

George Philip Bible Readings

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THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

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1:1

This epistle was written by Peter from Rome and addressed to the groups of believers in the general area of Asia Minor, possibly in the specific parts not being covered by Paul's ministry. It is clear from Gal. 2:7 that Peter's particular commission was to work among the Jews and it may well be that in Acts 16:6-7 Paul was being restrained from entering into another man's 'territory'. In Rom. 15:20 Paul refers to this principle of working, yet in 1 Cor. 3:4ff he warns against the carnal competition that can too easily result from an over-awareness of *our own* work. Safety lies in recognising that the work, its blessing and increase all belong to God and to God alone. To have our thoughts and desires God-centred is safety and peace, and it was to direct hearts to God and to anchor them in God that Peter wrote to these Christians around the year AD 63. It was in Rome in AD 64, during the rule of Nero, that a great outburst of persecution against the Christians began, but from Peter's references to the state in 2:13-14 it would seem that when this letter was written the danger to the Christians was not from official, organised persecution by the authorities but rather from the pressures and temptations of living the Christian life in the context of godless, secular society. Jesus made it plain to His disciples that they would suffer persecution (John 16:33), and throughout the Acts of the Apostles it is clear that ignorance, misunderstanding, prejudice, vested interests, ambition and rejection of the Gospel all led to persecution for the sake of Jesus' name. In these apostolic times they counted this a privilege (Acts 5:40-42), and Peter, having shared in it, was qualified to speak.

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1:1

There is a wealth of blessing and encouragement in simply considering the name of Peter. It was a name given by Christ (John 1:42) who was not slow, when necessary, to remind Peter of his old name and nature (John 21:15ff). We think of Peter as the man who denied his Lord (Matt. 26:70) and we need to recall also his impetuous enthusiasm that so often made him overreach himself (Matt. 14:28ff); his hasty speech when he was out of his depth spiritually (Matt. 17:4,5); and his deep God-given spiritual perception. He was a man who went through deep waters of testing, failure, discipline and training, and by God's grace became a mighty servant of Christ and the Gospel. He suffered for his faith and became a leader of men in days when it was dangerous to stand for Jesus. He earned the right to speak, counsel and lead. He had to fight against his traditional prejudices (Acts 10:9-16) and his personality weaknesses that tempted him at times to compromise (Gal. 2:11-12). We all need to do this more than we do. It leads to safety and balance. It is this Peter who describes himself now as *an* apostle (not *the* apostle) of Jesus Christ, an authorised agent or representative of Jesus, sent out by Him and always answerable to Him, having no authority except what was given for his specific task. He wrote to the exiles or sojourners of the dispersion. The Jews knew plenty about 'dispersion' and the word signified they were away from their true homeland. Peter emphasises the spiritual truth of this to these Christians and he refers to it later in 1:17; 2:11. What ever their present situation and condition, it was temporary. That is comfort.

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1:1-2

To describe the believers as exiles is only part of the truth. Believers are chosen, destined and sanctified, and in the original order of the Greek words 'chosen' or 'elect' comes first. They, and we, are chosen sojourners. That makes an almighty difference, especially to these churches then whose members were generally drawn from the lower strata of society. Think of how the 'chosen' are spoken of in Eph. 1:3-6 and 1 Cor. 1:26-29. These Christians, so aware of their separation from the world and their unacceptability in it, needed to be told that their election was not accidental but 'according to the foreknowledge of God' in relation to the carrying out of His plan and purpose. In the RSV the words 'chosen and destined' certainly speak of being marked out beforehand in respect of the future, but the AV and NIV rendering, 'chosen (elect) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father', is to be preferred. It is both thrill and comfort to think of God knowing *us*, having *us* eternally in His heart, and choosing us with deliberate intent and having no regrets or after-thoughts regarding His choice. This is how to look at our Christian lives and it imparts immense assurance. It is God who says He has loved us with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), that is, a love that stretches from vanishing point to vanishing point. It cannot be

said of us, as it is said of Christ, that He was with God 'from the beginning' (John 1:1,2; 17:5). But it is said that we were chosen in Christ before the worlds were ever made. Scripture urges us to consider well our own election (2 Pet. 1:10) and glory in it rather than speculate about the election of others.

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1:1-2

Christians are, and must always reckon themselves to be, 'exiles' having here no continuing city (Heb. 13:14). And, since this awareness will increase as the world becomes ever more materialistic and demonic, we must learn to grasp the God-centred and eternal nature of our salvation, which is rooted not in the will of the flesh (John 1:13) but in the will and purpose of God. Peter uses three phrases to portray this salvation in which all three persons of the eternal trinity are actively involved. Whether we speak of individual salvation or of the church, the glorious truth begins in the election, foreknowledge and eternal ordination of the Father (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:28-30). The plan of God takes effect and is executed by the activity of God the Holy Spirit, who brings people to Christ, sets them apart for Christ and makes them like Christ. This is sanctification. The end objective is obedience in newness of life, whereby the sons and daughters of God live to please Him and to do His will, delighting in its every aspect, as our Lord Himself did (Ps. 40:7,8). Called, as we are, to obedience we still stumble and fall and the reference to the blood of Jesus may speak of that continuing cleansing whereby fellowship is restored and maintained (1 John 1:3,7). It may also refer to the blood that seals the people in the covenant of God with all its privileges and responsibilities (Ex. 24:3-8). It may also refer to the believers' free access into God's presence for worship and service (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:19-22).

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1:1-2

These two verses state Peter's theme, which is salvation. It concerns what God has done for us in Christ; it is a salvation ordained by God. Later in v.3ff, he speaks of salvation accomplished; in v.6ff. it is salvation confirmed; in v.10ff. salvation ministered; in v.13ff. salvation applied; in v.18ff. salvation's cost; in v.20ff. salvation's dimension. It is a glorious theme and some at least of Peter's thrill in it stems from the dark hellishness of his own experience in the days between his denial and Christ's appearing to him after the resurrection. But for the grace of God in Jesus Christ, Peter would have been and would have remained a disastrous wreck of a man, destructive rather than constructive. But he had experienced God's love and kindness to sinners. This was grace, rich and free, and it brought peace to his heart. This is the blessing that Peter prayed for for these 'chosen exiles', and what a blessing it is. Read Num. 6:22-27. Would not Peter recall these words and their significance together with Jesus' words in John 14:1,27; 16:33; 20:19-21,26? Peter uses the same words again in 2 Pet. 1:2 and they are found also in Jude 2. The prayer is for an ever increasing, multiplying measure of grace and peace. There are some good things you cannot have too much of.

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1:3-5

These verses must be taken one at a time. Peter was concerned to show the security and glory of salvation before going on to demonstrate how it is brought into evidence and confirmed by trials. Remember that it was Peter's personal catastrophe of denial that persuaded him finally that he could not live without the power of God in his life. When he 'blessed' (praised) God, he used the word 'eulogise', meaning to speak well of, in glowing terms about God. The same 'speaking well of' is used three times in Eph. 1:3, signifying, among other things, that God has spoken well and highly indeed about us in His Son. Note how Peter refers to God, describing Him, not as a Jew might in Old Testament terms as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (which He still is, since God never changes (James 1:17) but as the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Note the apostolic emphasis on 'Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). He is Christ, the Messiah who has come to fulfil the promises and save His people from their sins, and He is Lord, exalted above all, so that every knee must and shall bow (Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 2:5-9). What encouragement this must have been to these Christians facing such rigorous slander and persecution from society. This is something we need to learn. We must think big thoughts about our Saviour. Peter goes on to speak of God's abounding mercy which has come to us through His Son. It

has issued in something quite decisive, revolutionary and irreversible. We have been born again, brought to a new birth in the life of God Himself.

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1:3-5

We may well be familiar with the paraphrase of these verses in the hymn, 'Blest be the everlasting God', a hymn full of grace and glory. The new life through the new birth (John 3:3ff; 2 Pet. 1:3-4) sets us in a totally new position with a living hope, because the life we now have is a life that cannot die. This Peter links with the fact of Christ's resurrection, but not just in the sense that the resurrection broke in on Peter's desolation with the light of hope. In the resurrection of our Lord *we* who believe are raised to newness of life in Him (Rom. 6:4,5). We are raised from the dead and death can no longer tyrannise us (Rom. 6:9-11). It is not simply a matter of forgiveness, great as that is, but of being transferred forever out from under the jurisdiction of sin and Satan into the kingdom, family and life of the Son of God's love (Col. 1:12-14). This is no fictitious life, nor is it weak, limited or uncertain. It is something we now possess by the power of the indwelling Spirit (Eph. 3:14-21) and we must tell ourselves this again and again until we are gloriously persuaded. 'Think what Spirit dwells within you' (H F Lyte). It is the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit of the power of the resurrection, the Spirit who is comforter and encourager (Jn. 14:25,26). Little wonder Peter wants us to speak well of the God who has done such great things for us. If this is salvation, we should indeed rejoice.

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1:3-5

The great salvation that is ours is not just a present possession, it is a future inheritance that is not one whit less sure and secure than what we now have. The guarantees that are built into the gospel are quite staggering, and it is surprising that we are not far more poised and peaceful in daily life than we are. Since the inheritance is ours, and we have the 'lawyer's letter' telling us about it in the gospel, we can start living in the wealth of it. We are to live in the power and blessing of the world to come. Among other things it will train and prepare us for the full expression of our Christian lives in eternity. This inheritance is something we taste now, as well as hope for and look to in the future, and it should have the effect of making us 'heavenly minded' people with something of the same quiet assurance and poise that is seen in people of 'royal' blood. They do not have to make a fuss to establish their status; they are inwardly and serenely sure of it. Our inheritance is imperishable or incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:53ff) and consequently permanent and substantial (2 Cor. 5:1-5). It is undefiled for it cannot be soiled or ravaged by sin from within or without. It is unfading, everlasting fresh, sweet and clean. Think of the amazing words in Rev. 21:1-4,9-14,22-27; 22:1-5. How true it is to say that 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things God has prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. 2:9 AV).

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1:3-5

The inheritance is in God's own hand and therefore out of danger. Its nature has been described in a threefold way (4) and is now spoken of as a 'salvation ready to be revealed' (5). This salvation is also in God's hand as we are in His hand, kept, guarded and garrisoned. It is the security and certainty of it all that Peter is driving home (Rom. 8:35ff; John 10:28). We must never allow anything to shadow or qualify this thought of the final perseverance of the saints. Our salvation is all the work of God from beginning to end. 'Our God is round about us', and the hymn writer's words are confirmed by Zech. 2:5,8,10. The end is as sure as the beginning (Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8; Jude 24-25). But we are instantly and insistently summoned to faith (itself the gift of God - Eph. 2:8), and faith stands its ground over against the most devastating human evidences of death itself (John 11:25-26,40). God's power and human faith are brought together, not in the sense that faith can qualify or diminish God's power, for that would make man stronger than God, and neither salvation nor inheritance would be secure, but in the sense that faith receives its stability from God's power. There is a mystery or tension in holding together God's election and our faith, but we must see it as a paradox of experience and not a brash contradiction. On the one hand we have the sureness of salvation sealed by the indwelling Spirit without whose presence there is nothing at all (Eph. 1:13-14), and on the other we have the costly struggles of experience by

the same Spirit, working out what God has given (Phil. 2:12-13). We triumph in the present because we are sure of the future and look to it (Col. 3:1-4).

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1:6-7

Having given two great expositions of salvation in v.1-2 and 3-5, Peter now gives a very practical, down-to-earth word to the believers in their particular situation of stress. He points out that the fact of their salvation is brought into evidence to themselves and others, and confirmed in their experience, by means of trials and difficulties. It is easy to be confident when everything is 'going for you', and it can be difficult to distinguish believers from unbelievers. It is when circumstances erupt that the inner integrity and disposition of men and women in relation to God are displayed. God does not need the trials to tell Him what is in our hearts. The Lord knows them that are His (2 Tim. 2:19). We need the trials and we have to learn to see them in this light and to recognise them as blessings rather than rebukes; opportunities for faith, rather than occasions for doubt (cf. Rom. 5:3-5 and James 1:2-3). We tend to be too quick to relate our difficulties to our own sins. Granted we do complicate our lives by sin, wandering and disobedience, but the sore difficulties we encounter may very well be related more dynamically to our faithfulness to Jesus, our participation in His service, and our refining and the development of our character. It may well be, as in the case of Job, that our sufferings are more linked to the vast purposes of God and His glory than to our experience at all. Think deeply about what God is doing.

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1:6-7

Note how Peter says we *may* have to suffer and that suffering's duration will be strictly limited. In the AV it says, ' . . . for a season, *if need be*, you are in heaviness . . . '. The decisions always rest with God. Peter insists that trials and struggles will be temporary and of limited duration (1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Cor. 4:17; Ps. 30:1-12). He also makes plain that if trials are necessary, they will be strictly controlled (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 10:13) and will be beneficial (Ps. 119:67,71). Peter is possibly thinking also of the experience of our Lord at the hands of Satan (Lk. 4:13) and we do well to remember we have an enemy who bides his time and always returns to the attack. In Christian life, trial and conflict are inevitable (2 Tim. 3:1ff,10-12; 1 John 3:13; John 15:18-22; 17:14-16), and Peter emphasises here that he is not speaking of inner struggles, battling in the power of the indwelling Christ so that sin will not have dominion (Rom. 6:14), but of undeserved suffering and slander from without. The Bible makes it plain that we are not required to *enjoy* suffering (Heb. 12:11), for that would be indicative of an unhealthy mind and spirit. We are to *endure* hardness (2 Tim. 2:3) and must recognise that the triumph of God's grace in our daily experience will indeed redound to God's glory. At the same time it introduces us to the business of 'enjoying God', for it is those who share the fellowship of His sufferings who share and enjoy His risen power.

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1:8-9

The end of v.7 pointed on to the revelation of Jesus Christ and this in measure seems to postpone the enjoyment of the fruits of suffering. There is a 'not yet' element in salvation and life, for we are saved 'in hope' (Rom. 8:24), but this does not make things any less sure. The word 'revelation' suggests not so much the appearing or coming of someone who has been absent as the unveiling or disclosing of someone who has in fact been there all the time, active, powerful, dominant and controlling. We have not yet seen Him face to face, nor is His full glory yet disclosed to our eyes, but we love Him. And this love is the 'agape' which Jesus spoke of when he questioned Peter in John 21:15, and not just the warm feelings of friendship signified by the word (*philo*) Peter used then. It is the presence, power and purpose of this glorious Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20) that quickens our hearts with love and joy. Though we have not seen, we are blessed, inasmuch as we have believed in Him whom we have not seen (John 20:29). Faith is not dependent on sight. Faith looks to and grasps the invisible (Heb. 11:1-3,13,27; 2 Cor. 5:7) and rejoices in the reality that becomes the dynamic of joy that is altogether beyond expression. Peter seems to speak here of a degree of ecstasy which could be compared to the excitement of Pentecost or to the accusation made against Paul in Acts 26:24-25 or in 2 Cor. 5:13. People even said Jesus was 'beside' Himself (Mk. 3:21). More of this tomorrow.

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1:8-9

When we gather on the Lord's Day, in fellowship with like-minded believers, we should lift up hearts and voices to give expression to our joy and gladness in Christ, which ultimately cannot be expressed. Read the section in the hymn book entitled 'Love and Gratitude', and let your heart thrill to the sweetness and comprehensiveness of the love of Jesus. This is no postponed pleasure but joy now, kindling the heart, moving the deep feelings of the soul and finding both its expression and confirmation in a life of holy obedience. Joy unspeakable or inexpressible is not necessarily demonstrative in an exaggerated sense, nor is it simply the surge and eruption of superficial feelings which can evaporate so quickly, leaving the person jaded and no more yielded to Christ than at the beginning. It is the deep joy of love that knows it can trust itself to its loved one for life, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, success and failure, to work regardless of the cost in pursuit of a glorious objective. The joy that is full of glory is not fictitious, nor is it a performance put on to hide from or to escape from the realities of experience, nor is it a self-induced conditioning to persuade you of your own spirituality. It is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and the by-product of a life that is absorbed in Jesus (Phil. 4:4-7,11-13,19). It is in this joyful disposition of life in Christ that we obtain now (as well as in the end) the salvation of our souls. It is a salvation of the whole personality in which we 'take possession' of ourselves so that we might live for Christ.

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1:10-12

Peter begins here to widen even further the horizons of salvation so that we begin to think of it not so much in individual terms (although it must always be personal) but in a way that spans and comprehends the whole sweep of God's purposes for history. We cannot emphasise too much the unity and continuity of the work of God. It is not a thing of bits and pieces and emergency measures, but one coherent dynamic whole. We all need to widen our horizons, to stand back and view the sweep of redemption history, so that we will be delivered from narrow parochial concepts of God's working. Think of Peter in Luke 9:28-36. He was excited (and frightened) and the sense of the nearness of God so overwhelmed him that he was obsessed with establishing either a memorial to the past or a preservation of the present, as if that one moment was the sum total of God's glorious salvation. But one experience, however exciting, could never be everything, and the extra-ordinary had to fade away so that Peter could be pointed on to the future, which was immeasurably greater than the proud young man realised and which held glory for him far exceeding his then proud ideas of his own spiritual significance. That story of the Transfiguration, with its central emphasis on the Cross binding together the old economy and the new, seems much in Peter's heart here. The work of God's salvation is one work, testified to by all the Scriptures, and centring on the Cross, which has retrospective validity underwriting all the Old Testament sacrifices (Rom. 3:21-26).

