

The Life of a Christian

STUDIES IN SECOND PETER

By

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During the last 20 years of his active ministry (from 1952 - 1972) Dr. Bast also served as the speaker on the Temple Time (now Words of Hope) broadcast until he was forced to retire due to ill health. Dr. Bast died in 1983. In 1986 Western Seminary established a preaching program in his honor which includes an endowed chair, the Henry Bast Professor of Preaching.

I

The Resources of the Christian Life

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.

— 2 PETER 1:3-4 RSV

Peter's second letter to the Christians of the first century is a tract for the times. Although it was written 1900 years ago, this letter has a very important message for us. This is because the situation the Christians faced in the first century is very similar to the situation the church faces today. Michael Green in a contemporary commentary on this letter says,

We live in days when the contents of the Christian faith are widely questioned, when new and speculative theologies are widely disseminated, and when a new morality is being advocated which is capable of being understood as 'the old immorality writ large.' . . . There is, moreover, an intellectualism about much of our Christianity which is not perhaps so far removed from that attacked in these letters—the knowledge that has little relation to holy living, growing spirituality and deepening love.

After commenting on the problem discussed in 2 Peter, he continues:

So long as sin needs to be exposed, so long as man needs to be reminded that persistent wrongdoing ends in ruin, that lust is self-defeating, that intellectualism devoid of love is a barren thing, that Christian theology has no right to overrun the 'faith once delivered to the saints,' this epistle will remain uncomfortably, burningly relevant.

But there is a second reason why this letter has a special interest and meaning for our times. It is Peter's last testament to the church. In a moving, personal note in the beginning of the letter he calls attention to the fact that his time has come. "I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to arouse you by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me" (1:13-14). Peter, the great apostle, the first to confess Christ as Lord and Saviour, Peter—who had been with Christ from the very beginning of His ministry—has been told by his Lord that he will soon be transferred from the church militant to the church triumphant. In this brief testament

to the church he opens a pastor's heart. He is deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of those who had been converted to Christ through his ministry and are under his pastoral care. This is Peter's farewell address to the church and it gives a peculiar urgency to his message.

In this letter he looks not only at the circumstances, the problems, difficulties, and temptations the Christians faced in the first century; he looks beyond these to the second coming of Jesus Christ and the end time. Here we come to the main thrust of his message. After speaking about the apocalyptic changes that are coming, he says, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness" (3:11). Here is the message for our times. It teaches us the supreme importance of Christian living.

There is a great deal of concern today about the impact the church is making on society. There is a call for the church to become involved in the political, economic, and sociological problems of our day. This is not debatable. The church does have an obligation to work for justice and righteousness at every level and area of life. The point of objection to much of the contemporary emphasis on social justice is that this is being done without any reference to the spiritual life and character of the individual. The New Testament never for a moment lets us lose sight of the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel that changes persons. Those who come to Christ are raised to a new life, and it is their obligation and responsibility to live a life of holiness and godliness. This righteousness of life and holiness of character is the secret of the impact the church made on society in the first three centuries and in many centuries since, and it must be recovered if we are to make an impact on society in our day.

This life of holiness is a necessity for a Christian not only because of the impact the church may make on society, but because every believer has a responsibility and obligation to God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of reconciliation to God (2 Cor. 5:19). The God of the Bible is the God who saves men and women from sin and death. Those who come to Him in Christ belong to Him, and their life must be God-like in character. God says, "Be ye holy for I the Lord thy God am holy." This is the theme that runs through this whole letter. Speaking of the end time Peter says, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness" (3:11).

With this brief sketch of the background of the letter, let us now look at the first section to observe what it teaches about the life of a Christian.

We find here, first of all, a full description of the Christian life. This life is described negatively and positively. We will consider the negative

factor first. The life of a Christian is a rescued life. A Christian is one who has found in Christ an escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion. The first aspect of the Christian life is deliverance. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul addresses believers as follows: “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:3-4). The same point is made in the opening lines of the 103rd Psalm: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psalm 103:2-4 KJV).

Here then is an important factor in the Christian life that is almost wholly overlooked or denied in current theology. The distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate, the saved and the unsaved is either muted or rejected altogether and there is much loose and careless talk about identification with the world, to the denial of the Biblical doctrine of the corruption of the world and of man’s nature. A Christian is one who has been saved out of the evil and corruption and lust of the world. Speaking of our salvation in Christ Paul says, “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). God has delivered us from “the inevitable disintegration that lust produces in the world” (2 Peter 1:4 Phillips).

But salvation is more than deliverance from the lust of the world; it is more than forgiveness of sin. A Christian is not only delivered from evil and from sin, but his nature is renewed and he becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He must show that he belongs to Christ by his behavior and in his character. Here is the apostolic exhortation: “For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Every believer must strive for holiness. The man who fails to do this is rebuked in this passage. Peter says: “For whoever lacks these things [that is, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, and brotherly love], is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (1:9). This teaches us the supreme importance of Christian behavior. The Bible knows nothing of a Christian profession that does not result in a changed life. Jesus said that “by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Let us now observe the provision God has made for us to live a

godly life. It is not easy to live a life of holiness, purity, and integrity in this evil world; and Jesus warned that it would not be easy. He said to His disciples, "In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." We cannot do it in our own strength. We can do it only in the strength that Christ gives.

