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**Comments on
the 1st Epistle of Peter**

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1.....	3
Chapter 2.....	20
Chapter 3.....	37
Chapter 4.....	46
Chapter 5.....	56

Introduction

WE BEGIN BY noticing certain features which characterize the whole epistle:-

1. It is definitely called in its heading a general or catholic epistle, inasmuch as it is not written to any particular church, nor to an individual, as most of the others.
2. It definitely addresses the "strangers scattered" in the provinces of Asia Minor, yet "elect" — i.e., Peter writes to converted people of his own nation scattered throughout the regions to the north of Palestine. Peter was the apostle to the circumcision (see Gal. 2:7-8), yet it was Paul who traversed these lands and evangelized the Jews while carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles; so Peter exercised his ministry towards them by pen and ink.
3. It is a definitely pastoral epistle. Peter manifests throughout it his shepherd care for the spiritual well-being of those to whom he wrote. He gives instruction in Christian truth, but even before he concludes his instruction and turns to exhortation, he pauses to deal with the practical state of their souls, as witness verses

13-17 in the midst of chapter 1. In all this Peter was true to his commission to "feed" or "shepherd" the sheep and lambs of Christ (John 21:15-17).

4. These things being so, there are a very large number of allusions to Old Testament Scripture, with which his original readers were so well acquainted. This is especially marked in chapters 1 and 2, wherein he unfolds the place and condition and hopes which now were theirs as Christians. He quotes plentifully from the Old Testament; but beyond this, almost every sentence contains an allusion to the ancient Scriptures, and it is the catching of these allusions that so greatly helps in the understanding of the Epistle.

Chapter 1

COMMENCING then our reading of the Epistle, we find the opening address in verses 1 and 2. To whom does he write? To "strangers scattered" or "sojourners of the dispersion," to people who were a standing witness to the fact that the Jew had forfeited his ancient privileges, to folk who had lost all the earthly foothold they ever had, though it was a big foothold as originally granted. Yet the sojourners he addressed were not by

any means all the scattered Jews of those provinces, but such of them only as were "elect," or chosen of God.

Three things are mentioned as to God's choice of them, connected respectively with the Father, the Spirit and Jesus Christ.

Note the prepositions used: —

"According to," indicating character.

"Through," indicating the means employed.

"Unto," indicating the end in view.

God's choice of them — and of us, for both Jew and Gentile come into the same Christian blessings on the same ground, as Paul's epistles show — was characterized by His foreknowledge as Father. What a comfort this is! How far removed it is from the blind fate which is supposed by some to preside over human destiny. God's election is never capricious and the idea of a sinner earnestly desiring salvation, and yet prevented by an adverse decree, is a nightmare of human reason and not Scripture. God chooses, knowing the end from the beginning, and therefore His choice is always right and justifies itself in its results.

His choice is made effectual "through sanctification of the Spirit." The root idea of "sanctification" is "setting apart for God" and the Holy Spirit is He who, by His inward life-giving work, sets apart the one who is the subject of it.

The end in view is that the one so set apart should be marked by the obedience of Christ — that is, obey even as He obeyed — and also come under the efficacy of His blood to this end. The words "of Jesus Christ" refer to both the obedience and the sprinkling of blood, but why, we may ask, is this order observed; why not the reversed order, for do we not need the cleansing of His blood before we can obey at all? The answer is, because of the reference there is to Old Testament Scripture.

They belonged racially to the people who were God's elect nation, chosen in Abraham, and sanctified, that is, set apart, as Exodus 13:2 testifies. Now read Exodus 24:3-8, and you will observe there the order, first the obedience promised which the law demanded, then the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice in ratification. Peter, addressing believers who were very familiar with this, carefully observes this order, only showing that we Christians have these things on a far higher plane in a vital and spiritual way, and the blood of Jesus Christ instead of be-

ing like that of the sacrifices of Exodus 24:8, which had a penal force (that is, it indicated that death was the penalty attached to disobedience to the law's righteous demands) is wholly purifying, and the righteous basis of all our standing and relations with God. Sanctified by the Spirit and sprinkled by the blood of Christ we are committed to a life of obedience after the very pattern of Christ. With so exalted a course set before us we certainly need the multiplication of both grace and peace!

Verse 3 opens the apostle's message in striking a note of praise to God, now revealed as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, since He has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As belonging to the commonwealth of Israel they had formerly had national hopes which centred in a Messiah upon earth, but the light of those hopes was quenched in their hearts when He died rejected, crucified between two thieves. The story of the two going to Emmaus, as told in Luke 24, is a telling illustration of this; but, when those two had their eyes opened and beheld Him risen, a new hope dawned in their hearts which nothing on earth could quench. It was a living hope because centred in a Saviour living beyond the power of death. How aptly the very words of verse 3 would

have sprung from their lips as they entered the upper room in Jerusalem to tell the news to the rest after their return journey of three-score furlongs! They were like men who had been born again into a new world of hope and expectation, in the great mercy of God.

Israel's hopes, when brought out of Egypt, centred in the land that was to be given to them as their inheritance. The Christian's hope also has an inheritance connected with it, as verse 4 shows, but what a contrast is here! Palestine as an inheritance proved a sad disappointment. The land itself was all that a land should be, still it was capable of being corrupted, and consequently it was speedily defiled by those who inherited it, since they were left to their own responsibility. Thus, bit by bit it was forfeited and it faded away. Our inheritance is reserved in the heavens and consequently it is beyond the possibility of corruption, undefiled and unfading; and we, for whom it is reserved, are being kept by the power of God for it. There shall, therefore, be no slip betwixt the cup of the inheritance and our lips!

The power of God keeps us and not our fidelity, yet God's power works through faith. Faith is our side of the matter. God

is sovereign in exercising His power, and we are responsible as to the exercise of faith. Many are puzzled as to how to put these two things, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility together, and regard them as quite incompatible and irreconcilable. Yet here, in this fifth verse, they are found going hand in hand, preserving the believer to the salvation that awaits him in the last time. The salvation mentioned here is future. It is the final deliverance that awaits the believer at the coming of the Lord. That final deliverance is a certainty before us; yet we cannot await it with self-confidence, for nothing short of the power of God is needed to keep us, nor can we await it with carelessness, for God's power is effective through faith, on our side. How then do we await it? Why, with exultation, yet tempered with the heaviness of many trials, as verse 6 declares. The coming glory shone brightly before the faith of these early Christians and filled them with great rejoicing, so that they were like ships with sails set and filled with heaven's breezes. On the other hand they had plenty of ballast in the shape of heavy trials. These trials are permitted in love, for they only come "if need be." In one way or another we all do need them. If we try to rejoice in the world and its pleasures we need trials to dislodge us from the world by stirring up the comfortable

nest we would fain build below. If we are exulting in the coming glory we need them as sobering and steadying ballast, lest our exulting should overbalance us.

The heavy trials, however, are "now, for a season," even as the "pleasures of sin," which charm the poor worldling are "for a season" (Heb. 11:25). Soon the worldling will say good-bye to his pleasures, and the Christian to his trials.

