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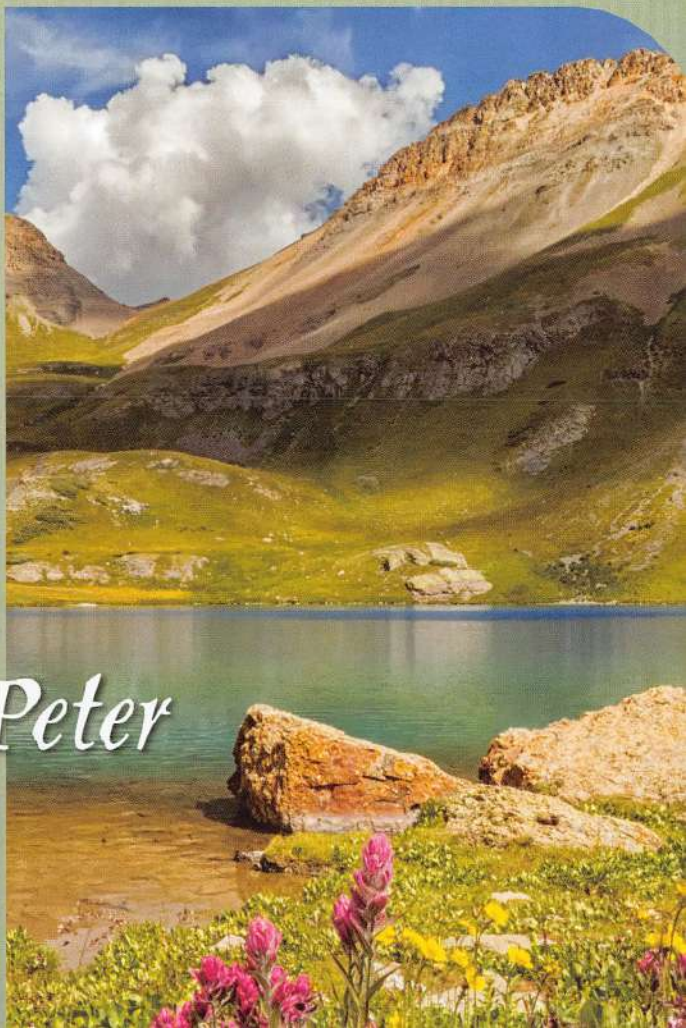


Total Bible Learning

ADULT **STUDENT BOOK**

STUDIES IN

I, II Peter



ADULT **STUDENT BOOK**

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Here's a full-color, weekly, take-home publication that's an exciting tool for personal growth and evangelism. With life-related stories of faith, ***Power for Living*** connects God's truth to real life.

DISCIPLES' BIBLE STUDY SERIES

YEAR	SEPTEMBER QUARTER	DECEMBER QUARTER	MARCH QUARTER	JUNE QUARTER
2016-17	Acts	Genesis	1, 2 Thessalonians; Jude	Joel; Jonah; Amos; Hosea; Micah
2017-18	Luke	Exodus	1 Corinthians	Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy
2018-19	Hebrews	Joshua	2 Corinthians	Isaiah
2019-20	Matthew	Judges; Ruth	1, 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon	Jeremiah; Lamentations
2020-21	Romans	1, 2 Samuel	1, 2 Peter	Nah.; Zeph.; Hab.; Obad.; Hag.; Zech.; Mal.
2021-22	John	1, 2 Kings; 1, 2 Chronicles	James; 1, 2, 3 John	Proverbs
2022-23	Philippians; Colossians	Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther	Revelation	Ezekiel; Daniel
2023-24	Mark	Psalms	Galatians; Ephesians	Job; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon

I & II Peter

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The Letters of I and II Peter

Peter was the leader of the apostles and a close companion of Jesus. He was one of the "inner three" disciples, along with James and John. A fisherman by trade, Peter was known for his impulsiveness and tendency to speak before thinking. The Lord in part used Peter's mistakes to shape him into a humble but powerful leader for the church. One of Jesus' last admonitions to Peter was "Feed my sheep." The letters of Peter represent part of the apostle's effort to fulfill that command.

First and Second Peter belong to a group of New Testament letters called the general letters because

they were addressed to a group of churches and not one specific congregation of believers. The other general letters include Hebrews, James, John's letters, and Jude.

First and Second Peter have clearly different objectives from one another. The first is warm and pastoral, written to believers who were facing persecution. The second letter is a warning to be on guard against false teachers.

No generation of believers has been exempt from the dangers of persecution and false teaching. The messages of I & II Peter are as relevant today as they were for the church in the first century.

Author

Peter's authorship of the second letter has raised more questions than that of his first letter. Whereas I Peter had an early and strong acceptance in the church, the authorship of II Peter is still the most disputed in the New Testament. Though many objections to Peter's authorship of the second letter have been raised, they can be addressed. For instance, it is true that the style of Greek in I Peter is sophisticated, while the style in II Peter is decidedly more awkward. Yet this may simply reflect the differences between the scribes who helped Peter write these two

letters. Silas is described as the scribe in I Peter, and no mention of a helper is made in II Peter. Another indication that Peter is the author of both these short letters is that they have 153 words in common.

Both letters identify Peter as their author. Some believe the writer of II Peter may have used the apostle's name in order to increase the letter's credibility. Many such letters claiming Peter's authorship circulated during the latter part of the first century A.D. These include The Apocalypse of Peter, The Gospel of Peter, The Acts of Peter, The Teaching of Peter, and The Letter of Peter

to James. Compared with these spurious books, however, II Peter stands out in terms of content and authoritative teaching. The author used the first-person pronoun "I" throughout the letter, made reference to his first letter (I Peter?), and claimed to be an eyewitness to the Transfiguration. If

the author had only been pretending to be the apostle, he would have had no more integrity than the false teachers he condemned.

Second Peter was officially recognized as part of the New Testament canon at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397.

Date and Place of Writing

First Peter is considered by many Bible scholars to be part of the persecution literature of the New Testament (which also includes Hebrews, Revelation, and possibly James).

As part of this collection, the letter would have been written during one of the three periods of Roman persecution endured by early Christians—under Roman emperors Nero (A.D. 62–64), Domitian (A.D. 90–97), and Trajan (A.D. 111). If we hold to Peter's authorship of the letter, the only period that would fit would be the time of Nero. Tradition has it that Peter was crucified outside the city of Rome during the last few years before Nero ended his own life in A.D. 68.

Peter included many references to Paul's writings in his first letter, which would indicate that he wrote after at least some of Paul's letters

were written. To take one example, Peter's instructions to the elders and leaders in the congregations are in harmony with Paul's words to Timothy and Titus, written in A.D. 63 or 64. On the basis of these historical connections, most Bible authorities set the date of the writing of I Peter in A.D. 63 or the early part of 64. The second letter was probably written shortly before his death, around A.D. 67.

Peter probably wrote these letters from Rome, based mainly on the code name he gave the city: "Babylon" (I Pet. 5:13). This symbolic reference to Rome as Babylon appears a number of times in Revelation and in several Jewish writings. Since II Peter was likely written shortly before Peter's martyrdom, Rome would naturally have been the location for its writing as well.

Recipients of the Letters

The salutation, or introductory greeting, of I Peter indicates that the initial recipients of this letter lived in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), particularly in its eastern, central, and western regions and in the territory that bordered the Black

Sea. Although Peter traditionally has been referred to as "the apostle to the Jews" (Gal. 2:7-9), we know that he also preached to Gentiles, such as Cornelius (Acts 10).

Because of the mixture of races in the provinces of Asia Minor, no

doubt both Jews and Gentiles profited from Peter's ministry, including many slaves (I Pet. 2:18-20).

The recipients of II Peter are not as easy to identify. In the saluta-

tion of II Peter, the apostle did not address his readers by name. If his reference to his "first letter" refers to I Peter, then the same churches probably received the second letter.

The Occasion and Purposes for Writing

Peter clearly stated the purpose for writing I Peter at the end of the letter—to encourage suffering believers to stand firm and to allow their faith in Christ to strengthen them for difficult times. Hope and perseverance are themes that run throughout this first letter.

Second Peter concentrates on the need for spiritual growth among believers and taking an aggressive stand against false doctrine and those who teach it. The letter also touches upon end-time events, such as the day of the Lord and the judgment of the unrepentant.

Many scholars believe most of II Peter attacks the foundations of sprouting Gnosticism, a philosophical religion of "secret

knowledge" and "enlightened thinking." (Gnosticism became the preeminent non-Christian system of thought in the second century.) Gnostics believed that (1) spirit and matter were essentially separate, spirit being good and matter being evil; (2) one or more inferior beings, not God, created the world; (3) an inferior being, not God, was responsible for most of what happened in the Old Testament; (4) God has no personality; (5) Christ was not fully human and His earthly life was unreal.

No wonder Peter, as well as John and Jude, focused their letters on destroying the foundations of this faith-damaging philosophy.

How to Use the Study Book

The *Study Book* is meant to be used with a Bible opened beside it. Before studying one of the lettered sections within a lesson, read the corresponding Bible passage. Then refer back and forth between your Bible and the Study Book until you get the meaning of the passage.

Also think about your personal answer to each of the "Ask Yourself" questions. Finally, come to class prepared to discuss the Bible passage and raise any questions that have occurred to you.



The Salvation of Our Souls

I Peter 1:1-12

a God's Elect (1:1, 2)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

—I Peter 1:1

Peter started his letter by following the traditional pattern used in his day: he named himself, he

named his readers, he stated where they lived, and he pronounced a blessing on them. All this is typical, yet Peter used the pattern for his own special purposes.

Peter said he was an apostle of Jesus Christ (vs. 1). The Savior had chosen him, along with eleven others, to proclaim His saving message to the lost (see Matt. 10:2-4). Peter took this responsibility seriously. In fact, the authorities would eventually execute him for his devotion to Christ (see John 21:18, 19).

Who Were the Apostles?

In the New Testament the term "apostle" is used to refer to God's special envoys who helped lay the foundation for Christian churches. The term was later—after Jesus' death and resurrection—applied to someone to whom Jesus had appeared and who had received a divine call to preach the Gospel.

Apostolic teaching was to be the norm for the doctrine and fellowship of the Church. The apostles' common witness was the yardstick against which all Christian teaching was measured.

Most Bible interpreters believe apostleship was restricted to some of the people who had seen Jesus with their own eyes. Others think the term did not always have such a restricted meaning.

Those whom the New Testament calls or assumes to be apostles include the Twelve (Luke 6:13), Paul (Rom. 1:1), James (Gal. 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Silas and Timothy (I Thess. 1:1; 2:6b), perhaps Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7), and messengers from churches (II Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25 in the Greek text).

Peter used his name in its most frequently appearing New Testament form. His original name in Hebrew was Simeon. However, the Greek equivalent Simon was more commonly used in the New Testament. The Greek term Peter and its Aramaic equivalent, Cephas, both mean "rock."

Peter referred to his readers as God's elect. Just as the Lord chose the Jewish nation to be His own and to receive as an inheritance the promised land, so Christian believers are spoken of as God's chosen in the New Testament.

The eternal life that Christ offers to us is far too precious to take for granted.

Ask Yourself . . . *When was the last time I thanked God for His gift of eternal life?*

The recipients of Peter's letter were "exiles" in the world (I Pet. 1:1). By this the apostle meant they were sojourners or temporary residents on earth. As pilgrims Christians live in the world, but heaven is their true homeland (see Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:13-16).

"Scattered" (I Pet. 1:1) renders a technical term that Greek-speaking Jews used for Jews

living outside Palestine. Peter used the word to refer to both Jewish and Gentile believers dispersed in various Roman provinces throughout Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

Peter said God the Father chose His readers for salvation in accordance with His foreknowledge (vs. 2). Christians have different viewpoints on how God's sovereignty relates to human freedom, especially in the area of salvation. Some believe God used His foreknowledge to look down the corridor of time to see which human beings will respond favorably to His offer of salvation and then called those individuals to salvation. Others believe God does not base His calling on foreknowledge, but rather sovereignly calls or elects certain individuals to salvation for His own glory.

The salvation of the letter's recipients came "through the sanctifying

The Homelands of Peter's Readers



work of the Spirit." The apostle meant that God the Spirit had made unholy people holy. Through Christ's death for sin He purified them for God's service.

God had saved the readers of Peter's letter so that they might obey Christ. Although heeding God's Word did not produce their salvation, their salvation was intended to lead to obedience. While unbelievers lived in rebellion against God, the Christians living throughout Asia Minor were to aim at doing His will.

God delivered us from sin so that we might faithfully serve Him and His people. We need not live our lives aimlessly, but can seek to discover and fulfill God's plan for our lives.

Ask Yourself . . . *What good works has God prepared for me to do in the coming week?*

Peter noted that the shed blood of Christ spiritually cleanses His people from their sin. According to Exodus 24:3-8, the priest sprinkled the people of Israel with the blood of bulls to show they would abide by their covenant with God. Peter was saying that it was the blood of Christ that sealed the covenant between God and His people (see Heb. 9:18-21).

It was Peter's desire that God's grace and peace would overflow in the lives of his readers. His twin blessings united typical Greek and Hebrew styles of address. Letters in Greek often began by wishing the reader grace. Jews greeted one another with a wish of peace.

Certainly, however, Peter thought of grace and peace in terms of their Christian meanings. "Grace" refers to God's unmerited favor to believing sinners, while "peace" refers to the inner tranquillity and contentment that result from the reconciling work of Christ.



The Believer's Salvation (1:3-9)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

—I Peter 1:3

Imagine holding a beautifully cut diamond up to the light. Each of its sides sparkles as you slowly turn and examine the precious stone.

This suggests how beautiful and multifaceted God's salvation is.

Peter was filled with gratitude as he thought about it.

Peter's outburst of praise following his greeting is distinctively Jewish and Christian in content. Giving thanks to God was a typical feature of Jewish prayer. The blessing in verse 3, however, has a richer conception of God than one would find in traditional writings. The one Peter praised was not just God, but God the Father as revealed by His unique and precious Son.

Peter referred to the Savior in three different ways. As "Lord"

His power is absolute and unchallengeable. "Jesus" is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "the Lord saves." "Christ" literally means "Anointed One" and is used to refer to the Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament.

The Messiah, the Christ, the 'Anointed One'

Christ is a word borrowed from Greek. It means "Anointed One," signifying a person who has received divine commissioning for a specific task. In Old Testament times, kings and priests were anointed with oil as a sign of their divine appointment.

The Hebrew word for the Anointed One is translated *Messiah*. It was used of the promised one who would deliver Israel from oppression. Most Jews thought He would be a political leader. They did not consider that His mission might be to free them from sin.

Peter praised God for His tremendous display of mercy in providing salvation from sin. The apostle specifically referred to the new-birth experience. When people trust in Christ, the Spirit does a work of grace upon them. He completely transforms their inner being so that they want to live for God rather than themselves.

As we renounce the ways of the world, our lives reveal the changes made by the Spirit.

Ask Yourself . . . How is my life different today than it was when I first trusted in Christ?

Those who are born again have a new life and a living hope. In the Bible hope is not a desire that has no basis for expecting fulfillment.

It is a firm conviction based on the revealed truth of Scripture. The firm conviction of the church is that one day God will raise His people from the dead to live with Him forever in heaven.

The hope of being raised is based on Christ's resurrection from the dead. Through faith Christians are identified with their Lord's death, burial, and resurrection (see Rom. 6:3-11). His new life makes it possible for them to trust and obey God, not doubt and defy Him.

Peter noted that Christians not only are born again but also are heirs of God. He will give them an eternal, heavenly inheritance that can never be destroyed by time, the elements of nature, or the powers of darkness. God also protects this inheritance from thieves. He

Sharing Christ's Glory

Peter reminded his readers that God had saved them so that they might share in the glory of Christ when He is revealed (I Pet. 1:7). Other Bible passages likewise describe believers as sharing Christ's glory—now and even more so in the life to come.

Peter wrote:

- "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (I Pet. 5:4).
- "The God of all grace . . . called you to his eternal glory in Christ" (vs. 10).

Praying to the Father, Jesus said to His disciples:

- "I have given them the glory that you gave me" (John 17:22).

Paul wrote:

- "We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (II Cor. 3:18).
- "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).
- "God . . . calls you into his kingdom and glory" (I Thess. 2:12).
- "He called you . . . that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 2:14).

preserves it safely in heaven for His people (I Pet. 1:4).

Great corporations, worth millions of dollars, often go bankrupt. Devious people misappropriate funds, causing financial empires to crash. But such will never happen to the inheritance God has set aside for His children.

God also watches over those who trust in His Son. The word rendered "shielded" (vs. 5) conveys the idea of vigilantly defending a fortress. Believers can count on God's protection regardless of the hardships they might encounter.

The salvation Peter mentioned in verse 5 refers to the believer's complete deliverance from sin in the future. When Christ returns, He will raise His people from the dead and give them glorified bodies. They then will enjoy the riches of heaven.

Peter's readers could rejoice in all that God would do for them. The word rendered "greatly rejoice" (vs. 6) refers to a jubilant expression of gratitude. Their confident expectation of the future would sustain them as they endured all sorts of trials that brought them grief. No doubt some of the persecutions were

physical, but more likely Peter had in mind social stigma, ridicule, the loss of status, and even the loss of their livelihood. The believers were paying a heavy price for their faithfulness to Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . What price have I had to pay for my faithfulness to Christ?

No persecution is easy to take. But Peter tried to get his readers to view their troubles from an eternal perspective. These hardships were "for a little while." One day God would bring their suffering to an end and eternally reward them for their faithfulness.

A Christian's attitude toward suffering makes all the difference on the effect it can have in that person's life. If hardship and difficult circumstances are constantly viewed as unfair and undeserved, then a root of bitterness can spring up in the heart of the believer that hinders his or her spiritual growth.

On the other hand, if a Christian views suffering as normal for the committed follower of Christ, then hardship and difficult circumstances become an expected part of life, and are often viewed as a special time for growth and opportunities to become more like Christ in His humility and perseverance.

Peter explained that God allowed the recipients of his letter to experience persecution to refine and verify the genuineness of their faith in Christ (vs. 7). As people used fire to refine precious metals, such as gold, so God used trials to distinguish

true faith from superficial profession. At the same time, He used suffering to strengthen faith.

Gold is a metal that most societies highly value. Despite this, gold will one day cease to have value. The faith of Christians, however, is enduring. When the Savior is revealed at His second coming, the believers' trust will result in praise, glory, and honor. Peter used the word *apokalupsei* [ah-poh-kah-LOOP-say], which stresses the unveiling of Christ's glory and greatness.

In this present age God has veiled the presence of Christ. Although the recipients of Peter's letter had never seen Jesus, their love for Him was unquestionable. Despite the fact that they could not see Christ, they continued to trust in Him for salvation (vs. 8). This truth is reminiscent of Jesus' words in John 20:29: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." This certainly includes believers in this century. Even though we have not seen Christ, we have experienced His powerful work in our lives.

Peter's readers were not depressed about their situation. They were overflowing with a joy that cannot be explained, a joy that was sustained by the hope of future glory. They could be this way because they realized that salvation in Christ was the goal or consummation of their faith (I Pet. 1:9). Although they already enjoyed certain aspects of salvation, their full possession of it awaited the return of Christ.

C The Prophets' Investigation (1:10-12)

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. —I Peter 1:12a

Peter had just been speaking about the salvation Christ provides to all who believe. Now the apostle noted that numerous Old Testament

prophets had spoken about this grace of God, which He would make available to Gentiles as well as Jews.

Although these spokespersons for God could see some details of the Lord's redemptive plan, there were many facts that eluded their grasp. These prophets searched diligently to learn about God's provision of salvation (vs. 10; see Luke 10:24).

The salvation that God offers is worthy of our interest and study.

Ask Yourself . . . *What can I do to maintain a sharp interest in the salvation Christ has given me?*

"The Spirit of Christ" (I Pet. 1:11) is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent (see

God's Angelic Workers

Angels are spirit creatures (Heb. 1:14) who live in heaven (Matt. 22:30) but whom God may send to earth as messengers. They are mighty and powerful (Ps. 103:20; II Thess. 1:7) and possess great wisdom (II Sam. 14:20). Ordinarily they are invisible to us (II Kings 6:17), though they have appeared as men (Luke 24:4).

Angels do not marry or reproduce (Matt. 22:30). Because they are not subject to death (Luke 20:36), they will live forever and remain constant in number.

Contrary to popular belief and artistic portrayal, few angels in the Bible are explicitly stated to have wings. In fact, Isaiah 6:2 may be the sole instance. On the other hand, angels are said to have the ability to fly (Dan. 9:21).

Angels exist as an organized hierarchy (Col. 1:16). Among their duties are serving God by serving us (Heb. 1:14), providing us protection (Dan. 6:22), guarding us (Ps. 91:11), guiding us (Acts 8:26), and helping us (Dan. 10:13).

John 16:7). The Spirit revealed to the Old Testament prophets that Christ would suffer and be glorified (see Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Luke 24:25-27). However, they did not comprehend the whole of the Lord's plan to save Gentiles by means of a suffering Messiah.

For instance, the prophets failed to understand that Christ would die during His first coming and that He would return in glory at His second coming. This message was so wonderful that even the angels longed to understand it.

The Spirit had revealed to the prophets that they were ultimately serving future generations of believers (I Pet. 1:12). The prophets ministered to New Testament believers when they predicted Christ's sufferings and glories. The messengers of the Gospel related these same truths to the church after Christ's resurrection and ascension.

Looking back, we can see how God was working through these prophets, even though they were not fully aware of how God was using them.

Those who proclaimed the Good

News did so in the power of the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord had sent from heaven (see John 14:16, 26; Acts 2:33).

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets also directed the Gospel messengers. Peter's point seems to be that there is a united message proclaimed in the Old and New Testaments concerning Christ and His salvation.

There are many different ways we can minister in the church. Ultimately, Christ and His salvation should be the foundation for our service.

Ask Yourself . . . *Is it sometimes hard for me to maintain my focus on Christ as I serve Him and His people? If so, why?*

Peter said that even angels have a strong desire to know the truths of the Gospel. The keen interest angels have in redemption is underscored by the word rendered "to look into" (I Pet. 1:12b). It means "to stoop over to look intently." God ultimately uses the church to make His plan known to angels (see Eph. 3:10).

2

A Christian Lifestyle

I Peter 1:13—2:3

a Being Holy (1:13-16)

**Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."
—I Peter 1:15**

In the preceding verses, Peter had talked about the living hope believers have through the resurrection of Christ. The apostle especially focused his readers' attention on the assuredness of salvation in Christ.

On the basis of God's wonderful gift of grace, those who have benefited from it should show evidence of their new relationship with God in certain specific ways. That is why Peter exhorted his readers to prepare their minds for action.

A more literal rendering of the opening to verse 13 might be "Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind . . ." In Bible times when people who dressed in loose clothing wished to move about quickly or perform tasks requiring significant freedom of movement, they would prepare themselves

by tucking the folds of their robe under their belt. Drawing upon this imagery, Peter urged his readers to be disciplined in their thinking and prepare themselves for vigorous and sustained spiritual exertion.

As we live for Christ, our faith is constantly being challenged. That is why we need to remain mentally and spiritually alert.

Ask Yourself . . . *What can I do to prepare myself for the spiritual challenges that lie ahead?*

Peter urged his readers to "be self-controlled." The King James Version has the rendering "be sober." In other words, believers were to exercise sound judgment in every area of their lives. One way to do this was to submit to the control of the Spirit (see Eph. 5:18). When the mind of the Christian is free from unwholesome thoughts, it is better able to concentrate on what is pure and pleasing to the Lord.

Peter also directed the recipients of his letter to fix their hope completely on God's grace, which He would bestow on them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The "hope" was the believers' confident assurance of being fully and finally

delivered from sin's presence. The Lord would bring this about at the second coming of Christ. At that time, they would also be glorified and dwell forever with Christ in heaven.

Peter referred to his readers as obedient children, that is, those who were characterized by a submissive spirit. This disposition contrasted sharply with the way they had thought and acted before trusting in Christ. While separated from God, they knew nothing of His love and

law. And when they were lost in spiritual darkness, their evil desires shaped and controlled their lives (I Pet. 1:14).

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I ensure that my mind reflects the thinking of Christ?*

Peter stressed that God is holy, which means He is superior to His creatures both physically and morally (vs. 15). Whatever the Lord thinks or does is characterized by purity, goodness, and perfection. There is no

Terms for the Second Coming

The New Testament writers used three Greek words when referring to the second coming of Christ:

Apokalupsis

[ah-poh-KAHL-ip-siss] means "revelation" or "disclosure." In connection with end-time events, it refers to the unveiling of Christ at His second coming. This may suggest the suddenness of His coming. The noun is translated as if it were a verb ("revealed") in I Corinthians 1:7, II Thessalonians 1:7, and I Peter 4:13.

