He was brought up in a community for whom dogs weren't nice little creatures that could sit on the lap of however elegant a lady in a most splendid drawing room. They were horrible creatures, filthy pariahs that went about the street. Therefore, to call anybody a dog was an insult of the highest order. I don't think Peter in his wildest imagination would ever have got round to use the dog as an illustration of a genuine believer.

And, of course, with Jews, as distinct from certain other nations, pigs were the abomination of the earth. By definition they were unclean animals, and you didn't touch anything from its honk to its tail. By the strongest stretch of imagination, I don't think Peter was ever going to use the pig as an analogy of a genuine believer. Of course, there is one animal that all believers are likened to, amongst others, and that is a sheep.

So now we have a dog. It has been eating some filthy garbage, and it has got a horrible feeling in its chest. So after a while, it can't stick it any longer and heaves it all up! And then it feels better. It goes on wagging its tail: 'Great to get rid of that. That would have been indigestible.' But you watch the filthy beast. Presently, it will go back sniffing all round it and start eating it up again! Horrible.

And then there is the sow that was washed. Well, it is possible to translate the Greek as a passive, but it is really a middle. It is more likely that it means 'the sow that took a bath'. You see, the ancients had a parable about that, a little story they used to tell about a sow that got

uppish in the world, and it began to give itself airs and graces and went down to the public baths along with the gentry and took a bath. Then it put an earring or two on, and a jewel in its snout, and went back home, along with the gentry, strutting beside them, feeling that, really, she'd arrived in high society because she could do what these others did. But then, although she'd taken a bath, halfway home she forgot about that when she saw a puddle of mud. Jewels and all, she went down and wallowed in it!

How is it that dogs do that kind of thing, and sows do it, and sheep don't?

You say, 'It belongs to the nature of the beast.'

And now you've hit the nail on the head. Why does the dog go back to its vomit? That is its nature. Sheep would never do it. A sow washed, goes and wallows in mire. Of course, it has its own reasons. They say they do it for a bit of recreation when it gets hot. When the summer is hot they like to find a nice, old, juicy, muddy swamp to wallow in. It refreshes them. And do you know, it is odd what some people will do by way of recreation. For instance, the kind of filth they'll look at in the name of recreation. Wow. Well, I was talking about sows. Sows will do that kind of thing because it's their nature. A sheep won't do it. It isn't in its nature.

Herein is the secret of the whole thing. True Christianity isn't just getting rid of a few uncomfortable and rotten things that we may have been feeding on. It isn't a question of washing us externally and putting a few jewels upon our ears. True Christianity is nothing short of a completely new life received, and with that new life, a new nature. It doesn't mean that when we come to the Saviour and receive eternal life and the very nature of God, the divine nature, that we've lost the old nature. That old nature is still there, but we do have a new nature. And that is the observation with which Peter started his epistle. Now he recurs to it. Nothing short of regeneration with a new nature will do. It doesn't mean that a sheep will never fall into a puddle and get muddy and dirty and filthy; but it won't willingly wallow in it.

The Bible makes it clear. It does not say believers will never fall, that they'll never sin, but the mark of a true believer is that he will not persist in it all the time, deliberately and unrepentantly. And if you find a man that wallows in it and carries on, and has no intention of changing, and constantly commits iniquity and wrong, John says, 'You'll have to decide about that man that he is not of God' (see 1 John 3:1-10).

How nice of God to teach us these things through Peter, for Peter fell, didn't he? Oh, what a big old ditch Peter fell into. We are all liable to fall, but Peter is there to remind us that he was not only Simon. When he came to Christ, Christ gave him a new life and a new nature, and he became Simon Peter. When he fell, he cried and broke his heart and cried to the Lord. And the Shepherd came and restored him. It is that Peter who is talking to us. When we are fallen, that does not prove we are not believers. What will show you are a believer is this, that if you fall you cry to the Shepherd and ask him to come and restore you. It is written of him that he restores our souls (Ps 23:3). So if someone can fall and carry on in sin and enjoy it and persist in it and go on with it, then it raises the question whether that person is one of the Lord's sheep, or is a temporarily refined dog and temporarily bathed sow.

May the Lord use his word to speak to our hearts to make sure our relationship with him now is built on solid foundations, that we have entered the gate, that we are born again, and



we have the divine nature. And if we have got to be clear ourselves in explaining these things, may God give us the compassion to make our preaching of the gospel clear, that we impress upon our hearers that they do not content themselves with mere reformation, short of regeneration, because it can be disastrous in the end.

## The Flood in Genesis

### *2 Peter 3 and Genesis 6–9*

We come now to the third and final chapter of the second epistle by Peter. Let us begin the day by reading it together.

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be [burned up]. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (vv. 1–18)

When Peter opens his third chapter of this epistle, he recurs to a theme that we have already had occasion to notice several times. He tells us that this is his second epistle, and in both of his epistles his declared intention has been to stir up our sincere mind by putting us in remembrance. And following that hint, therefore, let us once more go over what we have learned already of this epistle.

### **Our studies so far**

We saw that the major theme, or at least one of the major themes, of this epistle is that this present world is temporary. There is, however, an eternal kingdom, and all true progress here will have eternal consequences there.

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#### **Major Lessons of 2 Peter**

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This world is temporary

There is an eternal kingdom

Progress here will have eternal consequences there

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And then we tried to follow the thought flow of the first paragraph of his letter in which he begins to exhort us to live here in such a way that, when this temporary world is done, at least for us, we may not merely gain entrance into the eternal kingdom (all believers will do that) but that we may gain an 'abundant entrance' into that eternal kingdom.

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#### **2 Peter 1:1–11 Thought Flow: Grace and Peace**

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1:3 SEEING THAT all things have been given

1:5 FOR THIS VERY REASON add diligence: supply

1:8 For if . . .

1:9 For if not . . .

1:10 THEREFORE give the more diligence: make sure

1:10 For if . . .

1:11 For so . . .

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And, therefore, in the first paragraph he reminded us of what our resources are. As we start this path of progress, and the development of Christian grace and character, we start on the basis of certain resources. God's divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

With those gifts at hand, we are, for that very reason, to add all diligence that we may supply the Christian graces, that is, the features of character and qualities of character, that shall build us up and thus give us not merely an entrance into the eternal kingdom, but an abundant entrance, and a glorious potential for the enjoyment of eternity. And Peter argues his case, pointing out that if we add diligence and, therefore, add all these Christian qualities, certain things will happen. Whereas if we fail to add these qualities, certain other things will be the result; as he says, 'for if . . .' (1:8) and 'for if not' (1:9).

And having urged that upon us, he reverts to his theme, 'Therefore, give the more diligence to add to your character these Christian qualities for, in so doing, you will make your calling and election sure' (see 1:10). You will demonstrate that you are genuinely those that have been called and chosen. And once more, he adds 'for if' you do it certain things will follow (1:10) and, again, 'for so' doing it, you shall be granted an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom (1:11).

And with that as his main and general message and thesis, Peter, for the first time, announces his intention constantly to remind us of these things.

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### Peter's Declared Intention in 2 Peter

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1. To remind you
  2. To stir you up by reminding you
  3. To ensure you will always be able to recall these things
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He must be under the apprehension that we easily forget. So he announces his intention to remind us, then to stir us up, to get us excited and moving and earnest and energetic: 'to stir you up by reminding you', and to remind us so much that after his decease, he says, we may always be able to recall these things on our own initiative.

And then we found in chapter 1, having exhorted us energetically to prepare ourselves for the coming eternal kingdom, he turns to assure us of the validity of the evidence.

If we are going to make this our major business in life, to prepare for the eternal kingdom, we shall need to be absolutely sure and settled in our hearts that there is an eternal kingdom. The world at large holds that, for all practical purposes, this life is all there is and therefore the worldly man puts all his energies into this life. If it should ever happen that our conviction that there is an eternal kingdom should be undermined, we, as believers, might be tempted to put less energy into preparing for that kingdom and, like the worldly man, spend the major part of our energy on this temporary world. Therefore, on what ground may we be certain that there is an eternal kingdom? At the end of his first chapter Peter turns to this question and gives us two grounds: the apostolic witness and the witness of the prophetic word.

### Grounds for certainty

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WE DID NOT FOLLOW MYTHS, WE WERE eye-witnesses (1:16)

He received **from** God a voice borne **by** the majestic glory, this voice borne **out of** heaven (1:17)

We heard: WE HAVE THE PROPHETIC WORD (1:19)

No prophecy is **of** the prophet's own interpretation. Men spoke **from** God being borne along by the Holy Spirit (1:21)

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Peter tells us, 'we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty' (1:16). And in relating the story of the transfiguration mount, he assures us that the story is not a

myth. The transfiguration was an actual happening in history. Their feet were very much on a mountain. Their eyes were open, and they saw things happening before them. Their ears were open and they heard. This is an historical event and not just a story made up to convey a theological point. We have, then, the evidence of the apostles assuring us that there will be a second coming of our Lord in great power and glory.

And then, of course, we have the prophetic word—a word of utter certainty. We know that no prophecy is of the prophets' own interpretation. The vision the prophets were given was given to them by God; and the explanation of that vision was likewise given to them by God. Therefore we have in that prophetic word something that is utterly reliable, and we do well to take heed to it (v. 19).

## The thought flow of chapter 2

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2:1–3	<b>False teachers (1):</b> 'their destruction soon'
2:4–9	FOR GOD KNOWS HOW TO: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deliver the godly</li> <li>2. Keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment</li> </ol>
2:9–17	<b>False teachers (2):</b> 'For them the blackness of darkness has been reserved'
2:18–22	FOR THEIR EFFECT ON THE HALF-CONVERTED IS DISASTROUS: 'the last state is worse than the first'

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Then we found Peter moves on to warn us. In addition to the testimony of the apostles and the testimony of the *true* prophets, he warns us that there will come *false* teachers. Not only will they oppose the gospel; their influence is in part attributable to the fact that they rise up within the church. And Christendom has been the sorry history of how true this warning was, for all too often it has taken place. False prophets have arisen in the church preaching doctrines and advising such behaviour as altogether destroys both a person's chance of ever getting saved; and secondly, if they are saved, this teaching is calculated to destroy all their attempts to prepare themselves for an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom.

We noticed, therefore, in chapter 2, how he talks about these teachers. He first briefly describes them and then announces that their destruction will come swiftly; God will intervene to deal with them. Then he breaks off to explain how God will intervene so that, simultaneously, he may put an end to the deception of the false teachers and, at the same time, deliver his people from temptation once and for all. God will do that for he knows how to do it. He did it at the flood by catastrophically intervening within history to remove the wicked and to deliver Noah and his family from temptation. He did it in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, intervening catastrophically to bring to an end that luridly permissive society and, at the same time, to deliver Lot out of temptation and to save him from judgment.

So Peter has told us that the coming of the Lord Jesus will not be forever delayed. There will come this tremendous breaking into history, for the Lord Jesus shall come. And at his coming he will simultaneously do two things: he will grant to the believer rest from persecution, from temptation. To the ungodly, however, his coming will be one of flaming

fire, taking vengeance on them that do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then in his second chapter we found that Peter reverts to a further description of these false teachers and their doctrine, and ends up once more with an announcement of the judgment that shall come upon them. For them, 'the blackness of darkness has been reserved' (v. 17 RV). It is a suitable punishment for their crime. They have preached a lie. They have preached sinfulness, permissiveness and immorality. They have done the work of Satan and, in the place of God's light, they have spread moral and spiritual darkness. And, as a poetic justice, God shall eventually confine them to the blackness of darkness for ever.

Now, at the end of chapter 2, Peter turns to explain why that judgment comes. In that second paragraph it was *how* it will come. Now it is *why* it will come. They will be dealt with so severely because of the disastrous effect of their teachings, particularly on what I have here called 'the half-converted', which is shorthand for those that have gone in for some kind of moral reformation but, alas, their moral reformation has stopped short of positive regeneration. They have been 'Christianized' but not made true Christians. Their moral life has been cleaned up, but they have not really been born again. And just as they were beginning to escape the corruption that is in the world by lust, along came these permissive teachers and, in the name of the church, taught them that fornication isn't necessarily wrong, and said, 'You don't have to listen to those strict, old-fashioned morals such as people used to teach in the Victorian era. This is the modern world.' Therefore, these people that were just beginning to escape through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, are once more overtaken and entangled in corruption, and this time they go into their evil living in the idea that this is perfectly all right; the church of God approves of it (at least the modern bit does); and all those who oppose it are old fogies, and you don't have to take any notice of them. Now they imagine that they have got hold of real Christianity, and their eyes are ten thousand times more blind than they ever were before. And any chance of bringing them to true repentance is the more remote. Because of the disastrous effect of this teaching on other people, God's judgment will come upon these false teachers.

That then was the state of affairs when we finished our previous sessions, and we turn now to chapter 3.

### **Denying the eternal kingdom and Christ's return**

How is chapter 3 going to continue the story? It is going to be another chapter full of warning. It is to be another chapter about false teachers, or at least critics of the gospel. In chapter 2, Peter was dealing with men who taught a false morality and thus militated against the true gospel by teaching people that their morals need not be too strict. Now in chapter 3 he turns to talk about men who similarly oppose the gospel, but this time on another ground. They take up the Christian claim that there is an eternal world and that the Lord Jesus is coming again. The Christian claim is that Christ will come for his people, that he will come in power and great glory, that he will put down the man of sin and his false prophet, and he will put an end to their deception of the nations and confine them to the lake of fire. He will reign until all his enemies are put under his feet, and then the end will come, and a great, white throne

will be set up. From the face of him that sits on it, the very heaven and earth will flee away, and there shall be no place found for them. And in their place shall come the new heavens and the new earth, in which righteousness dwells. As we have observed, it has been Peter's intention to convince us of the reality of that eternal world and to urge us to live for it and to prepare for it. These false teachers say, 'Nonsense, there is no such eternal world. There will be no second coming of Christ!'

You will immediately see how their ideas would undermine all that Peter is talking about, if their ideas should prove to be true. And so Peter now turns to answering the arguments and the problems put forward by this kind of person.

Let us notice first of all in chapter 3 how he has four major things to talk to us about. And in his kindly apostolic heart, he prefaces each one by calling us beloved. 'Beloved,' he says, 'remember.' And then, again, 'Beloved, forget not'. And then again, 'So then, beloved'. And finally, 'Therefore, beloved'. That is an easy scheme, and we should easily remember it.

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### 2 PETER 3: THOUGHT-FLOW

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3:1-7	BELOVED . . . REMEMBER . . . Knowing . . . men will mock the promise of coming Their argument: the principle of uniformity The answer: the day of destruction of the ungodly
3:8-13	BUT BELOVED . . . FORGET NOT . . . Problem: apparent delay in the coming Answer: according to God's promise we look for new heavens and a new earth
3:14-16	THEREFORE BELOVED . . . seeing that you look for these things: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give diligence</li> <li>2. Consider . . . the ignorant who twist Scripture to their own destruction</li> </ol>
3:17-18	THEREFORE BELOVED . . . <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beware</li> <li>2. GROW</li> </ol>

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#### **A first objection (3:1-7)**

The first paragraph begins with Peter's exhortation to his 'beloved' fellow believers that they remember the words of our Lord Jesus and his apostles, 'knowing this first . . .' (vv. 1-3). And now we come to the central part of this first paragraph. We are to know in advance that mockers will come with their mockery, saying 'Where is the promise of his coming?' (v. 4). That is, they deny it. They not only deny it, but they pour scorn on the whole notion that there is to be a second coming of Christ, an end to the world and an eternal kingdom.