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1:10-12

In the mind and heart of God, the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, and therefore right from the beginning of the Old Testament there were indications, promptings, foreshadowings and promises regarding the great day when the Lamb of God would be slain in history (John 1:29). In every age, the prophets searched eagerly as God, progressively and ever more clearly, made known His purpose of salvation and the wide extent of it far beyond Israel to the nations of the world. Start with God's promise to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3), trace through the idea of great David's greater Son, the King who would reign in righteousness and whose name is glorious (Isaiah 9:6-7). Think of Micah's prophecy regarding Bethlehem and the one to come 'whose goings forth were from everlasting' (Micah 5:2 AV). Then range through the New Testament, where Paul speaks of God's plans for the fullness of the time (Eph. 1:10) and the reconstitution of the whole order of creation, which consummation is all bound up with the gathering into full salvation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18ff). How these Old Testament prophets were moved and inspired to search by the Holy Spirit, enquiring as to the nature and work of the One who was to come! Think of Isaiah 53

and the questioning of that chapter in Acts 8:29-35. Their costly ministry had significance far beyond themselves and their own generation.

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1:10-12

Peter is showing suffering Christians that they are in the glorious succession of the prophets, apostles and martyrs. Their experience is all bound up with the sufferings of Christ, the coming of grace to men and women, and the glory that is to come (Phil. 3:7-11ff; Col. 1:24-27; Phil. 1:29). These mighty men and women of faith of olden times were dynamically involved with God's working, yet they died not having received what was promised (Heb. 11:39-40). They did their job well, because when Christ came some were looking for God's promise to be fulfilled (Lk. 2:25ff). Old Simeon was one of that grand succession of faith who recognised not only the faithfulness of God, but also that, having played his part in the developing drama of redemption, he could leave the future to those who would be raised up by God's grace to be His servants. Now, if all these believers lived to serve the future, how much more is this true of us, upon whom the ends of the world, the fulfilment of the ages, have come (1 Cor. 10:11)? We too must live with our eyes on God's far horizons (Rom. 13:11-12) recognising that, as with the people of old, we must enter the kingdom by way of much tribulation (Acts 14:22). Sufferings and glory go together. This is what our Lord's disciples refused to see or accept, and that is why they stumbled when the time of crisis came. We must not make the same mistake but allow the Scriptures, written for our warning and instruction, to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

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1:10-12

These verses are almost inexhaustible, and this discovery should teach us to be diligent students and to search the scriptures instead of just glancing over them. We shall need these lessons Peter is teaching as the days grow darker and we see more persecution. Note how the apostle refers to the activity of the Holy Spirit in what we call preaching. This is not merely a human exercise. Nor is it just instruction or lecturing. When God's glorious Word is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is active in the Word, in the preaching of it, and in the hearers, to accomplish God's ordained purpose. It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21AV). This makes preaching and the necessary praying for an open door of utterance (Eph. 6:18,19; 2 Thess. 3:1; Col. 4:3) the most exciting experience of life. Think of Paul's words in 1 Thess. 2:13 and in 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5, and then think of God's words to Paul concerning Corinth, where at that time there were in fact few converts (Acts 18:9-11). In our work and witness we are engaged with the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, through the Word, in the developing purposes of the Father. We are not on our own, nor are the issues in our hands but in the power of Him who alone grants increase. As is His appointed function, the Spirit sent down from Heaven bears witness to Christ and calls people to Him in faith. It is His work and He does it with thorough competence (John 15:26-27; 16:7-15). Never forget that in the Old Testament the prophets, inspired by the Spirit as they were (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21), nevertheless were 'groping'; but it was the groping of faith which, when it cannot attain to the 'full' answer, is prepared to wait until further light comes.

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1:10-12

We must consider the angels, not concentrating on their various forms and functions, in the service of God and His people, visible and invisible (2 Kings 6:14ff; Zech. 1:8ff; Luke 24:22-24; Matt. 28:1-8), but in relation to the vast depth and dimension of the purposes of salvation. The angels may know more than we do about worshipping in the full light of the glory of God (Isa. 6:1-3), but the glory of salvation worked out 'in man, for man' by the second Adam, who is Christ, is something that they still stoop down to peer into, just as the disciples bent down to gaze into the empty tomb in a mixture of faith and unbelief (John 20:5,11). In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are reminded of the limitation of the angels. The 'world to come' is not under their jurisdiction (Heb. 2:5). This is redeemed man's province, for we are told that we shall judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3), whatever that may mean. Certainly angels are spoken of as ministering servants to the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). How are the eagerly searching angels to learn the full wonder and glory of God's plan of salvation? It will be through us, as Paul says in Eph. 3:7-11. If we only had the eyes to see it (and faith is sight), we would be

thrilled by the awareness of what we are involved in and we would not be nearly so worldly and materialistic. Angels give us a good example.

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1:13-17

The facts of our great salvation urge Peter to give this exhortation to holy Christian living. First he calls us to think of and to marshall the facts of the case rather than waste time dreaming fitfully of 'spiritual' things. Of course we must not be clinically intellectual, for that produces people who are cold and unappealing. But how can we be cold if we have grasped the fact that we are all bound up with the honour of God's name and the development of His purposes? When we really grasp this it is the death-knell to all inferiority complexes and indeed to recurring depression, since God cannot fall, let alone fail. What should discourage us, since God is the God who saves us? Read Psalm 43, especially in the metrical version. How we love to sing it, and with good cause. We must refuse to be browbeaten into defeat by the past (which has been dealt with in the Cross), or by the present, which is but an interim stage in the 'factory' process and progress of grace. Think clearly (with the helmet of salvation keeping your mind - Eph. 6:17; 1 Thess. 5:8); be attentively alive to the truth (Eph. 6:14,17,18; Lk. 12:35-38); let the truth mould your thinking (Rom. 12:1-2); be morally alert in speech and action and be carefully cautious about involvements; and do not be over-confident as Peter had been (Matt. 26:33-35). At the same time go after Christ without reserve.

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1:13-17

There is something gloriously positive about Peter's words. 'Set your hope' with deliberate intent and don't moon around hoping that somehow, in one easy movement or experience, you will become a spiritually minded believer. Set your minds and affections on the things above (Col. 3:1-10) and make it your business to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), because where your treasure is your heart will be also, and your feet will follow very soon. This is why we need to be able to muster the biblical facts of our salvation and to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). This is how we stand in the evil day. If we have not grasped the facts of justification (Rom. 5:1-2), of the divine declaration of a salvation that cannot be reversed (Rom. 8:1,28-34), and of the indwelling Spirit who guarantees our perseverance (Eph. 1:13-14; 3:14-21), then we will never stand in the evil day. But if we set our hope on the grace that is surely coming in manifest glory, then we will give the lie to our treacherous fears and begin to taste the liberty of God which enables us to live for His pleasure and service. But intellectual integrity in respect of competent doctrine is not enough. It must be married to and backed up by competent life in terms of moral obedience. Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). It is as plain as that, and if we are not disposed to do so, are we Christians?

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1:13-17

The motivating forces of human lives are subtle as well as powerful, and are demonic as well as human. Consider well such references as Rom. 12:1-2; 6:17-23; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:8 and I John 2:15-17. Part of the lie of the Devil is to heighten our awareness of the apparent desirability, thrill and satisfaction of former sins, and at the same time to erase from our minds and emotions the remembrance of the desolating price of sin, the remorse, shame, jangled emotions and spiritual jadedness. It is a further lie of the Devil that to deny ourselves what seem to be basic, natural dispositions and inclinations will lead to frustration, inhibition and brokenness of personality and life. The very opposite is true. Apart from the yoke of Christ (which is easy and not burdensome Matt. 11:29,30), all our personality potential will run in the direction of disintegration, because human nature is fallen. This being so, man, by himself, will destroy both himself and his neighbour. But in subjection to Christ, having been born anew by His Spirit (1:23) and being guided now by the objective standards of God's own law rather than by the changing whims of our subjective experience, we head for life. Don't ever sell the healthy life of God for the sickly 'pleasures of sin for a season' (Heb. 11:24-27).

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1:13-17

The standard of character and behaviour is nothing less than the holiness of God Himself, and this is neither unreasonable nor in any instance impossible since the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts and we have been made partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). To be holy means to be true to ourselves as we now are in Christ, and thus to manifest the family likeness of the living God. In God there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), no element of suspicion or injustice (Gen. 18:25), no divergence from truth since He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), and, since there is no variableness or change in Him (Jas. 1:17), He is everlasting love. Thinking of holiness, we have come to speak of love, and love speaks of purity and purity leads us back again to holiness. Since the life of the 'Holy One of Israel' is our life, we are to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), perfect like our Father (Matt. 5:48). Read Col. 3:1-17 with its clear teaching and rigorous challenge, then read 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 with its balanced encouragement and sweet promise. Be holy, show yourself to be holy, members of the family of the King of Kings. 'You shall be holy!' That is God declaring His intention and determination. This is what He saved His people for - to make them holy and to be their God (Lev. 11:45). It may not yet appear to be so, for we have a long way to go, but when His work is ended, He will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (1 John 3:2; Isa. 53:11).

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1:13-17

Consider well v.17. Privilege brings responsibility. We do not speak much these days about awe, reverence and the fear of the Lord, and we are the losers thereby. Abraham was the close friend of God, yet he always stood in awe of his privilege, as is clear from his words in Genesis 18:27. Think of how our Lord spoke in John 17:11,25 of His 'holy Father' and 'righteous Father'. In Hebrews we read of 'strong crying and tears . . .' (Heb. 5:7). Again in Hebrews 12:5-11, by way of encouragement to battling believers, the Holy Spirit urges us to have a right respect for a heavenly Father. After all, we are travelling home to God and on the way our concern must be to please Him who judges righteously. There is no element of doubt about our salvation, but our works shall be judged. Consider 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 14:13; 22:12. Life has far-reaching complications and issues right into eternity, and we do well to consider not only what we are doing as the years go past but what we are in fact becoming. God is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15) and He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity (Hab. 1:13). To worship God and to serve Him worthily we need to re-learn the fear of the Lord which is the beginning and the foundation of wisdom (Prov. 1:7).

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1:18-20

Another reason for an attitude of godly reverence is found in the cost of our salvation. This is something Israel was always taught to remember (Ex. 13: 3-10). and it is a healthy attitude in life. We need to remember what we were and the kind of life that was ours before God, in Christ, redeemed us. It was a great and gracious salvation for, although we may have been miserable, as Israel was in slavery to Egypt, we had neither the inclination nor the ability to save ourselves. Peter here speaks of redemption, being bought out of slavery and being set free by the paying of the ransom price. Think of Jesus' words in Mark 10:45. The price paid can never be expressed in terms of material wealth. It was by the precious blood of a life without inherent flaw or external defilement, laid down by way of sacrifice. This life of moral and spiritual integrity and perfection, totally pleasing to God in every way, not simply by the absence of sin but by the presence of absolute righteousness in every way that God desired, was not liable to be forfeited for its *own* sin. It had none, and therefore could be offered to atone for, to pay the price of, the sins of others. The righteous died for the unrighteous, to bring us to God (3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Isa. 53:4-6,10-11). This sacrificial death is to be seen not simply as an example of great love but as substitutionary and redemptive. It did something objectively. It paid the price of sin and set the prisoners free.

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1:18-20

Peter is concerned in v.20 to bring home firmly to our minds and hearts that God's great work of salvation was not in any sense a stop-gap emergency plan, hurried into operation when God was suddenly confronted by the fact of human sin and disobedience. The disastrous fall of man in the Garden of Eden (and the fall of the angels

that lay behind it - where else did Lucifer come from?) did not take God by surprise. He not only foresaw it, He was ready for it. It was clear in the mind and heart of God, before the worlds were ever brought into being, how and by whom He would work redemption. This is something of tremendous practical importance, especially when evil surges around us, seemingly having taken the initiative and is 'hell-bent' on destroying the church of Christ. The gates of hell *shall not* prevail (Matt. 16:18). How could they in the light of the determinative sweep of God's plan as outlined in Eph. 1:3-14; cf. Acts 2:23-24? This great plan of God was made manifest, brought out into open operation in history at the 'end of times', in 'these last days', 'when the fullness of the time had come' (Heb. 1:1-3; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 9:26). In this light we should consider and thrill to the deliberateness we see in Jesus as He made His way to the Cross. He was not trapped into death but gave Himself freely when the time was fully come (Lk. 9:51; John 12: 23,27; 13:1; Lk. 22:53). When our Lord declared from the Cross that all was finished He was stating the fact that all that had been foreshadowed right through the Old Testament had now been fulfilled in the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:6). God's eternal counsel had been worked out in history by God's Man.

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1:21

In the RSV this verse stands by itself but in the AV it runs on from the previous verse and reads, you who by Him do believe in God that raised him from the dead. This latter rendering emphasises the matter of faith, from which, of course, stems our confidence in God, the God who raised Christ from the dead and gave Him glory, the 'full bodily and heavenly glory destined for humanity' (Stibbs). Note also the emphasis on faith *through* Christ. Man cannot comprehend God, whose greatness and glory are far beyond his capacity. And, if man tries to grasp God apart from the Mediator, who is Christ, he will inevitably end up in speculation which becomes imagination, which leads to distortion. It is Christ alone who reveals God, who alone brings God near, who alone brings us near to God so that, assured of acceptance for Christ's sake, we can come boldly (Heb. 4:16) and at the same time rejoice in our sure hope of glory (Rom. 5:2; 8:16-21). Note how securely Peter binds faith to the fact of Christ's resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19), and we recall just how much the fact of the resurrection transformed Peter's own experience from darkness to light. Even after his denial he still believed in God but his heart had no peace nor his life power until the risen Saviour sent for him (Mk. 16:7). It may be that here Peter is really urging these believers to cope with their trials by 'taking it to the Lord in prayer', assuring them that in Christ they have access to the great Father of glory (Eph. 3:12-13; Heb. 4:14-16). This is indeed confidence and hope.

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1:22

Peter is intensely practical. There is no place in his thinking for a salvation that is not securely married to obedience (2,22), which in turn is manifested in love for others (John 8:31; 13:35; 14:15; 15:1-11). The faith that brings cleansing and purification and its consequent liberation into newness of life is spoken of as obeying the truth. It is not an empty beliefism. It is not the 'making of a decision' that authenticates conversion but obedience to God. Now, if salvation has to do with responding to the truth, then the essence of evangelism is the presentation, proclamation and explanation of that truth, and not just an appealing for decisions. It is the work of the Spirit alone to convict and convert (John 16:8), and, since He is much more competent and accurate than we are in methods and timing, we must learn to look to Him to do His work. But Peter is not concerned only with the start of salvation but with its expression, a theme which he takes up again in 2 Pet. 1:3-11, where again brotherly affection and love feature as the peak manifestations of grace in the heart. If salvation is all of grace and those who profess salvation are not gracious, not least in the business of good manners and consideration in dealing with others, then there is something very far wrong.

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1:23-25

Having spoken of the effect of the Word of truth in terms of purifying (cf. Eph. 5:26; Ps. 119:9) Peter now speaks of the dynamic regenerating power of the living and life-giving word of God. In its quickening work it 'gives us both a new nature to express and new relatives - brethren in Christ - towards whom to express it'

(Stibbs). The seed of the Word (Lk. 8:11) is never dead, irrelevant or inactive (Isa. 55:10-11). It is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) which *He* uses as the instrument of bringing to pass God's will. In quoting from Isa. 40:6-8, Peter affirms that God speaks powerfully through His own Word, and that in the preaching of that Word we are involved in an activity that is far more significant than we usually realise. Consider such references as Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 1: 17-18,23,24; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 4:1-5, together with Paul's impassioned appeal for prayer that the Word might go forth unhindered (Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:2-3; 2 Thess. 3:1-2). But it is not only in the realm of regeneration and conversion that we must see the place of the Word of Truth, but also in the whole business of growth in grace, as James 1:21 makes plain, cf. John 17:17. Of course the Word preached has to be met and received with faith (Heb. 4:1,2), and a slothful spirit becomes a great barrier and hindrance to the whole activity of God in terms of this growing in grace (Heb. 5:11-14). What spiritual troubles would be avoided if only Christians would get to grips with their Bibles instead of neglecting them. It would be a good exercise to read each day a section of Psalm 119 to learn what it says about the boon and blessing of Scripture.

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2:1-3

"The new divinely-enabled and divinely-intended life of love, consequent upon being born into God's family as His children, cannot be lived unless attitudes and activities towards our brethren which contradict and frustrate it are decisively renounced. Explicit exhortation is therefore given to put away every form of such anti-social evil, particularly those forms in which it commonly first begins to find expression, i.e. heart attitude and motive, in casual utterance, and in unreal and unworthy participation in outward fellowship" (Stibbs). Therefore, Peter urges the Christians to take decisive action and put away things that are a hindrance. It is not to be assumed that, having been converted, these things will drop away of themselves or that we shall necessarily lose the inclination and appetite for them. This is not to deny that Christ, who gives us new life also gives us new desires and interests. Of course He does! But we are still in the flesh in the sense that we are still living in an alien world and are not yet finally saved. We are to put away (1 Cor. 13:11) and put to death (Rom. 6:11-14; 8:13) all that would rise up to militate against a good and holy Christ-like life. This is sometimes done best by keeping out of the way of things and people that we know from experience will do our Christian lives no good at all (2 Cor. 6:14-7: 1; Rom. 16:17; 1 Pet. 2:11). That is the principle and the negative part. We go on further tomorrow.

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2:1-3

We are to put away certain things as a prelude to and enablement for doing other things. Put away malice, which is ill-will and does harm because it is vicious and unprincipled. Put away guile (AV) (deceit NIV), which is not being straightforward, like those who are proud of being a problem and are willing to absorb unlimited 'help' because they have no intention of being helped, which would be to part with what they see as a valuable 'asset' to gain attention. Put away insincerity or hypocrisy, which acts a part; and envy, which is always concerned as to place, priority and recognition; and slander, which is essentially disparaging gossip, calculating and ruthless, and set on fire of Hell. All these things are natural to unregenerate people but should not be appearing from hearts that are born of God (Gal. 5:19-24). Get that poison out of your system, says Peter, and desire, have a real hunger for, the sincere, unadulterated milk of God's word. Milk is basic food from birth onwards, is easily assimilated and leads to growth. That growth brings its own healthy appetite and makes us ready for the stronger meat of the Word, as we increasingly come to grips with the glorious doctrines of salvation in all their fullness in Christ. Christ is both the milk and the meat. He is in fact everything. Paul spoke sternly in 1 Cor. 3:1-3 to those who were not growing up but were still, after a long time, spiritual juveniles, so preoccupied with their own spirituality that they were falling behind in development of character and availability for service. How important it is that we should handle God's Word rightly (2 Cor. 4:1-2).