Moreover, the very trials themselves are profitable as working in us — in our character and lives — the qualities that glorify God. Hence verse 7 declares that faith (which is much more precious than gold) being tested by the fire of persecution, will come out to the praise and honour and glory of God when Christ appears. Many a bold confessor, suffering fiery trial — even to death perhaps — may have been tempted to think that, their light being extinguished, all was lost. The apostle tells them that, on the contrary, all would be found in that day. Christ being revealed in His glory, everything to His praise and honour will come into the light and be displayed.

Then Christ will appear, or be unveiled, as the word is. At the present time He is unseen. These dispersed exiles had never

seen Jesus in the days of His flesh for they had been driven far outside the land of Promise, nor were they then looking on Him. Yet they loved Him, and He was the Object of their faith and this caused them to exult with a joy beyond words and full of glory.

We, like them, have never yet seen the Lord, but is faith as active with us? Faith, remember, is the telescope of the soul, bringing into the field of our spiritual vision what is unseen to mortal eyes. Then we see Jesus as a living, bright Reality, and our joy is filled with the glory of what He is and the hope of what He is going to be, which is beyond all human language. Believing we rejoice, and believing we receive the salvation of our souls, for soul-salvation is the end, or result, of faith in the risen Saviour.

Love, faith, joy and hope are all found in verse 8, though the last is inferred and not explicitly named. How excellent must be the spiritual state marked by these things! Yet all produced not by being occupied with one's spiritual state, but by Christ Himself being the loved Object of faith's vision.

Those to whom Peter wrote were quite familiar with the idea of a salvation which consisted of temporal deliverance, such as the deliverance of their fathers from Egypt, and they had expected a supreme salvation of that kind at the advent of their Messiah, as promised through the prophets; but by faith in the risen Christ (verse 3) a salvation of a spiritual sort affecting their souls had reached them, though they were externally still under the iron heel of Rome. Of this salvation the prophets had also spoken, for the theme of their testimony was twofold — first, the sufferings of the Christ, and second, the glories that were to follow. As the immediate result of His first advent to suffer there is a soul-salvation for those who believe. As the direct result of His second advent to reign in glory the bodies of the saints will be saved from the power of death and public and universal salvation will be established for those who enter His kingdom.

Three very important things should be noted in verses 10 to 12.

- (1). The reality of inspiration, and its remarkable character. The prophets ministered, but the source of their prophecies, whether oral or written, was the Spirit. The Spirit in them testified through them, and He was so really the

source of their utterances that they had to search diligently their own words and inquire as to their real force, only to discover that their full meaning was beyond the apprehension of the age in which they lived, and that they were really writing for the instruction of saints in a coming age — even for us.

- (2). Though in the bygone age Christ had not been manifested, yet the Spirit in the prophets and speaking through them, could be spoken of as "the Spirit of Christ." Christ was accordingly the Speaker by His Spirit even in Old Testament days. We shall see the bearing of this when we consider 1 Peter 3:18-20.
- (3). The strong difference drawn between the age before and the age after Christ. The soul-deliverance, which is the common possession of believers today, was for even the prophets of the bygone age a subject of enquiry; it is spoken of as "the grace that should come to you," i.e., it was not come in the previous age. Further, the things now reported to us by the apostles and others who have preached the Gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven are the things which were only prophesied before.

Then predicted by the Spirit; now reported by the Spirit. Then the Spirit was in the prophets for the purpose of inspiration, but now the Spirit is sent down from heaven. The present age is marked by the sufferings of Christ having been accomplished and consequently by grace having come, soul-salvation being realized, things that angels desire to look into being reported, and the Holy Ghost having been sent down from heaven.

Having unfolded these great and blessed facts, the apostle turns aside to exhortation in verses 13 to 17. The great advance which marks Christianity as compared with Judaism entails a corresponding advance in the character of Christian life and behaviour. We are now children and call upon God as our Father, but we are to be obedient. On the one hand, we are to be braced up mentally, marked by sobriety and confident hope; on the other hand, we are to avoid the old desires which mastered us when we were in ignorance of God, and to be holy in all our conduct as God Himself is holy. What God has revealed Himself to be sets the standard for all our conduct. Moreover, the One whom we call Father is the impartial Judge of the work of

each, hence, reverential fear becomes us. He is Judge, but He is our Father, and we are before Him, therefore, in filial fear.

These exhortations, which spring out of the truth unfolded in verses 1 to 12 (notice the word "wherefore," commencing verse 13), are reinforced by the further details of truth expounded from verse 18 onwards to 1 Peter 2:10, as witness the word "Forasmuch" with which verse 18 starts.

They knew, and so do we, that we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Their fathers had been redeemed with silver and gold — a typical redemption carried out under Jewish law. Sometimes actual money was given as in Exodus 30:11-16; Numbers 3:44-51. Sometimes it was by sacrifice, as in Exodus 13:13-15; still, even then, silver and gold were involved, since they were needed to purchase the animal used for sacrifice. Silver and gold are the least corruptible of metals, yet they are corruptible. The price of our redemption was incorruptible and precious.

The Jewish manner of life had degenerated into a matter of mere tradition received from their fathers. This was quite manifest in Isaiah's day (Isa. 29:13), and the Lord Jesus charged it

home upon them, quoting Isaiah's words, in Mark 7:6-13. Even the right things they did, they did not because they were enjoined of God, but because ordered by tradition. Thus their manner of life had become corrupt and most offensive to God. Our Gentile manner of life was pure darkness and lawlessness, and equally corrupt. Whether, however, it were we or they, we have been redeemed out of our old manner of life by the precious blood of the One who was typified as the unblemished and spotless lamb of Exodus 12:3-6; only He was ordained not a mere matter of four days before sacrifice, but from before the foundation of the world. Our redemption, therefore, was according to the eternal counsels of God.

The Lamb of God was ordained in eternity, but manifested in time. He appeared "in these last times" — the "end of the world," or the "consummation of the ages" of Hebrews 9:26 — and that not only as the Redeemer but as the Revealer. God was perfectly revealed in Him so that it is by Him that we believe in God. We do not believe in God by the wonders of creation, nor by the law as given through Moses, nor by visions of angels, but by Christ, once dead but now risen and in glory. Our faith and hope repose in God who is known to us as He who raised

Christ up from the dead and gave Him glory. How wonderfully this fits in with Paul's testimony in Romans 4:23-25, and Romans 10:9.

From this it is clear that if we desire to win the faith of men for God we must present Christ to them — Christ once dead; Christ as risen; Christ now in glory. Every other theme is useless. We may possibly find subsidiary matter elsewhere. Useful illustrations may abound in the fields of creation and providence. They may be furnished sometimes by the facts, or even the speculations of science — though as to the latter, the greatest caution must be exercised as they are mostly wrong, as witnessed by the ease with which the oncoming generations of speculators dispose of the hypotheses (or, guesses) of their predecessors. Still, the fact remains that if men really believe in God it is by Christ that they believe in Him. Let us therefore preach CHRIST, whether by life or lips or pen.

Redemption is, of course, a work accomplished for us. We need also a work wrought in us. Of this the apostle proceeds to write.

The truth of the Gospel had brought their souls into subjection and obedience in the energy of the Spirit. This had wrought a mighty work of purification. The purifications of the law had consisted in "divers washings" of water (Heb. 9:10), purely external. This was a soul-purification, a moral renovation with love as the outcome, for love is as native to the new nature as hatred is to the old.