Epiphaneia

[epp-ih-FAH-nay-uh] means "appearing" or "appearance" and refers to a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity. In Titus 2:13, Christ's "appearing" is said to be "glorious." This idea of divine glory is taken one step further in II Thessalonians 2:8, where *epiphaneia* is translated "splendor."

Parousia

[pah-roo-SEE-uh] carries the ideas of "presence" and "coming," especially the official visit of a person of high rank (a king or emperor). The word implies personal presence and excited states. In I Thessalonians 4:15 and II Thessalonians 2:8 it is translated "coming."

Taken together, the three words tell us that Christ's second coming will involve His unveiling, His appearing in power, and His personal presence.

trace of evil in God, and He abhors all that is wicked and false.

The holy God, who has called us to salvation, wants us to be holy in every area of life (vs. 16; see Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7). This means we are to be cleansed from sin to serve the Lord. Our desires, motives, thoughts, words, and acts should be characterized by purity. We should detest sin and love righteousness. The moral perfection of God Himself is the standard we follow.

Even after we put our trust in Christ, we continue to struggle with sinful desires. We soon learn from experience that it is impossible on our own to adopt God's focus and priorities. That is why we must rely on the Spirit to help us obey and enable us to overcome sin. When we call on God's power, He frees us from the grip of sin.

b Revering God (1:17-21)

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.
—I Peter 1:17

Christians looked to God the Father for salvation. To call Him "Father" (vs. 17) was nothing new, for believers in Old Testament times referred to Him in this way (see Ps. 89:26; Jer. 3:19; Mal. 1:6). The Israelite conception of

the fatherhood of God portrayed Yahweh as the Father of the nation, not necessarily of individuals. Jesus shed new light on the believer's relationship with the Lord when He addressed God as His Father and when He taught His disciples to pray to the Father (see Luke 11:2; John 17:1).

This new relationship revolutionizes our prayer lives. We approach the Father not as slaves, apologetic and fearful, but rather as children of the King.

Peter cautioned, however, against presuming that because of this relationship, God will excuse our sinful behavior. The Lord will one day judge each person's work objectively and fairly (I Pet. 1:17). There will be no element of favoritism in God's evaluation of all that we have done.

Although God will not condemn true believers for their sins (see Isa. 53:4, 5; I Pet. 2:24), He will evaluate their deeds and reward them accordingly (see Rom. 14:10-12; I Cor. 3:12-15). Whatever rewards God bestows for faithful service are not based on merit, for He is the one who inspired these works in the first place.

Ask Yourself . . . Which of my works will the Lord reward me for? Which ones are not likely to survive His judgment?

Believers are "foreigners" (I Pet. 1:17) in the world. The Greek word conveys the idea of resident aliens dwelling in a foreign land. Peter was stressing the Christian's pilgrim status in the world.

The Fear of God

The concept of fear falls into two broad categories. First, fear can refer to a sense of alarm caused by the anticipation of danger, pain, or disaster. Second, fear can denote a feeling of awe and reverence toward a supreme being.

Both aspects of fear are evident in the Old Testament. When the Lord revealed His presence to His people, they were dreadfully aware of His holiness and their sinfulness (Exod. 19:16-19; Isa. 6:5). The Israelites also revered God because of His majesty, power, and holiness (Ps. 34:9). They demonstrated their respect and awe by obeying Him (Prov. 8:13; 16:6).

Both aspects of fear are also evident in the New Testament. A sickening dread will grip those whom God judges in the end times (Rev. 6:15-17). For Christians, however, there is no sense of dread, for "perfect love drives out fear" (I John 4:18). Out of reverence for God, not doubt and anxiety, Christians strive to grow and mature (Phil. 2:12). This is the least they can do as an expression of their gratitude for God's mercy.

The apostle also emphasized the importance of relating to God in reverent fear. This does not mean we approach the Lord cringing. Rather, we relate to our Father and Judge with humility and respect.

The lives of those to whom Peter wrote were at one time empty and futile, at least from an eternal perspective. Some think the apostle was talking about Gentiles who had worshiped pagan deities and lived merely for themselves. Others think Peter was referring to Jews who had followed the unbiblical traditions their ancestors taught (vs. 18). Most likely, Peter was addressing both Jews and Gentiles.

Peter reminded his readers of the tremendous cost of their redemption. The word translated "redeemed" speaks of freedom from the bondage of sin through the payment of a price.

The shed blood of Christ is infinitely more valuable than anything the world has to offer. For instance, the world values such costly metals as silver and gold. One day, however, God will destroy all of these items along with the rest of the created order (see II Pet. 3:11-13).

In Old Testament times, priests would sacrifice lambs on the altar in the temple. In order to be acceptable, these sacrifices had to be free from any defect (see Lev. 22:20-25).

Christ was like a lamb that had no blemish or imperfection (I Pet. 1:19). His life was sinless, qualifying Him to atone for the sins of the world.

From at least the time Abel offered the firstborn from his

Peter reminded his Christian readers that they had not been bought with perishable items, such as these gold and silver coins from the area around Asia Minor, but by the precious blood of Christ.



flock to the Lord (see Gen. 4:4), people have shed the blood of an animal as an act of sacrifice to God. Indeed, this ritual pervades the Old Testament, in which blood sacrifice is an atonement for sin.

The ceremony, however, was never 100 percent effective. True atonement could only occur through the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus, who died on our behalf to cleanse us from sin once for all.

We should never cease to be grateful for the shame and suffering Christ endured on the cross for our sake. He didn't have to do it, but He did it because He loves us.

There are two ways of understanding the word rendered "chosen" in I Peter 1:20. According to some, the term is merely talking about God's foresight. In other words, God knew before He created the world that He would have to redeem

sinners through the sacrifice of His Son. Others think the term implies purpose. In other words, in eternity past the Father selected the Son as the sole provider of redemption.

"These last times" was a term used by Old Testament prophets to speak of the end of time. Sometimes in the New Testament it refers to the whole messianic era, which began with Jesus' life on earth. At other times, it seems to refer to the period shortly preceding Jesus' second coming.

Christ came to earth to redeem the lost, and through Him we put our faith in God. The Father raised His Son from the dead and gave Him glory. For these reasons, we put our faith and hope in God (vs. 21). These truths remind us that Christ is the only mediator between sinful people and God (see I Tim. 2:5). Through His sacrifice, the Son provides the only access to the Father (see John 14:6).

C Loving Others (1:22-25)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. —I Peter 1:22

Peter directed his readers, in addition to being holy and revering God, to love one another sincerely, fervently, and with all their heart. As Paul did in I Thessalonians 4:9, 10, Peter encouraged his readers

for the love they had already demonstrated, but admonished them to pursue an even deeper love for each other.

There were two reasons for doing this. First, they had purified themselves from sin when they obeyed the truth of the Gospel (I Pet. 1:22). From obedience springs love. Once a person has received forgiveness for sin and been reconciled with God, it is only natural for that same person to reach out to others in love and graciousness. Though at first such affection might seem natural, it takes a concerted effort to deepen that love, especially to those who do not return the warmth we offer them.

The second reason for deepening our love for one another is that believers, by definition, have been born again. Of course, we are reminded of Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus, when the Savior told his friend that in order to enter the kingdom of God, one must be "born again" (see John 3:1-21).

Peter's commentary gives an answer to Nicodemus's probing question, "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" (John 3:4). The second birth is not accomplished by perishable, biological means, but by way of God's Spirit. This new life's source is not from something that dies; rather, it comes from a living and enduring source, namely, God's Word (I Pet. 1:23). The apostle specifically had in mind the

life-giving message of the Gospel.

Our minds and hearts are cleansed as we continue to expose ourselves to God's Word. This creates the climate for loving our fellow Christians. Because we have renounced sin and embraced righteousness, we are more inclined to show such love to them.

When it comes to love, there is always room for improvement. Perhaps someone we know has lost his job; we can just tell him we are sorry or we can try to give him some financial help. Perhaps someone we know is feeling depressed; we can pray for her or we can pray and try to encourage her. Sometimes a type of tough love is called for that pushes us and the recipient out of our comfort zones. Though it takes a concentrated effort, we all can strive to love more and more.

Ask Yourself . . . *In the last year, how have I shown love to my brothers and sisters in Christ?*

Peter quoted Isaiah 40:6-8 to highlight the contrast between the perishable nature of human life and the ever-enduring nature of God's Word. Peter noted that humans wither like grass and their glory fades like wildflowers, simply by the natural means of the aging process. Although grass dries up and flowers fall to the ground, the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection will stand forever. The apostle pointed out that this was the very message he had proclaimed to his readers (I Pet. 2:24, 25).

Words for Love

The ancient Greek language had several words for "love," two of which are found in the New Testament. The most common word for "love" in the New Testament is **agape** [ah-GAH-pay], referring to a love based on admiration and esteem. **Philia** [fih-LEE-ah], meaning a love prompted by appreciation and affection, occurs only once in the New Testament as a noun (though its kindred verb is found a significant number of times).

The phrase "love for each other" in I Peter 1:22 translates *philadelphian*, a word partly based on the root of *philia*. In nonbiblical Greek manuscripts, **philadelphia** is almost always used of the love among the children in a family. In the New Testament, the word always refers to the love of Christians for one another.

d Maturing Spiritually (2:1-3)

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

—I Peter 2:2

The recipients of Peter's letter had obeyed the truth of the Gospel and were born again. In light of this, the apostle urged them to rid their lives of several different vices. They were to cast these aside just as they would a dirty garment (vs. 1).

"Malice" includes ill will that destroys fellowship among believers. "Deceit" and "hypocrisy" would include such wrongs as lying, fraud, and two-facedness. "Envy" refers to any feelings of resentment or jealousy toward others who are supposedly better off in some way. "Slander" includes false charges, misrepresentations, and malicious statements.

We must remind ourselves that Peter was addressing Christians here, people who had obeyed the truth and had clearly been born again. Ridding ourselves of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slanderous thoughts is a humbling and rigorous process. But by God's Spirit, we are able to substitute these thoughts, feelings, and actions for ones that honor God.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I avoid the sinful attitudes and actions Peter mentioned?*

Physical birth is a shocking experience for infants. Babies suddenly emerge from the security of their mother's womb into an environment that seems cold and uninviting. For the first time they must concern themselves with breathing, eating, and crying. They eventually must learn to walk and communicate their needs to others.

Newborn infants have a natural craving for their mother's milk. Peter said that God's Word is like pure spiritual milk that all believers should thirst for. The apostle's emphasis is not so much on the elementary aspects of divine truth; rather, he was stressing its pure and nourishing character. As believers regularly partake of Scripture, they

will grow spiritually (vs. 2).

Ask Yourself . . . *What kind of spiritual food am I capable of eating at this point in my life?*

When people are born again, they realize through their relationship with Christ that He is good (vs. 3). His kindness is evident, for example, in redeeming them from sin. Their initial satisfying "taste" of salvation whets their appetite for more spiritual food.

Peter may have had Psalm 34:8 in mind: "Taste and see that the LORD is good." The original reference was to Yahweh, the God of Israel. The apostle shifted the emphasis to refer to Jesus, once again illustrating the full deity of Christ.

3

Living Stones

I Peter 2:4-12

a The Living Stone (2:4-8)

You . . . , like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

—I Peter 2:5

Peter had compared the spiritual nourishment from God's Word to the milk newborn babies crave. The apostle chose another analogy—that of a temple made from stones—to stress the position of honor that believers have in Christ.

Peter talked about coming to Jesus Christ (vs. 4). This, of course, includes initial repentance and faith. But the verb tense of the original suggests a continual drawing near to the Savior as well.

Christ is the "living Stone" in the sense that He imparts new life to all who believe. He likewise establishes an intimate, personal relationship with them.

Other passages of Scripture call Christ the "living bread" and the source of life and light for all believers

(see John 1:4; 6:51). The salvation purchased by Christ's death on the cross opens a "new and living way" into God's presence (see Heb. 10:20). Jesus gives His people "living water," that is, eternal life (see John 4:10). The Savior also gives them "rivers of living water," which is a reference to the Holy Spirit (see 7:38, 39).

Despite all the wonderful things that could be said about Christ, most people rejected Him. Although Jesus created the world and lived on earth for a time, the world did not recognize Him for who He was. Even His own people, the Jews, in large part did not accept His messianic claims (see John 1:10, 11). In fact, both Jews and Gentiles had a hand in sentencing and executing Christ (see Acts 2:23).

Although people rejected Christ, God chose and honored Him. The Son was precious to the Father and the object of His approval (see Matt. 3:17). After Jesus died on the cross, God raised Him to the highest place and honored His name above all others. Consequently, all people will one day bow the knee to Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord (see Phil. 2:8-11).

If Christ is the living Stone, His people similarly are "living stones"

(I Pet. 2:5). In this analogy, Peter was stressing the believer's union with and resemblance to Christ. Paul underscored the new life the Savior gives to believers when he called Jesus "a life-giving spirit" (I Cor. 15:45).

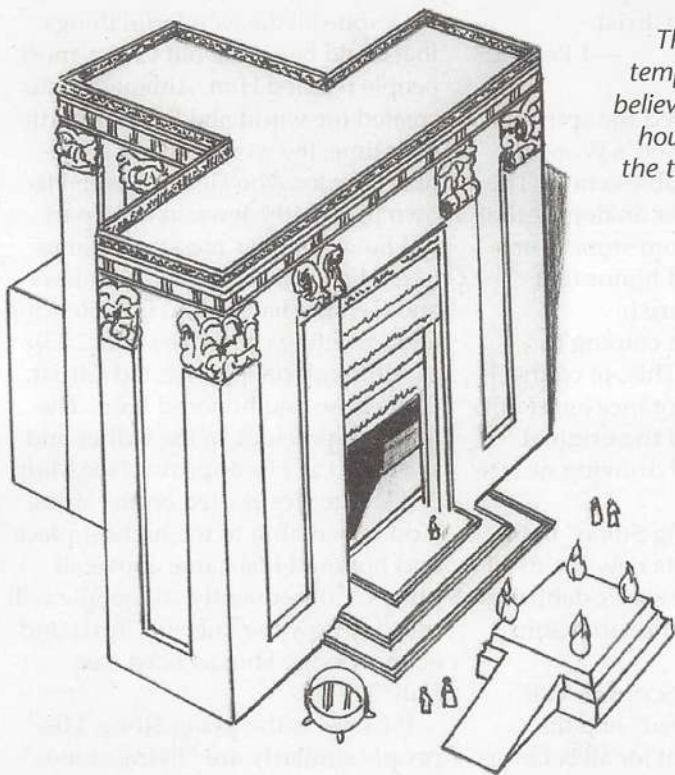
The Lord takes His people and uses them to build a spiritual house, or temple. The background for this analogy is the Jerusalem temple, which was the dwelling place of God. The Holy Spirit imparts new life to believers and indwells them so that they become the true temple of God (see II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 3:6).

Ask Yourself . . . *If I were always to keep in mind that God lives in me by His Spirit, how might I want to change my lifestyle?*

Believers are not only living stones for God's temple, but also a holy priesthood. In the Old Testament era, priests represented the people before God. Every person who trusts in Christ is part of the priesthood of believers. They have equal and immediate access to the Father and personally serve Him.

The entire Body of Christ, as a spiritual priesthood, offers spiritual sacrifices to the Father. The Savior

This is the Jerusalem temple. Peter said that believers are "a spiritual house" (I Pet. 2:5), or the true temple of God.



Zion: *Hill, City, Divine Dwelling Place*

The term "Zion" is used over 150 times in the Old Testament. Originally it referred to the citadel of the Canaanite city of Jebus—later known as Jerusalem—conquered by David (II Sam. 5:7). This eminence eventually came to be equated with Jerusalem itself (Isa. 40:9; Mic. 3:12). Psalm 125:1 declares that "Mount Zion . . . cannot be shaken but endures forever." In biblical thought, Zion is the place where the Lord resides and presides. Therefore, Mount Zion's celestial counterpart is defined in Hebrews 12:22 as "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."

makes these offerings acceptable to Him. These spiritual sacrifices include praise, good works, and charitable giving (see Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15, 16). The priesthood of believers also represents God before humankind, intercedes for people before God, and reflects the Lord's holiness.

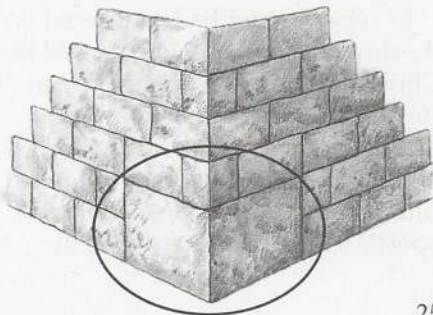
Peter quoted from Isaiah 28:16 to support his teaching. God said He had placed a choice and precious cornerstone in Zion. The reference, of course, is to Jesus Christ. Those who trust in Him for salvation will never be disappointed (I Pet. 2:6).

Some people trust in Christ, recognizing that He is the precious cornerstone. Others, however, reject Him (vs. 7). Quoting from Psalm 118:22, Peter stressed the supreme importance of Christ in determining a person's eternal destiny. The stone that the builders did not want turned out to be the cornerstone. A cornerstone was used to unite the two sides of an arch and hold it together. Peter was saying that Christ was the most important stone in God's spiritual temple.

Quoting from Isaiah 8:14, Peter noted the effect that Christ has for some people. To those who refuse to believe the Gospel, Jesus is like a stone that causes them to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

Peter commented that people spiritually stumble because they refuse to heed the message of truth. The apostle said this is the destiny God had planned for them.

In ancient construction, builders would lay a large stone for the foundation at the place where two walls came together. This cornerstone was of special importance for the proper construction and stability of the entire building. In calling Christ the cornerstone of the Church, Peter stressed that its entire orientation depended on the Savior.



There are three primary ways of understanding the last part of I Peter 2:8. One group thinks that God decrees all unbelief to end in eternal destruction. Another group argues that God sovereignly predetermines who will spiritually fall and be lost. A third group maintains that God in His foreknowledge sees the unbelieving way some respond to the Gospel, and based on this awareness of their response determines them to be lost.

Regardless of which perspective is taken, it is clear that those who reject Christ suffer eternally tragic consequences.

Ask Yourself . . . *Do I show my concern for the lost by taking every opportunity to share the Gospel with them?*

b God's Chosen People (2:9, 10)

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

—I Peter 2:10

In verse 7, Peter had contrasted the destinies of those who trusted in Christ and those who rejected Him. Verse 8 stresses that unbelievers face an eternally bleak future. In verse 9, Peter stressed the wonderful future that awaits God's people. The apostle's intent was to show that



Election

Election is a major theme in the New Testament, especially in Peter's writings. Yet Christians have developed quite different ways of understanding it.

According to one common view, people are so corrupted by sin that they are unable to respond to the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. Those who believe can do so only because God chose them for salvation. The Lord gives grace, thus leading them to believe.

According to another popular view, God supplies all people with enough grace to accept His offer of salvation, though not all choose to make use of that grace. God elects some for salvation in the sense that He foresees which people will choose of their own free will to believe.

there is no shame or disappointment for having believed in Christ (see vs. 6).

Believers are a chosen people. This is reminiscent of God's having chosen Israel from all the nations of the earth to be His special people (see Deut. 10:15). He did this because He loved them and because He wanted the world to know how

great He is (see I Sam. 12:22). Just as God called the Israelites His chosen people in the Old Testament, so Peter indicated that New Testament believers are the elect of God.

It is a privilege to be a child of God. It is one of the spiritual blessings we enjoy as followers of Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *When was the last time I thanked God for making me His child?*

The Christians were a "royal priesthood" (I Pet. 2:9). The emphasis here is on the entire Body of Christ serving in a priestly capacity.

MERCY

from God

Throughout Scripture "mercy" refers to God's display of favor to those who have offended Him. In His compassion, the Lord forbears punishing those who have violated His will. Instead, He chooses to withhold judgment. This is a free act on His part, for the recipients of His mercy can make no direct claim to it.

The concept of God's mercy is evident in both the Old and New Testaments.

MERCY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- God's mercy was the basis for His covenant with Israel (Exod. 33:19; Isa. 54:10).
- God extended His mercy to those who acknowledged their sins (Ps. 40:11, 12).
- In His mercy, God provided for His people's needs and delivered them from their enemies (Ps. 69:16-18; Isa. 49:10).
- God's mercy is the basis for the redemption of His people (Ps. 103:4).

MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Jesus felt compassion for the multitudes (Matt. 9:36).
- Because God is rich in mercy, He made us spiritually alive in Christ (Eph. 2:4, 5).
- God provides His mercy to both Gentiles and Jews when they trust in Christ (Rom. 11:30-32).
- Christ is our merciful and faithful high priest (Heb. 2:17).
- God's mercy is always available for those who come to Him through Christ (Heb. 4:16).

Of course, this does not contradict the notion of believers relating to God on an individual basis. Some have rendered the verse "the king's priesthood." This translation emphasizes the fact that the Church is a priesthood and that it belongs to the King of kings.

Peter additionally declared that the recipients of his letter were a holy nation. By this he meant that God had established the Church for His distinctive use. The Lord once declared Israel was a holy nation (see Exod. 19:6). Based on this, some think the Church is the new Israel of God and replaces Israel in His redemptive plan. Others, however, think Israel and the Church remain distinct entities with distinct roles in God's program.

Regardless of which view is taken, it is clear that New Testament believers belong to God. The Lord wants them to declare to the world the wonderful things He has done. This includes His noble acts of creating the world and providing redemption through Christ. Peter specifically mentioned the Lord's calling his readers out of spiritual darkness into the marvellous light of salvation (I Pet. 2:9).

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some of the wonders of God that you could share with unsaved acquaintances?*

Peter reminded his readers what their relationship to God was like before they were redeemed. At one time they were not God's people, but now they belonged to Him. In the past, they had never received

mercy, but now they enjoyed God's mercy through faith in Christ (vs. 10).

Peter's statements had once applied to the Israelites. During the nation's period of rebellion, God called His people Lo-Ruhamah (not loved) and Lo-Ammi (not my people; see Hos. 1:6, 9). The Lord promised to one day restore the Israelites so that He could once again call them His people, whom He loved (2:1, 23).

Interestingly, Paul applied Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to the Gentiles (see Rom. 9:25, 26). God took a group of individuals who were not His people—the Gentiles—and brought them into an intimate relationship with Himself. Whereas the Gentiles were originally not God's people, now by divine grace and mercy, they were called "children of the living God."

C Foreigners in the World (2:11, 12)

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

—I Peter 2:12

After discussing the privileges believers enjoy as God's chosen people, Peter next addressed the issue of how Christians are to live in the world. The term rendered "dear

friends" (vs. 11) can also be translated "beloved." It was a common form of address in Christian letters of the first century and indicated the close, intimate relationship that existed among believers.

Peter regarded his readers as aliens and strangers in the world. "Foreigners" refers to permanent resident foreigners in a land. They would have had no legal status or rights where they were sojourning. "Exiles" denotes those who dwelt temporarily in an area. When taken together, these two terms stress the truth that Christians live in the world but are not of it.

Because Christians are temporary residents on earth, they are not to live as the unsaved do. They are to abstain from "sinful desires." This phrase might also be rendered "lusts of the flesh." These destructive impulses constantly wage war against the soul.

We cannot resist the evil desires of the sinful nature in our own strength. We may want to do good, but apart from God's help, we will fail in our efforts. It is only when we are led by the Spirit that we can say no to the flesh (see Gal. 5:16-18).

Ask Yourself . . . *What areas of my life remain under the control of my sinful nature?*

In Peter's day, it was common for the unsaved to accuse believers of wrongdoing. Opponents of the faith claimed that Christians were traitors to the emperor, propagators of unlawful customs, troublemakers, and disrespecters of the gods (see John 19:12; Acts 16:20, 21; 17:6, 7; 19:23-27).

Our first response to hearing about a false rumor about us is important. First, we must not get defensive and loudly protest our innocence. If appropriate, quietly

Christian Behavior in a Pagan Society

(I Peter 2:11, 12)

Christians are to be . . .

Because . . .

Good citizens (2:13, 14)

Foolish people will be silenced (2:15)

Obedient servants (2:18)

Christ is our example (2:21)

Loving and considerate spouses (3:1-7)

An unsaved spouse might be won to the faith (3:1, 2)

Compassionate followers of Christ (3:8)

Believers will inherit a blessing (3:9)

tell the people directly affected by the rumor the truth. Affirm what is true, but don't feel compelled to cover all the bases. Peter placed an emphasis on our actions squelching false rumors, not our words.