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2:4-5

The first words here indicate how totally Peter was centred on Jesus Himself. He is indeed everything (1 98888888+69Cor. 1:30). Peter also presents a very close identification of Christ with His Word. He has already spoken of the 'truth' (1:22), the 'seed' of the abiding Word (1:23), the Gospel (AV 1:25), the 'milk' of the

Word (2:2), and he speaks of tasting the Lord Himself (2:3). No doubt Peter was thinking of Psalm 34, especially v.1-10; cf. Ps. 119:103; Heb. 6:5. There is no doubt at all that the more we seek after Christ, the more we will desire and delight in His Word; and the more we delve into the limitless treasures of the Word, the more we will learn Christ and desire Him. It is not surprising therefore that at the heart of much backsliding there is found neglect of the Bible and prayer. If we do not come to Christ in His Word, and if we do not speak to Him in prayer, is it surprising that our relationship to Him and our fellowship with Him wither? Peter never forgot the amazing kindness he himself tasted at the hand of Jesus who turned and looked on him with love in the very moment of his failure (Luke 22:61). Read Psalm 27, especially v.13 (AV) - 'I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.' Having once tasted that the Lord is indeed good and nothing but good to His people (Ps. 73:1), how can anyone ever go back from Him?

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2:4-5

Peter now speaks of Christ as the rock, the living stone (Matt. 7:24-25; 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Cor. 3:11; cf. Eph. 2:20). This imparts something gloriously solid and secure to Christian life. It is not to be thought of as a precarious thing at the mercy of every wind and storm, whatever people may think and say. Peter had made it very plain in his preaching at Pentecost that God had contradicted human assessment and verdict concerning Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:22-24). Now he goes on to make plain that the church of Jesus Christ is not a building of stone and lime in any given, localised situation, but a spiritual temple built of living stones grounded on and held together by Christ Himself. That is why we must come to Him, for there is no other way (John 14:6; Acts 4:11-12). Of course, as Jesus made plain, no one can come except the Father draws him (John 6:44). The picture is that of being drawn as by a magnet. Think of the hymn by Doddridge: 'He drew me and I followed on, charmed to confess the voice divine'. We are drawn to a living stone and being magnetised (spiritually speaking) along with others are held together in a unity. This is the church. Life is imparted by contact with the living stone, Himself alive from the dead and a life-giving spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The whole spiritual structure is held together by central power. Illustration and language are both insufficient to portray the full truth and that is why we must take time to study carefully.

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2:4-5

In Scripture many different and complementary illustrations are used to portray the glory and wonder of the church. There is the thought of Master and disciples (Matt. 11:1); Shepherd and flock (John 10:1-16); Vine and branches ((John 15:1-5); Body and members (1 Cor. 12:12ff); Bridegroom and bride (Rev. 21:2); King and people (John 18:36-37); Building and stones, as in these verses, together with the various descriptions we come to later in v.9. The picture of a building of living stones growing into a spiritual house is a wonderful one and emphasises constant life and growth, delivering us from thoughts and attitudes of stagnation. It also gives tremendous importance to the individual, not in isolation, but in relation to every other believer (Eph. 2:19-22; 4:15-16). Keep in mind that the word used for stones is 'lithos' and signifies prepared and polished stones rather than rough-hewn chunks of rock right out of the quarry (Isa. 51:1). We may not have been much use to man or God when we were first converted to Christ, but, having come to Him, He set to work to make us polished stones ready and fitted to take our appointed place in God's building. That explains many of the sore and baffling experiences that we go through. There are many rough corners to be knocked off, and as they are dealt with we begin to 'fit in' and that is the beginning of fellowship and service. We need to consider often the purpose, skill and perseverance of the great Potter in Jer. 18:1-4.

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2:4-5

'Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and corner-stone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious,
Binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever,

And her confidence alone.' (Neale)

Peter refers later (6) to the high value of Christ set by the Father and to the significant and pre-eminent place He holds in the economy of redemption (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:9-10). Here he simply contrasts Christ's rejection by the Jews with the reception accorded Him by those who had believed. What an almighty and eternal distinction there is between faith and unbelief! Little wonder they are always locked in combat. But look at the glorious privilege of the life of the believer. We are not only made into a spiritual house, we are the holy priesthood who offer spiritual worship. Christ alone is the Great High Priest, but we in Him and under His command, jurisdiction, guidance and enabling enter God's near presence to engage in holy service. We are both set apart (think of the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-4, and of Paul's further exposition of this in Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:4; cf. Jer. 1:4-5) and we are washed clean so that we can be fit vessels for the great Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21). This we are both individually and corporately, and the sacrifices we offer are neither ceremonial nor sacrificial in the atoning sense, but spiritual and moral. The nature and range of such sacrifices is seen in references such as Ps. 50:14; 51:15-17; 102:21-22; 141:1-2; Mic. 6:6-8; Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15-16.

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2:6-8

Speaking of Christ, Peter describes Him as the chosen and precious corner-stone. These words are indicative of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and of the pride and love of the Father for the Son in eternity and in time. Think of the testimony of both Father and Son in such references as Matt. 3:17; Acts 2:32-36; Phil. 2:9-11; Lk. 2:49; John 17:1-5; Ps. 40:7-8. Here Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16 where the chosen one is both foundation-stone and head corner-stone, and he emphasises the exaltation of Christ rather than His humiliation. This is something we need to remind ourselves of often. It is from the throne that Christ is head over all things for the good and blessing of the church (Eph. 1:21-23). In the quotation in Isaiah, faith is set over against haste (AV) or being dismayed (NIV) and this is a basic lesson to learn. We all tend to be in too much of a hurry *and*, in expecting too much to happen too soon (sooner than the slow sureness of God intends), we undermine our confidence and become prey to fears and disappointments, neither of which are necessary. Think of the long generations of preparation in the Old Testament until the fulness of God's time arrived (Gal. 4:4). Never forget that any wise builder will take much time in preparing and laying foundations and will be slower to produce results for show than the 'jerry-builders'. Peter sets faith over against being put to shame, perhaps in the sense of feeling 'you have backed a loser'. It is not so and can never be so for those who put their trust in the unfailing God.

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2:6-8

In the light of the truth spoken of yesterday it is not surprising to find Peter now speaking of the preciousness of Christ to those who believe. He is expressing the same feeling as Paul, who said he was proud of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:12). The longer you keep company with Jesus, the more you discover the treasures of the riches of grace, the satisfaction of His company, and the confidence of the sure purposes of God in and through Him (Rom. 8:28ff). So precious does He become that it is virtually impossible to conceive of life without Him, and you cannot imagine deliberately choosing to go into the future without Him. But there are those who do just that. To them, who believe not, Christ is rejected in His preciousness, His person, and His significance. Think of the blatant mockery of unbelief in Luke 23:35. These Christ-rejecting men were so sure that they, and only they, were the chosen people of God. But they were wrong. The very fact that they refused Christ marked them out as having no part at all with the Father (John 8:42-47) and as being destined for judgment. Christ, once revealed, stands inescapably in the way of those who refuse to believe. This message, together with the solemn and difficult words at the end of v.8, must have been a great source of comfort and encouragement to those believers who were beginning to face persecution for Jesus' sake and who may well have been wondering just how much worse things would get. They were thrown back on the Scriptures and reminded of the fact that unbelief has always been a factor in the experience of the church, but this does not unbalance God.

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2:6-8

The whole of v.8, especially the last phrase, is solemn, sobering and searching and can cause much confusion and distress. Remember that Peter here was writing not a logical treatise on systematic theology but a pastoral letter, full of doctrinal truth, to encourage believers who were facing persecution and the pressures of being a believing minority over against a multitude of dogged unbelief. In such a context we have to face the fact that the operation of the Gospel in its proclamation brings to pass judgment as well as salvation (2 Cor. 2:14-17; John 12:44-48). Rampant and radical unbelief is not an unforeseen consequence of the Gospel. It had never been expected that all would believe, and prophecy marked out the fact that people would stumble in unbelief because of disobedience. But Peter says they were destined to this, just as believers were destined for salvation (1 Thess. 5:9; 2 Thess. 2:13). Many find this a hard doctrine to receive, but Peter put it forward by way of encouragement and assurance to believers. It cannot be the doctrine that is defective but our understanding of it that is limited. We are not called to reconcile man's free will (whatever that means we are all conditioned by what we are!) with God's sovereign election. If man's freedom means anything, then God also must be free to bestow His grace gifts on whom He chooses. There are no *rights* accruing to sinner man who, according to Jesus, is condemned already (John 3:18). What Peter seems to be affirming is that the operations of sin and unbelief, plus the activities of Satan, who is the author of sin, are all within the divine control, order and plan. This leaves logical and philosophical questions to stretch the mind (and why not - are we too lazy to think?) but at the same time it anchors our hearts in the God of our salvation.

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2:9-10

Note how clearly Peter now states gloriously positive truth over against the sombre explanation of unbelief. All the terms are taken from the Old Testament and are collective rather than individual. In 1:1-2 Peter has already reminded groups of believers of their oneness with others in the gospel and we need to remember this. We are not a tiny remnant, even though in a given place we may be few in number. We are one with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:1-2) and that includes the church triumphant in Heaven. Christians are a chosen people (Isa. 43:1-7,20-21) and God has no regrets about His choice. We are both a royal priesthood and a holy nation (Ex. 19:1-6). We are kings as well as priests (Rev. 1:6 AV; 5:10 AV), called in Christ to rule as well as worship in relation to the affairs of God. We are a holy nation, called, identified, instructed, blessed and entrusted with God's name, promises and purposes, as Israel had been. But it is a wider nation than Israel, for people from all the nations of the world are in it yet, as the church, we are distinct from all and independent of all, for our citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20). We are a people for God's own possession (Mal. 3:16-17; Titus 2:14). We are reserved and preserved, our value beyond all calculation, and it is God Himself who says so and pledges to keep us (Zech. 2:5,8-12).

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2:9-10

To be a Christian is indeed to have a high and holy calling as we discovered in yesterday's reading (Eph. 1:18; Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 1:9). The nature or objective of this calling is twofold. We are to serve in relation to God (2:5b) and we are to witness in relation to the world (2:9b). This second theme is dealt with by Paul in Eph. 2:7; 3:10, where the witness is extended to principalities and powers, that is, to the realm of angels, fallen and unfallen. Indeed Paul emphasises that in the ages of eternity as well as in the ages of history we are to be 'an everlasting monument to God's free and boundless grace.' We are the shop-window in which the treasures of God's craftsmanship in grace are displayed (Eph. 2:10). Peter gives a slightly different description of the glorious story of what God has done for us. We have been called out of darkness into marvellous light, the light of life itself (John 8:12; 9:5; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Col. 1:12-14; 1 John 1:5-7). Think of Wesley's great words:

'Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,

I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.'

There is something wonderfully healthy and fulfilling about walking in the light with God, out in the open, with nothing to hide and enjoying the sunshine of His smile (Num. 6:22-27)

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2:9-10

Contrasting what once was and what now is can be a very effective means of bringing home to the heart the wonder of salvation. Paul does this in 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 2:1-6 and Peter does the same here in terms of identity and experience. He is recalling the words of Hosea 1:6-10; 2:23, used by Paul in Rom. 9:23-26. Peter speaks to the believers as God spoke to Israel, saying that at one time they were nothing, nonentities, with no identity, standing or clear purpose (Deut. 7:6-7). It was a bleak existence indeed, lost and lonely, with nothing to look forward to as Paul shows so comprehensively in Eph. 2:11-12, going on to show the transformation Christ has worked (Eph. 2:18-22). Little wonder the Psalmist spoke of God as lifting up his head (Ps. 3:3) and restoring to him the dignity of humanity made in the image of God. Isn't it wonderful to be able not only to look others in the face but to look ourselves in the face without shame? This is salvation. Peter adds the emphasis that for a very long time we had not received mercy. Our sins in all their guilt and in all their tyranny and destruction of personality held sway over us. But now this is no more the case, for by the mercy of God sin shall not any more have dominion over us (Rom. 6:14; 8:1). The mercy we have received is not merely forgiveness (which is really the negative side of salvation), it is the total wealth of God in Christ, cf. 1:3ff; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:19; 2:9-10; 2 Pet. 1:3-4. This is life indeed by the mercy of God.

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2:11-12

Having spoken of the manifold mercies of God Peter, like Paul in Rom. 12:1-2, makes a great appeal or exhortation. Do not fail to see the deep affectionate love in the word 'beloved' (AV) a warmer description than 'dear friends'. This is heart speaking to heart. Since you have been richly blessed and wonderfully called, and since here in this world you are and always will be strangers and pilgrims heading for the city of the great king, steer clear of and have nothing to do with anything or everything that would contradict, confuse or hinder that calling. Peter is well qualified to warn people against presumption and over-confidence, for these were the treacherous areas in his own life. It is both healthy and helpful to recognise that we are in fact strangers in this world, which can never be our home. We are non-resident aliens and the Spirit of God within us keeps on reminding us that he is not prepared to settle down here. His home is with the Father and the Son and He urges us on and keeps us right. In this pilgrim life that blessed Spirit both satisfies us, by ever leading us to Christ, and makes us unsatisfied, so that a divine restlessness becomes part of the deep motivation of our lives. We are away from home, but we are not homeless (Heb. 13:14; Phil. 1:19-24; 3:20; 2 Cor. 5:1-9). What we have to do is to live down here as we would if we were in fact up there. That means we have to get the eyes of our hearts fixed on Jesus. He is the one to please and, though we do it for the love of Him who first loved us, there is also detachment and discipline involved.

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2:11-12

To live a worthy Christian life calls for both detachment and discipline. This is not legalism nor is it a business of living in morbid fear lest you do anything that would harm your soul or spoil your witness. It is an honest recognition that some things are good and healthful and other things are nothing but a spiritual drag. It is realism to choose the good and refuse the bad. Some things which are good in themselves may be bad for a certain individual but not for another; and certain good things have to be yielded for a season in the interest of spiritual service (1 Cor. 7:5). But we must be careful with self-discipline lest inadvertently, perhaps by trying to copy another person, we do ourselves harm physically and emotionally as well as spiritually. Always remember that inhibition is not the same as consecration. People read our lives (2 Cor. 3:2) and what they see will either commend Christ to them or repel them from Christ. Men's eyes must be opened in respect of God by the sheer quality of the lives of those who call themselves Christians. If we are right in our hearts it will show in our faces. Inward beauty governs outward seemliness, and that is why it is so important to have right thoughts (Phil.

4:8). It is a true prayer to say, 'Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me'. Peter is obviously thinking here of Jesus' words about letting our light shine (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:14-15). In the RSV the phrase 'maintain good conduct' is really too cold, because the word 'good' (kalos) is the word used to describe the good Shepherd (John 10:11), the honourable name (Jas. 2:7), and the noble stones in Luke 21:5. It is a word that means 'beautiful' or 'bonny'. It is the kind of life that is both attractive and satisfying to look at.

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2:11-12

We must still consider the reaction of unbelieving society to the display of Christ-likeness in all the different areas of life and activity. Just as people in Jesus' generation spoke unjustifiable evil against Him who had no sin, so they will speak evil against us (John 15:18-20). There is no limit to the nastiness that will be levelled against those who show forth the grace and truth of Jesus. This must neither surprise us nor deter us (Matt. 5:11; John 16:33). Now, there is a time for answering back and refuting malicious charges, but there is also a time for keeping silent and allowing the sheer integrity, consistency and continuance of Christian life to silence and put to shame the critics. Of course, this may take years, because prejudice dies hard. This is something we must reckon on in the business of witness and service. Often there seem to be no results of any kind at all and we allow ourselves to be disheartened. This is wrong. We must not assume that the total development of any work of God is committed to us and to our conscious awareness. Granted we have a part to play, large or small, conscious or unconscious, but the outcome may become manifest far away from our locality or even outwith our generation. There are fruits of witness that we will never discover until we get to Heaven. Our witness may seem futile now, but later, what people have seen and heard will be taken up and used by God by His Holy Spirit to work conviction and conversion in the day of visitation, the day when God draws near in power. The day of visitation may of course be a day of judgment, not salvation (Luke 19:44b).

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2:13-17

From this point down to 3:12 the theme is Christian living in relation to others, and the emphasis is on submission rather than rebellion, self-denial rather than self-assertion. If we feel this too much or unjust in an evil world, we are pointed to Jesus (21-23) who had a clear right to protest since His motives were always pure and His life always sinless. He submitted; so must we. Peter challenges us first of all right at the point where we are most likely to rebel, namely in relation to institutional authority. This is a vast subject and needs the related passages in Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; Titus 3:1-3. What we are given are attitudes and principles and not instructions for specific situations, which have to be worked out in terms of faith and obedience. Faith, of course, recognises as a first principle that power belongs exclusively to God, and that the whole progress of the development of history is under His government (Ps. 62:11 AV; Isaiah 9:6,7). Whatever the mysteries, complexities and apparent contradictions of God's sovereign and free providence, the fact remains that He rules, directs and restrains (2 Thess. 2:6-12). Nothing happens outside His control and no power can exist and operate without Him, let alone in spite of Him (Dan. 4:17; Isaiah 45:1-7 - where pagan Cyrus is called the Lord's anointed). We must believe that there is in fact order and government as part of God's total plan. The chaos and agony of history are not without system, control, meaning, purpose and progress. God is on the throne and endures while our little systems have their day and cease to be. This is comfort indeed.