Now notice the grounds upon which they deny it. Their argument is that 'since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation' (v. 4). They say that Nature runs, and always has run and always will run, by an unbroken chain of cause and effect; and that chain of cause and effect has never been broken. They say there have never been any interventions by God in the past; there will be no interventions by God in the future.

All things have continued on since the fathers fell asleep, that is, history shows that is how Nature runs and always will run. The notion, therefore, that one of these days Christ will come again and intervene in the course of Nature, is unlikely, if not altogether impossible.

These days we call their argument 'the argument from the principle of the uniformity of Nature'. It is a kind of a scientific argument. And having stated their argument, Peter gives us the answer to it (vv. 5–7).

Now, that in itself should teach us a very important lesson, and particularly those of us who are older and have responsibility for teaching younger people. Peter may only have been a fisherman, yet he was aware of the kind of scientific argument that, in his day, was levelled against the gospel. Therefore, in the course of his teaching of his fellow believers, of course he taught them about the second coming of the Lord Jesus, but he didn't leave it at that. He knew that as his young fellow believers went out into the world they would be met by the hostile learned criticism of the scientists of their day. They would also be met by the half-baked scientists of their day, and of the BBC. No, I don't think it was quite invented then, but whatever was invented then would urge upon these Christians that it is impossible to hold this Christian view of the second coming of Christ, at least if you wanted to be a respectable modern person, or a scientist. So Peter warns them in advance. He knows about it and, what is more, he gives them the answers in advance.

That is an important thing to do, my dear senior fellow believers. You might be tempted to simply teach the promise of the second coming and not indicate to your Bible class that the world is going to criticize that teaching, and that they've got some very strong arguments (or arguments that appear to be strong when you first meet them). The members of your Bible class may indeed trust the Lord and believe what you have told them. Then they go out into the world, and they come across these arguments and they say, 'Oh, my Bible class leader didn't tell me about that; perhaps she didn't know. Perhaps he didn't know.' And their faith in you is undermined a little bit; whereas if you have inoculated them by warning them in advance, like Peter warns them in advance, that this is the kind of argument you will find in the world outside against the doctrine of the second coming, and here are the answers, you will have forearmed them by forewarning them.

### **A second objection (3:8–13)**

Having dealt with that particular argument against the doctrine of the second coming, Peter turns to another problem. This time the problem is a little bit different. This time the problem says, 'Yes, well, okay, the second coming is possible. But why ever has it been so long delayed? The prophets have been speaking of it for centuries.'

And we who live in this advanced age feel the strength of that argument the more strongly, don't we? Nearly two thousand years have gone by and still the promise has not been fulfilled, and the Lord has not yet come. Why is that? And if the promise has been so long delayed, can I still go on believing it? Or is the length of the delay in the fulfilment of the promise an argument against its validity? What is the reason for the delay?

Here are two major problems, therefore, and each time Peter will give us the answer to those problems. Not only negatively an answer to the criticisms, but positively. It is not merely



that we can answer them if we have to; the reason in each case is an important positive part of our faith.

### **A first exhortation (3:14–16)**

And having dealt with the two difficulties, he has two final paragraphs of exhortation. The first begins, ‘Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things’ (see 3:14).

Okay, you believe in the second coming. You believe that eventually the world will be burned up. You are looking, are you, for the new heavens and the new earth? And you can answer all the objections that are brought against it? That is marvellous. So do you really believe it? You are looking for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells? You? What were you looking for last Tuesday when you wanted to make a little money at the expense of the income tax inspector? That wasn’t altogether righteous, was it? But you are looking for an earth in which righteousness dwells, are you?

If you are really looking for a world in which righteousness dwells, what kind of present behaviour is consistent with that hope? If the enemies of the gospel try to refute the gospel by their criticisms, that is bad enough. But if I profess to believe the gospel that says there is going to be a new earth in which righteousness dwells, and I am living unrighteously, I am contradicting by my life the very gospel I profess with my lip. Let me not be amongst those who argue against the gospel by the way they live.

And finally, he says, ‘Therefore, beloved, if you do really look for these things and, of course, you do, well, that’s marvellous. Well, then give diligence in this and that particular, and consider this and that to be the case’ (see vv. 14–16).

### **A second exhortation (3:17–18)**

Not content to leave it there, he says finally, ‘You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability’ (v. 17). And then we read an exhortation typical of the whole of the epistle. The only way for a Christian to be safe, in a practical sense, is to ‘grow’ (v. 18). This world is temporary. There is an eternal kingdom. The glory about this present world is that it provides us with opportunity for change, for growth. So grow! Like the angels upon Jacob’s ladder where there was no standing still, so is the Christian life. The only safe thing to be doing is to be growing.

This, then, is the thought flow and content of Peter’s last chapter.

## **The flood in Genesis**

For this session, I want to briefly stand aside from the second epistle of Peter and to investigate a little more deeply one of the themes that he will mention in this third chapter. It is a theme that, in fact, he has already mentioned; and that is the theme of the flood. Previously, we spent some time searching through our New Testaments for the various references to Noah and his flood, seeking to learn the lessons which God, through the Holy Spirit, draws from that historic event for our present day and generation. Now, again we shall be thinking about the flood in chapter 3, when the earth that then was, perished by the word of God. And so I

thought it would be a good thing if we went back to Genesis for a few moments and looked to see what the story of the flood is saying in Genesis itself.

Here is a brief table of contents of the story of the flood in the book of Genesis.

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### Genesis 5–9

1.	5:1–32	GENERATIONS OF ADAM: Man made in the image of God
2.	6:1–8	PERVERSION OF MAN: ‘I will destroy man’
3.	6:9–12	GENERATIONS OF NOAH: Noah righteous; begat sons; all flesh corrupt
	6:14–7:1	Make ark: enter
4.		THE FLOOD
	8:4–20	Ark rests: exit: sacrifice
5.	9:1–7	GOD’S BLESSING: Death for murder because man is made in God’s image
6.	9:8–17	GOD’S COVENANT: Never again destroy all flesh by water
7.	9:18–29	THE SONS OF NOAH: Noah drunk and naked; his sons’ behaviour

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The story starts in chapter 5 and lasts through to the end of chapter 9. Central to the chapters, as you may expect, is the story of the flood itself, but it is preceded by three paragraphs of information. Starting in 5:1–32 we have the generations of Adam, and they are taken all the way down to Noah and his sons. Then there is a second paragraph, 6:1–8, that relates to us the story of the perversion of man—how man became utterly perverse, a freak, corrupt—to the point where God determined to destroy man that he had made. Then there is the third short paragraph, 6:9–12, that tells us about the generations of Noah: ‘These are the generations of Noah,’ it says. And against the background of God’s determination to destroy mankind, we are told of the generations of Noah. ‘Noah was a righteous man . . . in his generation’ (v. 9). He fathered sons, and then we are told several times over that all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth and, therefore, God brought the flood. Noah was told to make an ark, to enter into it, and then the flood came. Eventually the waters ceased, the ark rested, and Noah came out and offered a sacrifice. It is quite a long story.

But now notice that, after the story of the flood, we are given three more paragraphs of information. First of all, there is the story of God’s blessing in 9:1–7. It has several details. I have picked out one for certain reasons, which I shall say in a moment. And then there is another paragraph, 9:8–17, that records the making of God’s covenant with Noah. Finally, there is a paragraph that is headed, ‘The Sons of Noah’, and it tells us of an unfortunate incident that happened to Noah and his sons after Noah came out of the ark (9:18–29).

Now, our time is a little bit reduced so I must hurry and give you, as best I can, just a skeleton survey of what I had intended to say. Why am I diverting your attention to the story of the flood in Genesis? Well, because just as in the New Testament the Holy Spirit takes that story of the flood and from it deduces all sorts of lessons for us, and they are different lessons in different places, so if we look back to the flood itself in Genesis, we shall pick up certain lessons relevant to us in general, and relevant to the message of 2 Peter in particular.

### Three creation stories in Genesis

Now, just let me remind you that there are three creation stories in Genesis. Sometimes you will hear it said that there are two, and then that they contradict each other. That, I beg leave to say, is nonsense; they do not contradict each other. And, secondly, there are not two stories of creation in the book of Genesis; there are three. The first one is in 1:1–3:2. This creation story tells us of the creation in six days, a progressive series of increasing complication, arriving at the pinnacle of creation that is the creation of man. And it ends on the seventh day in 2:3. This first creation story is creation from one point of view.

The second creation story begins in 2:4 and continues throughout the rest of chapters 2, 3 and 4. It tells us about creation from a different point of view, and takes the story of creation on through the story of Adam and Eve, and the fall, and then the story of Cain and Abel, the curse upon Cain, and the story of Cain's descendants. This is creation put into a context that goes a great deal of the way down history.

Then again here in 5:1 the writer comes back once more, right to the very beginning of things, and starts up once more to talk to us about creation, and then follows the story of creation right down through history to the flood. Do notice that fact. After chapter 4 with its story of Cain and Abel and Cain's descendants, the writer comes again in chapter 5 all the way back to creation. This is another view of creation, in a different context this time, starting with the creation of man and following what happened to man down through history, right to the time of Noah and his flood.

So we are given three creation stories, with creation each time put into its context so that we should understand its significance. There are three creation stories in the same way as there are four stories of the life of our Lord. There is not just one story of the life of Christ; there are four, and they don't contradict each other. They are stories of the life of Christ, but each one from a special point of view that brings out something about the glory of our Lord that the other three do not. So here we have three creation stories, each one looking at creation from a different point of view and, therefore, helping us to see some significance of its own, some special significance in the creation. And from 5:1 we have the third one.

### The third creation story in Genesis

The third creation story tells us what it's going to be about in the very first paragraph.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. (5:1)

Now, I am sure the ladies won't get upset, not even the most progressive of them, if I just point out what that verse is saying. This is the story of 'Adam'.

You say, 'Of Adam and Eve?'

No, no, of 'Adam'. We have had Eve before, and a wonderful story it was, but this is the story of Adam. God made them male and female.

'Yes, he called their names Adam and Eve,' you say.

No, no, he didn't. He called 'their name *Adam*' because in this we are thinking, not so much of the first man whose name was Adam, like yours, sir, is 'William' or yours, sir, is 'Theophilus'. Adam was the personal name of the first man, but we are thinking now of *adam* in its Hebrew sense: of man or mankind; man, as distinct from angel; man, as distinct from buffalo; man, as distinct from butterfly. This is the story of 'Man'.

It must have been an exciting moment when man first appeared, mustn't it? According to Genesis 1, there had been animals before, such as buffalos; and there had been angels before. If the angels in heaven had seen another buffalo, they wouldn't have been all that surprised. But what on earth was this? What was the creator up to now? It had some similarities to animals, but it wasn't just animal. It could talk with God; it could have spiritual converse with God, like Michael could. So it wasn't just animal, though it wasn't just angel. It wasn't just flesh, though it was flesh. It was spirit. It wasn't just spirit: it was also flesh. It was an extraordinary new thing—of flesh and spirit. God called this new creature 'man'. It had sex. There was male and female in 'man'. It could reproduce. Oh, there were all sorts of interesting things about this new creature. Chief among them was this: that it was made 'in the image of God' (1:27).

Get hold of that point, because it is going to be re-emphasized when we come to the other side of the flood, when God blessed Noah and his sons. Among the things that God said then was that 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed . . .'. Murder was to be followed by the death penalty. Why is that? The verse goes on, 'for God made man in his own image' (9:6). That is the first point to get hold of.

#### *What is man?*

It is very important, isn't it? What fun computers are (and what geniuses our infants are, for they seem to learn to use them as easy, or more easily, than their ABCs). In these days of advanced computers, we shall presently come to the situation when we shall have to ask the question, what is man? Is he anything more than an exceedingly sophisticated computer? What are you? As the technologists more and more develop their machines that can simulate human intelligence, will they be able to create a machine that can genuinely think? Will they be able to create consciousness in a machine? What is consciousness anyway?

What is man? We are told that when the man of sin arrives, his false prophet will suggest making an image to him. He will have the power, not only to call down fire from heaven, which is a thing Elijah did to demonstrate the true God; the false prophet will also have power to give breath to the image so that it can speak (see Rev 13).

What is man? As our society moves into its advanced phase before the coming of the Lord Jesus, this question becomes exceedingly important. May you take him in a test tube and grow a man, and perform all sorts of experiments on him as though he were just a machine?

What is man? One of these days, you might go to a factory with a friend of yours, and here comes someone stalking down to meet you, perhaps a little bit awkward in his gait. And you say to your friend, 'Now, who's this? Is this a friend of yours?' And you shake hands with the thing, or with it. Or shall I say 'with *him*'? Because it can speak to you and answer your questions, and do all sorts of things that you can't do, and has a far bigger memory than you've got, and can solve problems far more quickly than you can. What is it? Suppose, in a

fit of temper, I got a sledgehammer and knocked its brains out? Would you have me up for murder? What is murder anyway? What is man?

Oh, my dear fellow Christians, I'm not here to amuse you; I want to urge on you, as you young folks in particular go on into the advanced stage of our civilization before the coming of Christ. Here is a problem you must face: what is man? Your very gospel depends on it.

I will say that this is distinctive of man: he was made in the image of God. Your study group leaders will tell you what that means. The clock says I mustn't spend too much time, so let's go on to the next thing.

### **Perverted intellectually, morally and spiritually**

Man, therefore, was made part flesh, part spirit, and made in the image of God. And the sorry story is that man became perverted, not just some men, but 'man'. He became so perverted that God said, 'I will destroy man, not just some men. I will destroy man *as such*. I'm going to obliterate this new creature.'

Man became perverted first of all in his *thoughts*. The 'imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen 6:5 RV). That is what our New Testament says as well. Man is alienated in his mind, alienated from the life of God in his evil thoughts (see Eph 4:18). Man rebelled against God. His mind became darkened; his thoughts became perverse because he was alienated from the life of God. You can be as clever intellectually as you care, but if you are alienated from the life of God, your mind is dark; you have become a freak. For man was made in the image of God, and to hold converse with God.

He became *morally* perverted and, in particular, Genesis calls attention to his violence. The 'earth was filled with violence' (Gen 6:11). Our world has known some special periods of violence in the course of its history. We are moving into another one when violence is glorified in the entertainment that is served to the mass millions of us. Man glories in violence, finds his entertainment in violence, and finds it a very interesting and a fascinating thing.

And, man became *spiritually* corrupt, if I read verses 1-4 right. When 'the sons of God came into human females', is what the Hebrew means (v. 4). It is the daughters of, not 'some men', but the 'daughters of man', that is, human females, and the race became corrupted spiritually. And God said he'd finished with the human race; it was to be destroyed, therefore. Except, for Noah (vv. 7-8).

### **The judgment God used**

How did God pronounce the sentence? And what kind of judgment was meted out to them? Well, it was a very interesting judgment. God decided to destroy them by a flood. And you well know the result. If you get a human being and put him under water, what happens?

You say, 'You kill him.'