The first thing God does for us is that He gives us faith. This letter is addressed to those who "have obtained like precious faith with us." This is "a faith of equal standing" (RSV) and it means that there is no distinction between believers. We all have the same faith because it comes to us from Jesus Christ. It is His gift to us. Paul makes the same point in that magnificent summary of the Christian faith which we find in Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Those who have been saved by grace walk by faith and not by sight. They put their trust in Jesus Christ and not in themselves. They rest on the promises of God, and not on the words of men.

Since faith is God's gift to us, the question arises: How can we obtain this gift of faith? A few weeks ago I received a letter from a listener that moved me deeply. The letter had only one line, "How can I believe in the deity of Jesus Christ?" That is an honest question and it has an answer. The Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel. Paul says in the 10th chapter of Romans, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." It is apparent, therefore, that if we really want to believe, we must use the means God has given us for believing. If you go to a physician for a diagnosis of an ailment and he gives you medication for the treatment of it, if you have any confidence in the physician at all, you will take the medication. We cannot expect God to bestow faith upon us and bypass the means by which He has ordained for us to receive it. Here then is the first resource of the Christian life. We can walk through this world in obedience to the will of God because we put our trust in Him.

The second resource for living the Christian life is the knowledge of God. This is the light that shines in the darkness of this world. God has spoken. He has made Himself known to us. Peter stresses knowledge as a source of power for living the Christian life in the salutation of this letter: "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (1:2). There is an old adage: "knowledge is power," and this is nowhere more true than in religion. Ignorance produces weakness, confusion, and fear. The ignorant are the prey of false prophets and teachers. It is the knowledge of God given to us in Scripture that enables us to walk through this world with the conquering steps of the children of God.

But God gives us not only faith and knowledge as resources to live the holy life. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Remember Paul’s great testimony, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The power to live a holy life is in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the more we know Him and the more we trust Him, the more He enables us to rise above the sordidness and the corruption of a world in alienation from God. This power and grace is promised to us by Christ who said, “Ask and it shall be given, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” Paul teaches us how we can claim such promises in prayer when he says, “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6, 19).

Peter not only assures us that God has made available the power to live a holy life, but he also urges us to put forth every effort on our part to do right. We are to put forth the utmost diligence to attain a Christian character. He says, “For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love” (1:5-7). As an added incentive to attain these qualities of character, Peter then adds: “For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8). Here then is the strongest possible exhortation to believers to live a Christ-like life. This is supported everywhere in the New Testament. James says, “Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.” Spurgeon used to say, “The soul of religion is the practical part.” I can think of no better way to close this message than by reminding you of the way Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount. He said, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

2

The Remedy for Doubt

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

— 2 PETER 1:16 RSV

One of the helpful features of the New English Bible is found in the headings it gives for the shorter books of the New Testament and for sections of the larger books. The heading for 1 John is *Recall to Fundamentals*, for Jude: *The Danger of False Belief*, for 2 Peter *The Remedy for Doubt*. These captions furnish us with a pithy statement of the main theme of each book. All three of these letters deal with the situation that existed in the church in the latter part of the first century when there was an infiltration of Greek thought and skepticism into the church.

In the second chapter of his second letter, Peter issues a stern warning against false teachers who had crept into the church. They denied the fundamental message of the gospel and substituted opinions of their own. They discredited the gospel by their immoral behavior. Their false teaching created doubt in the minds of the faithful and their immoral conduct discredited the gospel among the pagans. In the second half of the first chapter of the letter which we are studying today, Peter gives a ringing defense of the certainty of the gospel. Here is the remedy for doubt.

I spoke last week in the introduction to these messages on 2 Peter of the relevance of this New Testament letter to our day. Just as there were scoffers in the first century, so there are those who ridicule the historic gospel of a crucified and risen Saviour today. We will see how Peter deals with the scoffers in a later message, but today we will observe how Peter speaks to the honest doubter.

By way of clearing the air, let us begin by observing what Peter says about the nature of the gospel. He says, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (1:16). The important thing to observe here is that Peter is defending the historic gospel against the false teachers who alleged that the gospel was made up of fables and myths, “artfully spun tales” (NEB). These allegations are familiar to anyone who has participated in religious discussions in our generation. It is popular in certain intellectual circles to speak about the gospels as legends and myths as if this was something that was discov-

ered by the enlightened minds of the twentieth century. It should be observed that there is nothing new in these allegations against the historic gospel. The false teachers of the twentieth century are merely repeating the charges against the gospel made by the false teachers of the first century. The apostles, therefore, in preaching the true gospel faced exactly the same objections to the gospel which are made in the twentieth century. We may observe, therefore, that when the apostles preached the gospel in the first century they did so fully conscious of the fact that this message was unpalatable to the intellectuals of their day. There is nothing new about unbelief.

