

George Philip Bible Readings

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SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER

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Introduction

Although scholars argue and differ, there is no real reason why we should not accept this letter as being from Peter, as it claims to be. He is now an old man, expecting death soon, and his care for the church is seen in his warnings to her to guard against false teachers and to hold fast amidst error and infidelity. The Second Coming of Christ, which is the background to his message, is to the Christians an exhortation to holiness but to the false it is an intimation of judgment. Peter fulfils his charge to strengthen his brethren (Lk.22:32). In the first epistle he spoke of suffering in the context of persecution from outside, and now he strengthens them against the more subtle danger of apostasy arising within the church. (When first written these notes were based on AV).

1:1-2

How wonderful to hear Peter using his old name Simon. Gone are his pride and presumption as he recognises all he is to be the work of Christ in his soul and personality. He has grown much in grace, but has not forgotten the weak and treacherous possibilities of his human nature. "They who fain would serve Thee best, are conscious most of wrong within."(Twells) Peter knows two things. He is a bond-slave (servant) and an apostle. These two go together. There is nothing abject or humiliating about genuine consecration. It develops the truest part of your nature and makes you yourself. When, in the ministry of the Word, people begin to blame the preacher for undermining their personalities and subjecting them to an unnatural discipline and influence, they are treading on thin ice. What is happening is that the Word of God is revealing you for what you really are (probably shockingly self-centred), and you do not like it. When Peter was shown how pathetic he was, his tears led him to repentance and slavery to Jesus, and his slavery made him an apostle, which was vindicated by the fruits of God in his person and work. Jesus said by their fruits you shall know them.. Make no mistake about it, fruit is recognisable, as is its root.

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1:1-3

In referring to all who have received like precious faith, Peter does not mean that all have the same faith. Some are mighty men of faith while others will not put themselves to the trouble to believe. But the common fact of faith is the bond which creates a fellowship out of an amazing variety of different personalities. Christian fellowship should be the most fascinating thing, and any scheme which reduces all to a dull uniformity is not of God. In this fellowship we begin to understand that God has given us all we need to cope with the demands of life arising from both nature and circumstances. There is not one single problem too big for you as a Christian. God says, "My grace is sufficient!" (2 Cor.12:9). In Christ God has given you all you need, even to possessing a divine nature, a new godly life within your own person. Since that is so, live it out. Make the possibility a practical reality, for you are called not only to glory, but to virtue, which is sheer down-to earth goodness of life. If your conversion is not making you a better person, easier to live with, kinder, more reasonable, more gentle and truthful, then something is wrong with your conversion!

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1:1-4

We overlap the verses to keep the full sense of the Word. These verses tell us of the life of God imparted to us as a gift, and we begin to see the marvel of God's electing grace, so mysterious in its origin, yet so manifest in its outworking. The sequence in v.3-4 is - He *gave* in sovereign decision; He *called* by irresistible grace into His purpose; He *gave* mighty promises for our reassurance; so that there *might be* worked out in us the image of God in our life; this image defaced by the fall, and repeatedly defiled by the corrupting, destroying influence of lust, wrong and evil desires. There is no doubt that when we, as Christians, fail to lay hold on and to use all the provision of God, pressing on and in to God, then we gravitate very quickly, though not necessarily grossly, into the whirlpool of lust: unbridled, ungovernable desiring that can never be satisfied, and that in due season not merely warps our life, but destroys it. The lesson we need to learn very sorely is that sin does not pay. In another

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sense, it does pay a dividend that has to be lived with; a dividend far different from the peaceable fruits of righteousness. (Num.32:23;Gal.6:7; Rom.6:15-23).

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1:5-8

Besides this, for this very reason, because what we said yesterday is abidingly true, let this be the supreme concern and earnestness of our life, to cultivate these graces which God has in fact planted within us in embryo form. The growth will not be automatic, and much rubbish will have to be cast out of the garden of the soul if these plants are to grow. The books we read, the places we go, the friends we have, may all have to be changed if they hinder, because it is not only our own personal pleasure that is at stake, but our usefulness in the service of God. Service is not primarily activity. It is more being than doing, and the depth and quality which grace has been allowed to work in our own character and person will determine the depth, extent, worth and permanence of the fruit of our service (2 Cor.4:1-2). This applies not only to preaching and witnessing, but to praying. When you get down on your knees, or up on your feet at a prayer meeting, remember that God looks on the heart before He listens to the words!