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2:13-17

The reason why we often cannot see that the powers that be are ordained by God is because we fail to recognise that the world is under judgment and therefore there must always be the sombre, unrelieved side to experience. Sin and evil cannot and will not go unpunished. There are natural consequences of wrongdoing; there is divine judgment on wrongdoing in this world and the next; and the institution of government is part of God's present order in history to punish the evil-doer, to restrain the potential evil-doer and to protect those who seek to do good. Punishment is not, as foolish, humanist, God-forgetting do-gooders suggest, a lurch into barbarism. It is a standing with God in His institution of law and order, and it acknowledges that even if just punishment is not administered in this life, it will be in the life to come. There is a judgment seat and it is ultimately the denial of

this spiritual fact that has led to the confusion of thought regarding all forms of punishment and correction, so that now the humanist position is that remedial treatment is the only justifiable way of dealing with the evildoer. But in practice, human nature being what it is, this can lead only to anarchy, as human propensities express themselves to human destruction. 'Natural' man is not a law-abiding creature. It is his nature to exploit and assert. This is why God's law must stand in human experience. Granted there is the law of love in Jesus Christ, but if people will not yield to that law then they must stand under the sanctions of the other law.

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2:13-17

It is God who deals with sin, whether in salvation or in judgment. The remit of government is to deal with crime, which is a narrower field. The duty of the state is to act for the moral as well as the material good of the citizens, and in doing this the state should express or reflect the righteousness of God. But the motivation towards righteousness on the part of secular (or religious) rulers depends to a great extent on public opinion, which in turn is influenced by the spiritual health and vitality of the church of Jesus Christ. When the light of truth fades, it is inevitable that darkness encroaches on the people, and with it comes confusion, lack of standards and absence of objective. This is how the situation would remain in hopeless disintegration if God was dead. This is how it would have been if Jesus had remained in the tomb. Life would have been marked by bondage. We would have been victims of our natures and circumstances, manipulated by the powers of darkness who act with ruthless indifference to the needs, hungers and hopes of our hearts (Eph.2:1-7). This is one reason why we must be deeply concerned at the breakdown of law and order, for it is a symptom of a generation's departure from God's order. There are groups and philosophies working for this very end, but it leads not to freedom as they deceptively claim, but to the law of the jungle and the ruthless horror of animal instinct and passion. It was to deliver us from such hopelessness and to bring us into the kingdom of God's life and love that Jesus died (Col. 1:13).

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2:13-17

It is because we believe in the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can, with calmness of spirit, be subject to human institutions, for they can never bring us under their power. We must not fear those whose ultimate power against us is only to kill the body and despatch us to glory (Matt. 10:28; Phil. 1:19-26). In quietness and confidence we find our strength in God (Isaiah 30:15 AV). Think of Jesus' words in John 19:10-11; Paul's in 1 Cor. 6:1-8; and David's in 2 Sam. 16:5-14. To live under the shadow of the Almighty is peace, rest and liberty (Ps. 91:1; 1 Peter 4:19). The important thing is that we should do what is right by God and at the same time do everything in our power not to give people the occasion and opportunity to misunderstand (1 Thess. 5:22). It is by the sheer quality and integrity of our everyday lives that the slanderers of Christianity are muzzled (put to silence). Preventing people speaking evil of the faith and of the believers is better than giving them opportunity and then getting the better of them in argument. This kind of life needs the detachment that only Christ can give but it will never lead to indifference or indulgence. Prize your freedom and refuse to be brought under any bondage of men or devils (1 Cor. 6:12), but use that freedom to make yourself more and more a servant of Christ. See that you esteem and value everyone, treating people worthily, because they are precious to God. Love not only individual believers but 'the brotherhood', the fellowship of which you are a part because it too is precious to God. Reverence God before whose face life is lived and all secrets are known. Honour those set in authority and refuse to be a precocious rebel with a short-term perspective of life. Remember it is God who raises up and casts down, and He is very competent.

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2:18-20

It is a temptation often yielded to to philosophise and moralise about world issues and to neglect the narrower and more demanding realm of immediate duty. If our Christianity does not operate in our workaday world we have no right to pronounce on wider issues. Politicians, philosophers, economists, humanists and Christian ministers who cannot make their lives, marriages and homes work well and healthily are scarcely the right

people to entrust with national and international affairs. The world of our daily work is *the* area of our witness. Now the Christian may not be the best worker, for he may not have the capacity, but he should be the most Christ-like, dependable and most approachable (Jas. 3:13-18). After all, the Christian does his work to his earthly master as he would do it unto Christ (Col. 3:22-25), and therefore his attitude to his master is one of grace and loyalty. This must be our disposition in all our work; it also applies to that which involves and centres on the house of God. Nothing shoddy, off-hand, careless or irreverent is worthy of the Name we bear. Peter does not attack the institution of slavery, for that would have been tantamount to inciting rebellion and revolution which, *at that time*, almost certainly would have had disastrous results and would not have led to a free and balanced society. Neither revolution nor legislation can bring to society the blessings it needs. It is in the fellowship of faith that both persons and relationships begin to be given their true dignity and it is in this way that the leaven of grace and true humanity begins to permeate society. It has to start somewhere. Why not in us?

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2:18-20

Peter acknowledges that masters may have very different dispositions from each other. Some are considerate and reasonable and others are 'bent', unfair and awkward, not to say dangerous to deal with. He seems to assume that the latter kind will not be found among those who call themselves Christians. This may not be the case. Some Christians, when they are employees, are good witnesses and serve their masters as unto Christ, but if and when they become 'bosses' they lose their considerate humanity and may become indifferent to the well-being of their employees. We need to remember that masters have a responsibility to care as well as to administer. But what Peter urges on the servants (since there were no doubt far more of them in the church than there were masters) is a spirit of persistent loyalty in service whether or not they are treated unjustly. Indeed, mindful of God, they are to be loyal servants especially if they are treated unjustly. This kind of Christian conduct in the industrial and business world would have vast repercussions in our day when antagonism, conflict and entrenchment of attitudes seem to be the norm. A decision to strike for our rights must be prayed into clarity of issue before God *before* action is taken. It is the easiest thing in the world to confuse 'principle' with 'stubbornness'. Note that Peter teaches that when we do wrong it is both just and also to be expected that we should suffer for it. There is no spirit of irresponsibility in these verses. But there is a spirit of realism. The world, being what it is, and unbelief being utterly opposed to faith, it is more than likely that we will often suffer unjustly. We must be ready for it. (Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:10-13; Acts 14:22.)

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2:21

In the previous verse Peter has spoken of having God's approval when we maintain a true spirit of grace and humility towards those who are set over us whether in the church or in the world. A grace-less spirit seems to be a contradiction of salvation by grace. But it is not easy to be Christ-like when we feel we have been dealt with unreasonably and unjustly. Yet this is the standard and pattern to which we are called. This is how it was with Jesus, who suffered the contradiction, the speaking of sinners against Himself (Heb. 12:3). He has left us an example, and part of that example is that He refused to be deflected in any way from doing His Father's will, no matter what people said or did to Him. In like manner we are called, as God's people (2:9), to do the Father's will in situations of difficulty and persecution. It is easy to make the mistake of assuming that because we have been converted we should necessarily change our circumstances and calling. This is not right. In Peter's day slaves were not allowed to hand in their resignations or even request a transfer because their job was unpleasant or their boss unreasonable. What a slave could do, and it was a glorious challenge to Christian service, was to start to glorify God by behaving towards his master and his work as only a Christian would. Read 1 Cor. 7:17-24 and remember that Christians are marked men and women, and the world has a right to expect to see the marks of Christ in our lives (Eph. 2:10 where 'workmanship' is 'poem' or 'masterpiece'). Did not Jesus speak of men seeing our 'good works' and glorifying God (Matt. 5:16)?

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2:21-25

Consider Jesus, not least in the treatment He received from people. There was neither sin nor guile found in Him and therefore there were no just grounds for the animosity, slander and opposition. Yet He suffered, and 'He taught His disciples three things about suffering: first, that He must suffer, because He was the Christ (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47); second, that His suffering was for others, to provide for many the ransom and remission of sins (Matt. 20:28; 26:28); third, that all who would follow Him must similarly be prepared to suffer (Mark 8:34; 10:38,39)' (Stibbs). Now the sufferings we endure for Jesus' sake are related to His sufferings (Col. 1:24), not that they are part of His atoning work, for that was His work alone, but in the sense that we have fellowship with Him in His sufferings. What we go through is not to be understood or interpreted only or primarily in relation to ourselves (whether in terms of our sins or our sanctification), but rather in the sense that our sufferings, like His, are in some way vicarious. That is, we suffer for the sake of others, and in and through the sufferings that come to us because we are faithful to Christ others are led to blessing. All the struggles of Christian life are not meaningless, but redemptive. In a very real and dynamic way we are associated with God's work of redemption in Christ. In Galatians 4:19 Paul speaks of travail (pains of childbirth) that brought them to salvation. He seems to be affirming that there must be a living embodiment of the Cross in the lives of those who witness, before the power of God's salvation is known among men and women. This makes Christian life, with all its battles, a thing of profound significance and challenge.

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2:21-25

Note how much Peter's language here is drawn from Isaiah 53. It is profoundly theological and presents so clearly both the sinlessness of Jesus and the fact of His substitutionary death on the Cross. But it begins with an exhortation to follow an example (21-23). We are to copy meticulously, but not legalistically, this Jesus who had nothing to do with sin; who refused to allow crafty guile to infiltrate His dealings with others; who declined to answer ranting and bickering in their own terms, since that would be to come down to their level in a way that was not honouring to God. Under sustained and repeated provocation He kept silent, and in His sufferings He did not threaten those who did Him to death. He trusted or committed Himself to the God who judges justly. The word 'entrusted' is the word 'delivered up' as used in 1 Cor. 11:23; Matt. 26:14,15; John 19:11,16. It pictures our Lord handing Himself over to God for punishment, as if He were a wrongdoer (2 Cor. 5:21). Our Lord committed Himself and His cause into the hands of the God to be trusted, and this is exactly the pattern we are urged to follow (Rom. 12: 14-21). It may mean death, as it did for Stephen, to name but one of the martyrs, but it is the way the Master went. Do we not sometimes sing that, 'Jesus won the world through shame, and beckons thee His road'? (F.W.Faber)

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2:21-25

The last two verses deserve a series of sermons and even then we would not have plumbed the depth of grace they contain. The Saviour voluntarily took the sinner's place and, as if He were the worst of sinners, He bore the extreme penalty of sin. Of course, since He had no sins of His own to die for, and He knew this to be the case, what He was doing He was doing for others. He committed Himself to God for this purpose, believing that God who judges righteously would accept and vindicate His sacrifice and give to Him the right to forgive those who would believe on His name. But note that Peter introduces a further element to the work of the Cross. It is not merely a judgment on and a putting away of sins in respect of their guilt and condemnation. It is a breaking of the power of sin so that we, having died to sin in Him and with Him, might walk in newness of life and in righteousness (Romans 6:1-14). Men reckoned that He was rejected of God, for the man who so died was under the curse of God (Galatians 3:13). But He bore the curse for us, and He broke the power for us, and we are healed by His wounds. He was willingly hurt and we are healed. Isn't this a marvellous Gospel? Link with the word 'healed' the word 'returned'. Both speak of immense relief and easing of strain and worry. We are no longer out in the desert, lost and lonely, 'sick and helpless and ready to die'. We are home in the safe keeping of the great Shepherd who in person stands guard over us. Read John 10:1-18.

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2:21-25

Because we are Christians and believe certain glorious truths about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and our life, death and resurrection to newness of life in Him and with Him (Rom. 6:1-5), we have a definite, positive and liberating attitude to life in all the complexity and diversity of its experience. Whatever we may feel and however we may be hemmed in, we know that we *are not* and *cannot be* victims. We are conquerors (Rom. 8:37). Because we know we cannot be brought under the power of men or devils, we do not fear, and in consequence we can maintain a detachment from circumstances, while at the same time we accept them and live our lives in them to the glory of God. Although in the past few days we have been considering deep theology, the main theme from 2:11 ff. is that of Christian behaviour. We are given not only the theology of the Cross but the example of Jesus in terms of confident submission to the will and work of the Father. This was His joy and peace, and it must be ours. He delighted in what God had given Him to do (John 12:27; 17:1-5), even though it proved costly in the extreme, even to the point of utter bafflement (Luke 22:39-46; Mark 15:33-34). He made Himself subject to the workings of wicked men because there was an over-ruling providence at work beyond even *His* grasp. We have been called to be subject to institutions of government, however far they may be from ideal, for the same reason that power belongs to God. In like manner we are to be good servants at our work (2:18), however well or badly we are treated, because we accept God's placing in and ordering of life. This same principle applies to personal domestic life and must be considered.

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3:1

There is a realism in Christian thinking that highlights the shallowness and self-centredness of the so-called women's liberation movement. It is not freedom to break out of God's ordained pattern; it is confusion, because we end up trying to be something we were never created to be, are not fitted to be, and can never become in a fulfilling way. When we try to be creator and order providence from *our* standpoint, we produce only confusion. What Peter says here must not be dismissed as copying Paul's "bigotry against women" (an accusation based falsely on 1 Cor. 6), nor is it to be despised as out-of-date Victorian hypocrisy and domination. There have been and still are both bigotry and domination in human relationships, but that is not the point here. But some women need to be careful that they may not in fact be simply fighting with God because they have been born women and not men. They may however be simply objecting to the fact that men do not recognise either their qualities or capacities *simply* because they are women. Peter is speaking in the context of the living faith of Christ's church, and he recognises that often there are more women than men. This may well have to do with a woman's greater readiness to respond to love and to live a sacrificial life in the service of love, whereas men too often are trapped and inhibited by sheer materialistic preoccupation. You can imagine the cost to a woman to be converted to Christ while married to an unbelieving husband. What conflict, tension and separation have to be borne. This is why no believer should ever marry an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14). What is this wife to do? She is to do what pleases God.

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3:1-2

The situation Peter envisages is that of a totally heathen, worldly family in which, so far, only the wife has become a Christian. She will have to face hostility as well as indifference, and the cause of Christ is not likely to be advanced in the home by the wife preaching at the others, especially at her husband, and belabouring the family with Bible truth that they just do not understand. There is a pattern of behaviour based on the principle of submission which our Lord Himself manifested in all His life (Phil. 2:6-8). The fact that the grace of God has invaded the family unit in the salvation of the wife is an encouragement to believe that grace will operate yet more extensively. This means that the true spiritual reaction is one of waiting upon God, not just in prayer but in the whole disposition of life. The subjection or subordination spoken of here is not in any sense a devaluation of the woman. Man and woman are equal in dignity and standing before God (Gal. 3:28), but they are different in function and, if the family unit is to run well, it must have a head. To accept God's order is more creative and profitable than to rebel. And it is God's pattern, as Eph. 5:15-33 and Col. 3:17-24 make plain, and it is full of glorious possibilities as 1 Cor. 7:12-17 teaches. The whole of 1 Cor. 11:1-16 could well be considered here. But note how Peter recognises that when the Word of God enters a human situation its first result may well be to

divide and to bring enmity, as Jesus taught (Matt. 10:34-39). Our Lord's words had made a permanent impression on Peter's thinking.

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3:1-6

When Peter speaks of submission he is not thinking at all of surrender or defeat. Indeed he is being gloriously encouraging and urging the women to look for the conversion of their husbands in spite of the immediate circumstances of their disobedience to and refusal of the Word of God. He has already taught clearly the place of God's Word in the work of salvation (1:22-23; cf. Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Thess. 2:13), and he urges the women here not to limit God in His working, because the Word is presented to men not only by word of mouth but by the speech of a good and godly life. In this way the Word becomes flesh again and dwells among men. But what kind of behaviour is Peter indicating? He begins by warning against a certain kind of dress and adornment which has as its prime objective the attention of men (and perhaps the jealousy of other women). Of course, on the other hand there is a dowdiness of dress and an indifference of manner that is also guaranteed to draw attention to self. It is not right to protest and to say you have no interest in such things. We should have interest because what we are inwardly and how we express ourselves outwardly belong together and are important to God, to our families and friends and to ourselves. Dress, speech and relationships are all things that can either encourage or demoralise our personalities and, consequently, affect our spiritual vitality and usefulness. It would be tragedy indeed if people were put off Jesus by the appearance of Christians, whether by loudness of dress or behaviour or by indifferent untidiness.

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3:1-6

Peter is speaking of hidden beauty that cannot in fact be hidden. Think of how it was with Jesus. He could not be hid (Mark 7:24). Paul speaks of this in 1 Tim. 5:25, and this links with our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount about letting our light shine (Matt. 5:16). We don't have to wave the light about; we just let it be itself. This also is Peter's point. If we are at heart "beautiful" people, God will be immensely pleased with us and people will see grace in our lives and be drawn to Jesus. There is a certain manner of life which is instantly recognised by worldly people as stemming from godly reverence, just as there is a kind of spurious spirituality that repels people because it is so manifestly unreal. The issue here is really godliness, which has to do with living life to please God, so that every aspect of life, dress and behaviour, is related to Him. This does not mean a slavish tyranny in which people wallow in an agony of conscience as to whether or not they should buy some new clothes. It is something far more realistic. It guards against that kind of extravagance which is mere indulgence and at the same time it sets the heart on being the kind of person with whom Jesus would be glad and proud to walk along the highways of life. This applies to single people as well as married ones. A gentle and quiet spirit is quite different from a "hang-dog" appearance and is related to godliness and contentment, which is profit and benefit all along the line (1 Tim. 6:6). These graces which Peter extols are to be expressed in the context of family life, house-keeping and even the kitchen sink, and have a great deal to do with the capacity of a godly woman to make a house into a home. The family of such a woman will indeed rise up and call her blessed. Read Prov. 31:28. In J.B.Phillips' translation the passage in Proverbs , beginning at v.10, reads, "A good wife is a great find".