The apostles are unanimous in insisting that the Christian faith does not have its origin in philosophy or natural religion or myths. The Christian faith rests solidly on historical fact. When the apostles speak of the virgin birth of Jesus, His miracles, His atoning death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, His enthronement, and His second coming they are speaking of things that actually happened or will happen. This is their message. Those who teach any other gospel are tampering with the testimony of witnesses. The gospel is fact, not fiction. All of the apostles are very specific and clear on this point. When Paul speaks to those who had denied the resurrection or explained it away in philosophical precepts, he confronts the Corinthian Christians with a clear-cut alternative: either Jesus Christ rose from the dead or He did not. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:17-19).

This shows us that the historic gospel is candidly supernatural. It is a message about the living God who is wholly other than man. It is the message of the power and coming of Jesus Christ. He was not born by ordinary human generation. His existence does not begin with His birth at Bethlehem; He exists from all eternity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14).

In His earthly ministry Jesus demonstrated the power of God in healing the sick and raising the dead. He said that He had come to give His life a ransom for many. He came to make atonement for sin so that men might be reconciled to God. He rose again from the dead. This is the gospel message of the power and coming of Jesus Christ. But this is not all. When Peter speaks of the power and coming of Jesus, he not only looks back at the mission Christ has already accomplished, he also looks ahead to His second coming. Jesus will come again in power and glory.

This is the nature of the gospel. This is the content of the good news. This is the gospel Peter defends when he says, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.”

Let us now consider the foundations on which this faith in Jesus Christ rests. This letter of Peter, like all the letters of the New Testament, rings with assurance. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not conjecture or speculation, but a message of absolute certainty. The historian, James Anthony Froude, in an essay on the Reformation, makes a comparison between the faith of Erasmus, the great humanist and scholar, and Luther, the great theologian and preacher. He says, “For Erasmus the truths of the gospel never attained more than a high degree of probability; for Luther they were an absolute certainty, and the difference between these is not only great, it is infinite.”

We, too, can attain this same degree of certainty about Jesus Christ. This comes ultimately, of course, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. The true believer has the witness in himself; but there is also objective, historical evidence on which faith rests.

Peter cites two lines of evidence for the truth of the gospel. First, there is the testimony of witnesses. Peter says, “We were eye-witnesses of his majesty.” The apostles were not philosophers; they were reporters. They tell us what they had seen and heard. Paul says, “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). The Apostle John says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3).

Peter’s personal testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ and His mission is based on the transfiguration. Remember, he saw it all. He was with Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry, and now as an old man he is making his last testament to the church. Out of all the events of that great epic of revelation which he defines as the power and coming of Jesus Christ, he selects the transfiguration of Jesus as the basis for his testimony to the truth of the gospel.

You remember the incident. One evening during the Galilean ministry Jesus took Peter, John, and James with Him to go up into the mountain to pray. As He was praying, “The appearance of his countenance was altered and his raiment became dazzling white.” This is the incident to which Peter referred when he says, “We were eye-witnesses of his majesty.” They saw Jesus in all His glory in the days of His flesh. He was transfigured before them so that they saw Jesus Christ in His glory as God. They were not only eye-witnesses; they were also ear-witnesses. They heard the voice of God saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” They were sure of Christ because they saw and heard. Calvin says, “Peter mentions this voice as though it was sufficient alone as full evidence for the gospel, and justly so.”

The second line of evidence for the certainty of the gospel comes to us from the testimony of Scripture. Peter says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” The Scriptures confirm the apostolic witness. All the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Lord are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This reminds us that one of the most powerful arguments for the truth of Christianity is the fulfillment of prophecy. We find this everywhere in the New Testament. It forms the pattern of Matthew’s Gospel. Here is an example. After Matthew describes the unique birth of Jesus, he says, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel’ (which means, God with us)” (Matt. 1:22-23). The fulfillment of the prophecy is the basic foundation for the preaching of the apostles.

One of the great creeds of the Reformation shows us how the Reformers founded their faith on the same evidence. After naming the sixty-six canonical books of the Old and New Testament, the confession declares:

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.

(The Belgic Confession of Faith)

Having confirmed the truth of the gospel by the authority of Scripture, Peter now goes on to give one of the most comprehensive statements in the Bible on the nature and function of Scripture. First of all he tells us what Scripture is. He says, “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the

impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (1:20-21). When he says “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” he is referring to the origin of Scripture and not our interpretation of it. He means that when the prophets spoke they were not giving their own interpretation of what they saw and heard, but they spoke the words God gave them to speak. They were men moved by the Holy Spirit and thus they spoke from God. The message of the Bible is the message of God; what Scripture says, God says.

Next, he describes the function of Scripture in an illuminating metaphor. He says the prophetic word is like a “lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (1:19). The dark place is the world without God; it is the mind of man unilluminated by the Holy Spirit. This is the darkness that is penetrated by the light of the Word of God. The Bible is revelation. Here we have the knowledge of God and of truth. The Psalmist says, “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Finally, we may observe here that the great apostle is a true pastor and teacher. He closes with an admonition. Having made the point that the light of the knowledge of God shines from the pages of the Bible, Peter, the pastor, says, “You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place.” And we also will do well to pay attention to it. It shows us the way in which we are to go. It gives us the true knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. Follow the example of the Psalmist who said, “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.” Listen also to the apostle who said, “Let the word of God dwell in you richly.” The Bible is the Word of God and it is able to make us wise unto salvation. Here, in this Book, if faithfully read and studied with an open mind illuminated by the Holy Spirit, you will find the remedy for doubt.