Yes, I know, but how? If you were to put him through fire, you'd burn him up and reduce him to ashes. If you put him through water, a very funny thing happens. The breath of the spirit of life departs, and you're left with a bit of flesh, aren't you? And, curiously enough, the flesh goes rotten. That is not a pleasant topic or a pleasant sight, but that is what happens. It goes rotten. Now, listen to the terms.

Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh . . .'

And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD. (vv. 3, 6–8)

God said he would destroy all *flesh*; and, 'My spirit shall not always abide in man.' Why not? You say, 'Because he won't listen to the gospel.'

No, that's not what it says. 'My spirit shall not always abide in man *because he is flesh*.'

### Genesis 6:3

MY SPIRIT (see Ps 104:29–30): 'You take away their breath, they die . . . You send forth your Spirit, they are created'. SHALL NOT ABIDE IN (better than 'strive with') MAN FOR EVER BECAUSE (NB the reason) HE IS FLESH

God is commenting upon what man is. Man was compounded of spirit and flesh. God gave him spirit and flesh. When man went away from God and died spiritually, and was alienated from the life of God that was in him, God said, 'I will destroy man because he is flesh.' So the flood did precisely that. All 'in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life', expired (see 7:15). You were left with mountains of dead, corrupt, rotting flesh. That happened at the physical level. It seems to me that it was designed at that physical level to teach us a deeper lesson.

Man in the early days, soon saw that there were two big constituents in his life. There was his body—his flesh. There was also his breath—the stuff that you see on a cold November morning if you breathe out. And when the flood came, the breath was removed and you were left with flesh, and that spelt death. Ah, yes, but as time went on, man became aware and was taught by God's Spirit that there are deeper levels to these terms. There is spirit at the deeper level, not just breath, but spirit, by which a man holds fellowship with God. That spirit was meant to be in charge, and control of, his flesh. When man died spiritually, his flesh got out of hand and became a rebel. And hence we are left in the New Testament with the term *flesh*, indicating a state of rebellion against God. It is a state in which rebellious flesh rebels against God and eventually rebels against the man himself so that he himself can't control it. And man becomes a fleshly man, not having the spirit. So that, in a sense, every unregenerate man is a freak. He is a fleshly man, alienated from the life of God.

We notice the judgment was not to improve the flesh, but to destroy it. There was, however, an ark prepared. And we noticed previously how salvation was provided for Noah and his sons. They weren't saved *from* the judgment; they were submitted to the judgment. They too went through the flood, but they went *through* it in the ark, and thus came out the other side into a new and a cleansed world, now to make a new start.

This is a lovely story in Genesis when man became corrupt and God determined to destroy him, then God provided a salvation and he made a new start for man. There was the first man Adam; there was the second man Noah, and all are descended from Adam, and now all are descended from the second man, Noah.

## Life after salvation from judgment

What was life to be like in the new and cleansed world, now that Noah and his sons were on the other side of judgment?

‘Well,’ says God, ‘we shan’t go back to living like you lived before. The earth was full of violence. Now you will institute magistracy, that is, judgment. Whosoever murders must be put to death. Now, Noah, you will have to exercise judgment, and mankind must learn to judge itself, and to protect the image of God’ (see 9:5–6).

Doubtless it refers in the first instance to the social order of justice. It surely has a lesson for us as believers as well. At our conversion we accepted God’s judgment that all flesh was corrupt. We accepted God’s verdict that we had to be executed dead and buried—finished. We trusted Christ for salvation. We were joined to Christ, and we learned that in God’s sight we died and were buried. We expressed that in our baptism as we put ourselves (or rather got somebody else to put us) under the water. The whole lot was finished, buried—the end of all flesh. And as we rose from the waters of baptism, we were saying that God has, in his mercy, given us a new life so that we can walk in newness of life. What has that newness of life got to be like? Well, it too will have to learn to judge itself, to put on and grow in the image of him that created us, and to put to death all things that will pervert the image of God.

Oh, what a wonderful assurance God gave Noah when he gave the rainbow. As they came out into the new world, having experienced the terror of the flood, whenever the dark clouds rolled up again, you might have thought their knees would begin to quake. Perhaps this was another flood coming, another judgment! And so God gave them the assurance in the rainbow that he would never again destroy the world with a flood. To us who have trusted Christ, and are united with him in his death, in his burial, and now in his resurrection, we may know that the judgment has passed and, upon God’s own word and the authority of the Lord Jesus, we have it that we shall never come into condemnation (Rom 8:1). We are passed over from death to life (John 5:24).

What does that mean? Does that mean it doesn’t matter how we behave because the judgment has passed? Well, look at the last story (9:18–29). I could wish that story wasn’t in the Bible. Noah was perfect in his generation; he was a good and a godly man and came out after the flood into the new world. He began experiments with winemaking. Okay, but then he lost his self-control and became drunk and naked. The Bible is always delicate in the way it talks about things. What Ham did was disgraceful. Making lurid fun (and perhaps worse) of what in life should be utterly sacred. Alas for our modern world that thinks the whole thing is fit to be paraded as one interminable joke, and has lost the sacredness of life, and the sacredness of the procreation of life, and debased it on the one side into a joke, and on the other side, into an evil perversion with all its attendant disease. And nowadays you mustn’t say homosexuality is wrong; it is an alternative lifestyle. No, whatever its intricate causes, it is sinful, and those who agree that it is all right, says Romans 1, will bring upon themselves God’s judgment (vv. 26–27; 32).

Certainly for redeemed man, God has promised that there is no judgment to come, but it is not meant to lead to this kind of living. Peter tells us that the time past in our lives ought to have sufficed us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles in evil, immoral living. The rest of our time in the flesh ought to be lived to do the will of God (see 1 Pet 4:3–4).

What is man? You must forgive me that I have gone over these things so hastily, but I have at least tried to point you to Genesis for this reason. And in Genesis, the story of the flood talks to us about man, and what man is. It talks to us about man's corruption and perversion. It talks to us about man's salvation. It reminds us of the behaviour that is expected of those who have been saved from judgment through the salvation that is in Christ. And if we ponder this last incident in particular, we shall, I think, find it is not irrelevant to the kind of thing that Peter is talking about in his second epistle, and particularly in chapter 3.



## Answering the Mockers

*2 Peter 3:1–7*

### A question arising

I was asked to make a comment on one of the questions that I set for your first study session, which was about the image of God and whether the image of God is totally destroyed in the unregenerate man. I think we may take some evidence about that from the passage of Genesis that we were looking at.

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#### Genesis 5–9

- |    |          |   |
|----|----------|---|
| 1. | 5:1–32   | GENERATIONS OF ADAM: Man made in the image of God                   |
| 2. | 6:1–8    | PERVERSION OF MAN: ‘I will destroy man’                             |
| 3. | 6:9–12   | GENERATIONS OF NOAH: Noah righteous; begat sons; all flesh corrupt  |
|    | 6:14–7:1 | Make ark: enter   |
| 4. |          | THE FLOOD   |
|    | 8:4–20   | Ark rests: exit: sacrifice  |
| 5. | 9:1–7    | GOD’S BLESSING: Death for murder because man is made in God’s image |
| 6. | 9:8–17   | GOD’S COVENANT: Never again destroy all flesh by water              |
| 7. | 9:18–29  | THE SONS OF NOAH: Noah drunk and naked; his sons’ behaviour         |
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As we saw in the first section (Gen 5:1–23), man was made in the image of God. That image became exceedingly depraved. God destroyed man in the flood, except for Noah and his family. Then, when you come to the section dealing with God’s blessing, one of the items is the command that whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed. Why is that? And the answer given is because man was originally made in the image of God. It would seem to me, therefore, that if one were to say that that image has been totally destroyed in the unregenerate, well, then it would seem to follow perhaps that it doesn’t matter so much if such a man is killed. That couldn’t be the message of the passage. Man is originally made in the image of God. Even though he is much depraved, to kill him is an insult against almighty God, and the law must be vindicated. What I take to be the position is perhaps best put in the words of Paul in Ephesians 4, where he describes the Gentiles that walk ‘in the vanity of their mind’ (v. 17 RV). His description runs as follows.

Being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who being past feeling gave themselves up to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (vv. 18–19 RV)

And so it continues. It is perhaps not unsuitable to be used as a description of the men before the flood. And Paul goes on to say that, as Christians, you are to ‘put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxes corrupt after the lusts of deceit’ (v. 22 RV).

I suggest that phrase might help us in our thinking. Originally made in the image of God but alienated from the life of God, his thoughts and his imaginations were only evil continually; man was ‘waxing corrupt’. And God says, ‘All flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth’ (see Gen 6:12), and it is repeated: ‘all flesh was corrupt’ (see v. 13). That is, the image was exceedingly seriously *corrupted*, if you like, but not totally destroyed. And, therefore, murder remains as serious as ever it was because man originally was made in the image of God. The New Testament does talk, however, of God’s salvation, not so much as a restoration of man’s original state, but of putting on the new man in Christ.

Let’s leave it at that, therefore, and come now to the third and final chapter of the epistle.

## Answering the mockers

### The thought flow of chapter 3

Here again are the general contents of chapter 3, just to refresh our memories.

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#### 2 PETER 3: THOUGHT-FLOW

3:1–7	BELOVED . . . REMEMBER . . . Knowing . . . men will mock the promise of coming Their argument: the principle of uniformity The answer: the day of destruction of the ungodly
3:8–13	BUT BELOVED . . . FORGET NOT . . . Problem: apparent delay in the coming Answer: according to God’s promise we look for new heavens and a new earth
3:14–16	THEREFORE BELOVED . . . seeing that you look for these things: 1. Give diligence 2. Consider . . . the ignorant who twist Scripture to their own destruction
3:17–18	THEREFORE BELOVED . . . 1. Beware 2. GROW

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Peter is going to warn his fellow believers that, not only shall there arise teachers advocating permissive morality that would be destructive of all true Christian character, but he forewarns them that men will come mocking the assertion that one day the Lord Jesus shall

come. They deny the second coming of Christ; they deny the possibility of any divine intervention; and, therefore, they deny that God will intervene to destroy the earth. They say, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' And, of course, if their arguments were valid, then exit all we have been talking about regarding the coming of Christ and the eternal kingdom. And Peter seeks to talk to his fellow believers about these things.

### **Listening to authority**

Now, as we look at the text itself, notice how Peter begins this chapter 3.

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles. (vv. 1-2)

First of all, calling the believers 'beloved', Peter appeals to them to remember the authoritative words of: one, the prophets; two, the apostles; and three, the apostles as being apostles of the Lord Jesus. Why do you suppose he begins this passage with that appeal? He is thinking of his dear fellow Christians, some of them young in the faith, going out to face the attacks of the world, with all this world's ideas. And before they go to face them, he appeals to them to remember what the Lord Jesus has said, what the prophets have said and what the apostles have said. It seems to me to be exceedingly important.

I know you may say, 'But that's an appeal to authority instead of to argument.'

But then that is important. You young folks are going out into the world, and you are going to meet scientist X. He has about twenty-six letters after his name. Scientist Y, on the other hand, has thirty-three. And that other man over there hasn't got any science degrees but, wow, does he get up and pontificate with great authority, and tell you what modern science is. Some do that in the name of the church, and everlastingly tell us that we've got to revise our notions because the modern scientific man couldn't accept the doctrine of the virgin birth or the resurrection. Some of the dear theologians that talk like that are talking scientific bilge. Their science is exceedingly old-fashioned, and wouldn't be acknowledged by any creditable modern scientist. They learned this stuff twenty-five, thirty-five, or forty years ago when they were in their theological colleges, and they are just spouting the old-fashioned kind of science.

In that kind of welter, where there are all sorts of voices. We must listen to scientists, of course we must, and we must certainly listen to what has been actually proved. We are not on the side of obscurantism. We do believe that our blessed Lord was the one through whom the worlds were made (see Col 1:16). We honour him when we study his handiwork and do so by rigorous scientific method. We are not against science; but, on the other hand, we need to notice areas that are fact and have been proved, and areas upon which there are many theories, interesting and important, and working-hypotheses to be followed in our investigations. But, please, we don't confuse hypothesis with fact.

Thirdly, we need to distinguish between what is proven fact and what is, in fact, not science at all, but rather old-fashioned ideas put forward by some theologians of the past. And in all this matter, most of us have to listen to authorities. When it comes to digesting the results

of modern science, most of us are not scientists, and we have got to listen to the authorities, recognizing as we do their importance and their limitations. Therefore, if we are going to listen to authorities, it is important that we should, in the first place, listen to the supreme authority. 'Oh do remember,' says Peter, 'remember the words of the prophets; remember the words of the apostles; remember the commandment of the Lord, if you're going to listen to authorities. And please don't go naked into this modern world. Do remember the words of the Lord Jesus and what he had to say upon the topic.'

### **The coming Saviour**

What about the topic of the second coming? You will find, in fact, that if you look at our Lord's parables, a very high proportion of them are devoted to talking about the second coming. I must leave you to check upon my statement, though it is the fact. I repeat, a large proportion of our Lord's parables concern themselves with the fact of the second coming, let alone all those plain forward statements that he gave most solemnly and in particular in those last days in Jerusalem when he talked to us of his second coming. 'Heaven and earth will pass away,' he said, 'but my words will not pass away' (Matt 24:35). And we have the authority of our blessed Lord for it, that he who suffered at Calvary and rose again from the dead, and is risen and gone back to heaven, shall come again. 'You should remember then,' says Peter, 'this commandment of our Lord and Saviour.'

Why drag in the matter that our Lord is a *saviour* in this kind of context? Because the doctrine of the second coming and of the new heavens and the new earth is not a little icing to be put upon the birthday cake of Christianity. It is certainly not just a matter of a few decorations to make it look pretty, but you can dispense with it without doing much harm because the body of the cake is the real thing. No, it isn't that. The doctrine of the second coming is an integral part of our salvation, so much so that if you remove it, then exit salvation itself.

We wait for our Lord from heaven as the Saviour, Philippians 3:20 says. Conversion is expressed in these terms: 'you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven' (1 Thess 1:9-10). The Thessalonians, at least, knew from the start that the second coming was involved in this thing, and being converted and being saved meant, among other things, waiting for God's Son from heaven. Thus the Epistles speak to us and say, 'Yes, in one sense, by grace you have been saved, and you are being saved, but in another sense your salvation is not yet complete. Your salvation is nearer now than when you believed, but it isn't yet complete. Nor will it be complete until the Lord comes and finishes his great work of salvation.'

The second coming of Christ, then, is not just a deluxe edition of Christianity, a further doctrine that you can take or leave as you please. It is an integral part of our Christian salvation. And whatever views you have of its details and its chronologies, and all those kind of things, profitable as those discussions and questions are, pray let us not forget what lies at its heart. It is the question of salvation.

More than that, if Jesus Christ be God's Son, it is utterly impossible that this world should murder him, put him on a cross and in a grave, and nothing more ever be heard of him. That

is quite impossible. If Jesus Christ is indeed God's Son, this world will yet hear a lot more about him. He is the son of the owner of the vineyard. You don't throw him out, take the vineyard over yourself, and that's the end of it. The owner's son will come back, and he will take possession (see Matt 21:33–44).

## Arguments against the second coming

Now we turn to the arguments that these people use against the notion of the promise of his coming. Let's look at their arguments in more detail.

