LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE ONE

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-2

With this message we begin our Life-study of the Epistles of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude. In the past we have somewhat neglected the writings of Peter. We have spent much time and energy on other books of the Bible, especially the writings of Paul. Perhaps a part of the reason for our neglect of 1 and 2 Peter is the over-exalting of Peter by Catholicism. Catholicism considers Peter their first pope. We do not agree with the claim of Catholicism concerning this. Thus, our Peter, the Peter revealed in the Bible, is in certain respects different from the concept of Peter held by those in Catholicism. Because Catholicism exalts Peter in an improper way, I have paid less attention to Peter's writings.

However, I have given a number of messages on 1 and 2 Peter. In 1973 I had a conference on 1 and 2 Peter in Vancouver, British Columbia. Also in the same year I gave messages on grace in the writings of Peter during a conference held in San Francisco. These messages were published in *The Stream* (in Vol. 12, No. 1, February 1974, and No. 2, May 1974). In those messages I stressed strongly that Peter does have something rich, high, and particular to minister to us.

THE CHARACTER OF PETER'S WRITINGS

Paul wrote fourteen Epistles, but Peter wrote only two, containing a total of eight chapters. Nevertheless, even though Peter's writings are brief, he uses certain terms that cannot be found in the writings of Paul. For example, Peter speaks of the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19).

Although Paul speaks concerning the blood of Christ, he does not use this particular expression, *the precious blood*.

At this point we need to see that a particular characteristic of Peter's writing is his use of adjectives, especially high adjectives. Along with the precious blood, Peter mentions the incorruptible seed, unfading glory, and divine power. Paul does not use these expressions. Peter, however, had the habit of using such adjectives. But this was more than a habit; it is an indication that something had truly been built into Peter's character.

During the years he followed the Lord Jesus, Peter saw many things. But during those years he did not know the significance of what he saw. In fact, as we read the four Gospels, we may think that Peter was foolish. Although Peter did not behave in a clever way, the Lord Jesus selected him and put him ahead of all the other disciples. For this reason, in the Gospels Peter's name is usually listed as the first of the disciples.

Peter did not have the spiritual understanding of the things he had seen. He lacked the proper apprehension of them in life. This was why in the message given in chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen of John, the Lord Jesus spoke of the Spirit of reality: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:12-13).

The Spirit of reality did come on the day of Christ's resurrection, and Peter was probably the first one to be infused with this Spirit. This explains why the Peter in the first chapter of Acts is so different from the Peter in the Gospels. In the Gospels, Peter often spoke in a nonsensical way. In Acts 1, however, Peter did not speak like this. Rather, when he stood up to speak, he was transparent, crystal clear. Peter became transparent because the Spirit of reality had entered into him. This wonderful Spirit, who had been infused into Peter, then reminded him of all the things he had seen and heard. This can be proved by

Peter's own writings. For instance, in 2 Peter 1:16-18 he refers to the time he, James, and John were with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. This indicates that the Spirit of reality had reminded him of that event and had shown him the significance of it.

The Spirit reminded Peter of all the things he saw when he was with the Lord Jesus for three and a half years. Peter saw many things, but he did not have the proper apprehension or understanding of them at the time. But after the coming of the Spirit of reality and through the Spirit's reminding him of those things, Peter began to understand their significance. Peter may have said to himself, "Oh, now I know why the Lord bothered me so much and why He often exposed me. I recall the way I spoke to the tax collector. He asked me if the Lord paid the poll tax, and immediately I answered, 'Yes.' Right after that the Lord Jesus put me to shame by telling me that it was not necessary for Him to pay the half-shekel. Then He sent me fishing and told me I would catch a fish with a shekel in its mouth. Now I know that when I answered with a yes, the Lord would say no, and when I would say no, He would say yes." After the Lord's resurrection and after the Spirit of reality had come into Peter, he underwent such a change.

Through the Spirit of reality something solid, high, rich, and strong was built into the very fibers of Peter's being. Therefore, when he spoke concerning the Lord's blood, he added the word "precious." This adjective touches our feeling. As he uttered this word, Peter must have had a certain feeling within him regarding the preciousness of the blood of Christ. In 1:18 and 19 he says, "Knowing that you were redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ." Do you not believe that Peter expressed a particular feeling when he uttered these words? In verse 23 of the same chapter Peter goes on to say, "Having been regenerated, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God." In this verse Peter speaks

of the incorruptible seed and of the living and abiding word. In 1:4 he describes our inheritance as "incorruptible and undefiled and unfading." Thus, in these verses, as illustrations of Peter's practice of using adjectives, we have the words precious, incorruptible, living, abiding, undefiled, and unfading. This indicates that in this particular characteristic Peter is stronger, higher, and richer than Paul.

First Peter 2:21 says that Christ suffered on our behalf, leaving us a model that we should follow in His steps. The Greek word rendered "model" is difficult to translate. Some versions use the word "example." Literally, the Greek word means a writing copy. Thus, the Lord Jesus is our writing copy, an underwriting used by students to trace letters in learning to draw them. A modern term to describe the process of copying is "xeroxing." Xeroxing does not involve following or imitating. On the contrary, xeroxing is a matter of reproducing an original. (See the message entitled "Spiritual Xeroxing," published in *The Stream* Vol. 12, No. 1, February 1974). Christ is a writing copy not for us to imitate nor merely to follow. Rather, He is a writing copy to be xeroxed into us. This means that we all should become reproductions, xerox copies, of Christ. This is the significance of the Greek word translated "model" in 2:21, a term not used by Paul in his writings.

In 3:7 Peter uses another unique expression--"grace of life." We are familiar with the words grace and life, but not with the expression "grace of life." As weaker vessels, the wives are joint-heirs with their husbands of the grace of life. What a sweet expression! We, however, may be familiar with the grace of salvation or the grace of forgiveness without ever having been impressed with the grace of life. In his writings, Paul does not use this particular precious and sweet expression.

In 4:17 Peter says, "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God." Here we have a particular expression on the negative side: God's judgment beginning from His own household. Paul does not tell us this. But

Peter is very particular in the matter of God's judgment beginning from His own household.

Paul often uses the expression "grace to you and peace." Peter, however, twice speaks of grace and peace being multiplied. In 1:2 he says, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied," and in 2 Peter 1:2, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Peter desires not only that grace be with the saints, but that grace be multiplied to them. Have you ever thought about what it means for grace to be multiplied? Have you ever heard of a sermon or message telling you that grace and peace can be multiplied? Most of us may find this expression puzzling. Peter's use of the word "multiplied" is another illustration of his particularity. In this matter, not even Paul was as particular as Peter, for he never spoke in his Epistles of grace and peace being multiplied.

The word multiplied indicates that a certain thing is present and that instead of having another of the same thing added, we need what we have to be multiplied. This means that we need the multiplication of the grace we already have. We do not need another grace. What we need is to have multiplied the grace we have already.

With the thought of multiplied grace as the base, Peter goes on to speak in 4:10 of varied grace: "Each one according as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God." We all should be good stewards of what Peter calls varied grace, grace in different aspects and of different categories. Peter mentions grace again in 5:10, where he speaks of the God of all grace. Therefore, in 1 Peter we have four unique expressions concerning grace: grace of life, multiplied grace, varied grace, and all grace. The grace of life is being multiplied in us. Then it becomes the varied grace and eventually, the all grace. As a result, we do not have grace just from one direction, but from many directions, for example, from the heavens and from the earth, from our husband or wife, and from our children. The more children we have, the more aspects of grace we shall experience. If

you have four children, you will enjoy grace in four aspects. But if you have more children, you will enjoy more aspects of grace. In like manner, if a brother is unmarried, he will lack a particular aspect of grace. A married brother will experience grace in a particular aspect. Furthermore, if a brother's wife is naturally very good, he may be short of a rich aspect of grace. But if his wife is difficult and even somewhat stubborn, he will have the opportunity to enjoy a very specific and rich aspect of grace. Grace varies according to our situation and environment. For example, it will vary according to the kind of wife you have, whether she is naturally submissive or difficult. If your wife is good, you will not have as much grace as if she were difficult. Likewise, if you do not have any children, you will not enjoy the aspect of grace related to children. Oh, we all need to know this varied grace!

In 2 Peter 1:3 Peter says, "As His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness." It seems that Peter likes to use the word "all." In 5:10 he speaks of all grace; here in 2 Peter 1:3, of all things. The words "all things which relate to life and godliness" are a tremendous expression. We cannot find such an expression in the Epistles of Paul. Peter is the one who tells us that the divine power has granted us all things related to life and godliness, that is, all things pertaining to life inwardly and to godliness, the expression of God, outwardly.

In 2 Peter 1:4 Peter goes on to say that God "has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises, that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature." The Greek word rendered "exceedingly great" is difficult to translate. If it is rendered literally, it should be translated as "greatest." God has given us promises that are not only precious, but promises that are exceedingly great.

According to 2 Peter 1:4, God has granted us precious and exceedingly great promises so that through them we may become partakers of the divine nature. We are partakers of the divine nature. Often when I come to this point, I am beside myself with joy. How marvelous that we

can be partakers of the divine nature! Do you realize that you are a partaker of the divine nature, a partaker of the nature of God? We human beings can actually become partakers of the divine nature. This means that, as believers in Christ, we have not only the divine life, but we are now partaking, enjoying, participating in, the divine nature. If Paul were to read such an expression, he would have to say, "Brother Peter, in this matter, your writing surpasses mine. "

In his writings Paul does not tell us anything about the new heavens and new earth. This is mentioned in the writings of Peter and of John, who was intimately related to Peter. (Often in the book of Acts the names of Peter and John are put together.) In the book of Revelation John gives a long record of the new heavens and the new earth. Peter, however, utters only a short word in 2 Peter 3:13: "But according to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." Peter's word concerning the new heavens and the new earth is yet another illustration of how his writings contain particulars not found in the writings of Paul.

THE SPAN AND SCOPE OF PETER'S WRITINGS

Peter's writings are brief, containing only eight chapters. Nevertheless, the span of Peter's writings is vast. For example, in 1:2 he speaks of the foreknowledge of God the Father. Then in 1:20 he says that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. Based upon His foreknowledge, God chose us. As we shall see, we were chosen before the foundation of the world. Peter's mentioning of the foreknowledge of God and of Christ being foreknown before the foundation of the world indicates that the span of his writing begins from eternity past, from before the foundation of the world. Then, as we have indicated, Peter has a word concerning the new heavens and the new earth. This refers to eternity in the future, for it will be in eternity future that there will be the new

heavens and new earth. By this we can see that the span of Peter's writings embraces the two eternities; it goes from eternity past to eternity future.

What about the scope of Peter's Epistles? The scope also is very broad. The scope of Peter's ministry is wide. This is indicated by the first two verses of 1 Peter, chapter one: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen pilgrims of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." How broad is the scope and how rich is the content of these verses! Here we have the Father's selection, the Spirit's sanctification, and the Son's redemption. Of course, in verse 2 Peter does not use the word redemption. He purposely uses another expression--the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." It would have been too simple merely to use the word redemption. But to speak of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ is to expound the matter of redemption, define it, and apply it. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ is the application of redemption. It is redemption expounded, defined, and applied.

We may use a special definition to describe the contents of 1:1 and 2. What we have in these verses is the revelation of the economy of the Trinity of the Godhead operating on the elect for their participation in the Triune God. Here we see the operation of the Triune God upon His chosen people for their participation in His full salvation. We shall cover this definition more fully a little later. At this point, we refer to it to indicate how broad is the scope of Peter's writings.

First Peter is a difficult book to translate. In this Epistle, Peter covers many points, and his composition is not smooth. For example, some of his sentences are extremely long. Although Peter was a fisherman, a countryman from Galilee, he used some extraordinary Greek words. Peter's writing certainly is rich and high in the points it covers. Therefore, we need to love Peter and appreciate him and his ministry.

GOD'S UNIVERSAL GOVERNMENT

It is not easy to say what the main subject of 1 Peter is. Even after reading 1 and 2 Peter many times, you still will find it difficult to say what the main subject of these Epistles is. In this matter, Peter is again very particular. He talks about a certain thing, but he does not give us a term to describe that thing.

In his two Epistles Peter is on the subject of God's universal government. These two books speak concerning the universal government of God. As we know, Matthew is on the kingdom. Do not think that the government and the kingdom are identical. No, the kingdom is one thing and the government is another. A country or nation has a government. The government, however, is not the nation; rather, the government is the administrative center of the nation. For example, the government in Washington, D.C., is the administrative center of the United States. Although Matthew presents the kingdom, the government is not found in that book. The government of God is in the writings of Peter.

Mark presents service; Luke, salvation; and John, life. Thus, in the four Gospels we have the kingdom, service, salvation, and life. But we do not have the divine government. In his Epistles Peter makes up this lack by showing us God's universal government.

God's government covers the entire universe. We know this by the fact that Peter speaks of the new heavens and new earth. This indicates God's universal government. Eventually, in eternity future, everything will be right and in good order, for righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and new earth. Today the earth is filled with unrighteousness and disorder. Nevertheless, God is still governing heaven and earth.

God governs by judging. This is the way God carries out His government. As an elderly man who has some knowledge of world history both by study and observation, I can testify that I bow before God. He is the governing One, and He governs by judging. God has judged Hitler, Stalin, and other evildoers. On the one hand, to some extent, God tolerated them in doing certain things that

served His purpose, such as Hitler's slaughtering of the Jews, which caused the Jews to be one. Nevertheless, God judged them.

In 1 and 2 Peter we have a record of God's judgment. God judged the earth by means of the flood, the deluge. Later He judged Sodom and Gomorrah. The history of God's judgment also includes the judgment upon the children of Israel in the wilderness. During their years of wandering, the children of Israel experienced God's judgment again and again. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, all those who came out of Egypt, including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, died in the wilderness under God's judgment. Furthermore, the Bible says that thousands of the disobedient ones were strewn by God in the wilderness. That was God's judgment.

We should not think that God judges only evildoers such as Hitler and Stalin. God also judges His own people. According to 4:17, God's governing judgment begins from His own household: "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?" This is God's government.

What is the purpose of God's governing judgment? God judges in order to clear up His universe. The universe was created by God for a positive purpose, but Satan came in to defile it. Now God is cleansing the universe through judgment. He is doing a thorough work of cleaning the entire universe. Eventually, the universe will be new. Do you know the significance of the new heavens and the new earth mentioned in 2 Peter 3? The significance is that it indicates the newness of God's universe.

God will not live or dwell in a place that is unclean. Thus, God is cleansing, purifying, the universe. First He purifies us, His household. We are now the center of His cleaning work. Do you not sometimes say to yourself, "Why is it that the more I love the Lord Jesus, the more difficulties I have? My relatives are flourishing; they are doing very well. But my situation seems to get worse and

worse." Some saints have problems with their health; others are disappointed with their children. The reason we have difficulties is that God's judgment begins from His own household. You and I are under God's judgment.

The reason the two Epistles of Peter were written, especially the first, was that the dispersed Jewish believers were suffering persecution. They were undergoing a fiery trial. Peter compares this persecution to the burning of a furnace. Because the believers were troubled and perhaps doubting, Peter wrote to instruct them and also to comfort them. In 5:10 he says, "But the God of all grace, who called you into His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you." Here Peter seems to be telling the believers that there is no need for them to doubt, for God is perfecting them. Just as stones are cut in order to be fit together in a building, we also need to be "cut" in order to be perfected, established, strengthened, and grounded. Peter wrote to comfort the suffering, persecuted saints, showing them that all of them were under God's government. The exercise of God's government is first upon His own children.

The subject of 1 Peter, therefore, is the Christian life under the government of God. The subject of 2 Peter is a little different: it is the divine provision and the divine government. In his second Epistle Peter shows us that God is not only governing us, ruling us, but also providing us with whatever we need. God supplies us all things to live a holy life, a Christian life, under His government.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWO

THE OPERATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD UPON THE ELECT FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN HIS FULL SALVATION

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:1-2

A TRANSFORMED PERSON

First Peter 1:1 says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen pilgrims of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." The name Peter denotes his regenerated and spiritual man, whereas Simon denotes his natural man by birth (John 1:42; Matt. 16:17-18). Originally, he was Simon, not Peter. The name Simon denotes the old man, the natural man, full of self. But when Peter came to the Lord Jesus, the Lord immediately gave him a new name. The Lord looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (John 1:42). The Lord Jesus never does anything merely in name. His changing of Simon's name had a reality behind it. By changing Simon's name the Lord Jesus indicated that He would change Simon into Peter, into a stone.

If we read the four Gospels and Peter's Epistles, we may find it difficult to believe that Simon, a Galilean fisherman, could be such a writer. By the time he wrote his Epistles, Peter had been changed, transformed. One of the hymns in our hymnal begins with the words, "Earthen vessel I was made, Christ in me the treasure laid" (Hymns, #548). The last stanza of this hymn says, "Transformation is my need." Simon was an earthen vessel; Peter, however, was a transformed person. He had been regenerated and had become altogether new. Therefore, in his two Epistles we cannot see his flesh, the self, or his natural life. Instead,

what we see is the new man expressed in his writing. Christ is expressed in Peter's writing.

In 1:1 Peter refers to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. From Galatians 2:8 we know that Peter was an apostle to the Jews.

CHOSEN PILGRIMS OF THE DISPERSION

The first Epistle of Peter is addressed to "the chosen pilgrims of the dispersion." These chosen ones were sojourning on the earth, somewhat like the children of Israel sojourning in the wilderness. Although they were chosen ones, they had been scattered and they were sojourning.

The word "chosen" brings in the thought of God's government. Both of Peter's Epistles (2 Pet. 3:1) are concerned with the government of God. God's government is universal; it deals with all His creatures in order that He may have a clean and pure universe (2 Pet. 3:13) to express Himself. In the New Testament age, this dealing begins from His chosen people, His elect, His own household (1 Pet. 4:17), especially from His chosen pilgrims who are dispersed and sojourning among the nations, the Gentiles, as His testimony. Hence, these two books emphasize the believers' being chosen (2:9; 5:13; 2 Pet. 1:10). As God's chosen race, God's choice, God's particular possession, the dispersed chosen pilgrims need to see that they are under God's governmental dealing for a positive purpose, regardless of the situation and environment they are in. Anything and everything that happens to them, whether persecution or any other kind of trial and suffering (1 Pet. 1:6; 5:9), is just a part of God's precious governmental dealing. Such a vision will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground them (5:10) that they may grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18).

The Greek word rendered pilgrims can also be translated sojourners. Strictly speaking, this term in this book refers to the Jewish believers who were sojourners, foreigners, dispersed in the Gentile world (2:11-12). However, the principle of pilgrims can be applied to all

believers, both Jewish and Gentile, because all are the heavenly pilgrims sojourning as foreigners on this earth. These pilgrims are God's elect, chosen by God out of the human race, out of all the nations (Rev. 5:9-10), according to His foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2).

The term "dispersion" was familiar to all the scattered Jews among the nations. This word indicates that this Epistle was written to the Jewish believers. It is from the Greek word that means to scatter or spread abroad, with a root meaning to sow. This implies that the scattered Jews were sown as seeds among the Gentiles.

In verse 1 Peter speaks of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. All these were provinces in Asia Minor, between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

CHOSEN, SANCTIFIED, AND REDEEMED

First Peter 1:2 says, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." The phrase "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" modifies "chosen" in verse 1. Here, the divine economy through the operation of the Trinity of the Godhead for the believers' participation in the Triune God is unveiled. God the Father's choosing, His selection, is the initiation; God the Spirit's sanctification carries out the selection of God the Father; and God the Son's redemption, signified by the sprinkling of His blood, is the completion. Through these steps the believers have been chosen, sanctified, and redeemed into the enjoyment of the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--into whom they have been baptized (Matt. 28:19) and whose virtues they are enjoying (2 Cor. 13:14).

In verse 2 we cannot find the words "Trinity" or "Triune God." Nevertheless, the fact of the Trinity of the Godhead is contained here, for this verse speaks of the Father's choosing, the Spirit's sanctification, and the Son's redemption. Does this not refer to the Triune God? Is this not the Trinity of the Godhead operating, working, upon His chosen people? Yes, here we see the operation of the

Triune God upon the elect for their participation in His full salvation.

In verse 2 Peter speaks of the foreknowledge of God the Father. God chose us before the foundation of the world, in eternity past (Eph. 1:4). Hence, the divine foreknowledge was exercised.

Sanctification of the Spirit here is not the sanctification of the Spirit which comes after justification through the redemption of Christ, as revealed in Romans 6:19, 22; and 15:16. Here, sanctification of the Spirit, as the main emphasis of this chapter, an emphasis on holiness (vv. 15-16), is before the obedience of faith in Christ's redemption, that is, before justification through Christ's redemption (1 Cor. 6:11), indicating that the believers' obedience unto faith in Christ results from the Spirit's sanctifying work. The Spirit's sanctification in its two aspects is inclusively revealed in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, which is for the full salvation of God to His chosen people. God's full salvation is carried out in the sphere of the Spirit's sanctification.

In 1:2 three different prepositions are used for the three steps taken by the Triune God to bring His elect into participation in His full salvation: kata, according to, denotes the ground, the base; en, in, the sphere; and eis, unto, the end, the result. The believers' obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) in the redemption of Christ and the application of the sprinkling of the blood to them is the result of the Spirit's sanctification based upon God the Father's selection.

THE SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

This verse also refers to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. In typology, the sprinkling of the atoning blood ushered the sprinkled people into the old covenant (Exo. 24:6-8). Likewise, the sprinkling of Christ's redeeming blood brings the sprinkled believers into the blessing of the new covenant, that is, into the full enjoyment of the Triune God (Heb. 9:13-14). It is a striking mark that separates the sprinkled people from the common ones without God.

GROWING UNTO SALVATION

In his writings Paul does not give us a clear view of God's entire salvation in the way that Peter does. As used in Peter's Epistles, the word "salvation" implies full salvation. In 2:2 Peter says, "As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word, that by it you may grow unto salvation." On the one hand, we have been saved; on the other hand, we still need to grow unto salvation. This means that there is a further salvation that we have not yet reached. In other words we are short of some kind of salvation. We do not yet have it, and we need to grow unto it. We need to keep on growing until we reach, arrive at, full salvation. According to 1:5, this is the salvation that is "ready to be revealed at the last time." When the Lord Jesus comes back, this salvation will be brought in.

We have been saved, and yet we are still suffering. But why do we suffer if we have already been saved? Others may cause us to suffer, and we may even cause suffering to ourselves. For example, do you not suffer as a result of losing your temper? Are you happy when you lose your temper? Some may pray that the Lord will save them from their temper. They may say, "O Lord, save me from my temper. I don't want to lose my temper any more. Lord, You are Immanuel, God with us. You are also Jesus, the One who delivers His people from their sins. I confess that losing my temper is sinful. Lord, You are my Savior. You can deliver me from this sin." However, instead of saving you from your temper, He may allow you to lose it even more. For example, a brother may spend some time praying in the morning. But at breakfast his wife may give him a difficult time and criticize him. First, he tries to suppress his anger. He may ask the Lord to save him and to keep him from losing his temper. However, his wife continues to provoke him until he loses his temper. During the day, the brother suffers as a result of losing his temper with his wife. On the way home from work, the Lord Jesus may tell him to apologize to his wife, something that he finds very difficult to do. Should he refuse and tell the Lord, "I will not apologize to her," the Lord Jesus may say, "If you don't do it, I am through with you." This is an

illustration of the fact that even those who are saved continue to suffer.

On the one hand, the Christian life is a life of enjoyment. But we would all agree that, on the other hand, it is also a life of suffering. Do you not experience suffering in your life as a Christian? What Christian can say that he does not have any suffering? Sometimes we testify that we Christians have a good married life and a happy family life. Yes, this is true, and it is part of our testimony. There are times when the husband, the wife, and the children will happily praise the Lord. But we must also admit that sometimes our family life is not at all like this, for a brother and his wife may argue, and the children may be very unhappy. This indicates that we need the Savior and that we need to grow unto salvation. The Lord does not save us from losing our temper. Rather, it is our growth unto salvation that will save us from this.

We have pointed out that in 1:1 and 2 we have the operation of the Triune God upon His elect for their participation in His full salvation. In these verses the divine economy through the operation of the Three of the Godhead for the believers' participation in the Triune God is revealed. We need to be deeply impressed with this and assimilate the reality of these terms.

GRACE AND PEACE

Verse 2 ends with the words, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied." Grace is God as our enjoyment (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10). Peace is a condition which results from grace. Multiplied grace corresponds to varied grace (1 Pet. 4:10) and all grace (5:10). The believers have received the initial grace; yet this grace needs to be multiplied in them so that they may participate in all grace.

TWO ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT'S SANCTIFICATION

Concerning the sanctification of the Spirit, there are two aspects. We need to know both aspects and what they accomplish. The first aspect of sanctification precedes

justification, and it carries out God's choice, His selection, and brings the chosen ones to the obedience and sprinkling of the blood for their justification. Thus, this aspect of the Spirit's sanctification is before justification through the redemption of Christ. Then, following justification, the Spirit continues to work to sanctify us dispositionally. The sequence is this: God's selection, the Spirit's sanctification, justification, and then subjective sanctification. Not many Christians have seen this. Many Christian teachers say that God's selection comes first, then justification, and then the Spirit's sanctification. However, this does not take into account the two aspects of the sanctification of the Spirit, for it refers only to the second aspect, subjective or dispositional sanctification. We have pointed out that subjective sanctification of the Spirit is revealed in Romans 6 and 15. But before we can have subjective sanctification of the Spirit, we must have the first aspect of the Spirit's sanctification, the sanctifying work that takes place before God's justification.

In eternity past God, according to His foreknowledge, chose us. He selected us and made a decision to gain us. Then in time the Spirit came to us to sanctify us, to set us apart, from the world so that we would obey Christ's redemption. He came to separate us for the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ. When we obey, the blood sprinkles us. It is the sanctifying Spirit who separates us from the world unto the obedience of Christ's blood. First we repent and believe, and then we obey what Christ has done on the cross. Following this, we receive the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. This is the sanctifying work of the Spirit following God's selection to carry out God's choice and to bring us to Christ's redemption.

I can use my own experience to illustrate this aspect of the Spirit's sanctification. I was born into the religion of Christianity, but, of course, I was not born into Christ. As a young person, I became quite rebellious, having seen some things in Christianity that I did not agree with. When I compared the teachings of Confucius with what I saw in Christianity. I told myself that Christianity was

not as good as the teachings of Confucius. I felt that the disciples of Confucius were much better in their behavior and conduct than were the missionaries, pastors, and preachers. But one day, at the age of nineteen, I was arrested by the sanctifying Spirit. A young woman evangelist came to our town, and out of curiosity I went to listen to her. As I sat in the meeting, the Spirit asked me, "What are you doing here? I have been pursuing you for a long time, and now is the time for Me to catch you." I was indeed caught for the Lord at that time. I repented and I began to obey Christ and accept what He did. No doubt, at the same time I received the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, and I experienced the first aspect of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. From that time onward, the Spirit has been continually sanctifying me. Even now this sanctifying work, the second aspect of the Spirit's sanctification, is still going on.

The sanctifying work of the Spirit began before God's justification and it continues afterward. Before justification, we are separated unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ. After justification, we are sanctified subjectively, dispositionally. In 1:2 we have the first aspect; in Romans 6:19 and 22, the second; and in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, the all-inclusive sanctification of the Spirit. The goal of this sanctification is to carry out God's full salvation.

THE ENERGETIC WORKING OF THE TRIUNE GOD

Regarding 1 Peter 1:1 and 2, we can speak of the operation, the energetic working, of the Triune God, for here we have the Father's choosing, the Spirit's sanctification, and the Son's redemption. These three actions are the operation of the Triune God.

The Father's choosing was done before the foundation of the world. This selection was according to God's foreknowledge. Peter's word in 1:2 corresponds to Paul's word in Ephesians 1 and Romans 8, chapters where Paul tells us that in eternity, before the foundation of the world, God chose us according to His foreknowledge. This is God's selection.

The Spirit then comes in to carry out God's selection. God's selection was made in eternity, before the foundation of the world. The Spirit's sanctification, however, takes place in time. We were wandering, having no direction, but the Spirit carried out God's selection of us. As a result, we repented, believed, and received the sprinkling of the blood shed by Christ on the cross. Therefore, we have the move of the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. This is the operation of the Trinity of the Godhead upon His chosen people, His elect, so that they may participate in His full salvation. This is one way of speaking concerning what is revealed in 1:1 and 2.

ENJOYING THE TRIUNE GOD

Another way of speaking regarding the same matter is to say that the energetic working of the Triune God is to bring us into the enjoyment of the Triune God. To participate in God's full salvation is actually to enjoy the Triune God. When we enjoy the Triune God, we are in grace, for grace is God for us to enjoy. It is our enjoyment of the Triune God. According to verse 2, this grace should be multiplied and not merely added. Furthermore, the enjoyment of grace results in peace. This means that peace results from the enjoyment of the Triune God as grace. This is participation in the full salvation of God, and this is the divine economy of the Trinity of the Godhead to bring us into the participation of the Triune God.

We should not think that verses 1 and 2, the introduction to this Epistle, are simple. We should not dismiss them as words written by a fisherman. Peter was a fisherman, but he was a fisherman constituted of the Triune God in His operation. Therefore, Peter knew the Father's selection, the Spirit's sanctification, and the Son's redemption. He knew that the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ brings God's selected people into the full enjoyment of the Triune God as their salvation. This writing is the breath of the all-inclusive Spirit. Every word in these verses is part of the holy breath of the life-giving

Spirit. The scope, content, and span of these verses are marvelous, and we need to study them again and again.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THREE

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:3-4

In the writings of Peter a single word is often rich in meaning. Take, for example, Peter's use of the word "sprinkling" in 1:2. In this verse Peter speaks concerning the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." As Peter wrote these words, it seems he was saying, "You scattered Jewish believers are familiar with the sprinkling of the blood of sheep and goats described in the Old Testament. However, you must realize that the sprinkling of animal blood is a type of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. The old sprinkling, the sprinkling of the blood of animals, merely brought God's people into the Old Testament blessing. But the new sprinkling, the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, brings us into the full enjoyment of God's new covenant." By this example we see that in the Epistles of Peter a single word can indicate a great deal.

THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

In 1:3 Peter goes on to say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead." We need to pay close attention to the definite article used before the word "God." In this verse Peter speaks not only of God, but speaks of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The unbelieving Jews knew about God. Their God was the One who created the universe. But these Jews

would not believe that their God was also the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is an important difference here. Of course, it is not true to say that the Jews believe in one God and that Christians believe in a different God. The crucial point here is that there is a great difference between the understanding and realization concerning God among Jews and among Christians. According to the understanding of the Jews, God is the Creator of the universe, but He is not the God and Father of Jesus Christ. In our understanding, however, God is both the Creator of the universe and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:17). This is the reason Peter uses the definite article before "God" in 1:3.

In 1:3 Peter declares that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has regenerated us unto a living hope according to His great mercy. Here we see that once again Peter uses an adjective: he speaks not merely of God's mercy, but speaks of His great mercy. Paul also speaks concerning God's mercy, but he does not use the adjective "great" to describe it.

REGENERATED UNTO A LIVING HOPE

From 1:3 we see that the Father has not only chosen us, but has also regenerated us. In 1:1 through 3 we have four actions in the following sequence: choosing, sanctifying, redeeming, and regenerating. In eternity past God chose us, selected us. Then His Spirit came to us to separate us. Following that, we received the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, the application of His redemption. At the very moment we were sprinkled outwardly by the blood, we were inwardly regenerated by the sanctifying Spirit. Therefore, following God's choosing, the Spirit's sanctifying, and Christ's redeeming, we were regenerated.

Regeneration, like redemption and justification, is an aspect of God's full salvation. Redemption and justification solve our problem with God and reconcile us to God. Regeneration enlivens us with God's life and brings us into a relationship of life, an organic union, with God. Hence, regeneration issues and results in a living hope. Such

regeneration takes place through the resurrection of Christ from among the dead. When Christ was resurrected, we, His believers, were all included in Him. Thus, we were resurrected with Him (Eph. 2:6). In His resurrection He imparted the divine life into us and made us the same as He is in life and nature. This is the basic factor of our regeneration.

To be regenerated is to receive another life, the divine life, in addition to the human life. We all received the human life from our parents. But because of God's choosing, the Spirit's sanctifying, and Christ's redeeming, God begets us, regenerates us. As a result, we have a second birth. Through regeneration God the Father imparts the divine life into us. Therefore, the first birth was the birth of our human life, and the second birth, the birth of the divine life. We all have been born of the divine life. This is what it means to be regenerated.

In 1:3 Peter tells us that we have been regenerated unto a living hope. The Greek word rendered "unto" means issuing in, resulting in, with a view to. God has regenerated us with a view to a living hope. This hope in our pilgrimage today is for the future. It is not a hope of objective things; it is a hope of life, even eternal life, with all the endless divine blessings. It is this hope that we should set completely on the coming grace (1:13).

In verse 3 Peter speaks not merely of hope, but of a living hope. It is not easy to explain what this living hope is. Some may interpret it to mean a hope that is living and not dead. Yes, it is correct to say that the hope we have is living in contrast to a dead hope. Nevertheless, if we have the skill to interpret this expression according to our experience, we shall realize that more is involved. From experience we know that the life-giving Spirit has come into us to enliven us. Formerly we were dead, and everything related to us, in particular any expectation for the future, was also dead. But the enlivening which we have experienced through the life-giving Spirit results in a living hope, in the hope that everything related to us will become living.

When we were sprinkled with the blood of Christ, immediately the life-giving Spirit came into us to enliven us. Using the word "life" as a verb, we may say that the Spirit came into us to "life" us. Formerly we were dead and altogether without hope, but we have been "lifed" through the life-giving Spirit unto a living hope. Now we have the hope that every part of our being will be lifed. This is the living hope. To have a living hope is to be lifed.

The regeneration of God the Father results in the hope that every part of our being and everything related to us will be lifed, enlivened. Everything related to an unsaved person is dead. But with one who has been regenerated by God with the divine life, there is the hope that everything will be enlivened and thus become living.

In the Gospel of John the Apostle John speaks about being born again. Although Paul does not use the word "regenerated" or the expression "born again," in 1 Corinthians 4 he says something that indicates regeneration: he tells the believers that he begot them through the gospel. This is related to regeneration. But Peter is the only one who tells us clearly how we are regenerated and unto what we have been regenerated. We have been regenerated through the living and abiding word of God unto a living hope.

Through regeneration God has made us alive. In Adam we all are dead. When we were born of our parents, we were born dead. Furthermore, all unbelievers are dying a little more each day. All of them are marching toward the tomb. Their destination is the tomb, and their destiny is death. Hence, in Adam every man is born dead and is also born to die. According to the Bible the gospel is preached not merely to sinners; it is also preached to those who are dead in Adam. We know from Peter's word in 1:3 that through the means, the instrumentality, of the resurrection of Christ, God has regenerated us. Through Christ's resurrection God has made us alive. In Adam we all died, but in Christ we all have been made alive.

Do you realize that you were born six thousand years ago, when Adam was created? If Adam had not been

created, you would not have been born. Because we were born in Adam, we are all the same age--six thousand years. We also died in Adam. But nearly two thousand years ago, when Christ was resurrected, we were made alive, regenerated. According to the New Testament, when Christ was resurrected, we were resurrected in Him (Eph. 2:5-6). Hallelujah, although we were born with Adam, we have been reborn with Christ in His resurrection!

At this point I would quote a word from Dean Alford: "The resurrection of Christ, bringing in life and the gift of the life-giving Spirit, is that which potentiates the new birth into a living hope." The concept here is deep. The resurrection of Christ potentiates our regeneration into a living hope. When we were regenerated, the resurrected Christ entered into us. He is not only the living One--He is also the resurrected One. Now He is the life within us that potentiates the new birth and causes every aspect of our being to become living. Therefore, regeneration results in a living hope.

UNTO AN INHERITANCE

First Peter 1:4 says, "Unto an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, kept in the heavens for you." At the end of verse 3 there is a comma, not a period. Then verse 4 begins with "unto." This indicates that "unto an inheritance" in verse 4 is in apposition to "unto a living hope" in verse 3. This means that the living hope is the inheritance and that the inheritance is the living hope. A living hope, resulting from regeneration, is our expectation of the coming blessing; an inheritance is the fulfillment of our hope in the coming age and in eternity.

The inheritance in verse 4 comprises the coming salvation of our souls (see verses 5 and 9), the grace to be received at the unveiling of the Lord (v. 13), the glory to be revealed (5:1), the unfading crown of glory (5:4), and the eternal glory (5:10). All these items of our eternal inheritance are related to the divine life which we received through regeneration and which we are experiencing and

enjoying through our entire Christian life. "This inheritance is the full possession of that which was promised to Abraham and all believers (Gen. 12:3; see Gal. 3:6ff.), an inheritance, as much higher than that which fell to the children of Israel in the possession of Canaan, as the sonship of the regenerate, who have already received the promise of the Spirit through faith as a pledge of their inheritance, is higher than the sonship of Israel: compare Gal. 3:18, 29; 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Heb. 9:15" (Wiesinger, quoted by Alford).

At this point we need to ask an important question: Is this inheritance for us today, or is it only for the future? When I was young, I was taught that the inheritance in this verse refers to the eternal blessing, the blessing of eternity, which we shall enjoy in heaven. I was also taught that this inheritance is not for our enjoyment today, but is for us to enjoy in the future, after we die and go to our "heavenly mansion." Many Christians have been taught in this way. Others may think that in 1:4 Peter is speaking about an everlasting inheritance in contrast to the temporal inheritance of physical things. This kind of understanding is altogether natural; it is without light or revelation.

This verse does say that the inheritance is being kept for us in the heavens, but it does not say that the inheritance is for the future. However, as we read this verse, our natural mind may inject into it the thought of the future, even though this verse says nothing concerning the future. Often when we read the Bible we read things into it; we inject some element of our natural thought into God's revelation. This is serious! We should not regard the inheritance in 1:4 as only for the future. This inheritance is for us today, tomorrow, and for eternity. From the day we were regenerated this inheritance has been our portion.

An inheritance is a proper and legal possession. It is not gained by our energy, ability, or deeds. On the contrary, it is granted to us by another in a way that is legitimate. We do not work for an inheritance; we receive it. On the day we were regenerated, we were given the right to

share an inheritance. This inheritance includes all the blessings related to eternal life.

Our first birth gave us an inheritance. When we were born of our parents, we inherited God's creation. Because creation is our inheritance through birth, we can enjoy the air, the sunshine, and the rain. The money we pay for food actually goes to pay the cost of the labor. The food itself is given to us by God the Creator. If there were no sunshine, rain, or air, who could produce food? Food is a gift from God. By our first birth we have inherited the earth, the sunshine, the air, the atmosphere, the rain, and the wind. All these aspects of our earthly inheritance serve to keep us alive. Without such an inheritance, no one could live.

In the same principle, through our second birth, regeneration, we have been born into a new inheritance. This inheritance is not on earth; rather, it is kept in the heavens. Although the new inheritance is kept for us in the heavens, we can enjoy it now on earth. We may use as an illustration the application of electricity. Although electricity is stored in the power plant far away, we apply it and enjoy it daily in our homes. Electricity is transmitted from the power plant to our homes for our enjoyment. Likewise, our heavenly, divine, spiritual inheritance is kept in the heavens; yet it is continually being transmitted into our spirit for our enjoyment. Do you not enjoy the riches of the divine life?

As reborn ones, we can daily experience a divine transmission. When we call on the Lord Jesus, we may have the sense that something within us is connected to the heavens. Before we were regenerated, we never had this kind of realization. This transmission is the application and enjoyment of the inheritance kept in the heavens for us.

The strength of an electric current is measured in amperes. The greater the amperage, the stronger the current will be. The principle is the same in our experience of the divine transmission. When I was saved, the amperage of the transmission into me was quite small. But through the years, this heavenly amperage has increased so that now, especially when I minister, the amperage of

the heavenly transmission is beyond my ability to measure.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the inheritance in 1:4 is for us today. It is not only for us to enjoy in the future. Once a man has been born on earth, he has the right to enjoy the earthly inheritance. In the same principle, once a person has been born again by God with His Spirit, that one is born unto a living hope, and this living hope is the inheritance of all the spiritual and heavenly blessings related to eternal life. Daily we need to take possession of this inheritance and enjoy it. This inheritance is legal, proper, and legitimate, for Christ has died to purchase it for us. He paid the price of His precious blood, and we have been sprinkled with this blood. Therefore, every day we may enjoy the riches of the divine life. Daily we may participate in the inheritance that is ours today and for eternity.

In verse 4 Peter uses three words to describe our inheritance: incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. "Incorruptible" refers to the substance, which is indestructible, not decaying; "undefiled," to its purity, to its being unstained; "unfading," to its beauty and glory, to its not withering. In contrast to any earthly inheritance, our heavenly inheritance is incorruptible, for it is not material. Anything material or physical is corruptible. But our inheritance kept in the heavens is divine and spiritual, altogether incorruptible. Furthermore, this inheritance cannot be defiled; nothing can make it unclean. Finally, it is unfading; its beauty and glory cannot wither. These are the excellent qualities of our eternal inheritance in life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE FOUR

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT, THE SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD, AND THE LIVING HOPE

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:2-4

DOCTRINE CONFIRMED BY EXPERIENCE

First Peter 1:2 says, "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." This verse contains matters that are deep both in doctrine and in experience. One of these deep matters is the sanctification of the Spirit; a second is the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. According to this verse, the blood of Jesus Christ is the object both of obedience and of sprinkling. Hence, the obedience is of the blood, and the sprinkling also is of the blood. It is not easy for us to understand how obedience can be of the blood. Furthermore, it is not easy to have a proper understanding of the sprinkling of the blood.

Recently I have spent much time to study the writings of Peter again. In years past I did not realize that Peter, a Galilean fisherman and an evangelist, as indicated by the book of Acts, could be so deep in doctrine and experience. The Epistles of Peter are a composition of doctrines confirmed by experience. Peter's writings are mainly on experience, yet the experience is based on doctrines.

Humanly speaking, Peter did not have a high education. He was not nearly as learned as Paul was. Nevertheless, the vocabulary used by Peter in his writings indicates that he was deep both in doctrine and in experience.

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

Paul in his Epistles indicates clearly that the sanctification of the Spirit is of two aspects. The first aspect is positional sanctification, and the second is dispositional sanctification. But Paul does not tell us that the sanctification of the Spirit positionally and dispositionally is of two periods of time, the first period before we were justified and regenerated, and the second period afterward. Peter, however, does refer to the two periods of time related to the sanctification of the Spirit.

According to the general understanding of the sanctification of the Spirit held by Christians today, first God the Father selected us, then Christ redeemed us, and then the Spirit sanctifies us positionally and dispositionally. I have had this understanding of sanctification for many years. The messages I have given concerning sanctification also have pointed out that after the Father selected us and the Son redeemed us, the Spirit comes to sanctify us. But in 1:2 Peter says that sanctification comes after the Father's selection and before Christ's redemption. According to this verse, the sanctification of the Spirit is unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ. Surely, this indicates that the sanctification of the Spirit precedes the redemption of Christ. As I prayed over this verse and studied it, I was enlightened to see that not only Christ's redemption needs to be applied by the Spirit, but the Father's selection also needs to be applied by the Spirit. Without the application through the Holy Spirit, how could God's selection have anything to do with us in a practical, experiential way? God's selection has reached us through the Spirit's application. This application is what Peter means by the sanctification of the Spirit.

In eternity past God selected us. But how could this selection be applied to us? In order for it to be applied, there is the need of the Spirit's application. We all can testify of this from our experience. We were wandering on earth, perhaps as those who never had a thought concerning God. But one day the "wind" of the Spirit

"blew" us to a place where we heard the preaching of the gospel. While we were listening to the preaching of the gospel, faith was infused into us. In this way God's selection was applied to us. The next thing to be applied was the redemption of Christ. In this sense the sanctification of the Spirit preceded our experience of Christ's redemption.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul says, "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." As far as sanctification is concerned, this verse is all-inclusive. Paul says here that God's salvation is in the sanctification of the Spirit. This means that the part played in salvation by the Father and the Son are in the sanctification of the Spirit. Therefore, without the sanctification of the Spirit, there would be no way to apply what the Father and the Son have done for us. What the Father and the Son have done for us is applied to us by the Spirit. Paul refers to this application as sanctification of the Spirit. The salvation of the Triune God, therefore, is carried out in the sanctification of the Spirit.

THE OBEDIENCE AND SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD

Now we come to the obedience and sprinkling of the blood. The obedience of the blood and the sprinkling of the blood are Jewish, Old Testament, dispensational matters. The use of these terms in 1:2 implies and indicates that in Peter's writings the dispensation has changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the Old Testament God gave Moses commandments concerning the law and concerning the blood of animals, a type of the blood of Christ shed for our redemption. Thus, all the Jews, according to the Old Testament economy of God, believed in the law and in the sprinkling of the blood of the animals used for sacrifices. On the day of Atonement in particular, the Israelites put their trust in this blood. In other words, they obeyed the law and the blood. The law and the blood were basic elements of their religion.

Judaism is composed mainly of the law and the blood of atonement.

With the coming of Christ, the New Testament economy began. The Lord Jesus came to replace the law, and His blood fulfills the type of the animal blood and replaces it. The components of the New Testament economy, therefore, are the Person of Christ and the blood of Christ. For this reason, the Lord sent the apostles to proclaim that the dispensation of law is over and that we need to believe in Christ. They were also to declare that no longer was there the need for the sprinkling of the blood of animals, for the prevailing blood is the blood of Jesus Christ. Now we need to obey the faith in Christ and also obey Jesus' blood.

First Peter 1:2 indicates a change in dispensation. The old dispensation had the blood of animals; the new dispensation has the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, we must obey this blood. In verse 2 Peter seems to be saying, "Formerly you accepted the blood of animals and obeyed it. Now God commands you to accept the blood of Christ." This is what Peter means by the expression "the obedience of the blood."

Whereas Peter speaks of the obedience of the blood, Paul refers to the obedience of faith. In Romans 1:5 he says, "We received grace and apostleship unto obedience of faith among all the nations on behalf of His name." He speaks of the obedience of faith again in the last chapter of Romans: "But now has been manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the command of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations unto obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26).

Peter realized that it was by the working of the Holy Spirit that the Jews who believed in animal blood could turn their belief to the blood of Christ. In this way they received the blood of Christ and obeyed it. This is what Peter means by the obedience of the blood.

In 1:2 Peter also speaks of the sprinkling of the blood. The Old Testament was established through the sprinkling of animal blood (Exo. 24:8). Concerning this, Hebrews 9:18-20 says, "Wherefore neither was the first

covenant dedicated without blood. For when every commandment according to the law had been spoken by Moses to all the

people, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded to you." Furthermore, according to the book of Hebrews, the blood of Christ with which we are sprinkled has been brought into the heavens to purify the things in the heavens. Hebrews 9:12 says, "Nor through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, having found an eternal redemption." In Hebrews 9:23 we see that the blood of Christ purified the heavenly things: "It was necessary therefore for the examples of the things in the heavens to be purified by these, but the heavenly things themselves by better sacrifices than these." I mention this to point out that the expression "the sprinkling of the blood" is a dispensational term, an Old Testament practice referred to by Peter and also by Paul. Peter's word in 1:2 indicates that today is no longer the dispensation of the sprinkling of animal blood. That was the Old Testament dispensation. Today is the dispensation of the sprinkling of the blood of a living Person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Hence, Peter's word regarding the sprinkling of the blood in 1:2 is an indication that the dispensation has been changed from that of animal blood to that of the blood of a living Person.

THE LIVING HOPE AND THE INHERITANCE

In 1:3 and 4 Peter goes on to say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead, unto an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, kept in the heavens for you." For many years, I have been trying to understand the words "living hope." I could not understand how this living hope could be the inheritance, as indicated by the fact that, according to grammar, the inheritance in verse 4 is in apposition to the living hope in verse 3. This indicates that the living hope is the

inheritance and that the inheritance is the living hope.

A living hope is a hope of life. In particular it is a hope of eternal life. Life is the source of hope. For example, a little child has human life. Because he has life, his parents are full of hope that he will grow. At birth he weighed several pounds, but his mother is expecting him to grow to maturity as a man. Her hope is the hope of life.

We could not have such a hope in relation to something that is not living. For example, we would not have hope in relation to a chair. No one would look at a chair and say, "This chair is small and ugly, but I am full of hope that one day this chair will become larger and beautiful." That kind of hope is altogether vain. But it is not vain for parents to hope that their child will grow. By this illustration we can see that hope depends on life. The living hope is a hope of life.

We may also use a carnation seed to illustrate what Peter means by a living hope, a hope of life. If you were to sow a carnation seed in your yard, you would sow it with hope. You would have the expectation that the seed would eventually sprout. After a period of time, you would expect to have a full-grown carnation plant with blossoms on it. This is an illustration of the hope of life.

A dead person has no hope. However, if life could be imparted into a dead person, he would have the hope that every member of his physical body would be enlivened. In principle, the same applies to our regeneration. Before we were regenerated, we were dead and without hope. But the eternal life that has been sown into us is full of hope, full of the hope of life.

The hope of life is the enjoyment of eternal life. This enjoyment is not only for the future; it is for us to experience today. But when I was young, I was taught that the living hope in 1:4 was only for the future. I was taught that, sometime in the future, I would have a mansion in heaven. It was explained to me that believers have such a wonderful hope. This hope seems to be good, but it is for something far removed from us. We cannot participate in it today.

From the time I began to know eternal life, I also began to enjoy the living hope. To enjoy this living hope is to enjoy eternal life. This eternal life enables us to change. Furthermore, the enjoyment of eternal life is the fulfillment of the hope of life. Of course, the full enjoyment of eternal life will be in the future. But today we may have a foretaste. Then in the future we shall enjoy the full taste. But both the foretaste and the full taste are the fulfillment of the hope of this life. Therefore, this hope is actually the enjoyment of eternal life.

Now we need to ask how this living hope can also be our inheritance. When a child is born, he receives human life. In the future this child will enjoy many things. All the things which he will enjoy in the future are counted as an inheritance. Every human being receives as an inheritance many things related to human life. Birth gives the right to this inheritance.

When I was young, I was told that the inheritance described in 1:4 will be ours to enjoy in the future. I was taught that we must wait until the Lord Jesus comes back to experience this inheritance. Eventually I learned that the salvation in 1:5, the full salvation, is ready to be revealed at the last time. But we are not told that we must wait for the future to enjoy our inheritance. Peter does not say that the inheritance is kept in the heavens until the unveiling of the Lord Jesus. Rather, he says only that the inheritance is kept for us in the heavens. The heavens can be compared to a bank, and in this bank we have a deposit--the inheritance. We can make withdrawals from this heavenly deposit today; we need not wait for the future. At any time we can write a "check" to make a withdrawal from our heavenly checking account.

Eternal life is our enjoyment and also our inheritance. All the riches of God's being are involved in His life. These riches have become our inheritance in the heavenly bank. Our daily experience of eternal life is also an experience and enjoyment of the inheritance kept for us in the heavens. This means that the living hope and the inheritance are one.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE TRIUNE GOD

In 1:4 Peter gives a threefold description of our inheritance. He says that this inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. I believe that this threefold description points to the Trinity. The word "incorruptible" refers to the nature of this inheritance. This is God's nature, signified by gold. "Undefiled" describes the condition of the inheritance. This condition is related to the sanctifying Spirit. "Unfading" refers to the expression of this inheritance. This inheritance has unfading glory. In chapter five Peter speaks of an unfading crown of glory. The everlasting expression indicated by the word "unfading" is the Son as the expression of the Father's glory. Therefore, here we have the Father's incorruptible nature, the Spirit's sanctifying power to maintain the inheritance in an undefiled condition, to keep it holy, clean, and pure, and also the Son as the expression of the unfading glory. Therefore, the description of our inheritance is also a description of the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE FIVE

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:5-9

In this message we shall begin to consider 1:5-9.