Peter urged the Christians of Asia Minor to be so upright in their behavior that when pagans carefully observed what they did, it would be clear that God's people did things that were beneficial to society. The apostle was specifically referring to virtues that the culture in general would deem valuable. In the day when God visits, the unsaved will

give Him glory.

There are three primary views concerning the day of divine visitation mentioned in I Peter 2:12. It could refer to the second coming of Christ, a time of judgment and punishment, or the moment of a person's conversion. Peter may have hoped that as antagonists watched believers live their lives, they would repent of their sin, and trust in Christ for salvation.

Ask Yourself . . . *What Christian testimony have I set before the unsaved?*

4

Respecting Human Authority

I Peter 2:13-25

a Submitting to Rulers (2:13-17)

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

—I Peter 2:17

In verses 11 and 12, Peter stressed the importance of behaving virtuously. Part of presenting a positive testimony to the unsaved was properly obeying the governing authorities, which God had established. The apostle's teaching reflected Jesus' words in Mark 12:17: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Christians were to properly submit to every authority that God placed over them (I Pet. 2:13). Of course, there may be times when it is appropriate to practice civil disobedience; Peter himself set the example (see Acts 4:19; 5:29). If believers are asked by the government to do something they consider unbiblical, then they must make the hard decision to respectfully disobey, and then be ready to accept the difficult consequences of their decision.

Ask Yourself . . . How do I decide when civil disobedience might be justified?

Peter stressed that obeying all human authorities was important for both earthly and spiritual reasons. Christians were to submit because it helped maintain order in

The eagle was a symbol of the Roman Empire's power. Peter taught submission to authority figures.



society, fulfilled the will of God, and brought Him glory.

The Christians were to obey the king, or emperor, who was the highest human authority in the Roman Empire. They also were to submit to governors (such as legates, proconsuls, and procurators), whom the emperor dispatched to punish criminals and to praise law-abiding citizens (I Pet. 2:14).

The apostle Paul intimated that all human rulers have been established in their positions of authority by God (see Rom. 13:1-7). Therefore, obeying the government, in a way, was equivalent to heeding the Lord. Even if the state rulers were wicked, the institution itself was not evil, and so believers were to submit appropriately to the governing authorities.

Peter was urging his readers to maintain a godly testimony before the unsaved. It was God's will that His people do good by obeying the law and by performing beneficial deeds within their communities. Such a consistent witness might silence the baseless accusations that the unsaved made against believers and commend the Gospel to them. Christians could not stop others from spreading malicious rumors, but they could demonstrate by their lives that all such talk was foolish, being based on ignorant speculation (I Pet. 2:15).

Ask Yourself . . . *What's usually my first response to a false rumor about me?*

Rome's Attitude toward Christians

It was not until the reign of Constantine in the early fourth century A.D. that Christianity was officially sanctioned by the Roman Empire. Prior to that time, Christianity was held in suspicion by many officials.

Pliny the Younger (A.D. 62-113), the governor of the Roman province of Bithynia in Asia Minor from A.D. 111-113, wanted to know what his official stance should be toward Christians. He thus wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 53-117) in which he asked for instructions.

Pliny's letter reveals the kind of attitude that many Roman officials had toward early Christians: "I thought it . . . necessary . . . to find out finally what was true by putting to torture two girls who were called serving girls. But I found nothing but a depraved and enormous superstition. Consequently, I adjourned the investigation and turned to you for advice."

Peter did not want to imply that his readers were to live in slavish fear of the state. Through faith in Christ they had been freed from sin, selfish desires, and Satan. The apostle, however, cautioned against using their spiritual liberty to justify sinning or to cover up evil deeds (such as rebellion against the state). God's people were to live as His servants, which included behaving virtuously and obeying earthly authorities (vs. 16).

Peter summarized his thoughts by urging the recipients of his letter to show respect for all people. Some think Peter's command applied only to those who possessed legally constituted authority. It is better, however, to see the apostle's directive as applying to all people whom Christians come in contact with. This is based on the truth that everyone is created in the image of God and is thus deserving of respect.

Believers were to show Christlike love to their brothers and sisters in the faith. The Christians were also to revere God and show proper honor to the king.

Believers show their respect for the Lord by serving Him faithfully. And they show proper esteem for earthly rulers by freely submitting to them.

Ask Yourself . . . *What can I do to show my representatives in government that I respect their authority?*



Submitting to Masters (2:18-20)

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.
—I Peter 2:18

In most instances the recipients of Peter's letter would have had little problem submitting to a distant emperor in Rome. It was much harder, however, to yield to authorities closer to home who were harsh and evil. This would have been especially true for believers who were slaves of cruel unbelieving masters.

In the last three hundred years, most nations have abolished the institution of slavery. Most people living today therefore, have never had to endure the horrors of being a slave. In contrast, at least one-third of all people in the Roman Empire were slaves, and some historians put the percentage at over one-half. Most slaves served in private homes.

God never ordained slavery as He ordained marriage and the family. Christian influence eventually helped remove the blot of slavery from human society. But the day when that would be possible came long after Peter's time. And so, since slavery existed, the apostle tried to help those Christians who were involved in it.

Historical reports indicate that the church, in its first few centuries, was mainly made up of people from the lower classes. The recipients of

Peter's letter undoubtedly included many slaves.

We can safely assume that most slaves in the Roman world did their work grudgingly out of compulsion. They cared little if their efforts made their masters more prosperous or more comfortable. They did just enough work to keep from being beaten or otherwise mistreated.

Peter urged Christian slaves to adopt a far different attitude. They were morally obligated to accept the authority of their masters and always show them proper respect. This would be easier to do when a master was kind and thoughtful, but much more difficult when a

master was insensitive and cruel. Nevertheless, Peter directed Christian slaves to yield to their masters regardless of how they treated them (vs. 18).

By God's grace, none of us are slaves. But some of us may feel like slaves. We have to do jobs to pay the bills, but we may not enjoy our work. Yet until God provides us with a more enjoyable way to spend our working hours, our jobs are His will for us. If we realize that, we can see ourselves as working, not at a job we dislike, but for the Lord. This change of thinking may be enough to restore our enjoyment in our work.

Slavery in the First Century

Slavery was a basic part of Roman society. The majority of slaves were laborers, and they performed such duties as cooking, cleaning, and farming. A minority served as tutors, physicians, artisans, and managers of households. More skilled and better educated slaves generally enjoyed superior food, clothing, and shelter than their unskilled and uneducated counterparts.

Under Roman law, slaves were not considered legal persons. Additionally, slaves were not allowed to represent themselves in court, inherit property, or select a mate. Nevertheless, the law protected them against being cruelly treated by their masters.

There were two basic situations in which slaves obtained freedom. They could either be emancipated by their masters or they could purchase their freedom with funds they had accumulated over time. On some occasions an owner might grant freedom to all the members of a household; on other occasions a freed slave might be forced to leave family members behind.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I remind myself while working that I'm serving God?*

Peter acknowledged the possibility that believers might have to suffer even when they were not guilty of doing anything wrong. The apostle encouraged his readers to keep their focus on the Lord during such difficult times. They would be better able to endure the pain, and their loyalty to the faith would meet with God's approval (vs. 19).

The word rendered "commendable" literally means "grace" or "favor." As Christians suffered for doing good, their virtuous disposition would have an attractive quality in the sight of the Lord.

Often God blesses His people with good things in this life. But He always rewards His people, regardless of their earthly lot, in the life to come. We can be certain that we, too, will receive generous rewards for our unwavering commitment to Christ, despite the hardships we endure.

Ask Yourself . . . *What is my attitude when others treat me unfairly?*

Peter knew his readers were not perfect. There were times when the authorities might punish them for misdeeds they had committed. If the master of Christian slaves beat them for some wrong they had done, there would be no reason to offer praise, for nothing of eternal value was gained when it occurred (vs. 20).

At the time Peter wrote, the

unsaved sometimes persecuted believers. The apostle may have known of actual situations in which the masters of Christians who were slaves had punished them for doing good. Peter said that God was pleased when his fellow believers patiently endured such unjust suffering, just as Christ had done.

The apostle seemed to imply that the Lord would display His good pleasure by spiritually blessing His beleaguered people. Peter may have remembered the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

Roman Persecution of Christians

A.D. 64-68

Persecution under Nero

A.D. 91-96

Persecution under Domitian

A.D. 98-117

Persecution under Trajan

A.D. 161-180

Persecution under Marcus Aurelius

A.D. 249-251

Persecution under Decius

A.D. 284-305

Persecution under Diocletian

C Following Christ's Example (2:21-25)

Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. —I Peter 2:21

After instructing his readers in the proper way to bear unjust suffering, Peter pointed them to Christ. The word rendered "example" (vs. 21) refers to a specific model or pattern that one must copy. Jesus is the supreme example of one who patiently endured undeserved punishment despite all the good things He did for humanity (see Isa. 52:13—53:12).

Peter reminded his readers that God had not only called them to trust in His Son for salvation, but also to suffer as they followed in His footsteps. After all, Christ endured the suffering of the cross to free them from sin and give them eternal life.

Despite facing the largest obstacle anybody has ever had—the cross—Jesus remained faithful to God. Although the cross brought great suffering and disgrace, the Savior kept in mind the glorious salvation He was making available to the lost. Seen in this light, suffering as a follower of Jesus is a welcomed privilege, not a despised embarrassment.

There are times when we might feel weary and lose heart because of unjust treatment. Taking inspiration from Christ, we can persevere no matter what obstacles wicked

people may place in our way. Jesus is our supreme example.

Ask Yourself . . . How can the example of Christ help me face the obstacles people place in my way?

The Sinlessness of Christ

The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that Christ was absolutely free from sin (Acts 3:14; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; I John 3:5). The Son delighted in God's law and found joy in keeping it.

Hebrews 4:15 says that Christ was tempted "in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." People are tempted every day to be self-centered, to indulge in self-pity, to cut moral corners, to love themselves more than others, and to gratify their forbidden passions. Although Jesus experienced these kinds of enticements to sin, He did not give in to any of them.

In order to redeem sinful people, Christ had to be personally free from sin. For the sake of the lost, Jesus obeyed every commandment of God. He also fulfilled the Lord's specific will for Him. Because of Jesus' perfect obedience and sinless life, He is qualified to be our all-sufficient Savior.

Quoting from Isaiah 53:9, Peter noted that Christ never violated the will of God. Jesus was blameless in His words and above reproach in His conduct. No one could rightly accuse Him of having ever sinned. Even when wronged by others, He refused to lie. Instead, He always chose to tell the truth (I Pet. 2:22).

During Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion, His opponents hurled abusive remarks at Him. Yet He refused to verbally retaliate. Likewise, when they physically abused Him, He did not threaten to get even. Throughout His ordeal, Jesus chose to trust His Father to take care of Him. Christ realized that God is characterized by justice and would vindicate Him in the end (I Pet. 2:23; see also Mark 15:3-5).

When others treat us shabbily, we do not have to respond in kind. We can look to God for help, strength, and ultimately justice.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I respond to mockery and false accusations in a Christlike manner?*

Peter said that Christ personally bore our sins in His body when He was nailed to the cross (I Pet. 2:24). Peter may have had in mind the scapegoat, an animal that carried the sins of the people into the wilderness on the day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:10).

In ancient societies, the body of an executed criminal was sometimes hung on a tree as an added insult or a public warning. Old Testament law encouraged same-day burials because a person hung on a tree was

accursed. By extension, it could be said that Christ was cursed because He hung on a wooden cross to redeem us from the law's curse (see Deut. 21:22, 23; Gal. 3:13).

In saying that Christ bore our sins, Peter did not mean that He became a sinner. Rather, as an offering for human sins, Jesus became the object of the Father's wrath and judgment for those sins. Christ took the place of sinners on the cross as a substitute, bearing the punishment they deserved.

It was the Father's intent that those who trusted in Christ would die to sins and live for righteousness (I Pet. 2:24). Peter was stressing the truth of the believer's identification with Christ. Those who put their faith in Him are identified with His death, burial, and resurrection. Because Jesus lives, they also live, but not for themselves. Christ has liberated them from sin's power so that they might serve the Lord (see Rom. 6:3-11).

God wants us to become in our actions what we are in our new natures.

Ask Yourself . . . *How is the fact that I am dead to sin reflected in my daily experience?*

Referring to Isaiah 53:5, Peter said that believers are healed by the wounds others inflicted on Christ. The word translated "wounds" refers to bruises and welts caused by being whipped or beaten. Based on this verse, some think physical healing is included in Christ's atonement (see Matt. 8:16, 17). Probably

the majority believe that Peter was referring to spiritual healing. The apostle stressed that those who trust in Christ are delivered from their spiritual sickness.

Perhaps referring to Isaiah 53:6, Peter declared that his readers had once been like straying sheep. These domesticated animals were important to the economy of ancient Israel. Their tendency to wander was an appropriate illustration of the sinner's waywardness (I Pet. 2:25).

Peter said that although the recipients of his letter had once strayed far from Christ, they had returned to Him through obedient faith. He was their good Shepherd, the One who laid down His life for them (see John

10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; I Pet. 5:4; Rev. 7:17). Jesus is also their Overseer—He looks out for their welfare.

We will sometimes feel alone, abandoned by friends, perhaps even forsaken by God. We can be encouraged by the knowledge that Jesus felt that way too. His agony in Gethsemane and His loneliness on the cross can be a source of strength for us when we face struggles. Because He faced the same kinds of trials we face and still triumphed, we can receive strength to overcome our ordeals.

Ask Yourself . . . *When have I felt alone and abandoned? How does Jesus help me through those times?*



A young shepherd tending his flock of sheep.

5

God's People and Their Relationships

I Peter 3:1-12

a The Responsibility of Wives to Husbands (3:1-6)

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

—I Peter 3:1, 2

In the previous lesson, we learned about Peter's instructions concerning submission. The apostle ended chapter 2 by pointing his readers to Christ, the supreme example of appropriate submission.

This lesson's Bible passages begin with the responsibility of wives to husbands. The word rendered "in the same way" (3:1) refers back to the general principle of submission in 2:13. Just as Christians should submit to all human authorities, Peter said, wives should submit to their husbands. The apostle was stressing the importance of wives putting their husbands first.

Perhaps it is helpful to consider

what Peter did not mean by wives submitting to their husbands. He did not mean that women are inferior to men; the passage says nothing about that. Peter did not mean that all women must submit

Household Codes

At least as early as Aristotle, Greek writers—especially Stoic philosophers—offered rules for governing households. They hoped to build a stable society.

Hellenistic (Greek-influenced) Jewish teachers frequently made lists of household rules. They believed that these moral laws applied equally to Jews and Gentiles.

Early Christian writers were probably influenced by the Hellenistic Jewish teachers. Besides I Peter 2:18—3:7, household codes can be found in Ephesians 5:22—6:9; Colossians 3:18—4:1; I Timothy 2:8-15; 6:1, 2; and Titus 2:1-10. Several Christian leaders from the postapostolic period listed household codes as well.

to all men, for the passage speaks only about wives relating to their husbands. And even though Peter did not put any qualifications on the wife's submission, the teaching of Scripture as a whole indicates that a wife should not submit when her husband wants her to act in a way that is clearly contrary to God's will (compare Acts 5:29, "as you do to the Lord," Eph. 5:22).

Ask Yourself . . . *What woman of my acquaintance comes closest to the ideal Peter describes in this passage?*

The orderly operation of the home formed the backdrop of Peter's

This statue shows how women dressed and wore their hair at the time of Peter. The apostle raised inner spiritual beauty above outer finery.



instructions to wives and husbands. He was convinced that strong Christian families were the building blocks of any stable society.

The strength of the home had to begin with the right kind of relationship between wives and husbands. If a Christian couple could not relate to each other in affirming, considerate ways, this would hurt their relationship. And if they had children, their daughters and sons would be harmed by the divisive atmosphere.

Peter realized that some Christian wives were married to husbands who did not believe the message of the Gospel. The apostle stressed that the wife's willingness to put her husband first might help him become more receptive to the faith. Instead of resorting to argumentation to convert her husband, the wife was to allow her godly lifestyle to present the Good News in the best light. The wife's gentle responses might reduce the husband's suspicions and make him more receptive to the truth.

It would be wrong to conclude that Peter thought a Christian wife should never speak to her husband about her faith. Later in his letter, the apostle would urge his readers to always be ready to give a kind and respectful answer when someone asked them about their hope in Christ (see I Pet. 3:15, 16). Peter was discouraging Christian wives from constantly nagging their husbands to consider the truth of the Gospel. A badgered husband might come to resent, rather than respect, his

Elegant Attire

in the First Century

Secular writers of the first century A.D. underscored the importance that Greek and Roman women placed on lavish dress.

- Women curled and dyed their hair (mostly black or auburn). They wore wigs that were made from hair imported from Germany and India. The hair bands, pins, and combs they used were made of ivory, tortoiseshell, or gold and studded with gems.
- Women generally liked clothing that had been dyed purple, which was expensive to do. They preferred silks from India and purple-dyed cloth made from fine Tyrian wool. They favored slippers and gowns that were encrusted with pearls.
- Much of the jewelry the women wore was made from diamonds, emeralds, topazes, opals, and sardonyx. Most of these precious stones came from India and Arabia.

wife's commitment to the Lord. This would not only sour the husband's interest in Christ but also create other serious problems in the marriage relationship.

Christian wives were to focus on two aspects of their lives. First, their behavior was to be characterized by moral purity. This means that love and modesty, rather than selfishness and greed, were to typify their conduct. Second, Christian wives were to revere God. They were to respect and honor Him even though their unsaved spouses did not (vs. 2).

In Peter's day some women wore extravagant clothing to draw attention to themselves. They also braided their hair with silver, gold, and pearls to create a flashy appearance.

The apostle said the beauty of Christian wives should not come from fancy hairdos, expensive jewelry, or lavish clothing. Instead, they should be beautiful in their hearts by cultivating a gentle and quiet disposition. Instead of being restless and outspoken, godly women were to be calm and conciliatory. This kind of beauty would last a long time, and God considered it precious (vss. 3, 4).

Peter's intent was not to suggest that women should neglect their appearance. But rather than focus their attention on clothing and jewelry, they should concentrate on adorning themselves with the qualities God highly values. Such behavior not only expresses faith but displays the

true glory of a Christian woman.

An old adage says that beauty is only skin-deep. The beauty that should attract the world to us is not our outward appearance, but the winsomeness and grace that comes from a Spirit-controlled life.

Ask Yourself . . . *What is my motive for selecting clothing to wear?*

Peter was not advocating radical, new ideas. What he said had been practiced in times past by holy women. Because their hope was in God, they cultivated their inner beauty by striving to be morally pure and by consistently worshiping the Lord (vs. 5).

The women of old were respectful to their husbands. Sarah would be one noteworthy example. She willingly obeyed Abraham and called him her master (vs. 6; see Gen. 18:12). Peter said Christian wives were Sarah's spiritual descendants when they did what was right and did not let anything frighten them.

The apostle was stressing the importance of remaining committed to Christ even if one's spouse was unsaved. A disgruntled husband might be displeased with such a decision and try to intimidate his wife into renouncing her faith. Peter urged Christian wives to continue to trust the Lord even in a difficult situation such as this.

New Testament scholars have taken different positions on what Peter said concerning Sarah and the relevancy of her example for Christian women today. Some think

the apostle's teaching should be applied universally to believers in all times and places. Others say his teaching on this matter was merely situational to churches in his day.

To those who consider Peter's words normative, the apostle meant that the wife submitted to her husband as a recognized authority. Those who hold to this position argue that the creation order reflects a system of authority, with God placing the husband in charge of the wife (see I Tim. 2:12-14).

To those who think Peter's words applied only to the original recipients of his letter, Peter meant that a wife must honor and love her husband, but the two have equal levels of authority in the family. They share decision making equally and work through family problems as partners (see Gal. 3:28).

Sadly, Peter's teaching about the relationship of wives to husbands has been taken to extremes and abused. Throughout the New Testament, we see that women were respected members of their families and churches. Whether or not we believe that Peter's teachings are normative, we should all recognize that as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all of equal value in God's sight regardless of gender. Mutual respect is essential to harmony in the church.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I affirm the contributions that wives make to the betterment of their families?*

b The Responsibility of Husbands to Wives (3:7)

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.
—I Peter 3:7

Peter devoted only one verse to talking about the Christian husband's responsibility to his wife. Some might wrongly conclude from this that the apostle was less concerned about the husband's conduct in the marriage relationship. By no means. What Peter said here is just as important and is not to be minimized.

As in verse 1, the word rendered "in the same way" in verse 7 refers to the general principle of submission in 2:13. Jesus put His people first when He died on the cross for them. Similarly, a Christian husband was to put his wife first by being considerate of her needs, desires, and points of view.

A Christian husband was to be thoughtful, sensitive, and caring as he related to his wife. He also was to treat his wife with love and respect. Peter's emphasis on the husband honoring his wife in this way balances the apostle's earlier comments regarding a wife respecting her husband.

Peter was advocating mutual submission (see Eph. 5:21). This means yielding or adapting to each other. Because of our selfish human nature, we do not naturally want to yield or adapt to anyone. But since we love and respect Christ, and since He desires that we submit to one another, we must do so.

Ask Yourself . . . *Why is it sometimes hard for me to love and respect others the way Christ would want?*

Peter referred to the wife as "the weaker partner" (I Pet. 3:7). He was not talking about a woman's mental abilities, moral character, or spiritual endurance. The apostle was noting that men generally have more physical strength than women. Out of insecurity, frustration, or selfishness, a husband might try to bully or threaten his wife to make her do what he wanted. Peter made it clear that this was wrong.

A godly husband also needed to remember that his saved wife was on an equal spiritual footing with him before God. The Lord forgave both of them by means of their faith in Christ. Thus it would be wrong for a believing husband to treat his saved wife in a disrespectful manner. Since both were spiritual equals in the eyes of God, both needed to be loving, considerate and kind to each other.

Peter issued a note of caution to saved husbands. If they disregarded his teaching concerning their relationship to their wives, God would also disregard their prayers. A Christian husband could not expect

the Lord to respond favorably to his requests when he mistreated his wife either verbally or physically.

Ask Yourself . . . What can I do to improve the way I treat my brothers and sisters in Christ?

Two Models of Marriage

Authority Model

Some Christians think that a wife should submit to her husband by obeying him, and that a husband should submit to his wife by respecting her. These Christians maintain that while a husband should be considerate toward his wife, he should exercise authority when necessary.

Equality Model

Other Christians believe that Peter's command for a wife to submit to her husband is essentially equivalent to the apostle's command for a husband to respect his wife. These believers emphasize Christ's abandonment of authority on the cross and the mutuality of love between Christ and the Church. They conclude that in marriage, both partners are equals and should equally share authority.

C Relationships between Christians and Others (3:8-12)

All of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

—I Peter 3:8

The apostle concluded his thoughts on submission by outlining the way Christians ought to relate to one another as well as to the unsaved.

The recipients of Peter's letter were being mistreated by others because of their devotion to Christ. Under such stressful conditions it would be easy for Christians to argue and fight with one another. Peter said God's people should promote harmony and unity, not discord and division (vs. 8).

The word rendered "like-minded" means to be in harmony. Peter was not saying that believers had to think the same way about everything. Rather, he stressed the importance of embracing the same goals such as wanting to glorify the Lord and desiring to spiritually strengthen the community of faith.

One way to live in harmony is by showing genuine empathy. For instance, when others are happy over the good things happening in their life, we should rejoice with them rather than withdraw with envy. When others grieve, we should bear the burden of their grief with them

(see Rom. 12:15).

Another way to promote harmony is by loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. People don't begin to show spiritual kinship because of something they have heard or read. They don't have a kindred love because they observe others who have it. Rather, those who begin to exhibit true Christian love do so because the Spirit of God is living within them, teaching them and motivating them to show such love.

Kindred love should extend to wherever Christians are found. It may be easier for us to love the Christian brothers and sisters with whom we worship each week. But our love must take in believers who live far away from us and may seem different from us. Christ's worldwide church is a vast network of local congregations whose links must be maintained through love.

Ask Yourself . . . *In the last year, have I loved my brothers and sisters in Christ more and more or less and less? How have I expressed love?*

Harmony is maintained when believers are compassionate and humble. Compassion implies more than trying to understand how others feel. It means caring deeply about the sufferings and sorrows that others are experiencing (see I John 3:17). Humility includes more than just meekness. It involves putting the needs and interests of others above one's own (see Phil. 2:4-8).

The instructions that appear in I Peter 3:9 concern how believers should relate to those who are

hostile to them. The Old Testament followed a principle of justice called the law of retaliation. This principle limited punishments to fit the offense (see Lev. 24:19-21). Equitable justice, not revenge, was the main concern. Jesus brought this principle a step higher by teaching that believers should leave the demands of equitable justice in the hands of God and return only good for evil (see Matt. 5:38-42).