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### Beloved (1) Argument (3:3–4)

1. History shows that Nature is controlled by a uniform, unbroken chain of natural causes and effects
  2. Divine intervention in the future is therefore unlikely or even impossible
  3. Therefore the idea of a second coming which will break into Nature's closed system is absurd
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'Where,' they say, 'is the promise of his coming?' And their argument is based, first of all, upon history. 'For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of the creation' (v. 4). What, then, is their argument? It has to do with the way that Nature works (if I may use the term *Nature* for the whole show—heavens, earth and everything else). It has always worked by an unbroken uniform chain of cause and effect. Everything that happens can be explained by those natural explanations. There has never been any interruption, they say, in this uniform chain of cause and effect.

How do they know? Well, mercifully, they at least appeal to history. Do notice that in that they are wise, though they have got it wrong.

People talk so very frequently of the laws of Nature. We know what they mean. These are good scientists that have investigated the way that Nature works, and they find regular patterns in the way that Nature works, and they formulate what they call *laws*, and they call them laws because now they are able to test them and they find, 'Yes, thousands and thousands of times, this is the way things happen: do X and you'll get Y.' So they call them laws. But we ought really to notice very carefully what these laws are. They are descriptions of what able scientists have found happening normally, descriptions of what we find happening. You don't find these laws written up on the sky.

How do you know those laws are universal? Well, all we can say is that within history, wherever we have observed, it happens this way, and we can point to the mechanism by which it happens normally. Yes, but then inasmuch as our descriptions of what we have learned as having happened all down the many centuries depend, in part, on history, then of course here history has got to have the last say. They maintain history has shown that the chain of cause and effect has gone on utterly unbroken. 'For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were' (3:4). That is their contention. What they are now building upon that observation of history as they understand it is that divine intervention—the idea of God coming in and breaking that chain of cause and effect and intervening in our

world—has never happened, and divine intervention in the future is, therefore, unlikely or impossible. So the whole notion of a coming of Christ within history is impossible, they say.

I point out to you that it is not only many scientists who would hold that view, but a good many theologians are afraid of the doctrine of the second coming, on similar grounds. They don't mind the idea that one day the whole universe shall blow itself up, because science itself seems to teach the same thing, that one day the universe will burn itself out. So they don't mind thinking in those terms and then saying, 'Well, after that God will have another show.' What some of these good theologians (not all theologians, but some theologians) cannot stomach is that Christ will come within the course of history, and thus intervene. That is, of course, why some of them will not accept the doctrine of the virgin birth, because the virgin birth is the biggest intervention of the divine into history that ever has been. And that is why some of our modernist theologians prefer to talk of it as a myth, not an actual historical happening, but as a way of looking at Jesus and saying he was somewhat special.

In this matter, therefore, we are at an exceedingly important point in our faith. The question is whether it is possible to have divine intervention within this creation. These men in 2 Peter 3 say that history in the past has shown there has been no such thing, and it is a breaking of the chain of cause and effect. Therefore, in the future, they hold, there is not likely to be divine intervention and, therefore, the idea of a second coming that will break into Nature's closed system is absurd.

So much then for the argument against the second coming of Christ. And what will Peter say? Well, here is what he says about it. There are a number of observations that we may take from the subsequent verses.

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#### **Beloved (1) Answer (3:5–7)**

1. Nature owes existence not just to natural causes but to the creative word of God
  2. The word that created can also destroy
  3. History records that the course of Nature was once interrupted by a catastrophic flood
  4. God then used natural means—earth's own constituent element (water) to destroy earth
  5. God will again use natural means—fire—to destroy earth
  6. But the event is planned and timed for the day of judgment
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#### **The word of God that can create**

First of all, there is the observation that Nature does not owe her existence just to natural causes.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water *by the word of God*. (v. 5)

Notice that observation. Nature owes her existence, not just to natural causes, but to the creative word of God.

You say, 'How would you know that?'

'By faith', is the answer (Heb 11:3). But let us for the moment think about our scientific friends. One can but admire the tremendous work that they have done, and the tremendous

insights they have achieved into the workings of Nature. They have achieved such understanding of Nature to make it possible for them to go to the moon and beyond, and all such modern marvels as we see happening around us. If you ask where the universe comes from, the majority theory nowadays is called the 'Big Bang theory'. There is a book written of what happened in the first two or three seconds, and a very interesting book it is, written by a leading cosmologist, and it's tremendous fun to read. And maybe something like what they say did happen.

It is an interesting thing, if you get the chance, to talk to one of them. 'So it all started with a big bang and from that big bang there came photons and this and that and the other, and you can trace what happened to them. That's marvellous.' Now, ask them a simple schoolboy question (that's the only kind of question I can rise far enough to ask). 'Now, this big bang thing, where did the stuff come from that went bang?'

No, that's a silly question because they can only deal with what's there. As to where it came from, as far as I know, they have no answer and don't pretend to have any answer. Please observe it. They don't pretend to have any answer that I ever heard of. Where did it all come from to go bang in the first place? Who knows?

Therefore, here you are up against the question that the scientist cannot answer, and doesn't pretend to (if he's an honest scientist; and most of them are). We know, because we have it on the authority of God's revealed word, and the authority of the prophets, and the authority of our Lord Jesus, that it came from 'the word of God'. He created it by his word, as Hebrews says: 'By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God' (11:3). That is a glorious statement, for it tells us that this universe is not one mighty great accident, mindless in its origin and purposeless in its end. It says that he who is the Word, by his word—his intelligence, purpose and planning—informed this great universe in which we are. That is how it came into being. That is how it functions.

#### *Coded information*

What marvellous things are those codes that you find written into the human genetic system. Just allow me to sidestep a minute to illustrate. Years and years ago, people had washing machines, only they weren't the modern marvels we have now; they were a little bit ancient. And to make them go, there was a slit in the front of the machine, and you had a little square plastic affair. You put it in, and that made the thing go, 'Gurgle, gurgle,' and the handkerchiefs came out white. Now, if you looked more closely at that thing you put in that made it go, it had a lot of funny-looking notches on the side of it around the edges. They didn't look like they had any regularity in them; they were all apparently haphazard with different sets of notches on different sides. Now, what happened was, if you put the thing in one way, it was one programme for washing the woollens. And, if you put it in the other way, it was another programme for washing the whites. And one went 'Gurgle, gurgle', and the other went, 'Glug, glug', and the clothes came out differently. And, do you know, that plastic card controlled the machine. First the water, then the rinse, and then the soap, and then the rinse, and then the hot water, and then the spin, and the machine did all sorts of things. It was a marvellous affair. And when you took out the square bit and looked at it, it was only a bit of plastic with some notches in it.

You say, 'Well, that's all it was—plastic.'

No, that isn't all it was. They weren't just bits of plastic, and they weren't just notches. Some brilliant person put the notches there and stamped onto the notch the *information* that the machine needed to get about its business.

The universe everywhere is stamped with all sorts of codes. The human genetic material is stamped with an exceedingly wonderful code controlling you from the moment of your conception to your death. It isn't just stuff. It is stuff informed with information. Believe if you must (because it will be an article of faith) that it happened out of nothing without any intelligence behind it or planning. Believe if you must that it is one colossal, great accident. It will not be science now directing what you say; that is your faith.

We believe, on the authority of our Lord, upon the authority of the prophets and upon the authority of God's word, that it did not come about as an accident. Behind our universe stands God who, by his word, not only created matter but informed it, put its notches into it, so to speak, and all those bits of information that it needs to develop and do its task.

### **The word of God that can destroy**

It follows, therefore, that if Nature owes her existence not just to natural causes, but to the word of God, the word of God that created can also destroy. Peter says that, by that same word, eventually our present world shall be destroyed (v. 7).

#### *The record of history*

Now notice Peter's appeal to history. History records that at one stage the course of Nature was interrupted by a catastrophic flood. Witness to this fact is to be found not only in the Bible but in the literatures of other people.

The story of the flood in Genesis is interesting for the terms it uses. Let me paint in for you, if I may briefly, the background of the flood. In creation story one (Gen 1), we are told that God created the earth, but at this stage the earth was covered with water. Then God separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and gave earth its atmosphere. And he called the firmament 'heaven'. If you would have known about it as a primitive man, you might have been a little nervous, mightn't you? 'What happens if the old firmament wasn't quite so *firm* as its name suggests, and the stuff were to come down on us?'

You say, 'There are not waters up there anywhere, are there?'

Well, you'll have to ask a scientist about that. I'm no scientist. But to this very present, there are some things up there that are pretty lethal to human life, and they tell us that, even to this present moment, there are bands round the earth that shelter us from the utterly lethal and destructive cosmic rays that are outside. There are all sorts of belts that keep those streams of particles, of whatever they are, outside.

Do you know our earth is a crazily dangerous place to live on? I wouldn't have recommended you come if you weren't already here. Here you are on this side of the globe, standing upside down, and beneath your head is an almost limitless gulf of nothing. That's how the Australians look at it anyway. We might say it is the Australians who are standing



upside down. And we have an atmosphere with all of those belts that keep those lethal things out and make human life possible. And an amazing contraption it is.

But we are told that in those days there were waters above the firmament. Then God took the earth, all covered with water, and he called the whole thing 'earth', but then he divided the waters, and he put the waters here and the dry land there. Now earth was divided into two bits. There was the dry land, which he called the earth, and there were the waters. He called them the seas.

Do you know what? As humans, we say we own the earth, but we don't own most of it. The bits we can stand on are limited, aren't they? What if another ice age should come and the oceans overflow again? Our life on this earth is only possible because of these restraints that act at the moment. If some of the mechanism were to change, we'd be flooded tomorrow, and that would be the end of you. If the earth should tilt drastically on its axis, life would be impossible; for the waters would return.

What we are told happened at the flood is that when man went from God and broke moral restraint and spiritual restraint, then God said, 'OK then; I will break physical restraints.' And the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the deep erupted, and the whole thing returned to chaos. If man is going to rebel against God and break spiritual and moral restraint, why shouldn't God let go of the physical restraint? And he did; and temporarily earth returned to its watery chaos.

*God will again use natural means to bring judgment*

God will one day destroy heavens and earth again. Now let us notice what Peter further says. He says that when God does that, he will do like he did the first time: he will use natural means. At the flood, as at creation, it is God's word that was the initiatory thing, but at the flood God used natural means. There was an earth standing in and out of water. The earth that had been caused to appear by the word of God, with God setting the bounds of the waters to make our life on earth possible, and an atmosphere and so forth and so on. When he punished human sin, he used natural means. He used, in fact, the very constituent parts that went up to make our universe, to destroy it. He will not destroy the earth with water anymore; eventually he will destroy it with fire. The present earth and heavens that are now are 'stored up for fire' (v. 7), and in the following verses Peter talks in terms that, even if he didn't mean them so, must remind us of what we now know about the constituent parts of our universe. 'The very elements,' he says, 'shall melt.' He seems to be talking about something that we would call atomic fusion. It will cause great noise and vast heat. God will use natural means.

With that, of course, the really modern scientist hasn't got a lot of fault to find because he tells you likewise that the most likely end of our universe is going to be by fire, and our planet in particular. When, in the normal course of events, our sun burns up to a certain stage, it will explode and become a great red giant like Betelgeuse is at this moment in the sky (along with sundry other stars). And in that moment when it explodes and becomes a great red giant, earth will disintegrate, and almost incalculable heat will be produced.

*The timing of God's use of natural means to bring about judgment*

'Ah, but,' say the scientists, 'we can understand it simply by the natural means and by the physics of it. We don't have to believe in divine intervention.'

Yes, but that's the point, isn't it? Peter is saying that when the judgment comes it will be by natural means, but notice he says that though he will use natural means, God has timed it and planned it for a moral purpose. In other words, it does not just happen. Perhaps if you are there to see it happen, and you've got your physics book ready, you can give a good physics account of the end of the heaven and earth, for God will use natural means. But the way of understanding *how* it is happening won't tell you by itself *why* it is happening. God's use of the natural means is how it happens. Why it happens is that God has timed it for 'the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly' (v. 7).

Yes, you can explain the natural causes and effects, but just because you can explain the natural causes and effects doesn't mean you've understood everything there is. You've now got to ask, 'But what is it all for?' You can boil a kettle on your electric stove if you like, and the physicist will be able to explain to you, in terms of natural causes and effects, *how* the water is boiling. What he won't be able to tell you by his physics is *why* the kettle is boiling. Is it boiling because you are going to make a cup of tea, or is it boiling because you're going to wash your socks or something? Yes, God will use natural means. That is how. The why of it will be that God will use it and time it. Because this is a moral universe, God will time its very destruction to coincide with the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly.

The Lord is coming; the Day of the Lord will come, that is, the day of judgment. You will remember the words of the Lord, won't you? Don't be led away by specious science, nor by scientists who don't know where science finishes and faith begins. I repeat, they can tell you what happened after the big bang; they can't tell you where the stuff came from to go 'Bang!' in the first place. They may be able to tell you how and by what means the whole thing will end. Science itself can't tell you why, or if there is any moral purpose and significance in its end. If they tell you there's no purpose, then they're not talking as scientists; they are merely expressing their faith, or their lack of it. We, as believers, trust the authority of Christ.

#### *The man in the shop*

And, with that, I'll tell you a little story just before you go to your classes. We have been talking about solemn things, so let me tell you a silly story. Once upon a time, there were two chaps, one was Bill and one was George. Bill and George belonged to the honourable profession of burglars. They, for their part, made a speciality of jeweller's shops. That was their line, and they knew where to dispose of the loot. There was this particular jeweller's shop that they had been to several times, now and again, at suitable intervals, and taken this and that. One day they went back to this jeweller's shop. They had carefully got in through the window when an enormous buzzer and a bell went off, and they ran for their lives! Said George to Bill, when they got to safety, 'There must have been somebody in there. He saw us come, and when he saw us come, he rang that big bell affair. Better not go back there anymore. There's a man in there. He saw us and rang a bell.'

Now, George and Bill, they weren't very bright on the whole. They were bright enough to sell stolen jewellery, but they weren't too bright. And one day they were at their pub, and they came across a very bright chap. He also was in the trade; only he went in for bullion and things. He had a degree in science, and when they were talking to him, they told him this

story. 'You know that jeweller's shop where we normally go, this time when we got in, there was a man there and he saw us, and he rang a bell.'

And this friend, said, 'Nonsense. Now, that is superstition. There wasn't any man there.'

'Oh,' says George, 'there must have been because the bell rang.'

'No,' he says, 'you're living in a pre-scientific age. There wasn't any man in the shop. Nobody saw you.'

'Oh?'

'No,' he said, 'I can explain to you how it all happened. I can explain the technology of it. You see, there wasn't any man there; there was an electric thing on the wall, and an electronic device on the other side, and that was giving out an electronic ray.'

George said, 'How marvellous. And what then?'

'Well, when you chaps went past it, it broke the ray and that set up a reaction in the electricity, and it caused a bell to go.'

'Oh,' says Bill. 'You mean to say there wasn't any man there?'

'No.'

'You can explain it all by technology?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, well we could go back again then, if there's no man there.'

So they went back one Thursday night. They got in the window; they broke the beam, the bell went off, and George says to Bill, 'Never mind, Bill, there's no man here. We can explain it all. There's the thing on the wall just like our friend said. There's a ray coming out there, and it's going there. Now, you just stand right there, George. Now, you've stopped it. There isn't any man.'