GUARDED BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH

In verse 5 Peter says, "Who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time." If we would enjoy our heavenly inheritance today and participate in it, we need to be guarded. This means that we need to be kept in the right position. Sometimes we are distracted and moved away from the position necessary to enjoy the heavenly inheritance. In the past we all have experienced, at least to some extent, that when we are carried away from the Lord by something, we lose the enjoyment of the inheritance of eternal life. Therefore, we need to be guarded, protected.

Thank the Lord that we are being guarded by the power of God through faith. The power of God is the means by which we are being guarded. Faith is the secondary means through which the power of God becomes effective in guarding us. Thus, the power of God is on God's side, and the faith is on our side. This indicates that we need to cooperate with the power of God. If we cooperate in this way, we shall be kept in the right position to enjoy our heavenly inheritance.

According to verse 5, we are being guarded, garrisoned (a military term), by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The result of this guarding is salvation. In this

verse three prepositions are used concerning our coming salvation: by, through, and unto. By refers to cause, through to the means, and unto to the result.

DISPENSATIONAL PUNISHMENT

The salvation spoken of in verse 5 is full salvation, ultimate salvation. Specifically, it refers not to salvation from eternal perdition, but refers to the salvation of our souls from the dispensational punishment of the Lord's governmental dealing. This dispensational punishment of God's governmental dealing is neglected by most Christians today. They seem to have no light concerning it nor understanding of it. Although such a revelation is found in the Bible, most Christians do not have it in their concept.

Even though we are saved, we need to ask ourselves if we are now ready to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. If the Lord Jesus were to come back today, would you be ready to appear before His judgment seat? Could you stand before Him there in peace? No doubt, your conscience would tell you that in many things you have not yet been saved. If this is your situation, then the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ may have a negative result as far as you are concerned. However, I hope that the result for us all will be positive. But should the result be negative, we shall experience some kind of punishment. That will not be eternal perdition; rather, it will be the dispensational punishment of God's governmental dealing.

THE THREE STAGES OF GOD'S FULL SALVATION

The Initial Stage

The full salvation of the Triune God comprises many items in three stages. The first stage, the initial stage, is the stage of regeneration. This stage is composed of redemption, sanctification (positional--1:2; 1 Cor. 6:11), justification, reconciliation, and regeneration. In this stage, God has justified us through the redemption of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26) and regenerated us in our spirit with

His life by His Spirit (John 3:3-6). Thus, we have received God's eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9) and His eternal life (John 3.15), and become His children (John 1:12-13), who shall not perish forever (John 10:28-29). This initial salvation has saved us from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition (John 3:18, 16).

The Progressing Stage

The second stage of salvation, the progressing stage, is the stage of transformation. This stage is composed of freedom from sin, sanctification (mainly dispositional--Rom. 6:19, 22), growth in life, transformation, building up, and maturing. In this stage, God is freeing us from the dominion of indwelling sin--the law of sin and death--by the law of the Spirit of life, through the effectiveness of the death of Christ working subjectively in us (Rom. 6:6-7; 7:16-20; 8:2). He is sanctifying us by His Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16), with His holy nature, through His discipline (Heb. 12:10) and His judgment in His own house (1 Pet. 4:17). He is causing us to grow in His life (1 Cor. 3:6-7) and transforming us by renewing the inward parts of our soul by the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6, 17-18; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) through the working of all things (Rom. 8:28). He is building us together into a spiritual house for His dwelling (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:22) and maturing us in His life (Rev. 14:15) for the completion of His full salvation. Thus, we are being delivered from the power of sin, the world, the flesh, the self, the soul (the natural life), and individualism into maturity in the divine life for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose.

The Completing Stage

The third stage, the completing stage, is the stage of consummation. This stage is composed of the redemption (transfiguration) of our body, conformity to the Lord, glorification, inheritance of God's kingdom, participation in Christ's kingship, and the topmost enjoyment of the Lord. In this stage, God will redeem our fallen and corrupted body (Rom. 8:23) by transfiguring it into the body of

Christ's glory (Phil. 3:21). He will conform us to the glorious image of His firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29), making us wholly and absolutely like Him in our regenerated spirit, transformed soul, and transfigured body. He will glorify us (Rom. 8:30), immersing us in His glory (Heb. 2:10) that we may enter into His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:11), into which He has called us (1 Thes. 2:12). He will cause us to inherit His kingdom as the topmost portion of His blessing (James 2:5; Gal. 5:21), even to reign with Christ, to be His co-kings, participating in His kingship over the nations (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6; 2:26-27; 12:5), and sharing His royal, kingly joy in His divine government (Matt. 25:21, 23). Thus, our body will be freed from the slavery of corruption of the old creation into the freedom of the glory of God's new creation (Rom. 8:21), and our soul will be delivered out of the realm of trials and sufferings (1 Pet. 1:6; 4:12; 3:14; 5:9) into a new realm, full of glory (1 Pet. 4:13; 5:10), sharing and enjoying all the Triune God is, has, and has accomplished, attained, and obtained. This is the salvation, the salvation of our souls, which is ready to be revealed to us at the last time, the grace to be brought to us at the unveiling of Christ in glory (1 Pet. 1:13; Matt. 16:27; 25:31). This is the end of our faith. The power of God is able to guard us unto this that we may obtain it (1 Pet. 1:9). We should eagerly expect such a marvelous salvation (Rom. 8:23) and prepare ourselves for its splendid revelation (Rom. 8:19).

TWO ASPECTS OF THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

At this point I would like to comment further on the Spirit's sanctification. The sanctification of the Spirit is of two aspects: the sanctification of the Spirit before justification, the first aspect, and the sanctification of the Spirit after justification, the second aspect. With the second aspect of the Spirit's sanctification there are two sides--the positional side and the dispositional side. After God justifies us and regenerates us, immediately the sanctifying Spirit continues His separating work upon us

and within us. First, the sanctifying Spirit separates us positionally from things that are common and worldly. This positional sanctification is objective. Simultaneously, the sanctifying Spirit also begins to sanctify us dispositionally. This means that the Spirit is sanctifying our disposition. This is the subjective side of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The subjective sanctification is what we mean by the work of transformation. Subjective sanctification involves the transformation of our disposition and our inward parts. Therefore, this transformation of our disposition is the dispositional sanctification of the Spirit.

By now we should be clear concerning the two aspects of sanctification. The first aspect takes place before justification. The second aspect, with its two sides, takes place after justification. After we have been justified and regenerated, the Spirit works to sanctify us positionally and also dispositionally.

EXULTING IN THE LAST TIME

In 1:5 Peter says that we are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation, and this salvation is ready to be revealed at the last time. The last time refers to the time of the Lord's coming (1:7). This last time does not denote a day or an hour. Rather, it signifies a period of time. At the end of this particular period of time, the Lord Jesus will come back.

God's full salvation will be revealed to us, or brought to us, by the Lord's coming back. That is the time this full salvation will become complete to us in experience. Even now this salvation is ready to be revealed.

In 1:6 Peter goes on to say, "In which you exult, though for a little while at present, if it must be, you have been made sorrowful by various trials." Some readers of the Bible may think that the antecedent of "which" in verse 6 is salvation. This understanding is not correct. The relative pronoun "which" does not refer to salvation; instead, it refers to the last time. This means that we exult in the last time. Whenever we consider the last time, we should exult,

that is, we should become joyful and rejoice to the uttermost.

MADE SORROWFUL BY VARIOUS TRIALS

In verse 6 Peter not only speaks of exulting in the last time, but also speaks of being made sorrowful by various trials. These trials are sufferings which test the quality of someone or something.

The purpose of the book of 1 Peter is to establish and strengthen the suffering believers who have been chosen by God, sanctified by the Spirit from the world unto God, sprinkled by the redeeming blood of Christ, and regenerated by God the Father unto a living hope, unto an inheritance kept in the heavens for them (1:1-4), yet are as pilgrims still sojourning on this earth (1:1, 17; 2:11). In their sojourn, sufferings are unavoidable. They are used by God to test and prove their faith (1:7), to see whether they will follow Christ in suffering for doing good (2:19-23; 3:14-18). The sufferings are used to arm them with a mind against the flesh, that they might not live in the lusts of men, but in the will of God (4:1-2), that they might share the sufferings of Christ and rejoice at the unveiling of His glory (4:12-19), that they might be witnesses of the sufferings of Christ (5:1), and that they might be perfected, established, strengthened, and grounded for the eternal glory into which God has called them (5:8-10). This is wholly under God's government that He might judge His chosen people (1:17), to begin His judgment from His own house (4:17). Hence, this book may also be considered a book concerning God's government.

In verse 6 Peter inserts the phrase "if it must be." Peter's intention is to give the suffering saints a comforting word. Sometimes we need a certain trial, a trial that makes us sorrowful. When we are made sorrowful by a particular trial, we need to realize that such a trial is necessary. However, this trial is "for a little while at present." The "last time" is coming. At that time God's full salvation will be revealed to us. Therefore, we should exult in the last time.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE SIX

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:5-9

In the foregoing message we considered 1:5 and 6. We saw from verse 5 that we are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation and that this salvation is ready to be revealed at the last time. The power of God is the cause by which we are being guarded, and faith is the means through which the power of God becomes effective in guarding us. We also saw that the salvation spoken of in this verse denotes the full salvation of the Triune God in three stages: the initial stage, the stage of regeneration; the progressing stage, the stage of transformation; and the completing stage, the stage of consummation. This salvation is ready to be revealed at the last time, at the time of the Lord's coming. According to verse 6, Peter tells us that we should exult in this last time, though for a while, if necessary, we are made sorrowful by various trials.

THE PROVING OF OUR FAITH

In verse 7 Peter continues, "That the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes and is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ." In this verse Peter gives the reason we are put into trials. We are put into trials because our faith needs to be tested, proved.

The Greek word rendered "proving" means testing for approval. It is the proving, the testing, of our faith, not our faith itself, that may be found unto praise. This may be

compared to an examination in school related to a student's study. It is not the student's study itself that is found approved; rather, it is the examination that is found to be approved. Of course, the approval of our faith comes out of the proper faith. The emphasis here is not on our faith; the emphasis is on the proving of our faith by the trials through sufferings.

A good student will actually welcome the opportunity to be examined. An examination will prove how thoroughly he has studied and how much he knows concerning the material on which he is being tested. Without examinations, a superior student would never be proved to be outstanding. A student who studies diligently may look forward to an examination because it will prove, both to the student himself and to others, that he is an excellent student. This is an illustration of what Peter means by the proving of our faith.

In verse 7 Peter says that the proving of our faith is "much more precious than of gold which perishes and is proved by fire." The words "much more precious than of gold...by fire" do not modify faith; they modify the proving. This means that the proving of our faith is much more precious than the proving of gold. The comparison here is not that between faith and gold. Many Christians understand verse 7 in this way; however, this understanding is wrong. The comparison here is that between the proving of our faith and the proving of gold. Gold is proved by the purifying fire. In like manner, our faith is proved by trial. This proving is certainly more precious than the proving of gold.

In verse 7 Peter uses the adjective "precious." Peter in his two Epistles presents us five precious things: the precious stone, which is the Lord Himself (1 Pet. 2:4, 6-7); the precious blood (1 Pet. 1:19); the precious promises (2 Pet. 1:4); the precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1); and the precious proving (1 Pet. 1:7).

THE UNVEILING OF JESUS CHRIST

In verse 7 Peter indicates that the proving of our faith

"may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ." The various trials in verse 6 are that the proving of our faith may result in praise, glory, and honor at the unveiling of the Lord.

Peter's use of the word "unveiling" in verse 7 is significant. Christ is present with us today, but He is veiled. The time of His coming will also be the time of His unveiling. Some mistakenly think that the Lord Jesus is not here today. But the Lord certainly is here. Matthew 28:20 says, "Behold, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age." Although the Lord is with us, He is with us under the veil. Sometimes, however, in our experience with the Lord, we are not under the veil with Him. But at other times we are with Him under the veil. Are you under the veil with the Lord, or are you outside the veil?

Do you know what the Lord's coming back will be? The Lord's coming back will be His unveiling. When He is unveiled, we who are under the veil with Him will also be unveiled.

The Lord Jesus actually is present with us today. Do you not believe that the Lord is with us? I must testify that the Lord is in my spirit. But according to the concept of unbelievers, Christ is not with us. Even certain believers who are fundamental and who emphasize the objective aspect of the truth say that Christ is far away in the third heaven on the throne at the right hand of God. Some of these fundamental Christians may not believe that Christ is in us. But we know that the Lord whom we love not only is in the heavens, but also dwells within us.

Because the Lord is now veiled, people cannot see Him. But His coming will be His unveiling. In verse 7 Peter emphasizes the particular matter that the Lord's coming back will be the taking away of the veil that now covers Him. At that time, everyone will see Him. Prior to that time, we can see Him in spirit.

In John 14:19 and 20 the Lord Jesus speaks of being seen by His disciples: "Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live,

you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." According to John 14:19, the worldly people cannot see the Lord Jesus, but the believers can see Him. In John 14:20 the Lord Jesus indicates that He and we live together. How can we live together with the Lord without seeing Him? Actually, what we have described for us in John 14:20 is not merely living together with the Lord; this verse actually speaks of a life of co-inherence with Him, that is, a life of the Lord living in us and of our living in Him. Because we live such a life, to us He has already been unveiled.

When the Lord Jesus is unveiled and we are unveiled with Him, those who oppose us will be amazed. Today some oppose us and speak evil concerning us. In some cases, young people may be opposed by their parents. Nevertheless, although their parents oppose them, sometimes the parents are astonished at the young people. They may say, "Sometimes you do things that are marvelous. We don't understand you. How can you do these things?" Although the parents of some of the young people may not be able to understand them now, they will understand when the veil is taken away from the Lord Jesus and also from us. Then they will know the Lord and they will also know us. When the Lord Jesus is unveiled, the worldly people will see Him, and they will see us with Him. Then they will know Christ, and they will also know us.

Unbelievers and people of the world sometimes regard us as peculiar and strange. According to their understanding, we are not normal. They enjoy different kinds of worldly entertainment, but we do not partake of these things. For example, someone at work may encourage you to participate in a certain form of worldly amusement. If you refuse to do so, he may say that you are strange or abnormal. Unbelievers will see things differently when the Lord Jesus is unveiled. When this veil is taken away and our veil is removed as well, the worldly people will say, "Now I know that this one is a follower of Jesus. When I knew him at work, he was one who loved the Lord and sought Him. Now I understand why I

thought he was so strange, so abnormal." This will be the situation if we love the Lord and follow Him today. However, if we do not love the Lord, follow Him, and seek Him, our situation will be very different when He is unveiled.

PRAISE, GLORY, AND HONOR

If the proving of our faith is positive, this proving will result in praise, glory, and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ. What is the difference between praise, glory, and honor? It is characteristic of Peter that he does not stop with the word "praise" but goes on to mention glory and honor.

We may use graduation from school as an illustration of the distinction between praise, glory, and honor. Suppose a particular student receives the highest score on a final examination. This proving through testing first results in praise, for he will certainly receive praise for his outstanding achievement. This praise will bring in glory at the time of his graduation, when he is singled out as the most outstanding student in his class. That will certainly be a glory, and this glory will bring him honor. Therefore, first there is praise, then glory, and then honor.

Glory is a certain condition, whereas honor puts us into a particular position. At the time of graduation, the outstanding student in a class is in a condition of glory and also in a position of honor.

If through the various trials we have a positive proving of our faith, this proving will result in praise, glory, and honor when the Lord Jesus comes back. First, the Lord Jesus will tell us that we have done well. Following this praise, there will be a condition of glory and, along with that, a position of honor.

Before we go on to verse 8, I would point out that verses 3 through 12 are actually one long sentence. In his writing Peter does not care for good language, grammar, or composition. Peter's way of writing indicates that he cares for the divine revelation and for genuine spiritual experience. Although Peter's writings may not be highly

regarded by certain scholars, he nevertheless expressed in these verses what he intended to say.

GLORIFIED JOY

Referring to the Lord Jesus, Peter goes on to say in verse 8, "Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, not seeing at present yet believing, you exult with unspeakable and glorified joy." It is a wonder and a mystery that the believers love One whom they have not seen. The phrase "in whom" modifies believing. We love Him whom we have not seen because of believing, because of the very faith which has been infused into us through hearing the living word (Gal. 3:2). Hence, this faith is under the testing, the proving, in verse 7.

According to verse 8, the believers "exult with unspeakable and glorified joy." Glorified joy is joy immersed in glory; hence, it is full of glory, that is, full of the Lord expressed.

The King James Version adopts the rendering "joy unspeakable and full of glory." We also have a song in our hymnal that says, "It is joy unspeakable and full of glory" (*Hymns*, #1153). Actually, Peter does not mean that we are full of glory. On the contrary, he speaks of a glorified joy. We exult with a joy that is immersed in glory. This joy is immersed in the Lord as glory; thus, it is full of the expression of the Lord.

THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS

Verse 9 continues, "Obtaining the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls." This verse is the direct continuation of verse 7. The proving of our faith to be found unto praise, glory, and honor results in the obtaining of the end of our faith, that is, the salvation of our souls.

The salvation in verse 9 is full salvation, the salvation which is in three stages--the initial stage, the progressing stage, and the completing stage. We are of three parts: spirit, soul, and body. Our spirit has been saved through regeneration (John 3:5-6). Our body will be saved, redeemed, through the coming transfiguration (Rom. 8:23;

Phil. 3:21). Our soul will be saved from sufferings into the full enjoyment of the Lord at His unveiling, His coming back. For this we have to deny our soul, our soulish life, with all its pleasures in this age, that we may gain it in the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming age (Matt. 10:37-39; 16:24-27; Luke 17:30-33; John 12:25). At the Lord's unveiling, some believers through His judgment seat will enter into the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23; 24:45-46), and some will suffer in weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30; 24:51). To enter into the Lord's joy is the salvation of our souls (Heb. 10:39). This salvation is more precious than the salvation of the body, which the children of Israel expect to receive.

The full salvation of the Triune God includes the Father's regeneration, the Spirit's sanctification or application, and Christ's redemption. This full salvation is revealed in 1:3-23. These verses reveal the full salvation of God in three aspects according to the Trinity. The Father's regeneration brings something into us, and it also brings us into something. Do you know what the Father's regeneration brings into us and what it brings us into? The regeneration of the Father brings eternal life into us. Furthermore, the Father's regeneration brings us into the hope, the inheritance of eternal life. Therefore, eternal life has been brought into us, and we have been brought into the hope, the inheritance, of eternal life. We now have eternal life, and we are also enjoying the inheritance of this eternal life. This is the Father's regeneration with its results, its issue. The result of the Father's regeneration is to bring eternal life into us and to bring us into the full enjoyment of God as our life supply. This life supply is the living hope. This life supply is also the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. This marvelous inheritance is kept in the heavens for us so that we may enjoy it and participate in it daily, hourly, continually.

At this point I would like to say, parenthetically, a word of appreciation for Peter's writings. The Gospel of John is wonderful. However, in certain respects it cannot compare with the writings of Peter. The Epistles of Paul also are

marvelous. Yet, at least to some extent, the spiritual matters in Paul's writings may be covered over by his excellent language. As we have pointed out, the writings of Peter, although much less in quantity than those of Paul, include the same span and scope as Paul's writings.

In content Peter has some extraordinary "diamonds" not found in Paul's Epistles. For example, Paul does not tell us that the Father's regeneration has brought us into a living hope and that this living hope is the heavenly inheritance for us to enjoy today and for eternity. Because the Epistles of Peter contain treasures not found elsewhere in the New Testament, we surely need to dig into them and study them thoroughly.

ENJOYING A LIVING HOPE

In 1:1 and 2, we have the operation of the Triune God: the selection of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Then in the remainder of the first chapter we have the full salvation of the Triune God. This full salvation is composed of the Father's regeneration, the Spirit's application, and the Son's redemption. The Father's regeneration has brought His eternal life into us and has also brought us into the enjoyment of this eternal life. Now this enjoyment is a living hope for us today.

When some hear that we may enjoy the living hope today, they may argue and say, "How can you claim that the living hope is a present matter? Something present can never be a hope. Romans 8 gives us a description of hope. That chapter tells us that hope refers to things that we have not seen." Those who would try to argue in this way need to realize that the living hope, the inheritance, is ours today, tomorrow, and for eternity. With our present enjoyment we have a hope. This means that our enjoyment of the divine life is a hope. For example, perhaps early in the day you may have a failure in your Christian life. Nevertheless, even though you have failed, you still have a hope. You may say to yourself, "I'm very weak, yet I still have hope. My experience may be poor, but I have hope.

Perhaps even later today my experience will be uplifted." Do you not have such a hope within you? We all have this living hope. Day by day we live a life of living hope.

The reason we have a life of hope is that we have a heavenly inheritance. This hope, this inheritance, is the result of the Father's regeneration. In verses 3 through 9 we see various aspects of the inheritance of eternal life. Our enjoyment and experience of eternal life are due to the Father's regeneration.

A recent experience I had with a stomach ulcer may be used to illustrate what Peter means by living hope. When I discovered that I had a problem, I was hospitalized briefly for examination and tests. After the examination and the tests were completed, I began to have a living hope every day. I realized that within my body there is a life that could solve the problem of my ulcer. This life caused me to have a living hope. Eventually, I was fully healed and recovered. I was recovered according to the living hope I had.

A living hope depends on life. If there were no life in our body, we would not have the hope to be healed of any illness or injury. But because we have life in our body, we have the hope for it to be healed of injury or illness. We would not have such a hope for something that is not living. For example, suppose a wooden chair is broken. The chair does not have any hope of repairing itself. If no one comes to work on the chair to repair it, it will remain indefinitely broken without any hope of being fixed. But when I was in the hospital, I could have a living hope because of the life in my body. I had the confidence that my physical life would heal the problem in my body. Therefore, I had a living hope.

What is a living hope? A living hope is a hope that comes from life. This hope results from the living, organic element within us.

In addition to physical life, we also have the divine life in us through the Father's regeneration. This life is the strongest, richest, and highest life. To be sure, this life will take care of us. We may have problems and troubles, but

we have a living hope because of the divine life within us. We are not dead--we are living. Thus, we have a living hope, the hope that our situation will be better in the future. We have eternal life, and this life gives us a living hope. This hope is the inheritance of all the blessings of eternal life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE THREE STAGES OF GOD'S FULL SALVATION

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:5

In this message I would like to say a further word on the three stages of God's full salvation.

GUARDED UNTO SALVATION

First Peter 1:5 says, "Who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time." Many years ago I was bothered whenever I read this verse. I was troubled by the phrase "unto salvation." According to this phrase, it would seem that we do not yet have salvation, for we are being guarded by the power of God unto salvation. I could not understand why we are being guarded unto salvation if we have already received salvation. I was certain that I had received God's salvation and had been saved. Regarding this matter, I was very strong. Whenever someone asked me if I had been saved, I replied, "Yes, I have been saved." Furthermore, I visited many places preaching the assurance of salvation. I pointed out the verses in the New Testament that indicate that, when we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were saved and that we may have the assurance of this salvation. But here is a verse in 1 Peter 1:5 with the phrase "unto salvation." I wondered if Peter was correct in his knowledge regarding salvation. I thought that he might have said something wrong according to doctrine. I had such a consideration because I was puzzled, bothered, by this verse.

In 1:5 Peter says that this salvation is "ready to be revealed." This means that salvation is not yet here. Therefore, I said to myself, "What does it mean that salvation is ready to be revealed? I have already received

God's salvation. How, then, can salvation be ready to be revealed? Peter says that salvation is ready to be revealed at the last time. What is this last time?" I was bothered not only by the phrase "unto salvation," but also by the words "ready to be revealed at the last time." I did not know why salvation had yet to be revealed, and I did not understand when the last time would be.

I was puzzled by 1:5 for almost forty years. Only in the last period of my Christian life did I begin to understand it. Now I realize that salvation is not a simple matter. Salvation covers a long span and cannot be enjoyed or experienced all at once. God's full salvation is of three stages: the initial stage, the progressing stage, and the completing stage. I would encourage all the saints, especially the young people, to gain a thorough knowledge of these three stages of God's full salvation. In particular, we need to understand what God's salvation does for us in each stage. We need to know from what we are delivered by each stage of God's full salvation. We also need to know the items or aspects of this salvation and its results. In each of the three stages of God's full salvation we are delivered from particular things, we experience certain matters, and we have definite results.

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD ACCORDING TO THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

The word "salvation" in 1:5 denotes the full salvation of the Triune God. This means that it does not refer only to a part of our salvation, to that initial aspect of salvation that comes through the Savior, Jesus Christ. Rather, this is the full salvation of the Triune God, of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In this full salvation a great part is accomplished by the Father; another great part, by the Son; and yet another great part, by the Spirit. Therefore, this salvation is the full salvation of the Trinity of the Godhead.

The full salvation of the Triune God comprises many items in three stages. As we have pointed out, these stages are the initial stage, the progressing stage, and the

completing stage. These three stages are not divided according to knowledge or merely according to objective aspects of God's salvation. On the contrary, these stages are arranged according to life. Spiritual life, as we all know, begins with regeneration, continues in transformation, and reaches maturity in the stage of consummation. Therefore, these three stages of salvation are divided according to the experience of life.

THE STAGE OF REGENERATION

The initial stage, the stage of regeneration, is composed of redemption, sanctification (positional--1:2; 1 Cor. 6:11), justification, reconciliation, and regeneration. Redemption, sanctification, justification, and reconciliation are all for regeneration. Regeneration is the totality of redemption, sanctification, justification, and reconciliation. Regeneration is the result of these four matters.

In the stage of regeneration God has justified us through the redemption of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26), and He has regenerated us in our spirit with His life by His Spirit (John 3:3-6). Thus, we have received God's eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9) and His eternal life (John 3:15), and we have become His children (John 1:12-13), who shall not perish forever (John 10:28-29).

Eternal Life and Eternal Salvation

God has regenerated us in our spirit. The element, the substance, God used to regenerate us is His own life. Furthermore, this regeneration with God's life was accomplished by a Person, that is, by God's Spirit. As a result of this regeneration, we have received God's eternal salvation and His eternal life. In this sense we have already received God's salvation. No one can deny that we have received God's salvation in its first stage. There is no need for us to grow unto this stage, and it is not necessary for us to wait until it is revealed to us. We have received two things that are eternal--eternal salvation and eternal life. This is not my teaching, theology, or opinion; it is the revelation of God's pure Word.

Because we have been regenerated and have received God's eternal salvation and eternal life, we have become God's children. As children of God, we shall never perish. This truth should strengthen us and keep us from the erroneous teaching that says if we sin after we have been saved, we shall perish. That teaching is nonsensical and is absolutely not according to the truth. Once we have received God's eternal salvation, we are saved forever, for eternity. God's eternal salvation is not dispensational; it is not temporary. Because it is an eternal salvation, we shall never perish.

Saved From Condemnation and Perdition

This initial salvation of God has saved us from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition (John 3:18, 16). However, although this initial salvation saves us from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition, it does not save us from God's discipline. During our lifetime God will discipline us and may even punish us. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul indicates that God judges, disciplines, and even punishes the believers. This does not mean, however, that those who are disciplined by God will lose their salvation. According to Scripture, on the one hand, we have been saved for eternity. We shall never be condemned by God, and we shall never perish. On the other hand, while we are living on earth in the flesh, God will deal with us and discipline us. Sometimes He may even judge us or punish us. By this we see that through the initial stage of God's salvation, we receive eternal salvation and eternal life. Although we shall never perish, we may experience God's discipline during our lifetime. But it is altogether contrary to the Bible to teach that to be disciplined by God means that we shall lose our salvation. God may punish us for certain things, but we have been saved for eternity and we shall never lose this eternal salvation.

THE STAGE OF TRANSFORMATION

Dispositional Sanctification

The second stage of God's full salvation, the progressing

stage, is the stage of transformation. This stage is composed of freedom from sin, sanctification (mainly dispositional--Rom. 6:19, 22), growth in life, transformation, building up, and maturing. The sanctification in this stage is mainly dispositional, although there is still an amount of positional sanctification. In the first stage sanctification is altogether positional; in the second stage sanctification is mainly dispositional.

In this stage of transformation God is freeing us from the dominion of indwelling sin--the law of sin and death--by the law of the Spirit of life through the effectiveness of the death of Christ working subjectively in us (Rom. 6:6-7; 7:16-20; 8:2). In the second stage God is also sanctifying us by His Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16), with His holy nature, through His discipline (Heb. 12:10) and His judgment in His own house (1 Pet. 4:17). God is now sanctifying us by a Person, and this Person is the Holy Spirit. The element, the substance, God uses to sanctify us is His holy nature. The means through which we are sanctified is God's discipline and judgment, the judgment He exercises in governing His own house.

Maturing in the Divine Life

In the progressing stage of salvation God is also causing us to grow in His life (1 Cor. 3:6-7). He is transforming us by renewing the inward parts of our soul by the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6, 17-18; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) through the working of all things (Rom. 8:28). He is building us together into a spiritual house for His dwelling (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:22), and He is maturing us in His life (Rev. 14:15) for the completion of His full salvation.

In the first stage of God's salvation we are saved from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition. But in the second stage we are being delivered from the power of sin, the world, the flesh, the self, the soul (the natural life), and individualism. Therefore, in this stage we are in the process of being delivered from so many negative things. The goal of this deliverance is that we would have

maturity in the divine life for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose.

THE STAGE OF CONSUMMATION

The third stage of God's full salvation, the completing stage, is the stage of consummation. This stage is composed of the redemption (transfiguration) of our body, conformity to the Lord, glorification, inheritance of God's kingdom, participation in Christ's kingship, and the topmost enjoyment of the Lord. These matters are beyond our present experience. They will be revealed to us in the future. Although we have experienced the first stage of salvation and are now in the second stage, the third stage is still far beyond us. The items in this stage will be revealed at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus.

The Transfiguration of Our Body

In the completing stage of salvation, God will redeem our fallen and corrupted body (Rom. 8:23) by transfiguring it into the body of Christ's glory (Phil. 3:21). He will conform us to the glorious image of His firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29), making us holy and absolutely like Him in our regenerated spirit, transformed soul, and transfigured body. He will also glorify us (Rom. 8:30), immersing us in His glory (Heb. 2:10) that we may enter into His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:11), into which He has called us (1 Thes. 2:12), and inherit it as the topmost portion of His blessing (James 2:5; Gal. 5:21), even to reign with Christ, to be His co-kings, participating in His kingship over the nations (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6; 2:26-27; 12:5) and sharing His royal, kingly joy in His divine government (Matt. 25:21, 23). Our body will be freed from the slavery of corruption of the old creation into the freedom of the glory of God's new creation (Rom. 8:21), and our soul will be delivered out of the realm of trials and sufferings (1 Pet. 1:6; 4:12; 3:14; 5:9) into a new realm, full of glory (4:13; 5:10). In this new realm we shall share and enjoy all the Triune God is, has, and has accomplished, attained, and obtained.

The Realm of Suffering and the Realm of Enjoyment

Recently some brothers said to me, "Brother, in this country we enjoy all manner of riches, but the saints in other places are poor and they are suffering many things, including persecution. This does not seem fair. While they are suffering so much, we are here in this country enjoying good things."

I replied, "The saints in other countries are suffering their own kind of trials, whereas we in the United States are suffering in a different way. When I was in China, I didn't suffer the kind of things I am suffering now. Do not think that because we may have an abundance of material things we do not have sufferings. Many Americans suffer from heart disease, ulcers, and mental illness. In this country we may suffer in one way, whereas those in other countries may suffer in a different way. Wherever we may be, we shall suffer and be subject to God's discipline."

There is no way for us to avoid suffering in our soul. To live on earth as a human being is to suffer. The earth today is not for our enjoyment.

The young people may expect to finish their education, find a good job, and then have a very pleasant married life. They need to realize, however, that on this earth there is no paradise. We must wait for the Lord's coming to be saved from the realm of suffering into a realm of comfort. That will be the full salvation of our soul.

I can testify that although I have a good wife and although I am loved by the saints and the churches, I continue to suffer a great deal in my soul. No one can help me to avoid this suffering. Therefore, I am waiting for the unveiling of the Lord Jesus. At the time of His coming back, I shall be rescued from this realm of suffering into a realm of enjoyment. In that realm we shall have the full enjoyment of the Triune God and of all that He is, has, and has accomplished, attained, and obtained.

This is the salvation of our souls that is ready to be revealed to us at the last time. This is also the grace that

will be brought to us at the unveiling of Christ in glory (1:13; Matt. 16:27; 25:31). Furthermore, this is the end of our faith (1 Pet. 1:9). The power of God is able to guard us unto this that we may obtain it. Therefore, we should eagerly expect such a marvelous salvation (Rom. 8:23), and we should prepare ourselves for its splendid revelation (Rom. 8:19). Hallelujah for the full salvation of the Triune God in its three stages!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(4)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:10-12

First Peter 1:3-25 is concerned with the full salvation of the Triune God and its issues. Verses 3 through 9 cover the Father's regeneration unto a living hope; verses 10 through 12, the Spirit's application; and verses 13 through 25, Christ's redemption. In this message we shall consider the Spirit's application through the prophets' prophesying and the apostles' preaching.

THE WIDE SCOPE OF PETER'S WRITINGS

According to Peter's word in 1:10-12, the first means of the Spirit's application was the prophesying of the Old Testament prophets, and the second means was the preaching of the New Testament apostles. By this we see that two groups of persons were used by the applying Spirit to apply God's full salvation to His chosen people.

Once again we see that the scope of Peter's writing is wide. Furthermore, all the contents included within this scope are rich and all-inclusive. Although Peter wrote only eight chapters, not much in comparison with Paul, he put into these chapters the divine riches. It may be that Peter's skill in using the Greek language could not match that of Paul. However, I admire Peter's boldness. Not caring for grammar, language, or composition, Peter found a way to express the divine riches in his writings.

When we first read 1:10-12, we may not think that these verses are very deep. But the more we read them and pray-read them and in so doing touch the depth of these

verses, we shall realize that Peter's word here is quite deep. One example of Peter's depth is what he says in verse 11 about the prophets searching into the manner of time Christ would suffer.

PROPHESYING CONCERNING THE GRACE UNTO US

First Peter 1:10 says, "Concerning which salvation the prophets, who prophesied concerning the grace unto you, sought out and searched out." Here Peter uses the Old Testament prophets to confirm his teaching concerning the New Testament salvation. The Lord Jesus did the same thing (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46).

In verse 10 Peter points out that the prophets prophesied concerning "the grace unto you." In this verse "grace" is a synonym for "salvation." In 1:13 grace also refers to God's salvation. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace. This grace is God in the Son as our enjoyment. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." The grace to which Paul refers three times in this verse is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply that we may live in resurrection. Therefore, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us.

THE SEARCHING OF THE PROPHETS

In 1:11 Peter goes on to say, referring to the prophets, "Searching into what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them made clear, witnessing beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these." The searching of the prophets was the Spirit's preapplication of God's salvation in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets were searching into what time and what manner of time the Spirit in them made clear concerning Christ's marvelous accomplishment through His sufferings and glories. Eventually it was revealed that those

marvelous things were ministered not to them, but to the New Testament believers (v. 12).

WHAT MANNER OF TIME

In verse 11 Peter says that the prophets searched not only into what time but also into what manner of time. Although it is easy to understand the meaning of "what time," it is difficult to know what Peter means by "what manner of time." This is an unusual expression. Does time have a manner? We may be bothered by this expression and wonder what Peter means by "what manner of time."

In seeking to understand this, we may substitute "kind" for "manner" and speak of "what kind of time." In conversation we sometimes refer to a certain kind of time, or ask a person what kind of time he had in doing a certain thing. You may ask someone, "What kind of time did you have with your father today? Did you have a good time with him? Did you enjoy a happy time?" Furthermore, the kind of time or manner of time may denote a particular season. For example, the winter season is a time of cold weather, whereas the summer season is a time of hot weather. These are illustrations that may help us understand Peter's expression "what manner of time."

Regarding the coming of Christ and His sufferings, the prophets not only searched into what time this would be, but also searched into what manner of time, what kind of time, it would be. A number of verses in the prophecy of the Old Testament indicate that the anointed One of God, the Messiah, Christ, would suffer for the salvation of God's people and the fulfillment of God's purpose. According to these prophecies, it was necessary for God's anointed One, the One appointed to fulfill God's commission, to suffer. The ancient prophets knew this, and they spent considerable time to find out when the Messiah would suffer. This means that they were seeking to know what time He would suffer. Furthermore, they were also searching into what manner of time this would be. Would it be in a time comparable to the winter season or one

comparable to the summer? For this reason, in 1:11 Peter speaks concerning what manner of time.

We have seen that it is characteristic of Peter to use particular and even peculiar expressions in his writings. He speaks not only of the blood, but of the precious blood; not only of seed, but of incorruptible seed; not only of what time, but of what manner of time. Peter's word in verse 11 is not drawn out of the air. On the contrary, what he says is based upon what he found in the Old Testament. Peter surely has a ground, a basis, for whatever he says. His word regarding what manner of time is based on the Old Testament.

Peter treasured the Old Testament, and we in the Lord's recovery today certainly treasure the Bible. One striking characteristic of the Lord's recovery is that we treasure the Word of God and spend a great deal of time reading it and studying it. Many of us have been dealing with the Bible diligently and seriously for years, especially during the years we have been in the recovery. Therefore, let me address a question especially to those who have been serious in their reading of the Bible: What verse in the Old Testament tells us the manner of time of Christ's suffering and of His glorification? It is easy to find a verse that speaks of what time. For instance, Daniel 9:26 says, "After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off." The words "cut off" point to Christ's crucifixion. Daniel 9:25 mentions "seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." Here we have a total of sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred eighty-three years. According to these verses, four hundred eighty-three years after the command to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, the Messiah, Christ, would be cut off, crucified. By this we can know what time Christ would suffer. The time was at the expiration of the sixty-ninth week.

Although we have these verses related to what time Christ would suffer, it is very difficult to find a verse that tells us the manner of time. As I was writing the notes for the Recovery Version of 1 Peter, I was severely pressed by this word "manner" in verse 11. It was like a huge stone grinding me. It took a long time and a lot of labor for me to

understand this verse. (We shall come to the verses on the manner of time in the next message.) Verses 10 through 12 are not shallow. Rather, they are deep and difficult to understand. Thus, we should never look down on Peter as a writer or think that he was shallow.

CONSUMMATE SALVATION

The salvation in verse 10 refers to the salvation of the soul mentioned in the preceding verse. The phrase "salvation of the soul" indicates a full salvation. It does not refer to initial salvation; it denotes consummate salvation, full salvation. Furthermore, as we have already pointed out, in verse 10 salvation and grace are synonyms. This means that grace here refers to God's full salvation. Many Christians define grace merely as unmerited favor. How shallow is this explanation! The grace in the Bible is not limited to some kind of unmerited favor. The grace in the Bible is equal to full salvation.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN THE PROPHETS

In verse 10 Peter also tells us that the prophets sought out and searched out. In verse 11 he speaks of the prophets' searching. All these words indicate seeking. If we read through the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi, we shall see that all the Old Testament saints were seekers. I believe that they were much more exercised in their seeking than we are today. The prophets in particular were seeking and searching into what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them made clear. Let us quote the first part of Peter's word in verse 11 once again: "Searching into what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them made clear." The composition here seems awkward. Nevertheless, Peter's expression is marvelous and has been much used by God. What does this marvelous expression indicate? It indicates that while the prophets were searching, they had the Spirit of Christ in them.

You may be troubled by the phrase "the Spirit of Christ" in verse 11. When some read this verse, they may say to me, "Brother Lee, you have told us again and again

that, according to John 7, the Spirit was not yet before Christ's glorification. You have told us that prior to Christ's glorification, the Spirit was only the Spirit of God with divinity and did not have the elements of humanity and of Christ's death and resurrection. You have taught us that the Spirit of God had not yet been constituted of all these ingredients. But, Brother Lee, Peter speaks contrary to your teaching. He says that even in Old Testament times the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets. What would you say about this?" I have even received letters asking me concerning these questions. In 1:11 Peter definitely says that while the ancient prophets were seeking and searching, the Spirit of Christ was in them. We need to consider this matter very carefully in order to understand it properly.

The highly respected Vaticanus manuscript omits "of Christ." This omission fits in with the New Testament revelation concerning the Spirit. However, the other manuscripts of authority have "of Christ" in their text. In the New Testament revelation the Spirit of Christ denotes the Spirit after Christ's resurrection (Rom. 8:9-11). Before His resurrection, the Spirit that is not only the Spirit of God, but the Spirit of Christ, was not yet (John 7:39). The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of God constituted through and of the death and resurrection of Christ for the application and impartation of Christ's death and resurrection to His believers. Although the constitution of the Spirit of Christ is dispensational, constituted dispensationally through and of Christ's death and resurrection in New Testament times, His function is eternal, because He is the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). This can be compared to the cross of Christ: as an event, it was accomplished at the time of Christ's death, yet its function is eternal. Hence, in the eternal sight of God, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). In the Old Testament time, to the prophets who were seeking out and searching out the sufferings and glories of Christ, the Spirit of God, as the Spirit of Christ, made the time and the manner of time concerning Christ's death and resurrection clear.

Regarding the phrase "of Christ," there is, as we have pointed out, some difference in the manuscripts. In translating the Bible, we need to study the manuscripts. Only when we have the proper manuscripts do we have the ground to make a translation. Whereas the Vaticanus manuscript does not have the phrase "of Christ," other manuscripts do have it. It is right to go along with those manuscripts that include this phrase. The important matter for us to grasp is that the constituting of the Spirit of God to become the Spirit of Christ took place after the resurrection of Christ. This means that the constituting of the Spirit of Christ is dispensational. However, the function of the Spirit of Christ is eternal, for He is the eternal Spirit.

As we have already indicated, we can compare the constituting of the Spirit to the crucifixion of Christ. When was Christ crucified? According to the facts of history, Christ was crucified more than nineteen hundred years ago. But according to Revelation 13:8, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. This word in Revelation 13:8 is according to God's view. In the sight of God, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. But according to the accomplishment in history, Christ was crucified somewhat more than nineteen hundred years ago. Regarding its accomplishment, the crucifixion of Christ took place in time more than nineteen hundred years ago. But regarding function, the effectiveness of Christ's death is eternal, and in the sight of God, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. The principle is the same with the constituting of God's Spirit to be the Spirit of Christ. The actual constituting took place after the resurrection of Christ. But the function of this Spirit is eternal.

THE WORKING OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN US

Peter's somewhat awkward composition helps us to see that as the prophets were searching, the Spirit of Christ was working in them. Likewise, if we come to the holy Word with a seeking heart, immediately the Spirit of Christ will also work in us. I can testify of this from my

experience. Many times, while I was studying, searching, and even researching the Scriptures, the Spirit of Christ made matters clear to me. Because of the working of the Spirit of Christ in me, I could see things that were beyond my ability to see. Praise the Lord, as we are searching in the Word, the Spirit of Christ is operating within us!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE NINE

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(5)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:10-12

In 1:10 and 11 Peter says, "Concerning which salvation the prophets, who prophesied concerning the grace unto you, sought out and searched out, searching into what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them made clear, witnessing beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these." In the foregoing message we pointed out that in verse 11 Peter refers not only to what time but also to what manner of time Christ would suffer and be glorified. It is rather easy to understand what time, but it is difficult to understand what Peter means by what manner of time.

Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; and it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." According to this verse, the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, and the serpent would bruise his heel. This means that Christ would bruise the head of Satan and that Satan would bruise Christ's heel. To bruise the head is to kill, but to bruise the heel is to hurt. This word concerning the serpent bruising Christ's heel points to His suffering. When Christ came to deal with Satan on the cross, He suffered. If we research Genesis 3:15 carefully, we shall see that this verse speaks of the suffering of Christ. What is described in Genesis 3:15 is exactly what Christ did to Satan, and what Satan did to Christ.

A TIME OF UNBELIEF

Isaiah 53 speaks of what manner of time Christ suffered. If you research Isaiah 53, you will see that this chapter reveals the manner of time of Christ's crucifixion. This chapter speaks clearly about Christ's death in plain words, just as the New Testament does. But probably none of us has searched this chapter to find out the manner of time in which Christ died.

The first verse of Isaiah 53 says, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" This verse indicates that Christ came to suffer at a time that was full of unbelief, at a time when God's people were not believing in Him. The prophet asked the question: "Who hath believed our report?" The prophet reported, preached, made an announcement, but no one listened to him. This means that when Christ came, the people of God were full of unbelief. That was the manner of time. Christ did not come at a time when the people of God were filled with faith and everyone had a strong belief in God. No, He came at a time when God's people did not have belief in Him. The prophets knew this. They knew what manner of time Christ would come.

In Isaiah 6 the prophet indicates that God's people were not willing to listen to His word: "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." (Isa. 6:9-10). The Lord Jesus quoted this word in Matthew 13, and Paul also quoted it in Acts 28. The quotation of this word by the Lord Jesus and by Paul indicates that the time Christ came to suffer for the accomplishment of God's redemption was a time of unbelief.

A TIME OF CAPTIVITY

Furthermore, according to Daniel 9, it was a time of captivity. If we read concerning the seventy weeks and study the context, we shall understand that the seventy

weeks are a time of captivity. This is a further indication of the manner of time when Christ would come. It was to be a time of captivity. Christ actually did come at such a time. According to Daniel 9:26, "after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off." This refers to the crucifixion of Christ, which was during a time of captivity. Both Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9 indicate the manner of time Christ would come to suffer for us.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST WORKING IN THE PROPHETS

Peter may have been a fisherman, but he was also an excellent writer. He spent a great deal of time studying the Old Testament. He found out into what the prophets had searched, and he had the boldness to say that while the prophets were searching, the Spirit of Christ was in them. As we pointed out in the previous message, the constitution of the Spirit of Christ is dispensational. This means that the Spirit of Christ was constituted dispensationally through and with Christ's death and resurrection. However, the function of this Spirit is eternal, because He is the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). Regarding the constitution of the Spirit of Christ, time is a factor. But regarding the function of the Spirit of Christ, time is not a factor. The Spirit of God was sufficient and adequate for creation, but for the carrying out of God's full salvation and for the application of this salvation, there is the need of the Spirit of Christ. When the Old Testament prophets were searching into what manner of time Christ would come to suffer, the Spirit of Christ was working in them. This means that the Spirit of the Triune God--the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit of Christ--was operating in them. According to function, there is no difference between the Spirit's work in the prophets and His work in the apostles. It was the same Spirit with the same function.

First and 2 Peter were written to Jewish believers. The Jews knew God, and they trusted in the sprinkling of animal blood. Although they knew God, they did not know Him as the Father of Christ. Furthermore, they knew the

Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jehovah, but they did not know the Spirit of Christ. In 1:2 Peter purposely uses the expression "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" to differentiate this sprinkling from the sprinkling of animal blood in the Old Testament. Furthermore, in 1:3 he speaks of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" to distinguish the God of the Christians from the God of the Jews. Now we see that he even used the term "the Spirit of Christ" instead of the Spirit of God in order to make yet another distinction. Peter was seeking to convince the Jewish believers that even the Old Testament prophets were the same as New Testament Christians. The Spirit of Christ who is in New Testament Christians was also working in the Old Testament prophets.

As a rule, in the Old Testament times the Spirit was upon the saints, not in them. But here, based on the principle of the eternal function of the Spirit of Christ, is an exception: we are told that the Spirit of Christ was working in the Old Testament prophets. Peter says that the Spirit of Christ in them made the prophets clear concerning what manner of time Christ would suffer. It is a shame that so many of the New Testament believers are not clear about this. Probably only now do you understand what Peter means by what manner of time Christ would suffer.

Peter's expression "what manner of time" implies a great deal. It indicates to the Jewish believers that the manner of time of Christ's coming was a time of unbelief. This is also the manner of time in which we live today. In Peter's day not many Jews believed in the Lord Jesus. Rather, those who believed suffered persecution. The unbelieving Jews challenged the Jewish believers, saying, "Look, what a small number believe in your Jesus! Why are you so foolish as to believe in a Nazarene who was put on the cross?" The manner of time of Christ's coming surely was a manner of unbelief. It is the same today. We should not expect many Jews to believe in the Lord Jesus. The manner of time of Christ's coming is unbelief. This means that unbelief is a characteristic of the time of

Christ's coming. Isaiah asked, "Who has believed our report?" Peter certainly saw this unbelief in those of his day. Peter reported, but very few Jews responded. That was the manner of time. Many Christians today expect to have a great revival. That, however, is against the principle that the manner of time of Christ's coming is characterized by unbelief.

Peter's composition may not be refined, but he was nevertheless a giant in spiritual experiences. He may not have had a thorough knowledge of the Greek language, but he surely knew spiritual experience. In using his limited knowledge of the Greek language, Peter tried his best to put the aspects of his experience into words. In particular, he put a lot in 1:11. I would like to follow Peter in caring for spiritual experience and for the riches of Christ rather than for language.

THE GLORIES OF CHRIST

In verse 11 Peter says that the prophets witnessed beforehand "the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these." Christ first suffered and then entered into glory (Luke 24:26). We should follow Him in the same steps (1 Pet. 4:13; Rom. 8:17). The sufferings of Christ, as revealed to the prophets and prophesied by them in Psalm 22:1, 6-8, 12-18; Isaiah 53:2-10a, 12b; Daniel 9:26; and Zechariah 12:10 and 13:6-7, are for the accomplishment of God's redemption, which has solved all the problems between man and God, and terminated the old creation on the negative side, and has released the eternal life of God for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose on the positive side.

The glories of Christ are for His glorification, which He asked of the Father before His crucifixion (John 17:1), and which is for the execution of God's New Testament economy for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose. The sufferings of Christ and the glorification of Christ with the glories in different steps--the factors of God's full redemption and salvation--being applied to us and experienced by us, equal the salvation mentioned in 1 Peter 1:5, 9-10. This is what the prophets in the Old

Testament sought and searched out, what the Spirit of Christ revealed to them, what the apostles preached in the New Testament by the Holy Spirit, and what the angels longed to look into (v. 12).

Literally "of Christ" is "unto Christ." The sufferings Christ endured were sufferings assigned to Him by God (Isa. 53:10). Hence, they are of Him, belonging to Him.

The glories are in different steps: the glory in Christ's resurrection (Luke 24:26; Acts 3:13), the glory in His ascension (Acts 2:33; Heb. 2:9), the glory in His return (Rev. 18:1; Matt. 25:31), and the glory in His reign (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6), as revealed in Psalm 16:8-10; 22:21-22; 118:22-24; 110:1, 4; 118:26; Zechariah 14:4-5; Daniel 7:13-14; and Psalm 24:7-10; 72:8-11.

It is unusual for the word glory to be used in the plural. Do you know of another writing that speaks of glories? Abstract nouns are not usually used in the plural. Solid nouns, however, are often used in the plural. Glory is an abstract noun. But to Peter glory is not abstract; on the contrary, it is very solid.