This teaching of Jesus is reflected in I Peter 3:9. Christians should not be hateful and rude to people just because people are hateful and rude to them. Instead, believers are to treat people with kindness. For

Word Study:

'Blessing'

"Blessing" in I Peter 3:9 translates the Greek word *eulogeo* [you-low-GEH-oh]. The term means to speak well of someone.

In secular Greek literature *eulogeo* was used in reference to people extolling one another or praising the gods. In biblical literature *eulogeo* can mean to speak gratefully of someone, to confer spiritual prosperity or happiness on someone, to invoke divine care for someone, or to praise or glorify the Lord.

instance, Christians can ask the Lord to bless their enemies. It is difficult to do this when others have treated us unfairly. Yet when we are kind to others, God is pleased and showers us with eternal rewards.

Ask Yourself . . . *What things can I do to bring the kindness of God to others?*

In verses 10-12 Peter quoted from Psalm 34:12-16 to substantiate his point about being kind to one's enemies. David said that those who wanted the benefits of godliness had a negative and positive task ahead of them. They had to abandon evil and do what was good—this can require a concentrated effort.

There are more kinds of wickedness than those performed by the tongue. But evil, deceptive speech is among the most dangerous kinds of wickedness (see Jas. 3:1-12). So David used spoken evil as an

example of the wickedness from which we ought to turn (I Pet. 3:10).

As an example of doing good, David cited the pursuit of peaceful relationships with others. The words translated "seek" and "pursue" (vs. 11) indicate that believers are to cultivate this virtue energetically.

The decision to revere or not revere the Lord has consequences, and these are spelled out in verse 12. God sees all that happens to the upright and knows their problems before they pray about them. Yet He listens to their requests and judges the wicked.

It is admittedly difficult to treat opponents of the faith with kindness and compassion. Nevertheless, with God's help we can show His love to the most antagonistic, malicious unbeliever.

Ask Yourself . . . *How might I do good to people in my community?*



Dealing with Difficult Circumstances

I Peter 3:13-22

a Coping with Mistreatment (3:13-15a)

Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."
—I Peter 3:14

In verse 9, Peter alluded to the fact that his readers were being persecuted for their faith. In 3:13—4:19 the apostle dealt more fully with the issue of suffering as believers.

Peter began by stressing the importance of enthusiastically doing good deeds. This included obeying the law and performing beneficial deeds within the community. The apostle reasoned that if his readers tried to do good, it was less likely that antagonists to the faith would want to harm them (3:13).

Peter was not denying that the recipients of his letter were suffering for the cause of Christ. The apostle was stressing two truths worth remembering. First, mistreatment was less likely if one's behavior was exemplary. Second, regardless of what happened to God's people, no

earthly force could eternally harm them (see Ps. 56:4; Luke 12:4, 5).

Some think that the more godly they become, the easier their lives will become. Yet Peter, as upright as he lived his life, could not avoid hardship and suffering (see Acts 4; 5:17-20, 40, 41). He knew that some of the difficulties he endured stemmed directly from the godly life he sought to live.

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some hardships I've had to endure for my devotion to Christ?*

Christianity is not a religion of escape. Peter stressed to his readers that those who commit themselves to following Christ's will in this world might be persecuted by opponents of the faith (I Pet. 3:14). One reason is that their pagan codes of conduct differ from those of Christians.

Some people are so perverted in their behavior that the virtuous behavior of a righteous person enrages them. They therefore persecute that individual just because he or she is upright. But a Christian's zeal for doing good can rob unbelievers of any valid reason to mistreat him or her.

Word Study:

'Blessed'

"Blessed" in I Peter 3:14 translates the Greek word *makarioi* [ma-KAH-ree-oy]. The term means more than "happy" and conveys the idea of being the privileged recipient of God's favor.

Jesus expanded upon what it meant to be blessed in the Sermon on the Mount. These pronouncements are commonly called the Beatitudes. This term comes from the word *beati*, which was used in the Vulgate, a Latin translation of the Bible. The word refers to a state of bliss, satisfaction, and contentment.

Some think Peter's mention of suffering was a reference either to physical illness or to state persecution. Most likely, however, the apostle was talking about mistreatment from unsaved spouses, neighbors, and masters.

Though believers may suffer for the cause of Christ, they know they are blessed. Peter's words hark back to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:10-12). Part of God's blessings to persecuted Christians includes receiving eternal rewards.

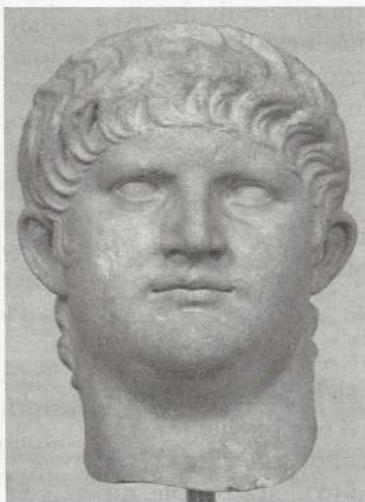
As others persecuted them,

it would be easy for the Christians of Asia Minor to fear their enemies and begin to think and act in worldly ways. Peter urged his readers not to dread what unbelievers fear. Also, he encouraged his friends in the faith not to worry about what others might do to them.

First Peter 3:14 says, "Do not fear their threats." The idea here is that instead of fearing people, Christians should "fear," or respect and revere, God. He promises to watch over and protect them from eternal harm (see Isa. 8:12-14; Matt. 10:28).

Peter did not teach that God would always shield His people from persecution. Rather, the apostle assured his readers that God would give them the strength to do what was pleasing to Him.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever gone through a trial in which I found comfort in knowing that God is with me?*



Nero was the emperor of Rome who spearheaded the persecution of believers around the time when Peter wrote his letter.

Peter exhorted his readers to set apart Christ as Lord (I Pet. 3:15a). The apostle meant more than a mere intellectual commitment to the facts about the Savior.

The confession "Jesus is Lord" was an early Christian creed (Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11). But it could be a dangerous confession to make publicly. In certain periods the Roman emperor required everyone to confess that he was divine. Christians suffered greatly for insisting, on the contrary, that Jesus is Lord. The believers were to honor Christ by acknowledging His lordship.

Doing this would help them maintain an eternal perspective as they were harassed by others and experienced other difficulties.

The biblical writers saw the heart as their spiritual center, the control station of their emotions and will. When Christ is Lord of our hearts, we are in a right relationship with Him. Only then can we respond properly to hardships.

b Responding Respectfully to Others (3:15b-17)

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. —I Peter 3:15b

When the authorities harassed Peter for his devotion to Christ, he

saw it as another opportunity to share his faith (see Acts 4:8-12). The apostle wanted his readers to adopt the same attitude toward their unjust suffering.

Peter's readers would not be able to predict when others would persecute them. That is why Peter urged them to always be ready to give an answer when someone asked them about their hope in Christ. Hostile questions were prominent in the apostle's mind. If his readers were unprepared when the inquiries came, they might be either speechless or unable to articulate clearly why they had devoted themselves to the Lord.

The term rendered "to give a reason" (I Pet. 3:15) can also be translated "to make a defense." The English word apology is derived from it and refers to vindicating the Christian faith. Some argue that Peter was referring only to formal interrogations. Others, however, think he included informal questioning. Either way, the apostle wanted his readers to hold fast to the Gospel and fearlessly proclaim it to others.

Attacks on the Christian faith—both by people who call themselves believers and by others—are still common. In each generation Christians must prepare themselves to defend the faith. Only in that way will the Good News continue to be a powerful force in the world.

Ask Yourself . . . *How might I have to give a defense of my faith to others?*

God's people were to stress the hope they had in Christ. This would

be beneficial for two reasons. The believer's hope would direct the attention of the unsaved to the Savior, who alone could redeem them from their sins. Also, the hope of God's people would help them endure the rejection and suffering of others.

When others slandered Christ, He did not hurl abusive remarks at them. Instead, He remained godly in His behavior (see 2:23). As true followers of Christ, His people were to be humble and respectful to their detractors. If antagonists were harsh and critical to the Christians, it would be inappropriate and counterproductive for them to respond

in a sarcastic, demeaning way. They were to give a kind and composed answer to any who might question their faith.

When others attacked their beliefs and spiritual commitment, the Christians might have been tempted to defend or justify themselves. They could avoid making this mistake by committing their cause to the Lord.

As long as the recipients of Peter's letter followed his advice, they would keep their conscience clear of guilt. Others would see them as citizens who obeyed the law and respected the authorities. Although this might not stop unbelievers from accusing them of doing evil, their

The Human Conscience

Many people have accepted the old saying "Let your conscience be your guide" without questioning its validity. In reality, following this adage can be spiritually dangerous, for the conscience is tainted by sin and thus an imperfect gauge of right and wrong.

Even though the conscience is flawed in its ability to distinguish between goodness and blameworthiness, it still serves a useful purpose. Paul said in Romans 2:15 that God has given every person some innate sense of right and wrong. Though this intuitive knowledge is often suppressed, it is there all the same, and so all people are held responsible for their actions.

The conscience is that inner faculty that evaluates actions and thoughts, and it bears witness to the law written on the hearts of all people. The conscience can either accuse or excuse a person's behavior. Of course, the Holy Spirit plays a major role in this inner dialogue. The Christian who is filled with God's Spirit will be able to rightly distinguish between true and false accusations or rationalizations.

commendable behavior in Christ would shame their revilers (3:16).

There are several reasons why the slanderers would be shamed. Others would see that their malicious comments were false. Also, the kindness of the Christians would contrast sharply with the meanspiritedness of the antagonists. And in the day of judgment, the enemies of the cross would realize how groundless and disgraceful their false accusations were.

Peter stressed that his readers' good behavior was "in Christ." He meant their commendable conduct was based on their spiritual union with the Savior. Jesus determined what constituted good behavior and He empowered His people to act this way.

Peter did not want to see his readers suffer for their faith. But from an eternal perspective, he said, it would be better if the enemies of the Gospel persecuted them for doing what was right rather than for doing what was wrong (vs. 17). Peter wanted the Christians to remember that unjust suffering was within God's will.

Tragically, some Christians grumble when they are treated unfairly and accuse God of injustice. We may not always understand why the Lord allows others to mistreat us, but we should never blame Him for their conduct. God can use our pain to spiritually mature us, to display His power in our lives, and to bring glory to His name.

Ask Yourself . . . *What might be*

my response if I had to experience the type of persecution thrust on the early Christians?

Although it is impossible to know exactly what suffering the recipients of Peter's letter had experienced, it is probable that others had subjected them to public insults and injuries. The authorities may have confiscated the property of some and imprisoned others.

Regardless of the hardships they faced, the readers of Peter's letter were to remain calm and treat their enemies with kindness. They could do this knowing that the Lord would eternally bless them.

C **Suffering with Christ (3:18-22)**

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

—1 Peter 3:18

Peter had stressed that it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing wrong. He then reminded his readers that Christ's life offers the supreme example of the type of suffering he described in verse 17. The Father allowed His Son to be crucified, and Christ patiently endured this ordeal.

Peter noted that Jesus died on the cross for sins "once for sins." In Old Testament times, the high priests of

Israel had to offer sacrifices yearly to atone for the sins of the people. Unlike the high priests, Jesus does not have to offer sacrifices for His own sins, because He is sinless. And He does not have to offer ritualistic sacrifices for our sins, because He Himself is our sacrifice. Christ's atonement for the sins of the world was final. No other sacrifices need follow it (see Heb. 7:26-28).

Ask Yourself . . . *How does it make me feel to know that Christ has given Himself as a sacrifice for my sins once for all?*

Peter explained that Christ, the righteous one, died to redeem those who are unrighteous. The apostle meant that Jesus was innocent of all wrongdoing. Yet He died a criminal's death to make salvation available to those who had rebelled against the Lord.

Although Jesus physically died, He was "made alive in the Spirit" (I Pet. 3:18). According to the NIV rendering, the Holy Spirit physically resurrected Christ from the grave. Several New Testament passages teach as well that the other two persons of the Godhead played an active role in the Son's resurrection (see John 10:17, 18; Acts 2:32; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20).

Some have rendered I Peter 3:18 "made alive in the spirit," which would be a reference to Christ's human spirit. Those who prefer this translation say that Peter was drawing a contrast between Christ's flesh and His spirit. Although He was put to death, His spirit was made alive

by God, His body was resurrected, and He entered into the fullness of a glorified human existence. A similar glorious future awaits us all as Christians.

If verse 18 refers to the Holy Spirit, then verse 19 says that He enabled Christ to go and preach to the spirits in prison. If verse 18 refers to Christ's human spirit, then verse 19 says that Jesus, in His glorified state of existence, went and preached.

Peter said the spirits in prison had refused to obey God long ago in the time of Noah. The Lord waited patiently for them while Noah built the ark. Peter noted that only a few people—eight in all—were saved by water. This means God brought them safely through the Flood, even though it was a cataclysmic natural event (vs. 20).

It would be wrong to conclude from Peter's teaching that there is a second chance after death for salvation for those who refuse the truth in this life. The Bible teaches that after death the unsaved must face judgment and render an account of their lives to God (see Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:11-15).

Peter said that the water of the Flood symbolized baptism and that baptism depicted salvation (I Pet. 3:21). The Flood reminds us of all who died at the time of Noah. Similarly, baptism reminds us of Christ's death on the cross and the believer's identification with His death.

New Testament writers closely associated water baptism with salvation (see Rom. 6:3, 4).

'Preached to the imprisoned spirits'— What Does It Mean?

There are five primary views regarding Christ's preaching to "the imprisoned spirits" (I Pet. 3:19).

1. During the short interval between Christ's death and resurrection, He announced His victory over sin and death to the spirits of Noah's wicked generation who were confined to Hades (the realm of the dead).
2. Between Christ's death and resurrection, He proclaimed His victory to fallen angels—the "sons of God"—in their state of confinement as they awaited judgment (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).
3. Christ proclaimed His victory to fallen angels at the time of His ascension into heaven.
4. Between Christ's death and resurrection, He announced salvation to God's faithful followers who had been waiting for their deliverance during the Old Testament era in the Paradise section of Hades (Abraham's bosom) (Matt. 27:52, 53).
5. The preincarnate Christ proclaimed a message of righteousness through Noah to the people living at the time of the Flood (II Pet. 2:5). Noah urged them to repent, but they refused and are now awaiting judgment.

In fact, the early church taught that the baptismal ceremony depicted the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. In some instances, believers would use the drama of baptism to refer to the reality of salvation in Christ.

Others, however, do not think I Peter 3:21 is referring to water baptism, for if it did, it might seem to teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation—something that is denied in other passages of Scripture (Acts 10:44-48; 16:29-33). Salvation hinges solely on believing in Christ.

Many Christians hold that water baptism dramatizes the work of salvation in a person's heart.

For this reason, some scholars believe Spirit baptism may be in view in I Peter 3:21. In Spirit baptism, the Spirit places the believer into the Body of Christ (see I Cor. 12:13).

This is understood by many to bring about a spiritual identification with Christ. Believers—in their union with Christ—have spiritually died to sin and have been raised to newness of life.

Whichever view is correct, the fundamental point Peter was making about salvation remains the same. Deliverance from sin is not based on the washing of dirt from the body, but the response of a good conscience toward God. The sinner makes a genuine commitment to the Lord through faith in Christ. The ceremony of water baptism serves as a pledge that the new convert will live as a follower of Christ. While outward obedience to the commands of Christ is important, what happens inside the repentant human heart is of the utmost significance.

The reason the lost can look to Christ for salvation is that He was sacrificed on the cross to atone for their sins. God vindicated Jesus' death when He raised Him from the dead (see Rom. 1:4). For forty days, Christ ministered on earth to His followers. Then He ascended to heaven and assumed His place at God's right hand (I Pet. 3:22).

When a person of power and importance, such as a king, wanted to honor someone, the important person would let the person who was to be honored take up a position at his right hand. Of course, this doesn't mean that the Father and Son literally have side-by-side thrones in heaven. Peter simply meant that Jesus received from God the highest honor and authority.

Peter underscored the truth of Christ's exaltation when he noted that angels, authorities, and powers are under His control. Paul said something similar when he taught that Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers (see Eph. 1:20-22).

Next time we are up against a problem that seems unbeatable, we should remember that we serve a Lord whose authority encompasses everything. Nothing takes God by surprise.

Ask Yourself . . . *How might it help me to meditate on Christ's authority?*



Living for Christ

I Peter 4

a Dying to the Old Life (4:1-6)

Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

—I Peter 4:1

In 3:18 Peter stressed that Christ, who was innocent, died for the guilty so that they might have the opportunity to be saved. After a brief digression in verses 19-22, the apostle returned to the theme of unjust suffering in 4:1.

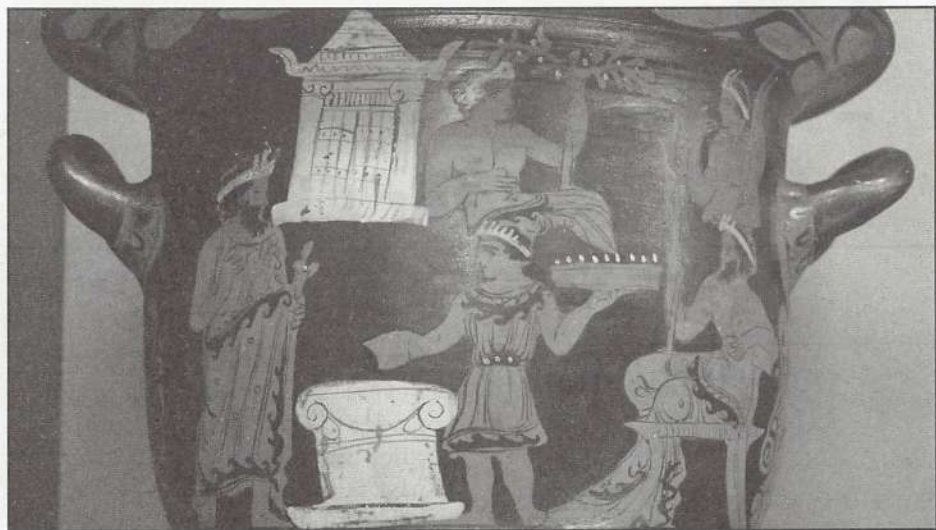
When Peter said that Christ suffered in His body, the apostle was referring to the Savior's crucifixion and death. Christ did not value His physical life so much that He refused to die on the cross, and His followers were to adopt this same attitude. They were to accept the fact that living and dying for the cause of Christ were more important than preserving their earthly existence

Ask Yourself . . . Which is more important to me, serving Christ or living for myself?

It would have been hard for the believers of northwest Asia Minor to consider the possibility of enduring further mistreatment as followers of Christ. Although the prospect was unpleasant, there were spiritual benefits to suffering unjustly. Foremost in Peter's mind was the truth that the Christian "is done with sin."

There are two primary ways of understanding what Peter meant. According to one view, he was referring to the character-building effects of suffering. As enemies of the church persecuted God's people, they were forced to decide what was most important in life. Consequently, the things of the world became less attractive.

According to a second view, Peter was thinking about the spiritual union of believers with Christ in His suffering and death. This identification is symbolized by baptism, which the apostle had talked about in 3:21. Christ died to sin in the sense that, after His death and resurrection, He was no longer subject to the power of sin and death. Similarly, believers were dead to the power of sin and alive to God through their identification with Christ (see Rom. 6:11).



This painting on an ancient vase shows a banquet for the wealthy. Peter admonished Christians to let go of the debauchery of their pasts, which in many ways imitated that of their pagan neighbors.

As a result of experiencing unjust suffering, the recipients of Peter's letter were more likely to spend their time on earth doing what God wanted, not doing the evil things that people wanted (I Pet. 4:2). The apostle said his friends had already spent enough time in the past living like pagans, that is, people who did not know the Lord (vs. 3).

At one time, the Christians followed their evil desires. They participated in lewd activities, got drunk, indulged in orgies, and caroused with others. They even worshiped idols.

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some of the ungodly practices the Lord has freed me from?*

The readers of Peter's letter were grateful that they no longer lived immorally. Of course, their unsaved acquaintances did not understand why they would abandon sin. Those who opposed the faith were shocked that God's people refused to do the wasteful things they did. That is why the former friends of the Asia Minor Christians maligned them for their virtuous behavior (vs. 4).

Peter knew that it was difficult for his fellow believers to endure such persecution. He explained that one day God would require their enemies to explain their reprehensible actions. The unsaved would stand condemned before the One who will one day judge the living and the dead (vs. 5).

According to Jesus, unbelievers now live under the threat of God's condemnation and wrath (see John 3:18, 36). Outwardly they may appear to be secure and comfortable, but they are skating on thin ice. God will judge all of humanity (Jews and Gentiles); the agent of His judgment will be Jesus Christ; and His evaluation will focus on the secrets of people's hearts (see Rom. 2:16).

Sometimes people do good things that are actually rooted in selfish intentions. Other times people may appear guilty of a wrongdoing when there was no bad intention. Sometimes people internalize blame for the sins of others. On the great day, all that is hidden will be revealed—there will be no second-guessing when it comes to motives. God's judgment will be impartial, perfect, and absolutely just.

Ask Yourself . . . *How has the knowledge of God's judgment affected my efforts to spread the Gospel?*

Peter explained that Jesus' disciples had proclaimed the Gospel to people who were now dead (I Pet. 4:6). Some think Jesus, between His death and resurrection, preached and offered salvation to all the dead who had lived in pre-Christian times. Others connect this preaching with 3:19 and 20 and say the dead were the people of Noah's day. A third group says He preached salvation to the righteous of Old Testament times.

Each of these views gives the impression that the preaching took place after the people had died. Yet

the Bible teaches that once people die, there will be no second chance at salvation (see Heb. 9:27).

Most likely, Peter was referring to people who had died after becoming followers of Christ. In other words, they heard the Good News while they were still alive and then subsequently died.

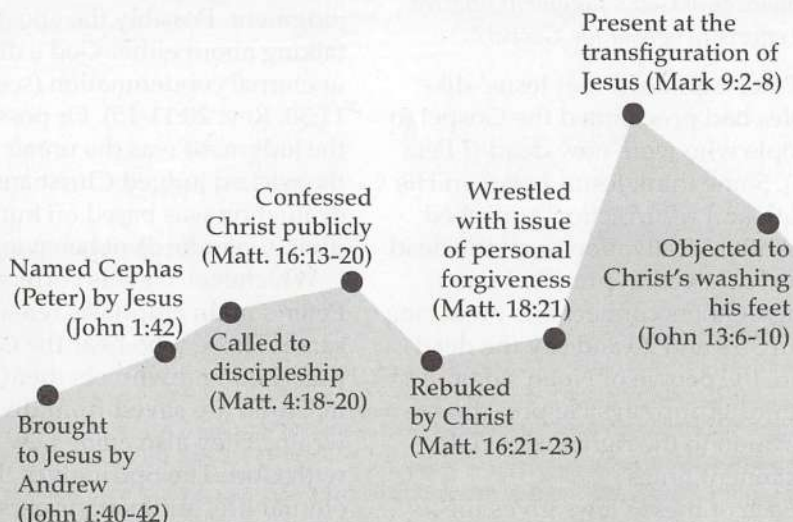
These believers had experienced the same judgment that eventually falls on all people—death (see Rom. 5:12). When God raised Christ from the dead, He triumphed over death (see 6:9). However, the full extent of that victory is not yet manifested in the lives of God's people. Of course, they enjoy new life through union with Christ. And they have the assurance of knowing that one day Christ's victory over death will extend to their physical bodies (see Rom. 8:11; I Cor. 15:25, 26).