3

False Teachers in the Church

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

— 2 PETER 2:1 RSV

The second chapter of 2 Peter is one of the dark chapters of the Bible. It describes the appalling evil that has come over the world and its infiltration into the church. It is a chapter of sin and rampant wickedness coming under the certain and sure judgment of God. It speaks of greed and lust; of men who behave like animals, who count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime, who have “eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin” (2:13). Peter is speaking of apostate church members when he quotes an old proverb which says, “The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire” (2:22).

But this chapter is part of the Word of God, and it is not an isolated chapter of the Bible. The prophets of the Old Testament, the apostles of the New Testament, and Jesus Christ, God’s final prophet, all speak of the sure judgment of God that comes on the sins of men. Some time ago I saw a religious cartoon that showed a clergyman in full ecclesiastical dress leading a sparse congregation in worship. The particular petition in the litany the cartoonist catches is “Lord, deliver us from unpleasantness.” This is a picture of thousands of churches in America today. Sin and death and judgment are not pleasant subjects, but they must be faced. The church that ignores evil in its own ranks is a church that has lost its savor. This second chapter of 2 Peter teaches us that we must face reality. There is evil in the world and this evil is creeping into the church. False teachers, enemies of the faith, are in the church and they are luring men and women away from the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter says that they deny the Lord who bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. There are wolves in the flock.

The first point that comes to our attention in this chapter is the warning against false teachers. “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies” (2:1). These false teachers are deceivers who exploit the people with false words. They “are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm; for them the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved” (2:17).

There are three reasons for such stern warnings against the false teachers. The first is that they are a continual threat to the church. Peter

refers to Old Testament history when he says, “But false prophets also arose among the people.” By this he means the false prophets who plagued Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and all the true prophets of God in the Old Testament.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount also warned His disciples against the teachings of false prophets. He said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Paul, in his moving farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus, said, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

All these warnings teach us that we may expect that there will be false teachers in the church in our day. They are a continual threat to the true church of God because they are agents of Satan, the enemy of truth and righteousness. Although the church is always under this threat, this will be especially true in the last days. The Bible teaches that at the end time there will be an increase of error culminating in the antichrist and the Man of Sin attacking the church.

The second reason Peter issued such a stern warning against false teachers is because many will be deceived by their doctrine. He says, “And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled” (2:2). The fact that many are turned away from the faith was also true of the church in the Old Testament. Sometimes the true prophets stood almost alone for the truth. You will recall Elijah’s cry to the Lord in the widespread apostasy in the days of Ahab. “The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

The same thing has happened in other ages. The period of the Reformation was a time of great awakening and revival, but even then many turned away from the faith they professed. Listen to Calvin: “For hardly one in ten of those who have made a profession of faith in Christ retain the purity to the end.” We must also remember that it was Jesus who said, “When the Son of man comes will he find faith on the earth?” Hence, the warning that many will be deceived by false teachers is intended to put us on our guard. We must not give up the faith because many have wandered away from it. Truth is not decided by popular vote.

A third reason for the stern warning against false teachers is because

false teaching is disastrous. Speaking of the false prophets, Peter says that “they secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them.” Here we learn one of the basic principles of conduct. Doctrine affects life. False teaching leads to false living. We see this principle in operation in our society today. For two generations, now, there have been theologians and teachers who have said that there is no heaven and no hell, no final judgment, and no God. Do you wonder that young people today are saying, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die”? Nothing really matters.

Peter wrote this urgent letter to the Christians of the first century to remind them that they were never to treat heresy lightly. This is a lesson we need. How utterly unconcerned we are about false teaching! Today, the heretic is the hero. He is the thinker, even though he may be expounding error that is thousands of years old. How blind we are in spiritual matters! We are deeply concerned about pollution in the physical world. Our cities, our rivers, our lands and forests, the air we breathe must be kept clean. We have joined together in a war against pollution. This is a worthy cause and deserves our support not only to preserve the beauty of nature, but also to preserve our health. We know how the air and the rivers become polluted, and we trace the pollution to its source and attack it at that point.

But in spite of all our learning and understanding, we fail to recognize the disastrous consequences of spiritual pollution. The rejection and denial of Jesus Christ and His righteousness leads to a spiritual and moral pollution that is far more disastrous than any mere physical pollution we have ever seen. The only way we can overcome the unspeakable moral pollution we face today is by going back to the true fountain of life, the Word of God, the truth as it is in Jesus.

Let us now observe, in the second place, how the judgment of God is pronounced upon the false teachers and their followers. Peter says, “Perdition waits for them with unsleeping eyes” (2:3 NEB). God’s judgment on the unrighteous is impending; it is certain, and it is severe. Michael Green says, “Such stringent condemnations as Peter’s appear to twentieth-century readers as old-fashioned and inappropriate, because we have largely lost any sense of the diabolical danger of false teaching, and have become as dulled to the distinction between truth and falsehood in ideas as we have to the distinction between right and wrong in behavior. But it is impossible to be alive, as Peter was, to the ethical and intellectual importance of ‘the way of truth’ (i.e. Jesus Himself) without being incensed when that way is flouted, particularly in the Church.”