According to Peter's understanding, Christ has many glories, one glory after another. He has a glory in resurrection, another glory in ascension, and other glories in enthronement, lordship, kingship, and reigning. He has a glory in His humanity and another glory in His divinity.

Christ does not have only one kind of glory; He has many glories. The prophets searched into these glories. They learned what time Christ would come to suffer and what time He would enter into all His glories.

THE SPIRIT'S PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF GOD'S SALVATION

In verse 12 Peter goes on to say, "To whom it was revealed that not to themselves, but to you they ministered these things, which have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; which things angels long to look into." "These things" refer to the sufferings of Christ and His glories. The Old Testament prophets

ministered the sufferings and glories of Christ to the New Testament believers.

These things have been announced to us through those who preached the gospel. The ones who preached the gospel were the apostles of the New Testament. The prophets searched and prophesied; the apostles preached. The preaching of the apostles is the Spirit's practical application of God's salvation in the New Testament. Both the prophesying of the prophets and the preaching of the apostles were the application of the Spirit. This means that the Spirit applies God's full salvation by two instrumentalities, the prophesying of the prophets and the preaching of the apostles.

In my ministry I am preaching. I believe that through this preaching the Spirit is applying God's full salvation to you. It is not my goal actually to train anyone. Instead, I simply preach Christ, the death of Christ, and the different glories of Christ. Each preaching is an application of the Spirit. Those who attend the meetings of the ministry are under the application of the Spirit of Christ. My greatest joy is to see the saints receive Christ through the application of the Spirit. I am especially happy to see the second generation growing up in the church life. My heart leaps when I see that they are receiving the application of God's salvation through this ministry and by the Spirit.

I encourage you all to go forth and preach Christ. The apostles are not the only ones who can preach. As long as you preach Christ, you are included among those who preach the gospel by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

THINGS WHICH ANGELS LONG TO LOOK INTO

Peter ends verse 12 with the words "which things angels long to look into." The Greek word rendered "look into" portrays one stooping and stretching the neck to look at some wonderful sight. This shows how interested the angels are in observing the things concerning Christ for God's salvation. They declared and celebrated the Savior's birth (Luke 2:8-14), they rejoice over the sinner repenting to receive salvation (Luke 15:10), and they are happy to

serve those who inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14; Acts 12:15; Matt. 18:10).

After speaking concerning the prophets in the Old Testament and the preachers in the New Testament, Peter suddenly speaks concerning the angels. While the angels are serving us, they are stooping down to look into the situation. As part of one sentence concerning God's full salvation, we have the prophets, the preachers, and the angels. This is characteristic of Peter's writing.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TEN

PETER'S WELL-SPEAKING CONCERNING THE TRIUNE GOD

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:3-12

First Peter 1:3-12 is one long sentence. This long sentence is a blessing, a well-speaking, that involves the Trinity of the Godhead. Verse 3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here Peter speaks of God the Father. Beginning in verse 3, Peter mentions the Lord Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ, again and again. At the very end of this section, in verse 12, Peter speaks of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this blessing is actually composed of the Trinity of the Godhead--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three Gods. We have one God, the unique, eternal God. This unique God is complete and perfect. But although God is uniquely one, He is triune. He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Those who know Greek may not consider that Peter's composition is very good. The Bible, however, is a matter of revelation, not of composition. These ten verses in 1 Peter 1 may not be good human composition, but they give us an excellent, marvelous, and wonderful divine revelation.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BLESS GOD

In 1:3 Peter uses the word "blessed." Paul also uses this word in Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." In Greek the word blessed means well spoken of, praised with adoration. Hence, a blessing is a well-speaking, and to bless someone is to speak well of him. Therefore, to bless God is to speak

well concerning Him and all that He is to us, has done for us, and will do for us. To bless God is to speak in a sweet way of what God is, of what He has done, and of what He will do. This kind of speaking is a blessing.

Many Christians think that to bless God is to praise Him. This understanding of blessing certainly is not wrong. Whenever you are about to praise God, you need to speak something about Him. However, in what way shall we praise God? A child may say, "God, I praise You for giving me a good father, one who loves me and who earns a lot of money. God, I also praise You that my mother buys nice things for me." Many Christians praise God mainly for material things. They may say, "Oh, blessed be God the Father! Praise Him for giving me a good business, a large house, and a nice family." This falls far short of the revelation in 1:3-12.

Gradually the Lord has brought me into the thought of the divine revelation in the Bible. I can testify that when I read such a verse as 1:3, I realize that to bless God the Father is to speak well of what God is to us subjectively. It is not merely to praise Him for what He has done for us or given to us objectively. To bless God the Father is to speak subjectively of what He is to us, of what He has done for us, and of what He will do for us. This is to bless God according to what is revealed in the New Testament.

These ten verses in chapter one of 1 Peter tell us what the Father has done for us through the Son and by the Spirit. The Father has done so much for us through His Son. All that the Father has done for us through the Son is applied to us by the Holy Spirit. We need to speak well regarding all these things.

THE BACKGROUND OF PETER'S WELL-SPEAKING

It is important for us to realize why Peter uttered such a well-speaking concerning the Triune God in a letter written to scattered saints. According to 1:1, this Epistle was written to "the chosen pilgrims of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." All the five provinces mentioned in this verse were in Asia Minor,

between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The fact that the believers to whom this Epistle was addressed were scattered in these provinces of Asia Minor was a significant part of the background of Peter's well-speaking concerning God.

At the time this Epistle was written, both Peter and the recipients of this book, the chosen saints scattered in Asia Minor, were under the Roman government. In 64 A.D., the approximate time of the writing of 1 Peter, the Roman Empire was very strong. About thirty years before the birth of Christ, Julius Caesar defeated Egypt and established the Roman Empire in full. Probably there has never been a stronger government in history than the government of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. The Roman Empire controlled the entire region around the Mediterranean Sea, including territory in Asia, Europe, and northern Africa. As a strong government, the Roman Empire also had very strong laws. It is common knowledge that western culture is built on three pillars: Roman law, Hebrew religion, and Greek culture.

The recipients of the Epistle of 1 Peter not only were under the Roman government, but they were also under the influence of Hebrew religion and Greek culture, in particular, Greek philosophy. The well-speaking concerning the Triune God in 1:3-12 is altogether different from both Hebrew religion and Greek philosophy. In these ten verses there is nothing of religion or philosophy. In other words, Peter's writing here is neither religious nor secular. Here we cannot find any religious thought or any secular concept or philosophy. According to what, then, were these verses written? They were written according to God's revelation. This revelation, however, is not merely objective. On the contrary, it is a subjective revelation. This means that Peter's composition of these verses was according to his spiritual experiences.

THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Because Peter wrote according to his spiritual

experience, he covers a great many points in these ten verses. Let us consider how many points are in verse 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead." One major point is the title "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This title has nothing to do with either religion or philosophy. The matter of blessing is another important point. Other matters are God's great mercy, regeneration, living hope, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead. None of these points is religious or philosophical. Instead, they all are aspects of the divine revelation.

In reading the Bible we should not take anything for granted. We should not assume that we understand what we read. We need to drop the traditional way of reading the Word, the way that causes us to take it for granted. When we come to a word such as "blessed" in 1:3, we need to say, "What does this word mean? I know this word in my native language, but what does it mean in this verse? What does it refer to?" If we read the Bible in this way and pray regarding what we read, we may find that a chapter such as 1 Peter 1 may occupy us for an entire year. I urge you not to take for granted Peter's words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We need to find out what Peter means by "blessed."

Writing this Epistle according to his spiritual experiences, Peter intended to annul Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. I believe that if Peter were with us today, he would say strongly that this was his intention. He might say, "The intention in my heart when I wrote the first book was to knock down Hebrew religion and to destroy Greek philosophy." Many phrases in this chapter indicate that this was Peter's intention.

Peter's words "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" were a severe blow to Jewish religion. The Jews would say that such speaking is blasphemy. Furthermore, these words were altogether contrary to Greek philosophy, myths, legends, and superstitions. With Jewish religion

and Greek philosophy as the background, Peter declared, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." If the rabbis and the philosophers had read these words, the rabbis would have said, "This is blasphemy!" and the philosophers would have asked, "What is this?"

ASPECTS OF THIS WELL-SPEAKING

In verse 4 Peter goes on to say, "Unto an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, kept in the heavens for you." The major point in this verse concerns the inheritance. Three subpoints related to the inheritance were also included here. The inheritance is incorruptible in essence, undefiled in condition, and unfading in expression. I believe that this description of our inheritance implies the Trinity. "Incorruptible" refers to the Father's nature; "undefiled," to the sanctifying work of the Spirit that keeps the condition clean and pure; and "unfading," to Christ as the expression of God's glory which never fades. Two other points related to this inheritance are that it is kept in the heavens and that it is for us. Therefore, in this verse we have one major point with five subpoints. None of these points is either Jewish or Greek. In other words, nothing in this verse is either religious or philosophical. Everything here is according to the divine revelation.

Verse 5 says, "Who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time." Here Peter tells the believers that they are being guarded, garrisoned, by the power of God. They are not guarded by religious rituals or philosophical reasonings, but are guarded by the power of God through faith. Once again, this is not common language; it is not an ordinary way of speaking. Rather, this is something extraordinary. The first point in this verse concerns being guarded; the second is the power of God; the third is "through faith"; the fourth is "unto salvation"; and the fifth is "ready to be revealed at the last time." Again we see that in a single verse Peter covers many points.

In verse 6 Peter continues, "In which you exult, though for a little while at present, if it must be, you have been made sorrowful by various trials." The word "exult" is stronger than the word "rejoice." To rejoice is to be joyful in an audible way; to exult is to rejoice with a full and complete release. When we exult, we are beside ourselves with rejoicing. In addition to exulting, Peter speaks here of being made sorrowful for a little while, if it must be, by various trials.

In verse 7 Peter goes on to say, "That the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes and is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ." This verse does not speak concerning the preciousness of our faith; it talks about the preciousness of the proving of our faith. In 2 Peter 1 precious faith is mentioned. What is precious in this verse, however, is not the faith itself; it is the proving of our faith that is more precious than the proving of gold. Peter's desire is that this proving would be found unto praise, glory, and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ. The proving tests out our faith. At the judgment seat of the Lord, this proving may be found unto praise, glory, and honor. Peter concludes this verse by referring to the unveiling of Jesus Christ. Here he does not use the words "manifestation" or "revelation." He deliberately selects the word "unveiling."

Verse 8 says, "Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, not seeing at present yet believing, you exult with unspeakable and glorified joy." The relative pronoun "whom" refers to Jesus Christ. Although we have never seen the Lord Jesus, we love Him. At present we cannot see Him, yet we believe in Him. Furthermore, according to this verse, we exult with unspeakable and glorified joy. This is a joy that it is beyond our ability to utter. Things that are wonderful are also unspeakable. In this verse Peter uses a special expression--"glorified joy." Glorified joy is joy immersed in the expression of God.

In verse 9 Peter says, "Obtaining the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Here Peter indicates that the

end of our faith, the consummation of the process of our faith, will be the salvation of our souls.

Verses 10 and 11 say, "Concerning which salvation the prophets, who prophesied concerning the grace unto you, sought out and searched out, searching into what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them made clear, witnessing beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these." Here Peter says that the prophets prophesied of the grace that is unto us, that they sought out and searched out, and that they witnessed beforehand the sufferings of Christ and His glories. Peter seems to leap from one point to another. In verse 12 he concludes this section by saying, "To whom it was revealed that not to themselves, but to you they ministered these things, which have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; which things angels long to look into."

THE DIVINE REVELATION EXPRESSED THROUGH HUMANITY

The writing of these verses is not according to religious or philosophical knowledge. These verses were written according to Peter's spiritual experiences. For this reason, Peter's composition is not common, not ordinary. This should strengthen our belief in God. If there were no God, how could such words be written? These words testify not only that there is a God, but also that there must be One, the Son of God, whose name is Jesus Christ. Furthermore, there must be One who is called the Holy Spirit. This Triune God has surely worked in Peter, the writer of these verses. Therefore, Peter had experience of the Triune God.

The source and the ground of Peter's writing are not religion or philosophy. The source and ground of Peter's writing are the experiences of the Triune God operating in him. Peter gathered together much of his experience and put the various points of his experience into writing. Peter did not care for literary style; he cared only for the genuine points of his experience of the Triune God.

Although I am short of utterance in speaking about this, I hope that this brief word will help you understand that 1:3-12 is indeed the divine revelation. This revelation is different from anything religious or philosophical. It is altogether divine. But although it is divine, it is something experienced by a human being through the Trinity of the Godhead. Therefore, Peter's well-speaking of our Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--came from his own experience.

As Peter was writing his first Epistle, he was surely inspired by God. No human mind is capable of producing such a work. No philosopher or ethical teacher would write in such a way. No one else in history has written such a thing, and no one today can write such a thing. Who could possibly invent all the terms used by Peter? Who would think up all the different points? The answer is that no one can invent these terms or think up these points. Not one of the Greek philosophers would even imagine them. All these points have their source in the very God Himself.

God not only originated these terms, but He also wrought Himself into a fisherman such as Peter so that, although he was not a learned person, he could write this composition with all its wonderful points. As we read chapter one of 1 Peter, we need to touch Peter's spirit as it is expressed in his writing. If we do this, we shall see that his writing is not human. Peter's writing is spiritual and divine. Here we see the divine revelation expressed through humanity.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(6)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:13-17

The first twelve verses of 1 Peter 1 are deep and full of complications. These verses cover matters on the divine side, whereas verses 13 through 25 cover matters on the human side. An example of the profound matters covered by Peter in 1:1-12 is the foreknowledge of God. According to 1:1 and 2, we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. Can you explain what the foreknowledge of God is? This matter of God's foreknowledge is deep and profound.

In 1:3 Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is Himself God. How, then, can God be His God? This is another profound matter in these verses.

In the first twelve verses of this chapter the points concerning the divine side are deep and profound. The matters on the human side covered in 1:13-25 are more detailed. This chapter, therefore, can be divided into two portions: verses 1 through 12 covering the divine side, and verses 13 through 25 covering the human side.

Verses 13 through 25 cover two main points: a holy manner of life and brotherly love. Verse 15 says, "But according to the Holy One who called you, you yourselves also become holy in all your manner of life." Verse 22 says, "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love, love one another from the heart fervently." In these verses Peter is concerned that the

believers would have a holy manner of life and brotherly love.

We have emphasized the fact that the first twelve verses of this chapter unveil profound matters on the divine side. Some of these matters are the foreknowledge of God the Father, regeneration unto a living hope, and an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, and kept in the heavens for us. Verses 13 through 25 are mainly concerned with the development of a holy manner of life and brotherly love. These are the issues, the results, of the full salvation of the Triune God.

GIRDING UP THE LOINS OF OUR MIND

Let us now consider verses 13 through 25 one by one. Verse 13 says, "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, set your hope completely on the grace being brought to you at the unveiling of Jesus Christ." Verses 3 through 12 are one long sentence of blessing, of well-speaking, of God the Father, disclosing to us His marvelous and excellent salvation, beginning from the regeneration of our spirit (v. 3) and consummating in the salvation of our soul (v. 9), accomplished through the sufferings of Christ and His glories (v. 11), and applied to us by the Holy Spirit (v. 12). Based upon this, verse 13 begins an exhortation to those who are participating in the full salvation operated by the Triune God according to His economy.

To gird up the loins of our mind means not to be loose in our thinking. However, most of us are very loose in our thinking. Our thoughts jump from one thing to another. In a few seconds, in our mind we can travel around the world. We may think about one thing and then suddenly think about something else. For example, while praising the Lord at the Lord's table, we may suddenly begin to think of something we have just purchased from the store. Because our thoughts can travel so fast, we need to gird up the loins of our mind.

Here Peter seems to be saying, "Brothers, I have just presented you a number of marvelous, divine items. You

have read my well-speaking concerning the Triune God. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has regenerated us unto a living hope. I have spoken of God's selection according to His foreknowledge, of Christ's redemption, and the Spirit's application. Now I urge you to gird up the loins of your mind. Don't let your mind be loose."

BEING SOBER

In verse 13 Peter also speaks of being sober. To be sober is to be calm and clear in mind, able to realize God's economy in His salvation, as revealed in verses 3 through 12, without being disturbed by fear, anxiety, or any care.

SETTING OUR HOPE ON GRACE

In verse 13 Peter also charges us to set our hope completely on the grace. This hope is the living hope which has issued from regeneration (v. 3). We need to set our living hope completely on the grace that is being brought to us at the unveiling of Jesus Christ. Surely this grace is not merely unmerited favor. It refers to the salvation of the soul (vv. 5, 9-10), which will be the consummation of God's full salvation. The grace has been brought to us by the Lord's first coming (John 1:17). It will be consummated by His second coming. On such grace we should set our hope.

Whatever we enjoy of the Lord today is, comparatively speaking, a small portion. In the Bible this is called the foretaste; it is not yet the full taste. This age is an age of foretaste. But when the Lord Jesus comes back, we shall enjoy the full taste. While we are enjoying the foretaste, we set our hope on the coming full taste. The nature, the essence, and the reality of the foretaste are the same as that of the full taste. The difference is one of quantity. Today we are enjoying a small portion as a sample, a foretaste. Eventually we shall enjoy the full portion and experience the full taste. Therefore, on the one hand, we are now enjoying grace; on the other hand, we are expecting the coming full taste. This means that as we are

enjoying the foretaste, we are expecting to have the full taste. This causes us to set our hope on the coming full taste. The coming full taste will be the consummation of this unique grace.

This grace is not merely unmerited favor. It is the Triune God as our full salvation for our full enjoyment. Today we have only the foretaste, the enjoyment of a small portion, but the full taste is coming. Let us set our hope on this coming full taste, which will be the consummation of grace.

THE UNVEILING OF JESUS CHRIST

Toward the end of verse 13 Peter speaks of the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is significant that he uses the word "unveiling" and not advent or some other word. At present, we are enjoying the Lord Jesus as a foretaste under the veil. But the time is coming when the veil will be taken away. Then we shall be able to declare, "Hallelujah, I am enjoying the Lord Jesus outside the veil!" Today we are enjoying grace; however, we are enjoying this grace under the covering of a veil.

Because we are under a veil with the Lord, others may not be able to understand what we are doing. We may try to tell them that we are enjoying Christ. However, they may say that this is nonsense. Our enjoyment is concealed, and others who do not share the same experience cannot know anything about it. But one day the Lord Jesus will be unveiled. Then others will be able to understand that we have been enjoying the Lord Jesus. This unveiling will be the coming grace as the consummation of the full salvation of the Triune God.

If we are not enjoying the Lord Jesus as the foretaste, we shall not have the hope that He will be unveiled as our full taste. I can testify that daily I enjoy the Lord as the foretaste and always have an earnest expectation concerning the full taste. I may pray, "Lord Jesus, unveil Yourself, and let my enjoyment of You be in full." When we enjoy the foretaste, we have such a hope. We need to set

our hope completely on the grace being brought to us at the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

BECOMING HOLY IN ALL OUR MANNER OF LIFE

In verse 14 Peter goes on to say, "As children of obedience, do not be conformed to the former lusts in your ignorance." The Greek word rendered "conformed" is the same as that used in Romans 12:2. It is used here to denote a state as the path in which God's elect as sojourners walk. We should not be conformed to the former lusts. This means that we should not shape ourselves according to them. Formerly, we were ignorant. But now, having become children of obedience, we are knowledgeable.

Verse 15 says, "But according to the Holy One who called you, you yourselves also become holy in all your manner of life." The Holy One is the Triune God--the choosing Father, the redeeming Son, and the sanctifying Spirit (vv. 1-2). The Father has regenerated His elect, imparting His holy nature into them (v. 3); the Son has redeemed them with His blood from the vain manner of life (vv. 18-19); and the Spirit has sanctified them according to the Father's holy nature, separating them from anything other than God, that they, by the holy nature of the Father, may become holy in all their manner of life, even as holy as God Himself.

We become holy in all our manner of life through the sanctification of the Spirit. This is based on regeneration, which brings us the holy nature of God and issues in a holy life.

We ourselves need to become holy. This is not merely a matter of wearing a certain kind of clothing or of not wearing makeup. That concept of holiness is too outward. Our being, our disposition, our entire person, should become holy. This is for us to become holy in all our manner of life.

In verse 16 Peter gives us the reason we need to become holy: "Because it is written, You shall be holy, because I am holy." This is a quote from the Pentateuch. In the

Pentateuch we are told at least a few times that God's people should be holy because God Himself is holy.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE HOLY ONE

In verse 17 Peter continues, "And if you call upon as Father the One who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear." In this verse Peter comes to the matter of God's government, the particular point that he covers in his Epistles. The judgment of God is for the carrying out of His government.

The Holy One who has called us as the Father has regenerated us to produce a holy family--a holy Father with holy children. As holy children, we should walk in a holy manner of life. Otherwise, the Father will become the Judge (4:17) to deal with our unholiness. He begat us with life inwardly that we may have His holy nature. He disciplines us with judgment outwardly that we may partake of His holiness (Heb. 12:9-10). His judgment is according to our work, our conduct, without respect of persons. Hence, we should pass the time of our sojourning in fear. If we call upon Him as our Father, we should also fear Him as our Judge and live a holy life in fear.

In verse 17 Peter "is not speaking of the final judgment of the soul. In that sense 'the Father does not judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son' (John 5:22). The thing spoken of here is the daily judgment of God's government in this world, exercised with regard to His children. Accordingly it says, 'the time of your sojourning' here" (Darby). This is God's judgment on His own household (1 Pet. 4:17).

Since these two Epistles are concerned with the government of God, the judgment of God and of the Lord is referred to repeatedly (2:23; 4:5-6,17; 2 Pet. 2:3-4, 9; 3:7), as one of the essential items. It began from the angels (2 Pet. 2:3-4) and passed through the generations of man in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 2:5-9). Then in the New Testament age it begins from the house of God (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:23; 4:6,17) and continues until the coming of the day of

the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10), which will be a day of judgment on the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles before the millennium. After the millennium, all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged and perish (1 Pet. 4:5; 2 Pet. 3:7), and the heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10b, 12). The results of the varied judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. However, by all these judgments the Lord God will clear up the entire universe and purify it so that He may have a new heaven and a new earth for a new universe filled with His righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13) for His delight.

God judges according to each one's work without respect of persons. The work in verse 17 refers to conduct, behavior, as in Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16.

PASSING THE TIME OF OUR SOJOURNING IN FEAR

In verse 17 Peter urges us to pass the time of our sojourning in fear. This is a holy fear, as in Philippians 2:12. It refers to a healthy, serious caution for us to behave in a holy manner. Such fear is mentioned a number of times in this book because its teaching is concerning the government of God.

To pass the time of our sojourning in fear means to walk in a holy fear of God all the time. The words "pass the time" include every minute of our daily life.

Years ago I visited some saints in Las Vegas. Certain of them suggested that I visit a gambling casino just to see what it is like. I replied, "No, I shall not go. If it were not for your invitation, I would never come to this evil city. Because you have invited me, I am now here with you. But I will not go to see a gambling casino." If I had gone to such a place, then a certain amount of time that day would not have been passed in fear.

Every minute of our sojourning must be in fear. This is related to the holy manner of life. In all our manner of life we need to become holy, separated from the world.

Verses 18 and 19 explain why we should pass the time of our sojourning in fear: "Knowing that you were

redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ." Why should we pass the time of our sojourning in fear? Because we know that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. It is because we know this that we now pass the time of our sojourning in fear. The point here is that the holy manner of life should issue out from the dear and precious redemption of Christ.

Paul tells us that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of sin and from this evil age. Peter, however, tells us that Christ has redeemed us from the vain manner of life. It is vain to indulge in worldly entertainments or to purchase worldly clothing. The vain manner of life may also be related to the way we do our shopping. Some sisters very much like to go shopping. Every week they go to the department store at least to look around even if they do not buy anything. Do you not know who you are? You are sons and daughters of the King. As children of the King, you should not go to a department store in a light way. On the contrary, you should be stately and dignified even in your shopping. I use this as an illustration of being redeemed in a practical way from the vain manner of life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(7)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:15, 18-19

BECOMING HOLY IN ALL OUR MANNER OF LIFE

Before we go on to verses 18 and 19, I would like to say a further word concerning the matter of becoming holy in all our manner of life (1:15). The phrase "manner of life" is a literal translation of the Greek. According to 1:15, we should not merely be holy and live a holy life; we should become holy in all our manner of life. Others should be able to see a certain manner in our living, and this manner should be holy. This does not mean that we are holy occasionally or that we are holy in certain things. For instance, it is not that in the morning we are holy in one matter, and then later in the day we are no longer holy in that matter. No, we need habitually to have a holy life. This is what constitutes a holy manner of life. If we would have a holy manner of life, we need to be habitually holy in our constitution. This means that we need to become a certain kind of person, a person who is holy in constitution.

We may use fruit trees as an illustration of what we mean by a holy manner of life. An apple tree produces apples according to the apple tree manner of life. Likewise, an orange tree produces oranges according to its manner of life. The producing of apples by an apple tree and oranges by an orange tree is not accidental. On the contrary, it is altogether according to the manner of life characteristic of each tree.

The same should be true of our becoming holy in our manner of life. Some Christians who emphasize a so-called holiness may sometimes act holy, but at other times they may be very worldly or fleshly. This indicates that they do not have a holy manner of life. To have a holy manner of life is to have a life that is the expression of God. It is to have a living that is the expression of the holy nature of God.

When we were regenerated, the holy nature of the Father was imparted to us. This holy nature that is now within us is the basic factor for us to live a holy manner of life. Once again we may use fruit trees as an illustration. If an apple tree did not have the life of an apple tree, it could not possibly have the manner of life of an apple tree. Suppose someone tried to attach apples to the branches of another kind of tree. After a short period of time, the apples would fall down. But an apple tree, having an apple-tree manner of life, expresses the nature of the apple tree that is within it. The principle is the same with becoming holy in all our manner of life. The Father has imparted His holy nature into us, and this is what makes it possible for us to have a life that expresses the holy God.

Second, concerning a holy manner of life, the Holy Spirit is doing a sanctifying work within us. The Greek word for sanctify is the verb form of the adjective holy. When the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, He makes us holy. With the Father's holy nature within us as a basis of operation, the Holy Spirit is working in us to make us holy.

Third, because we are often disobedient, we need God's discipline. For this reason, Hebrews 12:10 says that God the Father disciplines us so that we may partake of His holiness.

To have a holy manner of life, we need three things: the impartation of the Father's holy nature into our being, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to make us holy, and God's discipline so that we may participate in the holiness of our holy God. These are the three factors for us to live a life of holiness. Our living should not only be holy to a certain extent, hut our very manner of life should be holy.

This means that we should have a living that is the expression of our holy God.

KNOWING THAT WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED

Verse 18 says, "Knowing that you were redeemed not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers." According to grammar, verse 18 is related to "pass the time of your sojourning in fear" in verse 17. This indicates that in order to pass the time of our sojourning in fear, we need a deep realization concerning the redemption of Christ. Today many Christians are living in a loose way because their understanding of Christ's redemption is shallow.

When I was a child studying in the elementary school of a Baptist mission, I heard much about the cross of Christ and Christ's redemption. However, nothing that I heard touched my heart, for that teaching regarding the redemption of Christ was shallow. I do not know why the missionaries and the Chinese ministers did not say something weighty from 1:18 and 19. I cannot recall hearing any teaching from these verses while I attended that school. All the preaching concerning Christ's redemption that I heard there was very shallow.

Peter's way of speaking about redemption in these verses is far from superficial. I believe that anyone who would read these verses by concentrating his entire being on them would be touched when Peter says, "Knowing that you were redeemed...with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ."

According to verse 18, the blood of Christ has redeemed us from our vain manner of life. This vain manner of life is in contrast to the holy manner of life in verse 15. According to most other references in Scripture, the blood of Christ redeems us from sins, transgressions, lawlessness, and all sinful things (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:15; Titus 2:14). Here is an exception: Christ's blood has redeemed us from our old, vain manner of life, because the emphasis here is not on sinfulness, but on the manner of life. The whole chapter emphasizes the holy manner of life which God's

chosen people should have in their sojourn. Not only is the Spirit's sanctification for this; even Christ's redemption is for this--to separate us from our vain manner of life handed down from our fathers. Knowing that this was accomplished with the highest price, the precious blood of Christ, we pass the days of our sojourning in fear.

Our old manner of life, a life in lusts (1 Pet. 1:14), had no meaning and no goal; hence, it was vain. But now to live a holy life, to express God in His holiness, is our goal (vv. 15-16).

Many precious biblical terms, terms which are very important in the Word, have become common and religious. We may even say that they have been spoiled. The word "redeemed" is an example of a biblical term that has become religious because of the way it is commonly used. Therefore, when we read this word in the Bible, we may not have much feeling within us concerning it. However, when Peter wrote 1:18 and 19, he was full of feeling.

PURCHASED BY THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST

I prefer to translate the Greek word for "redeemed" as purchased. Actually this is the meaning of the Greek word. We have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ.

As fallen human beings, we were in a dreadful situation before we experienced Christ's redemption: we were merchandise up for sale in an unclean marketplace, the marketplace of the vain manner of life. If the spiritual feelings within you are tender when you are in a shopping center, you will realize that such a place is unclean. Outwardly, it may be very clean; however, spiritually speaking, it is very dirty. Furthermore, nearly everything in a shopping center is related to the vain manner of life. Formerly, we were merchandise up for sale in Satan's shopping center, in his unclean, worldly market. Today all of human society is an unclean market.

Although we were items on sale in Satan's shopping center, Christ came to purchase us, to redeem us. He paid a very high price to buy us--the price of His precious blood.

Satan did not want Christ to buy us. Satan's plan was that we would be bought by someone else. Therefore, when Satan realized that Christ had come to purchase us, he caused a great deal of trouble. Unwilling to release us, to let us go, he raised up many obstacles and barriers to frustrate Christ from purchasing us. Nevertheless, Christ died on the cross and shed His precious blood to redeem us. From our side, we were purchased, but from Satan's side, we were redeemed.

The blood that redeemed us was an extraordinary kind of blood--the blood of the God-man, Jesus Christ, the Man whose life reached the highest standard. The Lord Jesus is a Man mingled with God. Therefore, when this Man died on the cross, God also passed through death. No human words are adequate to explain this.

Only the blood of Christ was qualified and sufficient to redeem us, to purchase us. We had been put on sale by the enemy Satan, our usurper. But Christ, our Redeemer, paid the highest price to purchase us. Peter speaks of this in verses 18 and 19.

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD OR SILVER

In verse 18 Peter says that we were redeemed "not with corruptible things." The blood of Christ is a material substance, yet its effectiveness, function, worth, power, and authority are eternal and incorruptible.

The blood of Christ, by which we are sprinkled and thus marked out from common people, is more precious than silver and gold. The highest price has been paid for our redemption, that we might be redeemed from the vain manner of life to the holy (vv. 18, 15). For this we should have a holy fear, a healthy, serious caution before God that, as God's elect, redeemed with such a high price, we would not miss the purpose of this most high redemption of Christ.

In verses 18 and 19 we have a comparison between gold or silver and a lamb. Gold and silver are valuable, but they are lifeless. They are not organic, but a lamb is living and organic. Through this comparison, Peter indicates that the

price paid for us by Christ was related to something of life and to something organic.

In chapter six of John the Lord Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves of barley and two fishes (John 6:9-12). Barley in typology signifies resurrection life. In Palestine barley ripens earlier than wheat does. For this reason, barley signifies Christ in resurrection.

Using the miraculous feeding of the multitude as a basis, the Lord Jesus went on to give a message to the people, a message telling them that He is the bread of life. In John 6:35 He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes in Me shall by no means ever thirst." Again, in John 6:48 He said, "I am the bread of life." Bread, of course, is made of materials of the plant life. Who would use something of animal life to make bread? Nevertheless, after telling the people that He is the bread of life, the Lord Jesus went on to say, "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). Then the Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.... For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink" (vv. 53, 55). First the bread is barley bread; eventually, this bread becomes the Lord's flesh. Barley, of course, is of the vegetable life, but the meat of the flesh with the blood is of the animal life.

I refer to John 6 in order to point out that we cannot understand or explain in full the things of Christ for the accomplishing of God's redemption. Furthermore, biblical truth cannot be systematized. How can you systematize barley bread and meat in John 6? According to this chapter, the barley and the meat are mixed, blended together as one. On the one hand, the life of Christ is represented by the vegetable life; on the other hand, His life is represented by the animal life. This can be compared to saying that Christ is both divine and human. Christ's divine nature is mingled with, blended with, His human

nature. When He died on the cross, He died as a man. Nevertheless, God was involved with this death. It is beyond our ability to explain this.

Because Christ is both God and man, represented by both the animal life and the vegetable life, His Person is unique, and His blood also is unique. No other blood can redeem us. Only the blood of Christ is sufficient for this. His blood is unique because His Person is unique. Because He is precious, His blood is precious. The Bible even tells us that today the blood of Christ still speaks for us in the heavens (Heb. 12:24).

WITHOUT BLEMISH AND WITHOUT SPOT

Verse 19 says, "But with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ." It is important to understand what Peter means by "blemish" and "spot" and to know the difference between them. Blemish is a term often used for impurities found in precious stones and gems. Suppose you have a precious stone in your hand. If this stone is pure, it does not have any mixture; that is, it does not have any foreign body mixed in with it. However, sometimes a precious stone or a gem does have a foreign body in it. That foreign body, that element of mixture, is a blemish.

A spot is a scar that comes from a wound. If you have a wound on your hand, eventually that wound may develop into a scar. Such a scar is a spot on your body.

God created us pure, but the fall has brought many foreign bodies, blemishes, into us. All these foreign bodies are of the Devil, Satan. Furthermore, in our natural life we have been wounded.

We can see from the typology in the Old Testament that the animal sacrifices were to be without blemish and without spot. For instance, suppose a sheep was to be offered as a sin offering. That sheep had to be without blemish, without mixture; it also had to be without spot, without any wound. The sheep offered as a sin offering had to be pure and perfect.

Among all the human beings who have ever lived on

earth, there has been only one Man--the Lord Jesus Christ--who is without mixture or blemish. Furthermore, He is the only Man who has not been wounded morally and ethically. I would ask you to consider your situation. Even though you may still be young, have you not received many wounds to your ethical and moral being? You must admit that you have not been preserved perfect. There are some who have developed the habit of gambling. Being addicted to gambling is a serious wound to a person's character. We also wound ourselves whenever we tell a lie. I do not believe that there is anyone among us who has never told a lie. Every lie is a wound. If a wife lies to her husband or a husband to his wife, such a lie will be a wound to their married life. Most of us have also been wounded by stealing. Very few people have never stolen anything from others. Sometimes children steal things from their parents, or wives from their husbands. Stealing always wounds us.

Our person and character have been wounded in many ways. As fallen human beings, we have many blemishes and wounds. Anyone who has been divorced has experienced a serious wound. The Samaritan woman in John 4 had been wounded in this way. Because she had changed husbands six times, she had been wounded in many ways. She was full of spots.

Jesus Christ is the only person without mixture and without spot. He does not have any blemishes or wounds.

Actually, the words "without blemish and without spot" are Old Testament terms used with respect to sacrifices offered to God. Any Jews reading the First Epistle of Peter would realize this. Because Peter was writing to Jewish believers, he used terms that were familiar to them. In other words, this verse indicates that Jesus Christ is the real sacrifice to be our sin offering and trespass offering. Christ is the real Passover lamb.

The lamb sacrificed at the time of the Passover had to be without blemish and without spot. Furthermore, this lamb had to be kept for four days in order to be carefully examined. Before the lamb could be sacrificed, it first had

to be examined to prove that it was without blemish and without spot. This is what the Lord Jesus experienced in Jerusalem during the days before He was crucified. Day by day He was examined by the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the elders, and the priests. They did their best to find a fault of some kind in Him. However, according to their law, they could not find fault with Him. Then they handed the Lord Jesus over to the Roman rulers, to Pilate and Herod. But neither could these Roman rulers, according to Roman law, find any fault in Him. For this reason, Pilate declared, "I find no fault whatever in him" (John 18:38). Therefore, according to both divine law and secular law, the Lamb of God was examined and found to be without mixture and without spot. Only this unique Person is without blemish and without spot.

On the one hand, Peter refers to the Old Testament typology; on the other hand, simultaneously he indicates that Christ is the real Passover lamb. He is our sin offering and our trespass offering, the One offered for the atonement of the sins of God's people. As the Lamb without blemish and without spot, He shed His precious blood to redeem us. We all need to know that we have been redeemed from our vain manner of life by the precious blood of Christ.

I would encourage you to spend an hour alone with the Lord to consider the precious blood of Christ shed for you on the cross. This will give you the desire to have a holy manner of life in fear. You will want to become holy in all your manner of life and to pass the remaining time of your sojourn in fear. If we would live in this way, we need to realize that we have been redeemed, bought, purchased, with the high price of Christ's precious blood. This realization will cause us to have a living in a holy manner of life, for we shall realize that Christ's precious blood has redeemed us from the vain manner of life. No longer will we want to live in a way that is vain.

A vain manner of life is not necessarily sinful. Rather, in certain respects it may be quite moral. Nevertheless it is still vain--having no goal aim, or purpose. Anything

without a goal or purpose is vanity. Now we should live a life without any vanity. Everything we do and say should have God's goal in view. This kind of life is weighty and full of content. It is a life with purpose, goal, and aim. Let us all spend time to consider Peter's writing concerning the precious blood of Christ so that in a practical way we may become holy in all our manner of life and pass the time of our sojourn in fear.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(8)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:20-21

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In 1:20 Peter speaks of Christ: "Who was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in the last times for your sake." Christ was foreordained, prepared, by God to be His redeeming Lamb (John 1:29) for His elect according to His foreknowledge before the foundation of the world. This was done according to God's eternal purpose and plan; it did not happen accidentally. Hence, in the eternal view of God, from the foundation of the world, that is, since the fall of man as a part of the world, Christ was slain (Rev. 13:8).

In 1:2 Peter speaks of the foreknowledge of God the Father, and in verse 20 he says that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world as the redeeming Lamb. In the New Testament the root of such words as foreknowledge, foreknow, and foreknown is know. To this root a prefix is attached. The Greek prefix *pro* means before or beforehand. In New Testament Greek, words such as foreknow, foreknowledge, and foreknown imply more than what we would understand from the English translations. The Greek root for these words includes the meaning of appreciation, approval, and possession. If we approve something, we shall appreciate it. Then we shall want to take possession of it and own it. Sometimes "I do not know" means "I do not own that" or "I do not want that." Furthermore, in the Bible the word "know" is also

used for the relationship between husband and wife. For example, concerning the relationship between Joseph and Mary, Matthew 1:25 says that Joseph "did not know her until she brought forth a Son." This, of course, does not simply refer to Joseph's knowledge of Mary. It refers to his taking her and owning her as his wife.

The foreknowledge of God spoken of in 1:2 implies that in eternity past God approved us and appreciated us. It also implies that in eternity past He took us over, possessed us, owned us. We may even say that, as Joseph married Mary, God in His foreknowledge married us in eternity past. (There is no time element with God.) All of this is included in the connotation of the word foreknowledge.

FOREORDAINED BY GOD

For Christ to be foreknown means that He was foreordained by God. To foreknow is to foreordain, to ordain beforehand. In his expanded translation of the New Testament, Kenneth S. Wuest uses the words "foreordained" and "foreordination." According to this translation, verse 20 says, "Christ...was foreordained before the foundation of the universe was laid," and verse 2 says that the believers are "chosen-out ones, this choice having been determined by the foreordination of God the Father." God's foreknowledge, therefore, means not only that He knew us in eternity past; it also means that He ordained us. We all were ordained by God the Father in eternity past. We do not need any other kind of ordination.

Do you know when you were ordained by God? You were ordained by Him before the foundation of the world. Hallelujah, God's foreknowledge includes foreapproval, foreappreciation, foreacknowledgement, foremarrying, and foreordination!

Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. This means that in eternity past God approved Christ and appreciated Him. Then God also ordained Christ to be His anointed One. God has ordained Christ to be the One commissioned to fulfill in time all that had been planned by God for the accomplishment of His

eternal purpose. At the same time God foreordained Christ, He also foreordained all the believers.

When some hear that they were foreordained with Christ in eternity past, they may be rather doubtful and say, "This is just the preaching of Brother Lee. Just as a salesman sells his goods, so this preacher is trying to sell me his concept." If this is your attitude, I encourage you to wait until we are in the New Jerusalem in eternity. I have the assurance that when we all arrive there, you will praise God and say, "Hallelujah! Now I see that I truly was foreordained by God the Father before the foundation of the world!"

We may say that in eternity past God held a ceremony of ordination. In that ordination ceremony He first ordained His Son to be the Christ. Then He ordained all of us, the believers in Christ, to be Christians. In an eternal ordination ceremony before the foundation of the world, we all were ordained when Christ was ordained. When He was ordained to be the Christ, we were ordained to be Christ-men. He was ordained to be the Anointed of God, and we were ordained to be the little anointed ones. How marvelous that Christ and we were ordained at the same time in eternity past! Christ was foreknown by God the Father, and we also were foreknown by Him.

Do you believe that you were foreknown by God when Christ was foreknown, and ordained by Him when Christ was ordained? If you see this and believe it, you should not hesitate to declare it. Perhaps you are reluctant to say that you were ordained before the foundation of the world when Christ was ordained. You may feel uneasy about speaking such a thing; you may think that others would consider you beside yourself if you said this. Oh, we all need to see the revelation in 1 Peter 1 concerning God's foreknowledge and foreordination! It is a marvelous spiritual fact that we and Christ were foreknown and foreordained by God the Father in eternity past!

Verse 20 says that Christ was foreknown, foreordained and verse 2 indicates that we the believers were chosen according to the foreknowledge, the foreordination, of God.

Therefore, verse 20 matches verse 2. When Christ was ordained, we were foreknown and chosen. This is possible because there is no time element with God.

PRAISING GOD FOR HIS FOREKNOWLEDGE

In eternity past, on the day of the ordination of Christ and all the believers, God could see all the millions of Adam's descendants. In a very real sense, all of Adam's descendants were there before Him. Then God could choose, approve, and ordain certain ones, for no reason that is apparent to us. God could say, "I like this one. Therefore, I choose him, approve him, and ordain him." God looked at people from countries all over the world. Then He selected some from the United States, from China, and from England, France, Germany, and many other nations. He chose people of different colors--black, white, yellow, brown, and red. What do we have to say concerning this? Actually we should have nothing to say except, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord for His foreknowledge!" Let us praise God the Father for His selection, approval, and ordination.

With God's foreknowledge and foreordination as the basis, Christ came to earth to be our Redeemer and to accomplish God's purpose. Furthermore, the Spirit came to us, worked on us, and brought us to repentance and faith in Christ. In a sense, the Spirit could say regarding us, "Oh, here is one who was ordained by God in eternity past. Now is the time for him to be called and saved." Because we were foreordained by God, the Spirit came to us and did whatever was necessary to cause us to believe in Christ.

Praise the Lord that when Christ was ordained, we were ordained too! Hallelujah for God's foreknowledge! God in eternity past ordained Christ and a multitude of Christians, of Christ-men. Hallelujah for God's foreordination of Christ and of all the Christians!

CHRIST MANIFESTED IN THE LAST TIMES FOR OUR SAKE

In verse 20 Peter also says that Christ "was manifested in the last times for your sake." This implies that it was

not necessary for Christ to be manifested for the sake of God. Rather, it was for our sake that He was manifested.

The incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the constitution of the Spirit of Christ exist eternally in the sight of God. But for our sake it was necessary for Christ to be manifested through incarnation and to pass through human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension so that the Spirit of Christ could be constituted dispensationally.

Christ was ordained before the foundation of the world, but "in the last times" and for our sake He was manifested and passed through human living, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Actually, in the eternal sight of God, all this had happened already. Christ had already been ordained to be Christ, and we had already been ordained to be Christians in eternity past. However, it was still necessary for this foreordination to be carried out in time. Therefore, we were born, lived our human life, and committed many sins and offenses. One day we heard the preaching of the gospel, repented, believed, called on the Lord, and thanked Him for all He had done for us. However, the Lord could say, "All this has taken place already. But now, for your sake, this is being carried out." This is the genuine and proper understanding of God's salvation. God did everything in eternity past. The only thing needed was in the last times for Christ to be manifested for our sake.

In verse 21 Peter goes on to say, "Who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from among the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God." Here Peter says that through Christ we believe in God. Our believing into Christ has brought us into an organic union with Him (Gal. 3:26-27). Then through Him we believe in God to be one with Him, participating in all His riches.

The Jews believe in God directly, but we Christians believe in God through Christ. This means that we believe in God through an intermediary. This intermediary is Jesus Christ.

CHRIST RAISED FROM AMONG THE DEAD AND GIVEN GLORY

In verse 21 Peter says that God raised Christ from among the dead and gave Him glory. This was to glorify Christ with glory (v. 11). It was the Father's answer to His prayer in John 17:1. This glory actually includes many kinds of glories: the glory of resurrection, the glory of ascension, the glory of the Lord's coming back, the glory of His reign over the nations in the coming kingdom. Satan put Jesus to death, but God raised Him up and gave Him glory.

Peter's writings are not easy to follow. For instance, in verse 21 the first "who" refers to us, and the second "who" refers to God. Even in a short verse Peter is able to wedge in or insert a number of things. Therefore, in verses 20 and 21 there are a number of turns.

FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD

The last of these turns is "so that your faith and hope might be in God." This indicates that Christ died and God raised Him up from among the dead and gave Him glory for a purpose. Purpose is indicated by the words "so that." Christ died and God raised Him from among the dead and gave Him glory so that, for the purpose that, our faith and hope may be in God. This is not a matter merely of doctrine or position; on the contrary, it is an organic matter. God raised up Christ and gave Him glory. This is the very Christ in whom we believe. We believe in the One whom God resurrected and to whom God gave glory. Our believing brings about an organic union. We are now organically united to this One, the One who possesses God's eternal life. He also has resurrection life and the glory of God. Because we believe in this One, we have an organic union with Him.

Furthermore, through this organic union with Christ, our faith and hope are in God. With this hope we have a future. Both the faith and the hope we have in God are by means of the organic union with Christ. Therefore, we

have been organically united in Christ with God. Thus, our faith and our hope are in this God. This is altogether a matter of life.

It may be better to render verse 21 "so that your faith and hope are in God," instead of saying "might be in God." What we have here is a fact, not a possibility indicated by the subjunctive mood. God raised up Christ from among the dead and gave Him glory in order that we may have faith and hope in God. Now through Christ we are joined to God, united to Him organically in life, nature, and glory. Because we are one with God in this way, our faith and our hope are in Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE FULL SALVATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND ITS ISSUES

(9)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:22-25

THE PURIFICATION OF OUR SOULS

In this message we shall consider 1:22-25. Verse 22 says, "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love, love one another from the heart fervently." According to his habit in writing, Peter in this verse puts a number of things together. First he says, "Having purified your souls." We cannot find such an expression any place else in the New Testament. We may read about purifying our heart, but not about purifying our soul.

The purification of our souls is the Spirit's sanctification of our disposition that we may live a holy life in God's holy nature (vv. 15-16). It is deeper than the purification of our sins (Heb. 1:3) and the cleansing of sin (1 John 1:7). The latter is the purification of our outward doing; the former, the purification of our inward being--the soul. This is like the washing in the word in Ephesians 5:26.

In verse 22 Peter uses the perfect tense when he speaks of having purified our souls. But when did this happen? In verses 1 through 21 there is no mention of such a thing. But suddenly, in verse 22, Peter says, "Having purified your souls." But in the foregoing twenty-one verses he has not said anything concerning this purification.

Our soul is composed of mind, emotion, and will, which are also parts of our heart. To have our soul purified is to

have our mind, emotion, and will, the parts of our heart,

purified from any kind of defilement and contamination. (Acts 15:9; James 4:8). This actually means to have our mind, emotion, and will delivered from all things other than God, and fixed on God as the sole object and unique goal. This kind of purification is accomplished by our obedience to the truth, which is the content and reality of our faith. When we obey the truth, the content and reality of our faith in Christ, our entire soul is concentrated on God and in this way is purified from all things other than God. This is to save our souls from all filthiness by receiving the implanted word (James 1:21), which is the sanctifying truth (John 17:17).

According to Peter's word in verse 22, we purify our souls by obedience to the truth. Here we have the three matters of the purification of the soul, obedience, and truth. We should not take any of these things for granted. Instead, we should ask what truth is here and also what it means to have obedience to the truth. Furthermore, Peter says that this purification of our souls by obedience to the truth is unto unfeigned brotherly love. Here Peter speaks not merely of love, and not only of brotherly love, but of unfeigned brotherly love. Therefore, in this one verse Peter covers the purification of our souls, obedience to the truth, and unfeigned brotherly love. Then he goes on to urge us to love one another from the heart fervently. It is characteristic of Peter's writings to put so many points together in one verse.

According to the proper understanding of language, the subject of "having purified your souls" is "you." This means that Peter is telling the believers that they have purified their souls. Therefore, it is possible to translate the first part of verse 22 this way: "You, having purified your souls."

The way we purify our souls is by our obedience to the truth. This may not be a profound matter like the foreknowledge of God, but it is very practical. Compared to the great matters on the divine side, it is quite small. Nevertheless, it is very important in our Christian life. We need to ask ourselves if in our Christian life we have

experienced the purifying of our souls by obedience to the truth.

TOUCHING REALITY IN THE WORD

In order to understand what it means to purify our souls by obedience to the truth, we must be clear concerning the meaning of truth in this verse. Truth here is the sanctifying truth, which is God's word of reality (John 17:17). Truth in this verse does not mean doctrine. Truth is the reality contained in God's word and conveyed by it. For example, John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world." This is the divine word. This word, however, should not merely be a doctrine to us, as it is with so many readers of John 3:16. To read this verse only in a doctrinal way is to have a natural understanding. This natural understanding is devilish, for the Devil is behind our natural understanding. If our natural understanding occupies us in full, it becomes devilish. If we are to have more than a natural understanding of John 3:16, we need to touch the reality contained in this short word and conveyed by it. When we read, "God so loved the world," we need to ask ourselves if we have experienced this love. We should say, "God so loved the world. Does this 'world' include me? Does this word mean that God so loved me?" Anyone who reads John 3:16 in this way will get saved. Such a one would say, "O God, how I thank You that the world includes me. For You to love the world means that You love me." This is to take John 3:16 as truth, as reality, and not merely as a doctrine.

First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the house of the living God. This verse contains doctrine, but to us it should not be merely a doctrine. Rather, Paul's word about the church being the house of the living God should be a truth, a reality. We need to ask, "Is the church in my locality the house of the living God?" If we read the verse in this way, we shall contact reality, truth. The truth is the solid content, the reality, contained in the word of God and conveyed by it to us.

First Peter is addressed to scattered Jewish believers who had been in Judaism before they were saved. They

had much knowledge of the types in the Old Testament. When they heard the gospel and the teaching of the apostles, they contacted reality. Through the preaching of the gospel and the apostles' teaching, the truth, the reality, in the word of God was conveyed to those Jews. As a result, they heard the reality contained in the word of God. This is the truth.

We should not only receive doctrine from God's word--we should touch reality. The gospel and the teaching of the apostles contain realities, and these realities had been conveyed to the Jewish believers. The Jewish believers to whom Peter was writing in his first Epistle had received the truth, the reality, from the gospel and from the teaching of the apostles.