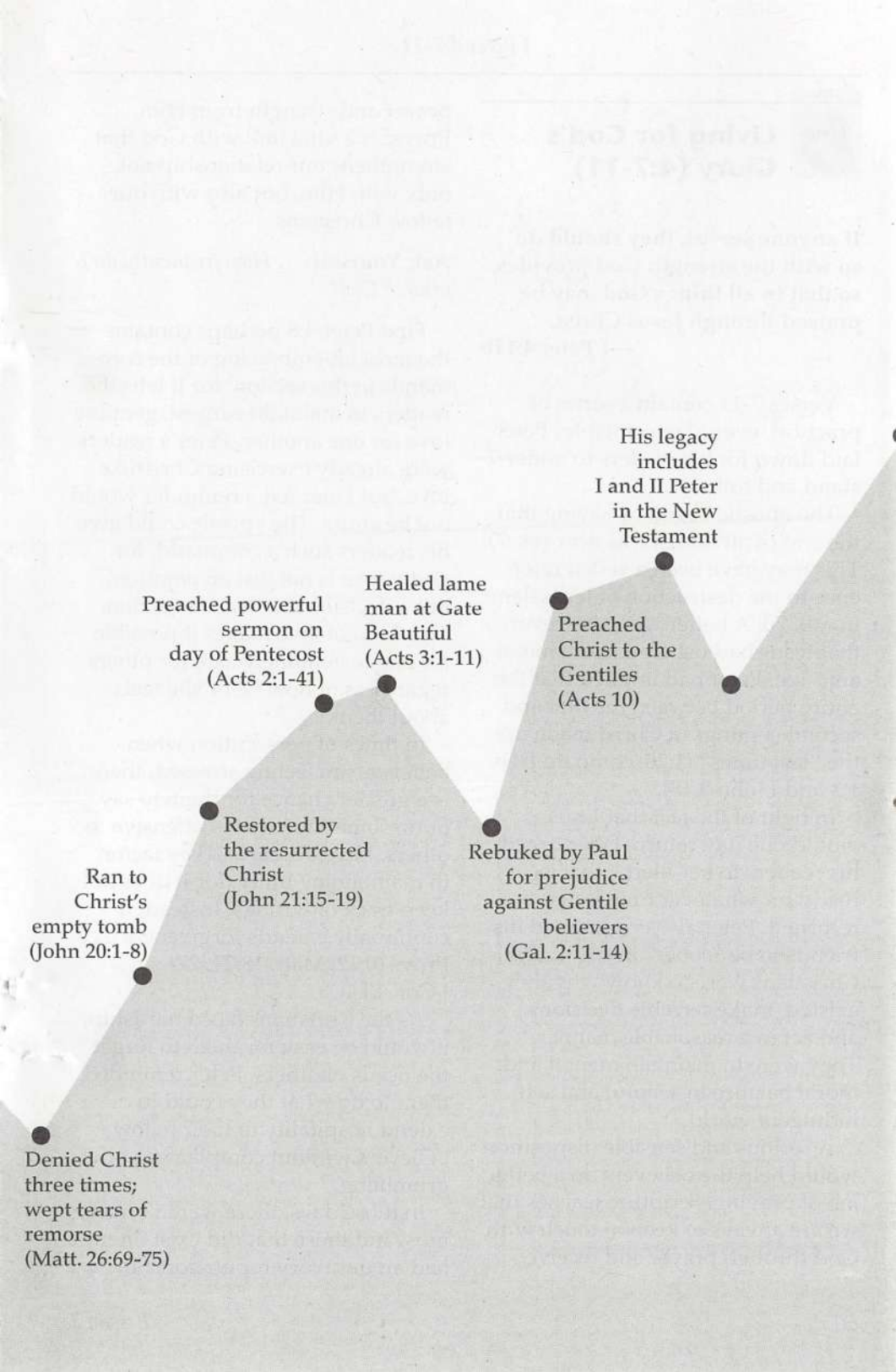
There are two other ways of understanding Peter's reference to judgment. Possibly the apostle was talking about either God's discipline or eternal condemnation (see I Cor. 11:30; Rev. 20:11-15). Or possibly the judgment was the unfair way the wicked judged Christians. Their evaluation was based on human, not divine, standards of behavior.

Whichever view is correct, Peter's main emphasis remains the same. Those who hear the Gospel preached and who obediently trust in Christ are saved from divine wrath. They also enjoy new life with God. The Spirit gives them eternal life, and neither persecution nor death can take it away from true followers of Christ.

Highs and Lows in Peter's Life

Simon, son of John, brother of Andrew, native of Bethsaida, fisherman, was an unlikely candidate for leadership among Christ's disciples. Yet Jesus saw past the rugged and unpredictable facade of this man and began within him what would become a lifelong project of starts and stops, progress and detours, ecstasy and sorrow. Though the ascent was irregular, Simon's direction was upward toward mirroring in his life the Lord Jesus, the Savior of his soul and the goal of his journey.





Denied Christ
three times;
wept tears of
remorse
(Matt. 26:69-75)

Ran to
Christ's
empty tomb
(John 20:1-8)

Restored by
the resurrected
Christ
(John 21:15-19)

Preached powerful
sermon on
day of Pentecost
(Acts 2:1-41)

Healed lame
man at Gate
Beautiful
(Acts 3:1-11)

Rebuked by Paul
for prejudice
against Gentile
believers
(Gal. 2:11-14)

Preached
Christ to the
Gentiles
(Acts 10)

His legacy
includes
I and II Peter
in the New
Testament



Living for God's Glory (4:7-11)

If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

—I Peter 4:11b

Verses 7-11 contain a series of practical, everyday principles Peter laid down for his readers to understand and follow.

The apostle began by saying that the end of all things was near (vs. 7). This may have been a veiled reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. A better view, however, is that Jesus had ushered in the messianic age. Peter had implied that the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ made up the "last times" (1:20; compare Heb. 1:1 and I John 2:18).

In light of the fact that Jesus would one day return, Peter urged his readers to be "alert," that is, ready for whatever time Jesus returned. Peter also encouraged his friends to be "sober" in spirit. The Christians were to know why they existed, make sensible decisions, and act in a reasonable manner. They were to maintain mental and moral balance in a sinful and self-indulgent world.

A serious and sensible disposition would help the believers do a better job of praying. Scripture teaches that we are always to keep in touch with God through prayer and receive

power and strength from Him. Prayer is a vital link with God that strengthens our relationship not only with Him, but also with our fellow Christians.

Ask Yourself . . . *How frequently do I pray to God?*

First Peter 4:8 perhaps contains the most all-embracing of the commands in this section, for it tells the readers to maintain earnest, genuine love for one another. Peter's readers were already exercising Christlike love, but Peter felt a reminder would not be amiss. The apostle could give his readers such a command, for godly love is not just an emotion, but a decision that leads to action. This kind of love makes it possible for one to genuinely care for others regardless of how he or she feels about them.

In times of persecution when believers are feeling stressed, there is a greater chance for them to say or do something that is offensive to others. Love becomes a key factor in maintaining unity, for it does not keep track of wrongs. Instead, it continually extends forgiveness (see Prov. 10:12; Matt. 18:21, 22; I Cor. 13:4-7).

As the Christians faced hardship, it would be easy for them to forget the needs of others. Peter reminded them to do what they could to extend hospitality to their fellow believers without complaining or grumbling.

In those days, there weren't many inns, and those that did exist often had an unsavory reputation. So

Putting Out the Welcome Mat

In Bible times, hospitality was taken seriously. A guest—whether a friend or a stranger—was treated with the utmost courtesy.

When a person came to another's home, the following traditions were usually observed. First, the host would show respect by bowing to the guest. Then the host would wish his guest peace, and the guest would respond with the same wish. The two would kiss one another's cheeks. Next, the host would invite the guest to remove his sandals and have the dust washed from his feet. Sometimes the host would anoint the guest's head with olive oil, possibly mixed with spices. Finally, the host would offer the guest a drink of water and prepare a meal for him.

travelers had to rely on households if they were to get good accommodations during a journey. By welcoming people into their home and meeting their needs, the readers of the apostle's letter would show God's love in tangible ways (I Pet. 4:9).

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some creative ways I could use my home to minister to others?*

Peter next mentioned that the Lord had given the Christians of Asia Minor spiritual gifts and that they were to use these to serve others (vs. 10). They did not own the gifts. Instead, they were stewards of what God had graciously provided for them.

These gifts of grace took various forms, and the apostle's friends were to faithfully use them wherever and whenever possible. The spiritual gifts that Peter mentioned in verse 11 represent only a few of the many that God had given His people in Asia Minor.

The apostle noted that some had a special ability to declare the truths of Scripture. This included all forms of speaking (preaching, teaching, prophesying, and speaking in tongues). Peter reminded his readers that they were proclaiming the message of God (as opposed to a mere human message). Others had a unique ability to serve others. Peter exhorted them to minister to people in God's strength, not their own.

As the believers diligently helped one another and relied on God for enabling, they would bring Him

honor through Jesus Christ. Others would see the believers ministering in the name of Christ and praise God for it.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what ways can I glorify God through the use of the gift(s) He has given me?*

The thought of God being honored moved Peter to write a doxology of praise. Glory and power belonged to the Lord for ever and ever. Peter then affirmed this truth with an "Amen," which might be paraphrased "So be it!"

Word Study:

'Gift'

The Greek word translated "gift" in I Peter 4:10 is *charisma* [KAH-riss-mah]. The plural form of this word is *charismata*—"gifts." Both words are related to the word *charis* [KAH-riss], which means "grace" or "favor." Thus charisma is a gift of grace.

The Holy Spirit graciously gives Christians special abilities to accomplish the will of God. These are our spiritual gifts.

C Suffering for Being a Christian (4:12-19)

Rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. —I Peter 4:13

For most of Peter's readers, it was shocking to experience suffering for their faith. That is why Peter made a special effort to encourage them in the painful trials, or fiery ordeals, they had to endure.

Peter addressed his readers as "dear friends" (vs. 12). He wanted them to know how much he cared for them. In all that he said, he had their best interests at heart.

The apostle urged the Christians not to be shocked or to think it was unusual that others persecuted them. Jesus had warned His followers that unbelievers would hate them, just as they had hated Him (see John 15:18, 19). Going through times of hardship was not going to be easy. Yet God could use agonizing hardships to strengthen the faith of His people (see Jas. 1:2-4).

Instead of viewing suffering negatively, Peter urged his friends to adopt a more constructive attitude. They were to rejoice in the privilege of having a part in Christ's suffering. Peter did not mean that believers who suffered made up for any lack in the atoning work of Christ. Rather, the apostle was saying that his readers were blessed to endure afflictions for the cause of Christ.

They were to view suffering for the faith as something to be welcomed, not loathed (I Pet. 4:13).

Peter stressed that Jesus would eternally reward His disciples for suffering on His behalf. When Christ returned again in glory, His people would share in it. At that time persecuted believers, like those living in Asia Minor, would be full of joy. They would see that their faith in Jesus was not in vain, for He would vindicate their commitment to Him.

In verses 14-18, Peter made several conditional "if" statements. He realized that some of his readers were not suffering for their faith. But many were, and he wanted them to know that God was aware of their circumstances and would help them make it through.

The word rendered "insulted" in verse 14 is a strong term denoting the presence of reproach or revilement. The recipients of Peter's letter had identified themselves with the name of Christ, and enemies of the faith were maligning them for it. Peter said God blessed His people in such situations, for He caused His glorious Spirit to rest on them in a unique way. The Spirit would help believers endure mistreatment and remain faithful to Christ.

Not all the suffering that believers experienced in Bible times was due to their faith. Sometimes they broke the law, and in these instances the authorities were right to punish them. Peter said the Christians should not be guilty of criminal activities such as murdering and

stealing. They should not even meddle in other people's affairs (vs. 15). All these offenses were wrong and brought shame, not honor, to the cause of Christ.

We may not be guilty of murder or theft, but there are other offenses we could easily commit such as meddling.

Ask Yourself . . . *What areas of my life are not honoring to the Lord?*

Peter said there was no shame for suffering as a Christian (for instance, experiencing social disgrace). The apostle urged his friends to gladly endure reproach for being

Word Study:

'Christian'

Peter told his readers that they would suffer as "Christians" (I Pet. 4:16). The term "Christian" was a word unsaved Gentiles probably used to slander believers (Acts 11:26). The word denoted someone who belonged to or followed Christ. Even though outsiders used the term in a derogatory manner, the church adopted it as an appropriate title. Christians were not ashamed to be associated with Jesus or to be known as His disciples.

associated with the Savior. In fact, they were to praise God that He had given them the privilege to do so (vs. 16). By giving glory to God in the presence of His enemies, they honored the name of Christ.

Peter noted that judgment began with the family of God (vs. 17). The apostle meant that God allowed others to afflict His people so that they might be strengthened in their faith and purified in their conduct.

The Lord was not being callous in allowing believers to endure suffering. Through this refining process, they would become more like Christ. Peter noted that if God judges those who followed Him first, it is hard to imagine how horrible the judgment will be for those who refused to obey His message of salvation.

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some hardships I've recently endured that have refined my faith?*

To substantiate his point, Peter quoted Proverbs 11:31 according to the version contained in the Septuagint (an ancient Greek

translation of the Old Testament). Retribution for sin is certain. If God deals justly with the righteous on earth when they sin, imagine how much more He will punish the wicked.

A similar thought appears in I Peter 4:18. The righteous are saved from God's wrath, but not on the basis of their good works. If the upright barely escape eternal condemnation, then those who reject Christ are surely lost.

Peter addressed those who suffered for obeying God. The apostle urged them to trust their lives and futures to Him. They could do so knowing that He is their faithful Creator. He would not abandon them, but constantly watch over them.

Because the One who had made them is trustworthy, they were to continue doing what was right (for instance, obeying laws and respecting authority; I Pet. 4:19).

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I draw encouragement from knowing that God is in control of my circumstances?*

8

Final Words

I Peter 5

a Counsel to Elders (5:1-4)

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be. —I Peter 5:2a

Peter had focused on the issue of suffering and how his readers should handle it. The apostle realized that when a church is under pressure, the strength of the leadership is crucial to help the congregation remain intact. That is why Peter, before ending his letter, gave advice to the leaders of the churches in Asia Minor on how to serve in their roles properly.

The term rendered “elders” means “older.” In the early church, senior members of the congregation were considered prime candidates for leadership. Of course, younger believers who were mature in the faith and whom God had gifted with leadership abilities could serve as elders, too. Regardless of their age, church elders were to take their leadership responsibilities very seriously.

Peter had previously mentioned that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ (see 1:1). In 5:1, however, he stressed his shared eldership with the leaders of the Asia Minor churches. Instead of giving them orders, Peter appealed to them as a fellow servant. The term rendered “appeal” literally means “a calling to one’s side.” In other words, one person is called alongside another to encourage or to exhort.

In calling himself a fellow elder, Peter sought to encourage the overseers in the Asia Minor churches to remain faithful to their leadership duties. They undoubtedly valued his advice as they shouldered heavy responsibilities during a difficult time.

The apostle could urge his friends to remain faithful to their calling because he had seen the various trials and sufferings that Christ had endured while here on earth. For instance, Peter had witnessed Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane before the cross.

Christ’s sufferings won for Him great glory, which will be revealed to all at His second coming. In addition to having witnessed Christ’s

Elders

in Judaism and the Church

Jewish believers were familiar with the concept of elders. The members of the Sanhedrin, or Jewish supreme court, were called elders. The term "elder" was also applied to preeminent older scholars, priests, and scribes (experts in Jewish law). On occasion, local authorities and members of synagogue councils would be called elders. Even older people and notable citizens (such as the heads of leading families) were known as elders.

Early on, the church adopted the office of elder. Like a synagogue council, elders in the congregation provided administrative oversight for the fellowship of believers. Like the Sanhedrin, the elders made policy decisions that affected the operation of the church. And like scribes and priests in Israel, elders were supposed to know God's Word and be able to teach it to others.

suffering, Peter fully expected to share in His glory when He was revealed at His second coming.

Ask Yourself . . . *How does the knowledge that I will one day share in Christ's glory encourage me to remain faithful to the Lord?*

Using both positive and negative exhortations, Peter stated what the leaders of the churches in Asia Minor should be doing. Perhaps more than anything else, they were to shepherd the flock of God—that is, the congregation of believers—under their spiritual care (vs. 2). In Bible times, shepherds would protect, lead, and provide for the needs of their sheep. Similarly, Christian leaders were to spiritually feed and guide their fellow believers.

Another duty of Christian leaders was to serve as overseers. Almost all interpreters agree that the words "overseer," "shepherd," and "elder" referred to the same office in the early church. "Overseer" indicates the supervisory duties of the office, while "elder" emphasizes personal dignity and maturity.

Peter urged his friends in Christian leadership not to care for God's people simply because they had to. Instead, they were to do their job with willingness, which is the attitude God wanted them to cultivate. If they felt compelled (rather than privileged) to oversee their churches, they might grow to resent or dislike the responsibility, especially in times of persecution.

Peter may have known about some leaders in the Asia Minor



This statue of an athlete from Peter's time shows the victor receiving his laurel crown. Peter said that Jesus' reward for believers would be a crown of glory that would never fade away (1 Pet. 5:4).

churches who thought being an elder was a way to get rich. The apostle said that a greedy desire for money was the wrong motive to have when serving as an elder. Believers who spiritually led other Christians were to do so with enthusiasm and joy. Their primary concern was to glorify God and strengthen the faith of His people.

Ask Yourself . . . *What is my primary motive for serving the Lord?*

In stressful situations, church leaders might be tempted to treat their fellow Christians in a heavy-handed manner. Peter saw this as an inappropriate use of authority. That is why he urged the leaders to be godly examples for those whom God had entrusted to their care (vs. 3). By showing others how to love and serve God, the elders would do

a better job of encouraging others in their walk with Christ.

While it was wrong to think of church leadership as a means to make money, there was a sense in which devotedly serving God led to eternal reward. Peter informed his readers that the Chief Shepherd of the flock—Jesus Christ—would one day return. When He does, He will bestow crowns of glory on His people (vs. 4).

In an ancient athletic contest, the victor was rewarded with a wreath that over time would deteriorate. The apostle reminded his readers that their reward, on the other hand, would be a crown that would last for all eternity. Its luster and beauty would never fade away.

b Counsel to the Young and All Believers (5:5-11)

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

**"God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble."**

—1 Peter 5:5

Having reminded the leaders of the churches in Asia Minor of their duties, Peter next turned his attention to younger members of the congregations. He said they were to adopt a proper attitude in relation to

their circumstances and their fellow Christians.

For instance, the young people were to willingly obey those who were older, whether church leaders or other senior members of their church (vs. 5). The idea of submission included respecting the advice and guidance of those in the congregation who were more experienced and mature than they were.

Older believers have a wealth of insight and experience that younger Christians can benefit from. New believers should make every effort to learn from those who are seasoned in the faith.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who are some of the older people in my church whom I could learn from?*

When times are rough for a church, its people can become irritable with one another. That's why Peter urged all of his readers to clothe themselves with humility. Instead of responding arrogantly to others, they were to be unpretentious and meek.

Peter's command provides an interesting word picture. The term rendered "clothe yourselves" was commonly used in reference to a slave tying an apron around his or her waist before serving others.

The apostle may have been thinking about the incident described in John 13:1-11 in which Christ washed His disciples' feet. Jesus willingly performed this lowly act to stress the importance of humility (see vss. 12-17).

Peter supported his appeal for

humility by citing Proverbs 3:34. This verse teaches that God is against those who are arrogant and insolent. In fact, He thwarts their evil plans. He showers His grace, however, on the humble. They receive His favor and kindness because they trust in Him and genuinely want to serve Him.

The persecuted Christians of Asia Minor were in need of divine help. Peter thus urged them to be humble in the presence of God's mighty power. In other words, they were to recognize their plight and welcome God's assistance. At the moment, they were distressed and discouraged from all the affliction they had to endure. Peter reminded them that when the right time came, God would send relief. He would honor their faith by one day ending their suffering (I Pet. 5:6).

The believers in Asia Minor were filled with anxiety as they endured unjust suffering. The word rendered "anxiety" (vs. 7) means to be troubled with cares. The term refers to an extreme uneasiness of mind or a brooding fear about some trauma in life.

Perhaps intentionally echoing Psalm 55:22, Peter told his readers to cast all their concerns on God. Note that the apostle did not tell them to share some of their burdens with the Lord. Every matter was to be given over to His control; nothing was to be held back.

Peter's friends could roll all their burdens over onto God because He deeply cared about the matters that distressed them. Others might have

been indifferent to their afflictions, but God wasn't. He would console and encourage His people in the most troublesome events of their lives.

We learn about God's care for us best when we give Him our concerns.

Ask Yourself . . . *What are some problems in my life that I can entrust to God's care?*

Peter was not giving his readers empty advice. They were at the mercy of those who mocked their God and despised their faith. The law courts evidently provided little relief. The Christians often did not

know what would happen next to them, although martyrdom was always a possibility. They would gladly welcome Peter's teaching on God's care of them.

Peter wanted his readers to realize that they were in a spiritual battle and that their foe was powerful. That is why Peter urged them to be self-controlled and alert to the attacks of the enemy (I Pet. 5:8). We often think of self-control in negative terms, as the avoidance of sin. But in this context, Peter had in mind self-control's positive virtues.

Believers who are self-controlled maintain a sober disposition. This attitude is complemented by a

The Devil's Names

Peter described the devil as a lion looking for someone to devour (I Pet. 5:8). Biblical names for the archdemon reveal his evil character. In the Old Testament, he is called "Satan," meaning "the adversary." In the New Testament, he is called a variety of names:

- "Beelzebub" [be-EL-zee-bubb], meaning "lord of flies" (Matt. 12:24)
- "a murderer from the beginning . . . a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44)
- "the prince of this world" (12:31)
- "the god of this age" (II Cor. 4:4)
- "Belial" [BEE-lih-al], meaning "the wicked one" (6:15)
- "the tempter" (I Thess. 3:5)
- "the evil one" (II Thess. 3:3)
- the "enemy" (I Pet. 5:8)
- "Abaddon" [ah-BAD-un] and "Apollyon" [ap-PAHL-yuhn], both meaning "the destroyer" (Rev. 9:11)
- "the great dragon . . . that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan" (12:9)
- "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" (vs. 10)

vigilant state of mind. By remaining careful and alert, Christians can do a better job of resisting the attacks of Satan.

God wants Christians to be aware of the challenges facing them and to do all they can to resist the enemy of their faith.

Peter described the devil as a ravenous lion that prowls around looking for a victim to devour. Once the animal has found its prey, it wastes no time in launching its attack. By remaining alert, the apostle's friends would be better able to spot and ward off the devil's attacks.

The Christians were to resist the devil by standing firm in the faith (vs. 9). By "faith," Peter could have been referring to one's trust in Christ. In this case, believers could ward off the enemy's attacks by continuing to trust in God. Eventually the devil would flee from those who resisted him (see Jas. 4:7).

Another possibility is that Peter was referring to the apostolic truths of the Christian faith. In this case, God's people were to hold fast to what they had learned about Christ. They were never to surrender their beliefs just to avoid the possibility of suffering.

Peter said his readers were not alone in their hardships. Other Christians throughout the Roman Empire had to endure similar kinds of abuse. Many others had not wavered in their faith despite the devil's attacks. If these Christians could oppose the evil one, so could those living in Asia Minor.

God, who is the source of all grace, gave His people help and strength, which were sufficient for every need and occasion. He had summoned the recipients of Peter's letter to receive His eternal glory in union with Christ. They would share in that glory at Jesus' second coming (I Pet. 5:10). This truth undoubtedly proved encouraging to them.

Peter did not end it there, however. He further noted that the Christians would not suffer indefinitely. From an eternal perspective, their affliction would last only a short while. At the appointed time, God would restore them to wholeness. He also would strengthen them in their faith, support them in their walk, and keep them from falling.

Someday God will usher all believers into His glorious presence. The one who keeps and welcomes them is worthy of every honor His people can give. All power belongs to Him forever. With Peter, all of us can heartily say, "Amen" (vs. 11).

C Final Greetings (5:12-14)

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

—I Peter 5:12

Peter ended his letter with some final greetings. The apostle mentioned that Silas had helped him write to the Christians of Asia Minor (vs. 12). Peter may have dictated the letter to Silas and possibly asked him to carry the document to its recipients.

Silas was a faithful follower of the Lord, as seen in the help he gave to both Peter and Paul in their respective ministries. Silas was a leader in the early Jerusalem church, a prophet, and a citizen of Rome (see Acts 15:22, 32; 16:37).

Ask Yourself . . . *In what ways do I show others that I'm a committed Christian?*

Peter said he had written briefly

to the Christians of Asia Minor.

Although the apostle had not written as extensively about some subjects as he may have wanted, what he did say was sufficient for his readers' needs. Peter sought to encourage his friends as they suffered for Christ. That is why he had told them about the true grace of God. By standing firm in this grace, no enemy of the Gospel would be able to weaken their spiritual commitment.

The apostle said he was in "Babylon" (I Pet. 5:13). There are four main possibilities concerning the identity of this place. It could have been a military outpost in Egypt, Jerusalem, Rome, or the ancient Mesopotamian city of Babylon.

Ancient Mail

Letters in the first century A.D. were different in many ways from those in our day. Ancient letters may have been written on waxed wooden tablets, papyrus, parchment, clay, or pottery. Frequently, the sender would dictate to a scribe, sometimes a professional, who in certain cases had freedom to shape the expression of the sender's ideas. Once finished, the letter would generally be delivered by a private courier, who might verify or expand verbally upon the letter's contents.

Ancient letters generally had a three-part form: opening, body, and closing. The opening often would include the name and title of the sender, the name and title of the recipient, and a greeting in the form of a blessing or a wish for the recipient's welfare. The closing might include final greetings, a mention of the scribe, the date, and the signature of the sender.