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3:7

Peter does two things in this verse. He summons Christian men to be truly manly and he relates all relationships to the basic business of prayer in the life of the believer. If the Christian man does not fulfil his calling to be the head of the wife in grace, consideration and dignity (Eph. 5:21-28) he really makes it difficult to the point of impossibility for the woman to take her rightful place in gracious submission. This creates a situation where husband and wife stand over against each other in opposition and hindrance, rather than as "helpmeets". If the man and the woman are not being complementary to each other, encouraging and inspiring each other under the man's spiritual leadership, to be and to become all they are capable of by God's grace, then they are not living as heirs together of the grace of life. The man is indeed the head of the woman but the strong are strong in order to

minister to the weaker (Gal. 6:1-2), and not to be independent, indifferent and ungracious. This issue of personal relationships has far reaching significance in Christian life. If we are wrong, out-of-joint, unbalanced in our attitudes to and our dealings with one another, then our prayers are hindered, or cut into. On the one hand, preoccupation with unbalanced relationships will distract in the sheer business of having time and inclination to pray. On the other hand if we do make time for prayer, most of the time will be taken up with praying about unsatisfactory relationships and in consequence we become more preoccupied with ourselves. Relationships are not sorted out just by praying about them but by action and by a change of attitude and practice.

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3:8

Being heirs together of the grace of life applies to the spiritual family of the church as well as to the domestic situation and Peter urges us to learn how to treat each other with care and respect. Note the sequence of teaching. We are to manifest Christ-like grace and dignity in all our dealings with the state, business life, family, marriage, relationships, thinking and speaking. Let this mind be in you and among you which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1-8). Peter's emphasis on togetherness may stem from a continuing awareness of how much he had owed to the fellowship of others in his own days of distress and failure. It seems from John 20:1-2 that John may in fact have taken Peter to stay with him. That was indeed compassion and care. Peter here urges unity of spirit (Phil. 4:1-3; Eph. 4:1-3,13-16; Rom. 12:16,18; cf. Ps. 133:1). This will never be unless we have the right "mind" and attitude, and these inward dispositions will be manifest in what we generally talk about. Indeed "a man's character is determined and revealed by the things to which he gives his mind" (Stibbs); cf. Rom. 8:5-7; Col. 3:1-3. Sympathy is compassionate understanding whereby in the realm of *feelings* we can share both joy and sorrow. It is possible to say, "I understand" in a way so cold and aloof that it simply crushes the other person. It is also possible to have genuine care and sympathy yet never express it to the person who needs it, although this seems so strange that it indicates a disordered thought pattern. Care must be expressed to the person who needs it. It is not enough to pray for them.

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3:8-9

Unity and sympathy are followed by brotherly love which is a recognition of and a maintaining of the harmony of love, because we are now related to one another in the family of God. Such love is not blind; it is folly to pretend that the members of the family are without fault. To think so would make people impossible to live with and would lead them into a fictitious assessment of their own virtue. But realism need not be harsh and must not be so. We are to show that we have a tender heart and be quick to sense how people are feeling, so that we can come right alongside them. This is what Jesus was like and since we have His Spirit in our hearts we should be growing like Him. This is the least we can be and do for others because of what He has been and done for us (Eph. 4:25-5:2). What a man thinks and how he thinks are very important (Rom. 12:2,3) and that is why Peter exhorts us to be humble-minded like Jesus (Matt. 11:29). We have every reason to be so minded because all we are that is of value is the work and gift of God's grace (1 Cor. 4:6-7). This gentle and genuine spirit of grace must be shown also to those who are against us and critical of us. We must not act on a basis of retaliation (Rom. 12:14; Matt. 5:10-12,43-48). We go much further. We are to bless, or speak well of, those who would speak evilly of us (1 Cor. 4:12). It is easy to revile; it comes naturally to fallen human nature; but it is something which degrades and devalues. There are times when people resolutely refuse every overture of friendship. What do we do then? We must maintain the same attitude of friendship because it is all the more clear that they need it. Their bitterness signifies the depth of their need and their bondage to be far greater than they realise. It is no use telling them for they will not listen. That is why we must learn to pray.

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3:10-12

The attitudes and standards spoken of yesterday call for a real death to self, but today's verses make plain that the issue is life and blessing. This pattern of death and life is what we have been called to and when we live in this way, showing freely to others the grace we have so freely received, then we are blessed indeed. Our Lord's

words in Luke 6:36-38 are worthy of deep consideration, as is the parable of the two debtors in Matt. 18:21 ff. To back up his exhortation Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16. Read the whole Psalm and compare it with Psalm 1, then enlarge your appraisal of life in terms of Ps. 73, where the man of God faces the baffling fact of the prosperity of the wicked. In his epistle Peter has been teaching the believers that their experience in following Christ will be the same as His and that they will meet opposition and persecution (John 15:18-21; Matt. 10:16-31). But those who set themselves to do right and to do good, no matter the cost, will have God on their side, and if God be for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? If you would have a sweet life, guard your tongue which can so easily be set on fire of hell (Jas. 3:5-10). Keep from that kind of talk which is calculated to hurt or to mislead (cf. Ps. 55:21-22). But more, the man who would live in the blessing of God must swerve away from evil and set himself deliberately to do right. There is a time for clearing out from situations, especially when they are producing dis-peace. In it all, remember that God sees (2 Chron. 16:9), God hears, and God is actively taking sides. This is comforting or disturbing, depending on the kind of life we are living.

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3:13-14

Peter recognises that there are those who do evil and who in the providence of God are allowed to continue their wicked works. He may be recalling Jesus' words in Gethsemane when He faced the wicked rabble come to arrest Him (Luke 22:49-53). Peter may also be recalling his own wild swinging of the sword, a reaction of fear rather than faith. In these days he was very aware of the immediate situation with all the appearances of the strength and success of evil. Now he has learned to take a broader and deeper view of life and he speaks to Christians who are soon to face persecution, urging them to maintain a clear distinction between having to suffer and being harmed. Was Peter recalling the words of Jesus in Luke 12:4-7 and John 16:32-33? Paul takes the same attitude to life's hazardous experiences in Romans 8:35-39. The full range of costly and painful experiences will come the way of Christians in the world but none of these things, individually nor all of them together, has the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is glorious news indeed; this is truth you can live and die by. Let not your heart be troubled. Peter has spoken of this theme of suffering for righteousness' sake in 1:6-7, and returns to it again in 4:12ff. Paul, likewise, emphasised this theme of the inevitability of suffering in Acts 14:21-23, for this was the very message he had been given when he was first converted (Acts 9:15-16). Sometimes we make things difficult for ourselves and we unbalance ourselves because we expect a life free of trouble. How could it be so since we are 'chosen to be soldiers in an alien land'?(Havergal)

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3:13-14

In dealing with this theme of the hard life of suffering, we need to remember that there are sufferings which are the common lot of humanity:- sickness, poverty, privation, disappointment and heartbreak. We must be careful in coping with this that we do not try too rigidly to relate specific suffering to specific sins. Jesus corrected the disciples on that matter in John 9:1-3. People said Paul's difficulties were due to secret backsliding and Job's 'friends' were insistent that his troubles must be rooted in his being adrift from God, but they were wrong. There are other sufferings which are inescapable if we are faithful to Christ:- ostracism, criticism, contempt and rejection, to say nothing of abuse and mental and physical cruelty. But there are other miserable and horrible experiences that are self-inflicted and come to us because we are self-centred, unfriendly, dogged and stupid, often setting far too high standards for ourselves and for others. Remember that there is a Devil who always tries to swing us to extremes of attitude and reaction. One of Satan's most common weapons is fear, that gripping panic that can grasp mind and emotion and virtually paralyse us. We must not press Peter's words to extremes, for all who live godly will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:10-13), but at the same time we have the statement in Prov. 16:7. Of course our own disposition helps (Prov. 15:1-4). Peter's counsel is that we should be enthusiasts for what is right. That kind of life tends to carve out a clear path and leaves little time for complications or distractions.

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3:14-16

Peter is greatly exercised by this matter of suffering in the interest of righteousness and insists that the issue is blessing. It is something we will experience and enjoy, not only after the bad spell is over but even in the context of it. The same theme is found in Psalm 23 which speaks of a table of feasting and fellowship and peace in the presence of the enemy. The phrase 'for righteousness' sake' (AV) may apply to our personal progress in righteousness and sanctification, as in Heb. 12:3-11, or to the broad and deep purposes of righteousness and salvation in the world. Whichever application we settle for (why not both?), we can see how differently faith and unbelief regard the sore experiences of life. To faith everything is and must be for good (Rom. 8:28), but to unbelief problems and difficulties are enemies, threats and full of impending disaster. This is the reason why the natural reaction to danger and difficulty is to panic. But we are urged on no account to share that kind of fear. Peter quotes from Isa. 8:12-13 (but read v.9-20). Rumour and speculation are dangerous things and they undermine faith by pressurising God's people to think of and fear situations which *may* come to pass. Get your eyes back on to God the Lord to whom the issues belong (Prov. 4:25; Isa. 26:3-4; Ps. 68:20 AV). Let your heart say again and again, 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. Set the Lord Christ securely and unquestionably on the throne of your heart and life so that He has no competitors (why should He have?) and, no matter the threats of danger or the seductions to compromise, be ready!

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3:14-16

If we are walking in obedience and fellowship with our God and if we are ready for whatever may come, then we will not need to be belligerent in our defence of the faith nor in our dealings with those who would oppose and persecute us. It is insecurity and uncertainty, often linked with a bad conscience, that cause us to be extreme in the things we say. The man who shouts loudest is not necessarily the man who is sure of his ground. But note here that Peter is not speaking of that popular pastime of 'aggressive evangelism' but rather of the defence of the faith. The initiative here comes from those who are antagonistic and this is not surprising, for we have been speaking of faith and grace and quality of Christian life that can neither be hidden nor ignored. When people begin to challenge and to criticise the faith (a more serious thing than criticising *us*, although the two may be connected), we must be ready to give a reasoned explanation of what we believe and where we stand. This is a frequent situation in the New Testament (Acts 24:24-25; 25:13-16; 26:1-3ff, 24-29; Phil. 1:16; 2 Tim. 4:16; Jude 3). But it is not only in face of official challenge that we must be prepared to give an answer but in the daily round of life. This means we must have thought through our Christian position and have a good working grasp of Scripture (Jas. 1:19-22). Mindless Christians are not a good advertisement for the faith (Eph. 5:15-17). People do not want to hear how you *feel* about Jesus but what is true about Him, and these may not be the same.

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3:14-16

Witness is important. It must be competent, as we indicated yesterday. It must be comprehensive (Acts 20:20, 27), dealing with the whole counsel of God (but not all at once!), and reasoned out of the Scriptures in true apostolic pattern (Acts 17:2-3). It must also be gracious, emphasising the hope of the Gospel rather than suggesting that we have in our possession the final truth about every aspect of God and His purposes. It does not help a great deal to suggest that we have all the answers. We don't! There are mysteries in experience that we will never explain here on earth. But the truths of the Gospel are clear and categorical and these must be our prior concern. We must witness 'with meekness and fear, i.e., without arrogance or self-assertion, with due respect and deference towards men, and with a proper awe and reverence before God. For the spirit in which a statement is made may matter with some hearers more than its content. Only if they are attracted (or at least not put off) by the former will they give a proper hearing to the latter.' (Stibbs) This needs a clear conscience and a good life (2:12; 1 Tim. 1:19; Acts 24:16). It is often a sign of a bad conscience when people say, 'I don't care what people think.' Not many of us are able to take the public stand that Samuel did (1 Sam. 12:1-5) or Paul in Acts 24:10-21. There will always be those whose business it is to run down Christians but they can safely be left to God to deal with. It is our business to see to it that they have no real grounds for their slander. Of course the sweet reasonableness spoken of here is not in any sense weakness, rather it is conviction.

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3:17

This is an important verse and should keep us from going looking for trouble, from stirring it up unnecessarily, and from perpetuating it when it could well be subdued and laid to rest. In 1:6 the AV reads '... for a season, if need be . . . temptations'. There is purpose in tribulation and in its timing and we must not expect Christian life to be one long saga of unrelieved difficulty. God remembers our humanity (Ps. 103:14), He will not overload us with trial (1 Cor. 10:13) and His dealings with us are not designed to break our wills or quench our life of faith (Isa. 42:3). At the same time Peter recognises that justice does not always prevail on earth. Stephen was martyred (Acts 7), James was executed although for some mysterious reason at the very same time Peter was just imprisoned. He was miraculously released later (Acts 12:1-5, 10). Some commentators refer the suffering of today's verse to the death penalty coming as the result of the judicial processes which may be referred to in v.15. This may well be the case and Paul was one of those who faced trial and anticipated death as the result (2 Tim. 4:6), although on another occasion he felt sure he would be released (cf. Phil. 1:19). God is not obliged to explain or justify every step He takes. Heaven is the place for explanations. But we can be sure that His will is always good, perfect and acceptable (Rom. 12:1-2). The righteous God will always do what is right (Gen. 18:25) and the outcome of His will will always be good, to benefit those who suffer, to minister to others and to glorify God. Such thoughts lead Peter to consider yet again the suffering and death of the Righteous One, who was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21).

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3:18

This verse introduces a difficult section which runs on to 4:6. Both 3:18 and 4:1 refer to the death of Jesus and each verse introduces a passage of teaching and exhortation. The emphasis throughout seems to be on the link between sufferings and victory and the need to guard against assuming that suffering and afflictions are necessarily a sign of the displeasure of God. This is the note so profoundly expressed in Isa. 53:3-5. People made a wrong assessment of what was going on when Jesus died, as Matt. 27:39-43 makes plain. Today's verse is very closely linked with what has gone before. Peter has been speaking of undeserved sufferings and also has distinguished two kinds of suffering. One has to do with wrongdoing and is to be understood in terms of judgment, but the other has to do with righteousness and with salvation. This is illustrated in the sufferings of Christ, which are both a work of judgment on sin (1 John 2:2) and a work of salvation (Heb. 1:3; 9:26).

Remember that Peter has already spoken of Christ's sufferings in terms of an example to be closely copied by those who follow Him (2:21; cf. Phil. 3:7-11). Keep in mind that here Peter is not primarily stating the doctrine of the atonement, although he does say in basic and categorical terms that Christ died as our substitute. He is giving a word of comfort and encouragement to Christians who are beginning to suffer for their faith. What he says to them is that in the suffering and death of Jesus all that we mean by sins and sin and the whole ramification of the kingdom of sin, including Satan, has been dealt with *once for all*. This means that sin and evil do not call the tune and whatever operations they are allowed, it is under the direction and command of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 13:27; Luke 22:53).

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3:18

At the heart of this verse there are words which declare in unmistakable terms that Jesus' death was one of substitution. He who had no sin (2 Cor. 5:21) stood in the place of the sinner and died to pay the price. 'In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood.' (P. Bliss) He died, the just for the unjust (AV), in order to bring us to God. This highlights the sinner's problem with sin. It is not merely one of guilt that needs taking away (expiation), but also one of wrath and righteous judgment which must be met and paid (propitiation). To be a sinner is to have a past and to be in a situation of profound predicament. The sinful past has separated and alienated us from God (Eph. 2:1-3) and it has brought us under the judgment of God (Rom. 3:9, 19, 23). Christ suffered the banishment from God that is the penalty of sin (Matt. 27:46) and He did it for us. He took what was ours (rejection) and gave us what was His (acceptance). This great work of salvation, which was glorious victory, was won for us through suffering and death. On the human level appearances suggested that God had suffered a great defeat, but in fact, in the very moment of seeming defeat, God completed, consolidated and advanced His glorious work of salvation. It was triumph indeed as Jesus' words

from the Cross proclaimed, 'It is finished'. The fight was over and the battle won. The age-old kingdom and dominion of evil was conquered.

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3:18

The point Peter seems to be applying to his readers is that we have to see our sufferings in the same positive light. The battle is won and the kingdom of evil is thrown down, but the mopping up operations are still going on in the world and that is why we suffer. But we are not on the run. However it may seem, the fact is that the gates of Hell are on the defensive and cannot prevail however furiously they may oppose Christ's church in the short time remaining to them (Rev. 12:12). As Paul said to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:3), we are still here in the flesh, and we walk and work in the context of a fallen world, but we must never think that God is limited by 'flesh' as we are. On the level of the 'flesh' that is mortal, Christ not only suffered but submitted to the ignominy of death, which is the final insult to man made in the image of God. He did not remain dead. When it seemed that death had triumphed, He was quickened in spirit. Death could not hold Him (Acts 2:24). The corn of wheat fell into the ground and the 'shell' died but the 'germ' of life could not be extinguished (John 12:24). In fact death released life. We must not think of the day between the Cross and the Resurrection as something of a limbo of negativeness. God's working in the interest of His saving purposes is no stop-start programme. If it were, we would have neither comfort nor encouragement in our sufferings, for we would be dogged by the thought that they were meaningless and purposeless. What we have to do when hemmed in by sore circumstances and unjust suffering is not only to think of the renewing of the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16), the quickening in spirit, but to remind ourselves of the working of the mighty Spirit of the living God who is not and never can be bound. Jesus spoke about being 'straitened' (Lk. 12:50 AV), 'constrained' (RSV), 'distressed' (NIV), but since His death is 'accomplished' that is no longer the case.