GIRDING UP OUR MIND AND PURIFYING OUR SOUL

However, after the believers had received this truth, this reality, the Judaizers came to them and reminded them of their background in the Jewish religion. The talk of the Judaizers was distracting and disturbing and caused the mind of the Jewish believers to wander away from the truth. Perhaps one of the Jewish believers said to his wife, "Peter's preaching is real, isn't it? Why, then, does it contradict so many things we have heard from our parents? It even seems that some of Peter's teachings are contrary to those of Moses. We really have a problem. Can you believe that our fathers taught us something wrong? Why does Peter teach us things that are different from what we heard in the past?" This illustrates what was the background when Peter wrote this Epistle.

In verse 13 Peter says, "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, set your hope completely on the grace being brought to you at the unveiling of Jesus Christ." The word "wherefore" at the beginning of this verse is based upon all the divine truths contained in verses 1 through 12. The matter of our being chosen according to the foreknowledge of God is not merely a doctrine; it is a truth, a reality. It is also a reality that the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has regenerated us unto a living hope. Furthermore, it is a truth that this living hope is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, kept for us in the heavens. In these twelve verses we have a great deal of truth, of reality.

With all this truth as the basis, Peter charges us to gird up the loins of our mind and to be sober. We should not allow our mind to wander, and we should not be drunken or drugged. To be sober is to be de-drugged, to wake up from a stupor. Therefore, in verse 13 Peter is telling the Jewish believers to forget their religious background, to be sober, and to no longer wander in their mind.

As the Judaizers tried to influence the Jewish believers, so today certain ones may try to influence those in the Lord's recovery. For instance, a young brother may love the Lord's recovery and praise the Lord that he is in the recovery. But then a relative who is a pastor with a theological degree may visit this brother and say, "What do you mean 'recovery'? I have a master's degree from a seminary, but I have never heard about a recovery. Who told you that the Lord has a recovery?" The young brother may not know what to say. Later, he may be unhappy and begin to have doubts in his mind concerning the recovery. He may say to himself, "I certainly have been helped by the ministry in the Lord's recovery. But what about this pastor with a master's degree in theology? Can he be completely wrong about the recovery?" What this brother needs is the girding up of the loins of his mind.

To gird up our mind is actually to purify our soul. Whenever our mind is wandering, our soul is impure. Dissenting thoughts cause our mind to wander. These dissenting thoughts may enter our mind like fiery darts. When our mind begins to wander, our soul becomes unclean. If this is our situation, we need to purify our soul. But how can we purify our soul? We purify our soul by girding up our mind and by setting it on one thing, not allowing it to wander.

The fiery darts of dissenting thoughts not only disturb our mind, but they pollute our emotion and our will. As a

result, we are not pure in the Lord and before the Lord. This will make it difficult for us to praise the Lord in a genuine way.

Let us consider again the example of the young brother influenced by a relative who is a pastor. The talk of that pastor brings impurities into this brother's emotion. Not only do the dissenting thoughts cause his mind to wander from the goal of the Lord's recovery; they also cause his emotion to be impure, that is, to have more than one love. This impure emotion can be compared to that of a woman who loves more than one man. She loves her husband, but she also loves someone else. This is fornication. Our emotion should be set only on the Lord. The brother who listened to the dissenting thoughts and words had his emotion polluted. As a result, he has more than one goal, one aim. On the one hand, he is in the Lord's recovery; on the other hand, he has doubts regarding the recovery. This is a kind of pollution.

This pollution can also damage our will. It becomes difficult for us to make decisions, for we have two goals. Therefore, our entire soul becomes impure. Our mind is wandering, our emotion is divided, and our will is damaged. In such a case, we need the purification of our soul.

God will not purify our soul for us. We need to do this ourselves by our obedience to the truth we have heard and received. Suppose a certain brother struggles for a period of time concerning the Lord's recovery. Eventually, by God's mercy and the moving of the sanctifying Spirit within him, he declares, "Praise the Lord! My mind is girded up with one goal. My emotion is fully set on one Person, the Lord Himself. I have no other object of my love. Therefore, my will follows to make a strong decision: I am for the Lord, and I am for the Lord's recovery. I don't care for anything else." This is obedience to the truth. Such an obedience to the truth becomes the means by which we purify our souls. Therefore, in verse 22 Peter tells the Jewish believers that they have purified their souls by obedience to the truth. This truth is conveyed in God's sanctifying word.

UNTO UNFEIGNED BROTHERLY LOVE

In verse 22 Peter says that we purify our souls by obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love. Since the purification of our souls concentrates our entire being on God that we may love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (Mark 12:30), it results in unfeigned brotherly love. We love from the heart fervently all those whom God loves. First, God's regeneration issues in a holy life. Then His sanctification (purification) results in brotherly love.

What does the word "unfeigned" mean? It means not to pretend or not to be hypocritical. But in particular it means not to put on a mask. To feign something is to put on a mask to disguise how we really feel. It is to pretend to be something that we are not. Unfeigned brotherly love is brotherly love that is genuine, without pretense; it is brotherly love without any kind of mask. In verse 22 the adjective "unfeigned" is very important. It indicates that through the purification of our soul, all the masks have been taken away.

If a brother takes in dissenting thoughts concerning the Lord's recovery, he may still love the brothers, but that love will be feigned. This means that it will be love with a mask. The mask is there because the brother has doubts concerning the recovery. If he lives with others in a brothers' house, he may apparently still love those brothers. But he does not have an unfeigned love, a love without a mask, for them. However, if he decides to obey the truth and by that obedience purifies his soul, this purification will result in unfeigned brotherly love. Then he will love the brothers without any mask.

Many times the saints may put on masks in the church life. They may love one another, but it is a love with a mask. The reason for this feigned love is that these saints have not purified their souls. They have not girded up the loins of their mind, concentrated their emotion, and made a strong decision with their will concerning the recovery. Therefore, everything they do is with a mask. They may realize that as long as they are in the church life they need to behave in a loving way. But inwardly they are doubting,

and their souls, including the mind, the emotion, and the will, have been polluted. These saints need to purify their souls by obeying the truth.

When we have purified our souls by our obedience to the truth, we can love one another from the heart fervently. In verse 22 we have both the purifying of the soul and love from the heart. To love from the heart is to have a love that comes not only from the parts of the soul but also from the conscience. Our conscience testifies that we love the brothers with an unfeigned love. When our conscience has this kind of testimony, we love from the heart. But if our conscience does not confirm our love or testify concerning it, then our love is merely from the soul. It is not a love from the heart, because the conscience is not part of the soul, but is part of the heart.

REGENERATED THROUGH THE LIVING AND ABIDING WORD OF GOD

The main part of the sentence in verses 22 and 23 is, "Love one another from the heart fervently." "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love" is a clause that modifies the subject (you understood) of "Love one another from the heart fervently." Then verse 23 continues with another modifying clause, "Having been regenerated, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God." This verse modifies verse 22. Having been regenerated, we have purified our souls unto brotherly love. Regeneration with the divine life is the base, the ground, for the purification, sanctification, of our souls unto unfeigned love. This section of the Word both begins and ends with regeneration, which results in a holy life toward God and a brotherly love toward the saints.

Verse 23 indicates that we have been regenerated through the living and abiding word of God. We have not been regenerated of corruptible seed. A seed is a container of life. The word of God as the incorruptible seed contains God's life. Hence, it is living and abiding. Through this

word we have been regenerated. It is God's living and abiding word of life that conveys God's life into our spirit for our regeneration.

We may paraphrase Peter's writing this way: "Brothers and sisters, don't you know that we have all been regenerated? We have been regenerated not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible seed. This incorruptible seed is in the living and abiding word of God. Therefore, we have been regenerated of incorruptible seed through the living and abiding word of God. The word of God is not actually the seed itself; rather, it is the container of the seed. For this reason, the seed comes through the word. You need to realize that you have been regenerated of incorruptible seed which is conveyed to us in the living word of God."

If the seed is not the word of God itself, then what is it? The seed is the eternal life of God. God's eternal life is a seed containing divine genes. We all have been regenerated of this organic, divine seed through the divine word.

Since we have been regenerated in this way, we need to care for the seed within us, and we should not care for any dissenting talk from those who oppose the Lord's recovery. Instead of listening to the words of dissenting ones, we need to pay attention to the seed. We should check everything with the seed in us.

Furthermore, with this seed within us as the basis, this seed received through regeneration, we need to purify our soul. Do not listen to the dissenting talk of religionists. Instead, pay attention to the inward seed. Gird up your mind, concentrate your emotion, and strengthen your will. Then make a strong decision for the Lord's recovery. This is what it means to purify our soul. If you purify your soul in this way, the result will be unfeigned brotherly love.

In verses 24 and 25 Peter goes on to say, "Because all flesh is as grass, and all its glory as the flower of grass. The grass has withered, and the flower has fallen off, but the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which is preached as the gospel to you." These verses are not nearly as deep as verses 22 and 23, and they are much easier to understand. The flesh in verse 24 refers to fallen

man. All the fallen human race is as withering grass, and its glory as the falling flower of grass. The believers were like that, but the living and abiding word of the Lord, with the seed sown into them through regeneration, has changed their nature and makes them living and abiding forever.

The word in verse 23 is *logos*, referring to the constant word. The word here is *rhema* (twice), referring to the instant word. When the *logos* is spoken to us, it becomes *rhema*.

In verse 25 it is the word of the Lord that abides forever. "Lord" refers to God in verse 23. This indicates that the Lord Jesus is God.

In verse 25 Peter speaks of "the word which is preached as the gospel to you." The word preached by the apostles is the gospel that regenerates the believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

GROWTH IN LIFE AND ITS RESULTS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 2:1-4, 6-8

A PICTURE OF THE CHURCH LIFE

First Peter chapter one is a complete section of this book. This section clearly reveals that the Triune God operates upon His chosen people to carry out His economy and to bring them into the full participation of Himself so that they may enjoy Him as grace. When God's chosen people enjoy the Triune God as grace, they have peace. Peace, therefore, is the result of the enjoyment of grace. The first point covered in chapter one is the operation of the Triune God upon His elect to bring them into the enjoyment of Himself as grace so that they may have peace.

Chapter one goes on to reveal that the operation of the Triune God produces full salvation. First we have God's operation for His economy, and this operation brings forth God's full salvation. God's full salvation includes the Father's regeneration, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sanctification. This is the full salvation carried out by the operation of the Triune God.

The full salvation of the Triune God issues, results, in two matters: a holy manner of life for the expression of God, and unfeigned brotherly love toward all the saints. These two matters, a holy manner of life and unfeigned brotherly love, are a picture of the genuine church life. On the one hand, in the real church life we see the expression of God; on the other hand, in such a church life there is unfeigned love for one another. Therefore, holiness and

love are the result of the full salvation carried out by the operation of the Triune God upon His elect. This is a clear and complete summary of chapter one.

First Peter is a complete unit that stands by itself. If we have a bird's eye view of this chapter, we shall love it very much. I can testify that in these days I have come to love Peter's writings more than ever before. I hope that all the saints will come to appreciate Peter even as they appreciate Paul. Furthermore, I hope that all of us will come to love chapter one of 1 Peter and the three major points revealed there concerning the operation of the Triune God for His economy, the full salvation carried out by the operation of the Triune God upon His elect, and the result of this full salvation in a holy manner of life to express God and in unfeigned brotherly love toward the believers. In the church life we need to live a life to express our holy God and to love all our brothers.

In the church life we have a very large family. Our Father has generated us, and all His children are our folks our brothers and sisters. The church family is universal. This is the church without division or denomination. In the universal family of the church there is not any discrimination. We may say that this is the genuine catholic church. We, of course, have nothing to do with the Roman Catholic Church, but we are the genuine catholics. Furthermore, in our locality we have the practical expression of this unfeigned catholic church, a church where we express the holy Father and love all the saints.

PUTTING AWAY FIVE NEGATIVE THINGS

In 2:1 Peter goes on to say, "Therefore, putting away all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings." This verse begins with "therefore." This indicates that the exhortation in 2:1-10 is based upon what is unveiled in chapter one. Three main things accomplished in the believers by the Triune God are emphasized in chapter one: the Father's regeneration (vv. 3, 23), the Son's redemption (vv. 2, 18-19), and the Spirit's sanctification (v. 2) to make the believers a holy people, living a

holy life (vv. 15-16). Based upon this, Peter charges the believers to grow in life (2:2) for the building up of a spiritual house (2:5).

Although chapter one is complete in itself, Peter, according to his experiences, still has more to say. Therefore, with chapter one as his basis, he proceeds to give the charge found in chapter two. He begins by telling the saints to put away all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings. Of the hundreds of sinful things, Peter selects five: malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. I would ask you to spend some time to consider what these are.

According to the sequence of these five matters, malice is the root, the source, and evil speaking is the expression. We may have malice as a root within us. Then there will eventually be evil speaking as the expression of this malice. The development from malice to evil speaking includes guile, hypocrisies, and envyings, three downward steps from malice toward evil speaking. If we have guile, we shall also have hypocrisies; and if hypocrisies, then envyings as well. Hence, the root is malice, the development includes guile, hypocrisy, and envy, and the final expression is evil speaking.

Not even a verse such as 2:1 should be read in a careless way. We should not take any verse for granted or neglect to study it seriously. Rather, we should study every verse with the goal and expectation of getting into the depths of it. Actually, the depths of the Word are the reality of the Word. This reality is the truth. If we consider verse 1 carefully, we shall see the root, the development, and the expression. In the light of this verse we see that all malice needs to be uprooted.

LONGING FOR THE GUILELESS MILK OF THE WORD

Verse 2 says, "As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word, that by it you may grow unto salvation." Born through regeneration (1:3, 23), the believers become babes who can grow in life unto further salvation, and that

for God's building, by being nourished with the spiritual milk.

"Guileless" in verse 2 does not mean unadulterated, in contrast to less pure teachings; instead, it is guileless in contrast to the guile in verse 1. Guileless milk is milk without false purpose, without any other goal but to nourish the soul.

The Greek word rendered "of the word" is *logikos*. This word, in Romans 12:1 translated reasonable, is derived from the noun *logos*--the word; hence, of the word; having the sense of pertaining to the mind (in contrast to the body), to the rational faculties; hence, rational, logical, reasonable. The milk of the word is not milk for the body, but is milk for the soul, the inner being. It is conveyed in the word of God to nourish our inner man through the understanding of our rational mind, and it is assimilated by our mental faculties.

As far as grammar is concerned, verse 1 is a modifier of the subject of verse 2. As we have pointed out, "guileless" in verse 2 is in contrast to "guile" in verse 1. The Recovery Version may be unique in using "guileless milk" in the translation of verse 2. Other versions have "pure milk" or "sincere milk." It may be that Peter intended guileless to include the meaning of pure and sincere. However, the purpose of Peter's writing here is to show a contrast between guilelessness and the guile that proceeds out of malice.

What can swallow up, or eliminate, our guile? The nourishment contained in the guileless milk of the word is an antibiotic for guile. In the Word of God there is a nourishment that is milk for our inner being. Just as our physical body is nourished with milk, so our inner being, our soul, needs to be nourished with the guileless milk of the word. This milk contains an element that can eliminate our guile. Therefore, the milk of the word is guileless milk.

In 2:1 and 2, Peter indicates that, as newborn babes, we need to practice putting away all guile, and we also need to desire the guileless milk of the word. The purpose of putting away the evil root of malice is that we may long

for, desire, the milk of the word. I believe that Peter wrote this not according to doctrine, but according to his spiritual experiences. If we do not have adequate experience, we shall not be able to understand what Peter is saying.

If you are full of malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking, you will not have any appetite for the Word. You will not be hungry or thirsty for the Word of God. You will not have the longing, the desire, to drink the pure milk of the Word. If you want to hunger and thirst after God's word, that is, if you want to desire the drinking of the milk in the word, you need to hate your malice and abstain from speaking evil things about others.

Suppose for quite a long period of time, perhaps more than a year, a particular brother has been filled with malice. Certain brothers, especially the elders, he does not like. Because he is full of malice and also full of guile, hypocrisies, and envyings, spontaneously he begins to speak negatively about others. He may speak evil concerning both brothers and sisters, both older ones and younger ones. This evil speaking has its source in the malice within him. To be sure, a brother in that condition will not have any appetite for the Word. From experience I know that he would neither hunger nor thirst for the nourishment in the Word of God.

However, let us suppose that this particular brother receives the mercy of the Lord one day to realize his sinfulness. Realizing his need of Christ as the sin offering and the trespass offering, he repents, confesses his sins, and prays, "O Lord, forgive me. For a long time, I have been filled with malice, and I have spoken in an evil way about others. Lord, this shows me that sin is within me. Lord, even though I have been regenerated, I still have sin in me, for my fallen nature is sinful. O Lord, I need You as my sin offering. I take You and apply You as my sin offering. Oh, may the blood of the sin offering cleanse me, Lord! I realize that my evil speaking concerning the brothers and sisters is an offense, a trespass. Lord, I am full of trespasses! Forgive me and cleanse me. I take You

not only as my sin offering, but also as my trespass offering All day long, Lord, I want to enjoy You."

If the brother prays in this way, soon he will begin to have an appetite for the milk of the word. He will desire to come to the Word for nourishment. He will come to the Bible not to gain the knowledge of doctrine, but to drink nourishing milk. Spontaneously as he is reading the Bible, he will be drinking the guileless milk of God's word. Eventually, this milk will get into his inward being and function as an antibiotic to kill the germ of malice. Furthermore, this brother will begin to love all the saints. He may say, "Oh, I love the brothers and the sisters. I love all the elders. All the saints are good, and all of them are better than I am."

AN EXPERIENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

This understanding of verses 1 and 2 comes from experience. Peter wrote these verses according to his experience. It was also through experience that I have come to understand Peter's writing. More than fifty years ago, when I read this portion of the Word, I could not understand it, because I did not have adequate experience. But through the years I have had much more spiritual experience, and now I understand what Peter is saying. I believe that many saints also have this understanding of 2:1 and 2 according to their experience.

We should never read the Word in a natural way or in a careless manner. However, many Christians read the Bible in a natural way and take it for granted. But if we get into the depths of the Word, we shall be enlightened. Then we shall have a lot of inner feeling and also have the utterance to speak what we see.

GENUINE GROWTH

According to Peter's word in verse 2, we should long for the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may grow. To grow is a matter of life and in life. We received the divine life through regeneration, and we need to grow in

this life and with this life by being nourished with the milk conveyed in the Word of God.

We should desire the guileless milk of the word not only to have a spiritual antibiotic, but also to receive nourishment so that we may grow. The guileless milk of the word nourishes us, and by this nourishment we grow.

Many Christians think that to grow is to gain more knowledge. After a new believer has been baptized, others may encourage him to attend some kind of Bible class. He may be encouraged to get more knowledge. However, he may not hear a word that helps him to realize that through regeneration he has received the divine life and that now his need is to grow in life. He may only be helped to learn the stories in the Gospels and then the stories in the Old Testament. Gradually, he may pick up more Bible knowledge, and some may regard this as growth. This concept of growth, however, is altogether contrary to that in the New Testament. According to the New Testament, growth is the genuine increase in the measure of life. Knowledge does not help us to increase in the measure of life.

How do children grow? They grow by receiving nourishment. If an infant has a healthy diet and daily is given nourishing food, gradually he will grow. This growth is the increase from all the food taken into him. Eventually, as a full-grown adult, this one will be a composition of what he has eaten. Perhaps at birth he weighed only six pounds. But when he is full-grown, he may be a man weighing one hundred eighty pounds. He has experienced the real growth in life, the growth that comes from eating healthy food, digesting it, and assimilating it into his cells so that it becomes the very fibers of his being. This is an illustration of genuine growth in life.

We need to desire the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may have real growth in life. True growth is the increase of the measure of life. If we are growing in life, the life element within us will increase, and there will be an increase in our spiritual stature (Eph. 4:13).

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

GROWTH IN LIFE AND ITS RESULTS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-4, 6-8

First Peter 2:1 and 2 say, "Therefore, putting away all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word, that by it you may grow unto salvation." In the foregoing message we pointed out that we need to do two things. First, we need to put away all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings. Second, we need to long for the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may grow in life. As we have seen, the genuine growth in life is the increase of the measure of life.

GROWING UNTO SALVATION

According to Peter's word in 2:2, by the pure milk of the word we may grow unto salvation. The Greek word rendered "unto" also means resulting in. To grow in life results in salvation. Salvation here, as the result of growth in life, is not initial salvation. God's full and complete salvation has a long span--from regeneration, including justification, to glorification (Rom. 8:30). At regeneration we received initial salvation. Then we need to grow by feeding on Christ as the nourishing milk in the word of God unto full salvation, unto maturity for glorification. This will be the salvation of our soul, which will be revealed to us at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus (1:5, 9-10, 13). However, according to the context, "unto salvation" here refers directly to "being built up a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices" in verse

5, and to telling out "the virtues of Him" in verse 9.

If we grow unto salvation, we shall experience salvation from malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings, the five negative things spoken of in verse 1. To be saved from malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings is not accomplished by effort of our own. This cannot be done by self-improvement, adjustment, or correction. On the contrary, to be saved from these negative things is an inward matter.

As an illustration, suppose someone has bacteria that cause disease in his body. These bacteria are in his blood and in the fibers of his being. What would be the use of trying to solve this problem by washing the person with a strong soap? This could do nothing more than cleanse the outer layer of his skin. But that cleansing would not be effective against the bacteria in him. In order to deal with the bacteria, that person needs to receive an antibiotic. He also needs to take in the proper nourishment for his physical body so that it may grow. This growth will help to heal him of his illness. In like manner, it is by the inner growth unto salvation that we are saved spontaneously from the "germs" of malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings.

Fifty years ago, it was difficult for me to overcome my temper. But now after more than fifty years' experience with the Lord, I can testify that it is difficult for me to lose my temper. Some may say that it is because I am now an elderly man that I no longer have a problem with my temper. Such a suggestion is not accurate. Actually, a person's temper usually increases with age. For this reason, older people are often critical of others and impatient with them. Naturally speaking, the older we get, the more of a problem we shall have with our temper. In the Lord and before the Lord I can testify that the older I get, the less temper I have. The reason for this change is that over the years I have experienced growth in life unto salvation from my temper This is an illustration of the fact that, in a practical way, we all need to grow unto salvation.

The salvation in verse 2 is not salvation in the initial stage or in the stage of consummation; it is salvation in the progressing stage, in the stage of transformation. It is correct to understand this verse as saying that we need to grow unto transformation. Of course, the word transformation is not used here. Nevertheless, salvation in this verse implies transformation. Regeneration is in the stage of initial salvation; transformation, in the stage of progressing salvation; and glorification, in the stage of consummation. We are not in the initial stage or in the stage of completion. We are in the progressing stage of salvation; that is, we are in the stage of transformation.

Transformation is different from a mere change. Transformation involves a change from one form into another form. However, it involves an inward change in nature or constitution, not simply an outward change in form. For example, suppose a person is ill, and his complexion does not look healthy. He may try to improve his appearance by putting some kind of coloring on his face. I do not like that kind of skin coloring, for it makes me think of the work of a mortician, who tries to make the face of a dead person appear as attractive as possible. Today both disciples of Confucius and many Christians are involved in outward works of self-improvement, works that can be compared to those of a mortician. Such an outward change is altogether different from living, inward transformation.

Recently, I was somewhat ill. But day by day my wife served me nourishing food. Eventually that food made me healthy and restored a healthy color to my face. When my wife saw my complexion, she was happy. There was no need for me to color my face, because the healthy color came out of the inward nourishment. I ate, digested, and assimilated nourishing food. The nourishment was transmitted into my cells, fibers, and even into my skin, and caused me to have healthy skin color. This is an illustration of transformation.

Peter charges us to long for the guileless milk of the word that by it we may grow unto transformation. We do not grow unto outward correction or outward adjustment

or outward improvement. On the contrary, we grow unto inward transformation by life and in life.

THE BASIS OF ALL SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Nourishing food will cause transformation only when it is given to something living and organic. If you try to give nourishment to something lifeless and inorganic, that thing would become corrupt and unclean. It is impossible for something lifeless to receive help from nourishing food. Obviously it is useless to try to feed a dead person. No doubt, the guileless milk in the word can feed us and nourish us. However, it can only feed and nourish those who are living and organic. Without life, there would not be anything in us to cooperate with this nourishment.

Peter begins 2:2 with the words "As newborn babes." The word "newborn" indicates a living organism. A newborn babe is living and organic. As such newborn babes, we need to drink the guileless milk of the word. Then the milk will afford us living, organic nourishment. Spontaneously the life within us will work together with the nourishment of the milk so that we may grow. However, if we did not have a living, organic element in us through regeneration, the nourishment in the milk of the word would not have any effect, for there would not be any cooperation on our part.

In 1:23 Peter says that we have been regenerated. In 2:2 he urges us to be as newborn babes longing for milk. Both regeneration in 1:23 and the newborn babes in 2:2 point to the same matter--regeneration with the divine life. This regeneration is the base for our growth in life and for the purification of our inner being. We all have within us the divine life that we received in regeneration as the basis of all spiritual growth. In order to grow and be purified, we must have this base. Therefore, as newborn babes, we should long for the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may grow unto transformation.

TASTING THAT THE LORD IS GOOD

In verse 3 Peter continues, "If you have tasted that the

Lord is good." The Lord can be tasted, and His taste is pleasant and good. If we have tasted Him, we shall long for the nourishing milk in His word. The Greek word rendered "good" in this verse also means pleasant, kind.

Peter was certain that the ones to whom he was writing had been regenerated. But he was not sure that they had tasted the Lord. For this reason he says, "If you have tasted that the Lord is good." It was certain that the believers were newborn babes, but as verse 3 indicates, some of them may not have tasted that the Lord is good. Today millions of believers have truly been regenerated, but a great many have never tasted that the Lord is good.

Let us use an example to show how someone may be regenerated and yet not have tasted that the Lord is good. A middle-aged lady had been saved for two years. She had been redeemed and regenerated. After visiting our meetings a few times, one day she stood up to give a testimony. She said that her husband had lost his job, and they were unable to pay the rent. Furthermore, their son was sick. She went on to say that she prayed to the Lord about the situation. She praised the Lord that He gave her husband a better job, provided a better place for them to live, and even healed their son. She declared, "Hallelujah, the Lord Jesus is living and able!"

Let us consider this testimony carefully and ask if it is the testimony of a person who has tasted the Lord. I would say strongly that this is not the testimony of one who has tasted that the Lord is good. Years ago I would have felt differently about this, and I would have said that this woman surely has tasted that the Lord is good. Actually, in her testimony she said, "How good the Lord is to me! He is real, living, and good. We prayed, and He gave us a better job and a better house, and He healed our son. Hallelujah! The Lord is good." But although she spoke of the Lord's goodness, this is not the testimony of tasting that the Lord is good.

What, then, would be a genuine testimony of tasting the Lord? Suppose the same sister testified something like this: "My husband has lost his job, we have lost our

dwelling place, and our son is ill. The more we pray, the more trouble we seem to have. But, brothers and sisters, I can testify that the more difficult our situation is, the happier I am inwardly. Oh, how I enjoy the Lord! I have experienced a little of what Paul experienced when he asked the Lord to take away the thorn and the Lord refused, saying that His grace was sufficient for Paul. The Lord caused Paul to enjoy His grace. He put him into a particular environment so that he would have to enjoy grace. He did not take away the thorn. On the one hand, Paul suffered the thorn. But on the other hand, he was experiencing the Lord's sustaining grace. In our case, it has been several months, and still the Lord has not done anything for us outwardly. But I can testify that I have been enjoying Him as my grace. When my mother learned of our situation, she said, 'What is this? Where is your Jesus? Is He real and living? Why wouldn't He do anything for you? You should go to Buddha instead.' But no matter what she says to me, I keep on enjoying the Lord's grace." This is a testimony of tasting the Lord.

The tasting of the Lord is not in outward miracles. Rather, it is in the inward nourishment of life. No matter what kind of environment we may be in or what kind of circumstances we may have, we are sustained by the Lord. We can say with Paul, "I can do all things in Him who empowers me" (Phil. 4:13). We can stand the test of both riches and poverty, of both pleasant circumstances and difficult, because we do not care for the outward situation but for the inward nourishment. This inward nourishment is the genuine tasting of the Lord. In these verses Peter indicates that if we have tasted that the Lord is good, we shall surely long for the milk in the word.

THE LIVING STONE FOR GOD'S BUILDING

In verse 4 Peter goes on to speak of Christ as a living stone: "To whom coming, a living stone, having been rejected by men, but with God chosen, held in honor." The

Greek word rendered "coming" can also be translated approaching, drawing near, coming forward.

A living stone is one that not only possesses life, but also grows in life. This is Christ for God's building. Here Peter changes his metaphor from the seed of the vegetable life (1:23-24) to the stone of minerals. The seed is for life-planting; the stone is for building (2:5). Peter's thought has gone on from life-planting to God's building. As life to us, Christ is the seed. For God's building, He is the stone. After receiving Him as the seed of life, we need to grow that we may experience Him as the stone living in us. Thus He will make us also living stones, transformed with His stone nature so that we may be built together with others a spiritual house upon Him as both the foundation and the cornerstone (Isa. 28:16).

The Greek word translated "held in honor" also means precious. It differs from the word found in 1:19. There it denotes preciousness in essence. Here it indicates preciousness as recognized and held in honor.

In verses 6 through 8 Peter has more to say concerning Christ as the stone. Verse 6 says, "Because it is contained in Scripture: Behold, I lay in Zion a chosen stone, a cornerstone held in honor, and he who believes on Him shall by no means be put to shame." This indicates that Christ is a stone chosen by God as the cornerstone for His building (Eph. 2:20). In Ephesians 2:20 Paul speaks of "Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." In that verse, as here, Christ is referred to not as the foundation, but as the cornerstone, because the main concern is not the foundation but the cornerstone that joins together the two walls, one of the Jewish believers and the other of the Gentile believers. When the Jewish builders rejected Christ, they rejected Him as the cornerstone (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7), which would join the Gentiles to them for the building of God's house.

In 2:7 Peter continues, "To you therefore who believe is the preciousness; but to the unbelieving, A stone which the builders rejected, this became the head of the corner." In Greek the word for "preciousness" is a kindred word to

honor in verses 4 and 6. The very Christ chosen by God as a stone, even a cornerstone held in honor, is the preciousness to His believers. But to the unbelieving He is a rejected, despised stone.

The "builders" in this verse were the Jewish leaders in Judaism (Acts 4:11), who were supposed to build the house of God They rejected Christ to the uttermost. The Lord predicted this to them (Matt. 21:38-42).

Literally, "became" means "became unto." Christ became the head of the corner in resurrection. In his early preaching Peter had already declared this to the Jews (Acts 4:10-11).

Verse 4 says, "And, A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed." This verse reveals that the reliable Christ (v. 6), being rejected, became a stumbling stone, at which the rejecting Judaizers stumbled (Matt. 21:44). The relative pronoun "which" refers to the Jews' disobedience with the result of stumbling.

In verse 4 Peter makes a leap from the milk of the word to the living stone. There does not seem to be a bridge or any other kind of connection between the milk and the stone. First, Peter indicates that the Lord is the milk and the word for nourishment. Then he goes on to speak of Him as the living stone.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS THE MILK AND THE STONE

According to verse 4, we need to come to Christ as the living stone. But what is the way to come to Him? We come to the Lord by drinking the milk of the word. Have you ever realized that when you are drinking milk from the word, that is your coming to the Lord? What is the milk in the word? That milk is the Lord Himself. Therefore, when we drink the milk, we come to the Lord. Do you have some other way of coming to the food you eat? What is your way of coming to the food? Do you not come to it by eating it? We all come to the food by eating it. The same is true with respect to coming to Christ as the living stone. In verse 4

the word "coming" is equal to drinking. Therefore, when we drink the milk, we come to the Lord.

We have pointed out that Peter seems to leap from the milk-Christ to the stone-Christ. This implies that the milk becomes the stone. How can this be? With us, this is impossible, but it is not impossible with the Lord, because He is all-inclusive. As the all-inclusive One, Christ is milk, and He is also the stone. We are not able to exhaust all the aspects of Christ. He is the milk, He is the bread, and now we see that He is the stone. According to 2:6-8, Christ is not only the stone for building, but also the stone for stumbling and grinding. Even as the stone Christ is all-inclusive: He can build us, or He can cause us to stumble, and even grind us.

We need more experience of Christ as the milk and the stone. In the morning we should drink Christ as milk from the Word. Then during the day the process of transformation should take place within us. In the evening we should come to the church meetings and fellowship with the saints. This is building. Here we see that in the morning Christ is milk, and in the evening He becomes the stone. During the day the milk does a transforming work within us to produce a stone.

Those who do not experience Christ as milk may like to be scattered or independent. The elders may visit them and encourage them to come to the meetings. However, these saints do not want to attend the meetings. One such brother once said, "As long as certain persons are in the meeting, I do not want to attend. I don't want to see their faces. I don't like to attend the meetings simply because they are present." But after a time the Lord did something in this case. This brother repented of his attitude toward the particular ones involved. Then he began to have a desire to drink the milk of the word. Because of his drinking the milk, he longed to come to the church meetings. Eventually he was fully reconciled with the saints for the sake of the building.

First the Lord is milk to nourish us. Through the nourishment in the milk of the word, transformation takes

place. Then we have the building, where the Lord Himself is the stone. This is the reason that in chapter two we first have the milk and then the stone.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

GROWTH IN LIFE AND ITS RESULTS

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 2:4, 6-8

In 2:4 Peter says, "To whom coming, a living stone, having been rejected by men, but with God chosen, held in honor." We have pointed out that a living stone not only possesses life but also grows in life. The living stone in verse 4 is Christ for God's building. Here Peter changes his metaphor from the seed of the vegetable life (1:23-24) to the stone. The seed is for life-planting, whereas the stone is for building (2:5). Peter's thought has gone on from life-planting to God's building. As life to us Christ is the seed. For God's building He is the stone. After receiving Him as the seed of life, we need to grow that we may experience Him as the stone living in us. Then He will make us living stones, transformed with His stone nature, so that we may be built together with others a spiritual house upon Him as both the foundation and the cornerstone. Let us go on to consider what Peter says in verses 6 through 8 regarding Christ as the stone for God's building.

CHRIST CHOSEN BY GOD

First Peter 2:6, quoting Isaiah 28:16, says, "Because it is contained in Scripture: Behold, I lay in Zion a chosen stone, a cornerstone held in honor, and he who believes on Him shall by no means be put to shame." Although this living stone was rejected by the leaders of God's people, this stone was chosen by God. God's choosing of Christ as the living stone is of two aspects. First, as we have seen, Christ was chosen by God in eternity past. That was God's initial choosing of Him. Then God chose Christ the second

time in resurrection. Resurrection is a strong proof that God has chosen Christ. This second choosing was a confirmation of God's first choosing. Therefore, in resurrection God confirmed the choice He had made concerning Christ in eternity past.

When Christ was on the cross, apparently He was rejected by God. To the Pharisees and to all the others who opposed Him, the crucifixion of Christ was a sign that God had rejected Him. According to Matthew 27:42 and 43, the chief priests, with the scribes and the elders, said, "He is king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe on him. He trusted upon God; let Him rescue him now if He wants him; for he said, I am God's Son." Luke 23:35 says, "And the rulers were even sneering and saying, He saved others, let him save himself if this is the Christ of God, the Chosen One!" The religious leaders thought that God had rejected Christ. However, on the third day Christ was resurrected, and that resurrection was a sign of God's choosing, a proof that God had chosen Christ to be the stone for His building.

From the time of Christ's resurrection, Christ has been held in honor. The Greek word rendered "honor" in verse 6, the same word that is used in verse 4, also means precious. It differs from the Greek word translated "precious" in 1:19. There the word denotes preciousness in essence; here it indicates preciousness as recognized and held in honor.

The statement, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chosen stone," refers not only to Christ's resurrection, but also to His ascension. After God resurrected Christ, He lifted Him up to the heavens. Therefore, Christ's ascension was a further sign and confirmation that God had chosen Him.

The Zion spoken of in 2:6 is not the Zion on earth; it is the Zion in the heavens. In the New Testament there are two Zions, one earthly and the other heavenly. The earthly Zion is a reflection of the heavenly one. The Jewish people may have an earthly Zion, but we Christians, those who believe in Christ, have a heavenly Zion. For this reason, we are not coming to an earthly Zion; we are coming to the heavenly Zion (Heb. 12:22).

God's choosing of Christ in eternity past was not seen by anyone, not even by the angels. When God chose Christ, nothing had been created, for that choice was made before the foundation of the world. Only God knew that Christ was His chosen One. But this choice has been manifested in Christ's resurrection and ascension. Soon after Christ's ascension, Peter realized clearly that Christ is the Messiah chosen by God. This was the reason Peter said to the religious leaders in Acts 4, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (vv. 10-12). There is salvation in no other name because God has chosen Christ, and this choice has been manifested in and confirmed by Christ's resurrection and ascension.

Along with the other apostles, Peter could testify that he had seen the resurrected Christ. Furthermore, they had all witnessed His ascension. These two acts, resurrection and ascension, prove and confirm that Jesus of Nazareth is the One whom God has chosen to be the head of the corner for God's building.

As such a chosen One, Christ is now held in honor. Christ is not only in glory; He is also on the throne at the right hand of God. This means that He is in a position of honor. Because Christ is now in such an honorable position, He is precious, highly valued.

First Peter 2:6 also says that he who believes on Christ will by no means be put to shame. Christ is trustworthy, stable, and steadfast. We can put our trust in Him and be assured that we shall never be put to shame.

THE REJECTED STONE BECOMING THE HEAD OF THE CORNER

In verse 7 Peter goes on to say, "To you therefore who

believe is the preciousness; but to the unbelieving, A stone which the builders rejected, this became the head of the corner." In Greek, the word rendered "preciousness" here is a kindred word to honor in verses 4 and 6. The very Christ chosen by God as a stone, even a cornerstone held in honor, is the preciousness to His believers. But to the unbelieving, He is a rejected, despised stone. Christ's preciousness is not only a matter of condition, but also a matter of His position. For Him to be precious means that He is held in honor, that He occupies an honorable position.

In this verse we are told that the builders rejected Christ as the living stone. These builders were the Jewish leaders in Judaism, who were supposed to build the house of God. They rejected Christ to the uttermost, as the Lord had predicted (Matt. 21:38-42). Nevertheless, Christ became the head of the corner in resurrection. As we have seen, in his early preaching Peter declared this fact to the Jews.

To the unbelieving, Christ is a stone rejected by the builders. Nevertheless, this rejected stone has become the head of the corner. Hence, Christ is a stone of two aspects. With Him as the stone for God's building, there is the aspect of honor and also the aspect of rejection. On the one hand, Christ was rejected; on the other hand, He has been honored. He was rejected by the Jewish builders, but He has been honored by God. How do we know that Christ was rejected by the Jewish leaders? We know it by the fact that they put Christ on the cross. That was their rejection of Him. How do we know that Christ has been honored by God? We know this by the fact that God resurrected Him and exalted Him. Therefore, the resurrection and exaltation of Christ are strong signs both that God has chosen Him and that He is held in honor by God.

A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE

In verse 8 Peter continues, "And, A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed." Christ is not only a rejected stone and a stone held in honor; He is

also a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. The reliable Christ, being rejected, became a stumbling stone, at which the rejecting Judaizers stumbled (Matt. 21:44a). As the stone, Christ functions in both a positive way and a negative way. For us, He is the cornerstone positively, but for the unbelieving Jews, He is a stumbling stone and a rock of offense.

THOSE WHO STUMBLE AT THE WORD

In verse 8 Peter speaks of those "who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed." What is the antecedent of the relative pronoun "who"? Actually, there is not a clear antecedent expressed. However, we may say that the antecedent is implied. Peter's thought may be that "who stumble at the word" may refer to anyone or to everyone who stumbles. If we stumble at the word, then this "who" includes us. It refers to anyone throughout the generations who stumbles at the word.

Now we need to ask what is the word at which people may stumble. It certainly is not the word with the guileless milk mentioned in 2:2. On the contrary, it is the word quoted by Peter in verses 6 through 8, the word regarding a chosen stone, a cornerstone held in honor, being laid in Zion. It also refers to the word concerning the stone rejected by the builders that becomes the head of the comer (v. 7). Furthermore, it includes the word in verse 8 about this stone being a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. This is the word at which people may stumble.

Because of the atmosphere in the Lord's recovery today, it is easy for us to believe in such a word. But the Jews at the time of the Lord Jesus and the apostles would not believe in it. Their attitude was that it was impossible for Jesus of Nazareth ever to be the head of the corner. Instead of believing in this word, the Jewish leaders and the rabbis argued against it. Whoever does not believe this word will stumble at it.

We should not think that it is impossible for Christians to stumble at the word. Many are the Christians who have

stumbled at the word. They do not believe that the Lord Jesus can be so strict or straight. Sometimes we have spoken with certain believers regarding the matter of Christ being both the building stone and the stumbling stone. They have replied, "No, the Lord Jesus is merciful. He would never be a stone of stumbling or a rock of offense. The Lord has a broad heart; He is not narrow like you. You think that you are the only ones who are right. You are narrow, but the Lord Jesus is not narrow." However, if we are too broad, we shall not believe this word. We shall not believe that, on the one hand, Christ is the building stone and that, on the other hand, He is also the stumbling stone. Many Christians have stumbled at this strict word. The Jewish leaders have not been the only ones who have stumbled at it.

Have you ever thought that Christ could purposely be a rock of offense? We need to be careful concerning this and ask ourselves if we believe this word. If we do not believe it, then we stumble at this word. Then automatically the Lord will become a stumbling block to us. We stumble at such a word because, in our opinion, it is too narrow and strict.

A GRINDING STONE

We should not regard Peter as being too strict because of the way he wrote in 2:6-8. Actually, the Lord Jesus was the first to utter such a strict word. In Matthew 21:42 He asked the religious leaders, "Have you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the cornerstone; this was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" Then in verse 44 He went on to say, 'And he who falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it shall scatter him as chaff." "He who falls on this stone" refers to the person who stumbles at Christ. "On whomever it falls" refers to the nations which Christ will smite at His coming back.

Here we see that the Lord Jesus speaks of another aspect of Himself as the stone. He is not only the building stone and the stumbling stone; He is also the grinding stone, the crushing stone. As the grinding stone, He will

crush the opposers into powder. This aspect of Him is mentioned in Daniel 2:34-35. These verses reveal that when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will crush all the opposing nations into powder.

THE RESULT OF STUMBLING AT THE WORD

Peter says in verse 8 that those who stumble at the word are disobedient and that this being disobedient is something "to which also they were appointed." This refers to the Jews' disobedience with the result of stumbling.

Those who stumble at the word have been appointed by God to disobedience. Disobedience is their portion. If someone does not believe what the Bible says concerning Christ, he stumbles at Him. Spontaneously the result of that unbelief and stumbling will be rebellion. This is disobedience. Hence, disobedience becomes the appointed portion of that one. Actually, this is logical. Anyone who does not believe in the word will stumble at it and then reap the fruit, the harvest, of what he has sown. He sows unbelief, and he reaps disobedience as the result appointed to him. It is a basic, governing spiritual principle that as long as we have unbelief, we shall reap disobedience. If you have unbelief, you will reap rebellion. This means that you will be rebellious. This is true not only of the Jews, but also of Christians, including those in the recovery.

Both in China and in this country I have seen disobedience and rebellion come as the appointed portion to those who do not believe in the word and who stumble at it. No Christian would stumble at the Lord's gracious word. Someone may hear that the Lord is merciful, gracious, full of kindness, sending the rain upon the just and on the unjust. No one would stumble at such a gracious word. The Bible, however, also has a strict word. The building stone, the head of the comer, is also a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. Those who are loose and careless may not believe such a word. Instead, they may say, "No, Christ is not that narrow. As long as I believe in the Lord Jesus, I can take whatever way I choose concerning the church.

Why do I have to be in the recovery? The Lord Jesus is not narrow like you." Eventually, the result of not believing the Lord's strict word and stumbling at it will be disobedience, rebellion. The ones who now oppose the most are these rebellious ones. They have been appointed to this. We need to see that there is a principle governing this matter. The principle is that if we have this kind of unbelief, we shall reap the harvest of disobedience, and that disobedience is rebellion.

As we read 1 Peter 2:4-8, we may think that it was not necessary for Peter to include verses 6, 7, and 8. At least, we may regard verses 7 and 8 as unnecessary. In our opinion verse 4 alone may be adequate. As far as God's building is concerned, verse 4 may be adequate. But Peter goes on in verses 6 through 8 to present a full picture of Christ as the stone.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

GROWTH IN LIFE AND ITS RESULTS

(4)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 2:5, 9-10

GROWING UNTO SALVATION FOR THE BUILDING

In this message we shall consider 2:5, 9 and 10. Verse 5 says, "You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." In reading this verse we need to take care of grammar. Verse 4 is a modifier of the subject of the sentence in verse 5. The main part of the sentence in verse 5 is this: "You...are being built up a spiritual house." Hence, the main thought here is that of the building. This thought continues the thought in verse 2 of growing unto salvation. This means that following salvation we have the building. Growing unto salvation is for the building. This indicates that here salvation involves not only transformation, but also includes being built up. As a totality, salvation in 1 Peter 2 indicates transformation for building up.

Salvation at the end of verse 2 is related to transformation for the building. Notice that at the end of verse 2 there is a comma, not a period. In verse 3 we have a condition related to drinking the milk of the word: "If you have tasted that the Lord is good." Verse 3 concludes with a semicolon, and verse 4 ends with a comma. Therefore, the punctuation indicates that the main clause in the second part of the sentence is in verse 5. Actually, verse 5 is the direct continuation of verse 2. Verse 2 ends with the thought of growing unto salvation, which implies that salvation includes transformation. Then verse 5

continues

by indicating that this transformation is for the building. For this reason we say that salvation in verse 2 is a matter of transformation for building.

I believe that we have touched the thought in Peter's mind and heart as he was writing. In these verses Peter seems to be saying, "You believers have all been regenerated, and now you are as newborn babes. As newborn babes, you should hunger and thirst for the milk in the word so that you may grow unto salvation. This salvation is transformation for building up." These must have been Peter's thoughts as he was writing this Epistle.

Whenever we write a letter or article, we first have certain thoughts within us. Then gradually we write according to these thoughts. This was Peter's situation when he wrote this Epistle. He had the thought that the believers had been regenerated to become newborn babes. Now they should long for the milk in the word. By the guileless milk in the word they could grow unto a salvation that was transformation for their building up. Having these thoughts within him, Peter went on to compose this Epistle.

On the one hand, Peter's composition may not seem very good. But, on the other hand, spiritually speaking, Peter's composition is excellent. If Peter had not written the way he did, not all of the points covered could have been included. However, because it is sometimes difficult to understand Peter, we need help to grasp the various points he covers in his writings. This is the reason we are having this Life-study.

I can testify that for more than fifty years I have been digging into the Word of God. In 1956 the Lord began to show me His building. First Peter 2 is a very important section in the New Testament related to God's building. When I was in Manila in 1956, I began to see from 1 Peter 2 that salvation includes transformation and that this transformation is for the building.

Few Christians have a proper understanding of the building. Furthermore, many have not seen the matter of transformation. Before you came into the Lord's recovery,

did you ever hear a message on transformation? But in the recovery many messages have been given on the subject of transformation. In December, 1962, I gave a conference on the all-inclusive Christ. Then in 1963 I began to speak in this country on transformation. That year I gave at least twenty messages on transformation. Although the light concerning transformation and building was given to me years ago, this light has never left me. Rather, it has always been with me. It took me years of study to see these things. Therefore, I can say that without the help rendered through these messages, you may find it difficult to understand what Peter is saying about salvation, transformation, and building.

Praise the Lord that regeneration has made us newborn babes! As newborn babes, we all should long for the guileless milk of the word. Then by this milk we shall grow unto salvation. This salvation is transformation, and transformation is the building. Feeding on Christ by the nourishing milk in the Word of God is not only for growing in life; it is also for building up. Growing is for building up.

TRANSFORMED INTO LIVING STONES

In verse 5 Peter indicates that the believers are living stones. We, the believers in Christ, are living stones, like Christ, through regeneration and transformation. We were created of clay (Rom. 9:21). But at regeneration we received the seed of the divine life, which by its growth in us transforms us into living stones. At Peter's conversion the Lord gave him a new name, Peter--a stone (John 1:42). When Peter received the revelation concerning Christ, the Lord revealed further that He also was the rock--a stone (Matt. 16:16-18). Peter was impressed by these two incidents that both Christ and His believers are stones for God's building.

By our natural birth we are clay, not stones. Do you realize that you were made of clay? Genesis 2:7 says that man was made from the dust of the ground. Romans 9 reveals that we are vessels of clay. How, then, can we

become stones? We become stones through the process of transformation.

When Peter first met the Lord Jesus, the Lord changed his name from Simon to Peter. Referring to the Lord Jesus and Peter, John 1:42 says, "Looking at him, Jesus said, You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means a stone)." According to biblical principle, whatever the Lord speaks will be. Therefore, when the Lord called Peter a stone, that meant that he would certainly become a stone. Whatever the Lord says to us will be fulfilled. If He says, "You are gold," then you will be golden. The Lord knew that when He changed Simon's name to Peter, a stone, he would become a stone.

In John 1:42 Peter was told that he was a stone. Then sometime later, in Caesarea Philippi, in answer to the Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am," Peter, receiving the revelation from the Father, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." To this the Lord Jesus replied, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church..." (Matt. 16:18). Here the Lord indicates that He is the rock upon which the church is built and that Peter is a stone.

No doubt, these two incidents, the one recorded in John 1 and the other in Matthew 16, were deeply impressed into Peter's being. He could never forget those events. It must have been from these experiences that Peter obtained the concept of living stones for the building of the spiritual house, which is the church. When Peter wrote this portion of 1 Peter, he wrote it according to the impression these events made upon him.

First Peter 2:5 says that we, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house. However, we all are clay. How can we be built up? In order to be built up a spiritual house, we need to become stones. But how can we actually become living stones? We become living stones by coming to Christ as the living stone (v. 4).

We may use petrified wood as an illustration of transformation. In Arizona there is a place called the petrified forest, an area that contains much petrified wood.

Petrified wood is wood that has been changed into stone. Over a long period of time, water has been flowing over wood and through it. By means of this flow of water, the substance of the wood is changed into stone. On the one hand, the element of wood is carried away; on the other hand, the element of stone is brought in to replace the element of wood. In this way the wood becomes stone.

The principle is the same with our experience of transformation. If we long for the milk of the word, this milk will be like a current of living water flowing within us. As we stay in this flow, the current will carry away our natural substance and replace it with heavenly, divine minerals. These minerals are actually Christ. Gradually, over a period of time, we shall be transformed or "petrified"; that is, we shall become precious stones.

If we would be transformed, every day we need to come to the Lord as milk. We have pointed out that the way to come to Christ as the living stone is to drink the guileless milk of the word. This means that we come to Christ by drinking Him. As we daily drink in the milk of the word, we shall be transformed.

Transformation cannot take place overnight. The petrified wood in Arizona required a very long time to be changed from wood into stone. If the petrified wood could speak, it might say, "It has taken me a long time of being in the current of water to be transformed from mere wood into petrified wood." As one who has been in the Lord for more than fifty years, I can testify that transformation takes time. I assure you that you cannot be transformed in a few months or even in a few years.