So they filled their pockets with loot because they could explain what made the bell go. And they turned round to go out of the door, and there were half a dozen policemen standing waiting for them.

Yes, of course, they could understand what made it go, but behind all of that there was a mind that designed it on purpose, not just to make a bell go, but for the catching and punishment of ungodly burglars.

Be sure you don't make the same mistake. You can understand how the physical universe works. That doesn't settle the question of why, or whether there's a mind behind it. Our authorities tell us that behind Nature there is a mind. He will eventually use the natural means of this universe to destroy it. Yes, but there is a purpose behind it. He will do it for the capture, the judgment and the punishment of ungodly men and women.

## The Significance For Us of the End of the World

*2 Peter 3:8–18*

### **A word of thanks**

I am naturally glad to know that you have found these occasions profitable and gladly, if God so will, we will come back and hold other sessions in other years. But let me repeat how much of the profit of these occasions has been due to those who have been prepared to come along to lead the discussion groups. I am exceedingly grateful to you. To you, I say, I hope I have not trodden on any of your feet or undermined your authority in any way by giving expression to different views from what you have expressed or anything of the sort. It is exceedingly kind of you to come along and cooperate in this fashion. The strength of these occasions lies very much in the hands of those who lead the study groups and take the things seriously and fill in and correct the things that I am able to say, and gently, in their wisdom, to adjust the things that I say that are amiss. I am very grateful to you, and I shall be reminding my brethren at Apsley Street that it's no good their prevailing upon me to come next year unless they can prevail on some of you to come along as well.

### **Our studies so far**

Now we come to the final passage in 2 Peter 3. To begin our session, I am going to read from verse 14 to the end.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (vv. 14–18)

So let us look once more at our survey of the thought flow of chapter 3.

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## 2 PETER 3: THOUGHT-FLOW

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3:1–7	BELOVED . . . REMEMBER . . . Knowing . . . men will mock the promise of coming Their argument: the principle of uniformity The answer: the day of destruction of the ungodly
3:8–13	BUT BELOVED . . . FORGET NOT . . . Problem: apparent delay in the coming Answer: according to God’s promise we look for new heavens and a new earth
3:14–16	THEREFORE BELOVED . . . seeing that you look for these things: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give diligence</li> <li>2. Consider . . . the ignorant who twist Scripture to their own destruction</li> </ol>
3:17–18	THEREFORE BELOVED . . . <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beware</li> <li>2. GROW</li> </ol>

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There are four parts to the chapter, each of them introduced by the affectionate greeting: ‘beloved’. And we have been observing how Peter deals here with those objections to the Christian faith that have to do particularly with the doctrine of the second coming, if not the end of the world, when men deny the possibility of divine intervention on scientific grounds. We tried to make the point earlier that, as Christians, we are not against science, but for science. God give us more physicists and chemists and cosmologists and astronomers. And I nearly said a few less social scientists but, of course, not; we need a lot of them as well! We could do with more Christians who are scientists, couldn’t we? If only for the fun of it! It is God’s universe; and it was all made by our blessed Lord, and we honour him by studying his handiwork as scientifically as we possibly can.

We have to be careful about two things. First, we have to notice the boundaries, the limits of science where all good scientists themselves would tell you that, beyond this, science cannot go; and it becomes the proper area of metaphysics, and then faith. Some people do not always distinguish between those things, not generally the leading scientists, but the lesser scientists and the general popular writers. Then, of course, we must distinguish between the facts as demonstrably proved by science and all sorts of theories that are merely working hypotheses. We mustn’t make the basic mistake of treating a hypothesis as though it were a fact.

Second, we must try (particularly theologians, if I may for the moment group myself with them) to bring our science up-to-date. It is no good telling the world that they can’t be expected to believe the Christian faith because science teaches such and such when, at best, it was only a theory and has long since been abandoned by modern scientists. If we are going to object to biblical doctrine on the grounds of science, we had better make sure our science is up-to-date.

But that said, here we dealt with the argument against the doctrine of the second coming: ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’ We considered the argument, which is erected on the basis of history and certain scientific and philosophical arguments, that states that Nature is a closed system, an unbroken chain of cause and effect that always has been and always will be

and there can be no intervention. We have seen how Peter answers those objections. He not only gives us the answers, but in doing so he sets us an example of what we should aim at in our teaching. At least some of us need to be aware of the arguments that the world is going to erect against our Christian gospel. We ought to prepare our young people as they go out into the world. We are not to make them anti-science, but while encouraging them to be scientific we must give them the answers of God's word to the false criticisms that sometimes are erected in the name of science. We mustn't let ourselves become a little ghetto where we simply preach the gospel and don't even know what the world is saying and don't know their arguments and, therefore, don't know the answers. Peter was up-to-date. He knew what the world was saying. To prepare them for the shock they would face he could tell the believers beforehand what they would have to meet one day. 'Know it in advance,' he says. 'Yes, remember the words of the Lord Jesus, but know in advance that those promises of his second coming that he gave us will be opposed and criticized in your educational circles, and in the world at large. They will be opposed on these grounds. Know it in advance!' And if we know it in advance, we shall not be mere innocents. We shall be prepared for the shock, and we shall, pray God, understand the answers to the criticisms.

Now we move to another problem, and then after that to the final two paragraphs of exhortation.

### **Another objection to the second coming (3:8-13)**

The second problem, which is more of a problem than it is an argument, can be summed up as the apparent delay in the coming of Christ. The coming of the Messiah was something promised in the Old Testament, of course. And it is our Christian belief that when our Lord came the first time he fulfilled a large number of Old Testament prophecies by that first coming. He left a lot more unfulfilled and promised that those would be fulfilled at his second coming.

Already in Peter's time it appears people were beginning to say, 'Well, why hasn't he come?' The writer to the Hebrews has to comfort his contemporary Christians, saying, 'You have need of [patience] . . . For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay"' (10:36-37). Nearly two thousand years have gone by, and still he hasn't come. Why is that? And is there any justice in the view that says, 'Well, look, perhaps, it isn't ever going to happen'? Some people have given up hope completely, haven't they? And some of them have gone so far as to say that Christ must have been mistaken when he said 'this generation will not pass away until all these things take place' (Matt 24:34); and that's too bad.

That, of course, is not so; and it is not the answer that Peter gives to the problem when he turns to answer it. So let us look to the problem and to the answers that he gives for the long delay.

**Beloved (2) Problem**

Why the long delay? Answer:

1. God does not count time like we do
2. His patience is not slackness, but calculated to allow men time to repent
3. We can hasten the coming by earnest preparation
4. But if earth and all its works are to be burned up and replaced by heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells, WHAT KIND OF PREPARATORY BEHAVIOUR WOULD BE NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT?

Answer number one comes immediately.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (3:8)

We should perhaps notice what that verse does not mean. It was early taken by some of the church fathers as though it meant that wherever in the prophets you have some prophetic dating given, such as in the prophecy of Daniel, you can interpret 'days' as years. So, for example, if it says that after 2,300 days the temple shall be cleansed, you can say, 'Ah, 2,300 days, well, now, count one thousand years every day, and that will bring you to the date of the Lord's coming.'

That is utter nonsense. That is not what these verses are saying. It is not saying that the times given us in the prophets are to be interpreted as one thousand years for every day mentioned. It is making a general proposition about the way that God counts time. And you notice that he puts it two ways. First he says, 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years', and then he puts it the other way round, that 'a thousand years is as one day'. Do, please, notice that it is put both ways. In other words, God does not count time as we do. And if we are thinking about this problem of the apparent delay in our Lord's coming, here is the number one answer to it. What may seem a long time to us doesn't necessarily seem a long time to God at all. Two thousand years at our counting might seem to him as merely two days. He does not count time as we do. But notice, on the other hand, a day to him could seem like one thousand years.

Now, I suspect that all of us in some sense understand in our minds a little bit of this same principle. We have all sorts of ways of counting time ourselves. You can count time by your clock, whether it's an old-fashioned clockwork clock with sensible hands, or whether it's one of those things that blinks in and out and puzzles your eyes and tells the time that way. You can count time by a clock or, if you're very clever, you can count it by the decay of some atom or other, or by the beat of some pulsar stars. There are all sorts of ways of counting time. But by whatever mechanism you use to count time very exactly, there is another sense in which time bears upon us. It did so upon me when I was at school. No week of the holidays lasted the same length as a week of school did. I mean, that was obvious to any sensible person. And, of all the periods at school, the longest forty minutes was Mathematics, of course. The fifteen minutes on the playground felt like the equivalent of about fifteen seconds. And since we've grown up, we've tended to feel like that sometimes, haven't we? A fortnight's holiday is gone before you can turn around. How long is one day's pain? Some things go all too quickly. Age

and decay, for instance. How quickly life has gone by since you were twenty-five! You didn't think it was going to go so quickly, because it took you such a long while to get to that age. It took me ages to get to twenty-five; I thought I should never reach it. I got there, up the hill, by dint of great effort, but it took forever. I had just got there, but it was like getting on the top of the mountain, and I started to slide down with ever increasing speed. I'm nearly at the bottom now. The speed of going down was ten times what it was coming up to twenty-five.

We don't just count time by clocks either, do we? God doesn't. With him a day could be one thousand years. It could indeed. Oh, I could tell you of certain things that God has done in one day! Do you know what he packed into one day when he saved my brother over there? What a job that was! He filled that one day of twenty-four hours with a work that is going to last eternally. Yes, that is how God judges a day. And I, as a believer, could take an ordinary, common Monday and make the work of that Monday last eternally. Or I could take three weeks and fritter them away and do nothing, and it's gone like that, and I would have nothing to show for it. God doesn't count time like we do, therefore.

### **The Lord is patient**

That leads us onto the point about his patience, that is, his long-suffering.

The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (v. 9)

He has not yet staged the second coming of Christ, and certainly not the end of the world. Why hasn't he done it? He promised he would do it. Well, you mustn't read his patience as though it was slackness in fulfilling his promise. You know what I mean by slackness: I promise you that I'll come round and cut your lawn. I promise it in May, but I forget it through May, and I forget it through June, and you remind me in July, and I still forget it. I am being slack to the fulfilment of my promise. I might get round to it in August, but I've been rather slack in fulfilling it, haven't I? You mustn't suppose that God is being slack because nearly two thousand years have gone by and our Lord still hasn't come. His patience is not slackness; it is calculated patience.

He is 'not willing that any should perish,' says the verse, 'but that all should reach [or, come to] repentance' (see v. 9). I'm glad God is patient, aren't you? I don't know whether Peter was patient or impatient, or Paul, or my first-century fellow Christians; but I'm glad God didn't listen to them and stage the second coming of Christ in the first century AD. And that is for one very good reason: I shouldn't have been here. I wouldn't have got saved. I wouldn't even have been born. And God, who wanted to save the large number of the redeemed, was prepared to wait.

There is a lovely story told us in the Gospels. It's the story of Jairus and his little daughter, and she was desperately sick (see Luke 8). So he came to the Lord Jesus and asked the Lord Jesus if he would come and lay his hands on his daughter and save her from dying. And our Lord began to go. And as he was going, a crowd got round him and presently a woman came. She had an issue of blood, and she pressed forward and she touched the hem of his garment, and our Lord stopped and spoke to the dear woman. And I suspect Jairus was fuming: 'If only



you knew! Why are these folks coming now? If the Lord doesn't come soon, my girl will die! And there are all these folks holding him up.'

Well, they did hold the Lord up. By the time he'd had a word with the woman, there came a man from Jairus' house saying, 'Trouble not the Master, your daughter is dead.' It was too late. He didn't come quickly enough. And when our Lord heard that, he said, 'Fear not, Jairus; only believe and she shall be saved.'

'What?' Jairus might have said. 'But she has died.'

'Yes, I know,' said our Lord, 'but, you see, that's not the end of it. I shall come and I shall raise her from the dead, Jairus.' And he did that, with his three apostles. They entered in and, along with Mum and Dad, our Lord came and raised the girl from sleep, and restored the family circle.

Thus shall it be for multitudes. You'd like the Lord to come before you die, wouldn't you? I know you would: 'Oh, joy! Oh delight! should we go without dying'.<sup>11</sup> But what happens if the Lord gets held up saving some Ethiopians or something? If he does that too long, he mightn't come before you who are eighty-five and a half have passed away. Tell me, would you really want to have it that the Lord should say, 'Right, well, I'm going to come before she passes away,' and the other Ethiopians not get saved then?

He is not slack. He has in mind the great company of the redeemed. He is not willing that any perish; he wants them saved and for that purpose he is prepared to wait. How long? Thank God he waited until I came along in 1925. And I, in my turn, must be prepared to see him wait yet longer if need be, mustn't I?

### **The Lord will not wait forever**

Now Peter comes to the third bit of the lesson. The fact that our Lord waits doesn't mean that he is going to wait forever. The Day of the Lord will come. What a long day it will be; what tremendous events it will see happen, in that long age of our Lord's reign and the eventual destruction of heaven and earth. For, 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night' (1 Thess 5:2), and all shall pass away and be destroyed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (vv. 11-13)

#### *Hastening the coming*

Notice, first of all, that phrase that speaks of 'hastening'. Some translations render it 'looking for and earnestly desiring'. Well, that may be one translation. The Greek actually says, 'hastening'. As the old hymn has put it, 'Let all that look for, hasten'.<sup>12</sup> That is literally what the Greek means. Some have thought that is an impossible translation. 'How could I possibly *hasten* the coming of the Lord? Surely, the time is fixed. What can I do about hastening it?'

<sup>11</sup> H. L. Turner, 'It may be at morn, when the day is awaking.'

<sup>12</sup> D. W. Whittle (1840-1901), 'Our Lord is now rejected' (1859).

There you are thinking in terms of the clock, aren't you? Do you think there is going to be a big grandfather clock on the walls of heaven? And God will look at the clock and say, 'Oh, the time has come now; the clock says so.' But he doesn't count time like that. Take an example, for instance. He said to Abraham at one stage, 'Abraham, I'm going to give this land and to you and your seed. I'm going to give it you, but not just yet.'

'Well, when then?'

And he gave two answers to that question. One was a sort of a chronological answer: 'After so long, after so many hundred years.' There was another answer: 'I'm not going to give it to you yet, because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full' (see Gen 15:12-16). In other words, when God's purposes happen is determined, in part, by the behaviour of people down here. To give Abraham the land, he must turn out the Amorites. He won't turn out the Amorites yet. When will he turn out the Amorites? When their iniquity has come to its full. God runs this universe on moral principles, not just on the question of a clock.

You say, 'What's holding him up then to have this great Day of the Lord come?'

Well, perhaps you are. Are you ready for it? We have just seen this idea, haven't we, as it refers to salvation? Goodness me, if the Lord had come twenty years ago, some of you would have been lost, because you weren't saved yet.

You say, 'I'm saved now though.'

Thank the Lord for that. And you are ready for the Lord to come? Praise the Lord for that as well.

You say, 'Yes, like the dying thief I am; I trusted the Saviour. If the Lord came tonight, I'm ready to go.'

Thank the Lord for that. Oh, what a wonderful assurance it is, if the Lord came tonight, to be with the Lord, and an entrance into what for you will be the eternal kingdom. And you are ready to go.