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1:5-8

What does God look for? Things that are well within the reach of even the simplest believer. Note that each grace grows out of the soil of the earlier one. As the hard rocks of pride and self are broken and ground down, there is a soil provided, and a seed, from which source the graces here mentioned come into flower. Add, cultivate in, or grow from your faith real goodness of life, because out of moral worth or character comes the capacity for knowledge or discernment. Never forget that wrong-doing clouds your sight! When you have true knowledge or judgment of a situation then you begin to learn temperance, self-control, or the capacity to hold oneself in. This is the opposite of impulse, which is always dangerous. When you restrain immediate inclination because of understanding, you begin to develop patience, which endures as well as waits. From that source comes godliness or reverence that is quiet and serene because it is confident of the issue. But this God shared, God directed life is by no means inhuman or super-human, for it is marked by kindness that is affable and sociable. None of these characteristics are cold or repellent, for they are warmed by love diffused through the whole personality. God has provided that we should be like this. How are we getting on?

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1:8-9

Two reasons are given why we should cultivate these graces. Firstly, if these things are in us, as a permanent part of us rather than a spasmodic manifestation when we are so inclined, and if they abound and show signs of increasing, we shall not be idle or without work, nor shall we be without fruit in deepening knowledge of God in ourselves and others. Secondly, he who has none of these graces, seeing nothing of attraction in such an emphasis of ministry, is blind, short sighted, having only the haziest notion of the sweep and majesty of the calling of God. He cannot see the future because the present fills his vision. And in his preoccupation with the tawdry present, he has forgotten the debt he owes, in that he has been purged from his old sins. Too many people make use of Christ as the scavenger to clear away the mess of their sins, and then relegate Him to the servants' quarters to be ignored. Remember what you once were, what you might have become and where you might now be.. Would you go back? You are doing so if you are not pressing on.

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1:10-11

Too many people take it for granted that they are people of God and are going to heaven. What are the grounds of your assurance? Is it enough to have made a decision for Christ; to look back to a day and a time when you professed conversion; to point to years of enthusiastic service in the cause of Christ, and His Church? None of these things according to Peter is sufficient ground for assurance. He urges great diligence to give proof of your response to God's calling and election by means of the works or graces he mentions in v.5-7 The only proof that we are born of the Father is that we begin to grow like Him. If this be so, your path will be cleared of many

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stumbling-blocks and your eyes will be cleared to see and avoid many others. In this way your entrance into the Kingdom will be abundant as opposed to a sneaking, unworthy, ashamed one. Compare 1 Cor. 3:11-15. In v.5 Peter tells us what we are to develop from our faith. In v.11 the word "minister (AV)" is the same word as "supply" or "add" in v.5. Peter seems to be saying, "supply these graces, and an entrance into the Kingdom shall be abundantly supplied to you"(Ellicott). This speaks of a warm welcome home by God who crowns our lives with His goodness.. Think of Jesus' words in Matt.7:2b about getting back what we give, and Paul's similar and searching words in 2 Cor.5:10.

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1:12-15

There are three thoughts here. First, it is necessary to tell people over and over again things they already know and believe because they forget so soon. We are all too prone to desire something new or novel in the Word when we come to church. What we need is to be brought back repeatedly to basic truth. Second, Peter's attitude is urgent because realistic, and he is aware that soon and swiftly, with little time for last minute preparation or conscience-clearing exhortation, he must bid farewell to this temporary life. It is always a good principle to live as you would die, especially when you never know when the latter is to happen. Third, the Peter who once feared the taunts of a servant maid now speaks of his coming martyr's death as an exodus (decease, or departure). It is not a premature end. God's servants don't die before their time. Nor is it something to be mourned and although human sorrow *must* be expressed, it is a triumphal procession of victory as the battle scarred warrior enters the presence of the King he has served. He now receives his reward. The Lord will then turn and look on Peter again, but this time there would be no tears (Lk 22:61-62).