When some hear a word concerning how long transformation takes, they may say, "I can't wait so long. I quit." Actually, this is not up to you, for it is your destiny to be transformed. Wood that is in the process of being petrified cannot stop the process. It is the destiny of this wood to be changed into petrified wood. We need to remember that, according to chapter one of 1 Peter, we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God before the foundation of the world. God has chosen us. Also, in

our experience, we have been "caught" by Him, and we cannot escape, no matter how hard we may try. Therefore, instead of trying to escape, we should simply rest in the flow of living water and allow this water to pass through us so that we may be transformed.

If others ask us what is happening in the Lord's recovery, we should say, "We are simply allowing the water of life to flow through us. Daily we are drinking the milk of the word so that we may be transformed." Let us allow this process of petrification, of transformation, to take place for forty or fifty years and then see what the outcome will be. It is by this process of transformation that clay becomes living stones.

According to 2:5, as living stones we are being built up a spiritual house. Although the nourishing milk of the word is for the soul through the mind, it eventually nourishes our spirit. Instead of making us soulish, it makes us spiritual, suitable for building up a spiritual house for God.

God's goal in the believers is to have a house built up with living stones. He does not want separated and scattered stones, nor even a pile of stones merely gathered together. He wants stones built up with one another.

The spiritual house into which we are being built is God's building. Eventually, this building will consummate in the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there will not be any clay, for all the clay will have been transformed into precious stone. This means that the New Jerusalem is built with precious stones. We are becoming the precious stones that will be built up into the New Jerusalem. Hallelujah, the building work is now going on! How is this work going on? It is being carried out by the process of petrification, transformation. This happens as we daily, even hourly, come to Christ as milk and drink Him in. Then we shall have the flow, the current, that transforms us from clay into stone for God's building.

A HOLY PRIESTHOOD

In verse 5 Peter speaks of both a spiritual house and a

holy priesthood. "Spiritual" denotes the qualification of the divine life that lives and grows; "holy," the qualification of the divine nature that separates and sanctifies. The house of God subsists mainly by the divine life; hence, it is spiritual. The priesthood subsists mainly by the divine nature; hence, it is holy.

The holy priesthood is the spiritual house. In the New Testament two Greek words are used for priesthood, both of which are translated priesthood. *Hierosune*, as in Hebrews 7:12, refers to the priestly office, and *hierateuma*, as in 1 Peter 2:5, 9, refers to the assembly of priests, a body of priests. The coordinated body of priests is the built-up spiritual house. Although Peter did not address his two Epistles to the church, nor did he use the term church in stressing the corporate life of the believers in this verse, he does use the terms spiritual house and holy priesthood to indicate the church life. It is not the spiritual life in an individualistic way, but that in a corporate way that can fulfill God's purpose and satisfy His desire. He wants a spiritual house for His dwelling, a priestly body for His service. Peter's view concerning the believers' corporate service in coordination is the same as Paul's in Romans 12. This service issues from three vital steps in the spiritual life: new birth (1 Pet. 1:2), growth in life by being nourished with Christ, and building up with the believers.

SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

The spiritual house and the holy priesthood are synonymous terms. The spiritual house is for God's dwelling, and the holy priesthood is for God's service. According to 2:5, the building up of a spiritual house into a holy priesthood is for a particular function. This function is "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Here we see that Jesus Christ is the channel through which the spiritual sacrifices are offered to God. Christ channels our offerings to God, and these offerings are the sacrifices presented to Him. Furthermore, what is offered to God must be something of Christ.

The spiritual sacrifices which the believers offer in the New Testament age according to God's economy are Christ in all the varied aspects of His riches as the reality of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament types, such as the burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering (Lev. 1--5). Also these spiritual sacrifices include our praises and the things we do for God (Heb. 13:15-16; Phil. 4:18).

A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR A POSSESSION

In 2:9 Peter goes on to say, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Race, priesthood, nation, and people are all collective nouns, referring to the believers corporately. As a race, the believers have been chosen; as a priesthood, a body of priests, we are royal, kingly; as a nation, we are holy; as a people, we are God's possession, a possession particularly acquired and owned by God as His treasure. The chosen race denotes our lineage from God; the royal priesthood, our service to God; the holy nation, our community for God; and the people for a possession, our preciousness to God. This is all in the corporate sense. Hence, we need to be built together.

The words "chosen race" indicate our source. As a chosen race, we have our source in God. We are also a royal priesthood. "Royal" denotes the status of our priesthood, which is kingly, like that of Christ the King, our High Priest, typified by Melchisedec (Heb. 7:1-2, 25; Gen. 14:18). We are also a holy nation and a people for a possession. "Holy" denotes the nature of the nation. The Greek words rendered "a people for a possession" are an equivalent to a Hebrew expression. This is a reference to the Old Testament, and the Hebrew expression implies a particular treasure. We are God's particular treasure, His special and precious possession. In Titus 2:14 Paul speaks of "a people for His own possession." This also may be rendered

"peculiar people." This is an expression borrowed from the Old Testament (Deut. 7:6); 14:2; 26:18), and it denotes a people privately possessed by God as His peculiar treasure (Exo. 19:5), His own possession. First we are a chosen race, then a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for a possession. As God's particular treasure, we are His people who are precious to Him.

TELLING OUT GOD'S VIRTUES

We are such a race, priesthood, nation, and people so that we may tell out the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Greek word rendered "tell out" also means proclaim abroad. First we must be born anew and grow in life, and then be built up and serve corporately. Now we need to proclaim abroad, to tell out. To serve corporately is to satisfy God by offering up Christ as spiritual sacrifices; to proclaim abroad is to benefit others by showing forth the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The virtues in verse 9 are excellencies, excellent and glorious virtues (2 Pet. 1:3). These refer to what God is and has, and the marvelous light of God consummates in His glory. To and by His virtue and glory God has called us.

The virtues here are excellent attributes, acts, and behavior. God has many virtues. For example, He is merciful. To be merciful is a virtue. God is also loving. He even loves sinners. This love is another of God's virtues. All the excellent divine attributes are the virtues of God. We need to tell out, to proclaim abroad, these excellent virtues.

In his writings Peter emphasizes the matter of virtue more than Paul does. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:3 that we have been called by the virtue and the glory of God. He says not only that we have been called to God's glory and virtue; he says that we have been called by His glory and virtue.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, Peter and the other disciples saw His virtues. At least once, on the mount of transfiguration, they saw the Lord's glory. Seeing Christ's virtues was a daily occurrence. Whatever the Lord did was

an excellent act full of virtue. Christ's excellencies are great in number. Every day the Lord Jesus manifested His virtues, and Peter saw this. Later, Peter wrote that we have been called by the Lord's virtue and glory. This indicates that Peter himself had been attracted by the virtue and glory of the Lord. Furthermore, he was called to this virtue and glory. Therefore, he is one with the Lord in virtue and in glory.

The apostles proclaimed the virtues of the Lord. They preached them, they taught them, and they announced them. Whatever the apostles preached and taught was a telling out of the virtues they had seen and enjoyed. It was a proclaiming abroad of the virtues in which they had participated. This is what it means to tell out God's excellencies. Today we need to follow the apostles to tell out the excellent virtues of the Lord.

CALLED OUT OF DARKNESS

According to verse 9, we should proclaim abroad the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Darkness is the expression and sphere of Satan in death. Light is the expression and sphere of God in life. God has called us, delivered us, out of Satan's death-realm of darkness into His life-realm of light (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).

THE PEOPLE OF GOD OBTAINING MERCY

In verse 10 Peter concludes this section: "Who once were not a people, but now are the people of God; who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." This word from Hosea 2:23 was quoted by Paul in Romans 9:24-27, referring first to the Gentiles and then to the remnant of Israel, because not all are Israel who are out of Israel (Rom. 9:6). Here Peter, quoting this word, refers to those who received this Epistle, the scattered Jewish believers. They once were out of Israel, but were not Israel. Hence, they were not God's people in the New Testament sense. Now, after they were called by God, they became God's people, God's particular possession, as a treasure to God.

They obtained God's mercy, which they had not obtained before.

When I was young, I was bothered by the verses that indicate that the Jewish people were not the people of God. I wondered how it was possible for them, being Jews, not to be God's people. If we read Hosea 2, Romans 9, and this verse from 1 Peter, we may be confused, for the same quotation from Hosea is used to denote the Gentiles and the Jews in the flesh. The Gentiles were not God's people and they had not obtained His mercy. But the same word refers to the Jews in the flesh. In Romans 9 Paul says that not all are Israel who are of Israel. This refers to Jews who had not believed in the Lord Jesus, to Jews in the flesh. But in the sight of God, Israel in the flesh is not the genuine Israel. Only when the Jews believe in the Lord Jesus do they become the real people of God. Before believing in Him, they did not obtain His mercy, but after believing, they have obtained the Lord's mercy. Now, after much study and digging into the Word, I have seen that the word in Hosea is used in the New Testament to denote both the Gentiles and Israel in the flesh. Israel in the flesh actually was not the genuine people of God, the people who had obtained the mercy of God. But now through believing in the Lord Jesus, they have become the people of God, and they have obtained His mercy.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE NINETEEN

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 2:11-20

GOD'S DESIRE

First Peter 2:1-10 reveals God's goal; it shows us what God desires. God wants a built up house and a priesthood for His expression. Both the house and the priesthood must be corporate. This is indicated by the four collective nouns used in verse 9: race, priesthood, nation, and people. First, God wants a house in which to dwell. As we all know, a house cannot be built of a single piece of material. On the contrary, a house can be built only of many different materials put together. In addition to a house for His dwelling, God wants a priesthood for His service. God does not desire individual priests; He desires a priesthood, a corporate body of priests, for His service.

The house and the priesthood, both of which are corporate entities, are for God's expression. This is indicated clearly in 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Telling out the virtues of Him is a matter of expressing Him. To tell out the Lord's virtues simply means to express Him according to what He is. God is rich in virtues. For example, He is loving and kind. Both His love and His kindness are virtues. Actually, all of God's attributes are His virtues, and we should tell out these virtues. Whenever we preach the gospel and teach the truth concerning the Lord, we should tell out His virtues. But unlike the practice of many

Christians today, this telling out should be a corporate matter, not an individual one.

We need to turn from traditional, religious teachings and come back to the pure Word. We grow by taking in the guileless milk of the Word so that we may be transformed. Then we shall be built up into a house for God's dwelling and a priesthood for His service. Furthermore, we shall become God's expression in His virtues. These are the main points of the second section of this Epistle, 2:1-10.

In 1 Peter chapter one we have God's economy to bring forth His full salvation so that we may have His life to have a holy manner of life and to have genuine love for the brothers. In 1:1-2 we see that the pilgrims in dispersion are under the operation of the Triune God. Then in 1:3-25 we have the full salvation of the Triune God and its issues. In chapter two we see the matter of growth in life and its results (2:1-10). First we grow by feeding on the milk of the Word unto full salvation (2:1-3). Then we are transformed unto the building up of a spiritual house for God's dwelling, a holy priesthood for God's service (2:4-8). Following this, in verses 9 and 10, we have the telling out of the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Peter may have been a fisherman, but he was very intelligent. After studying Peter's two Epistles, I have become fully convinced that this fisherman had a scholarly mind. However, in order to appreciate the beauty of Peter's thought, we need to dig deeply into his writings.

THE OUTLINE OF FIRST PETER

The beauty of Peter's thought is seen in the outline of this Epistle. I can testify that I spent a great deal of time to outline 1 Peter. This was a great pressure upon me, for it was extremely difficult to determine where to draw the lines between the various sections of this book. I believe it would be very helpful at this point to consider the outline of 1 Peter:

I. Introduction--to the Pilgrims in Dispersion under the Operation of the Triune God (1:1-2)

II. Full Salvation of the Triune God and Its Issues (1:3-25)

A. The Father's Regeneration unto a Living Hope, an Inheritance Kept in the Heavens and Ready to Be Revealed at the Last Time (1:3-9)

B. The Spirit's Application through the Prophets' Prophesying and the Apostles' Preaching (1:10-12)

C. Christ's Redemption unto a Holy Life by the Holy Nature, and Brotherly Love through Purification by the Sanctifying Truth, Based on Regeneration of the Incorruptible Seed through the Living Word of God (1:13-25)

III. Growth in Life and Its Results (2:1-10)

A. Growing by Feeding on the Milk of the Word unto Full Salvation (2:1-3)

B. Transformed unto the Building Up of a Spiritual House for God's Dwelling, a Holy Priesthood for God's Service (2:4-8)

C. To Tell Out the Virtues of the Calling One (2:9-10)

IV. Christian Life and Its Sufferings (2:11--4:19)

A. A Life in an Excellent Manner toward All Men in All Concerns (2:11--3:13)

1. As Pilgrims among the Nations (2:11-12)
2. Toward Human Institution (2:13-17)
3. Servants toward Masters (2:18-20)
4. The Model of Christ (2:21-25)
5. In Marriage Life (3:1-7)
6. In Common Life (3:8-13)

B. Suffering for Righteousness by the Will of God as Christ Did (3:14-22)

C. Arming Themselves with the Mind of Christ for Suffering (4:1-6)

D. Ministering as Good Stewards of the Varied Grace of God (4:7-11)

E. Rejoicing in Sharing the Sufferings of Christ (4:12-19)

V. The Elders' Shepherding and Its Reward (5:1-4)

A. The Shepherding Patterns (5:1-3)

B. The Chief Shepherd's Reward (5:4)

VI. The Mighty Hand of God and Its Goal (5:5-11)

A. Humbled under God's Mighty Hand (5:5-9)

B. Perfected and Grounded by the God of All Grace (5:10-11)

VII. Conclusion (5:12-14)

A. Testimony of the True Grace of God (5:12)

B. Greetings (5:13-14)

In the introduction to this Epistle (1:1-2) we see that the operation of God's economy is to bring us into the full enjoyment of the Triune God. What a great matter this is! Then in the first section (1:3-25) we have the full salvation of the Triune God and its issues. God's full salvation includes the regeneration of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the sanctification of the Spirit. The issues of this full salvation are a holy manner of life and an unfeigned brotherly love.

The second section of this Epistle covers the growth in life and its results (2:1-10). In order to grow in life, we need to long for the guileless milk of the Word. It is by this milk that we grow. The result of the growth in life is transformation, building up, and the expression of God. By the growth in life we are transformed and built up, and then we become God's expression.

The third section of this Epistle, concerned with the Christian life and its sufferings, is the longest (2:11--4:19). Peter takes more than two whole chapters to cover this

subject. In this portion of his Epistle he does not speak of the Christian life and its enjoyment; he speaks concerning the Christian life and its sufferings. In the messages to come we shall see what these sufferings are.

After the lengthy section on the Christian life and its sufferings, Peter has two short sections on the elders' shepherding and its reward (5:1-4) and the mighty hand of God and its goal (5:5-11). Finally, in 5:12-14, we have the conclusion.

FIVE MAIN POINTS

If we consider Peter's thought according to this outline printed above, we shall see that in this Epistle he covers five main points: full salvation, growth in life, the Christian life, the elders' shepherding, and the mighty hand of God. If we get into the depths of this book, we shall see that these are the basic matters Peter was seeking to cover as he wrote. Furthermore, with each of these five matters there is an issue, a result, some kind of suffering, a reward, or a goal. With God's full salvation, we have a twofold issue, a holy manner of life and brotherly love. With the growth in life, we have transformation, building up, and the expression of God. With the Christian life, we have sufferings. With the elders' shepherding, we have the reward. With the mighty hand of God, we have a goal. This understanding of the structure of 1 Peter is clear and also logical.

If you consider the brief sketch of this book presented in the outline, you will see that this Epistle covers the full salvation of the Triune God and its issues, growth in life and its results, the Christian life and its sufferings, the elders' shepherding and its reward, and the mighty hand of God and its goal. God will reward all the elders for their shepherding. In this book the mighty hand of God is emphasized because the subject of this Epistle is the Christian life under the government of God. The mighty hand of God is for the carrying out of His governmental administration, and with this administration there is a goal.

After the section on the mighty hand of God and its goal, we have the conclusion in 5:12-14. We have seen that the introduction (1:1-2) is on the operation of the Triune God in His economy to bring the elect into the participation of His riches. Then in the conclusion we have a testimony of the true grace of God (5:12). What is this true grace of God? The true grace of God is His full salvation. This grace was experienced by Peter and testified by him. Therefore, both by his experiences and by his writing Peter could declare what the true grace of God is and testify concerning it.

The outline of 1 Peter will help to make the text clear to us. If we read the text apart from seeing the main points presented in the outline, we may become puzzled. Our feeling may be like that of someone driving through the small streets of a city without having an understanding of the overall layout of the city. It would be helpful to have a bird's-eye view of the city and its main streets. We may say that the outline of 1 Peter is a bird's-eye view of this book that helps us to see the main points. Therefore, I encourage you to use the outline as you read and study the text of 1 Peter. You will find this a great help.

SOJOURNERS AND PILGRIMS ABSTAINING FROM FLESHLY LUSTS

Let us come now to the third section of 1 Peter and begin to consider the Christian life and its sufferings. In 2:11 Peter says, "Beloved, I entreat you as sojourners and pilgrims to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." The fleshly lusts are in man's fallen body (Rom. 7:18, 23-24), warring against man's soul--man's inner being, composed of mind, will, and emotion (Rom. 7:19-23).

Peter's entreaty in 2:11 is based upon what he has said in the two previous sections. In particular, this entreaty is based on the new birth and on the growth in life. When Peter says, "I entreat you," he is actually saying, "I beg you."

In verse 11 Peter refers to the believers as sojourners and pilgrims. He begs these sojourners and pilgrims to

abstain from fleshly lusts. This entreaty is a very practical matter and not merely a doctrine. Here Peter seems to be saying, "I beg you all to abstain from fleshly lusts. Do you know who you are? You are not worldly people. You are sojourners and pilgrims, people who belong to another country and who are traveling through a foreign country. Actually, you are on this earth as aliens, for you are not citizens of the earth. You are heavenly sojourners and spiritual pilgrims. As such persons, you should live a life that is different from that of the worldly people. You need to abstain from the vain manner of life. The vain manner of life is a life that comes out of fleshly lusts. Therefore, in order to show others that you are heavenly aliens, you must abstain from fleshly lusts."

In verse 11 Peter says that the fleshly lusts war against the soul. The fallen body is fleshly and full of lusts. The fleshly lusts in the fallen body war against the soul, against our inner being, that includes the mind, the will, and the emotion. Often we think good things, love good things, and decide to do good things. Thinking is in the mind, loving is in the emotion, and the deciding is in the will. Nevertheless, the fleshly lusts often war against what we think in our mind, what we love in our emotion, and what we decide with our will. The fleshly lusts are contrary to our good thoughts, intentions, and decisions. Therefore, we should abstain from the fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

AN EXCELLENT MANNER OF LIFE AMONG THE NATIONS

In 2:12 Peter goes on to say, "Having your manner of life excellent among the nations, that wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by observing your good works, glorify God in the day of visitation." The manner of life here must be the holy manner of life (1:15) and the good manner of life in Christ (3:16), a life not only for God but filled and saturated with God. This manner of life is versus the vain manner of life of the unbelievers (1:18). The

believers' manner of life should be excellent; that is, it should be beautiful in its virtues. We need to have such a life among the nations, among the Gentiles. Many versions render the Greek word for nations in verse 12 as Gentiles. Actually, the Greek word means nations. All the nations are Gentiles.

THE DAY OF VISITATION

According to verse 12, if we have an excellent manner of life among the nations, they, by observing our good works, will glorify God in the day of visitation. The Greek word translated "visitation" is *episkopes*. The basic meaning of this word is to observe, inspect, oversee, look upon. The day of visitation is the day when God will look upon His pilgrim people, as a shepherd over his wandering sheep. He will look upon them and will become the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (2:25). Hence, the day of visitation is the time of God's overseeing care.

Concerning the understanding of the day of visitation mentioned in verse 12, there are different schools of interpretation. One school says that the day of visitation is the day of judgment. However, if we look into the meaning of the Greek word, we shall find that it does not convey the thought of judgment. As we have pointed out, the basic meaning is to observe, inspect, oversee, look upon. (In the New Testament elders are called overseers, those who oversee.) The root of the Greek word for visitation is the same as that of the Greek word for overseers. Peter's thought here is that the day of visitation is the time when God will look upon His pilgrim people as a shepherd looking upon his sheep. Then God will become to them the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls. With this understanding of the word visitation as our basis, we may go on to say that the day of visitation is the time of God's overseeing care. To make the matter simple, we may say that the day of God's visitation is the day God comes to visit us. When God pays us a visit, that is the day of visitation.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S VISITATION

Have you not experienced God's visitation in the meetings of the church or of the ministry? I can testify that as I am ministering the Word to the saints, deep within I often have the feeling that God is visiting us in His overseeing care. In meeting after meeting, God comes to pay us a visit. Many of us can testify that we have experienced Him as the divine Visitor in recent days.

What does God intend to do when He comes to visit us? Does He come to judge us? No, instead of coming to judge us, God visits us for the purpose of looking upon us and observing how we are doing and what we are doing. It may seem that He says to us, "How is everything with you? What are you doing? Is everything all right?" God's visitation is like that of a shepherd. It is also the visit of an overseer. This is the reason Peter speaks of the Lord as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (2:25). Our Savior is the Shepherd and Overseer. He shepherds us and oversees us in order to take good care of us. This is the proper understanding of the word visitation in verse 12.

THE OPPOSERS GLORIFY GOD IN THE DAY OF VISITATION

In verse 12 Peter is saying that if we have an excellent manner of life among the nations, they will eventually glorify God concerning us in the day of visitation. In this verse Peter seems to be telling the saints, "The opposers now speak evil against you. But if you live a life that is excellent among them, a life that is beautiful in quality and excellent in manner, they will observe your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation. As they look upon you, they will realize that you are under the visitation of God. Eventually, the outcome will be a glory to God, for the opposers will glorify God in the day of visitation."

I can testify that throughout the years I have seen Peter's word fulfilled many times. Because they saw God's visitation of the saints, a good number of opposers regretted what they had done and repented. The saints

were under God's loving care in the day of His visitation. Even though these saints were evil spoken of, they lived a marvelous, excellent life under God's gracious care. Therefore, God visited them again and again. Their excellent manner of life and God's visitation eventually caused the opposers to repent and give glory to God.

Some of the young people in the Lord's recovery have been opposed by their parents. Several years ago, the parents of a particular young person may have opposed him strongly. They wondered why he spent so much time attending the meetings of the church and of the ministry. However, gradually they began to see a change, a transformation, in his manner of life. Although they did not have the word to describe it, they were witnessing the Lord's transforming work in their son. Eventually, they came to realize that he was a person under God's care, a person under God's visitation.

Not long ago, a number of saints testified to this effect in a meeting. They said that in the past they were opposed by their parents and, in some cases, even persecuted by them. But gradually, over a period of time, the attitude of their parents began to change. When the young people went home to visit the family, their parents continued to oppose them. But they also were carefully observing their children. Little by little, there was less opposition and more observation. Eventually, the parents had a complete change in attitude, and in some cases, they also came into the church life. They observed the excellent manner of life of their children, and they glorified God in the day of visitation.

SUBJECT TO EVERY HUMAN INSTITUTION

In verses 13 and 14 Peter says, "Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to a king as supreme, or to governors as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and praise of those who do good." What does the word "institution" mean? Literally, the Greek word means creation, as in Colossians 1:15. It refers to anything made, as a creature, building, regulation, ordinance. The King

James Version and the American Standard Version render this Greek word as "ordinance." Darby and the New American Standard Version translate it as "institution." In this verse the word institution means a regulation, an ordinance, an established principle. It is difficult to find a proper English equivalent of the Greek word.

In verse 13 "institution" means the making of regulations or ordinances much like the enacting of laws by the legislature. According to the context, "every human institution" includes "a king as supreme" and also "governors as sent by him." Here Peter is telling the believers that for the Lord's sake, that is, for the expression and glorification of the Lord (v. 12), we should be subject to all human institutions.

In verse 15 Peter goes on to say, "Because so is the will of God, by doing good to silence the ignorance of foolish men." The foolish men in verse 15 are the evil speakers mentioned in verse 12.

USING OUR FREEDOM AS SLAVES OF GOD

In verse 16 Peter says, "As free, and not having freedom as a cloak for evil, but as slaves of God." We should never use freedom as an excuse to do evil. We should not say, "Are we not free? We are not under the bondage of the law; we are under grace. This means that we are free." Yes, we are free, but we should not use our freedom as an excuse to behave in a careless manner. On the contrary, we should use our freedom as slaves of God. Peter's word here is similar to that of Paul in his Epistles. Although we are freed from the law of Moses, we are still under the law of Christ. As those under the law of Christ, we should be slaves of God. On the one hand, we are free; on the other hand, we are slaves of God under His control.

LOVING THE BROTHERHOOD

Verse 17 says, "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." Why does Peter say "love the brotherhood" instead of "love the brothers"? What does the term "brotherhood" mean here? The brotherhood is the

aggregate of the brothers, the family of the brothers, the brothers in the feeling of brotherliness. An aggregate is a totality. By using the word brotherhood Peter indicates that we should not merely love the brothers separately, one by one, or individualistically. Rather, we should love the totality of the brothers. This means that we should love the universal family of the brothers.

As believers in Christ, we are not only a community; we are also a family. A family is much more intimate than a community is. Because we are in a family, we refer to one another as brothers. If we were not of the same family, how could we be brothers to one another? No matter what our skin color may be--black, white, yellow, brown, or red--we all are brothers in God's family. Hallelujah for this worldwide, universal family! This family has been in existence for nearly two thousand years. The word brotherhood in verse 17 refers to this family.

We should love the brothers in God's family in the feeling of brotherliness. This is to love the brotherhood. However, few Christians today have the sense that in loving the brothers they are loving the brotherhood. This indicates that today's Christians do not have the sense of the corporate life. Nevertheless, the church is altogether a corporate matter. In verse 9 we see that the church is a race, a priesthood, a nation, and a people for God's possession. Now in verse 17 we see that the church is a brotherhood. The priesthood is for the service of God, and the brotherhood is for loving the brothers. We need to love the brothers in their totality; that is, we need to love the brothers in a corporate sense.

Suppose twelve people come together from twelve different families. Although they may love one another, this is not the love in the category of a "-hood," as love in a brotherhood. But if twelve people are in the same family, born of the same parents, their love for one another will be a love in a -hood. They will love one another, but this love for each member of the family will be in a -hood. Their love is different from those from separate families who love others but not with a love in a -hood. In such a case, they

may love certain ones more than others. But those born of the same parents love everyone in the family and care for everyone. This is an illustration of loving the brotherhood, of loving the totality of the brothers. In the church we love not merely the individual brothers; we love the totality, the -hood, of the brothers.

A WORD TO HOUSEHOLD SERVANTS

In verse 18 Peter goes on to say, "The household servants, subject yourselves in all fear to your masters, not only to the good and forbearing, but also to the crooked." Even though certain masters may be crooked, the believers who are household servants should be subject to them. This also is an aspect of the Christian life.

In verse 18 Peter charges the household servants to be subject to their masters in fear. This is a holy fear, as in Philippians 2:12. It is a healthy, serious caution for us to behave in a holy way. Such a fear is mentioned a number of times in this book because its teaching concerns the government of God.

GRACE AS THE MOTIVATION AND EXPRESSION OF THE DIVINE LIFE

In verses 19 and 20 Peter says, "For this is grace, if anyone because of conscience toward God bears sorrows, suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if sinning and being buffeted you shall endure it? But if doing good and suffering you shall endure, this is grace with God." Here Peter is saying that if, due to our conscience toward God, we are willing to bear sorrows and suffer unjustly, that is, suffer unjust treatment, this is grace. The Greek word rendered "grace" in verse 19 is *charis*, referring here to the motivation of the divine life within us and its expression in our life, becoming in our behavior gracious and acceptable in the eyes of both man and God (v. 20). The same Greek word is used in Luke 6:33-34 and Romans 7:25 for thanks.

As we have pointed out a number of times, grace is actually the Triune God becoming our life for our

experience and enjoyment. With this understanding of grace as our basis, we can say that here grace is the motivation of the divine life within us and its expression in our living. Therefore, this becomes in our behavior something gracious and acceptable in the sight of both God and man.

The words "conscience toward God" also mean consciousness of God. This is the consciousness of our relation to God. It indicates that a believer is living in an intimate fellowship with God, that he has and keeps a conscience toward God that is both good and pure (3:16; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3).

According to the context, the unjust suffering spoken of in verse 19 must be the mistreatment inflicted by the unbelieving masters. These masters opposed and persecuted their believing servants because of their Christian testimony (1 Pet. 3:14-18; 4:12-16).

These verses speak about our behavior in our daily life as Christians. The Christian life is a matter of behavior. Suppose we did not have the divine life within us. This would certainly make family life very difficult, especially in relation to our in-laws, and particularly, to the mother-in-law. It is rare to find a man who desires to have his mother-in-law live with him and his family. Likewise, married women do not like living with their mother-in-law. For both a husband and a wife, a mother-in-law can create a difficult situation. For this reason, humanly speaking, it is better that a married couple not have a mother-in-law live with them.

The point here is that if we are those without the divine life, we shall face problems in our married life, no matter how much we may love one another. We shall have at least five major problems: temper, disposition, habit, background, and our way of understanding things. No matter how much alike a husband and a wife may be, there will be differences between them regarding temper, disposition habit, background, and understanding. The husband will have his way of viewing things, and the wife will have hers. Likewise, the wife will have her habits and disposition, and the husband will have his. Therefore, they

will have difficulties with the five troubling factors of temper, disposition, habit, background, and way of understanding. This will be the situation, even if the husband and wife love each other very much and are refined, educated people. Sometimes at least they will find the situation intolerable and will quarrel with one another. If a mother-in-law is visiting at such a time, she will find the situation altogether unpleasant and unacceptable. She would not even want to observe such an ungracious situation.

But suppose a husband and wife both have the divine life and live according to this life. In spite of the differences in temper, disposition, habit, background, and understanding, grace inwardly motivates both the husband and the wife. Furthermore, this grace is expressed in their living. If the mother-in-law of either the husband or wife observes their way of living, she will find it gracious, pleasant, and acceptable. This is grace.

Here Peter seems to be saying, "You Jewish brothers are suffering persecution. Some of you have crooked masters who treat you unjustly. Nevertheless, you are willing to suffer this unjust treatment. In the sight of both man and God this is gracious, pleasant, and acceptable." This is what Peter means when he says, "This is grace." Anyone observing a believer living this way in a situation of suffering and persecution would have to recognize that this is grace. It is also something worthy of our thanksgiving to God. If a mother-in-law sees her daughter and son-in-law living such a life, she may say, "Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your grace."

As we have seen, in verse 20 Peter says, "For what credit is it if sinning and being buffeted you shall endure it? But if doing good and suffering you shall endure, this is grace with God." It is not a credit to us if we endure buffeting because we have sinned. But if we do good and yet suffer and endure, this is grace with God. Such a situation indicates that our living expresses the working of God's grace within us and through us. Therefore, concerning this manner of life, Peter says, "This is grace with God."

ENJOYMENT AND NOURISHMENT

If we do not have the knowledge that the divine life is in us as grace working out what God is, and if we do not have the experience of this grace, we shall not be able to understand what Peter means in these verses, even though we may read them again and again. In order to understand Peter's writing here, we need the sufficient knowledge and proper realization of the divine facts. Moreover, we need adequate experience of these facts. Only then shall we be able to understand what Peter is saying and be nourished by it.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 2:21-23

A FURTHER WORD CONCERNING GRACE

In 2:13-20 we have several matters related to our daily life. Toward the end of this portion Peter says in verse 19, "This is grace," and at the end of verse 20, "This is grace with God." The way Peter uses the word grace in these verses has been a problem to translators. If the Greek word is translated literally, the reader may find it difficult to understand what Peter is saying. Nevertheless, in the Recovery Version we adopt a literal translation. Verse 19 says, "For this is grace, if anyone because of conscience toward God bears sorrows, suffering unjustly." Thinking that the common reader of this verse would not be able to understand the meaning if the word grace were used in the translation, some translators have used the word "acceptable." Certain versions use the word "thankful." However neither of these translations is exact according to the Greek text. Furthermore, they do not satisfy the inner sense in the spirit. Therefore, these translations do not "strike home." This was the reason we decided to make a literal translation in the Recovery Version. Hence, verse 19 says, "This is grace," and verse 20 says, "This is grace with God."

Now that we have an accurate translation of these verses, how shall we understand them? In particular, how shall we interpret what Peter says about grace? I can testify that I found it very difficult to write the notes on verse 19. I wanted to say something, but at first I did not

have anything to say. Eventually, the light came from the Lord, and I saw that grace here refers to the motivation of the divine life within us and its expression in our life becoming in our behavior something gracious and acceptable in the eyes of both man and God (v. 20). What is grace in our manner of life? It is the motivation of the divine life which we received at our regeneration inwardly and the expression of this life outwardly. Then this motivation and expression become gracious, acceptable, in our behavior. When others observe this, they may say that this is grace in our manner of life. Day by day we should give others the impression that grace is with us. This means that they should be able to see grace in our daily life.

We have often seen grace in the lives of saints who have been in difficulty or hardship. For example, a sister becomes ill. Everyone is concerned for her because she seems to be dying. However, as she lies in bed in the hospital, she is full of joy. This is surprising to the doctors and nurses. The sister is able to bear sufferings that others cannot bear, and she is not afraid of dying. The life that motivates her inwardly is expressed outwardly, even in the midst of her illness. This is grace.

We have also seen grace expressed in this way at a funeral. A certain sister has lost her husband. But even at the time of the funeral, her face is glowing. Using Peter's word to describe this sister's experience, we would again say, "This is grace."

Grace is the divine life for our enjoyment. First, grace is an inward motivation then it finds an outward expression in our living. Both the inward motivation and outward expression become something sweet, gracious, and also acceptable. I believe that this is the correct understanding of Peter's word regarding grace in 2:19 and 20.

Hebrews 12:28 says, "Let us have grace." To have grace is to possess grace, take grace, and apply grace. Grace has come and is now with us. What is this grace? Grace is the processed Triune God as the all-inclusive, life-giving,

indwelling Spirit in us. In all circumstances and situations we should take grace and apply it.

We all need to learn how to have grace, that is, how to use grace. If we do this, something wonderful, excellent, and pleasant will motivate us from within. Then we shall be able to bear things, forbear things, and do things that others cannot. Spontaneously, as the result of the motivation within us, there will be a certain expression upon us. This motivation and expression is the Triune God experienced by us and lived out by us. To others, this is something sweet, gracious, acceptable, and worthy of thanksgiving.

I appreciate what Peter says concerning grace in verses 19 and 20. Paul had much to say about grace, but he never wrote a word like we have in 2:19 and 20. Peter's word here is unique. As we have seen, the grace spoken of in these verses is actually the processed Triune God, who is now the all-inclusive, life-giving, indwelling Spirit for our experience and enjoyment. Inwardly He motivates us, and outwardly He is the expression upon us. As such a One, He becomes sweet, lovely, gracious, and acceptable. This is grace. How great this is!

CALLED TO SUFFER UNJUSTLY

Based upon what he says in verses 19 and 20, Peter goes on to say in verse 21, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model that you should follow in His steps." Christ's living on earth was a model of this grace.

Verse 21 opens with the words, "For to this you were called." Have you ever thought that you were called to suffer unjustly? The word "this" in verse 21 refers to the unjust sufferings, the suffering for doing good mentioned in verses 19 and 20. We would he happy to hear that we have been called to the kingdom and to God's glory. These are marvelous things. But probably very few of us, whether young or old, have realized from verse 21 that we have been called to suffer unjust treatment.

As the context indicates, some of the believers to whom this Epistle was written were called to suffer unjustly

under crooked masters. In verse 18 Peter says, "The

household servants, subject yourselves in all fear to your masters, not only to the good and forbearing, but also to the crooked." Then in verse 19 Peter continues, "For this is grace, if anyone because of conscience toward God bears sorrows, suffering unjustly." As we have pointed out, conscience toward God means consciousness of God--the consciousness of our relation to God. This consciousness indicates that we are living in intimate fellowship with God and that we are keeping a conscience toward God that is good and also pure (3:16; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3). Deep within us, there is a consciousness before God, and this consciousness regulates and guides us. If anyone bears sorrows, suffering unjustly, because of this inward consciousness. this is grace. Verse 20 is very similar in content to verse 19: "For what credit is it if sinning and being buffeted you shall endure it? But if doing good and suffering you shall endure, this is grace with God."

Now we see that verse 21 indicates that we have been called to this. We have been called to enjoy grace and to express God, as described in verses 19 and 20. This means that we have been called to suffering so that in it we may have the enjoyment of God as grace and express Him. Whatever the circumstances may be, God is our grace, our inner enjoyment. This God is our grace. This enjoyment motivates us and then becomes our outward expression, an expression visible to others. Those who observe this grace expressed from within us will be able to see something attractive on our face, in our attitude, or in the atmosphere around us. They will feel that what they see expressed is pleasant and acceptable. As we have pointed out again and again, this is grace.

SPIRITUAL XEROXING

Verse 21 clearly says that we have been called to suffer unjustly because Christ suffered on our behalf and left us a model so that we should follow in His steps. Actually, I do not like the word "model," because it has been spoiled by common usage. Literally, the Greek word means a writing-

copy, an under-writing for students to use in tracing letters as they learn to draw them. In ancient times teachers would write letters on writing material, and those letters became a master copy. Another piece of writing material was put upon the master copy. Then the children would practice writing by tracing the letters from the master copy onto their copy. The Greek word for "model" is the word that denotes such a master copy used in the teaching of writing. The Lord Jesus has set His suffering life before us as an under-writing for us to copy by tracing and following His steps.

The making of xerox copies may be used to illustrate what Peter means by Christ being a model for us. In 1973 I gave a message on this entitled "Spiritual Xeroxing." Christ's living revealed in the four Gospels is the master copy used in this spiritual xeroxing. For xeroxing, we must first have a copy. The xeroxed copy made from this original is a reproduction, not an imitation. We know from experience that trying to imitate Christ does not work. We are not able to imitate Him. What we need is not imitation but reproduction. There is a great difference between imitation and reproduction.

I have heard an explanation of how the xeroxing process operates. First there is the need of a proper light to expose the original copy. Then there is the need of a special kind of ink, called toner. Besides this, there is the need of a heat roller and the paper upon which to make the copy. This paper, of course, must be clean. Then this clean paper is exposed under the light to the copy. Through the light, the heat, and the proper ink, whatever the copy is will be reproduced onto the paper. The result is reproduction, not imitation.

In the process of spiritual xeroxing, the Spirit of Christ is the light, and the riches of the divine life are the inking substance. We are the paper on which the reproduction of the original is to be made. This paper must be put under the light of the Holy Spirit, and it must pass through the inking substance in order to have the original copy--Christ Himself--reproduced on it. Through this process we

eventually become a reproduction of the original, a reproduction of Christ.

We have pointed out that the paper used in xeroxing must be clean. It should not have anything on it. For instance, we could never get anything xeroxed on a piece of newspaper. If you try to make a reproduction onto a piece of newspaper, nothing will come out clear. It is very important, therefore, for the paper to be clean. Peter refers to this clean "paper" in 1:22, where he speaks about the purifying of our souls. Much of what Peter writes in chapters one and two is related to producing clean paper for spiritual xeroxing.

Christ is not merely a model for us to follow outwardly. He is a writing-copy, an original for spiritual xeroxing, and we need to become His reproduction. This means that we should become xerox copies of Christ by experiencing a process that involves spiritual light and the riches of the divine life. The result of this process is that we eventually become a reproduction of Christ.

THE GRACE AND THE MODEL

Peter may not have been learned in the Greek language, but he was rich in his expression. First he says, "This is grace." Then he tells us that Christ has left us a model. The grace and the model are closely related. When anyone observes the expression of the Triune God as grace from within a believer and recognizes that this is grace, there is an indication that this one has become a xerox copy of Christ, the model. To express the Triune God as grace in the midst of unjust suffering is to become a reproduction of Christ. Therefore, instead of saying, "This is grace," it is possible to say, "This is a reproduction of Christ." The manner of life that expresses the processed Triune God as grace is not only grace--it is a reproduction of Christ.

In 2:21-25 there are five important words: grace, model, Savior, Shepherd, and Overseer. Christ is this grace, and Christ is also the model. Furthermore, as we shall see, Christ is our Savior, our Shepherd, and our Overseer. Christ is the grace expressed in our daily life.

Christ is the writing-copy, the original used for spiritual xeroxing. It is rather easy for us to understand that Christ is our Savior, Shepherd, and Overseer. But is not as easy to understand how Christ can be the grace expressed in our daily life, and how He can be the writing-copy. To understand Christ as grace and the writing-copy, we need experience. From experience we know that as we are living out Christ day by day, we are under the process of spiritual xeroxing. As a result, others will be able to read Christ on us, for we shall become a letter of Christ.

REPRODUCTION, NOT IMITATION

To become a xerox copy of Christ is very different from trying to imitate Him. To illustrate, a man may set up an example for a monkey to stand upright, and the monkey stands up, imitating the man. Then the man walks, and the monkey imitates him by walking on two feet. The man swings his arms, and so does the monkey. But after the imitation is finished, the man leaves and the monkey goes back to walking on all fours. Once I saw a monkey who had been trained to sit at a table and eat with a knife and fork. However, after the act was over, the monkey threw away the knife and fork and reverted to his usual behavior.

At least to a certain extent, those Christian teachers who instruct believers to imitate Christ are like a man training a monkey to imitate a human being. I have learned that trying to imitate Christ simply does not work. In these messages I am not encouraging you to imitate the Lord. On the contrary, I am pointing you to the riches of Christ and the beauty of the Lord. Furthermore, both the heavenly light and the spiritual ink are available to us, and we are all undergoing the process of spiritual xeroxing.

Peter's thought in verse 21 is deep. In order to appreciate the worth of a verse such as this, we need experience. If we do not have adequate Christian experience, we shall not understand what Peter says concerning grace and concerning Christ as our model.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:21-25

In the previous message we considered what it means for Christ to be our model. We saw that He is the master copy, the original copy, and that through a process of spiritual xeroxing we are becoming a reproduction of Christ. In this message we shall consider other matters in 2:21-25.

First Peter 2:21 and 22 say, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model that you should follow in His steps; who did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth." It is not an easy matter to have no guile in our mouth. Consider how many mistakes you make in one day because of the things you say. Because we in ourselves cannot be without guile, Peter specifically says that no guile was found in the Lord's mouth.

A LIFE UNDER GOD'S GOVERNMENT

In verse 23 Peter goes on to say concerning the Lord, "Who being reviled did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten, but kept committing all to Him who judges righteously." According to the usage of the verb "kept committing" in Greek, "all" needs to be inserted here as its object. This word refers to all the sufferings of the Lord. He kept committing all the insults He suffered and all His injuries to Him who judges righteously in His government, to the righteous God, to whom He submitted Himself. This indicates that the Lord recognized God's government while He was living a human life on earth.

I am somewhat concerned that in your reading of this verse you may not pay attention to the word "judges." We are accustomed to saying that we commit things to the Lord who is faithful or merciful or kind. Have you ever said, "I commit everything to God who judges righteously"? I do not think that many of us have had this practice. The reason we do not pray like this is that our prayer, expression, and utterance are still too traditional. This keeps us from applying many of the thoughts and utterances in the pure Word. Therefore, in reading a verse such as 2:23, we may take it for granted and fail to get into the real meaning.

While the Lord Jesus was on earth suffering, He kept committing all to the One who judges righteously. This brief word indicates not only that the Lord lived a life that was a model for us, but also that He lived a life absolutely under God's government. He Himself was always under the government of God, and He committed everything related to Him to God's judgment.

Peter has already referred to God's judgment in 1:17: "And if you call upon as Father the One who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear." Here Peter "is not speaking of the final judgment of the soul. In that sense 'the Father does not judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son' (John 5:22). The thing spoken of here is the daily judgment of God's government in this world, exercised with regard to His children. Accordingly it says, 'The time of your sojourning' here" (Darby). This is God's judgment on His own household.

Since these two Epistles are concerned with the government of God, the judgment of God and of the Lord is referred to repeatedly (2:23; 4:5-6, 17; 2 Pet. 2:3-4, 9; 3:7), as one of the essential items. It began from the angels (2 Pet. 2:3-4), and passed through the generations of man in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 2:5-9). Then in the New Testament age it begins from the house of God (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:23; 4:6, 17) and continues until the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10), which will be a day of judgment on

the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles before the millennium. After the millennium, all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged and perish (1 Pet. 4:5; 2 Pet. 3:7), and the heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10, 12). The results of the varied judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. However, by all these judgments, the Lord God will clear up and purify the entire universe so that He may have a new heaven and a new earth for a new universe filled with His righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13) for His delight.

CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR

In 2:23 Peter says that God the Father is the One who always judges righteously. This means that He governs in a righteous way. Christ put His trust in this righteous One. For this reason, Peter says that when Christ was on earth, He kept committing all to God the Father, who judges righteously.

Verse 24 says, "Who Himself carried up our sins in His body onto the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose bruise you were healed." This verse speaks of Christ as our Savior, our Redeemer. As our Savior, Christ "carried up our sins in His body onto the tree." The "tree" is the cross made of wood, a Roman instrument of capital punishment for the execution of malefactors, as prophesied in the Old Testament (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

Literally, "having died to sins" means being away from sins; hence, having died to them. In the death of Christ, we have died to sins (Rom. 6:8, 10-11, 18). We have died to sin so that we might live to righteousness. This living to righteousness is in the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 2:6; John 14:19; 2 Tim. 2:11).

The "bruise" in verse 24 is a suffering that resulted in death. According to Genesis 3:15, the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, and the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's seed. The bruising in Genesis 3:15 is related to the bruise in 2:24.

According to verse 24, we have been healed by Christ's bruise. This is the healing of death. We were dead (Eph. 2:1), but Christ's suffering of death healed our death so that we may live in His resurrection.

KEPT AWAY FROM SINS AND LIVING TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

We have pointed out that the phrase "having died to sins" literally means being away from sins. When Christ carried up our sins onto the cross and died, that death accomplished many things. The death of Christ terminated us, and this termination can keep us away from sin. The best way for people to be kept from sins or from sin is for them to be put to death. No matter how many sins a person may commit, once he has died, death separates him from sins. Peter speaks of being away from sins; Paul speaks of the one who has died being free from sin. Through Christ's death we can be kept away from sins so that we may live to righteousness. Apparently, being kept away from sin terminates us; actually, it enlivens us so that we may live to righteousness.

As we have pointed out, by Christ's bruise we have been healed. This means that His death heals our death.

Most of us are accustomed to Paul's terms, but we are not familiar with many of Peter's expressions. In verse 24 alone, Peter uses a number of unusual expressions: the carrying up of our sins in Christ's body onto the tree, being away from sin to live to righteousness, and being healed by Christ's bruise. Christians do not use many of Peter's expressions in conversation. I hope that after reading these messages, you will begin to use Peter's terms and expressions in your fellowship and prayer.

Verse 24 indicates that, as fallen human beings, we were dead and full of sins. But Christ put our sins upon Himself and carried them up onto the tree, the cross, where He suffered God's righteous judgment for all our sins. Christ's death on the cross was a bruise, and that bruise, that death, has healed our death. Now we have become alive. On the one hand, Christ's bruise that heals

us keeps us away from sins through His death; on the other, hand this healing enlivens us so that we may live to righteousness.

According to our dead, fallen nature, our intention is toward sins. But now that Christ has died to heal our death and to make us alive, we have a different intention. Because of the life of Christ within us, we live always with the intention toward righteousness, the inclination toward righteousness. This is our Savior, the One who died on the cross to terminate us and to heal our death wound.

The subjective aspect of the cross continues in our experience today by the Spirit. The life-giving Spirit is working within us continually to carry out the subjective aspect of Christ's cross in our being. Daily we are undergoing the inward working of the cross of Christ, and daily we are being made alive so that we may live to righteousness. Therefore, it is not difficult to overcome sins, because through Christ's death we are being kept away from sins. His death has drawn a separating line between us and sins. Being kept away from sins, now we are alive. There is no need for us to strive or to try to energize ourselves. We simply live, and this living always has an inclination toward righteousness. This is the experience of our Savior saving us daily. This understanding of Peter's word is according to our experience.

We should not have only the objective cross, but the subjective cross as well. The objective cross needs to become subjective to us in our experience. This depends upon the working of the life-giving Spirit within us. When we call on the name of the Lord and have fellowship with Him, the life-giving Spirit operates within us. Spontaneously we experience the subjective working of the cross to make a separation between us and sins so that we automatically live to righteousness.

FULFILLING GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

Now we need to ask why Peter uses the expression "live to righteousness." This is related to the fulfilling of God's governmental requirements. Actually, God's government

requires just one thing--righteousness. This is the reason 2 Peter 3:13 says, "But according to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." In 1 Peter 2:23 we see that the Lord Jesus continually committed all to the One who judges righteously. Then in verse 24 Peter indicates that we should live to righteousness. Peter's concept here is governmental; righteousness is a matter of God's government. We have been saved by our Savior to live a life that matches the righteous requirements of God's government.

God is righteous and His government is established upon righteousness. Psalm 89:14 says that righteousness is the foundation of God's throne. Therefore, as God's people living under His government, we must have a righteous life. We must live to righteousness. But because in ourselves we are not able to live this kind of life, the Savior saves us to live a life of righteousness, a life that fulfills the righteous requirements of God's government.

It is important for us to realize that Christ our Savior has carried up all our sins onto the tree and died there for us. Now His death separates us from sins and enlivens us so that we may live to righteousness. Spontaneously, we are under God's government and have no problem with His government because we live to righteousness.

CHRIST, OUR SHEPHERD

In verse 25 Peter goes on to say, "For you were as sheep being led astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Christ was our Redeemer in His death on the tree. Now He is our soul's Shepherd and Overseer in the resurrection life within us. Therefore, He is able to guide us and supply us with life that we may follow His model in His steps of suffering (v. 21). According to verse 25, Christ is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Our soul is our inner being, our real person. Our Lord, as the Shepherd and Overseer of our soul, shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our inner being and by exercising His oversight over the condition of our real person.

Our problem was that we were like sheep being led astray. But now we have returned, turned back, to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. We should not think that in verse 25 Peter uses soul as a synonym of spirit. This is definitely not the case. A shepherd takes care of the physical needs of his flock, and Christ our Shepherd takes care of the needs of our soul. He is not the Shepherd of our body; He is the Shepherd of our soul, our inner being. We all have a spirit, and the spirit is our inward organ. But our being is a soul. Therefore, Christ mainly shepherds us by taking care of our soul. He takes care of our mind, emotion, and will.

We may think that our problems are with the body. No doubt, the body does give us many problems. Nevertheless, our real problem is in our soul. Our mind, emotion, and will all have problems. Unbelievers are wanderers in the soul, and they do not have a shepherd to take care of them. But our situation is different in that we have a Shepherd who takes care of our soul. Not only do we have the Lord's life within us, but we also have Him as our Shepherd. He is now shepherding us in our soul.