Peter enforces his teaching on the nature and certainty of judgment on the unrighteous with three historic examples. The first is the conduct

of the angels who rebelled against God. “For . . . God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment” (2:4). The second example is the world in the days of Noah, which was one of the most corrupt periods of all times. It is described in Genesis 6 where we read concerning men in that day, “every thought of the heart of man was only evil continually.” The third example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain. These cities were so immoral that no man or woman was safe on the streets of the city. Peter’s argument in citing these examples of judgment is that if God did not spare the sinners of the ancient world, neither will He spare sinners today, because He is a righteous God.

When we look at these three examples of judgment, the question may be raised: Why did Peter select these incidents? With the whole Old Testament record before him with scores of examples of the execution of the temporal judgments of God, why did he take the rebellion of the angels, the destruction of the world in the days of Noah, and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of judgment?

When we read the passage carefully, we will observe that he selected these three incidents because they are examples of God’s judgment on the exact sins of which the false teachers were guilty in the first century. The angels fell because of pride. It was their arrogance that caused them to rebel against God. This was one of the dominant characteristics of the false teachers in Peter’s day, and it is equally applicable to our situation today. How arrogant and proud we are. We boast that we live in a world come of age. We have a contempt for history. It has nothing to teach us because in this scientific age we have the intelligence and the knowledge to solve our own problems. This is our pride and this is our sin.

It must be understood that this attitude is expressed not only by the philosophers of the day; it is found in the church of Jesus Christ. Where is the call for repentance and humiliation before God? Where is there any real expression of our absolute dependence upon Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit? Do we really believe that without Him we can do nothing? We need to learn once more that “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

Next, Peter cites the judgment of God on the world in the days of Noah because that age is an example of widespread disobedience and rebellion against God. This was applicable to Peter’s day because the false teachers were arrogant and rejected authority (2:10). Here again we face one of the dominant characteristics of our day. We, too, reject authority. We want no imperatives and no absolutes. The commandments of God are ignored because people do not want to be told what to do.

This explains the breakdown of preaching and the substitution of group discussion where we can pool our ignorance and add to our confusion. It also explains the increasing tolerance of downright corruption and licentiousness, not only in society but also in the church. We, too, are approaching the times when “every thought of the heart of man is only evil continually.”

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is cited as an example of God’s judgment because of the gross sexual immorality practiced in these cities. Sodom and Gomorrah were infamous examples of unlicensed sexual indulgence and perversion even in the ancient world. This is why the holy and righteous God destroyed these cities. Peter is writing to Christians living in a pagan world of the first century where sexual perversion prevailed everywhere. At this point we may recall Paul’s description of the pagan world of the first century. “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:26-27).

Once more we need to be reminded that we are rapidly approaching the same degree of unlicensed sexual indulgence and perversion in our society today, and these evils are infiltrating the life and practice of the church. When ministers defend homosexuality and marry homosexuals and theologians defend promiscuity we are ripe for the judgment of God. This is the message of this letter for us today. If God did not spare the angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and if He did not spare the sinners of the ancient world, neither will He spare the sinners of today.

This is an awful conclusion but it is the message of the Bible. It is not, however, the last word. God is not only righteous and holy, but He is also merciful and gracious. This is His word to us, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11).

The only way we can escape the awful judgment of God is by turning to Him in repentance for our sins, and by faith in Jesus Christ. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord; let us confess our sins to the Lord and put our trust in Jesus Christ.

4

The Day of the Lord

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!

— 2 PETER 3:11-12 RSV

When Peter says, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,” we come once more to the main theme of this letter. Those who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour must demonstrate that faith in holy and godly living. The emphasis is on individual character and behavior. God’s people are to be holy as He is holy. Peter comes back to this theme in the third chapter in which he speaks about the coming of the day of the Lord, the time of the end. In view of the fact that ultimately this world will be destroyed and there will be a new world, believers have the greatest possible incentive to holy living.

The opening statement in this chapter indicates that he has covered these subjects with his readers many times. He speaks of these things, now, by way of reminder to stir them up to be faithful to Jesus Christ in their daily life. In doing this, Peter shows us that he is a good preacher and teacher. He is not afraid to repeat. Samuel Johnson said, “It is not sufficiently considered that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed.”

But Peter is also a good pastor. He is deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of his people. In view of the false teachers in the church and the deep depravity of their pagan environment, he reminds them of the danger they are in and points out the necessity of constant vigilance to remain true to Jesus Christ. This teaches us something about preaching. If we would be saved and stand in the last day, we must come under the continuous admonition of the Word of God. Calvin says that “the minds of the godly become dim and rusty when admonitions cease.”

In order that we may benefit from these apostolic admonitions, let us begin our study of the chapter by observing Peter’s teaching about the day of the Lord.