If verse 22 presents the work wrought in them and us as it might be observed and described by man, verse 23 lets us into the real secret of it all, from a point of view impossible to man and only to be known because revealed by God. We are born again.

The necessity of this new birth for Israel was alluded to, though in veiled terms, in Ezekiel 36:25-27. The Lord Jesus yet more strongly enforced its necessity when speaking to Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus should have known the passage in Ezekiel, hence the Lord's words, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" The teaching of the Lord is based upon Ezekiel's words, though He greatly expands and clarifies them. Even so, the Lord did not drop all figurative language and still spoke of "water." In the main, however, He stressed the Spirit's

sovereign action in new birth. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Peter's epistle was written in the full light of Christianity. It was not now the Lord Jesus on earth speaking to a Nicodemus, but the same Jesus, risen and glorified after the accomplishment of redemption, speaking through His inspired apostle to Christians. Hence, figures are dropped and the matter stands out with full clearness. Here the energy of the Spirit is only alluded to in verse 22 and the main stress is laid on what we are born of and by.

The life of Adam's race, to which we belong, whether Jews or Gentiles, is utterly corrupted; its nature wholly evil. We must be not only redeemed, but purified. The Spirit of God works to this end and we obey the truth. The real inwardness of the matter, however, is that the Spirit uses the Word of God in such a way that we are born again of incorruptible seed. Consequently, we possess a new nature, springing from a divine source and beyond the taint of corruption. Here, then, is a purification of a most profound and fundamental sort brought about through the Spirit of God by the agency of the Word of God — the "water"

of John 3 and Ezekiel 36. It is not difficult to see how apt a figure "water" was.

You will find it helpful to glance at 1 John 3:9, which carries the matter a step further. The expression "born of God" emphasizes the divine source whence we spring. The seed of God remains in us and is incorruptible, as Peter has told us. This is the essential character of our new nature, as will be plainly manifested when the last trace of the old nature is eliminated from us at the coming of the Lord.

Returning to our passage we note that the Word of God by which we are born again is living and it abides for ever, and in this it is directly in contrast with ourselves as the children of Adam. All flesh is as grass which grows up and speedily withers. All man's glory is as the flower of grass, which falls away and disappears even more rapidly than grass itself. Man's glory speedily fades, and man himself passes away into death. The Word of the Lord lives and abides for ever, and by it we are born again.

How wonderful this is! That which is born partakes of the nature and character of that which gives its birth. "That which

is born of the Spirit is spirit." It is equally true that that which is born of incorruptible seed is incorruptible, and that which is born by the living and abiding Word of God is living and abiding. And that enduring Word of the Lord has reached us in the gospel message that we have believed. We shall not be surprised therefore when in the next chapter we find ourselves spoken of as "living stones" and as connected with a "house" which is incorruptible and abiding.

Chapter 2

THE LATTER VERSES of chapter 1 have shown us that the new birth which has taken place with each believer has a purifying effect, therefore the first verse of chapter 2 takes it for granted that we lay aside those ugly features which are the nature of the flesh in us. Of the things specified, malice, envy and evil speakings specially concern our relations with our fellows, and they are particularly mentioned because Peter is now going to bring before us truth which shows us the believer in intimate relation with all his fellow-believers as a stone in a spiritual house, and as one of the priestly family. In such connections, nothing will proceed rightly unless these evils are laid aside.

It is not enough, however, to lay aside evil, we must go in for that which is good. We must not merely put on good as an outward dress or adornment, but imbibe it as spiritual food. There is "the sincere milk of the Word" suitable for the new-born babe, and we are to earnestly desire it. If we feed upon the Word we grow up. But even then we still need the Word, for it is meat for those of full age as well as milk for babes, as Hebrews 5:12-14, tells us.

This furnishes us with a very clear answer to the oft-repeated question — Why do some Christians make such good spiritual progress and some hardly any at all? Because some feed heartily and regularly upon pure, spiritual diet. They feast their souls upon the Word, whether as milk or meat. Others feed upon it but little and are half-starved spiritually. Others again, choke up their minds and hearts with light and foolish reading. Some go in for sentimental love stories, slightly flavoured with the gospel perhaps; such, naturally, do not progress spiritually any more than a child would progress physically whose diet consisted only of sweetmeats.

Others take up reading of a more intellectual sort but with a strain of infidelity in it; and progress no better than would the

child brought up on solid food with small quantities of poison in it.

Food for our minds and hearts we must have. Let us see to it that it is the Word on which we feed, seeing it is by the Word we have been born again, if indeed, we have tasted the goodness of God — for all this supposes that we are truly converted people, that we have really come to the Lord.

And who and what is the Lord to whom we have come? He is the "Living Stone." This is a remarkable title of our Lord. It sets Him forth as the One in whom is life, who became Man, and who, by death and resurrection, has become the Head and Foundation of this new structure which God is building composed of men who live through Him and in Him. He is the "chief corner stone, elect, precious" (verse 6), "the head of the corner" (verse 7). The men who, as "living stones," have been built into this "house" of a living sort, became such by coming to Christ, the Living Stone.

Evidently, the Apostle Peter never forgot his first interview with the Lord Jesus, as recorded in John 1, and in these verses we have a definite allusion to it. John 1 introduces the Lord Je-

sus to us as the Word, in whom was life, become flesh that as Man He might die as the Lamb of God, and then in resurrection baptize with the Holy Ghost (verses 1, 4, 14, 29, 33). Then Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus, as the Christ. The Lord Jesus, knowing that which was before Him, and conscious of all that He Himself was — whatever Simon might know or not know Him to be — instantly assumed possession of him and changed his name to Peter, which means "a stone." It was as though the Lord said to him, "Coming to Me in faith you have become — even though your faith is partial as yet and incomplete — of the same nature as Myself."

Neither did Peter forget the subsequent interview recorded in Matthew 16. On this occasion Peter had confessed the Lord Jesus as the Son of the Living God, which was virtually to confess Him as the Living Stone. The Lord Jesus in reply reminded Simon that his real name now was Peter — "a stone" — while He Himself was the Rock; and that Peter as a stone was not to be left in isolation, but to be with the others builded into the church or assembly which Christ called His own — "My Church."

When the Lord Jesus spoke thus to Peter all was future, for He said, "I will build." Now Peter writes to others who also had come to Christ and thereby become living stones, and he can speak of all as a present and existing thing, though not an absolutely completed thing. He says in verse 5, "Ye are built up" — or, "Ye are being built up a spiritual house." A spiritual house they were, yet it was not a completed thing for other living stones were continually being added.

Now a house exists for its occupant, and we are thus builded together as a dwelling-place for GOD; not a material house of the sort they had been accustomed to as Jews, but a spiritual house. Moreover, where God dwells there He is to be praised and so, by His work and ordering, we fill a further capacity as "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." These spiritual sacrifices are "of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15).

Every true believer is a living stone in the house, and a priest as belonging to this holy priesthood.