I would ask you to consider this matter of the Lord's shepherding according to your experience. Do you experience the Lord's comfort and sense His comfort in your spirit or in your soul? In other words, where is the Lord's comfort, in our spirit or in our soul? If you say that His comfort is in the spirit, your answer is not according to the Bible. Before you came into the Lord's recovery, you may not have known that you had a human spirit. But since you have been in the church life, you have seen the revelation concerning the human spirit. But this revelation may have now become to you a new kind of tradition. To say that Christ's comfort is in our spirit is to speak according to a new tradition concerning the spirit. Many times we speak of turning to the spirit, perhaps expecting that when we turn to the spirit everything will be all right. Actually, even after we turn to the spirit, many things may not be all right. From experience Peter knew to say that Christ is the Shepherd of our souls. Therefore, Peter does not tell us in verse 25 that Christ is

the Shepherd of our spirit or of our body; He clearly says that He is the Shepherd of our souls.

This Epistle was written to Jewish Christians who were suffering much persecution. Apparently persecution is related to our body outwardly. Actually, persecution is aimed at the soul. Because it is our soul that suffers, it is our soul that needs the Lord's shepherding. It is not our body that needs this kind of care, nor is it mainly our spirit. It is our soul--our mind, our emotion, and our will--that needs the Lord as the Shepherd.

In our experience sometimes we just do not know what to think about. We do not know where to direct our thoughts. This is an indication that our mind needs the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd. I can testify that many times in this kind of situation the Lord Jesus has been a Shepherd to me. As a result of His shepherding our mind is directed and set in the right way.

Our emotion, being complicated, is easily upset. This is especially true of the sisters' emotion. Therefore, we need the Lord Jesus to shepherd us in our emotion. His shepherding comforts our emotion.

Our will also needs the Lord's shepherding. As human beings, we often find it difficult to make the right decision. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to make a decision. Unbelievers have no one to lead them and guide them in making decisions. But we have a Shepherd to lead us and guide us. The Lord's leading and guiding is primarily related to our will. As the living Shepherd, the Lord continually directs our will. I cannot tell you how many times I have experienced this. The Lord is truly the Shepherd of our soul. He directs our mind, comforts our emotion, and leads and guides our will.

According to my experience, there is a difference between leading and guiding. Leading is related to a destination. Suppose you are driving from your home to a certain city. A road map may lead you to your destination. But once you arrive at that city, you will need a guide, someone to direct you to the exact place where you want to go. In the Bible some verses speak of the Lord's leading, and others, of His guiding. On the one hand, the Lord will

lead His people to the holy land. But once He has led them there, He will guide them to Mount Zion.

As our Shepherd, the Lord leads us first and then guides us. He leads us to the right place, and he guides us to the exact spot. This is Christ, our Shepherd.

In order to be our living Shepherd, it is necessary for Christ to dwell within us. If Christ today were not the life-giving Spirit in us, if He were only the exalted Lord in an objective way in the third heaven, how could He be our Shepherd? For Christ to be our Shepherd, He must be with us, even in us. Many times He goes along with us in order to turn us back. Consider how the Lord was the Shepherd to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. These disciples were going in one direction, but the Lord went with them in order to turn them to go in another direction. Luke 24:15 says, "And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them." Then He asked them what they were talking about. In a sense, these disciples rebuked the Lord when they said, "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" (v. 18). Then the Lord asked, "What things?" (v. 19). After walking a while together, they constrained the Lord to stay with them (v. 29). Then, as He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, "their eyes were opened, and they knew Him" (vv. 30-31). This is an example of the Lord's shepherding.

Sometimes the Lord shepherds us in the same way that He shepherded the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We also may speak to Him in a nonsensical way or ask Him nonsensical questions. We may even rebuke Him, and He may pretend not to know what we are talking about. Many of us can testify of having the Lord Jesus shepherd us in this way. As the life-giving Spirit dwelling within us, He is the Shepherd to us in our experience.

CHRIST, OUR OVERSEER

According to Peter's word in 2:25, Christ is also the

Overseer of our souls. I wonder how many Christians have experienced Christ as an Overseer, as an Elder.

The New Testament reveals that an overseer is an elder and that an elder is an overseer. In 5:1-3 Peter gives a word to the elders concerning the shepherding of the flock of God. What is the function of an overseer? The Greek word for overseer means one who oversees a particular condition or situation. This word seems to indicate someone above us who takes oversight concerning us and watches what we are doing. However, according to our experience, the Lord as the Overseer is One who cares for us. For Him to oversee us means that He takes care of us. As the Overseer, the Lord does not govern us or rule over us. Rather, He cares for us as a mother cares for her child. A mother oversees her child with the purpose of caring for the child. She wants to take care of every need. The same is true of Christ as our Overseer.

As we read 2:18-25, we see that Peter was very rich in experience. In this portion he speaks of grace, the writing-copy, the Savior, the Shepherd, and the Overseer. Christ is the life within us, and He is also the model for us to follow. If we live by Christ as our inward life, that is, by the indwelling Christ Himself, we shall undergo the process of spiritual xeroxing to become a reproduction of Christ. At the same time, we shall experience Him as the Savior saving us, as the Shepherd leading and guiding us, and as the Overseer caring for us. Oh, Peter's experience was rich, and his writing is marvelous! May we all practice to enjoy Christ according to what is revealed in these verses. May we all enjoy Him as grace, as the model, and as the wonderful Savior, Shepherd, and Overseer.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(4)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 3:1-6

FIVE ASPECTS OF CHRIST

In 2:18-25 we have five important matters, five aspects of Christ: grace, the model, the Savior, the Shepherd, and the Overseer. Christ is the grace within us, and He is the model for our spiritual direction. Furthermore, Christ is also our Savior, Shepherd, and Overseer. He saves us, He shepherds us, and He cares for us, thus accomplishing a threefold work concerning us. We all need this gracious, threefold work of Christ for us. We need His saving, shepherding, and overseeing.

Peter did not write this Epistle merely according to the knowledge of doctrine, but according to his rich experiences of Christ. Peter experienced Christ as grace, as the model, and as the Savior, Shepherd, and Overseer. He experienced the motivation of the divine life within him and its expression in his living becoming something gracious and acceptable in the sight of both God and man. As we have pointed out, when others see such an expression in our living, they may say, "This is grace. This is something worthy of thanksgiving to God."

In 2:21 Peter says, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model that you should follow in His steps." The very Christ who is the grace within us has become a model, a master copy, the original copy, to be used in the process of spiritual xeroxing. As we have pointed out, through this process, we become a reproduction of Christ.

In 2:24 we have a picture of Christ as our Savior, and in verse 25 Peter says, "For you were as sheep being led astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Christ died to sins so that we might live to righteousness, that is, live rightly under the government of God. Furthermore, through Christ's bruise, a suffering that resulted in death, we have been healed of our death, so that we may live in His resurrection.

Now we have Christ as the Shepherd and Overseer caring for our souls. Christ's shepherding does not mainly take care of our body or our spirit; it primarily takes care of our soul. However, as the Shepherd and Overseer, Christ takes care of us from within our spirit. He does not shepherd us or oversee us from the heavens. Today our Shepherd and Overseer is in our spirit, indwelling us as the life-giving Spirit. His shepherding and overseeing begin from our spirit and then spread to every part of our soul. This means that from our spirit Christ reaches the parts of our soul--the mind, emotion, and will--and takes care of all our problems, needs, and wounds. How wonderful! This is our Christ!

TWO DIFFICULT MATTERS

In this message we come to 1 Peter chapter three, one of the most difficult chapters in the entire Bible. What makes this chapter difficult to understand is Peter's word concerning Christ making a proclamation to the spirits in prison (vv. 19-20) and his word concerning baptism (vv. 20-21). Throughout the centuries, there has been much debate over what Peter says in this chapter concerning these two matters. The debate continues to this day, for it seems that the problems of interpretation have not been solved. Furthermore, both matters are very deep.

In 3:19 and 20 Peter tells us something about Christ's death that Paul does not cover in his writings. We know that Paul has much to say regarding the all-inclusive death of Christ. But there is at least one aspect of Christ's death that Paul does not cover in his Epistles. This does not mean that Paul did not know of this aspect. I would

not presume to say this of Paul, for he received a complete, universal revelation. He knew the things on earth, and according to 2 Corinthians 12, he was taken to the third heaven and also to Hades, to Paradise. Therefore, Paul had a full view of the three sections of the universe--heaven, earth, and the region under the earth. But for some reason he does not mention in his writings the matter of Christ's making a proclamation to the spirits in prison.

In his Epistles Paul also has a good deal of teaching concerning baptism. Nevertheless, in 3:20-21 we have an excellent word by Peter concerning baptism, a word that cannot be found in the Epistles of Paul.

In a forthcoming message we shall study what Peter says regarding Christ's making a proclamation to the spirits in prison and what he says regarding baptism. That message will be a real landmark in the Life-study of 1 Peter. In this message and in the message immediately following we shall consider 3:1-13.

MARRIAGE AND THE GRACE OF LIFE

First Peter 3:1-13 is still in the section concerned with a life in an excellent manner toward all men in all concerns (2:11--3:13). In this section we have already covered the living of the believers as pilgrims among the nations (2:11-12), the believers being subject to every human institution (2:13-17), the subjection of household servants to their masters (2:18-20), and the model of Christ (2:21-25). In 3:1-7 Peter is concerned with marriage life, and in 3:8-13, with common life.

In Ephesians 5 Paul gives a word concerning married life that is familiar to every reader of the New Testament. But Peter's writing concerning married life in 3:1-7 also has some very good points, even the topmost point. The most outstanding point is what Peter says about a husband and wife being "joint-heirs of the grace of life." Paul does not say anything about the grace of life, much less about a married couple being joint-heirs, or co-heirs, of the grace of life. In 3:7 Peter says, "The husbands, in like

manner, dwelling together with them according to knowledge, assigning honor as to the weaker, female vessel, as also joint-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." Peter wanted the husbands and wives to realize that they are heirs together, not of property or material possessions, but of the grace of life.

Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years and yet do not have any understanding of what Peter means by the grace of life. Some may not even know that there is such an expression in the New Testament. Christians are familiar with the grace of salvation or the grace of forgiveness. Actually, it is not even necessary for us to read the Bible in order to have the concept of the grace of forgiveness. But the term, the grace of life, is a uniquely biblical expression. The problem is that, when we read about this, our mind may be veiled, or we may not pay adequate attention to this term. By the Lord's mercy, we would place a proper emphasis on this matter so that we may all appreciate it. I hope that we all shall see the wonderful matter of the grace of life. The grace of life is something real and substantial that we can inherit. This is not merely unmerited favor; it is solid, substantial, spiritual property that can be inherited by a husband and wife. Hallelujah for the grace of life!

We have pointed out that in this Epistle Peter has much to say about grace. In 1:2 he says, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied." Peter desired not only that grace be with the saints, but that grace be multiplied to them. With the thought of multiplied grace as the base, Peter goes on in 4:10 to speak of varied grace: "Each one according as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God." We all should be good stewards of this varied grace in different aspects and of different categories. Then in 5:10 Peter speaks of the God of all grace. Therefore, in 1 Peter we have four unique expressions concerning grace: multiplied grace, grace of life, varied grace, and all grace. Although Paul has a great deal to say concerning grace, he does not use the unique expressions Peter uses in his first Epistle. I deeply

appreciate what Peter says in this book concerning grace, in particular his word regarding the grace of life.

WIVES TO BE SUBJECT TO THEIR HUSBANDS

Let us now go on to consider 3:1-7 verse by verse. Verse 1 says, "In like manner, wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, that even if any disobey the word, they will be gained without a word through the manner of life of their wives." The phrase "in like manner" refers to the subjection of the household servants to their masters, as described in 2:18. Therefore, as a household servant submits himself to his master, so the wives should subject themselves to their *own* husbands. This kind of word is certainly contrary to the emphasis of the so-called women's liberation movement. That movement is against the Bible, for it is against God's ordination in His creation with respect to male and female. Using Peter's expression (3:7), God created the females weaker vessels. What country would use women as the main fighting force in the army? Females are weaker physically and psychologically. For this reason, it is easy for women to shed tears, which are often a sign of weakness. Furthermore, it is easy for a female to be troubled in her mind or emotion. All these are signs that the female is a weaker vessel.

Like Peter, Paul teaches the submission of wives to their husbands. However, unlike Peter, he does not tell us that females are weaker vessels. Concerning this matter, once again Peter uses a particular expression in pointing out that the females are weaker vessels.

In verse 1 Peter charges the wives to be subject to their own husbands. Paul also did this. Some women may find it easier to submit to someone else's husband instead of to their own husbands. Also, they may appreciate another's husband more than they appreciate their own husband. Even in the church life sisters may find it easier to subject themselves to a brother other than their own husband. The reason for this is that the wives know all the defects and shortcomings of their husbands, having lived with them in married life. But they do not know so much about the

defects and shortcomings of others. This is the reason they may appreciate other brothers more than their own husbands.

Once a sister comes to know the defects and shortcomings of her husband, she may feel cheated. Having had the concept that her husband was very nearly perfect, she may wonder if she has made a mistake in marrying him. In the world, when wives come to this point, the result is often divorce. But by the Lord's grace Christian wives should subject themselves to their own husbands.

Paul says that the husbands should love their own wives. However, in his word concerning married life, Peter does not tell the husbands to love their own wives. First he charges the wives to be subject to their own husbands. Then he charges the husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge (v. 7).

AN INSPIRING MANNER OF LIFE

In verse 1 Peter tells the wives that if they subject themselves to their own husbands, the husbands will be gained without a word through the manner of life of their wives. The "word" here refers to the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23, 25; Rom. 10:8; Eph. 1:13). A husband can be gained through the wife's inspiring manner of life. Sisters, no one can inspire your husband as much as you can. You need to have such a manner of life that your husband will be inspired by it. If he disobeys the word, he will be gained by your manner of life, not through preaching.

In verse 2 Peter goes on to say, "Observing your pure manner of life in fear." The Greek word rendered "pure" here also means chaste. The Greek word is a derivation from the word meaning holy, as in verse 5 and 1:15. The pure and chaste manner of life must be the holy manner of life, the excellent manner of life (2:12), and the good manner of life (3:16). Here Peter is saying that the husbands will observe the pure manner of life of their wives.

The phrase "in fear" modifies "pure manner of life." The word "fear," as used in this verse, denotes a holy fear (see

Phil. 2:12). This is a healthy, serious caution for us to behave in a holy manner. This kind of fear is mentioned a number of times in this Epistle because Peter's teaching in this book concerns the government of God. A married sister's pure manner of life must have a holy, pious fear.

THE SISTERS' ADORNING

Verse 3 says, "Whose adorning, let it not be the outward plaiting of hair, and putting on of gold, or clothing with garments." Women's hair was intended by God for their glory and a sign of their submission (1 Cor. 11:15; S. S. 4:1; 6:5; 7:5). But it was abused by many, especially by those who lived in the luxurious and corrupt life of the Roman Empire at the time of this Epistle, to beautify their lustful flesh by its extravagant adornment with gold and other costly things. Christian wives, as holy women, should absolutely abstain from this God-condemned matter.

Many years ago, a young woman began to attend the meetings of the church in Chefoo. She was intelligent and modern, a student of law. When she first came to a meeting, her hair was arranged like a high tower. I noticed that as she continued coming to the meetings, this tower became lower and lower. Eventually, after she attended more meetings, the tower was completely gone. She repented and was saved, and the Lord touched her concerning the way she styled her hair.

THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART-- A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT

In verse 4 Peter goes on to say, "But the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is costly." The hidden man of the heart is the meek and quiet spirit. Our heart is composed of all the parts of our soul--mind, emotion, and will--and of the main part of our spirit, the conscience (Heb. 4:12). Among all these, our spirit is the center. Hence, our spirit is the hidden man of the heart. The hidden man is in contrast to the outward plaiting, putting on, and clothing in verse 3; and a meek and quiet spirit, in contrast to hair,

gold, and garments. The wives' adornment before God should be their inner being--the hidden man of their heart, which is their spirit, in meekness and quietness. This is the incorruptible adornment in contrast to the corruptible hair, gold, and garments. This spiritual adornment is costly in the sight of God.

In his writings Paul does not use the expression, "the hidden man of the heart." What is this hidden man of the heart? It is a meek and quiet spirit. A spirit that has become meek and quiet is the kind of adornment that should be possessed by all Christian wives.

I believe that Peter wrote this Epistle according to his experiences and also according to his observations. He may have used the words "meek" and "quiet" because he knew that often the spirit of Christian wives is not meek and quiet.

Whenever we become angry and lose our temper, our emotion is upset. But that kind of upset in our emotion affects our spirit. This is the reason it is easy for us to release our spirit when we lose our temper. When a person loses his temper, he will have a genuine release of the spirit. Much of what we call the release of the spirit is not genuine. The genuine release of the spirit can easily be seen when a person loses his temper in full. At such a time, his spirit comes forth. However, this may not be a release of a meek and quiet spirit.

Many times the spirit of a Christian wife is not meek. Sisters, when you exchange words with your husband, do you have a meek and quiet spirit? It is a common, even universal, phenomenon for wives to exchange words with their husbands. For example, a husband may make a proposal regarding a certain matter, but the wife will disagree. The husband may want to go in one direction, but the wife wants to go in the opposite direction. The result of this disagreement is an argument.

As an elderly man with much experience in human life, I can testify that a wife's exchanging words with her husband is a sign of rebellion. Unconsciously and

subconsciously, she has deep within her a rebellious spirit. Because she has a spirit of rebellion, she does not want to subject herself to her husband. If a wife were willing to be in subjection to her husband, why would she argue with him? Perhaps she thinks that she has a better knowledge of the situation and is able to foresee problems. Nevertheless, it is still not necessary for her to argue.

One serious lesson for wives to learn is not to argue, not to exchange words, with their husbands. The sisters need to realize that when they exchange words with their husbands, they do not have a meek and quiet spirit. But if as a Christian wife a sister maintains a meek and quiet spirit, she will not lose her temper, and she will not even exchange words with her husband. Knowing the situation of married life from experience and observation, Peter charges the wives to adorn themselves with a meek and quiet spirit.

As we have pointed out, this meek and quiet spirit is the hidden man of the heart. We believers actually have two men. The first is in our soul with our body. This is the outward man. The other is the hidden man in the center of our heart. The fact that the hidden man of the heart is a meek and quiet spirit indicates that our spirit is the kernel of our being, hidden in the midst of our heart, which is composed of the mind, emotion, will, and conscience. Our spirit, therefore, is surrounded by the mind, emotion, and will. If our spirit is meek and quiet, this will influence our mind, emotion, and will. To be sure, if our spirit is meek, our mind, emotion, and will also will be meek. When we are meek, we are quiet. Meekness and quietness of spirit is a beautiful adornment in the sight of God.

A PICTURE OF GOD'S ORDINATION CONCERNING MALE AND FEMALE

What we have in 3:1-6 is not simply a human teaching or reasoning. This is a picture of God's ordination concerning male and female. Not even our experience of regeneration causes God's ordination to change. In today's church life, God still keeps the order He ordained in His

creation. God ordained that wives subject themselves to their husbands. Furthermore, as we have seen, a wife's adorning should not be "the outward plaiting of hair, and putting on of gold, or clothing with garments, but the hidden man of the heart," the adornment of a "meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is costly."

In verses 5 and 6 Peter says, "For in this manner formerly the holy women also, hoping in God, adorned themselves, subjecting themselves to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose children you have become, doing good and not fearing any terror." The sisters need to be today's Sarahs. Many of the husbands, however, may feel uneasy about what Peter says in verse 6. They may think that they are not worthy to have their wives refer to them in this way. The reason is that today's situation is altogether not according to the Bible.

At the end of verse 6 Peter tells the wives to do good and not to fear any terror, that is, not to have fright or nervous excitement.

In this message we have considered Peter's word to the wives (3:1-6). In the next message we shall consider Peter's word to the husbands (v. 7) and also his word concerning common life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(5)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 3:7-13

In the previous message we considered 3:1-6, Peter's word to the wives concerning married life. In verse 1 Peter indicates that, as household servants are subject to their masters, so the wives should be subject to their own husbands. Then in verses 3 and 4 Peter points out that what is costly in the sight of God is the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which is the hidden man of the heart. Let us now go on to consider Peter's word to husbands.

A BALANCING WORD

Verse 7 says, "The husbands, in like manner, dwelling together with them according to knowledge, assigning honor as to the weaker, female vessel, as also joint-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." Peter's word to husbands is quite different from Paul's word in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3. Peter uses the phrase "in like manner," a phrase that has bothered me. This phrase seems to indicate that as servants are subject to their masters, and wives to their husbands, so the husbands, in like manner, should be subject to their wives. I believe that Peter intends this phrase to mean that not only are wives to be in subjection to their husbands hut also husbands to their wives. (As we shall see, Peter's word about husbands honoring their wives implies at least a certain amount of subjection to them.)

Some may think that saying that husbands are to be subject to their wives contradicts the word that wives

should subject themselves to their husbands. Actually, as we shall see, this is not at all a matter of contradiction; it is a matter of balance. Neither Peter nor Paul says clearly that husbands should be subject to their wives. But Peter says that husbands should honor their wives, and Paul, that husbands should love their wives. In Ephesians 5:21 Paul says, "Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ." This seems to indicate that a husband and wife are to be subject to each other.

The Bible is much wiser than we are. In particular, it is wiser than those who say they are concerned about human rights. The Bible is full of wisdom, for it always keeps things balanced.

What Peter says in verse 7 is a balance to what he says in the preceding six verses. Regarding married life, it would be pitiful to have verses 1 through 6 without verse 7. That may cause some to think that the females should be slaves of the males. But if we read the book of Genesis, we shall see that Abraham highly appreciated his wife, Sarah. Yes, according to 3:6 Sarah did call Abraham lord. However, she did not say this directly to him. Rather, this word was uttered before the Lord. Genesis 18:12 says, "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" This word was not spoken directly to Abraham. There is no record in Genesis that Sarah ever called Abraham lord directly.

The proper practice between husbands and wives is that the wife should respect her husband as lord and subject herself to him, but the husband should not assume the position as being the lord over his wife. This means that a husband should not say, "Don't you know that I am your lord? Even you yourself recognize me as lord." It is wrong for a husband to have this attitude or to speak this way. Peter's word is balanced. When he speaks concerning the husbands, he indicates by the phrase "in like manner" that the husbands should subject themselves to their wives.

Some readers of this book may think that in 3:1-7 we

have two extremes. They may think that the first extreme is Peter's word about wives being in subjection to their husbands, and the second, the indication that, in like manner, the husbands should be in subjection to their wives. Actually, what we have here is a word of balance. If our married life is to be balanced, we need to have two poles, or, if you prefer to say it this way, two extremes. One pole should be the wife's subjection to the husband, and the other pole, the husband's subjection to the wife. If we have these two poles in our married life, we shall be balanced, and we shall live our married life in a "temperate zone." I enjoy living in a place where the climate is temperate, neither too hot nor too cold. The "climate" of our married life should also be temperate, moderate. In order to have such a climate, we need the two poles indicated clearly in 3:1 and implied in 3:7.

DWELLING TOGETHER ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGE

In verse 7 Peter says that the husbands should dwell together with their wives according to knowledge. The phrase "according to knowledge" can easily be misinterpreted. Men who have more knowledge or education than their wives may fail to respect their wives. Peter is not referring to the knowledge of human education. For a husband to dwell together with his wife according to knowledge is to live with her in an intelligent and reasonable way. It is to be governed by spiritual knowledge that recognizes the nature of the marriage relationship and the weakness of the female, not governed by any passion or emotion.

Husbands, your relationship with your wife should be governed by spiritual knowledge; it should not be governed by the knowledge you have gained through your college education. Spiritual knowledge recognizes the nature of the marriage relationship. In married life, husbands need to have a spiritual knowledge that recognizes the weakness of the female. If we have this knowledge, we shall know that God created woman the weaker vessel simply for the

nature of the marriage relationship. If there is to be a proper marriage relationship, both parties should not be equally strong. One party should be stronger than the other. Therefore, the brothers should not think that the weakness of their wives is something to be despised. No, we must realize that our wives' weakness was created by God specifically for the purpose of the marriage relationship. Therefore, we need to understand the reason for the weakness of the female, and we need to understand the nature of the marriage relationship. This is to have our married life governed not by the knowledge from human education but by spiritual knowledge.

A husband's relationship with his wife is certainly not to be governed by any passion or emotion. This means that in married life a husband should be governed neither by worldly knowledge nor by fleshly emotion. Instead, he must be governed by spiritual knowledge that recognizes that the weakness of the female was designed by God to fit in with the nature of the marriage relationship.

ASSIGNING HONOR

In verse 7 Peter also says that the husbands should assign honor to their wives as to the weaker, female vessel. The Greek word rendered "assigning," *aponemo*, means to apportion, to portion out; hence, to assign to. The Greek word for honor is time and means preciousness, valuable worth. The husbands should appreciate the preciousness, the valuable worth, of the wives, and apportion it, assign it, as honor to them duly and reasonably as to the weaker, female vessel.

Man, including woman, was made a vessel to contain God (Rom. 9:21, 23), and believers in Christ are vessels to contain Christ as the treasure (2 Cor. 4:7). The female, according to nature in God's creation, is weaker than the male physically and psychologically. Although the wives, as female vessels, are weaker, they are still vessels of the Lord and can be vessels unto honor (2 Tim. 2:21), deserving a certain honor.

Peter tells the husbands to assign honor to their wives.

A husband must give at least a certain measure of honor to his wife. If we see that a husband should honor his wife, we should realize that this implies some kind of submission to her. Submission always goes with honor. If you do not submit to a particular person, how can you honor that one? This would be impossible. Honoring someone always implies a certain degree of submission. As we have already pointed out, this is a word of balance. Husbands must honor their wives, and, no doubt, the wives must also honor their husbands.

A husband should not argue that because his wife is the weaker vessel, she should not be honored by him, the stronger vessel. Once again I would say that husbands need to recognize that the weakness of their wives was prepared by God for their marriage relationship. Even though the wife is the weaker vessel, in many aspects she is worthy of her husband's honor. Therefore, the husband must assign honor to her.

Married life can be compared to a corporation, a business, that assigns a percentage of the yearly profits to its shareholders or owners. In our married life husbands must learn what percentage of the "profit" of the marriage "corporation" should go to the wife. The husband needs to know how much of the profit belongs to him and how much should be assigned to the wife. Husbands should not rob wives of their profit, of their honor. In married life a portion of the profit or honor must be assigned to the wife.

The husband's assigning of honor to the wife should be according to knowledge. The phrase "according to knowledge" is related to "assigning honor as to the weaker, female vessel." Of course, "according to knowledge" is also related to the matter of dwelling together with our wives. Our dwelling with our wives should be according to knowledge and also accompanied by the assigning of honor to our wives. This is the way to have a proper balance in our married life. If our married life lacks this balance, it will be like a scale with one side in the air and the other side down low. That kind of imbalance causes a very poor married life. The point here is that the balance in

married life comes mainly from the husband assigning honor to the wife.

Often a husband will rob his wife of honor. He does not assign any portion of the honor, any part of the profits of the marriage corporation, to the wife. This practice is wrong.

As a result of my study of Peter's writings, I have come to appreciate them very much. I especially appreciate the particular terms used by Peter. One of these terms is "assigning honor." Brothers, have you ever realized that you are required to assign a certain amount of honor to your wives? Your wife may be weaker than you are and not as highly educated. Nevertheless, she is worthy of honor. The corporation of your married life has earned a large profit, and she deserves a share in it. As the husband, you need to know what portion of the honor, of the profit, should be assigned to her.

In assigning honor to the wife, the husband should be careful not to assign too much honor. I believe that Peter's word about assigning honor implies that a husband should not give too much honor to his wife. If he honors her too much, he will spoil her. The husband should assign honor to his wife properly, giving her neither too little nor too much. I have seen marriages where the husband was so kind, good, generous, and humble that he assigned all the profit of the marriage corporation to his wife. That caused the wife to be spoiled.

Brothers, assigning honor to our wives should not be done foolishly, blindly, or ignorantly. It must be done according to knowledge. As husbands, we need to determine what is the right percentage of honor that should go to ourselves as the husbands and what percentage to our wives. If you assign honor to your wife in a proper way, the "business" of your married life will be healthy and sound. Your marriage will be secure and peaceful.

JOINT-HEIRS OF THE GRACE OF LIFE

In verse 7 Peter says that husbands and wives are "joint-heirs of the grace of life." Grace of life is God as life

and life supply to us in His Trinity--the Father as the source of life, the Son as the course of life, and the Spirit as the flow of life, flowing within us with the Son and the Father (1 John 5:11-12; John 7:38-39; Rev. 22:1). All believers are heirs of this grace.

In brief, the grace of life is the Triune God processed to become the all-inclusive, life-giving, indwelling Spirit. The Triune God is now within us as the grace of life. Both husbands and wives are joint-heirs of this grace of life. We inherit the grace of life together.

This inheritance is part of the "inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading" (1:4). All the items of our eternal inheritance are related to the divine life which we received through regeneration and which we are experiencing and enjoying throughout our entire Christian life. All husbands and wives need to see that in their married life the husband and wife are co-heirs of such an inheritance, in particular, of the grace of life.

IN COMMON LIFE

In 3:8-13 Peter speaks of the Christian life and its sufferings with respect to common life. Verse 8 says, "And finally, be all of the same mind, sympathetic, loving the brothers, tenderhearted, humbleminded." This verse is filled with good terms. Paul also uses such terms, but he does not put them together the way Peter does.

Verse 9 continues, "Not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, because to this you were called that you might inherit blessing." In the first part of this verse "blessing" is not a noun as the object of "rendering"; instead, it is a participle, meaning "be blessing." When others revile us, we should not revile them in return. On the contrary, we should bless them. Peter's word here corresponds to what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:44 and to what Paul says in Romans 12:14.

In verse 9 we are told that we have been called that we might inherit blessing. We have been called to bless others, so we, as a blessed people, should always bless others that we might inherit blessing. What we bless others with, we

shall inherit ourselves (Matt. 10:13). Of course, the blessing here is not material. According to the context, the blessing refers to life, indicating that we shall inherit more life.

In verse 10 Peter continues, "For he who is desiring to love life and see good days, let him cause his tongue to cease from evil and his lips to speak no guile." Good days are days of good, referring to good things as blessing. If we would see such good days, we should cause our tongue to cease from evil and our lips to speak no guile. Concerning this, Christ is a pattern for us to follow. In 2:22 Peter tells us that Christ "did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth." But our lips and tongue cause much trouble. Many negative things have resulted from the improper use of our tongue and lips.

In verse 11 Peter speaks of turning from evil, doing good, and seeking and pursuing peace. In verse 12 he says that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are unto their petition, but His face is against those who do evil. Then in verse 13 Peter says, "And who will harm you if you become zealots of good?" According to this verse, we should not only be zealous of good; we should become zealots of good. The word "zealots" denotes a particular kind of person. We all should become zealots of good.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(6)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 3:14-22

In this message we come to 3:14-22, a section that speaks of suffering for righteousness by the will of God, as Christ suffered. Although this portion is included in the section on Christian life and its sufferings, it actually speaks concerning Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. These verses involve two major problems that have been debated over the years, one problem related to Christ's death and the other regarding baptism in relation to His resurrection and ascension.

SANCTIFYING THE LORD IN OUR HEARTS

Verses 14 and 15 say, "But even if you suffer because of righteousness, you are blessed; and do not be afraid with fear from them, nor be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being always ready for a defense to everyone who asks of you an account concerning the hope in you, but with meekness and fear." If we are terrified and troubled by persecutors, it will appear that we do not have the Lord in our hearts. Therefore in suffering persecution we should show others that we have Christ within us as Lord. This is to sanctify Him, to separate Him, from the false gods, not degrading Him to be as the lifeless idols.

The hope spoken of in verse 15 is the living hope of the inheritance of eternal life. This is a hope in our pilgrimage today for the future, not a hope of objective things, but a hope of life, even eternal life, with all the endless divine blessings. The fear mentioned by Peter in verse 15 is a pious fear, a holy fear. Peter speaks of fear a number of

times in this Epistle because the teaching of this book concerns the government of God.

In sufferings that come from opposition and persecution, we should sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. The word "sanctify" in Greek means to set apart, to separate from things that are common. This is to make something particular and even outstanding. In our suffering of persecution, we should make Christ particular; we should show that He is magnificent, absolutely different from idols. Sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts is not a matter of outward activity to set Him apart from what is common. It is an inward matter. To sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts means that when we are under persecution, we have the Lord in our hearts. If we allow the Lord to be the Lord in our hearts when we suffer persecution, we shall express Him. This expression spontaneously will sanctify Christ and set Him apart from idols.

If we are timid and fearful when suffering persecution, the Lord will not be sanctified in us. What a shame that would be to Him! It will appear as if we do not have the Lord in our hearts. Whenever we suffer persecution, others must realize that we have Christ within us as Lord. But if we are timid and fearful, others will think that we do not have anything within us. They will have the impression that we do not have the living Lord in us. But if we are bold, sanctifying the Lord in our hearts and expressing Him in our faces, others will realize that we do have something within us. This is to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts.

I have told you before of a story I heard concerning a young woman who was martyred during the Boxer Rebellion in China. This particular incident took place in Peking. Because of the Boxer movement, all the businesses in the city were closed. A young man who was learning a certain business did not dare to open the door of the building where he was. Peeking through a crack in the door, he saw the Boxers parading down the street. He heard the crying and shouting. He saw some of the Boxers,

with swords in their hands, threatening a young woman. She was a Christian. She was sitting in a wagon that was carrying her to the place where she would be martyred. Although the Boxers surrounded her, shouting, crying, and threatening, she was not afraid. Her face was glowing, and she was rejoicing in the Lord and praising Him. That young man was deeply impressed by what he saw. An unbeliever at the time, he decided then that he would learn about the Christian faith. He thought to himself, "If this is nothing more than a Western religion, why is this young woman not frightened by the threatening and the shouting? Why is she not afraid of death? Why is her face glowing, and why is she rejoicing?" This young man did not then realize that she was praising the Lord. Later he believed in the Lord and became a preacher. Long after that, when he became old, I met him in my home town, and we enjoyed a pleasant conversation. He told me the story of what he experienced that day in Peking.

That young woman who was martyred during the Boxer Rebellion truly sanctified Christ as Lord in her heart. The glow on her face, the rejoicing, the praising--all this was an expression that the Lord was in her heart. Spontaneously, she sanctified Christ as Lord. Her sanctifying Christ in this way influenced that young man to believe in the Lord.

CARING FOR OUR CONSCIENCE

In verse 16 Peter goes on to say, "Having a good conscience, that wherein you are spoken against as evil-doers, those who revile your good manner of life in Christ may be put to shame." Since the conscience is a part of our human spirit (Rom. 9:1; 8:16), to care for our conscience is to care for our spirit before God.

The Christian good manner of life should be one that is in Christ. It is a living, a daily life, in our spirit. This is higher than a life which is merely ethical and moral.

If we would have a good manner of life and sanctify the Lord in our daily life, we must take care of our conscience. It is not sufficient for us to be justified by others. We need

to be justified by our own conscience. We should not be satisfied that we are justified by the community, by the brothers, or even by the entire church. No one knows us as thoroughly as our conscience does. This is especially true of the enlightened conscience of the regenerated spirit. A renewed conscience enlightened by the indwelling Spirit is trustworthy in its testimony and accurate in its judgment. The judgment of our enlightened conscience is more accurate than someone else's judgment of us.

The enlightened conscience of our regenerated spirit is an inner judge. This inner judge, our conscience, cooperates with the indwelling God. The reason the enlightened conscience of the regenerated spirit can be an inner judge is that it cooperates with the indwelling God. For this reason, the judgment of the enlightened conscience is thorough and accurate. Therefore, we must take care of our conscience.

A brother, for example, should take care of his conscience in his relationship with his wife. In the sight of man, it may appear that he is not wrong with his wife in any way. But his enlightened conscience may tell him that he has been wrong with her in many ways. Likewise, in the church life apparently we may be honest and faithful. However, our conscience may know that in certain things we have not been altogether honest and faithful to the church. Therefore, it is very important that we take care of our conscience.

SUFFERING FOR DOING GOOD

In verse 17 Peter continues, "For it is better to suffer for doing good, if the will of God should will it, than for doing evil." Again Peter speaks concerning unjust suffering. He covered this point earlier in 2:18-21, where he says that Christ is a model to us of One who suffered unjustly and that we should follow in His steps.

CHRIST DYING TO BRING US TO GOD

Verse 18 says, "Because Christ also has once died

concerning sins, the righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in flesh, but made alive in spirit." Christ is the righteous One, and we are the unrighteous ones, yet He died for our sins. Christ died concerning our sins so that He might bring us to God. His death removed all the barriers, in particular the barriers of our sins and unrighteousness. Because His death has removed the barriers of sins and unrighteousness, we have a way to reach God. Christ died in order to bring us to God.

Sins in verse 18 and in 2:24, 1 Corinthians 15:3, and Hebrews 9:28 refer to sins we commit in our outward conduct. But sin in 2 Corinthians 5:21, John 1:29, and Hebrews 9:26 refers to sin by birth in our nature. Christ died for our sins, carrying up our sins on the cross, that our sins might be forgiven by God. But He became sin and took away the sin of the world that the problem of our sin might be solved. Peter does not deal first with sin in our nature, but with sins in our conduct, in our manner of life. In this book Christ's death redeemed us from our inherited vain manner of life (1:18-19).

The fact that Christ, the righteous One, died "on behalf of the unrighteous" indicates that His death was for redemption, not for martyrdom. On the cross Christ was our Substitute, bearing our sins, the righteous One judged on behalf of us, the unrighteous, by the righteous God according to His righteousness, that He might remove the barrier of our sins and bring us to God. This was to redeem us from our sins back to God, from our unrighteous manner of life back to the righteous God.

MADE ALIVE IN SPIRIT

According to verse 18, Christ was "put to death in flesh but made alive in spirit." This is not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit which is Christ's spiritual nature (Mark 2:8; Luke 23:46). The crucifixion only put Christ to death in His flesh, which He received through His incarnation (John 1:14), not in His spirit. His spirit did not die at the cross when His flesh did. His spirit was rather made alive,

enlivened, with new power of life, so that in this empowered spirit He made a proclamation to the fallen angels after His death in the flesh and before His resurrection.

On the cross Christ was put to death in flesh, but was made alive in spirit. We should not interpret "made alive in spirit" here as referring to Christ's resurrection. As we have pointed out, although Christ's body was slain on the cross, His spirit was enlivened. Therefore, as the phrase "in which" at the beginning of verse 19 indicates, it was in His enlivened spirit that Christ made a proclamation to the spirits in prison. This indicates and proves that in this spirit Christ, after dying in His flesh, was still active.

In verse 18 we see Christ's death, but there is no mention of resurrection in this verse. When Christ was buried in the tomb, in His empowered spirit He went, before His resurrection, to the abyss to proclaim God's victory to the rebellious angels.

CHRIST'S PROCLAMATION TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON

Verse 19 and the first part of verse 20 say, "In which also having gone to the spirits in prison, He proclaimed to those once disobedient...." Throughout the centuries great teachers of different schools have had varying interpretations concerning "the spirits in prison." The most acceptable according to the Scriptures is as follows: the spirits here do not refer to the disembodied spirits of dead human beings being held in Hades, but to the angels (angels are spirits--Heb. 1:14) who fell through disobedience at Noah's time (v. 20 and Life-study of Genesis Message 27, pp. 363-364) and are imprisoned in pits of gloom for the judgment of the great day (2 Pet. 2:4-5,; Jude 6). After His death in the flesh, Christ in His living spirit went (probably to the abyss--Rom. 10:7) to these rebellious angels to proclaim, perhaps, God's victory through His incarnation in Christ and Christ's death in the flesh, over Satan's scheme to derange the divine plan.

The "prison" in verse 19 refers to Tartarus, the deep and gloomy pits (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) where the fallen angels are kept. The word "proclaim" does not indicate the

preaching of good news, but the proclaiming of the triumphant victory. This proclamation was made to "those once disobedient." These are angelic beings, not human beings, and therefore are different from the "eight souls" spoken of in verse 20. So, the spirits in prison do not refer to the disembodied spirits of dead human beings held in Hades, but to angels who fell through disobedience at the time of Noah. But many interpreters say that the spirits in verse 19 denote the spirits of certain human beings who disobeyed Noah's preaching. Those who follow this interpretation claim that, at Noah's time, Christ through His Spirit preached the gospel to the people of Noah's generation. Furthermore, they teach that "made alive in spirit" in verse 18 refers to the Holy Spirit. Supposedly in this Holy Spirit Christ at Noah's time preached the gospel.

Another interpretation is that Christ, after He died, preached the gospel to the spirits of human beings who had died. What a mistaken interpretation this is! According to this interpretation, after people die and go to Hades, the gospel may still be preached to them there in Hades.

Christ did not preach the gospel to the spirits in prison He made a proclamation to them. He proclaimed to those rebellious angels God's victory over Satan through Christ's incarnation and death. At that time, Christ had not yet been resurrected. It was after His death that He went to that particular place, in His empowered spirit, to proclaim Christ's victory. Perhaps He said, "You angels followed Satan to rebel against God. But through My incarnation and death, your leader, Satan, has been conquered." This proclamation is a shame to Satan and his followers, but it is a glory to God.

I would urge you to study message twenty-seven of the Life-study of Genesis. That message explains how at Noah's time the so-called sons of God, who are angels became fallen. They left their own place, came down to earth, and used human bodies to commit fornication with the daughters of men. That polluted the human race and produced giants. Finding that situation intolerable, God would no longer allow the human race to exist, because

mankind had been polluted by Satan's angels. Therefore, except for Noah and his family God destroyed the entire human race with the flood. Also, when God sent the children of Israel into Canaan to slaughter the Canaanites, there were the same kind of giants among the Canaanites, giants born of fornication between angels and human females.

We are not the only ones who interpret the Bible record in this way. A number of Bible scholars, including Pember and Govett, agree with this understanding of this part of the Word.

Christ died on the cross for our redemption. But although He was put to death in His body, He was enlivened and empowered in His spirit even before the resurrection. In this enlivened and empowered spirit He went to proclaim to the rebellious angels God's victory over Satan, their leader.

Peter's word in these verses is very meaningful. Peter unveils something extraordinary related to Christ's death. He shows us that Christ's death not only accomplished redemption for us, but also gained the victory over Satan and his followers. Therefore, after His death and before His resurrection, Christ proclaimed to Satan's followers God's victory over the Devil through the crucifixion of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(7)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 3:14-22

In the previous message we covered the matters of sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts, having a good conscience, Christ dying concerning sins, the righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, and Christ, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in spirit and going in His enlivened and empowered spirit to make a proclamation to the spirits in prison, to the rebellious angels. In this message we shall pay special attention to what Peter says in verses 20 and 21 concerning baptism.

THE ARK AND THE WATER

Verse 20 says, "To those once disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through by water." According to verses 19 and 20, Christ made a proclamation to "those once disobedient." These disobedient ones are different from the eight souls spoken of in this verse. The disobedient ones are angelic beings, not human beings.

In verse 20 Peter says that in the ark prepared by Noah eight souls "were brought safely through by water." The Greek means to "arrive safe into a place of security through difficulty or danger," as in Acts 27:44 (Darby). The Greek words rendered "by water" literally mean through water. Water was the medium through which the saving was accomplished. The ark saved Noah and his family from God's judgment, the destruction of the world by the

flood. But the water saved them from the corrupted generation and separated them unto a new age, just as the water of the Red Sea did to the children of Israel (Exo. 14:22, 29; 1 Cor. 10:1-2) and the water of baptism to the New Testament believers (1 Pet. 3:21).

In the Old Testament the waters of the flood at the time of Noah and the waters of the Red Sea both typify baptism. The ark saved Noah and his family from God's judgment, from the punishment of God's condemnation that came by the flood. But the water saved them and separated them from that corrupted age and brought them into a new age to begin a new life on a new earth.

In the book of Exodus the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea. The waters of the Red Sea were a judgment upon Pharaoh and his Egyptian army. Pharaoh and his armies were drowned in that water of judgment. But that same water separated the children of Israel from Egypt, separated them from the corrupted world. As Noah and his family were separated from their corrupted generation by the waters of the flood, so the children of Israel were separated from the corrupted world, typified by Egypt, by the waters of the Red Sea.

In the New Testament we also have water, the water of baptism. Baptism saves us from the world and separates us from it.

In verse 21 Peter says, "Which figure also now saves you, baptism, not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience unto God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." As we shall see, this verse does not teach baptismal salvation. Therefore, we do not hold the belief that the waters of baptism put away the filth of the flesh. But, according to this verse, baptism is the appeal of a good conscience unto God.

The words "which figure" refer to water in the preceding verse, which is a figure of the water of baptism. This indicates that Noah and his family's being in the ark and passing through the flood was a type of our going through baptism. The water of the flood delivered them out of the old manner of life into a new environment. In like

manner, the water of baptism delivers us out of the inherited vain manner of life into a manner of life in resurrection. This is the main emphasis of this book. Christ's redemption for us was for this (1:18-19). This was accomplished by His death and accepted and applied to us in baptism by the Spirit through His resurrection. Now our daily walk should be in the Spirit of the resurrected Christ, a walk that lives Christ in resurrection through the life power of His Spirit (Rom. 6:4-5). This is a new and excellent manner of life that glorifies God (1 Pet. 2:12).

Baptism itself does not and cannot put away the filth of our flesh--the dirt of our fallen nature and defilement of fleshly lust. The erroneous teaching concerning baptismal salvation based upon this verse and Mark 16:16 and Acts 22:16 is corrected here. Baptism is only a figure. Its reality is Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit, who applies to us all that Christ has passed through in His crucifixion and resurrection, making these things real in our daily life.

THE APPEAL OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE

The Greek word rendered "appeal" is *eperotema*, a question, an inquiry. Its meaning is very much disputed. The right meaning of the phrase seems to be, as Alford said, "the seeking after God of a good and pure conscience," which governs the proper Christian life. This kind of question, asking for something, may be considered an appeal or demand. Peter's thought here may be that baptism is the appeal to God of the baptized one for a good conscience unto God. Baptism, as a symbol, a counterpart of our belief in all the accomplishments of Christ, testifies that all the problems we have before God and with God have been solved. Hence, it is also a testimony, witnessing that in our conscience there is no more offense, but rather we are full of peace and confidence that we have been baptized into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19) and organically united with Him through the resurrection of Christ, that is, by Christ in resurrection as the Spirit of life. Without

the Spirit of Christ as its reality, baptism by water immediately becomes an empty and dead ritual.

In this verse we see that baptism is first our appeal, the appeal of the baptized ones, to God for a conscience that is both good and pure. A proper baptism will always bring the baptized one into such a situation. Before we believed in the Lord and were baptized, we were sinners. But when we were enlightened through the preaching of the gospel, we came to realize that we are very sinful. Both before God and toward man we have had many transgressions, trespasses, and offenses, and we had a great deal of guilt. Then we repented, believed in the Lord, received His forgiveness, and were saved. But our repentance and believing need an outward expression. This expression is baptism. Therefore, baptism and our believing, our faith, are two aspects of one thing. For this reason the New Testament speaks of believing and being baptized (Mark 16:16). Believing and being baptized can be compared to using our two feet to take a single step. First we believe, and our believing can be compared to the half-step forward of one foot. Then we are baptized. Our baptism can be compared to the completion of the step with the other foot. Together, believing and baptism make one complete step.

As we have pointed out elsewhere, believing is our reflection of all that Christ has accomplished. First, what Christ has accomplished for our salvation is preached to us as the gospel. As we listen to this preaching, the Spirit works upon us and within us to cause us to reflect what we have heard in the gospel, a reflection of what we have heard regarding Christ's accomplishment.

This experience of reflecting Christ's accomplishment can be compared to taking a picture with a camera. A camera is focused on a certain scene, and then a reflection of the scene is impressed on the film. We may compare Christ's accomplishments to a scene to be photographed with a camera. The proper preaching of the gospel brings the view of this "scenery" into us, and the Holy Spirit enlightens us. Then the scenery is imprinted on the "film" of our spirit. The result is that, from within, we believe in

Christ. Therefore, in our being there is a reflection of Christ's accomplishments, and this reflection is our believing in Christ.

We have pointed out that believing in Christ requires an expression, and that this expression is baptism. Baptism, therefore, is the counterpart to our believing in Christ.

Furthermore, when we are baptized, we, as baptized ones, appeal to God for a good and pure conscience. After we have been baptized and rise up out of the water, we have a conscience that is good and pure, a conscience without condemnation. All our sins, offenses, transgressions, and trespasses have been forgiven, and all the problems that have entangled our life and our being have been buried in the water. This means that through baptism we have a clearance of our sinful past. Because of this clearance, we can have a good and pure conscience.

We would emphasize the fact that baptism itself does not put away the filth of the flesh. But baptism does enable us to have the assurance and the testimony that we appeal to God for a good and pure conscience. Then, after we are baptized, God answers us by indicating that we now have a conscience that is good and pure.

THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Verse 21 ends with the words "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we could not have resurrection life, and we could not have the life-giving Spirit within us. Through faith and through baptism we all have been put into an organic union with the Triune God. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we are brought into the Triune God. Then we have an organic union with the Triune God. Now in the Triune God and with the Triune God we enjoy the divine life and the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, after we have been baptized, we have the divine life and the life-giving Spirit to make the figure of baptism real and living to us in our experience.

Verse 21 emphasizes baptism in relation to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reality of baptism can be

realized only by the divine life and the life-giving Spirit. Our basis for saying this is Peter's word "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It was in His resurrection that Christ released the divine life so that it could be imparted into our spirit. It was also in resurrection that Christ became the life-giving Spirit to come into our spirit, dwell in our spirit, and exercise all the riches of His divine life. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we genuinely and with assurance experience the reality of what is figured in baptism.

There are two aspects of baptism, the aspects of death and resurrection. Going down into the water and being immersed in the water signify death. Coming out of the water and walking away from the water signify resurrection. Therefore, in baptism we see not only the aspect of Christ's death, but also the aspect of Christ's resurrection. Christ's death can be prevailing and effective only in resurrection. If Christ had died but had not been resurrected, His death would have been in vain. The effectiveness of Christ's death is in the Spirit of resurrection. Christ died to take away our sin (John 1:29), and He died for our sins, bearing our sins away (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24). Christ's death now keeps us free from sin (Rom. 6:7). But the effectiveness of this death is in Christ's resurrection. The reality and effectiveness of the death of Christ are in the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. When the life-giving Spirit comes into us with resurrection life, this Spirit makes the death of Christ effective in our experience. Immediately and spontaneously, we are free from sin, and we enjoy the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross.

Baptism is a figure indicating that all negative things have been dissolved and buried in the water. But baptism also signifies the resurrection of Christ. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we have the reality of what is signified in baptism.

CHRIST IN RESURRECTION PASSING THROUGH DEATH

At this point, I would like to say a further word

regarding the ark of Noah. It is commonly acknowledged that the ark of Noah typifies Christ. But many readers of the Bible are not clear in what way or in what aspect the ark of Noah is a type of Christ. The ark of Noah typifies the Christ in resurrection passing through death.

When Christ was living on earth, He, of course, was not yet resurrected, for He had not yet died. Nevertheless, in John 11:25 He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." This reveals clearly that Christ, even before His death and resurrection, was both life and resurrection. He was always the Christ of resurrection. The ark of Noah, therefore, signifies this Christ of resurrection passing through death.