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1:16-18

The solid ground of the Christian faith is that we do not follow fairy tales, myths, or fancy ideas, but historical facts which are vouched for. It is from the unassailable ground of *facts* that we preach the power that is now Christ's in His vindication through the Resurrection and Ascension, and the Second Coming of Christ in power and great glory to be the appointed judge of all people. Peter knows whom he has believed and testifies that he has seen with his own eyes, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the manifestation of Christ's glory, which was just a foretaste of that which is yet to be revealed to the world. Peter's remembrance of these things fires his whole being with deep conviction. This is something you cannot argue a man out of! We may not be granted visible manifestations such as some of the disciples received (Mk.9:1-4). But nevertheless we can have the same burning conviction if, as declared in v.18, we have met Him, been with Him, and heard Him in the reading and preaching of His Word. One great defect of our Christian living is that we have no time to draw apart to be quiet, to see and to hear things from the majestic glory. We are earth-bound, man-conditioned, activity-ridden, and we need to learn, as our fathers knew, the place of quiet worship (not least just before the beginning of a church service) where the realities of heaven come down to meet us. Then, and only then, shall our word of witness be with power and assurance.

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1:19-20

The final ground of our confidence is not our own experience of Christ's power, for the truth concerning His power now, and victory to come, remains even if we never prove these things for ourselves. The truth of God as we have it in the whole body of Scripture stands firm as a rock through the passing generations of time. The fruit of a ministry of the Word of God is its vindication, but the Scripture remains true, and holy, and health-giving whether there be fruit or not and we do well to take heed to it. Part of the defect and misdirection of our spiritual and psychological lives is the result of not learning to be subject to the authority of the Word when it searches, humbles and condemns. The Word is as light, dispelling shadows, not gathering them, and our living, creative receiving of it has the effect of introducing light into our lives, so that our whole personality shines with the light that is Christ. Compare Luke 11:34-36, and consider the course of our life, for in reading and preaching we are dealing with the Word of the living God, not the word of man. The testimony of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:105,130 deserves to be pondered.

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1:20-21

If the authority of our message is the Scriptures, then the content of the message is also the Scriptures, and if people will not believe through the Word, they will not believe at all, cf. Luke 16:27-31. The Scriptures are not to be wrested from their context as if we were dealing with some merely human book we could accept or reject or interpret at will. This Word came from God and is its own best commentator, comparing Scripture with Scripture, the one elucidating and complementing the other, and where we are left with a paradox, we hold the two irreconcilable parts together without whittling down either, until God, if He so pleases, gives us greater and fuller understanding. Beware the spiritual pride that arises from intellectual snobbery. Our minds will never be big enough to exhaust the Word of God. This Word is not the word of man. Holy men (think of that, you preachers) spoke, carried along by God as a ship before the wind. They were fully conscious, thinking persons, and the Word bears marks of their variety of idiom and characteristics. They were also fully governed by the Holy Spirit of God and therefore the word they spoke carried the authority and infallibility of God Himself. Read 2 Tim. 3:16, and let us range through the whole Word of God systematically, so that our spiritual life, our psychological balance, our moral integrity, and our thought patterns are all purified and vitalised by God's holy Truth.

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2:1-3

There is something very forthright and manly about Peter and he is not sentimental enough to gloss over differences that strike at the heart of God's work. There is no pious niceness, nor weak keeping of the peace, for the Church is at war. The danger is from those who, while parading themselves as being of God, in fact work by speech and influence to corrupt and hinder the fellowship. They will not be brave enough to be open in their contradiction of God's truth, rather criticising God's servant. In this way they draw many gullible souls away to follow their miserable ways. But those who work against the truth will not escape, for swift, inescapable judgment will overtake them. In fact the judgment may not come soon, but when it does come it will be sure. God is not mocked. The weeds sown by the enemy may have ample opportunity to grow, but they will be reaped and burned (Matt. 13:24-30). We need to learn just how deeply God cares for His true Church, and how He has pledged Himself to its protection. Whoever touches that which is God's particular treasure, touches the apple of God's eye (Zech. 2:8). Beware the influence you exert with your tongue or thought or attitude. God sees, hears, knows and rewards.