Had we approached one of the sons of Aaron and asked him how he became a priest, he would doubtless have told us that it was, firstly, by his birth; and that, secondly, being born of the priestly family, he was put into the priest's office by the washing of water, the sprinkling with blood, and the anointing with oil, as ordered in Exodus 29. We, too, are priests by birth. Being born of God, we are priests of God. We, too, have had the washing of water by the Word (1 Peter 1:22-23). We have been redeemed by blood, the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19), and we have received the Spirit, who was typified of the oil; though that particular feature is not brought before us in the passage we are considering. We have come to Christ (1 Peter 2:4), and thus we are priests, just as Aaron's sons were priests as having come to Aaron, and being thus associated with him in the priest's office.

Every believer today is then a priest. But we must remember that it is one thing to be a priest, another to really enter into and exercise our priestly functions. The first exercise of our priesthood is Godward, in the offering up of the sacrifice of praise. This is "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," for He is the Great High Priest, as the Epistle to the Hebrews makes so manifest.

All that we offer we offer by Him; and this of course accounts for its acceptability to God, since He is the chosen One and precious in God's sight, as the sixth verse shows.

It must never be forgotten, however, that He is not elect and precious, nor is He the acceptable One, in man's esteem. The very reverse, He is disallowed and rejected. The fact is that man has become a disobedient creature as verse 7 reminds us. Instead of falling in with God's plans, he wishes to push ahead with plans of his own. Instead of being content with God's building and with being called to have a part in it as a living stone, man wishes to create a building on his own account — a building which shall conform to his own fallen ideas and result in his own glory. When the Lord Jesus appeared, men attempted to work Him into their building and failed. Had He consented to fall in with man's ideas it would have been otherwise. They would have been delighted if so great an One as He had been a supporter of, or even a developer of, Roman government, or Greek philosophy, or Jewish religion. Coming as He did, on God's behalf, He exposed their folly and fitted in with none of their notions. He was, as it were, a stone of such peculiar formation that there was not a single niche in the imposing

temple of man's fame where He fitted in. Hence He became "the stone which the builders disallowed," and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to the proud men who rejected Him, whilst being elevated of God into the headstone of the corner in the divine building.

Consequently, we who are priests of God in association with Him are no more of man's building, of man's world-system, than He is, though we have another priestly function which has direct reference to the world through which we pass. We are "a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession" — as verse 9 has been rendered. We are those whom God has chosen out and separated to Himself. In the coming age the kingly character of our priesthood will be more manifest than it is at present, but now we are commissioned to show forth the praises, the virtue or excellences, of God in this disobedient world. This is our priestly function manward.

In the coming age the saints are going to judge the world, as 1 Corinthians 6:2 tells us. As kingly priests we shall then be commissioned to dispense His judgment. We are kingly priests today, but commissioned to dispense His excellent righteousness expressed in grace, to set forth His character as light and

love. This, of course, we do even more by what we are than by what we say. It is the character and spirit and attitude of the royal priest that counts for so much.

Do some feel inclined to declare this an impossible task? Nay, not impossible! Difficult perhaps, because not natural to us as men in the flesh, though natural enough to the born-again, redeemed, Spirit-indwelt priesthood to which we belong. Possible, indeed, because we ourselves have been the subjects of the grace that we are now to "show forth" to others. We have been called "out of darkness into His marvellous light."

Can you not imagine one of the converted Jews to whom Peter wrote, crying out at this point — "Darkness! But, Peter, you forget, we were never benighted heathen as were others"? And we, who were brought up in conditions controlled by an enlightened and christianized civilization, might say the same. "I know it," the Apostle would have replied, "but your Judaism was darkness, for all that." God was not fully revealed, it was not "in the light" (1 John 1:7), if Judaism be considered in its original purity. When it was corrupted into a mass of traditions and observances by the Pharisees it was darkness indeed.

All was darkness for us whether we were called out of Judaism or heathenism, or a nominal and corrupted Christianity, and now we are in a light which is marvellous; we are the people of God, having obtained mercy.

Marvellous light! Is this how we feel about it? The world plunges on, deeper and ever deeper into its darkness and unbelief. Its learned scientists and philosophers fill the air with triumphant shoutings as to their investigations and their discoveries. Yet really they are as men who clutch at elusive shadows while their science is an enshrouding mist. Their discoveries enable them to do lots of clever and curious things in the world, but not a ray of light shines in them as to things beyond the grave. And here are we, put in the light of God fully revealed in Christ, in the light of His grace, His purposes, His glory. Are we studying these things, so as to become even more and more enlightened, and consequently, luminous ourselves?

On a cloudless night at the season of full moon we get the benefit of our satellite shining in the light of the sun. How marvellous must be the sunlight that can make a dark body shine so brightly! Well, the world is still in the dark, for its back is turned towards God. We are in the light of His truth and grace,

— the light of the knowledge of Himself. How marvellous that light is may be discerned in the fact that it can make dark and unattractive people, like to ourselves, show forth His excellences and reflect Himself.

Oh! to be more fully in the unclouded brightness of God's MARVELLOUS LIGHT.

At 1 Peter 2:11 the apostle Peter turns the "marvellous light" of God upon the daily lives of the holy and royal priests to whom he writes, addressing them as "strangers and pilgrims."

They were, of course, strangers in the lands of their dispersion, as the first verse of the Epistle told us, but this is not what is alluded to here. Every Christian is a stranger and pilgrim, and we need not be surprised at this, since by the very fact that we are brought into such near and honoured relationship with God there must be a corresponding severance from the world. The world is entirely antagonistic to God and we cannot hold with both at the same time. It must be one or the other. For us it is relationship and communion with God, and hence strangership and pilgrimage in the world. The world itself began with Cain,

who was "a fugitive and a vagabond" (Gen. 4:12). We may summarize the matter thus: —

A fugitive is a man who has fled from home. A vagabond is a man who has no home. A stranger is a man who is absent from home. A pilgrim is a man who is on his way to home.

The actual presence of God is the true home of our souls and we are disconnected from the world system so as to be strangers in it, though left in it for a time to show forth the excellencies of God. Still, we do not wander aimlessly for we are pilgrims also, and this means that we have an objective before us — a fixed point of destiny to which we wend our way.

The world is consumed with fleshly "lusts" or "desires," and consequently, given over to the gratification of those desires. The Christian has other desires of a spiritual sort which proceed not from the flesh at all, and the only way to foster these is to abstain from the desires of the flesh. This is a very personal matter.

Verse 12 deals with our lives in relation to others. The Gentiles were naturally very critical of these Jewish sojourners in their midst and disposed to speak against them. When any of them

became Christians the Gentiles were more likely than ever to denounce them, as witness the way in which a Christian today gets denounced if he gives the world the smallest occasion for it. Therefore, their whole manner of life was to be right and honest. The Jew, with his notoriously strong instincts in the matter of profit-making may have particularly needed this exhortation, but who of us does not need it at all? If we maintain righteousness, ultimately our very antagonists will glorify God. They may do so in a way that will ensure their own blessing. They will certainly do so when God visits them in judgment.

Verses 13 to 17, inclusive, work this exhortation out for us, in its details. These dispersed Christian Jews might very possibly be inclined to resent many of the Gentile authorities who were over them, whether kings or governors, and also the many ordinances and laws and regulations that had been instituted, so many of them very different to what had been given of God through Moses, to which they and their forefathers had been accustomed. Still, they were to submit. Government, they had to recognize, was a divine institution. Hence they and we are to be subject for the Lord's sake. The Christian is of course, free for he stands in the liberty of Christ. Still, he must not use his

freedom as "a cloke of malice" — in any way to vent his spleen upon others — but he must regard it as liberty to serve God, and the service of God demands the subjection to rulers which is here laid down.