My brother, my sister, are you ready to go? Have you done all the preparation you want to do to make sure it will be an abundant entrance and not just an entrance? You've made all the progress you would like to make, and now you're just kicking your heels? You can't think of any further progress you could make in the Christian life? Well, I can. Not for you; I mean me! I was saved decades ago. I'm glad the Lord didn't come when I was twenty, and I'm glad he didn't come when I was forty. And, as a believer (mark it) I'm glad he gave me the opportunity to repent of wrong attitudes in my life, *as a believer*.

Do you know what I mean? I remember a silvery-haired elder in the church in which I was at one stage. He'd had a very busy life up in the city of London, all his years, and retired to the country parts from which he came. And in his advanced old age he said to me one day, 'I am grateful to God for giving me these last few years of my life. What a bonus they have been to me to put things right, and get right with the Lord and make further progress in the Christian path.'

Isn't it so? I do wish the Lord would come tomorrow. If he comes, I'm ready: cleansed by the blood of Christ to enter in. And another side of me says, 'Lord, well, I wouldn't mind if you didn't come because there are certain things I'd like to get right in my life.'

If we are looking for this great thing, do consider how tremendous it will be eventually, at the end of our Lord's reign. The whole earth and its works will be burned up, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. And I am looking for that? Well,

then, what manner of persons ought we to be? Well, I'll tell you, we ought to be taking every minute, every opportunity we can, for making progress. As Peter exhorts us to be preparing ourselves for that great and august coming of the eternal kingdom of our Lord: 'Give all diligence,' says Peter, 'to add to your faith . . .' (see 1:5). And we shall need the time to do it in, shall we not?

*What kind of preparatory behaviour would be necessary and sufficient?*

We may be grateful for our Lord's patience in that it gives generations of men opportunity to repent, and us included, and thus find forgiveness of sins and justification and peace with God, in that sense, and opportunity for the basic preparation for entering eternity. We may be grateful for our Lord's patience that also gives us, as believers in him, time for progress so that our entrance to that eternity may not be just a bare entrance, but an abundant entrance. Well, then, now let's come to the practical implications of it all.

'Since you look for these things . . .' (see v. 14), so what? If I'm really looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, well, obviously it has implications for the way I live now, doesn't it? As John will put it, 'everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure' (1 John 3:3). If I am living unrighteously and unrepentantly, and conducting my affairs and my business unrighteously by cheating in business or whatever else, it makes a nonsense of my claim if I then say I'm really looking for a world in which righteousness dwells.

And with that, he comes to his final exhortations.

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### **Beloved (3)**

Since then you look for these things:

- (1) GIVE DILIGENCE that you may be FOUND in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight
  - (2) COUNT THAT the patience of our Lord is (means opportunity for) salvation (the ignorant and unstable twist Scripture to their own destruction)
- 

Now look what he first says here. There are two things we've got to do. First, 'be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace' (v. 14). Let me underline that verb. What a lovely concept it is. It goes back, of course, to the way our Lord Jesus spoke. He talked of his servants, and he said, 'Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes' (Luke 12:37). Blessed are you if, when the Master comes, he may *find* you: watching, waiting and diligently carrying out your tasks; in that sense to be *found*.

You know what that is like. Mother goes down to the supermarket and she leaves six-year-old to look after four-year-old, and says, 'And I shall be back soon. Now don't you get up to your tricks,' or some similar words. She comes home and they weren't quite expecting her to be back so soon. Well, what she finds we'll leave undescribed, but you know what I mean. They suddenly discover that they've been *found* by Mother. She found them doing this, that and the other.

What shall the Lord find us doing when he comes? 'Be diligent to be found by him . . . at peace.' That is, in peace with God, of course, in peace with my brethren, and insofar as is in me, in peace with all men.

I am to be diligent to be found by him 'without spot or blemish' (or, blameless). Surely I cannot be sinless, but I could do something about the old spots, couldn't I? I can see to it that I have been, as best I know how, following his word and, where I have failed, I've confessed it. Am I in that sense blameless? Suppose he came more quickly than we thought. How would he find us?

Secondly he says, 'And count the patience of our Lord as salvation' (v. 15). Presumably that means the patience of our Lord means opportunity for salvation, in all the sense that we have been considering it. Salvation for the unconverted means an opportunity to repent and believe and be saved and forgiven and receive eternal life. Opportunity for salvation in the life of the believer means to be saved from this and that and the other wrong attitude and wrong activity. Count the time valuable, and don't get *too* impatient for the Lord to come. His patience means opportunity for salvation.

What a sad thing it is when 'the ignorant and unstable' (v. 16), instead of seeing that this long apparent delay is there for our salvation in all senses of that term, take hold of Scripture and wrest and twist it and make endless problems out of it. And they do it to their own destruction.

### The fourth 'beloved'

Finally, Peter has just another couple of ideas for us.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (vv. 17–18)

'Beloved,' he says now for the fourth time, 'knowing this beforehand,' and you will see what Peter has, in fact, been doing, won't you? Let me remind you of our general survey of the passage.

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#### 2 PETER 3: THOUGHT-FLOW

- 3:1–7 BELOVED . . . REMEMBER . . .  
 Knowing . . . men will mock the promise of coming  
 Their argument: the principle of uniformity  
 The answer: the day of destruction of the ungodly
- 3:8–13 BUT BELOVED . . . FORGET NOT . . .  
 Problem: apparent delay in the coming  
 Answer: according to God's promise we look for new heavens and a new earth
- 3:14–16 THEREFORE BELOVED . . .  
 seeing that you look for these things:
1. Give diligence
  2. Consider . . . the ignorant who twist Scripture to their own destruction
- 3:17–18 THEREFORE BELOVED . . .
1. Beware
  2. GROW
-

He said, 'Beloved, remember.' First he dealt with what we may call, roughly, the scientific difficulty. Then he said, 'Don't forget this,' and he dealt with the problem of the delay. Here in the third section he turns to give us the positive side of this delay. First he gives the reasons for it, and now the positive side: 'count the patience of our Lord as salvation'. It is a chance for folks to get converted, a chance for believers to make progress in the Christian life and find salvation practically working out. In other words, this third 'beloved' section is related to the second. The fourth is related to the first section, and to all those other false teachers that we read of in chapter 2. 'You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand', he says. So let's look at the last section in a little bit more detail.

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#### **Beloved (4)**

Knowing then these things beforehand:

- (1) Beware lest being carried away by the error of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness
  - (2) But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity
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Peter is telling them that, 'Knowing beforehand that there are these false teachers coming, you may be forewarned and, therefore, forearmed.' The danger is that, when the false teachers come, their arguments will sound so specious, and so many will follow their perverse ways, that it will create a tremendous pressure to think that their way of life is the thing that's done nowadays.

Oh, how sorry I am for my younger brothers and sisters. When they go out into the world these days, it's different from what it used to be. When I was their age, there was a certain decency amongst men. Oh, yes, sin was sin and there was every kind of temptation, but there was a sort of different temperature in society. Now the pressure is that you are odd if you do not conform to this modern world's standards of immorality and free love, and the rest of it. The pressures are enormous. Knowing it in advance, being forewarned, is to be forearmed.

#### *Take care not to be carried away with error*

Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. (v. 17)

Now notice what he says. He doesn't say, 'Lest you lose your salvation.' Of course, not. No believer can lose his salvation, but a believer can temporarily be 'carried away by the error of the wicked and fall from his own steadfastness' (see v. 17 RV).

In another direction, Peter fell from this steadfastness at one stage didn't he? He found the pressures building up against him. Even though he had been warned beforehand by Christ, he found that the pressures building up against him were too big, and he succumbed to them.

We are told that, in the wilderness when Korah, Dathan and Abiram (those jolly old apostates) rose up to challenge the apostleship of Moses and the high priesthood of Aaron,

then a lot of the ordinary Israelites listened and thought, 'Oh, yes, they've got a point there,' and began to side with them, and got carried away by the error of the wicked.

And God had to take some drastic steps and say, 'Don't you realize that these men are nothing short of utter apostates? Get clear of them.'

The bulk of Israel had to stand clear of them while God opened the ground and swallowed up those apostates. But the fact is that, at the beginning, many in Israel were carried away by the error of the wicked (see Num 16).

It can happen. So we would do well to know these things beforehand and be warned and be ready to meet the pressures lest we be carried away by their error and temporarily fall from our own steadfastness.

It is not given to me to judge. I do not speak in any Pharisaic spirit. I too have felt the pressures. If I stand at all, it is not my goodness, and God knows in what things I have compromised where I shouldn't. And I think of young folks I've known, oh, how strong they were in their Bible class, in their college days, and then the pressures proved too much, and whether they are still believers is a question that you couldn't give a clear answer to. Oh, my elder brethren, that is not time for criticism. It is time to make sure we first build in them the faith and not just innocent little ditties but *the faith*, and equip them under God as best we can, and forewarn them of what they will have to face and give them the answers in advance. And if then they should fall, God make us intercessors and give us the patience to try and bring them back, like our Lord brought Peter back. And he was restored and in turn was able to make his brethren steadfast.

### *Growth and glory*

'Take care that you are not carried away' (v. 17). What's the best way not to be carried away? Well, to 'grow' (v. 18). Pity the dear Christian man or woman that has stopped growing. The most elderly saint has still to grow. Life's biggest battles lie at the end when our faith will still be tested, and Satan takes advantage of our frailty and weakness. It is then still a time for growing. And the last years are not wasted if they are giving the final touches of perfection to our faith.

We need to be making progress all the time and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. He has grace to give us; he has knowledge to give us. We may go to him honestly with our problems and say, 'Lord, I'm finding difficulties, and I don't find the answer to these intellectual questions.' He will not rebuke us. He has knowledge to give us if, in humility, we will go to him with our doubts and or problems. And he will eventually give us the evidence and the answers, and so test our faith and cause our faith to grow. 'But grow' is what this epistle is about.

There comes the day of eternity. The great day of eternity will be here soon, and I fancy for many of us all too quickly. Oh, but then, what a wonder it should be, what a thing it is, to be ready for it in the sense of being saved and redeemed with the assurance of eternal life. And I shall never come into condemnation, and I shall never be lost. Oh, what a triumph of the grace of God it is. 'To him,' says Peter, 'to our blessed Lord and Saviour be *the* glory. Equal with the Father, and our Redeemer as well, to him be the glory.' And now he is available, with all his divine power, to lead us to make progress by his grace and by his knowledge. And

thank God when we get home and can survey the progress we made, then again our song shall be, 'To him be the glory.' For all I shall ever be, I shall owe it to his magnificent grace.

'To him be the glory . . . now' (v. 18). We already taste it, don't we? We sense it. We feel the throbbings of eternal life that runs in our spirit already. To him be the glory now, for his is already the triumph, and to the day of eternity. Soon it shall be here.

So let us just remind ourselves of what the lessons have been.

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### Major Lessons of 2 Peter

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This world is temporary

There is an eternal kingdom

Progress here will have eternal consequences there

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Then what is the progress I particularly need to go in for? In *this* epistle this is the progress that Peter urges upon us.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. (1:5-7)

Thus shall an abundant entrance be ministered to you into the eternal kingdom. Thus you will actually hasten the day of that coming.

Let all that look for, hasten  
The coming joyful day,  
By earnest consecration,  
To walk the narrow way,  
By gath'ring in the lost ones,  
For whom our Lord did die,  
For the crowning day that's coming by and by.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <sup>13</sup> D. W. Whittle (1840-1901), 'Our Lord is now rejected' (1859).

## Questions and Answers

### *Questions Arising From All Sessions*

In this session I propose to take the questions that you have written down for me and answer them as best I can. I had better forewarn you that, in answering questions, I have a very bad reputation. That is, when I am asked a question I have the unfortunate habit (so I'm told) of asking a further question instead of giving a reply. Instead of making things more simple, I end up by making them more complicated. I don't think I was like that before I came to Ireland, but on that different views are possible.

### **Question one**

You will find the basis of this first question in 2 Peter 2:1.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

*The question relates to the phrase, 'the Master who bought them'. Does that not imply that if they were bought by our Lord, they were covered by his redemption and, therefore, if as this verse says, God eventually brings down his eternal judgment upon their heads, would they not have a basis for complaint? Because they were bought by the Lord Jesus, that should mean they were covered by his redemption. How then can God judge them?*

My answer to that in the first place would simply be this. Coming at it from the practical end, what it means when it says they 'deny the Master who bought them' is that they repudiate all claims upon their lives issued by the Lord Jesus and his apostles. The passage is talking in particular about their immoral behaviour. These are men who, if an apostle rebuked them for their immoral behaviour, would have said, 'But who are you to tell us how we ought to behave?' And if the apostles had quoted to them the words of the Lord Jesus, they would have denied that they were subject to those words.

There are, of course, people around like that today. Some of them do it in a very refined sense, but they will tell you that the commands of the apostles on matters of morals, and a good deal else, and even the ideas of our Lord Jesus, are no longer applicable. And, therefore, you may go quite contrary to them, and it is all right. The difficulty is that these people wanted, at the same time, to be recognized as Christian and did profess to be Christian. I take



it, therefore, that when they deny the claims of the Lord Jesus they show that their profession of Christianity is empty; it is not genuine.

Now, our Lord talked about that kind of thing in some of his parables. In Luke 12, for instance, at great length he indicates to us the behaviour that he expects from those that profess to be his servants. And he asks us to consider who is that faithful and wise steward. When the Lord comes he will reward such a faithful servant of his.

And the Lord said, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (vv. 42–44)

But then he goes on to say,

But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming', and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him . . . (vv. 45–46)

And, as I understand it, the Greek should then be translated, 'with the unbelievers', because such behaviour is evidence that, in spite of his profession to be a servant of Christ, the man is an unbeliever and his portion is appointed with the unbelievers. So our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount: you judge a prophet by his fruits. If his fruits are evil, you decide that he is a false prophet. He is not the genuine article (Matt 7:15–20).

How then does Peter say that our Lord bought such people? You will notice the term he uses. You can translate the term 'redeemed' if you like. It is referring, of course, to our Lord's sacrifice at Calvary. I think the best thing I can do is simply to repeat what I said on the last occasion by referring to our Lord's parable in Matthew 13.<sup>14</sup> It talks about a merchant who bought a whole field in order to get the treasure hidden in that field. In that sense, our Lord has bought the whole world and all that is in it. One day, Colossians says, he is going to restore all things in heaven and in earth (1:20). He is going to take the whole lot under his control. It is his by right, not only by rights of creation, but by rights of redemption.

Therefore, he has a claim on these men. They profess to own that claim; in actual practice they deny it. And I conclude that a man who denies the claims of our Lord based on his redemption is no true believer and, therefore, will not be covered from the guilt of his sin by the sacrifice of Christ.

And I hope I have not yielded too much to my English character and made things, by the answer, more complicated than they were before.

## Question two

Now let me turn to a quite different thing in question number two.

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<sup>14</sup> See [talk 7](#) in this transcript.

*Peter sadly failed the Lord when he denied him three times. Will Peter recall this in heaven? If so, will this not detract from his enjoyment of heaven and would it be the same for us?*

I suspect the questioner is thinking now, very properly, of heaven and is inclined to take it very literally, as he should do, and thinking, 'Now, what are we going to feel like when we are there?' And if, when we get home to glory, we are still able to remember the things that we did wrongly here on earth when we seriously grieved the Lord, will not the memory of that spoil heaven for us? Shall we remember?