This phrase runs all through the New Testament as we can see from this compilation by Leon Morris. The day of the Lord is:

- *the day of God* (2 Peter 3:12)
- *the day of the Lord Jesus* (2 Cor. 5:5)
- *the day of Christ* (Phil. 2:16)
- *the last day* (John 6:39)
- *the great day* (Jude 6)
- *the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God* (Rom. 2:5)
- *the day of redemption* (Eph. 4:30)
- *the day of visitation* (1 Peter 2:12)
- *the great day of God the Almighty* (Rev. 16:14)
- *the day of judgment* (1 John 4:17)

It will help us to understand the meaning of this day better if we take a brief look at the three events which Peter singles out as comprising that day. The first is the second coming of Christ, the second, the final judgment, and the third, the consummation of history in the end of time. These events are discussed in the rest of the New Testament in some detail and Peter must have covered this with his readers many times as we have already seen. His purpose in this second letter is to stress the certainty of these events in order to stimulate their obedience and loyalty to Jesus Christ. A study of Peter's treatment of each event will show how he carries out that purpose.

First, he defends the second coming of Jesus Christ against the mockers and scoffers who ridiculed the whole idea of His coming. He reminds his readers that the prophets of the Old Testament had predicted that scoffers would come denying the second coming of Christ. He also reminds his readers that the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles had given the same warnings. We, too, need to hear these reminders and warnings because we live in a day of widespread rejection and denial of the return of the Lord to this earth. There are scoffers in the church today who, like the ancient mockers, ridicule the whole idea of a personal return of Christ. Furthermore, when we examine the objections of the false teachers of the first century to the personal return of the Lord, we will find that the skeptics and critics of the twentieth century are still using the same old arguments against the second coming of Christ.

Peter's answer to the scoffers has three parts. First, he answers their argument that the Lord will never come again personally because God does not intervene with the order of nature. They badgered the early Christians with their philosophy that there are no changes in nature.

They said that “all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” When we read this objection to the second coming of Christ we see how little things have changed in 1900 years. This is exactly the same objection that the twentieth-century secularist makes to the whole message of the Bible about creation and providence and miracles. The modern doctrine that nature is a completely closed system is not new and it is not true. A number of the most advanced scientists have already abandoned it.

Peter first answers the argument of the immutability of nature by affirming the fact of creation, and then by demonstrating the fact of God’s intervention in nature. He reminds the believers that the material universe has not always existed, but that it came into existence by the creative act of God. The apostle cites the creation account in Genesis to support it. As evidence of God’s intervention in the natural order since the creation of the world he cites the flood in the days of Noah, “by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.”

Having answered the objections of the scoffers to the personal return of Jesus Christ, Peter then reaffirms the certainty of Christ’s coming. “But the day of the Lord will come.” When Jesus ascended into heaven two messengers said to the disciples as they gazed heavenward, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11). The whole New Testament gives one consistent testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ will come again. The coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church.

Peter’s second answer to the objection of the scoffers to the coming of Christ is that they do not really know God. They ignore the fact that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. From God’s point of view there is no delay because there is no time with God. With Him there is only an everlasting present.

The third part of Peter’s answer to the mockers is that the delay in the Lord’s coming is an act of God’s grace. Peter says, “It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling his promise, as some suppose, but that he is very patient with you, because it is not his will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance” (3:9 NEB). Here we have a clear-cut statement of one of the great truths of the Bible. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He has made provision for their salvation believe are saved. But at the end of the gospel age the door of salvation by sending His Son Jesus Christ to make atonement for their sin and rebellion. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”

This is the gospel and this is the gospel age. This period between the first and second coming of Christ is the day of grace when the message of the gospel is proclaimed to all men and when those who repent and will be forever closed. This is why Paul says, "Behold, now is the acceptable time; Behold, now is the day of salvation."

If you are outside of Jesus Christ now, if you have never personally responded to the invitation of the gospel, answer the call now. This is the day when Jesus stands at the door and knocks saying, "If any man will open the door I will come in to him." But at His second coming He will come as judge and then the door of salvation will be closed. Remember the parable of the ten virgins. When the bridegroom came, the five foolish virgins found that the door was shut. They called, "Lord, Lord, open to us," but He replied, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." The Lord then added a word of admonition for all of us when He said, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:11-13).

This leads us to the second event of the end time, the judgment. Peter says, "But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (3:7). When the Bible speaks of the day of judgment, it refers to the final judgment. There are temporal judgments of God in history and Peter has already mentioned some of these. The destruction of the world by the Hood in the days of Noah and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot were temporal judgments of God upon the wickedness of that age, but the Bible everywhere teaches that there will be a final judgment at the end of the age. That Peter refers to this final judgment can be seen by the fact that he links it to the end of the world when he says, "The heavens and the earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

In the final judgment the righteous will be vindicated and rewarded and the wicked will be punished. No one emphasized this more often than Jesus Christ. One-third of His parables are parables of judgment. As an example let me remind you of the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus said, "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 25:31-34). The apostle John also describes the great day of judgment in the book of Revelation when he says, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who

sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done” (Rev. 20:11-12). The third event in the day of the Lord is the consummation of history with a dramatic finale. The Bible teaches us that history has a goal. It moves in a specific direction and it comes to a climax and conclusion. We desperately need this message of the Bible today because it is the only answer to the hopelessness and frustration of our age.