The matter is tersely summed up in verse 17, and we find what becomes "the servants of God." As to all men — honour. As to the brotherhood, i.e., all believers — love. As to God — fear. As to the king, the representative of all human authority — honour. Carrying out this we do the will of God and silence foolish adversaries.

Having thus exhorted all Christians to submission, the apostle specially addresses servants in verse 18. The word used means not exactly "slaves" but "household servants." These, too, are to be subject to authority and specially to the masters whom they serve. These masters may be often men of the world and ill-tempered. The servant may consequently often have to suffer wrongfully. There is no credit to the Christian if, suffering for wrong doing, he takes it patiently. Such is the divine way of thinking, though nowadays people even Christians — are very intolerant of a small rebuke for their faults. What does please God is to take patiently suffering which is endured for doing

well and acting with "conscience toward God." Nothing is harder to us naturally than this. How indignant we feel when our well-doing only serves to bring trouble upon us!

What will help us in this? Two things. Firstly, the example of Christ. Secondly, His atoning sacrifice and its results.

Verses 21 to 23 give us the first. No one ever did well like the Lord Jesus. No one ever was so misjudged, reviled and persecuted as He. Moreover, He did no sin, no guile was ever in His mouth. There was nothing in Him or His life to justify the smallest slur being cast upon Him. Yet no one suffered as He, and no one ever took the suffering with such meekness and perfection. He fulfilled the word of Isaiah 53, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth." In all this He was an example for us, for we are called to His path, and to follow His steps. The consideration of Christ in all the glory of His perfection cannot fail to have its effect on us, conforming our thoughts and ways to His. If called upon to suffer we, too, shall commit ourselves to Him that judges righteously, instead of attempting to avenge ourselves.

Yet even so, we are not as He was, for we have sins and He had none. We needed, therefore, the atoning sacrifice of which verse 24 speaks. He who did no sin "bare our sins in His own body on the tree." This is something altogether beyond us. We cannot follow in His steps here.

Every part of this wonderful verse deserves our most careful attention. His own self became the Sin-bearer, and no other. He bare our sins. Isaiah 53 had said He should bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, but it also predicted that He should be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities," and be stricken for "the transgression of My people," and His soul be made "an offering for sin." These sins were ours, for the verse definitely speaks of the work of Christ, not in its Godward aspect as propitiating Him, but in its believer-ward aspect as bearing his sins — his sins, and not the sins of everybody.

Moreover, He bore our sins in His own body. He was definitely our Substitute. We had sinned in our bodies, and having become a true Man, apart from sin, He bore our sins in His holy body as a sacrifice for sin. This He accomplished on the tree, for it was exclusively in His death that atonement was effected.

He did not bear our sins during His life, but in His death, and we are healed by His stripes as Isaiah 53 had also declared.

But then He bore our sins and delivered us from the stripes that our sins deserved, not in order that we should go on in our sins, but rather that we should henceforward be dead to the old life of worldly corruption and the sins which it entailed, and now live to practical righteousness. Our sins have been atoned for and dismissed as to their judicial sentence, in order that we should be delivered from the practice of them and from their power.

This verse may be helpfully compared with the truth set forth in Romans 6. There sin is in question — sin as a tyrant and a master — here sins. There we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Here we are to be dead to sins and live to righteousness. In both cases the cross of Christ is that from which all flows, but Romans 6 is the believer taking up the reckoning of faith in his experience. Here it is the practical result which follows. The consistent believer becomes as a dead man to all the sins that formerly pleased him, and he lives now for the will of God which is practical righteousness. And this because of the fact that the One who died for him as the Lamb

of sacrifice now lives as the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul. We were indeed "as sheep going astray" — a last reference to Isaiah 53 — but now we have a living Shepherd to lead us in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

Chapter 3

THE OPENING VERSES of chapter 3 continue the exhortation to submission. The apostle commenced this exhortation at 1 Peter 2:13. In verse 18 he applied it to those who socially are in the subject place. Now he applies it to those who hold the subject place in that great natural relationship which is the foundation of all human relationships.

The Christian wife is to be in subjection to her husband. If he is a Christian he obeys the word and she obeys him. A most excellent and delightful arrangement made according to the wisdom of God! Subjection, be it remembered, does not mean inferiority. In business partnerships two men may be equal partners and yet one is recognized as the senior with whom the final decision rests. So in the marriage bond the man has been creatorially fitted for the senior, directing place in the partnership, the woman for the subject place, though she is an heir to-

gether with her husband of the grace of life, and a sharer together with him in his exercises and prayers. If the husband loves and honours his wife as a fellow-heir and partner, and she honours and obeys him, an ideal marriage is the result.

But, as the first verse indicates, some believing women may have husbands who, not being converted, do not obey the word. In this case, the converted wife is still to act towards him as the word directs. She, at any rate, is to be a Christian woman and let her Christianity shine in her pure manner of life (v. 2), her avoidance of worldly artifices for self-adornment and self-display (v. 3), her meek and peaceful spirit, which is so great a thing in God's estimation (v. 4), and her subjection to him, coupled with the doing of good and a spirit of calm confidence in God (vv. 5, 6). By such "conversation" or "manner of life" many a husband has been won "without the word."

The "church," dominated by the principles of the twentieth-century world, may cut the word "obey" out of its marriage service, but see what you Christian wives are going to miss if you cut it out of your hearts and minds! Should your husband be unconverted you may miss the joy of winning him. Should he

be a Christian, how much of the grace of life and of prayer may be forfeited.

Verse 8 brings us to the final word of the apostle in connection with the matter of subjection. The gracious, gentle, humble spirit is to characterize the whole Christian company. We are never to indulge in evil or recrimination on the principle of tit for tat, but always to be in the spirit of blessing since blessing we receive from God, and this because we are left to pursue our pilgrim way under His holy government.

The principles of God's government of His people do not change. When David wrote Psalm 34, it was the age of law and God's people were in the place of servants. Today is the age of grace and we are before God as His sons, as Galatians 3:23 - 4:7, shows. Yet the apostle Peter can quote David's words from Psalm 34 as applying equally to us. We reap what we sow in the government of God; and the way to "see good" is to "do good," as verses 10 to 13 of our chapter show. Many a disagreeable event in our lives is clearly the result of our own disagreeableness. If we sowed more good we should reap more good.

At this point let us notice the remarkable way in which the apostle has set before us in its main outlines the truth set forth typically and in historical fashion in the books of Moses.

Genesis is the book of ELECTION. It shows us how God chose Abel and Seth and not Cain, Shem and not Ham. Abram and not Nahor, Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau, Joseph and not Reuben, Ephraim and not Manasseh. Peter brings before us first of all God's electing mercy (1 Peter 1:2).

Exodus is the book of REDEMPTION. Israel was redeemed out of Egypt, and brought to God. Peter proceeds to tell us how we have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ and brought to God with our faith and hope in Him (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Leviticus is the book of the PRIESTHOOD. It contains directions as to sacrifices for priestly guidance, and as to customs and cleanness for priestly fitness. Thirdly, Peter sets before us the Christian priesthood, its constitution and its privileges (1:22 - 2:10).