If the ark of Noah did not represent the Christ of resurrection, how could the ark pass through the water and come out safely? The very fact that the ark passed through the water and came out of the water signifies Christ in resurrection, since the ark itself is a type of Christ. How is it possible for Christ, and Christ alone, to enter into death and come out of it? Christ could come forth out of death in resurrection because He is resurrection and is of resurrection. Because Christ is the unique One of resurrection, He had the strength to pass through death. According to Acts 2:24, death could not hold Him. But when any other person enters into the realm of death, he is held there. It is not possible for anyone else to come out. Christ not only entered into death and passed through it, but He even deliberately stayed in the realm of death for three days. When those three days were over, He walked out of death. Because Christ is resurrection, He could simply walk out of death. This is signified by the ark of Noah, which entered into the death waters, stayed in the death waters, passed through the death waters, and came out of the death waters. This is a type of the Christ in resurrection.

In His resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) to come into us (John 20:22) and to impart His resurrection life to us. Now this resurrection life with the life-giving Spirit makes every aspect of Christ's death real and effective to us in our experience.

THE GLORIOUS AND HONORABLE ORGANIC UNION

In verse 22 Peter concludes this section by saying, "Who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him." This additional word not only unveils to us further, as the glorious result of Christ's suffering, His exaltation after resurrection and a high and honorable position He now holds in the heavens at the right hand of God, but also indicates how glorious and honorable is the organic union we have entered into with Him through baptism, for we have been baptized into Him (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

It is a characteristic of Peter's writing to add in as many points as possible. We see this characteristic in verse 22. After referring in the previous verse to the resurrection of Christ, Peter goes on to show us that today the resurrected Christ is at the right hand of God. Christ has gone into heaven, and angels, authorities, and powers have all been subjected to Him. We have seen that through baptism we have been put into Christ, and now we have an organic union with Him. The Christ to whom we have been joined organically is not only the resurrected One, but also the ascended One. Therefore, through the organic union, we are brought not only into Christ's resurrection but also into His ascension and exaltation. This means that, because we are in Christ, the angels, authorities, and powers are subject to us as well as to Him. Hallelujah, we are one with the crucified, resurrected, and exalted Christ!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(8)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 4:1-4

ARMED WITH THE MIND OF CHRIST

In 4:1-6 Peter comes to the matter of the believers arming themselves with the mind of Christ for suffering. Verse 1 says, "Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." The word "arm" indicates that the Christian life is a life of battle.

One main purpose of this book is to encourage and exhort the believers to follow the footsteps of Christ in their persecution (1:6-7; 2:18-25; 3:8-17; 4:12-19). They should have the same mind Christ had in His suffering (3:18-22). The main function of our mind is to understand and realize. To live a life that follows the footsteps of Christ, we need a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2) to understand and realize the way Christ lived to fulfill God's purpose.

In our practical daily life, the strongest part of our being is our mind. Whatever we do in our living is directed by our mind. It is not the will but the mind that directs our life. All our activities are under the direction of our mind.

Because the mind directs our living, the preaching of the Word must change a person's thoughts. One goal of preaching and teaching is to change people's mind. If we think in a certain way, we shall be directed in that way. But if we change our mind and think in another way, our living will then have a different direction. What we think governs what we do, say, and practice. For this reason,

Peter charges the believers in 4:1 to arm themselves with the mind of Christ.

To arm ourselves with the mind of Christ is to be armed with the thought and concept of Christ. This implies that we change our way of thinking. Many Christians think that as long as we love God and do His will, we shall be under His blessing, and we shall not suffer in any way. It is common for Christians to have the concept that those who love the Lord should not expect suffering. But consider the life of Christ. Did He not love God? Did He not do the will of God? Christ loved God to the uttermost, and He did God's will fully and absolutely. But what happened to Him in His living? It seems that throughout His life on earth there was not any blessing, but only suffering. He was born into a poor family, a family not considered of a high class. Of course, that family was descended from David and so was of royal lineage. But when the Lord Jesus was born, that royal family was very poor economically. Furthermore, this family did not live in Jerusalem, but in the despised town of Nazareth in Galilee. Galilee can be compared to one of the poorer states in the United States, a state that cannot compare with other states that are wealthy and have a large population. The Lord Jesus lived in Nazareth for more than thirty years. At the beginning of His life, He was put into a manger, and at the end of His life, He was put on the cross. Where do we see God's blessing in the life of the Lord? He endured suffering upon suffering. He did not have a good name, and He did not have a place to lay His head. This is the way the Lord Jesus lived when He was on earth. His life was a life of suffering.

The concept that the Christian life is a life of suffering is versus the natural, religious mentality, especially the natural mentality of many Christians. A great many Christians think that as long as we belong to God, are the people of God, love God, and do God's will, everything concerning us will be fine. According to this concept, we shall be blessed and may have a good job, a nice house, and an excellent family life. Christians who hold this

concept may expect all their children to become well-educated, wealthy professionals. Some Christians who are successful and wealthy may say, "What blessings I have received from the Lord! All that I have and all that I have attained is because I love the Lord Jesus and do the will of God. Look how God has blessed me."

This concept of a Christian life is altogether contrary to Peter's teaching in this Epistle. Peter knew that the more we love the Lord, the more we shall be deprived of things. He also knew that the more we do the will of God, the more trouble we may have. We may have trouble with our job, with our finances, and with our family life. When some hear this, they may say, "Brother Lee, don't say these things. This kind of teaching will frighten Christians away." This is the reason we all need to pay attention to Peter's charge to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ.

What kind of mind is the mind of Christ? If we have the mind of Christ, we shall realize that we are living in a rebellious age and in a crooked, perverted generation. Because the age is rebellious and the generation is perverse, the more we love God and do His will, the more we shall suffer. We shall suffer because we cannot go along with the trend of this age. We care to do the will of God, but the will of God is absolutely contrary to the trend or tide of this age. We would love the Lord Jesus, but this is utterly against the trend of this corrupted world. Therefore, if we love the Lord and do God's will, we are bound to suffer. This will be our outlook if we have the mind of Christ.

We need to arm ourselves, equip ourselves, with the mind of Christ. This indicates that the mind of Christ is a weapon, a part of the armor needed in fighting the battle for God's kingdom.

If we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ for suffering, we shall be willing to endure suffering. We shall say, "Praise the Lord that my suffering is part of my destiny. God has appointed this for me. Suffering is the portion of God's children in this age." In 1 Thessalonians 3 Paul tells the believers that God has appointed us to suffering and persecution. God has not appointed us to

material blessing; He has appointed us to suffering. Therefore, knowing that Christ suffered in the flesh, we also need to arm ourselves with the same mind. We should not have the mind to pray for material blessing. That is to have the wrong kind of mind.

SUFFERING IN THE FLESH AND CEASING FROM SIN

In 4:1 Peter points out that those who have suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin. Pleasure heats up the lusts of our flesh (v. 2); suffering cools them down. The purpose of Christ's redemption is to deliver us from our inherited vain manner of life (1:18-19). Suffering responds to Christ's redemption in this purpose, preserving us from the sinful manner of life, from the flood of dissipation (vv. 3-4). Such suffering, mostly from persecution, is God's discipline in His governmental dealing. To undergo such suffering is to be judged, dealt with, and disciplined by God in the flesh (v. 6). Hence, we should arm ourselves with a sober mind to endure such suffering.

In God's economy suffering accomplishes a good work for God's children. Suffering very much restricts our lusts. The more material enjoyment people have, the more they will exercise their lusts and indulge in them. But if we suffer poverty, persecution, or illness, this suffering will restrict the indulgence of lust. It is common knowledge that the rich commit more lustful sins than the poor. If you have vast riches and do not need to work, you will be able to spend your time indulging yourself in your lusts. You may travel around the world seeking pleasure. But the Lord may limit you financially so that you hardly have enough money for the necessities of life. You have to labor long hours to earn a living. As a result of your labors, you have neither the time nor the energy to indulge yourself in your lusts. Even the desire to pursue lustful pleasure is killed by your poverty.

It is dangerous to be rich. If you are wealthy and drive a luxurious car to make a display, immediately the lust in your heart will be stirred up. Do not think that because you are a Christian and have the divine life, you cannot be

tempted in this way. The Devil uses riches to stir up lusts. God, however, uses suffering in the flesh to cause us to cease from sin.

LIVING IN THE WILL OF GOD

In verse 2 Peter goes on to say, "No longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God." This verse indicates that we should live no longer in the vain manner of life handed down from the fathers (1:18), but in a holy and excellent manner of life (1:15; 2:12), pure in holy fear and good in Christ (3:2, 16), which is the will of God.

It is not easy to stay away from lusts and do God's will when we are rich in material things. This is the reason God assigns a certain portion of suffering to us. These sufferings restrict our lusts and preserve us in the will of God. In this sense we all should worship God for our sufferings. We should tell Him, "Lord, how I worship You that in Your sovereignty You have assigned sufferings to me so that I may be preserved in Your will."

We should not be afraid that our sufferings will be too great. The Lord knows how to assign sufferings to us. If He charges husbands to assign a certain portion of honor to their wives, surely He Himself knows how much suffering to assign to us. He will not assign either too little or too much. His assignment will be in the right proportion; it will be exactly what we need.

A brother may say, "Recently I have been so happy in the Lord. But today I lost my job and I am deeply depressed." This brother needs to realize that this suffering has been assigned to him from the Lord. However, the brother may say, "It was due to inflation and the poor economy that I lost my job. How can you say that this comes from the Lord?" Apparently, this brother lost his job because of the economy. But the economy and everything related to it is under God's sovereignty. Therefore, even losing a job is something assigned from the Lord. Likewise, the opposition we face, even from members of our

own family, may be a suffering assigned to us by God for our good.

A PICTURE OF THE VAIN MANNER OF LIFE

In verse 3 Peter says, "For the time which has passed is sufficient to have wrought the desire of the nations, having gone on in sensuality, lusts, debaucheries, carousings, drinking bouts, and unlawful idolatries." Literally the Greek word rendered "desire" here is purpose, will; that is, intention, inclination; hence, desire. All the negative things listed in this verse are related to the vain manner of life (1:18).

All the negative expressions in this verse denote indulgence in different aspects. Sensuality denotes indulgence in sex, and lusts are different kinds of indulgences. People may have various lusts. For example, worldly people may have a lust for adornment. Not only do they have that kind of lust, but they indulge in it.

The word "debaucheries" means indulgence in the drinking of wine. It refers to an excess of wine drinking.

"Carousings" signifies an eating and drinking together with evil companions. Carousing involves shouting and noise-making without limitation or restriction.

Peter also speaks in verse 3 of drinking bouts. People engage in drinking bouts when they try to outdo one another in drinking. They may compete to see who can drink more.

The words Peter uses in verse 3 portray the corruption in society at the time of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was defeated not only by foreign armies; it was defeated because of its own inward corruption. Knowing the history of the Roman Empire, we are concerned about our country today. This country is powerful militarily, but there is much inward corruption. Consider the activities of many worldly people on the weekends. The first day of the week was arranged by God to be a free day so that we may worship Him and learn the things of God. But worldly people use this day to indulge in sensuality, lust, debaucheries, carousings, and drinking bouts. This is a description of the manner of life of the nations. In verse 3

Peter tells us that the time which has passed is sufficient for us to have worked the desire of the nations. No longer should we live that way.

UNLAWFUL IDOLATRIES

In verse 3 Peter not only speaks of the indulgence in lusts; he also includes "unlawful idolatries." Wherever there is the indulgence in lust there will be idolatry. Some may say, "We live in a modern, scientific country. The people here are not superstitious. We do not have any idols." It is a fact that everyone who indulges in lust has an idol.

In verse 3 Peter speaks not only of idolatries but of unlawful idolatries. The King James Version and the American Standard Version use the adjective "abominable" instead of unlawful. Darby uses the word "unhallowed." But in the Recovery Version we use the word "unlawful." The adjective "lawless," used in at least one version, may be an even better rendering. After further study of this verse, I believe that lawless is a better translation than unlawful. The point here is that idolatry always causes people to be lawless. A person who worships an idol or practices idolatry will be lawless. He will do certain things without any restriction. Therefore, I believe that the word Peter uses in verse 3 refers to lawlessness. Here Peter is saying that idolatry makes people lawless. He does not mean that it is unlawful to worship an idol. He is saying that idolatry causes people to be without regulation or restriction; it causes them to live without being governed by any kind of law. In China I saw idol worshippers who truly were lawless in their living.

NOT RUNNING INTO THE FLOOD OF DISSIPATION

In verse 4 Peter continues, "In which they think it strange that you are not running together with them into the same flood of dissipation, blaspheming." The Greek word rendered "strange" is *xenizo*. It means to be a host or a guest, to be foreign, alien; to entertain, to lodge, to think it strange. To live in the flesh in the lusts of men (v. 2) is

common to unbelieving Gentiles, who are running together into the flood of dissipation. But to live a holy life in the will of God, not running together in the indulgence of lusts, is strange to them. It is a foreign thing, alien to them. They are surprised and astonished at it.

Literally, "running together" means rushing on in a crowd like a band of revelers. This is to live in the flesh in the lusts of men to work out the desire of the nations (v. 3) in the vain manner of life.

In Greek "flood of dissipation" is *anachusis* meaning a pouring forth, a pouring out upon (as in a tide); hence, a flood (ASV). It denotes here the overflowing indulgence of lusts, the excess of moral corruption and degradation like a flood, into which one sinks when running into it.

Worldly people think it strange that we do not run together with them into the same flood of dissipation. Here all the indulgences listed in verse 3 are compared to a flood. This flood is a current, a trend. Whenever the weekend comes, worldly people follow this current to indulge themselves in their lusts. They think it strange that we, as believers, would not run together with them into that flood of indulgence. It seems as if we are aliens to them. They may look upon us as foreigners, citizens of another country. For example, if you live in the United States and receive some guests from abroad, they may be strange to you, and you to them. You both would be conscious of being with foreigners. The principle is the same with our not running together with unbelievers and worldly people into the flood of dissipation. Our refusal to do this is strange, foreign, alien to them.

Your colleagues at work may think it strange that you do not use the weekend to indulge in worldly entertainment. Toward the end of the afternoon on Friday, some of them may ask about your plans for the weekend. They may boast of what they intend to do in the way of indulging themselves in their lusts, and they may eagerly press you to tell them what your plans are. Then you may explain that over the weekend you will be involved with the meetings of the church. Perhaps on a particular weekend

you will be going out of town to attend a conference. Your colleagues may think it strange that you would do such things on the weekend. Some may even say to you, "Where did you come from? Are you from another planet? You are a stranger to us. You are an alien."

Instead of "think it strange" the King James Version renders the Greek here "astonished." Other versions say "are surprised." We do not agree with these translations, for they are too far removed from the meaning of the original. It is best to use a literal translation and say, as the Recovery Version does, "think it strange." Unbelievers will think it strange that we do not care to participate with them in fleshly indulgences. In particular, they may think it strange that we do not celebrate Christmas or care for Christmas parties. The way of this corrupted world, the way of this crooked, perverted generation, is to follow the trend of indulgence and dissipation. But we would not run together with them according to this trend.

The word "dissipation" in verse 4 also indicates indulgence to excess. We all need to eat, but we should not eat in excess. We all need to drink, but we should not drink too much. Paul once told Timothy that, for the sake of his frequent illnesses, he should take a little wine. It is all right for someone with a special need to take a little wine for his health, but that one should not go too far and drink to excess. If we go too far in eating and drinking, that is indulgence, excess, dissipation. As believers, we should not have any kind of dissipation. In our eating, drinking, shopping, and spending of money, we should have a limitation, a restriction. In none of these things should there be any dissipation. The worldly people follow the flood of dissipation to indulge in their lusts, but we do not go that way. They are following the current of this age, but we are moving against the current. To them, this is very strange.

THE BELIEVERS BLASPHEMED

As the unbelievers run together into the flood of dissipation, they blaspheme the believers. This means that

they speak evil of us, speak injuriously of us (Acts 13:45; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16). During the days of the Roman Empire, the believers, whose behavior was thought strange, were slandered unjustly and accused of all manner of crimes.

The blaspheming in verse 4 is directed not at God but at us, the believers. Many of us have experienced the blasphemy of unbelievers at school, at work, or in our neighborhoods. Some have even been blasphemed by their relatives. Those who follow the trend of this age often will blaspheme the believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(9)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 4:1-11

In the foregoing message we considered 4:1-4. Verse 1 says, "Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Peter's word concerning arming ourselves indicates fighting, warfare. In 2:11 Peter also speaks of war, the war between the fleshly lusts and the soul: "Beloved, I entreat you as sojourners and pilgrims to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Both 2:11 and 4:1 refer to the same kind of fighting, to the warfare between the lusts and our soul. According to Peter's word in 4:1, we need to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ in order to fight against the flesh with its lusts.

If we would arm ourselves with the mind of Christ, we must have Christ as our life. If we try to arm ourselves with the same mind without having Christ as our life, we shall merely be imitating Christ in an outward way. As we have pointed out in a previous message, this kind of imitation can be compared to that of a monkey who has been trained to imitate a human being.

In 4:2 Peter says that we should no longer live in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God. Then in verses 3 and 4 he presents a picture of the vain manner of life. In particular, in verse 4 he points out that the unbelievers think it strange that we do not run together with them into the same flood of dissipation. In many cases, the unbelievers blaspheme the believers, speak injuriously of them.

THE JUDGE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

In verse 5 Peter goes on to say, "Who shall render an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." The relative pronoun "who" in this verse refers to the nations (v. 3), who are astonished at the believers' different manner of life and speak evil of them (v. 4).

In verse 5 Peter says that the unbelievers will render an account to the One who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For anyone to render an account to God is to relate to Him all that he has done and spoken in his entire life. This reveals the government of God over all men. He is ready to judge all, both the living and the dead. His judgment is His governmental administration to deal with the situation among men.

Christ will judge the living and the dead. First, at His throne of glory before the millennium He will judge those who are living of the nations (Matt. 25:31-46). Then He will judge the dead at the great white throne after the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). This will also be the judgment of God's government, but it differs from the judgment on the believers in verse 6, which begins from the house of God in this age (v. 17).

In Acts 10:42 Peter says that God has ordained Christ to be the Judge of the living and the dead. In 2 Timothy 4:1 Paul says to Timothy, "I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is about to judge the living and the dead...." God has given all judgment to Christ because He is a man (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16). As the righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8), He will judge the living at the time of His second appearing, and He will judge the dead after the millennium. Therefore, the Lord will exercise God's judgment over all men, over the living and the dead.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE DEAD

Verse 6 says, "For unto this end the gospel was preached also to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." For centuries, the meaning of this verse has been debated. What does it mean to say that the "gospel

was preached also to the dead"? The dead refers to the dead believers in Christ, who suffered persecution because of their Christian testimony, as referred to in 1:6; 2:18-21; 3:16-17; and 4:12-19. This kind of persecution is considered by Peter in this book as God's judgment, according to the government of God, which begins from the house of God (v. 17). The gospel was preached to these dead believers while they were living, in order that they might on one hand be judged, dealt with, by God through the opposers' persecution according to men in the flesh, but, on the other hand, live by believing in Christ according to God in the spirit. This shows how strict and serious is the judgment of God in His governmental administration. If the believers, who have been obedient to the gospel, are dealt with by God's governmental judgment, how much more will those who oppose the gospel and blaspheme the believers be judged by God's dealing!

In verse 6 "spirit" denotes the believers' spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit of God (John 3:6; Rom. 8:10-11). In this way the believers' spirit becomes a mingled spirit, in which they should live and walk (Rom. 8:4).

The word "dead" is used in both verse 5 and verse 6. In verse 5 the dead refers to all those unbelievers who have died and who will be judged by the Lord at the white throne after the millennium. In verse 6 the same word refers to dead believers. By the time Peter wrote this Epistle, a good number of the Jewish believers had died. The gospel had been preached to these believers while they were alive. Therefore, "the gospel was preached also to the dead" means that it was preached to certain believers who had died before this Epistle was written.

Peter says that the gospel was preached to the dead so that they might be judged according to men in the flesh. These believers were judged after they were saved. They were judged in the flesh while they were still living.

THE VARIOUS JUDGMENTS OF GOD

If we would understand what Peter says concerning

judgment in verse 6, we need to have a full view of the entire Epistle. The whole book of 1 Peter is on God's government, and God's government is carried out mainly by His judgment. God's judgment began from the rebellious angels (2 Peter 2:3-4) in Genesis 6. Then it passed through the generations of man in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 2:5-9). For example, God's judgment was exercised upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The judgment of God was also exercised a number of times upon the children of Israel in the wilderness. Nearly two million Israelites died in the wilderness under God's judgment. In a sense, even Moses died under God's judgment. Aaron, Miriam, and Moses all died under the judgment of God, for they all had done certain things that were wrong, against God's government. It is a serious matter that even a man of God like Moses could die under God's judgment. The two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were judged by God and died (Lev. 10:1-2). Furthermore, in one day more than twenty thousand Israelites were slain because of God's judgment. Eventually, of all those who came out of Egypt at the time of the exodus, only two persons, Joshua and Caleb, entered into the good land. Because they had been faithful throughout the journey, they did not come under judgment but rather were allowed to enter into the land of Canaan. But all the others, those who experienced the Passover, drank of the living water from the cleft rock, witnessed the miracles of God, and ate manna, became disobedient and died under God's judgment. Even a small degree of disobedience shown by Moses caused him to suffer God's judgment. All these instances should cause us to realize how serious God's judgment is.

In the New Testament age God's judgment begins from the house of God (1 Pet. 1:17; 4:17) and will continue until the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10), which will be a day of judgment on the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles before the millennium. After the millennium, all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged and will perish (1 Pet. 4:5; 2 Pet. 3:7), and the heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).

Many Christians hold the concept that to be judged by God is to suffer eternal perdition. This is a traditional understanding of God's judgment. Actually, in the Bible there are varied judgments, and the results of these different judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. By all these judgments the Lord God will clear up the entire universe and purify it so that He may have a new heaven and new earth for a new universe filled with His righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13) for His delight.

PERSECUTION REGARDED AS GOD'S JUDGMENT

According to 4:6, even persecution is regarded as a part of God's judgment. Verses 14 through 17 of this chapter indicate that persecution is the beginning of God's judgment. In verses 15 and 16 Peter says that we should not suffer as wrongdoers or as those who meddle into others' affairs. Instead, we should suffer as Christians. Then in verse 17 he goes on to say that it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God. This indicates that, according to Peter's understanding, even the persecution suffered by the believers was God's judgment.

Not many Christians realize that the persecutions suffered by the believers may be God's judgment upon them. I did not have this understanding of verse 6 until my recent study of this Epistle. As a result of my study, I came to see that the judgment spoken of in verse 6 refers to the persecutions assigned by God to His chosen people. In order to keep us from sin or cause us to cease from indulging in our lusts, God may assign a certain kind of persecution to us. This assignment of persecution is God's governmental judgment; it is His judgment in His dispensational discipline. Therefore, persecution may be a dispensational discipline exercised by God over His chosen people. The judgment in verse 6 definitely is not a judgment related to eternal perdition, to eternal condemnation, but rather a dispensational discipline.

We have seen that God's governmental dealing is

exercised through different kinds of judgment. He judged the rebellious angels, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the children of Israel in the wilderness. God also judges the New Testament saints. Persecution may come to believers because they are wrong in certain things. God may use persecution as a dispensational discipline. This dispensational discipline is God's governmental judgment exercised upon us to perfect us. The purpose of this judgment is that we may live according to God in the spirit.

SOBER UNTO PRAYERS

In 4:7-11 Peter goes on to speak about ministering as good stewards of the varied grace of God. Verse 7 says, "But the end of all things has drawn near; therefore, be soberminded and be sober unto prayers." All things on which the flesh rests will pass away, and the end of them, the apostle tells us here, has drawn near. This warns us that a life lived in the flesh in the lusts of men (v. 2) will soon be ended, for it is related to all things which will shortly pass away. Therefore, we should be soberminded and be sober unto prayers. Literally, to be soberminded is to be of a sound mind; it is to have a mind of sobriety, able to understand things properly and thoroughly without being disturbed. Furthermore, to be sober unto prayers is to be sober to watch; hence, vigilant. This is to be on guard; hence, sober unto prayer. This equals the Lord's word, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41; Luke 21:36).

We need to realize that all things will come to an end. Peter says that the end of all things has drawn near. Therefore, instead of loving material things, we should be soberminded and be sober unto prayers. Do not set your mind on a better home, a better car, or a better education. The end of all such things has drawn near.

LOVE AND HOSPITALITY

Verse 8 continues, "Before all things having fervent love among yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins." Love must be first.

In verse 9 Peter says, "Be hospitable to one another without murmuring." Peter wrote this verse according to his experience. He knew that hospitality can be troublesome. Because the saints love the Lord, the church, and the ministry, they are willing to extend hospitality to those visiting from other localities. However, the saints who show hospitality may be hospitable with murmuring. Some may complain about how a saint who once stayed with them conducted himself. This is murmuring. I hope that our hospitality will be without murmuring.

GOOD STEWARDS OF THE VARIED GRACE OF GOD

Verse 10 continues, "Each one according as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God." The varied grace of God, as the all grace in 5:10, is the rich supply of life, which is the Triune God ministered into us in many aspects (2 Cor. 13:14; 12:9). As good stewards, by the gift we have received we should minister to the church and the saints such grace, not merely doctrine or any vain thing.

The fact that verse 10 is the direct continuation of verse 9 indicates that even showing hospitality is a gift. Showing hospitality to others gives us an excellent opportunity to minister to them the varied grace of God. You need grace to prepare food for your guests, to provide transportation for them, and to help them with special needs. It takes patience to wait for them if they are late. By this we see that in our hospitality we need to minister the varied grace of God to others. Of course, in verse 10 Peter does not mean that we minister grace only in hospitality. He means that we minister grace according to whatever gift we have received.

In verse 11 Peter says, "If anyone speaks--as oracles of God; if anyone ministers--as out of the strength which God supplies; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen." The "oracles" here are the divine speakings or utterances as revelations. In the ministry of grace, as mentioned in verse 10, our speaking

should be God's speaking, God's utterance, that conveys divine revelation.

In verse 11 Peter mentions the strength which God supplies. God supplies to us the serving strength of Christ's resurrection life through the Spirit of Christ (Phil. 1:19; 4:13).

GOD GLORIFIED THROUGH CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

The goal of speaking as oracles of God and ministering in the strength that God supplies is that "in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." This indicates that all our ministry of grace, whether in speaking or in serving, should be full of Christ, so that God may be glorified through Christ in all things.

Peter concludes verse 11 with the words, "To whom is the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen." The relative pronoun "whom" refers to God. The glory and the might belong to God. Glory is without, and might is within. Might supplies the strength within us; glory is God glorified upon us. Hence, "glory" corresponds to "glorified," and "might" to "strength."

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(10)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 4:12-19

In this message we come to 4:12-19. This section of 1 Peter speaks of rejoicing in sharing the sufferings of Christ.

PURIFIED THROUGH FIERY ORDEALS

In verse 12 Peter says, "Beloved, do not think the fiery ordeal among you is strange, which is coming to you for a trial, as a strange thing happening to you." The Greek, for fiery ordeal, *purosei*, means burning, signifying the burning of a smelting furnace for the purification of gold and silver (Prov. 27:21; Psa. 66:10), like the metaphor used in 1:7. Peter considered the persecution the believers suffered as such a burning furnace used by God to purify their life. This is God's way to deal with the believers in the judgment of His governmental administration, which begins from His own household (4:17-19). The Greek word for strange in verse 12 is *xenizo*, the same as the word used in verse 4. Fiery persecution is common to the believers. They should not think it is strange or alien to them and be surprised and astonished by it. This persecution is a trial, a testing.

Peter's use of the metaphor of a burning furnace in verse 12 indicates that today the Lord is using persecutions and trials as a furnace to serve a positive purpose. The positive purpose served by persecution and trial is the purification of our life. We can be compared to gold and silver. However, we still have some amount of dross. Therefore, we need purification. As gold and silver

are purified through burning, we also need to be purified in this way. In verse 12 Peter tells the believers not to regard the fiery ordeal as strange. As Christians, we should realize that fiery ordeals are common. Persecutions and trials are the common experience of Christians. Such things are not strange, alien, foreign, to us. On the contrary, they are common, for we have been appointed to them. It is our destiny to suffer in this age. Of course, this is not our eternal destiny. God has not destined us to suffer in eternity, but He surely has destined us to suffer in this age.

SHARING THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

In verse 13 Peter continues, "But according as you share the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that at the unveiling of His glory you may also rejoice exultingly." Although persecution is a trial that purifies us through burning, eventually Peter says that by experiencing such a fiery ordeal we share, participate in, the sufferings of Christ. Here Peter is saying that it is possible for the sufferings a Christian undergoes to be the sufferings of Christ. How can the persecutions suffered by us be the sufferings of Christ? If we were not Christians, we certainly would not suffer the kind of persecution described in verses 12 and 13. Such persecutions are due to the fact that we are Christians, men of Christ. Because we believe in Christ, love Christ, live Christ, bear testimony to Christ, witnessing of Him in this age, the world rises up against us. This age is under the hand of the evil one, and for this reason unbelieving ones persecute those who believe in Christ and witness of Him. In the sight of God this kind of suffering is regarded as the sufferings of Christ. For example, a certain brother may have had the opportunity to become rich. But because he believes in Christ, loves Christ, and follows Christ, his business may suffer, and he may lose the opportunity to become wealthy. Actually, he may even be in poverty. This kind of poverty is the suffering of Christ. Those sufferings that are for Christ are counted by God as the sufferings of Christ.

Christ lived a life of suffering, a suffering life. Now we are His partners living the same kind of life. According to the book of Hebrews, we are not only partakers of Christ but are also His partners (Heb. 3:14). We cooperate with Him in living a life of suffering. We follow Him along the way of suffering. This means that what Christ suffered, we also suffer. Therefore, when we suffer for Christ in this way, our sufferings are counted by God as the sufferings of Christ.

We should not be discouraged because we must suffer as Christians. These sufferings are positive and very precious. What a privilege it is to experience the sufferings of Christ! Paul could even say that he made up what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His Body, the church (Col. 1:24). He also speaks in Philippians 3:10 concerning the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Today we should be Christians, followers of Christ, who undergo the sufferings of Christ. We need to participate not only in the riches of Christ, but also in the sufferings of Christ. If we take this point of view, we shall be encouraged whenever we suffer for Christ. We may even welcome this kind of suffering. Yes, we may face fiery ordeals, but these are the sufferings of Christ in which we have the privilege to participate.

REJOICING EXULTINGLY

In verse 13 Peter says that as we share the sufferings of Christ, we should rejoice so that at the unveiling of His glory we may rejoice exultingly. In this verse Peter speaks of rejoicing exultingly. According to my understanding, this means that we shall not only be joyful inwardly, but we shall sound out our joy. At the same time, we may stretch forth our arms and also leap for joy. This is to exult and to rejoice exultingly. At the time of the unveiling of the Lord's glory, we shall exult. I believe that we shall shout, rejoice, and perhaps even leap for joy. We shall be excited to the uttermost, beside ourselves with joy. Today we may rejoice, but when the Lord is unveiled we shall rejoice exultingly.

REPROACHED IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

In verse 14 Peter goes on to say, "If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." "In the name of Christ" is actually in the person of Christ, in Christ Himself, because the name denotes the person. The believers, having believed into Christ (John 3:15), and having been baptized into His name (Acts 19:5), that is, into Himself (Gal. 3:27), are in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30) and one with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). When they are reproached in His name, they are reproached with Him, sharing His sufferings, in the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

The reason the persecutions we suffer are the sufferings of Christ is that we suffer in the name of Christ. According to Peter's word in verse 14, we are blessed if we are reproached in the name of Christ. Do not think that it is a curse to be reproached in the name of Christ. This is to be blessed. However, it may be a curse if people appreciate us too highly. Regarding this matter, we need to have a change of concept.

Today the opposers spread rumors concerning us and accuse us of teaching heresy. I can testify that I am a fundamental Christian and that I love the holy Word very much. I do not teach anything except the Bible with Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, I am accused of teaching heresy. In a sense, I welcome this kind of reproach, for it is actually a blessing, not a curse.

THE SPIRIT OF GLORY RESTING UPON US

Peter tells us in verse 14 that if we are reproached in the name of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Literally, the Greek says "the Spirit of glory and that of God." The Spirit of glory is the Spirit of God. The Spirit of glory is the One through whom Christ was glorified in His resurrection (Rom. 8:11). This very Spirit of glory, being the Spirit of God Himself, rests upon the suffering believers in their persecution for the glorification of the resurrected and exalted Christ, who is now in glory.

In this Epistle Peter mentions the Spirit of God four times. In 1:2 he speaks of the sanctification of the Spirit, in 1:11 he says that the Spirit of Christ was in the Old Testament prophets, and in 1:12 he speaks of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Here in 4:14 Peter says that the Spirit of glory rests upon the persecuted believers. According to what Peter says in this Epistle, the Spirit of Christ is in us, and the Spirit of glory rests upon us. The Spirit of Christ is in us to reveal all that Christ is to us for our enjoyment. The Spirit of glory rests upon us to glorify God. One aspect of this wonderful Spirit is that the Spirit is in us to reveal Christ, and another aspect of the same Spirit is that He is also the Spirit of glory resting upon us.

The more we suffer and are persecuted, the more glory there will be upon us. This is truly a blessing. I can testify that the more I am persecuted and evil spoken of, the more I am empowered. Persecution and reproach does not hold me down. On the contrary, it lifts me up. Therefore, we should rejoice when we are reproached in the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory is resting upon us.

SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN

Verse 15 says, "For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler into others' affairs." Literally, "a meddler into others' affairs" is an overseer of others' affairs. This denotes one who causes trouble by interfering in others' business. If we are careless in the church life, we may interfere, meddle, with the affairs of others. To gossip about the saints is to interfere with others' affairs. If we suffer because we do such things, that kind of suffering does not mean anything. It is part of the vain manner of life.

In verse 16 Peter continues, "But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name." In verses 14 and 16 we have two names. The first name is Christ, and the second name is Christian. If we suffer because of these two names, that is glorious. This kind of suffering is a glory to God. It glorifies God because, when we suffer in the name of Christ and as Christians, the

Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of glory, rests upon us. When we suffer for Christ, glory rests upon us, and that glory is actually the Spirit of glory Himself.

The Greek word for Christian is *Christianos,* a word of Latin formation. The ending *-ianos,* denoting an adherent of someone, was applied to slaves belonging to the great families in the Roman Empire. Those who worshipped the emperor, the Caesar--*Kaisar,* were called *Kaisarianos,* which means the adherents of *Kaisar,* the people belonging to Kaisar. When people believed in Christ and became His followers, this caused some in the Empire to consider Christ as a rival of their Kaisar. Then at Antioch (Acts 11:26), they began to call the followers of Christ *Christianos* (Christians), adherents of Christ, as a nickname, a term of reproach. Hence, in this verse it says "as a Christian, let him not be ashamed"; that is, if any believer suffers from the persecutors who contemptuously call him a Christian, he should not feel ashamed but glorify God in this name.

Today the term Christian should bear a positive significance, that is, a man of Christ, one who is one with Christ, not only belonging to Him, but having His life and nature in an organic union with Him, and who is living by Him, even living Him, in his daily life. If we suffer for being such a person, we should not feel ashamed, but be bold to magnify Christ in our confession by our holy and excellent manner of life to glorify, express, God in this name. To glorify God is to express Him in glory.

JUDGMENT BEGINNING FROM THE HOUSE OF GOD

In verse 17 Peter says, "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?" This book shows the government of God especially in His dealings with His chosen people. The sufferings they undergo in fiery persecution are used by Him as a means to judge them that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from the unbelievers and not have the same destiny as the unbelievers. Hence, such disciplinary judgment begins from His own household.

As we have pointed out, Peter's use of the word "judgment" in verse 17 indicates that persecutions and sufferings are a kind of judgment. This judgment, however, is not for condemnation to eternal perdition. It is a judgment for discipline, a dispensational discipline to purify our life. This judgment is a fiery ordeal, a burning furnace, to purify us and remove any dross. We can be compared to gold, but we still have a certain amount of dross from which we need to be purified. No teaching or fellowship can accomplish this purification. The disciplinary judgment of the burning furnace is necessary to carry it out.

DISPENSATIONAL DISCIPLINE

The thought of dispensational discipline is found not only in the writings of Peter, but also in the Epistles of Paul. Paul deals with this matter in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32. In verses 27 through 29 Paul says, "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who is eating and drinking, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body." To eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is to fail to evaluate the significance of the bread and the cup of the Lord, which signify His body broken for us and His blood shed for our sins through His death for our redemption. For anyone to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord is to bring judgment upon himself. In verse 29 Paul uses the word judgment, saying that the one who does not discern the body eats and drinks judgment to himself. To eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner brings judgment to us. This judgment is not eternal condemnation; it is the Lord's temporary discipline.

Paul goes on to speak of this temporary discipline in 1 Corinthians 11:30-32. In verse 30 he says, "Because of this

many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." This is the discipline, the temporary judgment of the Lord, on the unworthy participants in the Lord's body. The Lord first disciplined them so that they were weak physically. Then, since they would not repent of their offense, further discipline caused them to become sick. Because they still would not repent, the Lord judged them by death. To die this way is equivalent to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:5 about being strewn along in the wilderness. This verse is a clear illustration of what we mean by God's dispensational discipline.

In verses 31 and 32 Paul goes on to say, "But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined that we may not be condemned with the world." This indicates that if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged. The judgment in verse 32 is not for eternal perdition. In this verse, to be judged by the Lord indicates that when we, the believers, those who love the Lord Jesus, are judged by the Lord, it is that we may not be condemned with the world. To be judged by the Lord is temporary, but to be condemned with the world is eternal. The condemnation of the world is for eternal perdition. But the judgment we suffer today is for dispensational discipline, not for eternal perdition.

We should not be ignorant of what the Bible says concerning God's judgment. Many of today's Christians do not know anything about God's dispensational discipline. When they read about judgment, they may say, "Oh, we have been redeemed by the Lord, and we can never be judged. It is heretical for anyone to teach that a Christian can be judged by God." As we have seen, this is not a heretical teaching or anyone's personal teaching. This is the teaching of the holy Word. The matter of God's dispensational discipline was taught by both Peter and Paul. Therefore, we need to believe and accept this teaching from the pure Word of God.

According to the Bible, God in His government carries out His universal administration by different kinds of judgment. We should not have the concept that God is not

judging the world today. God's judgment is everywhere. Every nation is under His judgment. According to the record in Matthew 25, at the time of the Lord's coming back, all the living ones will be judged. At the end of the millennium, all the dead unbelievers will be judged by the Lord at the white throne. Thus, there will be the judgment of the living and the dead.

Between these two judgments, there will be a period of a thousand years, the millennium. Immediately before the beginning of the millennium there will be the judgment of all the living nations. At that time, the Lord will gather all the living Gentiles to His throne of glory for judgment. Many will be judged as "goats," and will be sent to the lake of fire. Instead of passing through Hades, they will go directly to the lake of fire. Their entire being--body, soul, and spirit--will be cast into the lake of fire. After the millennium, the Lord Jesus will judge the dead unbelievers at the white throne. At that time, He will also judge the demons. Then the unbelievers and the demons will be cast into the lake of fire. This judgment will be the judgment for eternal perdition.

We, the saved ones, will not have any share in the judgment for eternal perdition. There is no need for us to be afraid of that judgment. As far as judgment for eternal perdition is concerned, God has passed over us in Christ as our Passover Lamb. However, we should not think that, because God has passed over us concerning this judgment, we could not have any problems and will not suffer the judgment of God's dispensational discipline.

Our situation as believers in Christ can be compared to that of the children of Israel. They experienced the Passover, and they were redeemed by the Passover lamb. After they made their exodus from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, they enjoyed the living water out of the cleft rock and the heavenly manna. They saw the miracles God did for them. Nevertheless, out of more than two million people who came out of Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, escaped the judgment of God leading to death. All the remainder, including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, died under God's judgment. This does not mean that they were

under God's curse. It means that they were under the judgment of God's dispensational discipline. As we have pointed out, this kind of judgment is not for eternal perdition. It is related absolutely to God's dispensational dealing. Moses, of course, was saved. God intended to preserve his body so that Moses could appear on the mount of transfiguration to be with the Lord. But because Moses made a mistake, God apportioned to him a particular disciplinary judgment.

Because many Christians today are veiled by traditional teachings, I would urge you to come back to the clear and pure Word of God, which is unveiling and enlightening. According to the Word of God, we know that God carries out His government by different kinds of judgment. These judgments include both the judgment for eternal perdition and the judgment for dispensational discipline.

God's judgment for dispensational discipline is absolutely different from the Catholic concept of purgatory. Many years ago, I was falsely accused of teaching a doctrine of purgatory. The teaching concerning purgatory is false and heretical. But to teach the matter of disciplinary judgment, a discipline that is dispensational, is altogether according to the Scriptures. This teaching has nothing to do with purgatory, and it certainly is not heretical.

We need to see the truth concerning God's judgment and have a holy fear of God. As Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 11, we need to be careful in taking the Lord's table. It is a great blessing to partake of the Lord's table. However, we need to take of the bread and of the cup with discernment. If we are careless in this matter, we shall eat and drink judgment upon ourselves. This judgment may involve weakness, sickness, or even death. Weakness is a warning, and sickness is a further warning. If we do not care for these warnings, we may experience the judgment of death. This judgment is God's discipline, a discipline that is a dispensational judgment exercised over the believers who are wrong in certain matters. This is one of

the basic teachings of the apostles, and it was taught by both Peter and Paul.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS

(11)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 4:17-19

In the previous message we began to cover the section from 4:12-19. In this message we shall continue with verses 17 through 19 of chapter four.

JUDGMENT BEGINNING FROM THE HOUSE OF GOD

First Peter 4:17 says, "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?" We have seen that this Epistle shows the government of God especially in His dealings with His chosen people. The sufferings they undergo in fiery persecution are used by Him as a means to judge them that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from the unbelievers and not have the same destiny as unbelievers. Such disciplinary judgment begins from the house of God.

The Greek word rendered "house" in verse 17 also means household. Here the house, or household, refers to the church composed of the believers (2:5; Heb. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19). From this house, as His own house, God begins His governmental administration by His disciplinary judgment over His own children so that He may have strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious to His government. This is for the establishment of His kingdom, which is covered in the second book (2 Pet. 1:11).

THOSE WHO DISOBEY THE GOSPEL OF GOD

In 1:17 Peter asks what will be the end of those who

disobey the gospel of God if God's judgment first begins from us. This question indicates that the unbelievers, who disobey the gospel of God, will undergo a judgment more severe than that which the believers have undergone.

In verse 17 the word "disobey" has a particular and specific meaning. Many Christians, however, do not realize this. Here in 4:17 "disobey" is used with regard to the unbelieving Jews mainly, not to the unbelieving Gentiles. As God's people, the Jews had received the Mosaic law and also the ordinances and rituals of the Old Testament. But by the time this Epistle was written, the dispensation had changed. The Old Testament was the old dispensation, and the New Testament is the new dispensation of God. The dispensation first began to change at the coming of John the Baptist. Of course, it changed even the more with the coming of the Lord Jesus.

John the Baptist was the son of the priest (Luke 1:5, 13). This means that he also should have been a priest serving in the temple by offering the sacrifices, lighting the lamps, and burning the incense on the incense altar. That was the way the priests served God according to the old dispensation. However, this son of a priest did not stay in the temple. Instead, he went out to the wilderness. Furthermore, as a priest, he should have worn the priestly garment, which was mainly made of fine linen (Exo. 28:4, 40-41; Lev. 6:10; Ezek. 44:17-18). But in the wilderness, he wore a "garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle" (Matt. 3:4). John should have eaten priestly food, which was composed mainly of fine flour and the meat of the sacrifices offered to God by His people (Lev. 2:1-3; 6:16-18, 25-26; 7:31-34). However, John ate locusts and wild honey. For a priestly person to wear camel's hair was an especially drastic blow to the religious mind, for the camel was considered unclean under the Levitical regulations (Lev. 11:4). All this indicates that John had altogether abandoned the Old Testament dispensation. John did not offer sacrifices, he did not light the lamps in the temple, and he did not burn the incense on the incense altar. Instead, he went to the wilderness and called upon God's

people to repent. Those who repented he baptized in water. From the point of view of Judaism, what John did was heretical.

According to Matthew 3:2, John preached in the wilderness, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." John the Baptist's preaching was the initiation of God's New Testament economy. He did this preaching not in the holy temple within the holy city, where the religious and cultured people worshipped God according to their scriptural ordinances, but in the wilderness, not keeping any regulations of the old dispensation. This indicates that the old way of the worship of God according to the Old Testament was repudiated, and a new way was about to be brought in.

Actually, the preaching of the gospel began not with the Lord Jesus but with John the Baptist. John said to those who came to be baptized by him, "I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance; but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire; whose winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12). Here John seems to be saying, "The One who comes after me will baptize you either in the Spirit or in fire. He will put you either into the Spirit or into the lake of fire. Only He has the power to do these things. Therefore, you must genuinely repent."

The Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, elders, and chief priests among the Jewish people did not obey the preaching of John the Baptist or that of the Lord Jesus. This is made clear both in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the eleven preached the gospel to the Jewish people. Most of those who believed were scattered Jews who had returned to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. But the local ones, in particular the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the leaders of the people, were not willing to believe. This means that they would not obey the gospel. Furthermore, when Paul

was raised up by the Lord, he went forth to preach the gospel in the Gentile cities. Wherever he went, he was persecuted, troubled, and opposed by the Jews. Therefore, in their writings the apostles used the word "disobey" with respect to the unbelieving Jews who did not obey the gospel.

We have pointed out that the book of 1 Peter was written to Jewish believers. In particular, this Epistle was written to the "chosen pilgrims of the dispersion" (1:1). The word "dispersion" was a term familiar to all the scattered Jews among the nations. This term clearly indicates that this Epistle was written to Jewish believers. These believers, who had been scattered throughout the Gentile world, were suffering persecution. It is important for us to realize that this persecution did not come mainly from the Gentiles; most of it came from the opposing Jews, the Jews who did not obey the gospel.

Words such as "dispersion" in 1:1 and "disobey" in 4:17 indicate that Peter's writing has a strongly dispensational aspect. Peter indicated clearly that he was writing to the chosen pilgrims of the dispersion. The word "dispersion" is a Jewish term. At the time this Epistle was written, many Jews were scattered in dispersion. Whereas the Gentile believers lived in their own cities, the Jewish believers were in dispersion, for they had been scattered, dispersed, among the Gentiles, separated from their fatherland. Hence, these scattered Jews were pilgrims in dispersion.

The Judaistic terms used in this book are an indication that it was written to Jewish believers. One of these terms is the "sprinkling of the blood" (1:2). In typology, the sprinkling of the atoning blood ushered the sprinkled people into the old covenant (Exo. 24:6-8). Likewise, the sprinkling of Christ's redeeming blood brings the sprinkled believers into the blessing of the new covenant, that is, into the full participation of the Triune God (Heb. 9:13-14). Expressions such as "chosen pilgrims of the dispersion" and "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" show that this Epistle was written to Jewish believers.

In 4:17 "those who disobey the gospel of God" refers mainly to unbelieving Jews. In the sight of God, the

unbelieving Jews were disobedient. God gave them the law through Moses, and they accepted it. But when God's dispensation changed and He wanted to give them the gospel, the Jews disobeyed the gospel and rebelled against it. If we would understand verse 17, we need to realize that "disobey the gospel" refers mainly to the disobedience of the unbelieving Jews.

In his synopsis J. N. Darby points out a number of times that 1 Peter is a dispensational book written to Jewish believers. Because of this dispensational aspect of 1 Peter certain verses are not fully applicable to Gentile believers.

THE RIGHTEOUS SAVED WITH DIFFICULTY

In verse 18 Peter goes on to say, "And if the righteous is saved with difficulty, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?" Here "the righteous" refers to the believers, who became righteous by being justified through their faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) and by living a righteous life in Christ (Phil. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rev. 19:8).

The correct translation of verse 18 should say "saved with difficulty." The King James Version has the rendering "scarcely be saved." That translation is not correct, and it actually changes the meaning. What does it mean to be scarcely saved? The Greek really means saved with difficulty. The difficulty refers to persecution, suffering, and, mainly, to God's discipline. God saved His chosen pilgrims with difficulty through much discipline and through many judgments, sufferings, and persecutions.

If God's children, the members of His own household, are saved with difficulty, do you think that those Jews who do not believe but who disobey God's gospel will escape God's judgment? Certainly they will not escape. If God's chosen pilgrims are disciplined by God and judged by Him, how much more will the ungodly be judged? We may apply verse 18 in a general way to all sinners and ungodly people. But according to Peter's concept, this verse applied particularly to the unbelieving Jews. If the believing Jews, to whom this Epistle was written, are saved with

difficulty, that is, through God's dispensational discipline and punishment, how much more will the unbelieving Jews, those who disobey the gospel of God, suffer? Certainly God will judge the ungodly much more severely than the believers. Where will the ungodly and sinners appear when God judges them?

In verse 18 "saved" does not mean saved from eternal perdition through the Lord's death, but saved from the coming destruction (1 Thes. 5:3, 8) through the trials of persecution as God's disciplinary judgment. The believer, who has been disciplined by God through the sufferings of persecution to purify his life, is saved with the difficulty of persecution from the destruction of God's wrath toward the world, especially toward the unbelieving Jews, with the coming destruction of Jerusalem in view.

Among the early apostles there was a strong belief that the Lord Jesus would come back soon to judge the unbelieving sinners, who are ungodly and disobey His gospel (2 Thes. 1:6-9). Peter's word here should refer to this. In God's government, if the righteous, who has obeyed His gospel and lives a righteous life before Him, is saved with difficulty, suffering persecution as the means of His disciplinary punishment to purify his life, where will the ungodly, who disobeys His gospel and lives a sinful life against His government, stand when the destruction of His wrath comes?

We may regard the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the Lord's coming back as two great mountain peaks seen by the Apostles. On the day of Pentecost, when God poured out His Spirit for salvation, the Lord opened the door for all sinners to be saved. First, the door was opened for the Jews and then, for the Gentiles. Expecting the Lord Jesus to come back soon, the apostles did not realize clearly that there was a gap between the "peak" of Pentecost and the second peak of the Lord's coming back. If we read Paul's writings, we shall see that he also expected the Lord Jesus to come back soon. The gap between Pentecost and the Lord's coming was not made clear to the early apostles. When they asked the Lord Jesus about the time of His coming,

He told them that this

was something known only by the Father (Acts 1:6-7). The Father kept this matter as a secret within Him. Therefore, not even the Lord Jesus was free to reveal this to the disciples. As we have pointed out, the apostles could see only the two peaks.

Perhaps you have had the experience of seeing two mountain peaks from a distance. You did not realize at first that between these two peaks there was actually a large gap. It seemed that the two mountain peaks were next to each other. Later you may have realized that these two mountain peaks were not in the same mountain range. I would use this as an illustration of the gap between the day of Pentecost and the day of the Lord's coming back.

Before the Lord Jesus died, He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. When the disciples spoke to Him concerning the buildings of the temple, He answered, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, A stone shall by no means be left upon a stone which shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). Moreover, in Luke 21:20 He said, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation has drawn near." The Lord was saying that Jerusalem would be destroyed, a prophecy that was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Titus, the prince of the Roman Empire, led an army to destroy the city of Jerusalem. I believe that as Peter was writing this book, he had in mind the Lord's prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, Peter seemed to be saying, "All the Jews need to be careful God is judging, exercising His governmental administration. We know that in not too long a time the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed, and God will judge the unbelievers." Because Peter had this thought, he could say to the believing Jews, who were suffering persecution as a disciplinary punishment from God, that they would be saved from the coming destruction. Then he goes on to ask where the disobedient Jews will be when that destruction comes.