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2:1-3

These solemn verses are full of instruction and encouragement. They give a permanent picture of the Church in the world. Even at its height, when the church is most blessed and used by God, evil is present to hinder and hurt. Judas was one of the twelve, at the heart of the inner fellowship. In Acts 5:1-10 the story of Ananias and Sappirah shows that there were dangerous hypocrites in the church right from the beginning. Paul spoke of there being enemies of the Cross in the church at Philippi (Phil. 3:18). In his farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus Paul warned that in coming days dangerous enemies of the truth would emerge from among their own number (Acts 20:25-32). This is a sore burden for the servants of God, for many will follow these evil corrupters in their evil ways. Those led astray by corrupting words very often end up being more abandoned to worldliness and worse than the instigators of their defection, with the result that the name of God and the witness of the Church is blasphemed. But this becomes increasingly clear. Those taken in by poisoned spirits realise they have been pawns in a game, and when their corrupt master (be he man, woman or devil) tires of them, they will be cast off. But God will yet take a dealing with the culprits. His judgment does not linger: in fact it is on its way and has started to work. Fear God and learn wisdom.

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2:4-6

Here we have three instances of the working of God's judgments in all ages and places. Among the angels, those who did not keep their own estate, or dignity, or proper home, (whatever that actually means) were summarily dealt with and are reserved unto their day of final judgment. Compare Jude 6, and Gen. 6:2, where "sons of God" may indicate angelic beings. This was followed by such a judgment on the whole world that only Noah and seven others survived. The patient God states that His Spirit shall not always strive with man (Gen.6:3AV). We dare not presume upon forgiveness. In the story of Sodom we read in Gen. 18:21 that God came down to see just exactly what was going on, and such words tell of the thoroughness of God's investigation of our lives. All these instances of judgment on those who trifle with God's purposes in the world are written for our example, calling us to holiness of life and purpose; warning us against backsliding and secret sin (if there be such a thing); and at the same time encouraging us in the knowledge that God is not dead, and is in fact supervising every place and phase of His own world. This is our strength and assurance.

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2:6-9

Peter, launched into his theme, turns aside to the particular case of Lot and he never returns to the original point. This must not worry us either in Scripture or preaching. Truth and its communication are far more important than elegance of presentation, and Peter is so carried away with the urgency of his message that, having initiated it, he leaves the Spirit to complete it. Perhaps Peter, having backslidden himself, has a special care for Lot. We are told he was a righteous man, and his soul was vexed by the iniquity of Sodom. Of course he had no business being there in the first place, and had no-one to blame but himself. He was vexed, as every backslider will always be, but not vexed enough to pack his bag and depart. When a man is really sick of sin, he won't linger with it for long. God did not reject Lot and a combination of terrible circumstances and divine intervention brought him out of the carnage that was Sodom's judgment. But Lot was the loser. He himself was saved, yet so as by fire (1 Cor. 3:15). Be sure of how you live, for you will yet live with its fruit.

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2:10-12

Peter is in full spate of denunciation, not through vengeance or personal spite, but because he sees in these evil men's influence a source of danger and harm to the flock committed to his charge by Jesus (John 21:17-22). In indicating degrees of retribution, note the classes that are brought together: first those given to base, sensual pleasure, dirty in mind and action; then those despising control or government or discipline; then impertinent upstarts not afraid of speaking against their betters and superiors. Spiritual beings are referred to, but included are human agencies on whom the Spirit of God is pleased to bestow His power and blessing. Even angels in like circumstances forbear to accuse or criticise. But these false men are like the beasts, devoid of spiritual sense and sensibilities. They devastate and lay waste the pastures of God's people. But they shall not escape. Remember that these persons being chastised are those who have professed Christ and shared in the fellowship of the saints. But they have become corrupted. Beware the beginnings of a carping, complaining, critical spirit. This is where you will end up. Fly to the Lord. You may be dealt with sternly, but you will be safe.