Numbers is the book of the WILDERNESS. It specially reveals the wilderness journey of Israel with all its vicissitudes and les-

sons. Fourthly, Peter instructs us as to our pilgrimage and the conduct that befits us in it (1 Peter 2:11 - 3:7).

Deuteronomy is the book of the GOVERNMENT OF GOD. In it Israel were warned of the consequence of their disobedience, the reward of obedience. And we have just got to the part of the epistle in chapter 3 where Peter warns us that though we are as Christians set in the grace of God we still come under His government and have to make our reckoning with it.

Verse 14 introduces another consideration. We may of course suffer for our own folly in the government of God. We may, on the other hand, be receiving blessing in the government of God, and yet be called upon to suffer for righteousness' sake. If so, God guarantees our happiness in it and under it. We are not to be afraid of men but, sanctifying the Lord God (or "Lord Christ" as it probably is) in our hearts, to testify meekly to the truth while maintaining a good conscience by holy living.

Notice in passing how verse 15 makes manifest the true force of the word "sanctify." It is not primarily "to make holy," for the Lord cannot be more holy than He is. He can, however, in

our hearts be set apart in His own proper place of glory and supremacy and authority. To sanctify is to set apart.

Now no one ever suffered as Christ. He is our supreme Example. Yet His sufferings as verse 18 presents them, were in a class by themselves and altogether beyond us, for He suffered for sins as a Substitute — the Just for the unjust ones. The actual word substitution does not occur in our English version, but that which the word represents is very clearly in this verse. Note the object of His substitutionary sufferings — "that He might bring us to God," making us thoroughly at home in His presence, having a fitness to be there. Are we all in our own hearts and consciences happily at home with God?

The Lord Jesus suffered for sins even to death and He rose again by or "in" the Spirit, the day of His flesh being over. In the Spirit also He had preached before the flood to those who now are spirits in prison. These people who now are spirits in prison once walked the earth as men and women in Noah's day and through Noah's lips Christ in Spirit (or, the Spirit of Christ) spoke. They were disobedient, hence their present imprisonment in hades, the unseen world. The Spirit of Christ spoke in the Old Testament prophets, as we noticed when reading 1

Peter 1:11. He also spoke in Noah. If any of our readers have doubts as to whether this is the correct explanation of the passage, let them turn to Ephesians 2:13 to 18. Having done so they will find that the "He" of verse 16 (which "He" refers also to verse 17) is undoubtedly the Lord Jesus. In verse 17, "you which were far off" were Gentile: "them that were nigh" were Jews. The passage states then, that having endured the cross the Lord Jesus "came and preached peace" to the Gentiles. When? How? Never, in a personal way. Only by the lips of the apostles and others who were filled with His Spirit did He do so. Exactly the same figure of speech is used in this passage as in the one we are considering in Peter.

As a result of this ante-diluvian testimony of the Spirit of Christ only eight souls were saved through the waters of the flood; a tiny handful that, the merest remnant of the former age. Now baptism, which is but a figure, has just that force. The flood cut off that little remnant of the antediluvian age that through the waters of death they might be disassociated from the old world and enter the new. The converted Jews to whom Peter wrote were exactly in that position. They, too, were but a small remnant, and in their baptism they were dissociated from

the mass of their nation that was under wrath and judgment, that they might come under the authority of their risen and glorified Messiah. Baptism is in figure dissociation by means of death and in that sense it saves. The Jews as a nation were like a foundering ship, and to be baptized was to formally cut one's last link with them which meant salvation from their national doom. Hence Peter's words in Acts 2:40. "Save yourself from this untoward generation." What followed? "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized."

Baptism accomplishes nothing vital and eternal, for it is "a figure." It is, however, not a mere ceremonial washing as were Jewish "baptisms." It is rather the "answer" or "demand of a good conscience toward God," as we see with the eunuch and with Lydia (see Acts 8:36; Acts 16:15). A good conscience gladly accepts it, and even demands it, accounting it as faithfulness to the Lord to be in figure cut off from the old life, even as He was actually cut off in death; and thus identified with Him.

All, however, is only effectual "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." For if there were not really and actually a new world of life and blessing opened for us by His resurrection who would cut their links with the old? It was by the resurrection that these

Christians had been begotten again to a living hope, as 1 Peter 1:3 told us. They would cheerfully go down into the waters of baptism, and so bid a formal goodbye to the old Jewish footing with its impending judgment (See 1 Thess. 2:14-16), in view of the vast range of grace and glory with its living hopes, that stood revealed to them and secured for them in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Not only is Christ risen, however, but He is gone into heaven and is already at the right hand of God, which signifies that He is the appointed Administrator of all God's will. A man of large business interests who has someone of great ability acting for him and carrying out his wishes, will often speak of him as "my right-hand man." The Lord Jesus is indeed the "Man of Thy right hand" of whom the Psalmist spoke (Ps. 80:17), and we have been baptized to Him and come under His authority. To Him all angels and authorities and powers are subject.

How great an encouragement for us! All these verses (15-22) have sprung, remember, out of the thought that we may have to suffer for righteousness' sake. It was just when the converted Jew formally severed his links with Judaism by being baptized that he did suffer. But then being baptized to the Lord Jesus he

came under the authority of the One who sat in the place of supreme authority and administration and since all powers were subject to Him, no power could touch them without His permission.

Similarly, when we, who are converted Gentiles, cut our links with the world, we have to taste suffering, but we, too, are under the mighty authority of Christ and need have no fear.

Chapter 4

THOSE OF YOU who have carefully followed our Scripture Portion thus far, have possibly noticed that the thought of suffering, both for Christ Himself and for His followers, has been very prominent from 1 Peter 2:11, where we started the practical and hortatory part of the epistle.

That suffering must be expected by the Christian is very clear. His life is to be one of well doing, but he may suffer for doing well (1 Peter 2:20). It is to be a life of righteousness, but he may suffer for righteousness' sake (1 Peter 3:14). The first verse of chapter 4 reverts to this matter, and instructs us that we

are to be armed for the conflict with the mind to suffer. It was the mind that animated Christ. He suffered for us in the flesh, and that even to death (3:18). There is, of course, a difference. He suffered for us in atonement, and this we can never do. He "suffered being tempted" (Heb. 2:18), because being perfectly holy, the very thought of sin was abhorrent to Him. We suffer in refusing temptation and in ceasing from sin, because, alas! sin is alluring to the flesh within us. If we gratify the flesh we do not suffer, but we sin. If we refuse temptation and have done with sin, the flesh suffers instead of being gratified. But it is just that suffering that is incumbent upon us.

In our unconverted days we lived in the gratification of our natural desires without any reference to the will of God. Now we are on exactly opposite lines, as verse 2 indicates. We do well to remember that God divides up our lives into two parts; "the time past of our life," and "the rest of our time in the flesh," the hour of conversion marking the boundary between them. In the earlier part we wrought the will of the nations who never were put under the law of God. Now we are to carry out the will of God, which has been made known to us not merely in the law but in Christ.

By the very fact however that we do not act as the world does we are open to the world's dislike and criticism. There are always many to be found who think and speak evil of what they cannot understand. This need not disturb the believer for there is One who is ready to judge the living and the dead and the accusers will stand before Him.