In Peter’s description of the consummation of all things two points are stressed. The first is the dissolution of the elements by fire. He says, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (3:10). This also was predicted by the prophets. Isaiah says, “All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll” (Isa. 34:4). In this connection we may also recall that Jesus said, “The heavens will pass away but my words will not pass away.”

Scholars differ on the interpretation of Peter’s statement that the elements will be dissolved with fire. Some commentators take these expressions symbolically as teaching a complete moral renovation of the universe. There are others who say that these statements must be understood literally. One of these is the contemporary commentator, Bo Reicke, who comments on the passage, “The solar system and the great galaxies, even space-time relationships will be abolished . . . All elements which make up the physical world will be dissolved by heat and utterly melt away. It is a picture which in an astonishing degree corresponds to what might actually happen according to modern theories of the physical universe.”

The second thing Peter tells us in this passage about the consummation of all things is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. “But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (3:13). Here again Peter is supported by the predictions of the prophets; for Isaiah said, “For behold I create new heavens and a new earth.” This is as far as Peter’s letter takes us in the information it gives us about the end time.

This universe in which we now live will be dissolved, and God will create a new heaven and a new earth. He has already made a beginning of the new creation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His resurrection is not only the guarantee of the new and glorious world in which righteousness dwells, but His resurrection body is a pattern of the

new heaven and the new earth. It will be a real world but it will be a spiritual world, for “this corruption must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.” Peter doesn’t give us a blueprint of life in that world, but he assures us of the reality of it. In the same way his beloved fellow apostle John encourages the believers to put their trust in the Lord who has prepared great things for them. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Let me now repeat Peter’s question with which we started this message. Seeing that all these things are to be, “what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness?” One of the best answers I know to that question is found in a hymn by Edward Mote:

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

5

Christian Growth

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

— 2 PETER 3:18 RSV

J. B. Phillips' heading for this section of 2 Peter is, "Never Lose Sight of the Eternal World." This shows how relevant this little letter is for Christian living in today's world. The spreading denial of the eternal world, even in the church, is eating like a cancer into the faith of millions of church members. The appalling decline in character, in morals, in spiritual vitality is the fruit of the increasing skepticism that has crept into the church.

In the first part of this chapter Peter shows that our view of the future has a direct bearing on the life we live in this present world. The false teachers mocked the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and the world to come, and their teaching resulted in immoral living. Peter reminds the believers of his day that the second coming of Christ and the certainty of judgment should stir them up to all holy living and godliness. This is also God's message to the church today.

In the concluding verse of the letter he adds one final point of instruction about the Christian life: there must be growth and progress. Someone has said that the Christian life is like riding a bicycle: you must keep moving or you will fall off. Paul, in an autobiographical passage in Philippians, speaks of his own experience in Christ when he says, "Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

In studying Peter's exhortation to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we will begin with a brief look at the theology of Christian growth. At the very beginning of this message it must be pointed out that the area of growth of which the New Testament always speaks is in the Christian's life and character, not in his standing and position before God. In describing these two aspects of our salvation we must use the familiar language of the New Testament, making the distinction between justification and sanctification.

Justification is the gracious act of God in which He pardons our sins, once and for all. It deals with the guilt of sin, man's alienation from God. Here we must remember that all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

There is no just man, not one;
No one who understands, no one who seeks God.
All have swerved aside, all alike have become debased;
There is no one to show kindness; no, not one.

Sin incurs guilt and punishment, but in the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross the penalty of sin has been paid. On the basis of this sacrifice God pardons the sinner and imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This pardon is obtained through faith. Paul sums it up when he says, "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). All those who are justified are justified completely. Here there are no degrees, for the newest believer is as fully justified as one who has been in Christ for many years.

The other aspect of salvation, the inward renewal of the believer, his spiritual transformation, is called sanctification, by which we mean "the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man in the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness" (Westminster Shorter Catechism). This is the area where spiritual growth occurs. So much for the theology of Christian growth.

Let us now consider the specific areas in which growth takes place in the life of a believer. The exhortation is, "grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ." We will take these two areas of growth separately, beginning with Peter's exhortation to grow in grace. We may distinguish three meanings of the word grace in the New Testament and all of them may be applied to Christian growth.

First, grace may be understood in this passage in its primary New Testament meaning as the undeserved favor of God. "By grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." We do not earn our salvation and we do not deserve it. Grace is God's redeeming love acting for our salvation. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

It may be asked, since grace is entirely of God, how can we grow in it? Well, for one thing, we may grow in our appropriation of it. We need to come to Him daily for the forgiveness of our sins. We need constantly to rely upon His mercy. We need the assurance that He loves us and that He gave Himself for us, and all this is available for us in the gospel of God's free grace.

To grow in this grace also means to grow in our appreciation of it. The more we realize our utter unworthiness, our helplessness in sin, the more grateful we are to God for His wonderful grace in saving us from

sin. Like the Psalmist we too exclaim, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

The second use of the word grace is to designate the gifts and qualities of character God bestows upon us through faith in Jesus Christ and in reliance upon the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. These are faith, love, patience, a forgiving spirit, and compassion. All these qualities of character are called graces in the New Testament. Paul says, "But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:7). This aspect of Christian growth is well described for us in a beautiful hymn by P. P. Bliss:

More holiness give me, more striving within,
More patience in suffering, more sorrow for sin;
More faith in my Saviour, more sense of His care,
More joy in His service, more purpose in prayer.