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2:13-14

This radical exposure of the falsity of life and influence of these disturbing people continues. If you sweep back over the earlier verses and on to the end of the chapter you cannot but wonder what the reaction would be to such a sermon from the pulpit today. The preacher would be accused of all manner of things, uncharitableness, spiritual pride, authoritarian attitude, too hard, unwise, likely to cause disunity. We can well imagine the furore. But such words are at times needful and must be spoken with nothing to blunt the edge, for truth and error are irreconcilable. We take one phrase (v.14) here which is the heart of the passage, "Beguiling unstable souls"(AV), "seduce the unstable" (NIV). Spiritual puppets gather a motley army of those easily led away with bait. We can be sorry for those so duped, but have only righteous anger for the deceivers. Some led away are more sinned against than sinning, although they should have had more spiritual sense than be taken in. Know

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your teachers and guides, lest you end in the ditch. But the root of the trouble is in the self-centred, self-absorbed, self-glorifying hearts of covetous people. Over the years we have watched many who lusted for leadership fall away and disappear. The first quality of a leader is the willingness to be led while he is under training and authority. Pride consumes and also brings down.

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2:15-16

Peter continues his description and denunciation of these cursed children (AV) (an accursed brood v.14) showing them to be such as knew the right way and yet turned away from it. The story of Balaam, beginning in Numbers 22, shows a man who, while outwardly obedient to God, was at heart covetous of gain and advancement. We see him bargaining with God so that the fruits of disobedience might be gained without openly or formally disobeying Him. He was trifling with conscience and with God, seeking to manipulate the will and command of God to his own inclination and desire. Remember that God withdrew His restraint, let him go, exposed him, confronted him and confounded him. Note how Peter refers to Balaam's attitude as being madness. What better description could there be for those who fly in the face of God's commands and directions? Guard your motives, thoughts and actions lest you be found fighting against God, for God will preserve His work and bless His people at all cost.

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2:17-19

Peter may well have had specific persons in mind as he wrote these scathing words, and, while he does not actually name them, the description would mark them out to the whole church. They were all talk, with nothing solid or lasting to show for their so called Christian life. When someone becomes over-critical and talkative, ask what they have done or how they have proved themselves to be men or women of God. These characters were plausible, but barren. They were clouds or mists, very insubstantial and easily blown about by every change in the wind of inclination or popularity. Their words were great spates of emptiness, arrogant and futile, but sadly finding easy victims among those only too glad to escape from the living demands of the Holy Word of God. They proclaim themselves to be apostles of liberty, (confusing liberty with licence) and in giving themselves to an easy association with the world and its immediate pleasures (mocking those who remain true), they find themselves held in a bondage greater than they realise. Such persons are too sure of being able to return to the fold when their ill-will is exhausted. They may not be able to. God may not allow it.

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2:20-22

This may refer to the false teachers or to those led astray by them. Better take its widest meaning so that we will be less inclined to listen to the vicious babblings of disaffected Christians, who have nothing of spiritual and practical fruit to confirm their faith. To be a professing Christian for years, and never be other than a problem to minister and friend alike is a very bad sign. When such a person does turn away from righteousness to ungodliness, they find the descending cataract of their life to be very unmanageable, and before they know where they are, they are worse than they were when first they professed faith in Christ. The sternness of these words indicates they apply more to the false teachers than to those led astray. Remember the warning of Jesus to those who cause one of His children, young disciples, to stumble (Matt. 18:6). The point of the proverb ending the chapter is simple. To turn back in this way is proof that the heart and nature had never really been changed in the beginning. By their fruits you know what people are (Matt.7:15-23).

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3:1-4

Having dealt with the troublemakers, Peter refuses to be distracted by them, and turns to speak reassurance to the faithful people of God. After all, those who are at cross-purposes with God can safely be left to God. He, better than any, is able to deal with them, and He will. Peter now speaks of the Second Coming of Christ, and does so with the same zeal as is evident in the previous chapter. At once he warns that in the last days, when the

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course of history is nearing its end, there will arise those who scoff at the facts of the Faith and live accordingly, as if there were no God and no coming of Christ to be the judge of all.