Now the ground of all judgment will be the testimony as regards God and His truth which may have been rendered to those who are subject to judgment; in other words, the responsibility of each will be measured by the divine testimony they have heard. "The gospel" of verse 6 is not the Christian gospel in particular. It is just "glad tidings" such as has at different times been preached to people of bygone ages, now dead. In particular it refers to the glad tidings of salvation by the ark through the flood, for "the dead" refers to the same people as the Apostle had alluded to in 1 Peter 3:19 and 20. All through the bygone ages there was also glad tidings of a coming Deliverer and always then, as now, the glad tidings separates those who hear it into two classes; those who refuse or neglect it and have to stand their judgment as men in the flesh, and those who receive it and consequently live in the spirit as regards God.

Those who thus pass from death to life by the hearing of Christ's word of glad tidings do not come into judgment, as another Scripture assures us.

Now we Christians have to remember that we have come to the end of all things. Obviously Peter did not mean that when he wrote — somewhere about A.D. 60, — the end of this dispensation was reached, but rather that the end dispensation was reached, that it is "the last time." The judge is quite ready as verse 5 has told us. He stands "before the door" (James 5:9), ready to enter the court and take His seat so that the judgment may begin. All things then were quite ready for judgment at the very start of this epoch in which we are living, and it is only the longsuffering of God which holds the judgment back as Peter's second epistle tells us. How sober and watchful to prayer should we therefore be.

More than this, we should be marked by fervent love amongst ourselves, and the utilization of every gift and ability to the glory of God, from whom all such things proceed. The world is a cold and critical place, the Christian circle should be a place of warm love. When love amongst Christians exists in fervour it expresses itself passively in covering a multitude of sins and

actively in giving and hospitality. There are alas many sins even with true believers. The antagonistic world delights to advertize the sins of believers, proclaiming them upon the house-tops. Love in the Christian circle feels them as though they were its own and covers them. When a Christian busies himself in advertizing the sins of some other Christian, he thereby advertizes his own carnal condition. Many of us would be rather careful not to advertize the sin of some other believer who happens to meet with us in our public gatherings. Are we as careful in regard to believers who do not meet with us?

Whatever we may have received from God we are to hold it in trust for the benefit of all saints. The grace of God is very manifold and various. This one may speak, that one may serve. He who speaks is to speak as God's mouthpiece. He who serves as in strength that God supplies; and thus those who benefit by the speaking or serving will trace all up to God and glorify Him and not the one who happens to be the vessel or channel of supply. Speaking "as the oracles of God" does not mean, "according to the Word of God," though of course we always should so speak. It means, speaking as a mouthpiece of His word. If a speaker comes to us telling us what he thinks, what

are his impressions and conceptions, we end by thinking him a very wonderful man, and doing him homage as a kind of spiritual hero! If he, on the other hand, just gives us what really is the word of God, we are subdued and we glorify God instead of glorifying him.

If fervent love prevails we shall not only give one another our due but give God His due also. Things will be right within the Christian circle even if the world without is very antagonistic.

In verse 12 the Apostle returns to the matter of suffering for the Christian, and he speaks of it with increased plainness and with prophetic foresight. There lay before these early Christians a "fiery trial," it was indeed already upon them. It very soon became as we know literally a trial by fire. They were not to account it "some strange thing." We are taught by this remark that suffering from the world is the normal thing for the Christian. We may hardly realize this, living, as we do, in a land of christianized culture and toleration. We may easily come to regard a life of ease and pleasantries in the world as the normal thing for us and persecution as a very abnormal thing. Then should persecution come upon us we would feel aggrieved and scandalized.

It is this wrong view of things and the "softness" which shrinks from "hardness" (2 Tim. 2:3) which largely accounts for the great weakness of today. Only a small minority of Christians are prepared to stand up for anything, or stand out against anything in the world. A weak spirit of compliance and compromise is in the air. Suffering is avoided but power and joy are lost.

How does Peter present this matter of suffering? In verse 13 he holds out to us the honour of partaking in Christ's sufferings — i.e., we enter into sufferings that have the same character as those which He endured as the great witness to God in a rebellious world. This is, according to his account a matter of rejoicing, — and here he only preaches what he himself practised as recorded in Acts 5:41. We are to rejoice now, while the suffering proceeds, and thus shall we be manifestly conquerors in the presence of our foes. The day of Christ's glory hastens on however and then we shall be glad "with exceeding joy." We shall "rejoice with exultation," the suffering being over and the day of reward having arrived. Christ's supreme sufferings are to be crowned with His supreme glory. It will be our honour and joy to share in both. Which shall we see to be the greater hon-

our in that day? Let us call shame on our faint and cowardly hearts!

But we shall get not only persecution in the world, but reproach, and often this is the harder to bear. Well, supposing reproach rolls in upon us, are we to be specially commiserated? Not at all. We are declared to be happy or blessed if the reproach be "for" the name, or "in" the name of Christ; which means that the world sees in us His representatives. The Lord Jesus was once in this world as the Great Representative of Jehovah, and He consequently had to say "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me" (Ps. 69:9). That was assuredly no disgrace to Him, and to be reproached in the name of Christ is an honour to us. Men may blaspheme Him and reproach us, but we glorify Him and the Spirit who indwells us rests upon us as the Spirit of glory and of God. Many a Christian who has been through reproach of this sort looks back afterwards to the occasion as a time of the greatest spiritual exaltation and blessing.

We are to be most careful not to suffer for evil doing of any sort but only as Christians. Then we have no need to be ashamed for we can glorify God "on this behalf," or "in this

name." Here we have the Spirit of God accepting and sanctioning the name Christian as applied to believers. It was first used as a descriptive nickname at Antioch (Acts 11:26). It had come into general use later (See, Acts 26:28) and now is formally accepted by the Spirit of God. We may accept it therefore, and as Christians we glorify God even as Christ Himself did.

One further thought as to suffering is expressed by the Apostle in verse 17. Though it comes upon Christians from the world it is overruled of God to serve the ends of His government — the government of which he had spoken to us in 1 Peter 3. Now God's governmental dealings especially apply to His own. He is of course the Judge of all, and beneath His judgment all will ultimately come. But He keeps specially short accounts with those acknowledged as in relationship with Him, those who are of His household. When failure supervenes and sin invades the holy precincts of His house He begins to make the weight of His judgment felt in the way of His governmental dealings.

That this is God's way was manifest in Old Testament times. Read Ezekiel 8 and 9 and see. Judgment was to be set in Jerusalem and the instruction was "Begin at My sanctuary." So it had begun to be in the church of God. These early Christians

had to accept these fires of persecution as permitted by God for the purifying of His house. We all know there is nothing like persecution for weeding the false out of the midst of the true.

But if judgment thus starts at God's house, if God does not spare these, what about those that are not in relationship with Him at all? What shall their end be? If the righteous is saved with difficulty where shall the ungodly and sinner appear? These are tremendous questions which only admit of answers of most terrible import.

The righteous may come through with difficulty, as many an Old Testament Scripture illustrates, but he IS SAVED, nevertheless. He may have even to suffer to the extreme point of death according to God's will, as verse 19 indicates. If so he has but to go on doing well and thus commit his soul into the hands of God "as to a faithful Creator." We know God not merely as Creator but as Saviour and Father. Still we do not lose the benefit of knowing Him as Creator, and as faithful to His own handiwork.