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3:19

The whole Bible insists on keeping the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bound closely together, never the one without the other. The quickening of Christ in the resurrection was the visible testimony to and confirmation of the victory of the Cross. Christ was no longer subject to the limitation of the flesh. God had highly exalted Him and given Him the name to which every knee must bow in Heaven, earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:9-11). This means that there is no realm and no group of beings where the fact of Christ's triumph is not a known fact (Rom. 8:38, 39; Col. 1:16-18; Eph. 1:18-22). The man Christ Jesus in His *bodyly* resurrection is now on the throne. And, with the authority of a conqueror, He went and preached to the spirits in prison. The meaning of this has sometimes been confused by the statement in the Apostles' Creed, 'He descended into hell' and we must try to search out the truth. The 'spirits in prison' are supernatural or angelic beings and not human beings. There is no room here for thinking of a preaching of the gospel to people who have died (cf. Luke 16:19-31). On the other hand we have the reference to 'the spirits of righteous men made perfect' (Heb. 12:23). In 1:10-11 Peter has linked the Cross with the faith of past generations, and in Rom. 3:25 Paul speaks of the retrospective validity of the death of Christ. This links with Luke 9:31 where the two representatives of the old economy, the Law and the Prophets, speak of the '*exodus*' (that is the original word), the 'departure' that Jesus was to accomplish in His Cross. The faith of past generations depended on the death of the Lamb of God validating the Old Testament sacrifices which were but a shadow of the reality to come. Peter may then be thinking of Christ in His victory proclaiming to all past history, 'It is finished'. This gives an interesting but speculative slant to Isa. 25:9.

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3:19

The reference to the spirits in prison being followed by reference to Noah requires us to link together Gen. 6:1-8ff; 2 Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6; and possibly Eph. 4:8-10; although the last reference may be to Christ's descent from the glory of the Father into this world and His lowly life in it. In Isa. 14:4,9-16, behind the taunting address to the King of Babylon, we have reference to Lucifer, Satan, and his being cast down into captivity. What Peter seems to be speaking of are evil spirits, emissaries of Satan and his kingdom, cast down and imprisoned until

the day of judgment. In His death and resurrection Christ entered that prison-house to declare and confirm the judgment of God on evil and at the same time to proclaim that Satan's captives were released (Heb. 2:14, 15). This could be linked with Paul's affirmation in Col. 1:13 that we have been delivered from the jurisdiction of darkness. The thought of angels who rebelled and broke out of their allotted sphere of service can also be linked to the passage in Genesis 6 in which some see the incursion of evil spirits into human life with the consequent production of 'giants'. This we have sometimes referred to in terms of the demonising of society. If this be so then it happened at other times also, for we have the story of Goliath. Satan is always seeking to produce 'big' men to terrorise society and in the Noah story it seems to be done by miraculous 'union' with evil spirits. We may see here the Devil's attempt to copy or counterfeit the virgin birth, a child born of 'the gods' (think of modern science fiction and satanist films). We must be greatly comforted in the thought that the Jesus we have (and who has us) strode mightily through the dark place declaring His victory and evil's judgment.

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3:20

The practical application of yesterday's verse is that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in the evil day we stand on this, that Jesus is stronger than Satan. This would make sense to the people to whom Peter is writing. Now Peter refers to God's long patience before He dealt with evil in the day of Noah, and here again the message is one of practical comfort and encouragement. The situation spoken of in Gen. 6:1-8 was so grim that God regretted having made man and having allowed him such room and opportunity for evil. But the evil is seen as being more than merely human. It had reached such a pitch of carnality (as it has done in our day) that it was manifestly demonic. The amazing thing was the length of time God was prepared to be forbearing in order to give sinners time to repent and to take refuge in the ark before judgment fell. Judgment had been announced by Noah, and his ministry continued throughout the building of the ark. But Noah's person and ministry were both despised and rejected. When the crisis of judgment came he had a mere eight souls as the fruit of one hundred and twenty years of ministry. On the face of it this was manifest failure, but *in fact* the opposite was true because these eight souls were the link or bridge from death to life. Without Noah and his tiny remnant of faith there would have been no future. Peter could well have been saying to these Christians, 'Who knows but that you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this,' (Esther 4:14). But the way of faith is not easy. For Noah it must have been costly beyond measure. But then, 'Jesus won the world through shame and beckons thee His road,' (F W Faber). Read again 2 Pet. 2:4-10; 3:1-14. Theology is very practical.

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3:20

The story of Noah had made a profound impression on Peter and it is a story we should be taking seriously. Our Lord compared the days of Noah with the days immediately prior to the coming of the Son of Man in glory and judgment. What was the world like? Its course was precisely similar to that of the world around us still. They ate; they drank; they married, and were given in marriage. The arts and sciences were richly cultivated. Gigantic engineering and architectural works must have abounded, or it would have been impossible to construct such a marvellous vessel as the Ark. Refinement and civilisation, side by side with abnormal and horrid crimes. The giddy pursuit of pleasure; the eager search for wealth; the lawless gratification of evil propensity; the reckless disregard of the claims of God; the rush of the torrent of evil and unholiness, in spite of the remonstrances and pleadings of the gray-headed preacher for a hundred years. All these are what we see today around us in confused and grievous manifestation,' (F B Meyer). Read Jesus' words in Matt. 24:37-39 together with the passages in 2 Peter mentioned yesterday. There are great issues being worked out before our very eyes and for this reason we must not be dismayed or disheartened. If God is prepared to be longsuffering and to allow evil a great deal of room to operate, it is in order to work both salvation and judgment, which He will do with certainty of method and timing. He knows what He is doing, and we are caught up into the doing of it. This, Peter has already said, is the explanation of our battles.

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3:21

In the previous verse Peter spoke of Noah and his company being saved through water. This could be taken to mean that their way was through deep waters of costly trial (Isa. 43:2) but it seems more likely to refer to the ark being lifted by the waters of judgment. Strictly speaking it was not the water but the ark that saved them, just as it is not baptism but Christ who saves us. More accurately it was the grace of God that saved Noah's family, through faith by which they entered the ark which was God's appointed means of salvation. The water came last, not first. In Noah's case the waters of judgment carried him to new life; the old passed away and all became new (2 Cor. 5:17). Now Peter applies all this to these Christians in their present situation and he reminds them of their baptism when they first confessed Christ. Baptism in itself does not save. How could it, since it is something men do whether in administering or receiving? Baptism is a figure, a picture, saying something very significant about God's salvation, as did the waters of the flood, and the Passover Lamb. Now, just as Noah entered the ark, and as the Jews sheltered under the blood of the lamb slain (Exodus 12:21 ff), at the command of God and in the obedience of faith, so we signify our trust in and obedience to Christ in baptism. We grasp the significance of the whole thing in terms of the past being done away and the new era of life in Christ being started (Rom. 6:1-4ff). Do not be distracted here by questions as to the method of baptism nor by the issue of infant baptism. Peter is not dealing with that theme. He is using baptism as an illustration of something God has done for people in Christ. He is emphasising the transformation of experience that is found in Christ. Something has been done that cannot be undone (Rom. 8:33). Our trust and hope are in God who saves. Read 1 Cor. 10:1-13 and if any would sidetrack into argument about baptism in itself, remember that those who were immersed in the Red Sea died in God's judgment.

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3:21

Note how carefully Peter guards against confidence in the mere outward rite of baptism as if it were something that operated automatically. Just as Christ is livingly present to save in the preaching of the Word, so He is present in the Lord's Supper and in baptism. He is present to be received by faith, but both preaching and sacraments have as their primary emphasis the fact that grace comes first. God has acted for salvation and He calls us to faith. In the Word we believe (Rom. 10:9ff), in the Supper we receive and make Him our very life, and in baptism we submit and declare whose we are and whom we serve. Part of Peter's emphasis on baptism is that he sees it as marking a total break with the past, just as the flood did in the time of Noah. There was no possibility of going back. 'As Noah obtained life through death, when he was buried in the ark just as if in a grave, and among the total ruin of the world he was preserved together with his small family, so today the death which is set forth in baptism is to us an entrance into life, and no salvation can be hoped for, unless we be separated from the world,' (Calvin). Our understanding of this difficult verse is helped if we link the words 'saves you' with 'by the resurrection' and put the rest of the verse in parenthesis. Baptism derives all its significance and efficacy from the death and resurrection of Jesus. The appeal (or answer) of a good conscience refers then to the confidence we have towards God who Himself has justified us and declared us righteous and accepted in His sight. This same confidence is spoken of in Heb. 9:14; 10:22; and it is the kind of encouragement these believers needed.

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3:22

Note how thoroughly Peter is grounding the faith of the Christians in the facts of history and theology. This is very important, especially in times of trial because our 'anchor' must always be outside ourselves. Our hope, comfort and peace do not lie in ourselves but in Christ, who is even now at the right hand of God, with all power made subject to Himself. The emphasis in this verse is not on Christ's heavenly intercession for us, a glorious and reassuring subject (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1), but on the fact that He has taken His rightful place as ruler and governor of all angels, authorities and powers (Col. 1:15-17; Eph. 1:21-23). Why should we ever again fear 'principalities and powers, mustering their unseen array,'? (Elliott) Granted we must watch and pray, but we must not fear for these principalities have been overcome and their defeat made public in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 2:13-15). These are truths we need to remind ourselves of again and again. Let us summarise the main lessons of these difficult verses. (1) Nothing and no-one can undo what God

has done for us in Jesus Christ whom we gladly confess at our baptism and in the daily disposition of life. (2) No matter the appearance of a situation as we see it, God rules, overrules and directs, and by His Spirit advances His work. (3) Death linked with resurrection is the pattern of the whole of Christian life and service (2 Cor. 4:8-12). (4) Because all powers are subjected to Christ crucified, risen and ascended, we, in Christ's name, are commissioned to go and proclaim liberty in the Gospel to people held captive. We must never think of ourselves and the Christian church as merely holding our ground against the assaults of evil. The gates of hell are on the defensive, and they cannot prevail.

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4:1-6

Those who possess the Tyndale commentary by A M Stibbs should read his introduction to this passage. His introductory sentence is: 'Because of Christ's death for them, those who become Christians cannot live the rest of their earthly lives as they did before; and after death, which they still have to die, they will live eternally before God, and have no eternal judgment to face like other men.' The reference to Christ's suffering in the flesh is linked to 3:18 and refers to His death, not merely to the hardship of His life as a man and His rejection by men. When Christ died He died unto sin (not merely for sins) once for all (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 9:26) and He did it for us. That death of the Sinless One terminated His relation to sin and we, in Him, have likewise been brought to an end in relation to sin. Sin has no more business with us and any attempt on the part of sin to intrude, obtrude or over shadow must be resented, resisted and refused. This new attitude of mind and heart must determine the way we live from now on. It is no longer our relation to sin that calls the tune but our relation to God and our life in Him. The will of God is now our only consideration (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:9, 15-17). It will help us to understand if we read and consider Romans 6:1-23, taking time to grasp the facts of our death with Christ and our resurrection with Him. When we are told to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God we are not dealing with fiction. We are not to imagine ourselves dead to sin, nor are we to try to make ourselves feel dead to sin, and certainly not to imagine that sin is dead to us. We are to stand in and live by facts, namely that we have passed from death to life. To live by such facts is the fight of faith. To believe what God has done, even when we are still conscious of the stirrings of sin within our flesh, is faith indeed.

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4:1-6

To reckon ourselves dead unto sin and alive unto God calls for a very real mortifying, a putting to death, of the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:1-13). This is costly, but Peter reminds his readers of the past, its wasteful bondage and its contradiction of life, humanity and personality (3-5; cf. Rom. 6:19-23). It is humbling and at times humiliating to look back and see just how much we were victims of the world, the flesh and the Devil. It is from such a pit that Christ has delivered us, and part of the testimony to our deliverance is that our lives are now on a different plane, so different that our erstwhile companions in sin simply cannot understand what has happened and how we can possibly live without the things that were once so central and important in our activity. If we are new creatures in Christ then that newness must show. It if does not, then there is a question as to our salvation. Peter seems to sense in his readers a temptation and tendency to give way to the prevailing spirit of permissiveness and he warns against it, as we must do in our own generation. When Christians begin to live in the same mould as unbelievers there is something wrong. We are commanded in Rom. 12:1-2 not to be squeezed into the world's pattern and in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 we are called to separate ourselves from all moral wrong, cf. Eph. 5:3-13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Jas. 1:19-21. Christian life is a serious business.

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4:1-6

A holy life, lived unto God in obedience and purity, is a powerful instrument of evangelism which convicts the conscience of wrongdoers to the extent that they will react and abuse the Christians who so disturb their complacent sinning. This happened in Jesus' life. Light exposes darkness and the two can never agree. Indeed there is no limit to the wicked things that some people will say to and about Christians. They said Jesus was in league with the Devil, but the fact remains that His presence among them as a testimony to God and to righteousness took away from them all excuse for their own wrongness (John 15:22). Peter is not afraid to make

plain the fact of judgment, a fact strangely ignored in contemporary evangelism, possibly in reaction to over much preaching of it in an earlier generation. But God has appointed the Day of Judgment (Acts 17:31) and it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). God is always working judgment as well as salvation and it is this that makes the passing years of life so important. Opportunities for repentance and faith are slipping away. In v.6 Peter is referring to those now dead who heard the Gospel while they lived (there is no suggestion of a 'second chance' after death). Those of them who believed entered into life and now through death, they have passed on into fullness of life (1 Cor. 15:42-56). There is not ever any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom.8:1). But those who refuse to believe are judged already (John 3:18-19) and they die in their sins. To die unforgiven is darkness indeed.

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4:7

This one verse introduces a practical section of the epistle full of stark yet glorious realism. Throughout the epistle Peter has been expounding the life of salvation and has emphasised the twofold aspect of it: being refined and developed in faith and character, and being drawn into the mystery of the redeeming purposes of God. This being so, this world and the world to come must always be brought together and held together in balance. If either is given too much prominence there will be distortion of life and service. If the future hope of the Gospel is neglected, we will lose out in terms of peace and dynamic for the present, for after all we are saved in hope (Rom. 8:24). There must always be this future prospect, and while it is right and biblical to think of history as proceeding towards eternity, like a main road coming to a T-junction, we must also hold clearly to the biblical insistence that the day is 'at hand'. That means that history and eternity can be thought of as two parallel lines very close to each other, so that the world to come is just through the thinnest of barriers and 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye' (1 Cor. 15:52) it is here and we are there. We do in fact live on the border land of eternity. This is one reason why in 'the last days' there is so much awareness of occult, supernatural things and such obsessive interest in them. Many, of course, fail to recognise that there is spiritual evil as well as spiritual good. On the other hand to be aware of the nearness of things eternal encourages us to live in the power of the world to come. This is the life of faith (Heb. 11:1-3, 26-27; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

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4:7

There is something staggeringly comprehensive about the words, 'end', 'all', and 'at hand' (near). Peter deals with this more fully in 2 Pet. 3:1-13. For the New Testament writers the last days began with the coming of Christ to Bethlehem, His life, death and resurrection (1 Pet. 1:20; Heb. 1:2; 9:26; Acts 2:16-17). This means that the whole of what we call history is drawing to a swift close. The world will not go trundling on for ever and the upheavals of world history are a testimony to its death struggles. We must read the signs of the times and interpret them rightly (Matt. 24:33). The Bible speaks of a specific end at the second coming of Christ. The Author walks on to the stage and the curtain comes down finally. The Bible speaks of a cataclysmic end and a new beginning, not a gradual evolution to a better state of things. Think of Jesus' words which signify both an alarming upheaval and also a swift, surreptitious coming, like a thief in the night (Matt. 24:42-44). We must be ready, and Peter urges two things. We are to keep sane and sensible, and we are to address ourselves to prayer with that same sanity and sobriety. We are to avoid at all cost that over-excitement, stupidity and imbalance that typify those who get drunk. Drunk people, depending on the degree of drunkenness, can be amusing and entertaining especially when garrulous, but they soon become a nuisance, an embarrassment and a hindrance to themselves and everyone connected with them. They are a distraction to the business of work and prayer, and we are speaking of spiritual condition rather than mere physical condition. Keep sane, with an absence of exaggeration. Keep in control of yourself, in your right mind. That way, you will get on with praying.

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4:8-9

A calm, balanced mind and a quiet composed spirit will not only be the health-giving encourager of prayer, it will set in motion the kind of love that leads to fellowship and to the grace of kindly, caring hospitality. Peter is no doubt mindful here of his own sleeping when he should have been watching and praying (Matt. 26:36-45; cf.

Eph. 6:13,18). In consequence as the situation developed he blundered so badly in the matter of snatching his sword (Matt. 26:51) and in his base denial of Jesus (Matt. 26:69ff). His mind was racing and confused, and that makes any person a prey for the Devil. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Whatever else you do, do not neglect prayer, because out of that neglect will come a diminishing of grace in your attitude and disposition, and practical love will wither. On the other hand, Peter says that above all and before all we must show unfailing or fervent love. A diminishing of love will certainly minimise prayer. But when he speaks of 'fervent' (AV) love the emphasis is not on the emotion but the effort, the sustained determined working at the business of love. This is not false 'love' that hunts people down and so dominates that it steals a person's individuality and freedom. It is love that works at the business of being a servant in the pattern of the Saviour who washed the disciples' feet (John 13). It is love in the pattern of 1 Cor. 13 and Col. 3:12-17. It is the love we have received from God Himself, unworthy though we be. It is the love poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 5:5). It is not beyond us. Indeed, if Jesus lives in our hearts, it should be natural to us.

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4:8-9

Two specific things are said about love. It covers a multitude of sins (Prov. 10:12 AV, Jas. 5:19-20). The reference in Proverbs seems to contrast the attitude which is eager to drag up a man's sins with that which, in love, desires only to forgive and forget. This is love which forgives seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21-22). It refuses to think only of defects or to concentrate on the immediate evidences of wrong and failure. Love recognises that there may well be other significant factors in the situation and will recognise that the sinner may well have fought the temptation again and again and have conquered. Why should one obvious failure or a sequence of similar failures overcome love? Love is a redeeming and forgiving grace and if that grace is in our hearts then it will be manifest in our dealing with sinners in their sins (Gal. 6:1-3). Love will think the best and give the benefit of the doubt, without being sentimental. It will also avoid situations guaranteed to create outbursts. Love will look for ways of so leading others that they will be sheltered from rather than exposed to temptations. Love may never be recognised or thanked, but it has its reward. Love will also show ungrudging, spontaneous hospitality of the kind that will encourage and lead people nearer to Jesus. In the church Peter wrote to, think of those who may well have lost home, family and friends as a result of their conversion. Think of those possibly destined to play a significant part in the future of God's work. It would be sad if they were neglected or hindered.