Most likely, Peter symbolically referred to Rome as "Babylon." Mark, who was with Peter when he wrote, was also with Paul when he was in Rome (see Col. 4:10; Philem. 24). Many believe Revelation symbolically refers to Rome as "Babylon" (see Rev. 17:5, 9). And several Jewish writings also referred to Rome as "Babylon."

The identity of "she" in I Peter 5:13 is also unclear. The apostle could have been referring to an actual person (such as his wife) or symbolically to the church located in Rome. The qualifying statement "chosen together with you" suggests Peter meant fellow Christians with him in the city.

One of these was John Mark, whom Peter regarded as his spiritual child. According to early church tradition, Peter furnished

considerable material for Mark as he wrote his Gospel.

In addition to receiving greetings from others, the Christians were to greet one another with a "kiss of love" (vs. 14). Kissing was a common form of greeting among Jews and Gentiles in Peter's day. The apostles encouraged it within the church to promote harmony.

Peter ended his letter by expressing his desire that God's peace would be with those among his readers who were united to Christ by faith. This was a final reminder that their spiritual wholeness and joy were based on their identification with Christ. He would help them to overcome the sufferings they encountered.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what ways have I experienced God's peace since trusting in Christ?*



Stepping Stones to Spiritual Growth

II Peter 1:1-11

a Greetings in Christ (1:1, 2)

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

—II Peter 1:2

As II Timothy was Paul's last will and testament, II Peter seems to be Peter's final words before his departure. The great leader of the apostles left some concluding directions that would help his readers not only recognize and reject false doctrine but also grow in their relationship with Christ. His admonitions show us that it is possible to take a firm stand against heresy and still cultivate the Christian virtues that reflect the Spirit of the Lord Jesus in our lives.

Peter introduced himself in his second letter with the names Simon and Peter (vs. 1a). Simon was a form of his given Hebrew name, and Peter was the Greek translation of the Aramaic name Jesus gave to him (Cephas). Throughout the Gospels this apostle is often identified as Simon Peter, or Simon, who is called Peter. In the Hebrew

language, Simon is a shortened form of Samuel, which means "God has heard."

In his first letter, Peter called himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:1); in his second letter, he described himself first as a servant and then as an apostle of Jesus Christ (II Pet. 1:1). First and foremost, Peter viewed himself as the bond servant of Jesus Christ. After confirming his servant status, Peter affirmed his commission as an apostle, appointed by Christ to communicate God's truth with authority and power.

Ask Yourself . . . *What two titles would I use to describe me in my relationship with Christ?*

The identification of the original readers of II Peter is not as clear as with the first letter. Peter described this letter as his second to this audience (see 3:1). If the first letter was I Peter, then the audience was the same. If his first letter was lost, then we have no idea who the first intended audience of II Peter was.

The apostle's identification of his readers was broad enough to include every believer in Christ.

Peter described his prospective readers as those who had received a precious and valuable faith through the righteousness of Christ. The faith to which Peter referred was more likely their personal experience with Christ rather than faith as a body of beliefs or doctrines.

Peter described this faith as “ours” (vs. 1). Even as an apostle, he stood on the same plane with all believers who have received the undeserved grace of God. There is no caste system in the kingdom of God. All who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have unrestricted access to God.

The vehicle through which all believers receive this precious faith is the righteousness of Christ, not their own. Here Jesus is described as “God and Savior.” Some have suggested that Peter was speaking of two persons here (God and Jesus). The grammar, however, clearly attributes full deity to Christ (see also Titus 3:4).

Peter concluded his salutation with the traditional words “grace and peace” (II Pet. 1:2). The first seven words to this phrase are identical with those found in I Peter 1:2c, only this time he added the words “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (I Pet. 1:2).

Here Peter introduced the type of knowledge that honors God, a topic which is seen throughout the letter. The apostle referred to godly knowledge no less than eleven times in this short letter. Peter knew his readers would be exposed to the purported “secret knowledge” of

the Gnostic cultists, and wanted to remind them that only a saving knowledge of God would bring them into a growing relationship with Jesus as Lord.

b Everything We Need (1:3, 4)

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.
—II Peter 1:3

The reference to knowledge in verse 3 expands upon the concept in the previous verse. Through that knowledge we have everything we need for a life that reflects God’s character.

Peter’s emphasis on “everything we need” is significant here. The Gnostics were telling Christians that they didn’t have everything they needed to live a godly life. They needed to be enlightened by a secret gnostic knowledge.

Many cults today, like Scientology, claim to lay hold of a secret saving knowledge that can be obtained only through various levels of teaching. In fact, the revelation that God has provided is sufficient, not only for our salvation, but for an abundant life as well.

The provision of everything we need is not secured by anemic human effort, but by the divine power of God—the same power that raised

Jesus from the dead (see I Cor. 6:14). Believers can grow in Christ only to the extent they recognize their spiritual need. The place where we are the neediest is usually the place where God wants to do His greatest work in us.

Ask Yourself . . . *What is my greatest spiritual need at this moment?*

Peter said that God has called believers by His own glory and goodness. In this context, God's glory is the distinction of His character, while God's goodness is the excellence of His actions. When God provides for a person's salvation, He reveals His splendor and moral perfection to that individual. The natural response to such a revelation is repentance, commitment, and worship.

Through God's glory and goodness, the Lord has given believers several great and precious promises (I Pet. 1:4). These promises include the opportunity we have for participating in, benefiting from, and imitating God's glory and goodness.

The tense of the verb rendered "has given" indicates that God not only gave these promises to us, but also fulfilled them in the saving work of His Son. Thus the purpose of these promises God has made is that we might become sharers in His divine nature through the miracle of the new birth. Receiving these promises results in two things: the privilege to participate in the "divine nature," and the opportunity to separate oneself from the corruption

of the world.

Participating in the "divine nature" does not mean that Christians become little gods. Human nature will always remain distinct from deity. Participation in (not identification with) the "divine nature" means that we as believers can become like Jesus in His glory and goodness. We partake of the "divine nature" by imitating Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I use the language of my non-Christian friends to build bridges for the Gospel?*

Speaking the Enemy's Language

When Peter said that Christians can "participate in the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4) he took a risk by using the language of his opponents to express an eternal truth. The Gnostics believed a person could become divine through secret knowledge and enlightened thinking. The truth is that though we will never become gods, we can participate in the "divine nature" by worshiping God in all His glory (while looking forward to our own glorification) and imitating His goodness.

These promises also have a purifying effect. The Spirit of Christ within His people enables them to “escape the corruption in the world.” The word translated “escape” virtually means “to escape by flight.” Because of believers’ new relationship with Christ, their new nature will compel them to run away from the corruption in this world system and run toward the Lord Jesus Christ. As we become more like Christ, we are better able to run from the corruption of the world, the spiritual pollution on our planet.

C Building Blocks for Spiritual Growth (1:5-9)

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. —II Peter 1:5-7

There is a very human side to participating in the divine nature. Peter made it clear that spiritual growth takes a concerted effort—empowered by the Holy Spirit, of course—but a human effort all the same. The reason Christians ought to aggressively pursue spiritual growth, Peter said, was because God has provided us with the great

and precious promise of salvation. The apostle did not leave his readers with simply the admonition to grow, but gave specific steps to take to accomplish this growth.

In this section, the apostle listed eight spiritual building blocks. Even though they build on one another, however, they are still developed simultaneously (not sequentially). For example, one need not master faith before moving on to goodness. All eight characteristics mark even the new believer—they are characteristics that can be developed and strengthened. Spiritual growth is an ongoing, lifelong building process.

Each of these virtues Peter listed builds up the foundation of faith on which believers’ spiritual lives are established. One is connected to the other as cinder blocks are held together by mortar and thus are bonded into one continuous and supporting wall. These building blocks are so interrelated that they often look similar in the life of the believer, and yet each bears its own part of the load. Because of this, both beauty and symmetry are added to the strength they provide.

Faith is at the foundation of spiritual growth (vs. 5). Without faith one cannot come into a saving relationship with Christ. The writer of Hebrews described faith as elementary and foundational (see Heb. 6:1). Peter assumed the existence of faith in his readers.

Goodness is the first building block to be added to the foundation of our faith. Earlier Peter had said that God had called us by His own

goodness (see I Pet. 1: 3). In this instance, "goodness" means more than just reflecting God's moral excellence. It also involves translating that goodness into action. God demonstrated His goodness toward us in providing salvation through the gift of His Son. Our goodness must be translated into acts or good works that demonstrate our faith.

Ask Yourself . . . *How have I recently demonstrated by faith through goodness?*

To goodness, we are to add knowledge. Again, Peter returned to the theme of the type of knowledge that honors God. There is nothing secret or mysterious about this knowledge, as the Gnostics would claim. An ever-increasing knowledge of God and His will is essential to dynamic spiritual growth. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you

have sent" (John 17:3).

This kind of knowledge also involves discernment in what we think, say, and do. Our acts of goodness must be based on accurate knowledge of God and clear understanding of God's will. Spiritual growth gains stability through knowledge.

To our knowledge we are to add "self-control," or self-discipline (II Pet. 1:6). The Gnostics would claim just the opposite. Their secret knowledge would eliminate the need for self-control. Since the body is so distinct from the spirit, in their way of thinking, then there was no need to control the body or its desires. To them, the body would always be evil, and thus should be allowed to simply run its course, only to be destroyed in the end. (Some Gnostics went to the opposite extreme and harshly denied the body's basic needs, again because they considered the body to be

Adding to the Faith

The English phrase "add to" doesn't do justice to the full, rich meaning of Peter's original statement in II Peter 1:5. The verb originally described bearing the expense of a chorus to be used in the dramatic presentations of the early Greek tragedies. The person selected to do this was responsible for the expense, training, and upkeep of such a chorus of performers.

Eventually the word came to mean providing the cost for any public duty or religious service to make it more than mediocre. Thus the word translated "add to" meant to supply generously, even lavishly, beyond the bare need. Believers must dedicate themselves lavishly, strengthening their faith by the development of the characteristics Peter mentioned (1:5-7).

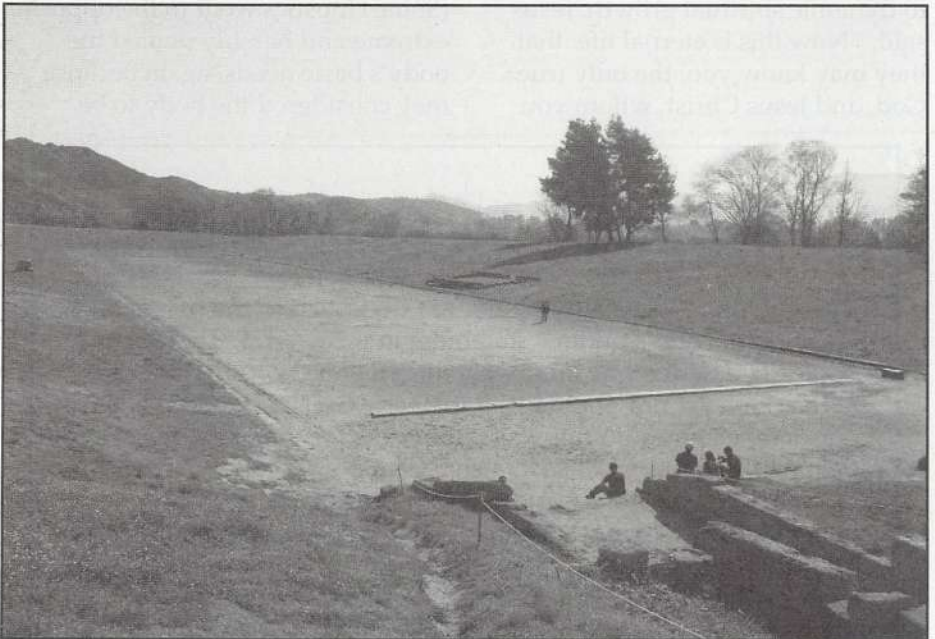
evil.) In contrast to gnostic thought, the fruit of the Spirit includes self-control, because the body does have a bearing upon moral character.

The word for “self-control” was used regularly of athletes in the first century. To prepare for the great Isthmian Games (held every four years in Corinth), for example, they submitted to strict training rules. This not only kept their bodies in shape, but also kept their minds clear. Thus they were able to focus on the contest in which they were involved. Likewise, Christians should exercise a kind of self-control

that keeps them morally and spiritually alert and sensitive to deceptive powers of darkness that would lead them astray.

To self-control, we are to add perseverance. Not only do we have to be in shape to run the race, but we also need to be able to finish the contest well. The word “perseverance” virtually means “to remain under” the burden of a trial and refuse to be overcome by it. One of the most difficult burdens of the Christian life can be waiting for God to act. We are to have patience all the same, though at times waiting for the Lord

These are the ruins of a training track at Olympia where first-century athletes exercised self-control in devoting themselves to regular and rigorous training for the great athletic events. The word for “self-control,” one of Peter’s spiritual building blocks, was often used to describe disciplined athletes in the first century.



to intervene can seem unbearable.

To perseverance, we are to add godliness. Faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance combine to reflect godliness in the lives of Christians who must live daily in a sinful world. Godliness is devotion to God and acute awareness of His presence in our lives. The greater this awareness, the brighter this godliness will shine through our lives.

The last two virtues in Peter's register are unique because both express love, but with different shades of meaning (vs. 7). "Mutual affection" describes a warm care for brothers and sisters in Christ. The last virtue, simply "love," is far broader. It is agape [ah-GAH-pay] love, the same unconditional love with which God loved a sinful world (see John 3:16). This kind of love is not primarily an emotional experience, but an expression of the will. God willed to love those who were sinners. Jesus told us to love our enemies with this kind of love (see Matt. 5:44). This type of love that knows no boundaries is the last virtue in Peter's list, and it represents the flowering of spiritual growth in a believer's life.

Ask Yourself . . . *Which of these building blocks needs the most attention in my life right now?*

After giving his readers these building blocks for spiritual growth, Peter urged them to proactively cultivate these virtues so that they might continue to grow spiritually (vss. 8, 9). If we are not growing as

believers in Christ, then we cannot be effective in our witness before the world.

As we grow in these virtues, we will come to know the Lord Jesus more and more intimately. If not, we can become spiritually "nearsighted and blind" (vs. 9). "Nearsighted" translates a Greek word that means "to close the eyes," or to squint. Such persons are blind to what is before them and forget that God has cleansed them from their past sins. The memory of God's grace and love in Jesus Christ is a constant reminder of our continuing responsibility as His children.

d Assurance of Faith (1:10, 11)

My brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. —II Peter 1:10a

Peter closed this section of his letter concerning God's promises and the spiritual virtues with an appeal to Christians to increase their assurance of salvation (vs. 10). He began his statement with "therefore," which referred to the confirmation he had just given regarding those who cultivated these virtues in their lives (vs. 8). He appealed to his readers as "brothers and sisters" (vs. 10), or family members in the Lord.

"Calling" and "election" are often described as synonymous acts of God. This calling is not merely an

invitation, but a command that demands obedience. In his first letter, Peter pointed out that God's election of His people to salvation was because of His foreknowledge (see I Pet. 1:2). Thus Peter urged believers to seize the opportunity to increase their assurance of their salvation by cultivating the virtues he had just described.

Ask Yourself . . . *How assured am I about my salvation?*

Peter is saying that our works are an indication of our deep appreciation for and understanding of God's gracious offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. The original word for "make" in verse 10 can be translated "to make for oneself." The

increasing assurance of salvation is a benefit of consistent obedience to God.

With this kind of assurance, God's people can expect a joyous welcome into His eternal kingdom (vs. 11). There is more to heaven than just getting through the gates. Scripture is full of promises of reward to those who are faithful. The greeting believers will receive when they enter God's presence will be rich because of the blessings God has lavished upon those who belong to Him through the redemptive work of His Son. No sweeter words could be heard by the faithful believer entering heaven than "Well done, good and faithful servant."

10

Witnesses to His Glory

II Peter 1:12-21

a

Helpful Reminders (1:12-15)

I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

—II Peter 1:15

Because of the rich welcome into the Kingdom that awaits all those who cultivate their walk with Christ (see vss. 10, 11), Peter felt compelled to remind his readers again about these things (vs. 12). Even though Peter considered the letters of Paul (which had already begun to circulate) to be “Scripture” (see 3:15, 16), the early Christians had no established New Testament to which they could turn to study the doctrines of the Christian faith or to receive instructions for daily living. We can imagine Peter’s concern for the fledgling church as he knew his departure was rapidly approaching. Like Peter, all believers are to be concerned about the spiritual growth of those within the sphere of our influence.

In spite of the uncanny speed with which our modern technology

is developing, creative repetition is still the oldest and one of the most reliable methods of teaching truth. The believers to whom Peter was writing had received God’s truth through the messages the Holy Spirit had inspired through him and other leaders. Peter had emphasized the importance of confirming their “calling and election” (see 1:10), and he had carefully outlined for them the way to do it. Now he would continue to remind them of these things.

The phrase “I will always remind you” (vs. 12) carries a sense of determination. Peter had taught them these truths in the past, he was doing so now, and he was prepared to do so in the future as long as God gave him opportunity.

Ask Yourself . . . *What biblical truths do I need to be reminded of right now?*

Peter was aware that his readers already knew these things—or at least that he had clearly communicated these truths earlier. In fact, he complimented them because they had given evidence that they were “firmly established,” or had been strengthened by the truth that was

The Body as a Tent

Peter used an interesting metaphor when he referred to his physical body as "the tent of this body" (II Pet. 1:13). The word is also translated "tabernacle" (KJV). Paul referred to this "earthly tent" we live in on this earth, waiting for our "heavenly dwelling" (II Cor. 5:2, 4). Neither Peter nor Paul suggested that the physical body was unimportant or inherently evil. In fact, Paul referred to our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19).

Peter and Paul used the word "tent" to carry the idea of a temporary dwelling. While he was on earth, Peter would use the "tent" of his body in obedience to God's will. Death was simply the putting aside of the physical tent so that the soul could depart to be with God. That "tent" would be raised again on the day of resurrection.

even then being impressed upon them by effective, faithful teachers. Their knowledge of the Word of God and the basic doctrines of the Christian faith had been established in their minds. They were thinking biblically.

When Peter used the word translated "established," he may have been thinking of the same word used in connection with the Last Supper when Jesus predicted Peter's denial. Jesus said, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen [establish] your brothers" (Luke 22:32).

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I build up and encourage my fellow believers in our class?*

Peter underscored his sense of pastoral accountability toward his fellow believers by describing his reminders as the right thing to

do—perhaps even a refreshing duty. To this he added a sense of urgency with a reference to his approaching death. He knew that he would soon be done with the tent of his body (II Pet. 1:13)

The word translated "soon" (vs. 14) suggests a swift and sudden end, not a lingering death as with illness. Peter might have been thinking about Jesus' words to him regarding the kind of death by which the apostle would glorify God (see John 21:18, 19). Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down by Nero. Thus, while he had the opportunity, the apostle wanted to urge his readers to use the truths they had heard over and over again.

As believers we must never take for granted the opportunities for service that God places before us. We must maintain a sense of readiness to act whenever the Lord wants to use our particular gifts and abilities

in order to build His kingdom.

Second Peter 1:15 is something of a preamble to all that is to follow. Peter had said that he knew his time was short. Thus he was going to tell them certain pertinent things so that, when he was gone, they could read and re-read these words and thus act on what he had said.

Peter's reference to his death as a "departure" pictures physical death as the beginning of a journey from a natural to a glorified existence. Death was not an end for Peter, but a launch into the presence of God.

b The Testimony of an Eyewitness (1:16-18)

We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

—II Peter 1:16

Peter was concerned that his readers not doubt the genuineness of anything he had to say about the Lord Jesus Christ. Most if not all of them had not seen Jesus in the flesh. They had not heard Him teach with power and authority, nor had they seen Him perform miracles. Peter was about to relate some amazing facts about Jesus as the Son of God. He felt it necessary to impress upon his readers that his stories of what the Lord did and said while He was on earth were true (vs. 16).

Accusations of MYTHIC PROPORTIONS

Peter made it clear that the apostles were not following myths of human invention (II Pet. 1:16). Some myths are humanly devised stories used to express a person's own opinion about the nature of spiritual reality. After he had left Ephesus, Paul urged Timothy to remain there to keep "certain people" from devoting themselves to "myths" (I Tim. 1:3, 4). He further warned Timothy to "have nothing to do with godless myths" (4:7). He noted also that in the last days people would seek for teachers who would "turn their ears . . . to myths" (II Tim. 4:4). In writing to Titus, Paul even referred to "Jewish myths" (Titus 1:14).

The false prophets of the first century A.D. were accustomed to using "cleverly devised stories" (II Pet. 1:16) to confuse and mislead the people. Naturally they would consign any miraculous teachings concerning the life and ministry of Jesus to the realm of myths and fables. Both Peter and Paul contended with this attempt to undermine the Gospel of Christ they preached.

Because of this concern, Peter prefaced his statement about the coming of Christ with both negative and positive claims. He and the other apostles were not repeating false tales, and they were eyewitnesses of the events they described.

To take the first of these claims, when Peter had told his readers about the "coming of...Christ in power," he had not resorted to myths or fables. The false teachers and prophets had perhaps been accusing the apostles of fabricating such tales to support the miracle-working power and deity of Jesus. Apparently the truth about the power and coming of Christ had brought the opposition to a head.

One of the Christian teachings that had evidently become suspect to some people was the second coming of Christ. Jesus had told His followers to watch because "the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt. 24:44), and consequently many looked for Him to come immediately. Because He had not come, many had begun to think the second coming of Christ was not a true doctrine. Peter appealed to his experience with the Lord to back up his claims.

Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses to Jesus' power and glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus had this climactic experience after being with His disciples at Caesarea Philippi, where He sought their own confession of faith in Him and then predicted His death. Peter rebuked Jesus for suggesting that

He, the Son of God, would be killed in such a violent matter. Jesus, in turn, severely rebuked Peter for his spiritual nearsightedness. Jesus brought that meeting to a close with a rather mysterious statement: "Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).

Six days later Jesus took His inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—to a high mountain, where He was transfigured before them. Not only were they stunned by Jesus' brilliant visible appearance, but they also heard the voice of God. The disciples, suddenly enveloped in a bright cloud, heard a voice saying: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (17:5).

Peter said that God the Father gave Jesus "honor and glory" at His transfiguration (II Pet. 1:17). Generally, to "honor" means to give public recognition. God's voice from heaven gave this type of honor to Jesus. The "glory" God gave to Jesus at His transfiguration was heavenly splendor, which stood in stark contrast to the humiliation He would have to bear on the cross.

Because they were eyewitnesses to the honor and glory bestowed on Jesus by the Father, the apostles were not to be doubted. John appealed to this same experience when he wrote, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Peter referred to the Father as "the



Many believe that Mount Hermon north of Galilee was the location of Jesus' transfiguration before Peter, James, and John.

Majestic Glory" (II Pet. 1:17). Some believe this refers to the Shekinah glory of God that overshadowed the mercy seat in the tabernacle's holy of holies, and also to the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night that led Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan (see Exod. 13:21; 25:22; 29:43; 40:34, 35).

Out of this glory came the Father's words affirming His Son. The Father's words at the transfiguration were reminiscent of what He had said at Jesus' baptism (see Matt. 3:17). The apparent source of the statement is recorded in Isaiah 42:1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I

delight." Peter wrote from his own memory of the event, leaving off the command three of the Gospel writers included, "Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).

Three things about God are revealed in the Father's statement. First, Jesus is His Son. Second, the Father loves His Son. Finally, the Father takes pleasure in His Son's work.

Peter repeated the claim that he and his fellow disciples not only saw the glorified Jesus, but also heard the voice from heaven (II Pet. 1:18). He referred to the mountain where the event took place as "the sacred mountain." God's glory revealed in His Son made the mountain a holy

place, just as Jerusalem is called “the holy city” because God’s presence was there in the temple on Mount Zion.

Ask Yourself . . . *Do I have any “sacred places” that remind me of a significant period or event in my spiritual journey?*

C

The Origin of the Scriptures (1:19-21)

Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. —II Peter 1:21

Peter approached God’s revelation of Himself from three directions. First, he noted the need for reminders concerning divine truth through constantly and creatively refreshing the memory of his fellow believers (see vss. 12-15). Second, he dealt with eyewitness proof of Jesus’ deity and coming in glory with the account of the transfiguration (vss. 16-18). Finally, Peter focused on the unquestioned reliability of the Scriptures as God’s revelation of Himself to the world.