How happy for us to know God in all these varied ways.

Chapter 5

WHEN CHRISTIANS are passing through times of persecution and suffering, so much depends upon there being a right and happy condition amongst themselves. The Apostle Peter, therefore, supplements his warnings as to the persecution with some words of admonition addressed respectively to the elder and the younger amongst the disciples. Between such friction may easily develop, as we know right well.

The tendency to develop friction has always existed but never more so than now, inasmuch as the rapidity with which world changes have occurred has never been as pronounced as in the last few decades. The consequence of this is that great changes in thought and habits and outlook have supervened within the limits of a single generation; and hence children look upon their parents as behind the times and their grandparents as thoroughly antique, and the older people look upon the younger as revolutionary in their ideas. If verses 1-7 of our chapter be observed and obeyed, all friction would cease and harmony reign inside the Church of God whatever conditions prevail without.

Peter addresses himself first to the elders as being the more responsible. These were men recognized as holding the office of

an elder, and not merely Christian men advanced in years. He claims a right to exhort them as being an elder and more than an elder — a witness of Christ's sufferings. To those sufferings he could render testimony since he had seen them, having been with Him in the days of His flesh. Once he thought that he could easily share in those sufferings, even to prison and death, and we all know the painful breakdown in which his self-confidence involved him. If, however, he then failed, the Lord in His grace indicated to him that he should partake in some measure before his course was finished (see, John 21:18-19). Here he simply speaks of himself as a partaker of the coming glories as the fruit of grace.

His one exhortation to the elders is, "Feed," or "Shepherd the flock of God." The Holy Ghost thus gives exactly the same injunction to the elders by the lips of Paul in Acts 20:28, and by the pen of Peter here. The elders should extend towards their younger brethren all the care which a shepherd takes of his sheep. Nothing but the outflow of divine love in their hearts will produce the watchful oversight which such care demands, and it is well for the younger believers to see in the care of

their older brethren an expression of the love of Christ the Chief Shepherd, which He will richly reward at His appearing.

It is most important that the "elder" should exert his spiritual authority in the right way and spirit, hence the three things stipulated in verses 2 and 3. He is to take up his service willingly, readily, and as himself a model to the flock. The Holy Ghost who inspired these words foresaw what a tendency there would be to take up such work, either from compulsion, or for love of gain, or for desire for power and influence. How much these words were needed is borne witness to by church history, which tells us how the simple "elders" or "bishops" of apostolic days were gradually magnified into "princes of the church," who lorded it over God's people as though they were their own possessions. It is, indeed, remarkable with verse 3 before us, that anyone professing to be a Christian "bishop" should call himself, or suffer himself to be called, "lord."

Those of us who rank amongst the younger believers, have to pay special attention to verse 5. The elder may indeed be willing and ready in the exercise of oversight, and also may himself carry out what he enjoins on others, so as to be an example himself; all will be in vain if the younger are not prepared to

listen to him and be subject. We beg every young Christian to remember that though there may be much advance in certain branches of human discovery and knowledge, so that the older generation may in these things easily fall behind the times, there is no such advance in the revealed truth of God. Consequently, spiritual maturity is still only to be gained as the fruit of years well spent in the school of God — and by that we mean, the study of His Word, supplemented by Christian life, experience and service. The younger Christian may indeed have superior zeal, energy, endurance, and possibly superior mental equipment, even so he will more effectually serve his Master if he is subject to the mature and wise guidance of the "elder," who may be in most other respects decidedly his inferior.

All this will be easy if the humble spirit prevails. All are to be clothed with humility in their dealings with each other. The person of humble mind is not uppish, and hence does not readily come into collision with others. Better still, he does not come into collision with God; for God sets Himself against the proud, whilst He gives grace to the humble. The mighty hand of God is upon His people in the way of training, and often in

very painful dealings, as was the case in the persecutions of these early Christians, yet under it we are to bow and in due time we shall be exalted. Meanwhile, we are to cast all the cares, which this painful state of things might produce, upon Him in the full assurance that He cares for us.

Although as believers we are privileged to take all our trials, even our persecutions, as connected with "the mighty hand of God," yet we are not to overlook the fact that the devil has a hand in them. The case of Job in the Old Testament illustrates this, and the fact is recognised here. In the persecution of saints the devil moves about as a roaring lion, aiming thereby at breaking down our faith. If faith be a mere matter of mental enlightenment, mere head-conviction and not heart-trust, it fails and he devours us. We are therefore to be sober and watchful. We must recognize that the devil is our adversary, and that he is to be resisted in the energy of a live faith which cleaves to the faith made known to us in Christ, remembering also, that if we taste suffering we are only sharing what is the common lot of our brethren in the world.

The "But" that opens verse 10 lifts us in the most glorious way out of the murky atmosphere of the world with its persecutions

and trials and the power of Satan. We are suddenly transported in thought into the presence of "the God of all grace." Are we conscious of needing grace in an infinite variety of ways? Well, He is the God of all grace. The powers of the world and the devil may be against us, but He has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, and nothing shall frustrate His purpose. He will permit us to suffer for a little while, but even that He will overrule. He will, as it were, take up the suffering and use it as material which He weaves into the pattern and design of His own choice as regards our characters and lives; and thus make it contributory to the perfecting, the establishing, the strengthening, the settlement of our souls.

As to His purpose for us, He has called us to His eternal glory. As to His disciplinary ways with us, He overrules even the activities of the adversary against us, for our spiritual perfecting and establishment. Grace, all grace, shines out in both His purposes and His ways. Who would not ascribe glory and dominion to the ages of ages to such an One as this?

The last three verses give us Peter's closing words. It is interesting to find Silvanus (or, Silas) and Mark mentioned, both of them brethren who had intimate relations with the Apostle

Paul, since the latter part of verse 12 is evidently an allusion to the Apostle Paul's labours.

These scattered Jewish Christians had been evangelised, be it remembered, by Paul and his companions. If they stood in grace it was the fruit of his labours, and the grace in which they stood had been opened out to them through his ministry. Now Peter is led to write to them, in fulfilment of his commission as Apostle to the Jews, testifying as to the grace of God, and thus confirming that the grace in which they stood was the "true grace of God." When we remember how once at Antioch, Peter and Paul came into pretty sharp collision over questions concerning law and grace, and how Paul had to exclaim, "I do not frustrate the grace of God" (Gal. 2:21), for Peter was committing himself to a line of action which threatened to do this very thing, we can rejoice in noting how thoroughly now they are in accord. We find a similar happy spirit of accord at the close of the second epistle (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Let us never forget that we stand in grace — the true grace of God. All our relations with God are on the basis of grace. He began with us in grace at our conversion to Himself. He continues with us on the footing of grace through all the vicissitudes

of our Christian life and service. With grace He will end — only, there is no end — for we shall enter His eternal glory as called to it and brought into it by the "God of all grace," as verse 10 has told us.

We are not so likely to overlook the start and the finish as we are the course between. It is now, amidst the failures and difficulties of our pilgrimage that we need an abiding sense of the grace that carries us through, the grace in which we stand. Soon, as we sometimes sing,

*"Grace all the work shall crown,
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise."*