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4:8-9

The subject of Christian hospitality is a broad and important one and it will play an increasing part in our life of service because the need will grow greater rather than less. Consider Matt. 25:34ff; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 2 John 10-11; 3 John 5-8, as being some of the passages dealing with this theme. Of course the angels we entertain may turn out to be fallen ones whose concern is to impose and presume upon Christian kindness. There are those who wander from house to house and who stir spiritual discontent (2 Tim. 3:6-9). We are to be as wise as serpents as well as harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16). That Christian hospitality was misused in post-apostolic days is indicated in an early Christian document, the Didache (the Teaching): 'let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord, but he must not stay more than one day, or two if it is absolutely necessary; if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when an apostle leaves you, let him take nothing but a loaf, until he reaches further lodging for the night; if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.' We may not want to be quite so radical in our standards, and indeed at times we will be quite willing to be presumed upon for Jesus' sake. But at the same time we must not indulge in, or indulge, an attitude of mind and heart that presumes upon Christian kindness. Some of those who are most hospitable work very hard indeed and deny themselves legitimate luxuries (not least their privacy) in order to minister to others. In many ways we must say there is no such thing as 'living by faith'. Someone has to work, and work hard, to have something to give to others (2 Cor. 9:6-8).

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4:10-11

Christian service in the context of fellowship is a glorious thing, to be done with all the might and gladness of hearts and lives enriched beyond measure by the good grace of God. Whatever is yours to do, do it as unto Jesus and do it with all your heart (Col. 3:17; Ps. 103:1-5, 20-22). Note the encouragement here. Each believer has a gift which in the life and work of the fellowship is both useful and necessary in terms of mutual ministry. This does not mean we must all preach at each other or that we must necessarily all take our turn at preaching. Besides, James makes plain that the place of public ministry is a dangerous as well as a demanding one (Jas. 3:1). It is not to be coveted. It is a matter of obedience for those who are specifically called to it. The particular gift that God has seen fit to allocate to each individual is to be his to be stewarded and exercised for the good of the whole fellowship. These gifts vary widely, as 1 Cor. 12:4-31 makes plain. The decision and the giving are God's, and we must not regiment into a particular pattern of spiritual experience what God has ordained to be different. If we do, we shall narrow down the exercise, the manifestation and the usefulness of God's varied grace. Gifts do not signify spiritual superiority. They mark out those who possess them as being equipped to be *servants* of others. We are stewards of God's gifts of grace and our using of these gifts must be in a spirit of grace, as Rom. 12:3-8 makes plain.

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4:10-11

Read along with these verses Eph. 4:1-16, and see how fundamental to Christian life and service is this thought of the interdependence of believers in the fellowship of the church. Peter highlights two main or general areas in which the gifts of God's grace are to be manifested:- speaking and serving. If speaking is our business, let it be as a conscious dealing with the 'oracles of God' (AV), the very words of God. The message is not ours and we must not deal unworthily with it (2 Cor. 4:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:4-5). It is both awesome and thrilling to think that our poor human words, so stumbling and limited (eloquence is dangerous), are taken by the Spirit and made to people as the words or message of God. No less wonderful is the thought that our simple deeds of kindness, our actions of love and loyalty, our down-to-earth slogging at work, are likewise taken by the Spirit and made God-inspired and God-glorifying service. This gives a new sense of importance to duty and a new glory to the ordinary things of life. When we consider this we see that the strength and competence come from God alone, all along the line. This means that when we see the fruits of our service we recognise at once and without qualification that this is all God's doing, marvellous in our eyes, and we gladly give the glory to Him, to whom it all belongs by right. When you see Christian life and service in this light you begin to see suffering in its true perspective and it is to that theme that Peter now returns.

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4:12-14

Peter begins to say three things about suffering. It is to be expected; it sifts unreality; and it is a sharing of Christ's suffering. He urges the Christians not to be taken aback by their difficulties nor by the evil disposition of men. The more a person takes his stand in Christ and with Christ, and the more he lives in the world in obedience to Christ, the more he will be a conscience-smiting reminder to others of the claims of Christ. This is bound to produce reaction. In fact, it is supposed to awaken reaction and, so far as Peter is concerned, a Christian who gets on well with everybody is simply not like Jesus. Consider Matt. 5:11-12; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 6:22-23, 26; John 15:18-22; 16:33; 1 John 3:13. Paul gives the same advice as Peter when speaking to young ministers and missionaries in 2 Tim. 3:10-15. James has the same emphasis (Jas. 1:2-4) and we cannot read too often J B Phillips' translation with its very healthy emphasis, so positive, practical and spiritual: 'When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance.' We are not required to enjoy suffering, and while we rightly relate it to the fiery ordeal of conflict with principalities and powers in the world, we must also see a higher hand and higher purpose in it all. The last word is not spoken when we say we suffer for Jesus' sake. That could leave us with a negative attitude. But for the Christian everything is positive. Heb. 12:7-11 speaks of one aspect of this, and Peter goes on to speak of another.

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4:12-14

The fiery ordeal has to do with the purifying and testing process by which true metals are hallmarked, as Peter has already taught (1:7). This 'proving' is deliberate, not accidental, and it is controlled, specific and suitable for the purpose in hand, else it would be destructive. Far from regarding suffering as a strange consequence of becoming a Christian, these converts were to see it as being fundamentally linked both to the sufferings of Christ and to His glory. Sufferings not only give place to glory, they are in fact the way to glory, and when Christ's glory is finally revealed, we shall share in it and be mightily glad that we stuck to Him in love and faithfulness in spite of the cost. Worldly people regard suffering as a thing to be avoided at all cost. They resent having to suffer privation of any kind. But this is essentially a worldly attitude that has nothing of eternity in it. Think of Paul's words in 2 Cor. 4:16-18 and Rom. 8:17-18. Christ did not enter glory without suffering (Lk. 24:26). Is there any reason why we should? When we take time to think of it, every evidence of our being caught up into active participation in the sufferings of Christ should be an inspiration of joy and confidence. Consider 2 Thess. 1:4-12; Titus 2:11-13; Rom. 5:1-5. Reproach (AV) 'insulted' is not a misfortune to be resented in self-pity but a privilege to rejoice in. Over against the reproach 'disgrace' (Heb. 13:13), with its inevitable ostracism and contempt, Peter places the spirit of glory and of God. This seems to be speak profoundly of God not being ashamed to own and vindicate us as His children (Heb. 2:11; 11:16). We look at this tomorrow.

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4:12-14

Three things seem to be spoken of or hinted at in v.14 and indicate why the suffering ones are to be considered happy or blessed. There seems to be reference first of all to the Spirit descending upon Jesus at His baptism and the voice of God the Father bearing testimony to His pleasure in His Son of whom He is rightly proud (Isa. 11:2; 61:1-2; Matt. 3:13-17). If we protest that this refers only to the Father's testimony to His own Son we need to read John 17:23 where we learn that God loves us as He loves Jesus. The second element in the verse (14) suggests a reference to the Shekinah cloud of glory which signified God's glorious presence leading, overshadowing and protecting Israel on all their journeys and battles. This cloud or 'spirit' resting on the redeemed people spoke of God's presence in power and grace to advance His work and to bring it to its perfect end. The third message from the verse concerns the presence of the ever active Spirit of the living God, able to operate without restriction just as he brooded over the chaos in Gen. 1:1-2 bringing order and light, and just as He operated mysteriously and mightily in the offering of Christ to the Father in the work of our salvation (Heb. 9:14). We underestimate the working of the Spirit and, having preconceived ideas as to how He manifests Himself, we tend to limit Him. Of course, He refuses to be limited, but we limit our awareness of Him and so prevent Him from being the comforter and encourager and teacher He was ordained to be (John 14:16, 25-26).

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4:15-16

It is in the context of the working of the ever active Spirit of God that Christians are urged so to live that that Spirit will not be hindered. How can He be hindered, grieved or quenched (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19)? The answer is: by sin, by wrong living, whereby the enemies of the Cross are given opportunity to criticise the lives of believers and so evade the challenge of Christ. It is undeserved suffering that brings us into fellowship with Christ and bears testimony to Him. Note in v.15 the things warned against. This indicates something of the prevailing moral climate of society and also suggests that the Christian converts had come from levels in that society where life was raw and tough. It is this level of society that we seem unable to reach and influence in our own day. Note also that converts were expected to manifest a new way of life (Eph. 4:17-29; 5:3-12), and the standards were high. Note as well that Peter includes in his list of prohibited behaviour 'mischief-making' (meddler). There are those whose main occupation in life, inside the church and outside it, is to meddle in other people's affairs, sometimes but not always with the deliberate intention of causing trouble. Such people sow discord, tension and suspicion, and arouse unnecessary criticism. They encourage people to think wrong thoughts and solicit them to attitudes and actions they would never have thought of themselves. "Some suggest that the word 'mischief-maker' means 'bishop in other men's matters' and indicates 'those prying and self-important people who fancy they can set everything to rights, and that everybody they come across is under their

personal jurisdiction" (Ellicott). Such 'barrack-room-lawyers' bring Christianity into disrepute. They cause trouble; they never cure it.

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4:15-16

When Peter was writing this epistle the name 'Christian' was one of derision and contempt and not a name by which believers referred to themselves (Acts 11:26; 26:28). The New Testament writers refer to Christians as saints, chosen brothers or God's beloved. One thing is clear, these Christians belonged to Jesus, they believed in Him, followed Him and obeyed Him. Indeed they were prepared to suffer and die rather than deny Him. These believers were proud of the name, even though it brought them ostracism. In our own day the name 'Christian' has again been devalued and many people who neither believe the substance of the Gospel nor practise discipleship become bitterly angry if there is any suggestion that they are not Christians. The name has come to signify something negative. People use it to indicate they are not Moslems, Buddhists, Animists, or 'pagans'. But in apostolic times it meant something far more radical. These people were marked out as different; different in nature and destiny; called of God, born of God and separated unto God. The name 'Christian' told all. Nowadays we have to qualify and amplify, and we talk about 'practising Christians', 'committed Christians' and even 'fully committed Christians'. The name has been confused and emptied of its meaning. The word 'evangelical' has likewise been denuded of its biblical and theological meaning and needs to be reinstated. A Christian is Christ's man or woman, and if we suffer for being so we must not be ashamed. Rather we must be glad that opportunity has been given us to glorify God.

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4:17-19

In the context of suffering for Jesus' sake we glorify God because we recognise that the persecution of believers is a sign of the beginning of judgment. Read Jesus' words in Luke 23:26-31. If the innocent Jesus (the green tree) suffers such a fate as this, what will be the fate of the guilty Jerusalem (the dry tree)? Never forget that the coming of Jesus, His death and resurrection, sets in motion the work of salvation *and* the work of judgment. Peter here seems to suggest that the judgment is about to begin, and 'if God, the righteous Judge, so hates evil, and must deal with it, so that He judges His redeemed people, what will be the fate of unbelievers, when His full wrath against sinners is revealed?' (Stibbs). God's judgment of and crusade against evil begins in and works outward from the House of God, that is, His own people. Read Malachi 3:1-6, 16-18; 4:1-5. Was Peter here recalling our Lord's cleansing of the Temple? God is no respecter of persons, and privilege never means concession to do evil. Paul speaks in the same terms as Peter in 2 Thess. 1:4-12. Now, if the justified man seeking to walk righteously in obedience to God is saved in and through many trials and tribulations, although there is nothing uncertain about his salvation since it is the work of God's grace, in the final day of judgment what will the experience be of those who refuse God and disobey the Gospel? They may seem to prosper in the short term, as Psalm 73 portrays so vividly, but their end is dark indeed.

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4:17-19

Prepare to meet your God (Amos 4:12) may be a solemn exhortation but if it causes us to live to please God rather than men it will prove to be a most healthful thing indeed. Amongst other things it will cause us to review with gratitude the goodness and mercy of God which have prevailed to bring us safely to where we now are. While Peter is certainly speaking of the inescapable trials of authentic Christian life in this world, He is thinking even more of the final judgment and the earnestness with which we must address ourselves to the things belonging to salvation (Heb. 2:1-3). Perhaps he was recalling his own failures and denials of Christ, and when he speaks of scarcely being saved (AV) or hard to be saved, "he means that there was but a little margin left: a very few more falls, a few more refusals to follow the calls of grace, and they would have been lost. Doubtless, when the best of us looks back, in the light of the last day, upon all he has been through, he will be amazed that he ever could be saved at all," (Ellicott). Carelessness, complacency and the tendency to let things slide are attitudes warned against right through the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Today, if you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts," (Heb. 4:7). Our daily decisions are important, for they set the direction of life and establish our

attitudes. That is why, in the context of suffering for the Gospel's sake, we are urged to do right and to entrust the outcome to the Almighty Father, even as Jesus did on the Cross (Luke 23:46). The suffering, even if it leads to death, is not accidental but integral to the will of God which we shall prove in time and in eternity to be good, perfect and acceptable (Rom. 12:1-2 AV).

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4:17-19

There is an immense exhortation and encouragement here to entrust ourselves to the God who is altogether trustworthy, who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18) and who will not fail (Eph. 1:11; Phil. 1:6). The word 'commit' speaks of handing over something valuable into the safekeeping of someone whose power and capacity are not in doubt. This is Paul's theme in 2 Tim. 1:12 (AV). His life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). There is no need for fear or doubt. None can pluck us out of His hand (John 10:28) and no possible factor in experience past, present or future has the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39). But the translation of 2 Tim. 1:12 in RSV indicates something entrusted *to us* by God. It is His deposit in our safe-keeping, and this is something to marvel at. This is indeed the story of the prodigal being reinstated not only to fellowship but to trusted service in respect of the Father's riches, of which he had earlier proved himself unworthy. Consider 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2 and 1 Cor. 4:1-2. This is responsibility indeed. We see how much this thought of safe-keeping features in Paul's life and ministry if we read Acts 14:22-23; 20:32. These great men of old all had this mark on their lives: they looked to God. They were God centred men. Read Psalm 31. Peter never forgot his Saviour's dying prayer, 'Into Thy hands . . .' In a situation of darkness and suffering that seemed so totally disastrous, God was mightily at work in terms of salvation and judgment. God always knows what He is doing, and He does it perfectly.

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5:1-4

Having expounded salvation and interpreted sufferings to Christians seeking to understand and to come to grips with life and service, Peter now applies what he has taught in terms of responsibility in and to the fellowship of faith which is the church. He addresses himself first of all to the elders, urging that they should have a right spirit, motive and manner in all their dealings with what belongs to God and is precious in His sight. The elders are 'presbyters' and when Peter appeals to (exhorts AV) them he uses the word which means to call alongside to help. It is the word 'paraclete' which is translated 'comforter' or 'encourager' in John 14:16, 26, and 'advocate' in 1 John 2:1. That seems to suggest that the function of elders among themselves and in the fellowship is to exercise an influence of encouragement and 'to speak on behalf of', rather than to instigate disagreement. There must be a unity and agreement if the flock is to be shepherded rightly. To be an elder in God's house is a great privilege which brings great responsibility and sets high standards. Read Ezek. 8:7-13; 34:1-10 and note in 1 Pet. 5:2 that the responsibility of shepherds belongs to the elders. The elders are to be pastors, and they are to take oversight (as AV and RSV footnote indicate). This word for oversight gives us our word episcopacy, and the overseers are bishops. It is clear that in the early church the terms elders, pastors and bishops were interchangeable. In Acts 20:17 the word is presbyters and in Acts 20:28 it is bishops or overseers. Each word used indicates the nature and scope of the eldership and Peter goes on to elaborate in some detail.

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5:1-4

Peter's description of himself as a witness refers not only to his being present when Christ suffered but to the fact that he bears witness now to those sufferings, just as the others do. Like them, he was exposed to danger but assured of his share in the glory to come. He urges the elders to feed or shepherd the flock which belongs to God. This was the charge of the risen Christ to Peter in John 21:15ff. The shepherd values, seeks, gathers, leads, anoints and guards the sheep, counting no labour excessive, making himself the door for the safety of the flock and, if necessary, laying down his life for them (John 10:1-15). The flock is God's and under His care (Ps. 100:3). It is one flock, allocated out in manageable sections to the under-shepherds whom God trusts to look after what is His, and from whom He requires an account. If that is the job specification, how is it to be done? There must be a right spirit; not under constraint or compulsion as if we were driven reluctantly to cold duty. It

must be done with willingness of spirit, with voluntary self-giving, and with cheerful gladness of heart since God loves a cheerful ('hilarious' is the Greek word) giver. What enthusiasm should mark Christian workers even when dealing with human sheep who can be so stupid and obtuse. On occasions, of course, reluctance can be genuine humility and eager readiness can be conceit. But if the church sees fit to place you in a position of spiritual responsibility and service, then it must be accepted and carried out in this spirit of willingness. Think of Paul's willingness in Rom. 1:14-15 and Phil. 3:7-15.

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5:1-4

If the elders must have a right spirit or attitude, they must also have a right motive. It must not be for shameful gain but eagerly, with a ready mind, that is for the love of the work itself, under God. Two of the questions asked at the ordination of a minister (the teaching elder) in our own denomination are: 'Are not zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire for the salvation of men, so far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements to enter into the office of the holy ministry? Do you engage in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ to live a godly and circumspect life; and faithfully, diligently and cheerfully to discharge the duties of your ministry, seeking in all things the advancement of the kingdom of God?' There must be no motive of shameful gain, that is, not coveting advantage. And there are far more temptations than simply money and what it might bring. There is the temptation of popularity and personal following. This not only means that we make use of Jesus to gain a name for ourselves, it means we steal for ourselves people and honour that rightly and safely belong to Him alone. We have to see to it that we are eager and ready for service for the sheer delight of doing it, and doing it as sons and daughters rather than mere servants. What does it matter of we never gain any worldly recognition? Is not our desire to point people to Christ and to gain them for Him? John the Baptist's attitude was the truly spiritual one (John 3:25-30). His followers were vexed, but he, like his Master, had meat to eat they knew nothing of (John 4:32).