The third use of the word grace in the New Testament is to denote the power and strength that Christ gives us to enable us to continue in the Christian faith and holy living. This use of the word is found in the popular gospel song, "He giveth more grace, when the burden is greater; He sendeth more strength when the labors increase." This is the usual meaning of the word grace in the salutations of the New Testament letters which almost always begin "grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Peter must have had this meaning of grace in mind when after this familiar salutation of his second letter he said, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature" (1:3-4). The second area in which we are to grow is in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Knowledge here means not only intellectual apprehension, but spiritual understanding. To grow in knowledge means not only to know more about Christ, but to know Him by experience in the fellowship of His presence with us. It may be said that this knowledge is fundamental because growth in grace depends on our growth in knowledge.

How much we need this exhortation can be seen in the appalling ignorance of Jesus Christ that exists in the churches today. There are millions of church members who never read the Bible, never read a serious Christian book, never even read a Christian tract or a Christian paper. There is an alarming decline in teaching in the churches and in the

homes of church members. There is very little teaching in much of the preaching of the day. In fact it almost seems as if there is a conspiracy forming against preaching in some areas of the church. This is evident in the lack of emphasis on preaching in many seminaries.

We can feel this in carrying on this broadcast of the gospel of Christ. We are constantly being told that nobody will listen if we preach and teach the historic gospel of Christ. We are told not to preach from the Bible, or if we do, to disguise it as much as possible or people will not listen to us. This broadcast was started 26 years ago in order to preach the gospel; and we carry it on in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

We also continue in this teaching ministry because we are aware of the disastrous consequences which come over a people who do not know God. Speaking through the prophet Hosea, God said, "My people perish for lack of knowledge." Millions are dying today because they do not know God. I remind you of Calvin's famous statement, "Faith is not based on ignorance, but on knowledge." No knowledge, no faith; no faith, no salvation.

The knowledge of Christ is inexhaustible. In the nineteenth century a great Bible teacher, nearing the end of his life, said, "I feel as if I have only investigated a small garden bed, and there is a continent still before me." In Jesus Christ are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Let me speak a word to those of you who are students. I want to commend to you the serious pursuit of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. Here is a subject worthy of your best intellectual and spiritual efforts. All the emphasis today is on science. We have made enormous gains in the scientific knowledge of the universe and the forces operative within it, but for the ultimate things science is a dead-end street. As evidence let me remind you of the identity crisis on the university campuses—not only in this country, but in the entire Western world. The questions, "Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?" can never be answered by science, for this does not come within its scope. These are the ultimate questions and you will find the answer to them only in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Having considered the areas of Christian growth, let us now direct our attention to the tests or marks by which we may measure our spiritual

growth. It must be understood that spiritual growth is not measured by days or years. We do not automatically increase in love, in faith and knowledge because we grow older. It must not be assumed that because a person has been in the church for many years, he is therefore a mature Christian. Growth is not measured by seniority, nor by the number of years we have been members of a church or active in its organizations. The youngest Christian may surpass the oldest in spiritual growth. This can be observed when we consider the tests for growth in grace.

The first test is an increase in humility. The characteristic of the natural man is pride, self-admiration, conceit. This is well illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. It was not the proud Pharisee who was accepted by God, but the humble publican who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Those who grow in holiness have an increasing sense of their own guilt and unworthiness. Spurgeon has a wonderful saying, "Self and Christ can never come together. When I stand near self, Christ is small; when I stand near Christ, self is small."

The second mark or test of Christian growth is an increasing consciousness of sin and desire for forgiveness and the righteousness of Christ. This is well expressed in Wesley's hymn—

O for a heart to praise my God!
A heart from sin set free;
A heart that always feels Thy blood,
So freely shed for me;

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
My great Redeemer's throne,
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone.

The third mark of growing in grace is an increased earnestness in reaching the goal of full Christian maturity. There are many people who have a distorted view of what it means to be saved. They accept Jesus Christ by faith in response to the admonition "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." But from there on, they act as if there is nothing more to do and as if there is no other goal in Christian preaching. We must understand that the Christian life does begin in accepting Christ as Saviour, but from that point on there must be growth and progress in Christian living in the development of Christian character. The Christian life is not static. There must be continued advances.

This is clearly indicated in Paul's summary statement in Ephesians 4 on the purpose of the Christian ministry. All these gifts are given to us and they must be exercised "until we come unto the measure of the

stature of the fullness of Christ.” This aspect of Christian growth is developed by Paul in the figure of a runner in a race. The runner makes progress. He passes markers. He is not running on a treadmill. So, for the believer, there are victories won over sin. There is marked increase in the power to resist sin. There is more interest in spiritual things and less in worldly things. These are old-fashioned words, but they need to be heard by many church members today.

Having studied together Peter’s exhortation to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, let me close with an apostolic greeting. The apostle John, writing to a close friend in Christ, says, “My dear Gaius, I pray that you may enjoy good health, and that all may go well with you, as I know it goes well with your soul” (3 John 2 NEB).