Well, as to the fact of memory in heaven, I think the answer must be, 'Undoubtedly, yes.' Let me put it to you simply this way. Shall we remember when we get home to heaven that our Lord was crucified for us? Or shall we forget all about the cross when we get home to heaven? That is impossible, isn't it? Revelation 5 admits us to that great vision of John the apostle where the very song of heaven is, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain' (v. 12). If in heaven we remember, therefore, and never forget the fact that our Lord was slain, shall we remember why he was slain?

You say, 'We shall remember he was slain for the sins of the world.'

So shall I find myself in the situation that I can remember that he was slain for your sins? And I say, 'Yes, they're a poor lot; they scarce deserve to be here.' But I can't remember any of my own sins for which the Lord suffered and died? It's unlikely, isn't it?

And then we have the story given by our Lord of the rich man who, lifting up his eyes in hell, was in torment, and Abraham said, 'Son, remember.' He could remember (see Luke 16:19-31).

So, if we have to say, 'Yes, Scripture seems to indicate that we shall remember in heaven,' then comes the second part of the question: 'will this not detract from the enjoyment of heaven?'

You do really ask some hard questions, don't you? I want, in the first place, to say, 'No.' Then, in the second place, let me give way to my weakness already mentioned and ask you a question. Does God, at this moment, ever feel sorry about his people's sins? At this moment?

Hands up those who think that God, at this moment, is sometimes sorry and feels sorrow at the sins of his people. There seem to be quite a substantial lot of people here that feel that God, from time to time, feels sorrow over the sins of his people. I ask now if anybody thinks of God as anywhere else but in heaven. So if God is at this moment in heaven, and if God at this moment feels some sorrow and grief over people's sins, in some sense (whatever that means for God), it sounds to me extraordinarily like as if there could be a kind of sorrow in heaven. Is it not so? Some are saying no. But how then?

I shall have to leave that one with you to sort out, shan't I? We can be sure of this thought. God is in heaven, wherever else he is. He is the transcendent Lord of time and space and, therefore, existing quite outside heaven, I dare say, but in heaven too. And from Old Testament indications God is distressed, in some sense, over the sins of his people. But now think it over, for this is my privilege of asking questions. At Calvary, did God himself feel no grief? And where was God when he felt it?

So we must grasp, and we do grasp, those Scriptures that say that in the eternal state, there is no more sorrow, crying and tears, no more curse 'for the former things have passed away'

(Rev 21:4). We must balance that with the fact that we shall, in those days, look back upon the occasions of earth. That will not destroy our enjoyment of heaven. We shall look at things then as God looks at them. In that sense we shall not want to hide the memory of what we did wrong. It will be for the everlasting glory of Christ that his sacrifice put it right. But I do not think that our memory will be wiped clean of what we did on earth.

You say, 'Sir, you have got things terribly wrong.'

That could well be.

You say, 'But doesn't the Bible actually say that, for instance, God will not remember our sins anymore?'

It does indeed (Heb 8:12), but pray, consider, what the term means. The term, 'their sins and iniquities will I remember no more,' doesn't mean that God up in his heaven has forgotten the fact that we are sinners. It is a legal term. When, in the ancient world, a sovereign or a judge *remembered* sin, it meant that he called the whole thing up before his judicial court. That is what 'remembering sin' means. As the widow said to Elijah when he came to her place, and her son eventually died, 'You have come to bring my sin to remembrance, and to call it up for investigation, trial, decision and passing a verdict' (see 1 Kgs 17:18). It is, in that sense, a judicial thing. You will read in the Revelation, for instance, that when great Babylon 'was remembered' before God (16:19 RV), then forthwith her judgments fell.

What God is saying when he says, 'their sins and iniquities I will remember no more,' (and thank God it means this) is that he will never bring up our sins into his court of justice, never bring them before his bar and pronounce the sentence of condemnation. He will never do that. Why not? Because the matter has been settled, and thus our Lord who shall be judge says, 'whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement' (John 5:24). Why not? Because the judgment has already been settled, and we have been justified. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1). It is then, as I take it, a legal term.

### Question three

*Peter talks in 2 Peter 2 of false teachers. In 1 Timothy 4, and also in 2 Timothy 4, Paul names five men who were leaders in false teaching. Were these men members of the local churches of the time? And, if so, could they not have been ex-communicated? Do these passages refer to the same conditions as those in the passages in 2 Peter?*

Well, the answer to the first question: 'could these men not have been ex-communicated', is, of course, they could have been. Perhaps the answer ought to be also, they should have been. But very often it happened that in the early churches there were some utter rogues, and the church was powerless to do anything with them. There was a certain Diotrephes, you remember, who not only wouldn't receive ordinary members and cast them out of the church, but he was for refusing access even to such a one as John the apostle. Now, John the apostle says, 'When I come, I'll deal with him', but it would appear from that context that there wasn't anybody locally who was able so to deal with him (3 John 1:9-10).

Similarly, Paul warns the elders at Ephesus that after his departure, grievous wolves would come. That is, the attacks on the church would arise from the inside (Acts 20:29–30). How long they were allowed to remain inside, we are not told, of course; but the fact of history is that, alas, so very often false teachers and prophets have arisen up and sometimes they have dominated their church and many another church as well.

### Question four

*Thinking of ‘an abundant entrance’, is Noah an example of one such Christian who has this kind of entrance, and Lot the opposite?*

I think I know what the question means. Noah was an exemplary man who was pleasing to God, he was ‘blameless in his generation’ (Gen 6:9). Can you say that, because he had lived an honourable life, in the eternity to come he will have an abundant entrance; but Lot (righteous man though he is declared to be) fell into unfortunate, sad and sorry ways of living towards the end of his life and, therefore, though he is a righteous man who will enter the eternal kingdom, he may not necessarily have an abundant entrance?

I would think that they are two reasonable examples of the kind of thing that Peter is talking about, though we do remember that dear old Noah came a bit unstuck at the end.

You could, if you like, contrast Abraham with Lot. To Abraham there were promises given, and he and Lot set forth on the same pilgrimage, ‘looking for the city that has the foundations’ (see Heb 11:10). Abraham was promised the land and inheritance (seed) and that he would become a blessing. And, eventually, through his trust in God, seed was given to him, and Isaac was born to perpetuate his family and to enjoy the consequent inheritance. Lot chose to go where business dictated, apparently for that reason only, without due consideration of the wickedness of the cities to which, for the sake of business, he was taking his family. It would appear that his testimony in the city amounted to very little in the end. His daughters married men who perished. His wife lost her life looking back longingly to Sodom, even when the flames of God’s judgment were upon it. Lot escaped to his cave and, in a desperate attempt now to keep his family going, his daughters resorted to methods that had better be left undescribed. It was a sorry exhibition of the flesh, if ever there was one. Moab was his son and simultaneously his grandson. One cannot help thinking that Lot forms an example of what Scripture talks about, of people who, because they are saved, will never be lost but who could find at last that their works are burned up. They suffer loss, though they themselves are saved, yet so as by fire (see 1 Cor 3:15).

### Question five

*Can you comment on 1 Corinthians 10:13 which says that, ‘God is faithful and will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will, with a temptation, make also the way of escape,’ (or, as some versions in English translate it, ‘that you may be able to endure it’)? If you escape the temptation, then you don’t bear it. What can the verse mean when it talks about making an escape from it so that you can bear it, because if you manage to get out, you don’t bear it?*

And I see the point of the question. Some people, of course, would want to say that the translation here given should be otherwise. I, myself, accept it for the moment as it stands. I think that what Paul is saying is that God puts us through trial, but before we enter the trial he has measured how much we can stand. On his part, he is faithful. He will not permit us to be tested beyond our point of endurance. When that point of endurance is reached, God, in his faithfulness, promises that the pressure of the temptations will be removed. There will be a way out of it so that now we can see that we have borne the temptation to its end, and not broken down under it but have been able to bear it.

Why have we been able to bear it? Because God didn't allow it to go beyond the point where it would have been impossible for us to bear it, in that sense. Whereas if God had allowed it to go on further we would have broken down under it. He makes the way out, therefore, so that we can, if we will, bear it while it lasts.

You say, 'But not all Christians do bear it. Some of us break down.'

We do, alas. But then this verse suggests to me that, if we do break down, then we can't say, 'Oh, but that's not fair of God. God gave me a test that was far too big. I couldn't have been expected to bear that.'

Oh, yes, you could. If God allows it, he has measured it, and we could bear it. That is not to say that we always do. Sometimes we break down so very soon. That must be regarded as our fault. There is, of course, mercy for those that fall.

### Question six

*Is there significance that there is a change from 'prophets' to 'false teachers' in 2 Peter 2:1? Does this suggest that the prophetic gift, in the New Testament churches, had ceased?*

The question is observing, presumably, that Peter says in 2:1 that in Old Testament days, false prophets arose among the people. And then he adds, 'as among you,' (in New Testament times) 'there will be false teachers'. And my questioner asks, 'Is there significance that there is a change from 'prophets' to 'false teachers'? Does this suggest that the prophetic gift, in the New Testament churches, had ceased?

I'm not so sure that it indicates that by this time the prophetic gift had ceased, but I suspect that by this time, you were arriving at a point, as Jude subsequently puts it, when the believers realized that 'the faith' had now been delivered for the saints; they had the revelation of God, and that hereafter nothing further would be added to the faith. That is what Jude appears to be saying as far as I read him in his short epistle. We are to 'contend for *the faith*' that has been, once and for all, handed over to the saints (v. 3).

That does not seem to me to suggest that all the functions of prophecy have thereby ceased, but its function of making known new doctrine, yes, by this time, if not ceased, was coming towards its end.

Now let's turn to a different set of questions completely. Most of them have reference to Genesis 5-9 and the story of the flood. Several of the questions deal with the same thing, namely Genesis 6:2. Let's read verses 1-2.

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.

### Question seven

*Who are these sons of God in Genesis 6:1–2? Please explain the meaning and significance of the sons of God taking wives. Who were they?*

Now, this is a matter, for one reason or another, that interests believers of all shapes, sizes, ages, and nationalities. If there is one verse more than another that I've been asked to comment upon in my small experience in many different countries, it is this one. And why shouldn't it excite people's interest? It is there. It's a poor job if we weren't interested in what Scripture talks of.

The questioner probably knows that Christian people hold widely different interpretations of this verse. And, who knows, the questioner may have put the question just to find out, 'What will this babler say upon this topic?' One more curiosity to put into his theological museum; I don't know.

The views divide over this question: were these 'sons of God' angels, spirit beings; or were they some branch of the human family?

You say, 'Why should anybody ever think they were angels?'

Why, because normally, in the Hebrew Old Testament, the term 'sons of God', *bene elohim*, is the term used for angels. You'll find it so used, for instance, in the first chapter of the book of Job.

Now there was a day when *the sons of God* came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. (1:6)

*Bene elohim* is a Hebrew phrase for angels, and therefore you might think that that settles the matter. But many have found difficulty here because Genesis 6:2 says that these sons of God saw that the daughters of men were attractive and took wives from among them. And people have said, 'How could angels possibly do any such thing? Does not our Lord tell us that angels cannot marry?'

Well, no, he doesn't. Actually, what he tells us is that they *don't* marry, neither are they given in marriage.

And Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels . . . (Luke 20:34–36)

Therefore, many people have felt that that verse means that angels can't marry (and certainly can't marry humans) and that, therefore, Genesis 6:2 cannot mean that spirit beings came and married human women. In fact, that great, notable and famous expositor, Campbell Morgan

said that if there was one thing Genesis 6:2 could not mean, it is that it could not be referring to angels.<sup>15</sup> And many feel likewise convicted of that same position.

Who were 'the sons of God' then, according to them? Well, there have been a variety of explanations. Perhaps the most common one has been that these sons of God were the godly line of Seth, that is, men that descended from the patriarch, Seth, and formed a godly line leading up to people like Enoch and Noah, and so forth and so on. And so what Genesis 6:2 is saying is that this godly line of Seth, having maintained a noble, godly behaviour for some many centuries, alas, in the end fell and went astray, and married the ungodly. So that is explanation number one.

There are others who hold that there were men and women before Adam, pre-Adamite man. They would be inclined to say that this means that true human beings went and had union with a sort of pre-Adamite man.

Well, that explanation convinces many a very serious and competent mind. It is not a view I share. All I propose to do now is to tell you why I don't share it. I don't share it because, number one, it seems to me to be impossible to get it out of the meaning of the Hebrew.

At this point, perhaps, the question itself may give us an opportunity just to reinforce in our thinking the basic terms of this passage of Genesis. Let's go back to chapter 5:1, which says, 'This is the book of the generations of Adam.'

'Adam', as I said before, was the name of the first man, his personal name, like yours is 'Tom' or 'Billy'. But, again, *adam* in Hebrew is more than that. It is a word meaning 'man', and it is used in that sense in verse 2: 'Male and female he created them, and blessed them and called their name Adam', that is, 'Man'. Here he does not call them 'Adam and Eve' but 'man', for here is the generic term 'man', as distinct from 'monkey'. It means 'human being', if you like. He called their name 'human being'. Now, notice the word. It is, of course, singular.

With that in mind, you come across to 6:1. Many English versions read, 'It came to pass when *men* began to multiply,' but that is not what the Hebrew says. The Hebrew says simply, 'It came to pass when *man* began to multiply.' He is still thinking generically of this new creature, man. So, if you like, 'when human beings began to multiply on the face of the ground and daughters were born, that the sons of God saw these daughters . . .' not of men, please, no. It does not say that 'the sons of God saw some daughters of some men', but 'sons of God saw daughters of *man*'. That, of course, is straight Hebrew for human females. And you will see that the writer goes on to retain that idea of 'man'.

The LORD said, 'My spirit shall not [always] abide in man'. (v. 3)

It does not say, 'in men' but 'in man'.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man . . . (v. 5)

I will blot out man whom I have created. (v. 7)

We are thinking of the race, we are thinking of the genus: man, as distinct from animal or angel. Because that is the sense in which the term is used, I suggest to you that in verse 2, the

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<sup>15</sup> See the section on 'Angels' in G. Campbell Morgan's book *The Teaching of Christ*.

only way we can take that Hebrew is simply to allow it to mean what it means all the rest of the way through the chapter. ‘Sons of *God*’ are put in opposition to ‘daughters of *man*’. Daughters of man, therefore, are human females. That would imply that the term ‘sons of God’ are spirit beings—angels, and so of a different genus.

If you say, ‘How could that be when our Lord says that angels, spirit beings, cannot marry?’

Well, our Lord doesn’t actually say that, does he? He says they *don’t*. And perhaps in such obscure matters as these, we ought to be careful to remain exactly according to what our Lord says and not necessarily go beyond it. He says that angels don’t. Certainly, they normally don’t.

Jude, the sister epistle to 2 Peter, seems to throw light upon this matter somewhat, doesn’t he? He says,

Angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation. (1:6 RV)

What does he mean by *habitation*? Maybe he is talking of their general sphere. You may compare the word he uses (if you know a little bit of your Greek) with the word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:1. Speaking of believers, he says that when we go home to heaven, we have ‘a *house* not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ Paul is referring to that spiritual body that we shall have there. Here Jude says that these angels did not keep their ‘house’, their ‘habitation’. And he compares what they did then: ‘just as Sodom and Gomorrah’ (Jude 1:7). What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? Well, they went after strange flesh. There was a perversion in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. What these angels did was even as Sodom and Gomorrah. It was, in some sense, a perversion of their original state and function.