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5:1-4

A right spirit and a right motive go hand in hand with a right manner, and the way we do things can often be a good indication of the kind of people we are. Since salvation is the work of grace, there can never be excuse for or justification of graceless bad manners in a Christian's behaviour. Whatever is the immediate cause of a graceless disposition, at heart it is simply a case of self being enthroned rather than Christ. In the Gospel narrative, as Peter would well remember, whenever there was a bad and bickering spirit among the disciples it stemmed from the desire to lord it over others (Matt. 20:25-28). Now, there is a right and necessary leadership in the church which has to be recognised, exercised and submitted to. But at the same time we must recognise that power corrupts, especially in the spiritual realm, and those most likely to seek to be domineering mark themselves out as being unsuitable for leadership. The true leader will be servant of all (Mk. 9:35). Perhaps even more, he will be the example of all, and this is how true leadership is exercised. You do not *drive* people along the way of holiness and obedience; you *draw* them. Consider the boldness of Paul's language and the glorious, unselfconscious dedication in 1 Cor. 4:15-16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6. This is the only way of leadership. Think of the vows Christian parents take at the baptism of their children. We promise by prayer, precept and example to bring (not to push) our children up in the ways of the Lord and of His church. Children, both natural and spiritual, grow like their parents and mentors. We must be able to say, 'Follow me, and you won't go wrong.'

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5:4

Leadership is entrusted to us as a privilege and a responsibility, and on both levels we will be held accountable. It is an immense honour to be trusted by the living God with work and people He has redeemed at the infinite cost of the blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28). It is also a solemn responsibility and we must recognise that we are only stewards or caretakers, not owners. The work is not ours nor are the people ours, and we must never steal their loyalty to ourselves. Our tenure of office is for a set and limited period and, just as other men have laboured and we have entered into their labours (Jn. 4:38), so we in turn must hand over our charge to the

one appointed to succeed us. At the handing over ceremony, the Chief Shepherd will ask for a report, saying perhaps, "How is my work? How are my people, my flock?" It will not be enough for the under-shepherd to say, 'I am feeling and looking well.' But here, Peter is thinking particularly about those who want to be faithful, whose chief desire is to serve their Lord, and who may be a little apprehensive about the outcome of their work because of the increasing pressure of their immediate situation. To such people Peter speaks this word of assurance. They will receive a crown of glory, that is, a share in the glory of Christ as the reward for faithfulness. Now, this seems a magnificent and indeed extravagant reward for what little we have done, and that is why we sing so often about casting our crowns before Him, lost in wonder, love and praise. On the one hand we do live and work to please Him (2 Cor.5:6-10) and we are aware that there will be "recompense" (Heb. 11: 26-27). But at the same time, those who are most Christ-centred and motivated will always be surprised by the reward and commendation (Matt. 25:31-46). Humility tends not to think of being a "good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

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5:5

It is not easy to be young, and this word about relationships and attitudes is searching. By nature youth is marked and motivated by self awareness, self-assertiveness and rebellion. When you are young, whether in age or spiritual experience, you feel confident that you know everything. You are full of bright ideas, and of course it is not wrong for the young to be visionary (Joel 2:28). But at the same time the ideas and ideals of youth have to be proved in the practicalities of life and service, and in the business of growing older, taking on responsibility, and coping with changes in circumstances, whether it be in terms of affluence or poverty. Remember that it was as a young man that Peter was both humanly and spiritually precocious, very ready to pronounce on all issues and also to compare himself favourably with his fellows (Matt. 26:30-35). What Peter seems to be emphasising is the need to learn the yoke of discipline, loyalty and obedience in time of youth, because that is when habits are formed that are not easily changed. In terms of future spiritual service many young people are cancelling out the hope of fruitfulness by their irresponsible independence of and refusal of spiritual guidance. Granted the gospel is revolutionary (whatever that popular phrase may mean) and that bad habits and formalism have done untold harm to the cause of the Gospel. But the disordered world will not be introduced to the peace of God by rebellious spirits that throw caution to the winds. A willingness to sit under ministry and to learn is a thoroughly biblical attitude (Ps 119:9-16).

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5:5

Not only the young, but all must be prepared to be learners. We are urged to gird on the garment of humility, and Peter is undoubtedly thinking of the washing of the disciples' feet in John 13. The humility spoken of is lowliness of mind (Rom. 12:3). It is that "true lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part." It has to do with actions and attitudes, and, in the first instance, has nothing to do with feeling humble or praying for humility. True humility does not speak belittlingly of itself; it just does not speak of self at all. There is a great deal in this verse about true fellowship, one with the other, in which both restraint and inspiration are basic and necessary elements. This is not difficult to put into practice when we remember that the will and work of God and the good health and happiness of the fellowship take precedence over all other considerations. But Peter adduces another reason for this healthy frame of mind: God is actively present to resist the proud and to give sustaining grace to the humble. Consider Prov. 3:30-35; Ps. 18: 25-30; 138:6; 147:6; Luke 1:46-53. This is why we are able to yield in the face of personal wrong. God is busy working things out in righteousness long before we ever see it. Indeed we may wait years for His vindication or we may never see it until we are in His eternal presence. But we can trust Him. It is no vain thing to say, "God knows." He does, and He acts on what He knows, looking ever on the heart and not the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7).

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5:6-7

So far this epistle has expounded salvation, showing its greatness and emphasising that it is all of God. It has interpreted sufferings, showing them to be not only inevitable experience for believers (2:21) but also the means

by which the work of God is carried forward. Peter then called the believers to responsibility in terms of a right spirit, a right motive and a right manner. Next he calls for humility, speaking of the mighty hand of God, His mighty care and the mighty enemy we have to contend with. This humility he speaks of is a deliberately adopted attitude of mind, heart and will to whatever circumstances or experiences we are involved in. Just as a sick person in need of surgery does not insist on doing the operation himself but commits himself to the competent and chosen surgeon, so we choose to commit ourselves to the mighty hand of God whom we have good cause to trust. Surgeons cause pain, but it is in order to heal (Job 5:17, 18) and a good surgeon will not cause unnecessary hurt. That would be to defeat his purpose. But the mighty hand of God is not referred to only in terms of personal and individual experience but in terms of the whole ordering of world affairs. God rules and works for His people's good, and Christ reigns supreme in glory in the interest of His church (Eph. 1:20-23). If we really believed this, the Devil would not be able to instil so much panic into our reactions to life's experiences. Consider well Job 23:8-17; Heb. 12:7-10; Rom. 8:28; Luke 14:7-11; and 2 Sam. 16:5-14. Note how clearly Peter states the objective of God in and through all our experiences. It is to lift us up. That is what Jesus did for Peter.

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5:6-7

The plans of God and the strenuous demands of experience are not to be thought of in terms of impersonal manipulation or as a mere manufacturing process dealing with unfeeling material. God remembers what we are made of and what experience has done to us, making us very sensitive (sometimes too sensitive, and the Devil is not slow to make capital out of that). Consider Ps. 103:13-14 and Isaiah 42:3. Think of the hymn-writer's words,

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind." (F.W. Faber)

Do we really believe that God cares for us and that everything about us matters to Him? Whatever is bothering us or whatever matters to us, take it to Him in prayer (Ps. 55:22). Then, having given the burden to God, don't try to carry it yourself. Leave it with Him and to Him. Note that Peter says to "cast" the burden on to God and the word signifies effort, the strong effort of faith which looks to God and determines to rest in His peace rather than to be broken up into little pieces, which is what fretting care does. Anxiety is debilitating physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and spiritually. It is this that marks it out to be a work of Satan and emphasises the need to go right to God. Read Matt. 6:25-34 and Luke 12:32.

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5:8

Our confidence in God, whereby we humble ourselves under His sovereign gracious providence and hand over all our cares to His safekeeping, must be married to a spirit of watchfulness. Throughout the epistle Peter has been urging on believers a spirit of holy boldness but this goes together with holy caution. Peter recalls his own rash confidence when, having followed on where it was safe for John but not for him, he ended up by denying his Lord (John 18:15-18, 25ff). Peter rushed into a situation in which he had underestimated the pressure of circumstances and the evil design of the Devil. Note the description of the enemy. He is an adversary, arguing the case against us as in a law-suit but never too concerned about the truth of his accusations. He is also "diabolos", the slanderer and accuser. Sometimes he accuses on the grounds of wrong we have in fact done, seeking to torment us with guilt, and at other times he deals in false accusation and innuendo. "His aim is to sow discord, to break fellowship, by malicious suggestion. He accuses God to men, men to God, and men to each other. His aim is to undermine confidence, to silence confession, to get us to stop believing" (Stibbs). Where do our sudden fears and trembling apprehensions come from? It is the work of the roaring lion,

sometimes prowling around to keep us on edge and sometimes hurling himself in ferocious attack, making us feel our end has surely come. Read Zech. 3:1-5, and remember the forgiveness of God. Read Rev. 12:7-17 and remember that the Devil's anger is partly that of frustration because he is a defeated foe (Col. 2:15).

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5:8-9

It follows from the last statement of yesterday's reading that the only reasonable and logical thing to do with the Devil is to resist him. In Rev. 12:9-12 the Devil is spoken of as being overcome by the faithful testimony of those who take their stand in the victory of the death and resurrection of Christ. To resist means to stand and face the enemy and that needs the armour of God spoken of in Eph. 6:10ff. It also means you have the enemy in front rather than behind your back as is the case when you run away or when you blandly turn away and let things take their course. The Devil will not go away by himself. He has to be resisted, and there seems to be emphasis that this resistance is a business for the whole fellowship standing together, presenting a solid front in the name of Christ and for the cause of the kingdom. Peter goes on to point out our fellowship with our believing brethren all over the world. It is one work and therefore one battle, and every section of the battle-front has to be held for Christ. The battle sways, sometimes fiercer in one area than another, and this makes communication important. It also means that we must make allowances for others when they are under pressure just as we must make allowance for ourselves. When we are at spiritual "action stations" at particular seasons, we cannot give to "cook-house" duties the same priority. At the same time if we are on "chores" or "off duty" we must still be sober and watchful. There is an enemy and the quicker we are to discern his manoeuvres the more effectively he will be resisted. But remember, he will always have another go (Lk. 4:13).

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5:10-11

Suffering and battle are by no means the whole story. Indeed these costly elements in experience are essentially temporary, whereas the glory that follows is eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18). God Himself is our salvation (Isa.12:2) and He is the God of all-sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9) from whom, in Christ, we receive grace upon grace (John 1:16). He is also the God whose gracious purposes far exceed our present grasp of them (1 Cor. 2:9 AV) and if the outworking of these purposes requires us to be involved in unpleasantness and suffering *for a time*, then we must accept God's way (2 Cor. 12:6-10). Of course, we could always petition God to have our usefulness and service narrowed down so that our immediate life could be more pleasurable and more self-indulgent! But, if we are prepared to walk with God through His darkened valley and His fiery trials, then we will have the pleasure of His company every step of the way and the assurance of His constant fellowship (Isa. 43:1-5a; 1 John 1:7; 3:1-2; Rev. 22:1-5). It is God who calls us to His eternal glory (cf. 1:3-6), and we think of Enoch who walked with God until one day God took him (Gen. 5:21-24). Glory is bright indeed and this kind of life is well spoken of in terms of "travelling towards sunrise". We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God because it is so sure (Rom. 5:2) and such a hope operates effectively as the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast (Heb. 6:19). Whatever immediate experience, the Christian must look forward because we are saved in hope (Rom. 8:24).

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5:10-11

The fact that God has called us to His eternal glory is an element in the doctrine of salvation, and Paul in Ephesians 2:5-7 declares that we are already in Christ, seated in the heavenly places with Him. Since this is spiritual fact, the rigours of experience must be seen as the working out of that fact. It is God who is doing the working and He makes a proper job of all that He begins (Phil. 1:6), being able to make all things work together in the interest of those He loves so dearly and plans for so specifically and gloriously (Rom.8:28). We underestimate God. He is set on our having the very best. He takes a personal interest in our promotion to glory (1 Thess. 5:23-24). How much Peter must have felt about the word "restore" which is used in Mark 1:19 in connection with "mending" the nets and making them ready again for service. The same word is used in 2 Tim. 3:17 in terms of being equipped and in Luke 6:40, where it means fully taught. Part of Peter's being taught was his terrible collapse when he denied his Lord and the tears of misery with which he lived until the resurrection, and the regrets which must often have come into his mind and heart. But Peter is clear there is going to be no

more of that unstable and miserable kind of Christian service. God will establish them (2 Thess. 2:16-3:5) and it was to this kind of stabilising ministry that Peter himself was commissioned by the risen Christ (Lk. 22:31-32). He encourages the Christians, saying that God Himself will sort them out and mend the defects; He will stabilise them so that nothing will shake them; and He will strengthen them to face and to overcome all things with a clear margin of victory (Rom. 8:37).

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5:11

This one verse is not only an ascription of glory, it is an expression of profound confidence and an exhortation to have confidence. It is fact that power belongs to God and to God alone (Ps. 62:11 AV). It is fact that God has given Christ the name above every name to which every knee shall surely bow (Phil. 2:10). It is fact that God ruled in the might of His saving power in and through the events of the Cross (Acts 2:23). It is fact that the full running of the course of history will find its conclusion when Christ delivers up the kingdom to the Father so that God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). It is fact, as Peter would recall in the teaching of the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:10), that God's will shall prevail on earth as it does in heaven, because His is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. This Godward attitude of mind and heart must mark the life of believers and be their song and their confidence, even as it is with the saints in glory (Rev. 5:12-14; 7: 10-12). We are far too prone to doubt when in fact we have every ground for confidence.

"His name for ever shall endure;

Last like the sun it shall:

Men shall be blessed in Him, and blessed

All nations shall Him call.

Now blessed be the Lord our God,
The God of Israel,
For He alone doth wondrous works,
In glory that excel.

And blessed be His glorious name
To all eternity:
The whole earth let His glory fill.
Amen, so let it be." (Metrical Psalm 72:17-19)

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5:12-14

Having dictated the whole letter to Silvanus (Silas), Peter now adds this final paragraph in his own writing, not least to pay testimony to and to commend Silas to the church. This Silas was Paul's companion in his missionary journeys (Acts 15:40), and was involved with him in the writing of the letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1) and in the preaching at Corinth (2 Cor. 1:19). Silas had been a faithful brother to Paul and to the saints of God. Could there be any greater commendation than this? Faithfulness includes dependability and availability. It is a word that speaks of dedication and of service over a long spell of time. Peter seems to be urging the Christians to listen to this man who would not only bring and read the epistle but who would be able to expound it more fully. It is as if Peter is saying that this man can be trusted as a man and as a teacher of God's truth. Happy is the congregation that has men like Silas. Peter then indicates the purpose of his letter. It has been to exhort (5:1), which word (paraclete) includes thoughts of comfort, encouragement and entreaty, and to declare or to bear witness to the truth in which we stand. All the apostles were rigorous in declaring that there was in fact "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Christian gospel is not a changeable or adjustable thing, requiring always to be updated or modified to suit prevailing fashion and opinions. The truth stands; and Peter urges believers to stand fast in it as Paul urged the Galatians to do (Gal. 1:6 ff). There is no other gospel. Christ is all, and in Him we stand, so help us God.

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5:12-14

The phrase, "She who is at Babylon," refers to the church at Rome, the very centre of organised godlessness. Chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation speak in awesome terms of Babylon and it is easily understood why Peter would not want to mention the city of Rome by name. In a ruthless police state you do not publicise the presence of a large body of Christian believers. Although we must be ready to die for our faith if necessary, we are not called to fly in the face of danger. Trouble will come, as Peter has taught in this epistle, but we must not go looking for it. If we do, we will find it, but we may not then describe it as suffering for Jesus' sake. Some of our own missionaries in the troubled areas of the world are very cautious about what they write in letters that might well be opened by the authorities. That there was a church in "Babylon" was a triumph of grace and a token of ultimate victory. It would not have been easy to live the Christian life right at the heart of anti-Christ government which was already becoming more and more carnal and ruthless. That is why it is so important to encourage our hearts in God, and Paul does this by speaking yet again of God's electing grace and of the fellowship enjoyed by those who are called to holy service. We are not alone. We are not a miserable minority but a glorious company who, in every place, call on the name of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:2). If we truly grasp this one-ness of experience then we will be not only fellow-labourers but fellow-sufferers for Christ's sake, and our prayers will have a new tenderness, immediacy and strength.

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5:12-14

The epistle closes on a note of glorious encouragement and comfort. Peter speaks of Mark as his son in the faith of whom he is rightly proud. This is the same Mark who contracted out of Paul's first missionary journey, was later restored to fellowship and service, and became the author of the first gospel to be written. It is generally accepted that Peter was the source of much of Mark's detailed information about Jesus' life and ministry. The references to Mark are in Acts 12:12, 25; 15:36-39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24. What hope is here held out to those who at some stage blunder and go astray. There is such a thing as restoration to service. It is in this context as well as in the general life of the Christian fellowship that Peter speaks of the kiss of love. It is a call to greet one another and treat one another in a way that visibly expresses and pledges both love and loyalty. This is something we fall down on in our staid Scottish tradition. No-one is impressed by superficial emotional "gush" but if care, concern and gratitude are never expressed there is something far wrong. But where love reigns with all its high valuation of people for their own sakes and its tender human consideration, then there will be peace. It will be the peace of God which passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7), subduing the storms and guarding both heart and mind. It is in fact the Saviour's own peace which He Himself promised, a peace the world can neither give nor take away (John 14:27). It is that peace which finds its confirmation in God Himself (Isa. 26:3). This is the abiding blessing of those whose lives are hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

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