What you believe or don't believe always influences your way of life! That is why many people are so worldly. They do not believe this world is going to come to an end. In the same way, people live as if they were never going to die. Even when they consent to such a thought as death, they do not believe that after death is judgment. Therefore, we need to be driven back in remembrance to the facts of life as declared in the words of prophets and apostles. Live by the Bible. You are on safe ground, for the Word cannot lie!

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3:3-7

One of the marvels of today is the number of people inside the various churches who quite literally mock at the Truth preached: Truth that is fundamental to the whole Christian Faith. Such mocking scepticism refuses to believe that judgment is surely coming. They say, because they believe it, that all is going on as it has always done and they assume it will continue to do so. They are deliberately closing their eyes to facts of history. The world, made by the Word of God and standing by the Word of God, was in fact in the judgment of God destroyed at the time of the Flood (Gen.6-7). And now the world, by the same Word of God, is reserved and preserved until the time of God's final judgment has come. Then, not with water but by fire, the world will know judgment. God may delay, and that is part of His mysterious work of mercy, but His judgments are certain and His instruments ready at hand. People get worked up rightly about nuclear warfare and the danger of radiation, but how many live with a realistic fear of the danger of certain judgment? Read Rev. 20:11-15, then search the Scriptures so that they may make you wise unto salvation. In a past generation evangelists would preach and ask people personally, "Are you saved?" Do we really hear much preaching about that these days?

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3:8-9

Bible truth is an excellent basis for life, for it is dependable truth. It does not change with the fashions of men as human philosophies do. The Word remains supremely and serenely sure despite all delays in its fulfilment. God is not in a hurry, nor is He slack like some people. As St Augustine once said: "He who is from everlasting to everlasting can afford to wait." The creation waits for God's final time (Rom. 8:22). The saints, martyrs and angels wait for God's vindication of their faithfulness (Rev. 6:9-11). But God waits and works many strange works in many inexplicable ways from generation to generation so that He might be gracious and have mercy (Isa. 30:18). He waits, so that by every possible means He may call sinners (and nations) to repentance and forgiveness. God's patience with perverse, stubborn men and women is far more to be wondered at than His righteous judgment. And if God, who has good cause to judge, exercises so much forbearance, how much more should we, in our dealings with one another. Mercy is a deeper grace in people than judgment. It is more mature. It is more Christ-like.

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3:10

The fact of God's mercy, and the fact of God's Son crucified for the sins of men is no ground for easy, careless thoughts of God and His judgment. The day of judgment will most surely come. It is appointed. That is one of the often forgotten notes of the Easter message (Acts 17:30-31). The Day will come swiftly and suddenly as a thief in the night, when people are not looking for it. Peter is recalling Jesus' words in Matt.24:42-44). People will be taken unawares and unprepared. There will be no time for last minute repentances or conversions; no hurried searching in the house for neglected Bibles; no panicked repeating of the Lord's Prayer, which is as far as many people's prayer life has ever got. (It is a pattern for prayer and not a luck charm). The whole of Matt.24:1-25:13 deserves quiet and careful consideration. Be quite clear, the Day of the Lord will not be a hole-and-corner thing. Every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7). According to Peter great noise, fervent heat, scorching searing flame will mark that awful day. So terrible will it be that people will call on the rocks and hills to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:15-16). Their anguish will be beyond expression (Rev. 16:10-11), but there is no sign of their repentance. How terrible. Fly to Christ. "When I soar through tracts

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unknown, see Thee on Thy judgment throne; Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." (Toplady)
Fly to Christ now, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man will come.