More than that, I would not say. I leave it there. I merely tell you the reasons why I hold my own view.

## Question eight

*Does Genesis 9:6 still apply?*

As we saw, this verse is concerned with the death penalty.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Jews of the old world took it that these commandments, being addressed to Noah, were to be regarded as commandments for all mankind, and not just specifically for the Jewish people.

If we ask what view does the New Testament take of this, well, as far as I know, the New Testament consents with the fact that the governor, king, ruler or judge is appointed by God.<sup>16</sup> He is God’s servant, at some level at any rate, and he bears the sword for the execution of justice. I know nowhere in the New Testament where that is denounced as being against Christian teaching.

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<sup>16</sup> See Rom 13, for example.



People will say, 'But doesn't the new covenant repeal or alter God's command in Genesis 9:6?'

Well, that would be a big story. Suffice it to say that, as far as I know, the new covenant hasn't really got anything to do with Genesis 9:6. The new covenant is new because it is different from the old covenant. The old covenant was the covenant that God made with the house of Israel as a national theocracy. The new covenant is made with us today and, so far as it is made with us today, it is made with the believers; with the church, if you like. The church is not a political theocracy. The church does not have magistrates. I don't myself quite see how the new covenant would be meant to apply to the world outside anyway. It is not made with them. It is made with believers in the Lord Jesus so, in that sense, I don't think the new covenant perhaps has any real bearing on the topic.

What does bear on it, perhaps, is our Lord's word to the woman who was taken in adultery. She was brought before our Lord, and she possibly had already been condemned. According to Jewish law, the sentence would have been death by stoning. Only, at that stage in Judaism, the death penalty was not normally carried out. The question they were putting to our Lord, presumably, was, 'Should the sentence be carried out?' Our Lord, in replying, 'Neither do I condemn you; I refrain from carrying out that sentence', did not deny the sentence was just. He indicated that he, personally, had no intention of carrying it out (see John 8:1–11).

If you ask why that is, I suspect you will have to trace that to the ministry of our Lord: 'I did not come to judge the world' (John 12:47). One day he will (Acts 17:30–31). When a certain man from the crowd appealed to him to intervene in a civil dispute our Lord declined.

Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'

But he said to him, 'Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?' (Luke 12:13–14)

It was not in our Lord's ministry to take up, in this world, a judicial post or execute the judgments of the law, either civil or criminal. And, therefore, I think again our Lord's attitude does not, in that sense, really bear upon the topic of whether a lawfully constituted government should use the death penalty for murder. As far as I know, the New Testament takes it for granted that the civil authority has this power, and rightly uses it. It does not, as I understand it, go on to say that it is a Christian duty, or the part of a Christian *qua* Christian, to pronounce upon these things.

But now our time is more than gone. You have been very patient, and it is your good etiquette and breeding, doubtless, that has restrained you from all sorts of protests. But it was you asking me questions, and I have done my best to answer. Please observe the spirit of intended 'undogmatism' in which I have tried to answer.

## Study Questions

*Questions From These Sessions for Study Groups*

### Seminar One Study Questions

*The Resources for Spiritual Growth*

1. The starting point for progress
  - a. What according to 2 Peter 1:1, do all believers have in common as the basis of progress (1:5)?
  - b. Consider the translations: 'like precious faith' (KJV) and 'faith of equal standing' (ESV). Which translation makes better sense in the context?
  - c. What has 'the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (1:1) got to do with our obtaining faith?
  - d. How were you called to faith and salvation?
    - (1) Through a sense of guilt?
    - (2) Through fear?
    - (3) Through a need or loneliness?
  - e. In 2 Peter 1:3 Peter says that 'he called us by his own glory and virtue' (RV). What does that mean?
2. The provision for progress.
  - a. Do we get the divine nature at our new birth? OR when we reach heaven? OR in the course of our Christian life?
  - b. What does it mean to partake of the divine nature? Do all believers partake of it equally?
  - c. What are the exceeding great and precious promises referred to in 2 Peter 1:4? Name some of them.
  - d. Second Peter 1:3 says that his divine power has given us all things necessary for a godly life. But how does this verse say that these 'all things' become available to us?

## Seminar Two Study Questions

### *The Process and Importance of Spiritual Growth*

1. The process of progress.
  - a. According to 2 Peter 1:5–7 is progress automatic? Or does it depend on a crisis-experience? Or is it a long-drawn-out process?
  - b. Can I myself do anything about it? Or do I have to wait for the Lord to take the initiative?
  - c. Give a brief description, with illustrations if possible, of the seven things that we have to supply.
2. The importance of progress.
  - a. Is it possible to know the Lord Jesus and yet for that knowledge to be ineffective and unproductive?
  - b. In what sense is it possible for a believer to forget the cleansing of his past sins?
  - c. Why do I have to make my calling and election sure? Are those things certain?
  - d. Is 'stumbling' (1:10 RV) the same as sinning? If not, what is it?
  - e. All believers will enter the eternal kingdom. But what does it mean to have the entrance into that kingdom 'richly supplied' (1:11)? Will all believers have this abundant entrance? What does it depend on?

## **Seminar Three Study Questions**

### *The Significance of the Transfiguration*

1. According to Luke 9:27, the transfiguration gives us a glimpse of the kingdom of God. Does that kingdom already exist, or will it begin to exist only when the Lord comes?
2. Where are Moses and Elijah now? Where did Peter go when he 'put off his tabernacle' (2 Pet 1:14 RV)?
3. At 2 Peter 1:15 Peter speaks of his 'departure' or 'decease'. What lesson about 'departure' was he taught at the transfiguration (Luke 9:31, 33)?
4. Mark 9:1 tells us that the transfiguration was a glimpse of the kingdom come with power. One example of power is given us at Mark 9:3. Do you see any connection between this and 2 Peter 1:2-3, 16?
5. What, according to Matthew 16:28, will the Lord Jesus look like when he comes again?
6. Moses died and was buried. Elijah went to heaven without dying. How will we enter the eternal kingdom? (See 1 Cor 15:50-52)
7. At what point, according to Luke 9:33-35, did the voice come out of the cloud? How is that a guarantee of the second coming?

## Seminar Four Study Questions

### *The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture*

1. What do liberal scholars mean by calling the virgin birth and the resurrection *myths*?
2. On what grounds does the apostle assure us that when he speaks of the second coming of Christ, he is not telling us a myth?
3. What does 2 Peter 1:21 tell us about the process of divine inspiration?
4. Do you think that 2 Peter 1:20 is talking about:
  - a. The prophet's own interpretation of his God-given revelation? OR
  - b. Our interpretation of his message?
5. What relevance would either *a.* or *b.* have to the lesson Peter is teaching us in this passage?

## Seminar Five Study Questions

### *The True and False Ways*

1. What is meant by describing Christianity as the 'Way', as in Acts 9:2?
2. Read Matthew 7:13–23 and then discuss the following questions:
  - a. Is it true that in order to be saved all you have to do is to get through the right gate?
  - b. What is meant in this context by a 'gate'?
  - c. What is meant in this context by a 'way'?
  - d. What is the difference in practical terms between the two gates and the two ways?
  - e. What test are we told to apply to a prophet to discover if he is true or false? How well does Peter apply the test in 2 Peter 2?
  - f. What distinguishes a true disciple from a false? Is it the performance of miracles (Matt 7:21–23)?
3. What is meant by 'the way of truth' (2 Peter 2:2) and 'the way of righteousness' (2:21)?
4. What does Peter mean by the phrase 'denying the Master who bought them' (2:1)? He himself denied the Lord once. Was that the same thing?
5. Sum up briefly the chief features of the false teaching taught by the false teachers.

## Seminar Six Study Questions

### *The Lessons to be Learned from the Angels, Noah and Lot*

1. What lesson does Christ draw from the stories of Noah and Lot in Luke 17:26–30?
2. What lesson is drawn from Noah in Hebrews 11:7? Is it simply the same as in Question 1. above?
3. Read 1 Peter 3:20–21 and then discuss the following questions:
  - a. Do you see any similarity between the salvation effected by the ark and baptism?
  - b. What does it mean when it says that baptism is the answer to God made by a good conscience?
4. In 2 Peter 2:3–9 how do the experiences of Noah and Lot demonstrate the fact that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation?
5. Considering the means by which God delivered Noah and Lot out of temptation, do you expect the Lord to use similar means to deliver you out of temptation?
6. Would you see any similarity between Lot's situation as described in Genesis 19:14–24 (especially verse 22) and in 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10?
7. In light of Lot's behaviour after he got out of Sodom, how can Peter refer to him as 'righteous Lot'?
8. The 'angels that sinned' were 'cast down to hell' and there 'reserved unto judgment' (2:4 KJV). Has that judgment taken place yet? (Compare Jude v. 6.)
9. Second Peter 2:9 says that 'the Lord knows how to . . . keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement'. How do you think this warning was meant to apply to the false teachers (see 2:3)?

## Seminar Seven Study Questions

### *The Story of Balaam*

1. What kind of characters were these false teachers?
2. What are the most important differences between man and the animal? In what respect were the false teachers like animals (2:12)?
3. Does it matter what we believe and how we speak about angels and spirits (2:10–11)?
4. Balaam's attempt to curse Israel (Num 22:6–18; 23:19–21).
  - a. On what grounds were Israel secure against all Balaam's attempts to curse them?
  - b. Do we enjoy similar security on similar grounds? Cite one passage from the New Testament that bases our security on the fact that God cannot lie.
  - c. Is it possible to allow the doctrine of eternal security to make us morally careless?
5. Balaam's success in causing Israel to stumble (Num 25:1–9; Rev 2:14).
  - a. Would we today be in danger of the things against which Christ warns in Revelation 2:14?
  - b. What did God do to Israel when they sinned with Moab?
  - c. What will he do to us if we sin in the same way? (See 1 Cor 10:8; 11:30–32.)
  - d. What did God demand Israel to do to Moab according to Numbers 31? Is there any analogy here for us?
6. What was Balaam's motive for his wrongdoing? (See 2 Pet 2:15.) What happened to him in the end? Do you see any connection between 2:15 and 2:13?
7. Do you see any connection between 2:12 and 2:16?



## Seminar Eight Study Questions

### *Moral Apostates*

1. Those who advocate permissiveness promise us freedom (2:19). Christ promises us freedom (John 8:31–32). What is the difference between the two?
2. What consideration shows that the claim of the false teachers is false?
3. The phrase ‘the last state has become worse than the first’ (2:20) seems to be a quotation from our Lord’s words in Luke 11:26.
  - a. What is the meaning of our Lord’s warning in Luke 11:24–26?
  - b. Matthew 12:45 applies the warning to Christ’s contemporaries. Could it apply to people nowadays?
4. Is it possible for someone to be Christianized without being born again? Would you draw a distinction between moral reform and regeneration?
5. Why does a dog return to its vomit, and a sow to wallowing in the mire, but sheep do neither?
6. What relevance does 2 Peter 1:4 have in this connection?
7. Can a believer fall into sin?
8. Does a believer habitually and unrepentantly live in sin?
9. Both Peter and Judas fell. What was the essential difference between them?
10. Why was it better for the people of 2 Peter 2:20–22 not to have known the way of righteousness?
11. How would what we have learned from this chapter affect our preaching of the gospel?

## Seminar Nine Study Questions

### *The Flood in 2 Peter and Genesis*

1. Consider Genesis 5:1 and 9:6:
  - a. What does it mean that man was made in the image of God?
  - b. Was that 'image and likeness' completely destroyed by the fall?
  - c. What does Colossians 3:10 mean?
2. What were the chief spiritual, moral and intellectual sins for which mankind was destroyed at the flood?
3. Consider Genesis 6:3, 12–13; 7:21–22 and then answer the following questions:
  - a. In what different senses does the Bible use the word 'flesh'?
  - b. Why does the perfectly good word 'flesh' come to be used in a bad sense in the New Testament?
4. 'Noah was not saved from the judgment of the flood. In the ark he went through it.' Is this statement true? Does it in any way illustrate the principle on which you have been saved?
5. What assurance did God give Noah and his sons that they would never again experience the judgment of a flood? Has the believer today any corresponding assurance that he will never come into judgment?
6. After their deliverance from the flood, what steps were Noah and his sons expected to take in order to guard 'the image of God' (Gen 9:5–6)?
7. Does our security from the penalty of sin mean that it does not really matter if a believer sins? What do Romans 8:13 and 1 Corinthians 11:27–32 mean?
8. Consider the sin of Noah and his sons (Gen 9:20–25), and then answer the following questions:
  - a. Do you see any similarity between their behaviour and the behaviour advocated by the false teachers in 2 Peter?
  - b. How does the behaviour of Noah and his sons underline the importance of the exhortation given us in 1 Peter 3:20–21; 4:2–3?
9. Do you see any connection between Genesis 8:8–12 and Matthew 3:16–4:1?
10. What, according to the New Testament, happened to Enoch (Gen 5:24)? Will what happened to him ever happen to anybody else?

## Seminar Ten Study Questions

### *Answering the Mockers*

1. What 'words' and 'commandment' do you suppose Peter is referring to in 3:2?
2. Consider the following comment on the titles of Christ in 3:2: 'To deny the second coming of Jesus is to deny Jesus as Saviour' (Michael Green). Say:
  - a. If you agree.
  - b. What the second coming of Christ has to do with salvation.
3. What these days is the principle called to which the objectors appeal in 3:4? How does Peter answer this argument?
4. By what means, according to 3:5, was creation brought into being? Do you see any connection between this verse and:
  - a. Hebrews 11:3;
  - b. Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26?
5. According to 3:5–6, at the flood God used the elements out of which the world was made, to destroy it. Do you think that 3:10–12 indicate the means by which God will destroy the heavens and earth in the future?
6. Consider this comment on 3:7: 'The important thing to grasp is not the means by which God will destroy the heavens and earth, but the purpose that will be served by this destruction.'
  - a. What does this comment mean?
  - b. Do you agree?
7. Where else does the New Testament speak about the events mentioned in 3:7, 10–13?

## Seminar Eleven Study Questions

### *The Significance for Us of the End of the World*

1. Does 2 Peter 3:8 teach that wherever prophecies like Daniel 12:11–12 refer to ‘days’, each day should be taken to mean a thousand years? If not, what, is 3:8 teaching?
2. Why has the Day of the Lord still not come nearly two thousand years after Peter was writing? (3:9, 15).
3. Does the fact that God wishes that all should come to repentance (3:9) mean that everyone will eventually be saved?
4. Second Peter 3:12 should be translated ‘waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God’. How can we hasten the coming of that day?
5. What is it about the new heavens and the new earth that, if I am really looking for them, will affect the way I live (3:11–14)?
6. Can I really hope that the Lord will find me ‘without spot and blameless’ when he comes?
7. Can you quote any passage in Paul’s writings where he says, as 2 Peter 3:15 suggests, that God is longsuffering and would have all men to be saved?
8. Is it possible for a believer to be ‘carried away with the error of the wicked’ (3:17 KJV)? If so, in what ways?
9. What does it mean to ‘fall from your own steadfastness’ (3:17 KJV)?
10. Consider the first half of 2 Peter 3:18. How does its exhortation fit in with the main message of 2 Peter?

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019)** was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.