From the spoken word of the Father the apostles heard on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter moved to the written Word, the Old Testament Scriptures. Since the believers who first received Peter’s letters as yet had no complete New

Testament, they relied wholly on the Old Testament Scriptures. The preaching texts for the apostles were from the Old Testament. In Peter’s mind “the prophetic message” (vs. 19) probably meant the entire Old Testament.

As the apostles had listened to Jesus and witnessed His miracle power (climaxed by the revelation of His glory), the Scriptures became even more sure to them. With their fellow Jews, they had longingly anticipated the coming of God’s Messiah. Now that they had found the Messiah, the predictions of the prophets of old vibrated with new life. The words of the prophets had become more certain for them because they had seen, heard, and touched the fulfillment of those prophecies in Jesus.

It is easy to take this privilege of hindsight for granted as 21st century believers. The saints of the Old Testament trusted in God for their salvation—but the means of that salvation was not nearly as clear to them as it is for us today.

Peter added a warning for his readers to pay attention to the prophets whose messages were proclaimed in the Old Testament Scriptures. In his first letter, Peter had noted that the prophets had spoken of the “grace that was to come to you” (I Pet. 1:10) as the Spirit of Christ moved their hearts to prophesy.

Ask Yourself . . . *What distracts my attention away from the study of God’s Word?*

Peter saw the words of the prophets as "a light shining in a dark place" (II Pet. 1:19). In the darkness, a light gets our attention at once because by it we are able to see everything. We do not simply stare at the light, but we enjoy the ability it gives us to see that which we were previously blind to. C. S. Lewis reflects this truth in his statement, "I believe in Christianity as I believe the Sun has risen not only because I see it, but by it I see everything else."

Ask Yourself . . . *How did my perspective on things change once I*

heard God's truth?

Peter called the place where the light shines "a dark place." The word rendered "dark" carried the idea of conditions that are squalid. It is a proper description of the whole world that exists in spiritual darkness, separated from the light of God. The light of God's Word can guide us through the murkiness that difficult circumstances sometimes bring our way.

"The day" that will dawn is the coming of Christ. God's Word shines into the sin-darkened hearts

Perspectives on Scripture

Peter said that the Scriptures were created by human authors, not originating from their own minds, but the result of their being carried along by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:20, 21). Here is a brief comparison of what people have thought about the divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

No Divine Inspiration

The Bible is simply a collection of human stories; some are historically accurate, but most are embellished by the religious fervor of the writer. Non-Christians normally treat the Bible this way.

Partial Inspiration

Certain portions of the Bible are more inspired or differently inspired than other portions—especially those passages upon which doctrines hinge.

Full Inspiration

Though a human element is clearly seen in authorship of the Bible, the entire text gives us God's truth, carrying undiminished divine authority (John 17:17). This last view is the one held by the majority of orthodox Christians.

of those without Christ. But it cannot be understood until it breaks through in the presence of the Spirit of Christ, who makes God's truth known to us.

The morning star that rises in the hearts of believers is probably Christ, who applied this title to Himself in Revelation 22:16. When Christ returns, His work in the hearts of believers will come to its fullest fruition.

First and foremost, Peter wrote, believers must understand that the prophetic Scriptures did not originate with the arbitrary interpretation of any individual person (II Pet. 1:20).

As we seek to understand the Bible today, we must keep in mind that the proper use of the Scriptures still does not include arbitrary interpretation by individuals. It is easy to take a verse or two out of context, and build an entire false doctrine upon it.

Part of seeking the counsel of God is studying what the entire Bible has to say about a particular subject, not focusing on just a passage or two. Undoubtedly, the Bible is the most powerful book in the world—and that power can be easily abused.

Peter's admonition against arbitrary interpretation applied to the false teachers who had twisted Paul's writings and other Scripture (see 3:16). Peter made his statement even clearer when he insisted that prophecy originated with God, and not with people (1:21). These words provide a strong defense for the inspiration of the Scriptures.

People whom God chose as His instruments spoke, but the words they spoke were God's. Peter said they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit." They were neither ordinarily dictated to nor caught up in a state of ecstasy. They were simply controlled by the Spirit of God as they wrote the words of God. While God used their personalities, cultures, and perspectives to shape each part of His special revelation, everything they wrote still bore the full weight of divine authority.

Thus Peter communicated the burden of his spirit to his fellow believers concerning divine revelation. He stood by what he and the apostles had taught as truth coming from God, validated by their eyewitness accounts of Christ's power and glory.

11

Impostors in the Church

II Peter 2:1-12

a The Nature of False Teachers (2:1-3)

In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.
—II Peter 2:3

Peter was like a mountain climber as he developed his second letter, moving from one level to another until he reached the pinnacle of his message. He began with a reminder to his readers of the blessings that were theirs as God's people. Then he moved to strengthen his own credibility as an eyewitness of Christ's transfiguration in power and glory. Next he approached the top with teaching about the inspiration of the Scripture. Finally, in this second chapter, Peter focused on the key teaching of this letter: a dangerous presence was plaguing God's people—the power of false prophets in their midst. Peter's readers needed to be jolted out of their naïveté and made aware of the destructiveness of these impostors.

The people of Israel had been blessed with many true prophets who had spoken God's words to them. Peter had just referred to those who had been "carried along by the Holy Spirit" to write down the body of truth known as the Hebrew Scriptures (1:21). But Satan has always had his counterfeiters ready to oppose God's truth. That was true in the Old Testament era, it was true in Peter's day, and it's true in our time (2:1a).

Even though many churches today are well grounded in the Christian faith and doctrine, false teachers representing an ever-expanding number of cults prey upon unstable and insecure members of these churches. Sadly, they have succeeded in luring many away from the truth.

The false teachers of Peter's day were not necessarily pastors or evangelists, but anyone who provided instruction in the Scriptures. No doubt Peter remembered Jesus' warning about these false teachers when He said to His followers shortly before He ascended back to the Father, "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come

The True Prophets

In contrast to the false prophets Peter described, true prophets spoke God's words directly as they were prompted by the Holy Spirit. They were sometimes called seers, or those who not only spoke God's words but also had keen insight into the direction God was leading His people. The following characterized true prophets.

- They received a specific call from God.
- They received God's message by visions, dreams, or a direct declaration or appearance from God, and then they spoke the message as God's representatives.
- Sometimes they delivered God's message by deed as well as word.
- They performed miracles to confirm their messages.
- They conveyed God's Word by writing their messages.
- They ministered to and interceded for God's people.

in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:4, 5). Peter likewise was putting his fellow believers on guard concerning these who would add falsehood to God's truth.

Peter said that these ruthless false prophets were not called of God or recognized by the apostles, but were self-appointed. Their strategy was to "secretly introduce" (II Pet. 2:1b) or subtly inject, their false teaching into the true doctrine. They included enough truth in their teaching to snare their hearers. Then they would cunningly introduce their "destructive heresies," or those teachings that struck at the very roots of orthodox Christian teaching. "Heresies" translates a Greek word that means "choices." Thus the false teachers were providing an attractive option to following God's truth. The inevitable result was a division or separation among God's people.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever heard a new perspective on Scripture that raised some red flags in my mind?*

Peter noted that the chief sin of these false prophets and teachers was their denial of "the sovereign Lord who bought them," or their contempt for Christ and His death on the cross. Christ's death on the cross paid the price for the sins of the whole world, yet it becomes effective only as people repent and personally receive God's gift of eternal life. These false teachers were evidently heretics who denied Christ.

Later in this chapter Peter stated

that these false prophets and teachers said they knew Christ and the way of righteousness (see vss. 20, 21). But their denial fits the description John gave of such persons: "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us" (I John 2:19).

Because of their evil works, these false teachers were "bringing swift destruction on themselves" (II Pet. 2:1b). Peter used the same strong word for "destruction" that he used to describe the kind of heresies they were teaching. It was a destruction that brings everlasting misery apart from a holy and just God. The false teachers' sinful practices triggered God's judgment upon them.

The destruction of the false teachers, though well earned, was a sad necessity. The tragedy that disturbed Peter more, however, was that many gullible people would be deceived by these shrewd teachers and would discredit the Christian faith (vs. 2). These outcomes reveal the seriousness of false teaching.

The word Peter used for "depraved conduct" in referring to the false teachers' behavior meant unbridled lust that led to sexual immorality. He used the same word later to describe the conduct of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 7). Not only were these impostors in the church teaching heresy; they were living openly immoral lives.

It is easy to see why the church members who identified with such people were giving false signals concerning the true faith to their unbelieving neighbors. Their daily

lives were mirrors reflecting their beliefs before the world. What they believed was revealed in how they lived.

Peter also stated that greed was characteristic of the false teachers (vs. 3a). All that they did was motivated by their selfish desire to have more. So they enticed people with invented stories they presented as divine truth. These likely were the myths or "cleverly devised stories" Peter had referred to earlier (1:16). "Exploit" (2:3a) is a marketplace term, used of unscrupulous merchants whose only interest is in making a profit any way they can.

Peter was not saying that true teachers of the Gospel should not receive financial support (see I Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6; I Tim. 5:17, 18). The motivation of those truly called by God to teach and preach will never be mercenary or driven by unreasonable profits. One of the blights on modern Christianity is the effort of some through the media to coerce unsuspecting people into supporting biblically unsound or questionable ministries.

Ask Yourself . . . *Am I aware of any ministries that might be considered suspect in terms of their teachings or finances?*

After exposing the false teachers of his day, Peter described their destiny in no uncertain terms. God had settled their judgment and doom long ago. The ancient psalmist wrote that "the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For . . . the



This photo shows the southern end of the Dead Sea, where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah may have been located. The destruction of these cities is an example of what can happen to false teachers.

way of the wicked leads to destruction" (Ps. 1:5, 6b). God will not let them out of His sight or allow them to get away with anything. He is not idle in His judgment as One who is sleeping. The Lord is alert, ready to execute His perfect judgment in the fullness of time (II Pet. 2:3b).

b God's Judgment and Grace (2:4-10a)

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. —II Peter 2:9

To emphasize his point about God's coming judgment on false prophets and teachers, Peter reminded his readers of three terrifying examples of God's past judgment on sin recorded in the Scriptures.

First, he mentioned God's judgment that fell on the angels that disobeyed (vs. 4). Jesus said, "I saw

Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Evidently Jude 6 and Luke 10:18 either refer to, or at least reflect, the original fall of Satan and his angels (see Matt. 25:41). Some believe the angels Peter mentioned were the angels of Jude 6, whom God "has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." Some would connect this with Genesis 6:2-4.

Jesus once gave the illustration of a man once delivered from a demon only to be tormented later by seven worse spirits (see Matt. 12:43-45). From this illustration we learn that some evil spirits are more wicked than others. Apparently some are so evil, so shameless, so pathologically destructive that God is restraining them until the day of judgment.

Second, Peter reminded his readers of the Flood in Noah's day. In spite of the faithful preaching of

Noah, the sins of that generation continued to be so severe that God destroyed every living thing except for Noah and his family (II Pet. 2:5; see Gen. 7:23).

Peter's third example of divine judgment focuses on Sodom and Gomorrah, the evil cities upon which God rained fire and brimstone (burning sulphur), reducing them to ashes. The people who lived in these cities were guilty of greed and sexual immorality, just like the false teachers in the church (II Pet. 2:6; see Gen. 19:1-29; Ezek. 16:49; Jude 7).

Ask Yourself . . . *How is my culture similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah?*

The judgments of God upon the fallen angels, the generation of Noah, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of what God will do to those who ignore His moral boundaries.

Peter balanced God's judgment with evidence of His saving grace in the salvation of Noah and his family from the destruction of the Flood, and Lot and his two daughters from the destruction that rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter was careful, however, to record the difference in God's dealing with Noah and Lot. Peter stated that God "protected" Noah and his family (II Pet. 2:5), but He "rescued" Lot (vs. 7).

Noah was a righteous man and did not give in to the sins of the people of his day. He faithfully bore witness to the righteousness of God. In contrast, Lot grew accustomed to the cultural benefits Sodom

provided, even though his soul was disturbed by the evil he witnessed. When the time came for him to leave the city before God's judgment fell, he hesitated and angels had to lead him, his wife, and their two daughters out of the doomed city (see Gen. 19:16).

Peter referred to Lot as "a righteous man" who also had a "righteous soul" (II Pet. 2:7, 8). Even though Genesis 19 portrays Lot as a weak and worldly person, he had not succumbed to the wholesale immorality that characterized the city. Apparently his righteousness did not have any measurable effect on the city. In fact, his choice to live there in the beginning was not to be a missionary for the true God, but strictly for economic reasons (see Gen. 13:10, 11).

Peter did not include Lot's wife and daughters in his observation that their husband and father was tormented because of the immoral lifestyle of the Sodomites. Lot's wife perished when she dared to look back at her old, comfortable way of life. Lot's daughters initiated an incestuous relationship with their father when he was drunk. Though declared righteous, Lot was apparently an unstable follower of God and therefore a weak husband and father.

Ask Yourself . . . *How am I affected by the unrighteousness of the society in which I live?*

In spite of Lot's weakness, the Lord still delivered Lot. God knows those who belong to Him, and is

faithful to protect and rescue them. At the same time, He deals justly with "the unrighteous" (II Pet. 2:9). Those who willfully disobey God and break His commandments will be punished now and will be held in reserve for eternal punishment hereafter. Some believe Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus is an example of the torment the unrighteous experience in the intermediate state as they await for the final sentencing (see Luke 16:19-31).

Whatever punishment the wicked receive in this life is only a foretaste of God's wrath. The great and final judgment is yet to come (see Rev. 20:11-15) and will be followed by "the second death," or eternal separation from God. Peter added that God's judgment is sure to fall on those whom he had been describing. They were morally corrupt and rejected the ultimate authority of God (II Pet. 2:10a).

C The Destiny of Impostors (2:10b-12)

These people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. —II Peter 2:12

Having used biblical examples to show the types of judgment false teachers would face, Peter went on

to deal with specific characteristics of these dangerous self-made prophets and teachers. He noted first that they were bold and arrogant (vs. 10b).

Boldness can have two faces. One who is strong in the Lord to stand against temptation and evil is bold, a commendable characteristic. Peter had the second side of boldness in mind, a boldness characterized by blind confidence and presumption. People with this kind of boldness are fools who rush in where angels fear to tread. This type of boldness describes a harsh, overbearing, inconsiderate attitude.

"Arrogant" portrays haughty, self-willed, self-pleasing persons who have no concern for others. Their primary desire is to control.

In their arrogance, the false teachers dared to speak evil of powerful celestial beings. Some have suggested that these false teachers claimed that these supernatural beings had practiced sexual immorality, and thereby condoned it. If not for God's restraining power, these evil spirits could wipe out these heretics in a flash; they had no idea who they were dealing with.

To illustrate the impertinence of the false teachers, Peter said that even the holy angels against whom they dared to speak did not presume to speak reproachfully of fallen angels (II Pet. 2:11). Peter may have had in mind an incident Jude referred to in which the archangel Michael had a confrontation with Satan. In an argument concerning the body of Moses, Michael, despite all of his authority and power over

Heretical Challenges

Second-century A.D. Gnosticism was probably the first structured heresy to challenge Christian orthodoxy. Peter's second letter attacked the foundations of this heresy. In fact, both the apostles Peter and John did everything they could to expose the false assumptions out of which this heresy developed.

After Gnosticism, several unorthodox teachings arose that also denied the sovereign Lord.

Docetism

(Late first century)

Denied the genuine humanity of Christ. As God He only appeared to be a man.

Ebionism

(Second century)

Denied the full deity of Christ. Claimed Jesus had the Spirit of God only after his baptism and did not exist prior to His human existence.

Arianism

(Fourth century)

Denied the genuine deity of Christ. Taught that Christ was the first and highest created being.

Apollinarianism

(Fourth century)

Denied the completeness of Jesus' humanity. Taught that the divine Spirit replaced the human mind in Christ.

Nestorianism

(Fifth century)

Claimed that Jesus was really two persons—one human, one divine. The human was completely controlled by the divine; there was no real union between the two natures.

Eutybianism

(Fifth century)

Blended the human and divine natures of Christ into one new nature. The human nature was completely swallowed up by the divine. Denied any distinction between Christ's two natures.

Peter compared the false teachers to unreasoning animals such as the hyena. The striped hyena was a common predator in Israel during Peter's time, notorious for raiding graves and exhuming human bodies for food—a fitting metaphor for the false teachers who preyed upon weak and less stable people in the church.



the angelic hosts, did not himself quarrel with Satan about the issue. Instead, he simply said to the devil, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9). Unlike the restrained Michael, the false teachers ignorantly blasphemed about angels (II Pet. 2:12a).

Then Peter took his assessment of these false teachers a level lower when he compared them to unreasoning animals (vs. 12b). With each statement Peter's indignation toward these impostors seemed to grow stronger. Like animals, the false teachers were alive, but they had no concept of the moral issues of life. They were controlled by the instincts of animal nature. Just as wild, predatory animals would eventually be captured and destroyed, so these false teachers, in the midst of their destructive ways,

would eventually be destroyed themselves.

In the face of Satan's determination to undermine the faith of God's people, Christians need to be constantly on guard against those who are willing to cooperate with the powers of darkness.

Ask Yourself . . . *How would I recognize a person who is controlled by the powers of darkness?*

12

The Destiny of Spiritual Impostors

II Peter 2:13-22

a The False Teachers' Addiction to Sin (2:13, 14)

With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!

—II Peter 2:14

The more Peter thought about the false teachers as they spread their lies among unsuspecting believers, the bolder he became in predicting their doom. These shrewd teachers of false doctrine apparently had done great harm in disrupting the fellowship and hindering the spiritual growth of the believers (vs. 13a). Peter's implication was that their sinister deeds were being carefully recorded and the time would come when they would reap the harvest of their wicked planting.

Peter revealed the brazen conduct of these disruptive instructors. They evidently had become so strongly established among the believers that they made no attempt to hide their immorality. They may have initially been more discreet in their

corrupt practices. But the longer they remained among the Christians in their congregations, the easier it was for them to be accepted. Soon they practiced their unscrupulous conduct openly. Shamelessly, they would carouse in broad daylight (vs. 13b).

"Carouse" translates a Greek word that also means softness, effeminacy, or luxurious living. These evil people probably did not work, but lived off the generosity of those whom they were leading astray. They were economic and spiritual parasites.

Usually, deliberate sin is committed under the cover of darkness. Jesus said that some people "loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). But these teachers felt no such restraints; exposure meant nothing to them.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what ways has my society ignored once-accepted moral constraints?*

Peter was angry about the way these false teachers made a mockery of a sacred ritual among the early Christians called the "love feast," which included the observance of

Adding to the Faith

Early Christians observed a simple meal, sometimes called the Agape [ah-GAH-pay] Feast. Believers celebrated this meal of love in connection with the Lord's Supper. All distinctions of rank, wealth, and culture were set aside at these feasts as the believers worshiped a common Redeemer. In some instances the participants prepared the food in a home, and other times at the place of meeting. Before the meal, the people often observed a ritual of hand washing. Those who gathered offered prayers and read Scripture.

Following the meal, the leaders would take an offering for widows and orphans. They would read and answer any communication received from other congregations, and exchange the "holy kiss" of love. Though intended to foster unity among believers, the practice of the love feast eventually led to all sorts of abuses such as those described by Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 11:17-20).

the Lord's Supper. Peter called them "blots and blemishes" at these festivals (II Pet. 2:13b)

Later, Peter urged believers to "make every effort to be found spotless" (3:14). In his first letter, he had referred to Christ as "a lamb without blemish or defect" (I Pet. 1:19). In contrast, Peter saw these manipulators as the blemished counterparts of Christ and His church.

With rising indignation, Peter continued his condemnation of these false teachers. Their open immorality had hit rock-bottom. He said they had "eyes full of adultery" (II Pet. 2:14). They were obsessed with lustful passion. The original text suggests that these evil people were constantly looking for someone with whom to commit adultery. They saw every woman as a potential prospect for their indulgence. Jesus

condemned this practice when He said that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Their passions had so consumed them that they could not (would not) stop sinning. They were hopelessly addicted to their immoral conduct.

Peter used a fisherman's term when he said that these people seduced the unstable (II Pet. 2:14). "Seduce," also translated "beguile," means "to catch by bait." The picture is that of experienced fishermen casting their expertly fashioned lures where unsuspecting fish would bite.

Peter called the victims of these teachers unstable, or not firmly established in their faith. Those who promote cults in our day often prey upon people who are unstable or

insecure in their beliefs. Many make it a point to go house-to-house peddling their false doctrine on Sunday mornings, when they often find nominal church members at home. These cultists take advantage of the religious instability of these people, planting seeds of unsubstantiated doubt, and have led many into the bondage of their cult.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who do I know who might be drawn to the warmth and sincerity of cultists? What can I do about this?*

As Peter's disgust with these people continued to increase, he saw them as people who trained themselves, as athletes would train for an event, in the practice of covetousness and greed. (The original word translated "experts" is the root of "gymnasium," describing the place where athletes train and become proficient in their skills.) The apostle Paul equated greed with idolatry (see Col. 3:5). Greedy people worship idols of their desire for more than they need.

Peter summed up his recital of descriptions condemning these false teachers by calling them "an accursed brood" (II Pet. 2:14). The phrase can also be translated "children of a curse," which reflects a typical Hebrew turn of phrase found throughout the Scriptures. In his first letter, Peter had referred to obedient children (I Pet. 1:14). The thought behind the phrase is that the persons described are child-like followers of whatever good or evil is noted.

b A Comparison to Balaam (2:15, 16)

They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness.

—II Peter 2:15

Caught up in his description of these false teachers, Peter observed further that they had made a habit of turning from the straight path, which is the way of obedience toward God. The verb phrase "have left" (vs. 15) in the original language indicates habitual action. God had given the false teachers many opportunities to follow the straight way and turn from their path to destruction, but they constantly ignored God's will and turned their backs on Him.

The words "straight way" or "straight path" appear repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. David wrote in Psalm 27:11: "Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors." An anonymous psalmist wrote in Psalm 107:7: "He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle."

The fact that these heretics had left the straight way does not necessarily mean they were ever devoted followers of Christ. They came to a crossroads where they were faced with a decision. The path they chose caused them to wander from God.

The way they chose to follow was

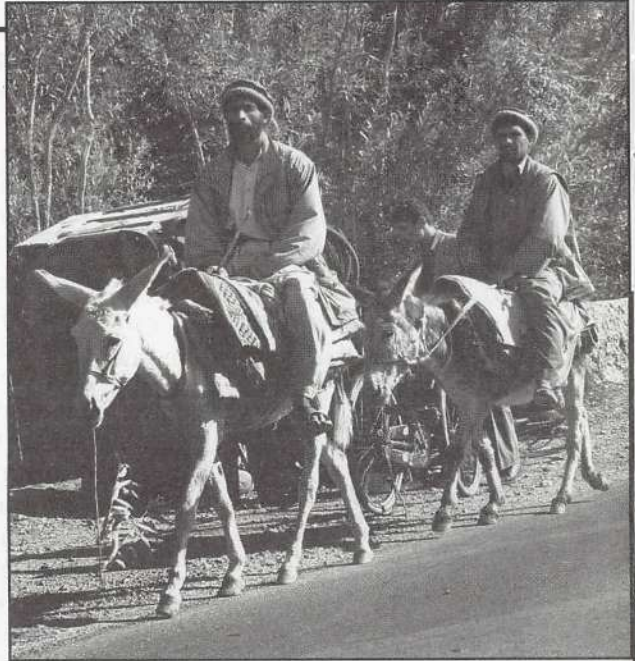
Peter described Balaam as a mad prophet who was restrained from his schemes by his donkey—which spoke to him with a man's voice.

like the way of Balaam son of Bezer. The original word for “follow” (II Pet. 2:15) means to tread in someone’s steps, or to imitate someone’s way of acting. Theirs was not a casual stroll down an alternate trail, but a deliberate choice to go in a particular direction.

Ask Yourself . . . *When was the last time I faced a crossroads in my spiritual journey?*

To bring his condemnation of these people into sharper focus, Peter identified their role model as Balaam son of Bezer. Balaam was one of many non-Israelite prophets of Eastern religions who worshiped the gods of the land. Some of them had considerable influence, and when they pronounced a blessing or a curse, it was considered a true prophecy. Balaam was one of those prophets whom Balak, king of Moab, tried to hire to curse the invading Israelites (see Num. 22—24).

In the strange story, we discover that this prophet for hire wanted to curse Israel for Balak’s fee, but God’s Spirit would not permit him to do so. As Balaam traveled to meet



with Balak, the donkey on which he rode talked with him (see 22:21-30), after having caused the false prophet’s foot to be injured by pressing him against a vineyard wall. The donkey rebuked him for his wrongdoing, as Peter stated (II Pet 2:16). Then God opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw “the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn” (Num. 22:31).