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3:11-12

I remember this verse as one of the first texts I ever preached on. It contains all the dynamic of the Christian ethic. It is a sane and simple exhortation. These are the facts. The day of judgment will come. All these things that constitute our worldly life, and for which we so often sell our souls, will be dissolved and will be no more. No more cinemas, dances, card parties, cocktail parties, idiotic, irreverent parties with the laughter of fools (Eccles.7:6). No more cars, holidays, bank-books, promotion at work. No more family gatherings or romantic day-dreaming. Nothing but facts. There remain the fact of our life and our sin and our denial of Christ and our neglect of duty and opposition to the truth. We must face the fact of judgment. We shall receive (to be our garment and our dwelling and our life for all eternity) the deeds done in the body (2 Cor.5:10 AV; cf.NIV; read also 1 Cor.3:10-15). Since all this is basic truth, what kind of people should we be, and what kind of lives should we be living? Start by making sure you *are* converted, then continue by living from day to day as if no one mattered but Jesus. We live as those expecting to meet Him, and in so doing, we hasten His coming. It is sad that most of us love this sinful world too much to want to part from it, even for Jesus.

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3:13

The end for a Christian is not the end, but the beginning. Our Gospel is not one of escape, but fulfilment. We have not yet seen the full glory of what God planned and purposed for man, the object of His love (1 Cor.2:9). It has always been marred by toil, travail, imperfection and incompleteness, because of the sin of man. At times, perhaps in fellowship with some of God's children in happiness and contentment, surrounded by the glorious beauties of creation, we have caught a glimpse of and tasted a little of both our capacity for life and God's capacity to satisfy it. Multiply that to infinity and you have some idea of the beauty and delight of the life that God has prepared for them that love Him. Read Rev. 21-22, and let your imagination run riot as you try to picture the light and glory described. Then remember that, as Peter says, righteousness has its permanent home there. There will be no sin there, no shadow nor darkness, no strain nor quarrelling, no tension nor friction. All will be perfection, and Christ, whose costly sacrifice lies at the heart of it all, will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa.53:11 AV). We share even in that for, looking back over life's finished story, we view the battles and say it was worth it all.

“ I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.” (A.R Cousin)

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3:14-16

"Wherefore be diligent."(14 AV). Because you are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth, be earnest, enthusiastic. Be full-hearted in the giving of your love and life to Christ so that when you see Him face to face you will not be ashamed (1 John 2:28). In 2:13 Peter has spoken of those who are blots and blemishes, and the exact opposite is here commanded, and it is linked with peace. Holiness of life is the fount of all peace, whereas in this life and the next there is no peace to the wicked (Isa.48:22). Peter again speaks of the longsuffering of God, God's immense patience, and he knew much of that in the Lord's dealings with him. He links his own word of teaching with that of Paul, for there is no contradiction in the books of the Bible. The message is one, but in the wisdom of God each servant is fitted to perform one specific task. This makes for a wonderful fellowship, wherein each can learn from the other, while still recognising that some are specially called to teach the deep things of God. These things are deep, and call for strenuous exercise of our minds as we seek to understand them. When we refuse to wrestle with the Scriptures in study, as opposed to mere reading, the basis of our knowledge of the faith is unstable, and our lives follow suit. This is why we read the Bible daily

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and study it consistently on a Sunday; that we might have a broad, comprehensive grasp of God's truth, thereby saving our own lives from destruction, and also those that are in our care.

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3:17-18

Three themes pinpoint the message of the closing verses: Be on guard, Fall from, Grow. Be watchful lest any evil thing or person assail your Christian life under the guise of spirituality. Lay hold constantly on the life-giving, stabilising truth of God so that your walk and service may be steadfast. A steady, balanced, dependable Christian is a treasure in any fellowship. The only way to be such a one is to grow in grace: to grow up in awareness and appropriation of the grace that surrounds and upholds you from day to day. Let God's grace probe deeper into your soul to enlighten you and sweeten you. Let grace mould and fashion and nourish you, so that, growing up into spiritual maturity (Heb.5:11-6:6), you might serve with increasing usefulness until at last you are called into the presence of the King Himself. The safest way to guard against falling is to keep on going on. It is all of grace from beginning to end: grace poured out from on high to such unworthy recipients as we are. It is grace that has made us captives of Jesus, at whose feet we sit in willing bonds. It is all His doing and it will be all to His glory now and for ever, Amen.

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