Ask Yourself . . . *How has God opened my eyes recently?*

In His sovereignty, God compelled Balaam to deliver four clear

messages confirming the Lord's blessing upon Israel. During this false prophet's preaching, he even spoke of the coming of the Messiah: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17b).

But true to his colors, Balaam continued to follow his evil course. He advised the Moabites to entice the Israelite men to worship Baal, which would involve them in acts of sexual immorality. Balaam, driven by his desire for material gain, experienced the indignity of being rebuked by a donkey, a beast God had not created with the ability to speak. Yet the animal spoke clearly to Balaam with a man's voice.

Peter's purpose in referring to Balaam was to show that the false teachers he was condemning were as insensitive as Balaam, that they followed their path of destruction blindly as Balaam did, and that they, like this prophet for hire, abused their religious power in order to gain a profit.

Peter also showed the superior power of God in forcing Balaam to turn from his madness regarding the cursing of Israel. This was the period of Nero, whose madness would drive him to wipe out the Christians in his jurisdiction. The persecuted believers of Peter's day needed to be reminded that God comforts and protects the souls of those who belong to Him. He would not abandon them.

Ask Yourself . . . *How have I seen God restrain people with evil intent?*

C The False Teachers' Failure to Satisfy (2:17-19)

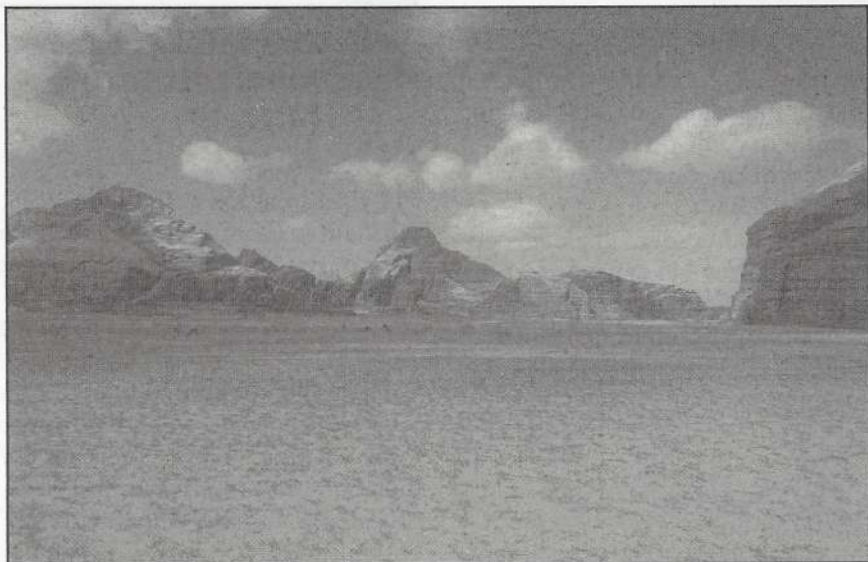
They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.

—II Peter 2:19

The more Peter thought about the false teachers who were determined to play havoc with the churches they had infiltrated, the more God revealed to him not only the depth of their depravity, but also their coming doom. Like an artist holding a palette with an array of colors, Peter painted a vivid portrait of these adversaries of God and of His people.

With the first strokes of his brush, Peter painted these false teachers as "springs without water and mists driven by a storm" (vs. 17). Peter's fellow worker Jude had possibly discussed these problems in the church with him. Jude may even have had a copy of Peter's letter in hand. In his letter, Jude appears to have used Peter's thoughts and expanded them (see Jude 12, 13).

Peter called these blasphemers springs without water. Springs of water in a desert land where precipitation was scarce provided an appealing illustration of spiritual truth. Jesus promised the woman at the well that He would give her "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). He also said



Peter described the false teachers in the church as springs without water. A parched traveler in this desert might expect to find a spring just over this ridge. All this person would come upon, however, is a valley of dust and gravel where a small creek may have once flowed.

that from those who believe in Him would flow “rivers of living water” (John 7:38). The false teachers, however, were not in touch with the true source of life, the Lord Jesus. They could make all kinds of promises, but in reality had nothing to give.

Ask Yourself . . . *When was the last time I was given an empty promise?*

“Mists driven by a storm” (II Pet. 2:17) reminded Peter’s readers of the farmer’s disappointing experience, in the midst of a drought, of seeing what appeared to be rain clouds forming in the sky. But the storm winds come and drive away the waterless clouds. The outwardly

appealing false teachers gave false hope to the people at first, but soon revealed that they had nothing satisfying to offer.

The “blackest darkness” reserved for these adversaries probably was hell. Peter’s word for “darkness” was also often used to describe the darkness of the underworld.

Peter described the strategy of these false teachers in three ways. First, the embellished words they spoke had no substance or true meaning. They spoke in a haughty, puffed-up, dramatic way to make up for the lack of content in what they had to say (vs. 18).

Second, Peter repeated his earlier

charge that these teachers played upon the lustful desires of human nature. They said things intended to arouse immoral desires and passions in the hearts of their hearers.

Third, typical of those who seek to lure believers into cultic practices, they attacked believers who were new in the faith and had not had time to grow in their understanding of God's truth. These new Christians had just come from the darkness of unbelief and had separated themselves from former destructive relationships. Now they were being enticed back into that darkness.

These false teachers were promising freedom, but it was far removed from genuine freedom. Not having experienced the new birth, these false teachers conceived of spiritual

freedom as a license to sin (vs. 19).

Ask Yourself . . . *How have I seen grace used as a license to sin?*

d The Fate of the Impostors (2:20-22)

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

—II Peter 2:21

In the closing verses of chapter 2 Peter presented the truth concerning the destiny of those who reject the

For the Love of Mud

Peter's proverb about the washed pig returning to wallow in the mud (II Pet. 2:22) may have come from a couple of sources. From the Hellenistic world, the Greek philosopher from Ephesus known as Heraclitus the Obscure often used the metaphor of pigs preferring to bathe in the mud rather than clean water to describe foolish people.

There was also a similar proverb that was contained in the Story of Ahikar. The Arabic version comes closest to Peter's rendering, "Thou hast been to me like a pig who went into the hot bath with people of quality, and when it came out of the hot bath, it saw a filthy hole and it went down and wallowed in it." Interestingly, this quote in the original story is also followed by a proverb about a dog.

Spirit's appeal to follow God's will. Some believe these teachers were once genuine Christians who had fallen away from the faith. Others see these teachers as only spiritual impostors who are nothing more than great actors (you may wish to compare such passages as Luke 8:13; Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-31 and I John 2:18-24).

As any unbeliever might, they may have agreed to the factual evidence of Christ. As they persisted in their false teaching, especially regarding freedom as a license to sin, they became entangled again in their former evil ways. "Entangled" (II Pet. 2:20) describes an interweaving of immorality into their lives that did not happen all at once, but by a gradual process.

Ask Yourself . . . *Am I getting entangled in anything that will be difficult to escape from later?*

The tragedy is that these teachers were exposed to the truth in the first place. They had deliberately turned away from God's way to pursue their own. The sacred command they had turned their back on was the teaching of the apostles, specifically the Gospel. Because they had rejected Christ, they would face the terror of God's eternal judgment (vs. 21).

Peter brought his dreadful description of these false teachers to a close by reminding his readers of two proverbs using the metaphors of dogs and pigs. (Jesus also did this; see Matthew 7:6.)

The first proverb is from Proverbs 26:11. Dogs, to the Jews, were unclean animals and generally were treated with contempt. A dog was a scavenger animal in that society and would eat practically anything. This made dogs potential carriers of all kinds of diseases.

The second proverb also was a common proverb whose truth was self-evident. A sow could be washed clean, but she would return to her mud wallow and grunt contentedly in the filth. Peter saw that the false teachers as revealing this inclination—moving away from a knowledge of truth and turning to the gross sins of the flesh.

The false teachers of today are no different from those in Peter's day. Seasoned and mature Christians have reasoned with the leaders of cults and other misguided people in the church to no avail. Many of these false teachers cry out "persecution, persecution" and then return to their immoral lifestyles.

13

Anticipating the Lord's Coming

II Peter 3

a Reminders of the Truth (3:1, 2)

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. —II Peter 3:2

Peter was finished with the difficult part of his second letter. He had denounced with strong words the false prophets and their misguided teachings. He had made it clear that they faced certain doom for the damage they were doing to the spiritual lives of immature believers. Now the storm was over, and the apostle had words of peace.

This last section of his letter contains once again the gentle words of Peter's pastoral heart. He had made it clear his readers should never trust the false teachers, regardless of how sincere they sounded. But God, to whom they belonged, could be trusted absolutely.

Peter concluded his letter with words of endearment used four times between this point and the end of the letter. The phrase "dear

friends" (vs. 1a) translates a word that means "beloved" and is based on the love word *agape*. Peter wanted these believers to know that he cared for them.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who would I call "beloved" in the sense Peter intended?*

Peter's reference to "my second letter to you" may refer to I Peter, but this is not conclusive. There may have been a lost letter, as we know some of Paul's letters were never found (see I Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16).

Peter stated that his purpose for writing both of these letters was for them to be "reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking" (II Pet. 3:1b). "Wholesome" can mean pure, sincere, unmixed, and thus free from lying stains of the false teachers.

Peter indicated that he wanted his readers to remember the inspired words of the prophets from the past. Their prophecies were recorded in the Old Testament, which was the primary Bible these believers had. Of course, the church also had Paul's letters, which were beginning to be recognized as inspired Scripture. In verse 2, Peter placed the words of the prophets and the

commands of the Lord Jesus (given through the apostles) on the same authoritative plane.

Peter had stated that the prophets spoke or wrote "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1:21). Peter was careful to refer to these prophets as "holy." This description often was used of the true vehicles of God's revelation, which set them apart from the self-designated prophets who were constantly harassing the early churches.

Not only were Peter's readers to remember the words of these prophets, but also "the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles" (3:2). The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles were mouthpieces for God.

Ask Yourself . . . *How seriously do I take the authority of Scripture?*

b

Mockers of God's Truth (3:3-7)

You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

—II Peter 3:3

Peter described as "scoffers" those whom he had already referred to as "false prophets" and "false teachers" (2:1). A scoffer is one who trivializes something serious. These false teachers were all the more dangerous because they were familiar with the Scriptures and the apostles'

inspired interpretation of the Lord's commands. The last days embraced the time from Christ's ascension to His return (3:3).

Scoffing in regard to revealed spiritual truth is more than mere jesting. In ignorance some will speak jokingly about spiritual matters. This grieves the Spirit of God. Scoffing, however, is a calculated effort to discredit an accepted truth.

Peter wrote with the urgency of prophecy when he said that scoffers "will come." They were already among them, but they would also continue to be present until Christ returned. Having rejected God's truth, these scoffers turned to "their own evil desires," which Peter had previously described (see 2:13-22).

Ask Yourself . . . *When is the last time I heard spiritual truth trivialized?*

Peter focused on the Christian belief these scoffers would attack with the greatest intensity. The early church focused on the return of Christ to bring to fruition the work of salvation. Believers were characterized by an intense sense of anticipation of the Savior's return. Jesus had laid the groundwork with His teaching on end-time events in Matthew 24. The early Christians lived with the expectation of Christ's return, just as believers should do today. These false teachers mocked their hope, reminding the believers that nothing had changed "since the beginning of creation" (II Pet. 3:4). "Our fathers" might refer to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), or perhaps even to the first

First-Century Christians and Christ's Return

Jesus' disciples asked Him when He would return and what signs would precede the event. Jesus predicted that His coming would be preceded by terrible times of persecution and upheaval (Matt. 24:4-14), but that no one, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son," knew the day or hour (vs. 36). Jesus' followers were simply to "keep watch," since no one knew when He would come (vs. 42).

The persecution and martyrdom of many first-century Christians caused the early church to think that surely Christ's coming was very near. In Paul's prediction of the resurrection of the dead in Christ at the Lord's appearing, he noted that "we who are still alive . . . will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep" (I Thess. 4:15). These early believers were not mistaken in their anticipation of Christ's return. They were merely being watchful, as the Lord had instructed them. The "signs" believers are to watch for, according to Jesus, Paul, and John, include:

- The preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 24:14)
- The appearance of false christs and false prophets (Mark 13:22)
- A time of increased lawlessness (II Thess. 2:7)
- The coming of the Antichrist (I John 2:18)

Christian martyrs such as James and Stephen. The false teachers' implicit argument was that if Jesus had not returned yet, then He was never coming back.

Peter responded with these well-known facts from Scripture: the creation of the world by God, and the flood that destroyed all who inhabited the world in Noah's day (except for Noah and his family). These scoffers had deliberately chosen to ignore these events (vs. 5).

In referring to the creation of the world, Peter recalled how God made dry land appear after separating the waters from the sky (see Gen. 1:7). God not only had the power to create the world with the use of these waters, but He also had the right to

destroy the earth by water (II Pet. 3:6). This destruction was complete, in that "everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died" (Gen. 7:22).

The conclusion Peter drew was that the same God who destroyed the earth with water will destroy both the heavens and the earth with fire. Just as the wicked were destroyed in the Flood, so will it be at the end of time, when the heavens and earth are destroyed by fire (II Pet. 3:7). And just as God preserved Noah and his family from the Flood, so will He save those who have believed on Him through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *How strong is my anticipation of Christ's return?*



God's Patience (3:8-10)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

—II Peter 3:9

Still conscious of the scoffers' insistence that the delay in the promised coming of Christ proved that it was not going to happen, Peter wanted his readers to understand time from God's perspective (vs. 8).

Again Peter used words of endearment as he encouraged these believers to think seriously about time. He paraphrased the words of Moses in his prayer to the Lord: "A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by" (Ps. 90:4).

The reverse is also true. A single day might seem to God like a thousand years. If we do the math, a single hour might seem like forty-two years to God. In contrast, the average human life span of eighty-four years might seem like only two hours to the Lord. Truly a person's life is but a mist that appears for a little while in the eyes of God (see Jas. 4:14).

Ask Yourself . . . *If I had only two hours to live, how would I spend that time?*

Peter did not presume to suggest

a date when the end of history would come. Jesus made it clear that only God knew the exact time of Christ's second coming (see Matt. 24:36). His point was that God does not see time as humans do. Whereas we are always conscious of days and months and years, God is above time, and its passing does not affect Him in the ways it affects us.

The one thing Peter wanted his readers not to forget was that God does not count time as humans do. The fact that Christ had not come did not mean God was "slow in keeping his promise" (II Pet. 3:9). Some of the weaker believers may have begun to think that the scoffers had a point after all. "As some understand slowness" refers to the scoffers and their eagerness to say that the delay in Christ's coming was proof that it would never happen.

Peter saw the apparent delay of Christ's return, not as a doubt-producing dilemma, but as a means of God's grace. The Lord was lengthening the period of time in which people could repent and be delivered from eternal destruction. God's supreme desire is that sinners come to repentance and find everlasting life—and that is why Christ's return seems delayed.

Peter was not teaching universalism (the view that everyone will eventually be saved) when he insisted that God was "not wanting anyone to perish." Peter had already indicated that the false teachers were marked for destruction. God delays His coming not because of



Replica of the Gezer Calendar, excavated at the city of Gezer northwest of Jerusalem, a Hebrew agricultural calendar dating from the tenth century B.C.

human sin, but because of His gracious forbearance. God wants all people to repent, so He provides enough time for them to choose.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who do I know who has not yet given his or her life to Christ?*

When God's patience is finally exhausted, "the day of the Lord" will come suddenly, as a thief who

strikes in the darkness (vs. 10a).

Jesus also taught that His coming would be unexpected, like the unwelcome intrusion of a thief (see Matt. 24:42-44). Unlike the thief, however, Jesus will have every right to take whatever He wishes—for there is no power, position, or possession that does not already belong to Him.

Peter used strong language typical of end-time passages to describe three things that will happen in the Day of the Lord: the heavens will vanish (see Isa. 34:4; Rev. 6:14), the "elements" (air, water, land) will be destroyed, resulting in everything being exposed by this great consuming fire (II Pet. 3:10b). This laying bare could mean that every human creation is completely destroyed, or laid open to be perfectly judged by God.

The Hebrew Concept of Time

In Old Testament times, the Hebrew people believed that time was the realm in which God principally acted. These acts were usually seen as "days." The creative acts of God in Genesis were divided into "days." Throughout the history of God's ancient people, great events during which God manifested His power and glory were special "days" that were memorialized through ritual celebrations. Jesus and His disciples observed certain "holy days" that were held sacred by the Jews.

Time in the Old Testament was referenced to the day of the Lord. The Hebrew people did, however, recognize a seasonal viewing of time. Excavations at Gezer, a major city northwest of Jerusalem, have produced an agricultural calendar of the seasons.

The New Testament referenced time against the coming of Christ. Examples of this include "my appointed time is near" (Matt. 26:18), "the time has come" (Mark 1:15), and "now is the time of God's favor" (II Cor. 6:2). The "last days" in the New Testament refer to the time between Christ's ascension and His return.

d A New Home (3:11-16)

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.
—II Peter 3:13

Peter had spelled out in vivid terms the terrifying events that will take place in the Day of the Lord. He had not done so to produce a trembling fear in the hearts of his readers, for he had assured them of their hope in Christ. Since eventually all earthly things will be destroyed in this manner, believers should want all the more to live lives pleasing to God (vss. 11, 12a). Since death for any of us is but a heartbeat away, and since Christ could come soon, we should feel an urgency to glorify God in our daily living.

Ask Yourself . . . *How is the way I live affected by the inevitability of Christ's return?*

A difference of opinion exists concerning Peter's phrase "speed its coming" in regard to the day of the Lord. Some believe it is merely a description of the eagerness with which believers anticipate Christ's return. Others, however, relate Peter's statement to the belief that Christians can do things to hasten the Lord's return. A recorded prayer of the early Christians, "Come, Lord Jesus" (see I Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20), corresponds with this perspective.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray,

"Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10), which was perhaps more than just an acknowledgment that it would arrive, but actually a request that the Kingdom's consummation be hastened. Jesus also said that once the gospel of the kingdom had been preached to all the nations, the end would come (Matt. 24:14).

Today, we need to be involved in evangelism and discipleship in light of the Lord's coming.

Ask Yourself . . . *What could I do this week to reflect my expectation of the Lord's coming?*

Peter repeated the prediction of the fiery destruction of the heavens and the elements (II Pet. 3:12b). Peter quickly reassured Christians that, though the fire would destroy creation, God would provide "a new heaven and a new earth" (vs. 13), anticipating John's statement in Revelation (see Rev. 21:1). Both of these statements likely have their roots in the words of Isaiah (see Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

The word "new" Peter used (II Pet. 3:13) suggests that this new creation will emerge from the old one. The old universe had been spoiled by the fall of Adam and Eve and by all their descendants, resulting in the deterioration of nature. The cleansing fire of God's holiness will make everything new on that day, renovating, renewing, and purifying the heavens and the earth.

Again Peter encouraged his readers to accept this glorious anticipation of a new heaven and earth as a challenge to live righteously

before God. This is accomplished by following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was "without blemish or defect" (I Pet. 1:19). Believers should strive constantly to ensure that their lives will also be "found spotless and blameless" (II Pet. 3:14). A pure person is more likely to be a peaceful person.

To emphasize his point, Peter referred again to the meaning of God's patience as an invitation to salvation. In this Peter was repeating what he knew Paul had already written to his readers. Indeed, this was a common theme in Paul's letters (vss. 15, 16a).

While Peter wanted his readers to note the similarity and harmony between his teachings and those of Paul, he admitted that some of the things Paul wrote were "hard to understand" (vs. 16b). This caused some people to distort and misrepresent Paul's teachings. Yet

Peter placed Paul's writings on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures, thus showing his high regard for the God-given authority of his fellow apostle and brother in Christ.



Grace and Knowledge (3:17, 18)

**Grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be glory both now and
forever! Amen. —II Peter 3:18**

Again at the end of his letter Peter encouraged his readers to be strong in the faith by constantly being on guard against the errors of false teachers, and to be continually growing in Christ.

Hard Sayings of Paul

Peter said that Paul wrote some things that are hard to understand (II Pet. 3:16). Though difficult to comprehend, the apostle Paul's teaching is still God's Word to the church. The Lord has left it up to Christians to grapple with the more difficult aspects of Paul's teaching. We would do well to follow Paul's instructions to Timothy, "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this" (II Tim. 2:7).

Here are some of Paul's teachings typically considered hard to understand.

- Handing disobedient people over to Satan (I Cor. 5:5)
- Living as though you had no spouse (I Cor. 7:29)
- Baptism for the dead (I Cor. 15:29)
- Making up what lacks in Christ's afflictions (Col. 1:24)
- Salvation through childbirth (I Tim. 2:15)

Peter's readers had already been struggling with false teachers and, in spite of this, for the most part, were standing firmly against them. Peter urged his readers to keep guarding themselves against the sinister appeal of error. They must not let down their guard lest, in a moment of weakness, they be "carried away" by the syrupy words of these impostors.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever come close to being fooled by false teaching?*

Weaker believers could "fall from their secure position," as Peter succumbed in a moment of weakness in Caiaphas's courtyard. Some Christians believe it possible to fall so far as to lose one's salvation. Others take the perspective that Christians, through sin, can lose the assurance of their salvation, but not their position in Christ. Jesus had

predicted that false prophets would come "to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24).

Peter's final exhortation was that his readers "grow in the grace and knowledge" of Christ (II Pet. 3:18). This is the last time Peter referred to godly knowledge that results in saving faith. God has given grace in providing salvation to those who believe on His Son. Through His Spirit, He also has made knowledge regarding His Word and will available to believers. It is up to Christians to act upon what God has made available to us.

Once he mentioned "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," Peter concluded his letter with a flourish of praise, ascribing glory now and throughout eternity to the Son of God.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what area of my life do I need to grow in the grace and knowledge of God?*

Jesus' Teachings

in Peter's Letters

Jesus' disciples were not clones of their Master in any sense of the word. The twelve apostles displayed an amazing diversity of temperament. James and John were called "sons of thunder" by Jesus, which tells us something about their dispositions. Some of them we know only by name. But Simon Peter was no doubt the most colorful of all.

The Scriptures contain an amazing amount of information regarding Peter—his gregarious nature, his tendency to speak before thinking, his naïveté, his readiness to admit failure and seek forgiveness. As he grew spiritually, he became a fearless witness of Jesus' resurrection, a performer of miracles, and a missionary both to Jews and Gentiles.

The two letters attributed to Peter bear the unmistakable imprint of Jesus' influence on him. They contain many reflections of Jesus' ministry and teachings. Some of the most outstanding include:



The transfiguration of Jesus, about which Peter delighted to write that he, James, and John were "eyewitnesses of his [Jesus'] majesty" (II Pet. 1:16). They also heard the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



Peter's denial of Jesus in Caiaphas's courtyard on the night before Jesus' crucifixion no doubt was in Peter's mind when he wrote, concerning the false teachers and their dangerous heresies, that they were "even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them" (II Pet. 2:1).



Peter's last recorded conversation with Jesus during one of the postresurrection appearances on the shore of the Sea of Galilee surely was burned into Peter's memory. Three times Jesus told Peter to feed His lambs, or take care of His followers. No doubt this unforgettable conversation was in Peter's mind when he wrote, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be" (I Pet. 5:2a).



Peter's reference to Jesus as "the Chief Shepherd" (I Pet. 5:4) likely grew out of Peter's memory of Jesus' poignant story of the shepherd who sought, at the peril of his own life, for the sheep that was lost (Luke 15:4-7). Jesus had also been moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes who "were like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).



Jesus had predicted the violent death Peter would suffer (John 21:18, 19). As Peter reminded his readers of the brevity of life, he referred to those prophetic words of Jesus (II Pet. 1:13, 14).



Jesus had taught plainly His deity and His unique relationship to the Father. Peter described Jesus as "our God and Savior" (II Pet. 1:1).



Jesus used a notable quotation from the Old Testament as He approached the cross: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" (Luke 20:17). Peter quoted this statement in I Peter 2:7.



Jesus' death and resurrection were focal points in Peter's writings. Several of his most significant statements relate to Jesus' death and its meaning (I Pet. 1:18, 19; 3:18).



Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who suffered for His sake (Matt. 5:11), and reminded His disciples that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer (Luke 24:26). Peter told his readers that Christians should anticipate and not be surprised by suffering (I Pet. 4:12), for God would use suffering to test faith, purge sinful conduct, and cause spiritual growth (I Pet. 1:6, 7; 4:16, 17; 5:10).



Both of Peter's letters contain passages that deal with end-time events, with the expected return of Christ as the source of joy for God's faithful people (I Pet. 4:13; II Pet. 3:13, 14). Peter emphasized the unexpected and sudden nature of Christ's return, reflecting Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24—25.

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