COMMITTING OUR SOULS TO A FAITHFUL CREATOR

In verse 19 Peter concludes by saying, "Wherefore, let

those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in welldoing to a faithful Creator." The will of God here is that He wants us to suffer for Christ's sake and has appointed us to this (3:17; 2:15; 1 Thes. 3:3).

Literally "commit" here means to give in charge as a deposit, as in Luke 12:48; Acts 20:32; 1 Timothy 1:18; and 2 Timothy 2:2. When the believers suffer persecution in their body, especially as in martyrdom, they should commit their souls as a deposit to God, the faithful Creator, as the Lord did with His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46). The persecution could damage only the body of the suffering believers, not their souls (Matt. 10:28). Their souls are kept by the Lord as the faithful Creator. They should cooperate with the Lord by their faithful commitment.

According to verse 19, the believers should commit their souls in welldoing to the faithful Creator. The word "welldoing" indicates doing right, good, and noble deeds.

The Creator in verse 19 does not refer to the Creator of the new creation in the new birth, but to the Creator of the old creation. Persecution is a suffering in the old creation. God as our Creator can preserve our soul, which He created for us. He has even numbered our hairs (Matt. 10:30). He is loving and faithful. His loving and faithful care (1 Pet. 5:7) accompanies His justice in His governmental administration. While He is judging us, as His household, in His government, in His love He cares for us faithfully. In suffering His just disciplinary judgment in our body, we should commit our souls to His faithful care.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THIRTY

GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL JUDGMENT

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:23; 4:5-6, 12, 17-19

A BASIC THOUGHT IN PETER'S WRITINGS

In this message and in the message following we shall have a thorough review of all the matters in chapters one through four related to God's governmental judgment. The concept of God's governmental judgment is a basic thought in Peter's composition of this Epistle. God's judgment as seen in 1 Peter may be likened to the hub of a wheel. If the hub were taken away from a wheel, all the spokes would collapse. Likewise, if the thought of God's judgment were removed from the books of 1 and 2 Peter, these Epistles would lose their basic structure.

Many Christian readers of these Epistles may not pay adequate attention to the matter of God's governmental judgment. The reason most readers may pay attention to things other than God's judgment is that their mentality has not been trained to concentrate on this subject in the Word of God. However, John Nelson Darby was an exception. In his treatment of 1 and 2 Peter he focuses his attention on God's governmental judgment. Whether or not we pay attention to this matter in the Epistles of Peter depends on whether or not we have a mind trained to pay attention to such a subject.

Many years ago, some of us were having fellowship concerning the main subject of the books of the New Testament. We all knew that Matthew is on God's kingdom; Mark, on service to God; Luke, on God's salvation; and John, on life. When someone asked about

the subject of the Epistles of Peter, much to my surprise Brother Nee said that these two books are on God's government. From that time onward I began to consider what God's government is. I said to myself, "Isn't the kingdom in Matthew God's government? What is the difference between the kingdom of God and the government of God?" Gradually I began to understand the difference between kingdom and government.

Of course, in 1 and 2 Peter we cannot find the word "government." But in these two books we see the means by which God carries out His government. The means by which God carries out His government is by judging. Eventually, after God's judgment has been completed, there will be a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells. The new heaven and the new earth are the consummation of 1 and 2 Peter. We all need to see this.

As we have already pointed out, at the beginning of 1 Peter we have a word concerning the foreknowledge of God before the foundation of the world, that is, in eternity past. In the last chapter of 2 Peter we have a word concerning the new heaven and the new earth in eternity future. This means that the scope of these two Epistles extends from eternity past to eternity future. These two books consummate with the new heaven and the new earth with righteousness as their contents. This is related to the government of God.

God's judgment began to be exercised in the Old Testament, and it has been continually exercised throughout the generations. Today God is still judging. In the New Testament we see that God's judgment begins from His own household and ends with the burning of the old heaven and the old earth. That burning will be the last step of God's judgment. When that last step of judgment has been completed, the new heaven and the new earth will appear. This means that when God has thoroughly cleansed the universe through judgment, there will be a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness will dwell. This is a matter of God's governmental judgment.

I am burdened that all the saints, especially the young ones, have a clear understanding of 1 and 2 Peter. In particular, we need to see that the subject of these two books is God's government carried out by His judgment.

THE DAILY JUDGMENT OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT

First Peter 1:17 says, "And if you call upon as Father the One who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear." Peter "is not speaking of the final judgment of the soul. In that sense 'the Father does not judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son' (John 5:22). The thing spoken of here is the daily judgment of God's government in this world, exercised with regard to His children. Accordingly it says, 'the time of your sojourning' here" (Darby). This is God's judgment on His own household (1 Pet. 4:17).

Since these two Epistles are concerned with the government of God, the judgment of God and of the Lord is referred to repeatedly (2:23; 4:5-6,17; 2 Pet. 2:3-4, 9; 3:7), as one of the essential items. It began from the angels (2 Pet. 2:3-4), and passed through the generations of man in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 2:5-9). Then in the New Testament age it begins from the house of God (1:17, 4:6, 17) and continues until the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10), which will be a day of judgment on the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles before the millennium. After the millennium, all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged and perish (1 Pet. 4:5; 2 Pet. 3:7), and the heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10b, 12). The results of the varied judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. However, by all these judgments the Lord God will clear up and purify the entire universe, that He may have a new heaven and a new earth for a new universe filled with His righteousness (2 Pet.. 3:13) for His delight.

The fear spoken of in 1:17 is a holy fear, as in Philippians 2:12. It is a healthy, serious caution for us to behave holily. Such fear is mentioned a number of times in this book (2:17, 18; 3:2, 15) because its teaching concerns the government of God.

We need to be impressed by the fact that God's government differs in dispensation. There are different judgments for different cases, and these judgments have different results. It is important for us to realize that, in Darby's words, the judgment in 1:17 is not "the final judgment of the soul." As John 5:22 reveals, that judgment has been given to the Son. What we have in 1:17 is the daily judgment of God's government in the world, a judgment that is exercised with regard to His children. This is not the final judgment at the white throne, but the daily judgment of God in the world. The daily judgment of God is not exercised upon fallen sinners; instead, it is exercised upon God's children.

Those who oppose this teaching from the Word may say, "How is it possible for us, God's children in grace, to be judged by God? God is our Father, and He loves us and gives us grace. How could He do something to judge us?" Because the truth of God's judgment is opposed in this way, I am burdened that we all grasp the pure thought regarding it in the Bible. Today all of us are under God's judgment. God is not only gracing us, giving us grace. He is also judging us. This is the reason we have many sufferings. We have sufferings because God is judging us. On the one hand, God is gracing us to live a life that suits His righteousness under His government. On the other hand, He judges anything that does not match His government. Therefore, in this age we the believers are under the daily judgment of God.

Darby points out that because the judgment in 1:17 is the daily judgment of God's government exercised with regard to His children, this verse speaks of passing the time of our sojourning in fear. This kind of judgment is exercised upon us, the children of God, while we are passing the time of our sojourning on earth. Therefore, this

judgment is not in the future; it is a judgment that we experience today. The Lord's word in John 5:22 refers to eternal judgment, to the judgment of unbelievers at the white throne. But the judgment here is the present judgment of God upon His children, not on unbelievers.

In the Old Testament God judged the fallen angels, He judged the earth at the time of Noah, and He judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He also judged the children of Israel in the wilderness. We have seen that in the New Testament God's judgment begins from the house of God. This means that God's judgment begins with us, that is, with the church including all the saints. God's governmental judgment has already begun. It was being carried out even during the time of the apostles. This judgment will continue until the coming of the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is mentioned both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. According to the Bible, the day of the Lord will be a day of judgment, not a day of saving. The whole world has gone away from God. Gradually the Lord has been carrying out His judgment. But a day of His final judgment will come. At that day God will judge everyone. Three categories of people are included in God's judgment: the Jews, the church people, and the worldly people. God's judgment has been carried out for thousands of years, and it will continue to be carried out until the final judgment as the day of the Lord. Eventually, God will judge each of the three categories of people. He will judge the Jews, all the Christians, and then all the unbelievers. Do not think that because you are a Christian you will escape the judgment of God. Concerning God's judgment, there is no escape. The day of the Lord will be a day of judgment before the millennium on the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles.

After the millennium, all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged at the white throne. That will be the final judgment for eternal perdition. After that judgment has been carried out, the heavens and the earth will be burned up and the new heaven and the new earth will appear.

Disciplinary Dealing

We have seen that the results of the different kinds of judgments are not the same. Certain judgments result in a disciplinary dealing. This is true of the judgments we experience today. Persecution, trouble, and illness are God's judgments resulting in a disciplinary dealing in this age.

Dispensational Punishment

Other judgments result in dispensational punishment. Dispensational punishment refers to punishment during the thousand years, during the millennial kingdom. The kingdom will be a dispensation. Defeated Christians will suffer a punishment during the coming age. That will be a dispensational punishment.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, some believers will suffer during the dispensation of the kingdom in the coming age (Matt. 24 48-51; 25:24-30). For them, that period of time will be a time of darkness with the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25 clearly indicates that when the Lord Jesus comes back, the faithful servants will be rewarded and the unfaithful ones will be punished. Some Bible teachers say that the unfaithful servants in Matthew 25 are false Christians, whereas the faithful ones are genuine Christians. This understanding is not logical nor correct. How could a false Christian be counted as a servant of the Lord? Furthermore, how could a false Christian be raptured to appear before the judgment seat of Christ? Instead of following the interpretation that the unfaithful servants are false Christians, we believe the pure Word of God. The Bible says that when the Lord Jesus comes back, we shall all stand before His judgment seat. In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul says clearly that we all shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive a reward according to what we have done. If we have done a faithful work, the Lord will give us a prize. But if we have been unfaithful and have failed the Lord, He will give us

some kind of punishment. That will be a dispensational punishment during the millennium.

Eternal Perdition

Other judgments will result in eternal perdition. As we have seen, the judgment upon men and demons at the white throne will result in eternal perdition. Therefore, we can see three kinds of results of God's governmental judgment: disciplinary dealing, dispensational punishment, and eternal perdition.

CHRIST LIVING UNDER GOD'S GOVERNMENT

In 2:23 Peter says concerning Christ, "Who being reviled, did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten, but kept committing all to Him who judges righteously." According to the usage of the verb "kept committing" in Greek, "all" needs to be inserted here as its object, referring to all the sufferings of the Lord. He kept committing all His insults and injuries to Him who judges righteously in His government, the righteous God, to whom He submitted Himself. This indicates that the Lord recognized God's government while He was living a human life on earth.

In no other book of the New Testament are we told that the Lord Jesus lived under God's government. Peter is the only one who tells us of this. In 2:23 Peter indicates that when the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was under God's government. Because the Lord lived under God's government, He committed all His sufferings to God. Here Peter does not speak of God as the faithful One, but as the One who judges righteously. The reason for this is that judging righteously is a matter of God's government.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

First Peter 4:5 says, speaking of unbelievers, "Who shall render an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." The relative pronoun "who" here refers to the nations (4:3), who are astonished at the believers' different manner of life and speak evil of them (4:4). They have to render an account by relating to the

Lord all that they have done and spoken in their entire life. This word concerning the nations rendering an account to the Lord reveals the government of God over all men. The Lord is ready to judge all, both the living and the dead. His judgment is God's governmental administration to deal with the situation among men.

According to the New Testament, God will judge the living and the dead. Acts 10:42 says that the Lord Jesus has been ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead, and Acts 17:31 says that God has appointed a day in which "He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained." In 2 Timothy 4:1 Paul says that Jesus Christ "is about to judge the living and the dead."

To whom does the word "living" refer in 4:5? It refers to unbelievers who are alive when the Lord Jesus comes back. Matthew 25:31-46 speaks regarding this. Matthew 25:31-33 says, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He shall sit on His throne of glory; and all the nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He shall set the sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left." "All the nations" are all the Gentiles who will be left at Christ's coming back to the earth after He destroys those Gentiles who follow Antichrist at Armageddon (Rev. 16:14, 16; 19:11-15, 19-21). They will all be gathered and judged at Christ's throne of glory. This will be Christ's judgment on the living before the millennium. It will differ from His judgment on the dead at the great white throne after the millennium (Rev. 20:1-15).

Before the Lord sits on His throne of glory according to Matthew 25:31, He will carry out many judgments during the great tribulation. During the period of the great tribulation, many people will be killed by natural calamities, by wars, and by Antichrist. After the great tribulation, the Lord will come and sit on His throne of glory at Jerusalem. All the living nations will be gathered together before Him to be judged. He will discern who are

the goats, the bad ones, those who will "go away into eternal punishment," into eternal fire, and the sheep, the good ones, those who will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This judgment will be the fulfillment of Peter's word in Acts 10:42, which says that Christ has been appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. It will also be the fulfillment of Paul's word spoken in Acts 17:31, which says that God has appointed Christ to judge all men. Again, in 1 Peter 4:5, Peter says that everyone will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The "dead" in 4:5 refers to the dead unbelievers, who will be judged at the great white throne described in Revelation 20. We have seen that after the great tribulation, the Lord will exercise His judgment upon the living nations. Then the millennium, the thousand-year kingdom will begin. After the millennium, the Lord will exercise His judgment upon all the dead. Regarding this, Revelation 20:12 says, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was open, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books, according to their works." According to Revelation 20:15, "If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." This is the final judgment of the dead unbelievers. That judgment will be followed by the burning up of the old heavens and earth.

GOD'S USE OF FIERY ORDEALS TO PURIFY THE BELIEVERS

In 4:6 Peter goes on to say, "For unto this end the gospel was preached also to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." In this verse the word "dead" refers to the dead believers in Christ who suffered persecution because of their Christian testimony, as referred to in 1:6; 2:18-21; 3:16-17; and 4:12-19. This kind of persecution is considered by Peter in this book as God's judgment according to the government of God, which begins from

the house of God (4:17). The gospel was preached to these dead believers while they were living in order that they might on the one hand be judged, dealt with, by God through the opposers' persecution according to men in the flesh, but, on the other hand, live by believing in Christ according to God in the spirit. This shows how strict and serious is the judgment of God in His governmental administration. If the believers, who have been obedient to the gospel, are dealt with by God's governmental judgment, how much more will those who oppose the gospel and blaspheme the believers be judged by God's dealing!

In 4:12 Peter says, "Beloved, do not think that the fiery ordeal among you is strange, which is coming to you for a trial, as a strange thing happening to you." According to what we have covered concerning this verse in one of the preceding messages, "fiery ordeal" here means burning. It signifies the burning of a smelting furnace for the purification of gold and silver, like the metaphor used in 1:7. Peter considered the persecution the believers suffered as such a burning furnace used by God to purify their life. This is God's way to deal with the believers in the judgment of His governmental administration, which begins from His own house (4:17-19).

The fiery ordeal is God's way to deal not with sinners and opposers but with believers, the members of His household. The burning furnace is a means used by God to carry out the judgment of His governmental administration. In the administration of His government, God uses fiery ordeals as a furnace to purify any dross the believers may have. Yes, as believers in Christ we are gold, yet we still have a lot of dross. Therefore, we need to be purified. This purification cannot be accomplished simply through teaching, fellowship, or attending the meetings of the church. We all need to pass through the burning furnace. God puts us into a burning furnace, into fiery ordeals, to burn away our dross. This is regarded by Peter as a judgment in God's governmental dealing with the believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL JUDGMENT

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:23; 4:5-7, 12, 17-19

In this message we shall continue our review of God's governmental judgment as revealed in the first four chapters of 1 Peter.

JUDGMENT BEGINNING FROM GOD'S HOUSEHOLD

First Peter 4:17 says, "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?" This book shows the government of God especially in His dealings with His chosen people. The sufferings they undergo in fiery persecution are used by Him as a means to judge them that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from the unbelievers and not have the same destiny as the unbelievers. Hence, such disciplinary judgment begins from God's own household. God's house, or household, is the church composed of the believers (2:5; Heb. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19). From this house, as His own house, God begins His governmental administration by His disciplinary judgment over His own children, that He may have strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious to His government. This is for the establishment of His kingdom, which is covered in the second book (2 Pet. 1:11).

We need to be deeply impressed from 4:17 that judgment begins from the household of God. This is God's governmental administration carried out by His disciplinary judgment over His own children. The purpose

of this disciplinary judgment that begins at God's house is that God may have a strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, all those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious against His government. This applies in particular to the unbelieving Jews. The result of this judgment will be the establishment of God's kingdom.

In 4:17 Peter asks this question: "What will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?" Peter is asking, if the judgment begins from us, what will happen to those who do not obey God's gospel? This question indicates that the unbelievers, who disobey the gospel of God, will undergo a judgment more severe than that which the believers have undergone.

THE RIGHTEOUS SAVED WITH DIFFICULTY

In verse 18 Peter goes on to ask, "And if the righteous is saved with difficulty, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?" Here "the righteous" refers to the believers, who became righteous by being justified through their faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) and by living a righteous life in Christ (Phil. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rev. 19:8).

The word "difficulty" refers to judgments, persecutions, and hardships. This may even include illness. Many believers have the concept that because they believe in the Lord Jesus and are saved, everything in their lives should be smooth. Actually, the very opposite is true. In the Christian life we have one difficulty after another. However, some may think that because they are in the church life, they should not have any problems. They imagine that they will be in perfect health, have a high income, and be well spoken of by others. Actually, both in the Christian life and in the church life there are many difficulties. Hence, Peter says that the righteous is saved with difficulty.

In 4:18 "saved" is not from eternal perdition through the Lord's death, but from the coming destruction (1 Thes. 5:3, 8), through the trials of persecution as God's disciplinary judgment. The believer, who has been disciplined by God through the sufferings of persecution to purify his life, is saved with the difficulty of persecution

from the destruction of God's wrath toward the world, especially toward the unbelieving Jews, with the coming destruction of Jerusalem in view.

This Epistle was written only a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, the prince of Rome. The Lord Jesus had prophesied concerning this in Matthew 24:2, when He said of the temple that not one stone would be left upon another. The Lord had predicted that judgment would come upon the disobedient and unbelieving Jews. Peter, along with all the other apostles, knew this.

We need to remember that this book was written in particular to Jewish believers. Peter warned these believers regarding the coming destruction. However, he told them that those who believed in the Lord would be saved from that destruction, but they would be saved through difficulty, that is, through persecution and sufferings. This difficulty is a kind of governmental judgment.

Among the early apostles there was a strong belief that the Lord Jesus would come back soon to judge the unbelieving sinners, who are ungodly and disobey His gospel (2 Thes. 1:6-9). Peter's word here refers to this. In God's government, if the righteous, who has obeyed His gospel and lives a righteous life before Him, is saved with difficulty, suffering persecution as the means of His disciplinary punishment to purify his life, where will the ungodly, who disobeys His gospel and lives a sinful life against His government, stand when the destruction by His wrath comes?

COMMITTING OUR SOULS TO A FAITHFUL CREATOR

In verse 19 Peter continues, "Wherefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in welldoing to a faithful Creator." Persecution can damage only the body of the suffering believers; it cannot damage their souls (Matt. 10:28). Their souls are kept by the Lord as the faithful Creator. They should cooperate with the Lord by their faithful commitment. The word

"Commit" here literally means to give in charge as a deposit, as in Luke 12:48; Acts 20:32; 1 Timothy 1:18; and 2 Timothy 2:2. When the believers suffer persecution in their body, especially as in martyrdom, they should commit their souls as a deposit to God, the faithful Creator, as the Lord committed His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46).

The Creator spoken of in verse 19 is not the Creator of the new creation in the new birth, but the Creator of the old creation. Persecution is a suffering in the old creation. God as our Creator can preserve our soul, which He created for us. He has even numbered our hairs (Matt. 10:30). He is loving and faithful. His loving and faithful care (1 Pet. 5:7) accompanies His justice in His governmental administration. While He is judging us, as His household, in His government, in His love He cares for us faithfully. In suffering His just disciplinary judgment in our body, we should commit our souls to His faithful care.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

First Peter is a book on the Christian life under the government of God. It is easy for us to pay attention to the Christian life and to neglect God's government. Actually, the Christian life and the government of God go together. The Triune God has passed through a long process and has become the life-giving Spirit to indwell us. This is for our Christian life. At the same time, the Triune God is still the Creator of the universe and its ruler. On the one hand, we have been reborn to have a spiritual life, the divine life. On the other hand, we are still in the old creation. For this reason, we need God's governmental dealings. In order for the Christian life to grow, we need the discipline of God's government.

The preciousness of Peter's writings is that he combines the Christian life and God's government. Paul did the same thing, but he did not do it in such a clear way as Peter did. Peter's writings show us that the Christian life and the government of God go together as a pair. If we would carefully read the two Epistles of Peter, we would

see that Peter is quite deep in the matter of life. The first chapter of 2 Peter, in particular, is rich, deep, and profound in the matter of life. But at the same time in his writings Peter gives a serious word regarding God's governmental dealings with His regenerated people. Therefore, in the Epistles of Peter we need to see the Christian life and God's government and also see how the two go together.

KNOWING THE TRUTH ACCORDING TO THE PURE WORD OF GOD

In the past, most of us received little more than traditional Christian teachings. Through the notes in the Recovery Version and through all the Life-study Messages, I am burdened to present the basic matters in the Word to the Lord's people. If we take these matters into us and allow them to make a permanent impression upon us, I believe that in the coming years we shall see a great change, even a change that will revolutionize our inward being. I hope that after a number of years these messages will issue in a very positive result. My desire is to see that God's truth, according to His pure Word, will be prevailing throughout this country. In spite of the opposition, I believe that eventually the seeking ones will read the messages and come to know the truth.

My immediate concern is that those of us in the Lord's recovery will have a clear view of all the basic matters in the Word. However, I am deeply sorry that some who have been in the recovery for many years still are not able to say an adequate word regarding many things. In 3:15 Peter says, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being always ready for a defense to everyone who asks of you an account concerning the hope in you, but with meekness and fear." This indicates that we all need to be able to speak forth God's truth. I hope that the time you spend in all these messages on 1 Peter will help you in this regard. I am not happy if the saints are merely excited over what they see and hear in the ministry. My desire is that the hands of all the saints would be filled with the solid things of the Word of God.

If you cannot remember all the details of what Peter says concerning God's governmental judgment, I hope that you will at least remember the basic points and also know where more detailed information is found. For example, you need to remember such verses as 1:17, 2:23, and 4:5. You may also want to refer believers whom you contact to the notes in the Recovery Version. You may say to them, "You claim that we are teaching heresy. I urge you to read for yourself what Witness Lee has taught. If you do this, you will realize that this man leads us to the truth in the Bible. Do you not want to know the Word of God? Let us open 1 Peter and consider some verses related to God's judgment. I ask you to be fair and discern who it is who is heretical and what is the truth of God according to His pure Word."

All of us need to personally carry out God's truth through our life, knowledge, and experience. Then God will have a way to accomplish His purpose. Otherwise, He will have to wait, perhaps for hundreds of years. The Lord's people have been veiled and drugged by traditional teachings for too long. I am burdened that the Lord may have a way and that all the saints would have a proper knowledge of God's truth according to the pure Word.

All the elders need to be clear concerning the condition of the churches with respect to the knowledge of the truth. The elders may need to reconsider their way of shepherding the saints and overseeing them. We need to find a way to get the truth into the saints so that everyone will be full of truth and full of experience of life according to the truth. For example, the saints should know the Gospel of Matthew. They should be able to open this Gospel to others and point out the truth to them. We should be able to do the same with the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Peter, the book of Revelation, and, in fact, all of the New Testament. We need to be able to help others have a clear definition of many aspects of God's truth. If we can do this, then we shall have a better way to go on.

I am concerned that many among us still have only a superficial grasp of the truth. I do not like to hear shouting

and the so-called release of the spirit that is lacking in content. It is good to shout praise to the Lord and to release our spirit, but this must be filled with content. If we are filled with the solid content of truth in knowledge, life, and experience, we shall have a firm foundation for our praise and release. We shall also be able to show others that we have a basis for the shouting of praises and the release of the spirit.

TAKING THE WORD OF GOD SERIOUSLY

Many of us have been addicted to traditional practices. When we read the Bible, study the Bible, or listen to a message, we may apply what we read or hear in a traditional and even a light way. We may not be serious regarding the Word. We may not regard every point found in the Word or released through a message as crucial. Regarding this matter, we need to be alert and sobered unto prayer. The elders especially need to pray concerning the church in which they are taking the lead. The elders should find out how much of the truth the saints have absorbed. If the elders examine the situation of the church in their locality, they may discover that there have been too many elements of tradition in the way we have taken in the past, and that our presentation has not been so practical.

I am burdened that all the saints would take the Word seriously. When we speak about the divine life, we must sense the seriousness of the matters of life. We need to realize that as believers, as those who love the Lord and seek Him, we must understand His Word, live His Word, practice His Word, and apply His Word first to ourselves and then to others. By the Lord's mercy, I have prepared all the notes in the Recovery Version and all the materials for the Life-study Messages in a very practical way. For this reason, if we read the notes in the Recovery Version or any portion of a Life-study Message, we shall find that it is full of food, full of nourishment. We need to take the Word into us as our nourishment, and we also need to learn how to apply it to ourselves and others.

I am concerned that certain of the saints have attended many trainings over the years, but have not received adequate nourishment from all the messages. Furthermore, they do not know how to present the truth of the Word of God to others. For instance, in these messages on 1 Peter you have heard something concerning God's governmental judgment. You may have a general idea regarding this, but you may not know how to use this truth or how to present it properly to others.

CONTACTING OTHERS IN A WISE WAY

Once we have a clear understanding of the governmental judgment of God, this does not mean that we should go out and speak concerning it to everyone we meet. If we do nothing except speak about God's governmental judgment, we shall offend others needlessly. It is important, therefore, that we learn how to contact people. We may realize that a certain person is not really clear about salvation. He may be a believer in name, but he may not have the knowledge or experience of God's salvation. Perhaps we shall meet another who is saved, but who does not have the assurance of salvation. This requires that, being skillful in handling the truth, we know how to help such persons to have the experience of salvation or the assurance of salvation. In like manner, we must know how to help others understand the truth concerning the indwelling Christ. You may contact a Christian who does not know that Christ is life to him or that the Spirit of life dwells in him. Therefore, you need to pray for that one and help him to realize something from the Word regarding Christ as life and the indwelling Spirit of life. You should also help him to get into the experience of this.

As you have fellowship with other believers, you may sense that the time is right to share with them that we should not only love the Lord but also serve Him. Furthermore, you may point out to them that we need to have a healthy fear of the Lord. The Apostle Paul not only loved the Lord but also feared Him. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul says that the Lord is loving. At the same time Paul

indicates in this chapter that we need to fear Him because one day we shall all stand before His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10). Furthermore, we know from 1 Corinthians 11 that even today the Lord is exercising disciplinary judgment over His children. On the one hand, we need to know this truth ourselves. On the other hand, we should know the right time and the right way to present this truth to others. If we speak concerning this at the proper time, others will be helped, and there will be a positive reaping from what we say. Otherwise, even though we speak about an important truth in the Bible, others will be offended. We need to speak the right word at the right season. Unless we speak the right word at the right time to the right person, what we say will be in vain. This, no doubt, requires training. We need to be trained to have the proper knowledge of the truth, to grow according to this knowledge, and to learn how to present the truth to others.

A TWOFOLD GOAL

My goal in giving these Life-study Messages is twofold. First, my desire is that through the messages the Word of God will get into the saints. Second, I expect that the messages, when put into print, will become seeds sown among God's people. No matter how much opposition there may be, I shall continue to sow this seed. On the one hand, this seed is a life supply; on the other hand, it is an inoculation. I believe that one day the seed we have sown will produce a harvest.

The future of the Lord's recovery is very promising. At present, in the United States there are at least seven thousand seeking saints in the Lord's recovery. Over the next ten years, many of our children will become members of the church. When some of them are in their twenties, they will be quite useful to the Lord. Brother Nee, for example, was raised up by the Lord when he was only nineteen. However, the future of the Lord's recovery depends upon our practice regarding the truth. If we treasure the Word and grasp every opportunity to get into it and to take it into us, eventually we shall be fully

equipped. We shall know the truth, we shall know life, and we shall know how to grow in the Lord. We shall have a full knowledge and an adequate experience of spiritual things. Then the Lord will have a way to break through and to gain what He has been seeking for centuries.

How can the Lord get what He is after today? According to the situation of the majority of Christians, the Lord has no way. Nearly everywhere the door is closed to Him. This is the reason the Lord must find a way to have a recovery. But my concern is that in the Lord's recovery there is still too much of the traditional practice among us. We need to abandon the traditional way and take up a new way to know the truth, experience it, and present it to others.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

THE ELDERS' SHEPHERDING AND ITS REWARD

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 5:1-4

In 5:1 Peter says, "Therefore, the elders among you I entreat, who am a fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory about to be revealed." The word "therefore" indicates that 5:1-11 is a concluding word to the preceding section (4:12-19) concerning suffering for Christ in nobly doing right. The exhortation is spread over the elders in the church in verses 1 through 4, the younger members in verse 5, and all in common in verses 6 through 11.

In 5:1-4 Peter speaks to the elders. Elders are the overseers of the church, who take the lead among the believers in spiritual things (Heb. 13:17). The apostle entreats them first, expecting that they will take the lead to nobly suffer for Christ.

Peter was the first of the initial Apostles (Matt. 10:1-4; Acts 1:13), and, at the same time, he was one of the elders in the church at Jerusalem, as was the Apostle John (2 John 1; 3 John 1; Acts 15:6; 21:17-18). Here, in exhorting the elders in the other churches, he does not use his apostleship, but his eldership, in order to speak with them on their level in an intimate way.

A WITNESS OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

In 5:1 Peter refers to himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Peter and the early apostles were witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8), not only as eyewitnesses testifying what they had seen of Christ's suffering (Acts 5:32; 10:39), but also as martyrs vindicating their testimony by suffering martyrdom for Him (Acts 22:20; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; 4:10-11; 11:23; 1 Cor. 15:31). This is to share the

sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13), to participate in the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

Peter also says in 5:1 that he is a partaker of the glory about to be revealed. Peter was first a witness, a martyr, a partaker of the sufferings of Christ. Then he was a partaker of His glory (Rom. 8:17). Christ Himself had gone the same way (1 Pet. 1:11; Luke 24:26).

In Greek witness and martyr are the same word. This indicates that we need to bear testimony as a witness even at the risk of being a martyr, of sacrificing our lives. This is what Peter did. On the day of Pentecost Peter gave a strong testimony, witnessing of the sufferings of Christ. He boldly told the Jews that they had crucified the Lord Jesus. Before the day of Pentecost, however, Peter was not bold. Rather, he was timid. The night the Lord Jesus was betrayed Peter denied that he was one of His followers. In the presence of the Lord, Peter denied the Lord. Actually, that was not Peter, a stone; it was Simon, a lump of clay. But on the day of Pentecost Peter had the boldness to rebuke the Jews for crucifying the Lord Jesus. After that, Peter began to suffer persecution. He was arrested and put into prison. He was willing to risk his life to be a witness for the Lord Jesus.

Peter, no doubt, remembered the Lord's word in Acts 1 about witnesses. When the disciples asked the Lord about the restoring of the kingdom to Israel, He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8). Peter was the first to become such a witness. He was a leading witness, a martyr, one who was willing to sacrifice his life to testify of the sufferings of Christ. Eventually, Peter himself was martyred. He sacrificed his life as part of his witness for Christ. This was the fulfillment of the Lord's word to him in John 21:18, a word concerning "by what kind of death he would glorify God" (John 21:19). When Peter wrote his first Epistle, he

was quite old. When he wrote his second Epistle, he knew that the time of his martyrdom was near: "Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is imminent, even as also our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me" (2 Pet. 1:14). When Peter wrote these Epistles, he was reminded of the words of the Lord's prophecy concerning him. In 5:1 we see that Peter had a threefold status. He was a fellow-elder, he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and he was a partaker of the glory about to be revealed.

Every elder needs to be a witness of the sufferings of Christ. This means that the elders should be ready to sacrifice their lives as part of their testimony. If a brother is not willing to risk his life, he is not qualified to be an elder. Every elder should be a martyr, one who sacrifices his life for Christ. Being a partaker of Christ's glory depends on being such a martyr. If the elders are willing to be martyred, if they are willing to risk their lives, then surely they will be partakers of the glory about to be revealed. But if the elders are not willing to sacrifice their lives, then instead of partaking of glory at the Lord's coming, they will probably be rebuked by Him.

As we have seen, in 4:19 Peter says, "Wherefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in welldoing to a faithful Creator." Here, "welldoing" refers to doing right, good, and noble deeds. Committing our souls to a faithful Creator is effective only if we are engaged in welldoing, that is, if we are doing noble deeds. Nothing is more noble than dying as a martyr for the Lord. Polycarp was an example of a noble martyr. One who had learned from the Apostle John, Polycarp was martyred when he was more than eighty years of age. Before he died, he was given an opportunity to save himself by denying the Lord. Polycarp refused, saying that he could not deny the One who had always been faithful to him. Surely Polycarp was not only bold and courageous--he was noble. At the cost of his life, he nobly confessed the Lord before his persecutors.

When we act in such a noble way, we have the ground to commit our souls to a faithful Creator. He is altogether

faithful. But are we faithful? Are we doing noble deeds? Do we care for His testimony in a noble way? When the Lord Jesus was being tried before His crucifixion, Peter was not at all noble. But later, in the book of Acts, Peter witnessed for Christ before his persecutors in a noble way. For example, Peter and John said to the persecutors, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Peter and the other apostles committed their souls in welldoing to a faithful Creator. Surely Peter was able to say, "Lord, You are faithful to me. Now I would be faithful to You. I would be faithful to You at the cost of my life." Certainly the Lord would honor such a noble commitment.

Because Peter was a noble witness, a noble martyr, he had the assurance that he would be a partaker of the coming glory. I would like to ask a question of the elders: Do you have the assurance that you also are partakers of the glory to be revealed? I question whether most of the elders have this assurance. Perhaps the elders can say that they are witnesses. However, whether an elder will be a partaker of the glory to come depends upon how noble and faithful he is as a witness. The point here is that an elder must be willing to sacrifice himself.

Not only the elders themselves, but the elders' wives also need to have the concept of sacrifice in relation to the eldership. It is not right for a wife to feel uplifted when her husband is put into the eldership. Actually it is shameful for a wife to feel that way. To be an elder is not a matter of gain; it is a matter of sacrifice. Any brother who would be a good elder must sacrifice himself. He will have to sacrifice his time and even his family life. Being an elder is not a matter of gaining position or receiving personal honor. The eldership requires sacrifice. Any elder who is not willing to sacrifice will not be a qualified elder. The elders should always have the willingness to sacrifice themselves. The elders will need to sacrifice not only their time and their energy, but even their lives. If the elders are willing to sacrifice in this way, then they will be witnesses

of the sufferings of Christ and partakers of the coming glory. First an elder must participate in Christ's suffering. Only then can he share in Christ's glory. I hope that all the elders will take this word.

I can testify that all the churches in the Lord's recovery have been raised up, established, and built up for the most part due to the faithfulness and sacrifice of the elders. I would say that the establishing and the building up of the churches is perhaps sixty or seventy percent due to the elders' labor and sacrifice, and thirty to forty percent due to the ministry. Seeing these percentages will help us to realize the importance of the eldership. Where there is a loyal, faithful, and sacrificing eldership, the church will be strong and established. The same ministry serves all the churches. However, some churches are strong and others are rather weak. Whether a church is strong or weak depends upon the loyalty, faithfulness, and sacrifice of the elders. We thank the Lord that in His recovery, for the most part, the elders are loyal, faithful, and willing to sacrifice.

SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK OF GOD

In 5:2 Peter says, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by way of compulsion, but willingly, according to God; not seeking gain by base means, but eagerly." To shepherd the flock of God requires suffering for the Body of Christ, as Christ suffered (Col. 1:24). This will be rewarded with the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

Literally, the Greek word rendered "flock" is little flock. This refers to the church of God (Acts 20:28), which is small in number (Luke 12:32) compared to the world. It is a little herb for the supply of life, not a big tree for birds to lodge in (Matt. 13:31-32), not a huge religion like Christendom.

According to this verse, elders are not rulers; they are shepherds. Sometimes a shepherd may have to rule the flock, but that is not the ruling of a king. It is a ruling of someone who cares for the flock. Shepherding is a proper

care exercised over the flock. The flock needs to be cared for, protected, and led in the right direction. They need to be brought to a place where they can eat and drink. This is shepherding.

In 5:2 Peter does not tell the elders to shepherd their own flock. He charges them to shepherd the flock of God. The flock is not the elders' possession, but God's possession. In a sense, the elders are employed by God to shepherd His flock.

The elders should not regard the church in which they are taking the lead as belonging to them. In the New Testament we are told that the church is of Christ, is of God, and is of the saints. The church is called the church of Christ, the church of God, and the church of the saints (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 14:33). But the church is not the church of the apostles or the church of the elders. The church definitely does not belong either to the apostles or to the elders. But because the church is composed of the saints, it is the church of the saints. Because the church has been redeemed by Christ, it is the church of Christ. Because the church has been regenerated by God, it is the church of God. However, it is possible for an apostle to think since a certain church has been raised up through his ministry, that that church belongs to him. Likewise, the elders may think, because they are taking the lead in the church, that the church is theirs. But Peter makes it clear that the elders are to shepherd the flock of God, not their own flock.

OVERSEEING, NOT RULING

The word "overseeing" in verse 2 means taking the oversight, looking diligently to be aware of the situation. Years ago I thought that the overseeing was to observe who is wrong and who is right, who is doing well and who is doing poorly. Later I came to realize that to oversee is mainly a matter of overseeing the need. For example, when a shepherd is overseeing the flock, he is not concerned with who is right and who is wrong. He is concerned with the need of the flock. His oversight is related to protecting the

flock, leading the flock, and feeding the flock. The shepherd exercises oversight in order to supply the flock with whatever is needed.

Both Peter and Paul use the word "oversee." But they do not use the word "rule" with respect to the elders. To oversee is to observe the situation, condition, and need. It is to take care of the church with all the saints. Parents do not watch over their children in order to find out their faults. Parents oversee their children in order to protect them and care for them. Because parents have a loving care for their children, they exercise oversight concerning the children's activities. This does not mean the parents rule the children; it means that the parents protect them and care for them by taking oversight concerning them.

The elders must realize that the Lord has not appointed them to be rulers exercising authority over others. Ruling over others is something ugly and base. The elders should never rule over anyone. In the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus said that He is the only Lord and Master and we all are brothers (Matt. 23:8, 10). This means that the elders, the leading ones, are also no more than brothers. More than a century ago, the so-called Brethren saw this truth, dropped all denominational names, and simply called themselves brothers. Actually, the title "Brethren" is a nickname given them by others. In the church we all are brothers, and no one should presume to rule over anyone.

In 5:2 Peter says that the elders should oversee not by way of compulsion, but willingly, according to God. The elders should be willing to take care of others, to look after them, to protect them. They should not be compelled to do this.

By the context we can see that to oversee does not mean to rule; it does not mean to be a king. In the natural life, everyone likes to rule over others. There is no need to compel someone, to force him, to be a ruler. The words "not by way of compulsion" indicate that to oversee is to care for the church, not to rule over it.

As Peter says, the elders should oversee "willingly, according to God." To oversee according to God means

according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory, not according to man's preference, interest, and purpose. The elders should not oversee according to their opinion, concept, or likes or dislikes. Instead, they should oversee according to God's choice, desire, intention, and preference. The elders must oversee the church altogether according to God's thought, feeling, will, and choice. They must oversee according to God's likes and dislikes.

Both Paul and Peter speak in their writings concerning elders. However, I would say that what Peter touches in 5:1-4 is even deeper than what Paul touches in 1 Timothy and Titus. Peter's word here is even more serious than what Paul says.

In 5:2 Peter warns the elders not to seek gain by base means, but to eagerly exercise oversight. This means that the elders should not take advantage of the eldership and use it as a means to gain money. They should eagerly take the oversight like parents who eagerly exercise care over their children.

NOT LORDING IT OVER THE ALLOTMENTS

In verse 3 Peter goes on to say, "Nor as lording it over the allotments, but becoming patterns of the flock." To lord it over others is to exercise lordship over those who are ruled (Matt. 20:25). Among the believers, besides Christ there should be no lord. All should be servants, even slaves (Matt. 20:26-27; 23:10-11). The elders in the church can only take the leadership (not the lordship), which all the believers should honor and follow (1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17).

In verse 3 Peter directly tells the elders not to lord it over the church. All the elders should be slaves of the saints. It is not adequate for the elders even to be servants; they must be slaves. This is something Peter learned from the Lord Himself. Peter heard the Lord Jesus say that those who desire to become great must be slaves. Elders should regard themselves as slaves, and the brothers and sisters as their masters.

Literally, the word "allotments" means lots, portions;

hence, allotments, portions entrusted. Here this word refers to the flock. The churches are God's possession, allotted to the elders as their allotments, their portions, entrusted to them by God for their care.

The church is God's flock and His possession. The elders have been appointed by God to be shepherds of the flock. Hence, God has allotted the church in their locality to them for their care. The church in a particular locality is God's possession; it is not the possession of the elders. But God has allotted that church to the elders so that they may care for it and shepherd it. Furthermore, the church is only allotted to the elders for their care temporarily. For eternity the church is God's possession. Even the elders themselves are a part of the church as the possession of God.

Instead of lording it over the allotments, the elders should become patterns of the flock. This means that they take the lead to serve and care for the church so that the believers may follow.

THE UNFADING CROWN OF GLORY

Verse 4 says, "And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." At the apostle's time, crowns were given to victors in athletic games and warfare (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8). Those were corruptible crowns, whose glory faded. The crown given by the Lord to the faithful elders will be a reward for their loyal service. The glory of this crown will never fade. It will be a portion of the glory for the overcomers' enjoyment in the manifestation of the kingdom of God and Christ (2 Pet. 1:11).

Peter's word to the elders is brief, but it is meaningful and very touching. I hope that all the elders will take adequate time to delve into these verses in order to touch the depths of the truth revealed here.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD AND ITS GOAL

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 5:5-9

In this message we shall begin to consider 5:5-11, a section concerned with the mighty hand of God and its goal. We shall proceed verse by verse through 5:5-9.

YOUNGER MEN SUBJECT TO ELDERS

Verse 5 says, "In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders, and all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Once again Peter uses the phrase "in like manner." In this verse "in like manner" must refer to what Peter has already spoken concerning submission or subjection (2:18; 3:1). Wives are to be subject to their husbands, and servants, to their masters. As we have pointed out, to some extent at least, husbands should subject themselves to their wives. Now in 5:5 Peter goes on to say that in the church life the younger men should be subject to elders.

Although the Greek word rendered "elders" in verse 5 is the same as that used in verse 1, here it should, in principle, refer to all older men. This means that the younger men should be subject not only to the elders of the church, but to all older brothers. I believe that the principle is the same concerning the younger sisters subjecting themselves to older sisters.

GIRDED WITH HUMILITY

In 5:5 Peter says that all of us should gird ourselves with humility toward one another. Everyone in the church,

including the elders, should gird himself with humility. In 1:13 Peter charges us to gird up the loins of our mind, but here he indicates that our entire being needs to be girded.

The Greek word for "gird" here is derived from a noun meaning a slave's apron, which girds up his loose garments in the service. It is used here as a figure of speech, signifying the putting on of humility as a virtue in service. This figure comes evidently from Peter's impression of how the Lord girded Himself with a towel when He humbled Himself to wash the disciples' feet. especially Peter's (John 13:4-7).

Today carpenters and printers often wear aprons while they are working. In ancient times the people wore clothing that was loose. Therefore, because this loose clothing made it difficult to work, the slaves wore an apron to bind up their loose clothing. Peter uses this as a metaphor to indicate that in the church life we all must learn how to gird up ourselves. We should not be loose in any way. If we are loose, we may automatically become proud. We need to gird ourselves with humility. If we are girded with humility, we shall become humble, careful persons. We shall not be loose or careless. In the church life we all should put on the apron of humility.

THE PROUD RESISTED BY GOD

According to Peter's word, we should be girded with humility "because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The Greek word translated "resist" is a strong word for an army preparing to resist the enemy. Peter uses this word to show how strong God is in resisting those who are proud.

The Greek word rendered "proud" in verse 5 literally means showing above (others). To be proud is to show ourselves above others. God resists the one who lifts himself above others and regards himself as better than others. Instead of being proud and showing ourselves above others, we should gird ourselves with the apron of

humility. Putting on such an apron will always bring us down and cause us to be lowly.

GRACE GIVEN TO THE HUMBLE

Peter says that God not only resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Strictly speaking, this grace refers to the Triune God Himself as the life supply being multiplied in the humble believer. We have seen that the multiplied grace (1:2) corresponds to the varied grace (4:10) and all grace (5:10). The believers have received the initial grace, yet this grace needs to be multiplied in them that they may participate in all grace. The varied grace of God, as the all grace in 5:10, is the rich supply of life, which is the Triune God ministered into us in many aspects (2 Cor. 13:14;12:9). God gives Himself as grace, as life supply, to humble believers.

The Greek word for "humble" in 5:5 also means lowly, as in Matthew 11:29, where the Lord Jesus says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." To be proud is to be high, but to be humble is to be low. If we would humble ourselves in the church life, we need to become lowly. Instead of uplifting ourselves, we should always keep ourselves low. Then we shall be in a position to receive the Triune God as our life supply. We shall receive the grace God gives to humble believers.

HUMBLED UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD

In verse 6 Peter says, "Therefore, be humbled under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." The words "be humbled" here are passive voice, indicating to be made humble by God, mostly through the sufferings of persecutions (v. 10). This, however, needs our cooperation with God's operation. We must be willing to be made humble, lowly, under the mighty hand of God. Hence, *be* humbled. We may say that "humbled" is passive; but "be" is active. While God is acting to operate on us, we need to take the initiative to be operated on by Him. To take the

initiative is active; to be operated on is passive. This is our willingness to be under the hand of God, which is mighty to do everything for us.

Persecution may be used by God to humble us. Actually, any kind of suffering may be used by God for this purpose. When good things happen to us, we may become proud. But suffering or persecution may help us to be humble. For example, a brother may be humbled as a result of losing his job. A student may be humbled by receiving a lower grade than he expected. If this student receives a high grade, he may be somewhat uplifted. But if he receives a lower grade, he may be humbled.

We may also experience being humbled in our family life. If the children of a certain brother and sister are outstanding, the parents may become proud. But if the children cause them problems or difficulty, this will make the parents lowly. Likewise, if a young brother's father has a very high position in his work, this brother may be proud. Suppose his father is the president of a corporation or the chancellor of a great university. Surely this brother would be proud of his father's position. But suppose his father were a janitor with a very limited education. Knowing that his father had such a lowly position may cause this young brother to be lowly. He is humbled by the fact that his father does not have a high position.

I would like to emphasize the fact that in verse 6 Peter tells us to "be humbled." We cannot make ourselves humble. Rather, we need to be made humble by God. Nevertheless, God's humbling of us requires our cooperation with God's operation. This means that we must be willing to be made humble, lowly, under the mighty hand of God.

We may say that "be humbled" is active-passive: "be" is active, pointing to our initiative to be humbled, and "humbled" is passive, pointing to God's operation to humble us. Although God's hand is mighty to do whatever is necessary for us, His hand still needs our cooperation. God's operation needs our cooperation. Therefore, we need to be humbled.

EXALTED IN DUE TIME

Peter says that if we are humbled under the mighty hand of God, He will exalt us in due time. To be submissive to God's mighty hand, willing to be made lowly, is to take the God-honoring way that gives Him the ground to exalt us in His time. Willing to be made low by God's humbling hand in His discipline is a prerequisite to being made high by God's exalting hand in His glorification. Here we have the God-honoring way, God's humbling hand, and God's exalting hand. Whether God will humble us or exalt us depends on our attitude. We may take a way that forces God to humble us, or we may take another way, the God-honoring way, that helps God to exalt us in due time. The words "due time" in verse 6 refer to the time God considers right to exalt us.

CASTING OUR ANXIETY ON GOD

In verse 7 Peter goes on to say, "Casting all your anxiety on Him, because it matters to Him concerning you." The word casting here means throwing upon, that is, committing to, giving up to. The verb denotes a once-for-all act. The words "all your anxiety" indicate that the whole lot of our anxiety throughout our entire life, our whole life with all its anxiety, should be cast on the Lord. We need to learn how to throw the burden of our anxiety upon God. It may now be on our own shoulder, but we should cast it from our shoulder to God.

Although the verb "casting" indicates a once-for-all act, because we are weak, we may need to cast our anxieties upon God again and again. Sometimes we cast our anxieties upon Him only to secretly take them back a while later. This has been my experience. I may cast my anxiety upon the Lord. But a few days later I may realize that I have taken this anxiety back upon myself, and therefore I need to pray, "O Lord, forgive me for taking this anxiety back from You. Once again, I would cast my anxieties upon You."

Sometimes I have said to the Lord, "Lord, I cast not only today's anxiety upon You, but all the anxieties I

expect to have in the future. Lord, I anticipate that much anxiety will be coming. All this coming anxiety I will now give to You."

The Greek word for "anxiety" also means worry or care. In persecution the believers' sufferings cause worry and anxiety to them. They need not only to be humbled, to be brought low from their pride, their haughtiness, but also to throw their life with its care upon God; for He is not only mighty and just, but also loving and faithful concerning them.

We may use the landing of airplanes at a busy airport as an illustration of the coming of anxiety upon us. If you watch the airplanes making their approach to land, you will see that they usually come in one after another. But sometimes they come in pairs or even in a parade. Anxiety may circle around us like an airplane circling an airport, waiting for the time to land.

Those who are involved with people will usually have more anxiety than those who live alone. For example, an unmarried brother will probably have much less anxiety than a married brother with several children. The married brother's concern for his wife and children causes him to become anxious. First his wife becomes a source of anxiety. Then as each child is born, he has another reason to be anxious. The causes of anxiety may increase as the children grow up, get married, and have children of their own? for then the grandchildren become a source of anxiety.

Likewise, the property or possessions we have may cause anxiety. If you are the owner of one house, you may he anxious concerning the care of that house. But if you own a second house, you will also be anxious about that house. The same is true about your bank deposits. The money you have in the bank may also become a source of anxiety. From experience I can testify that the more things I have, the more anxiety I have, the more the "airplanes" of anxiety circle above my head.

We all must learn to cast all our anxiety upon the Lord. If we do not cast our anxiety upon Him, we shall not have

peace. Perhaps little children under the age of four do not have any anxiety. But the older we are! the more anxiety we have. because more airplanes of anxiety are waiting to land at our "airport." What, then, shall we do? Although it is not easy, we need to cast our anxiety upon the Lord. If we find that we take back the very anxiety we have given the Lord, we need to cast it upon Him again.

The reason we may cast all our anxiety on the Lord is that "it matters to Him" concerning us. The words "it matters to Him concerning you" may also be rendered, "He cares for you." The disciplining and judging God has a loving concern for the believers, especially the persecuted ones. He cares for them faithfully. They can cast their care upon Him, especially in their persecution.

SOBER AND WATCHFUL

In verse 8 Peter continues, "Be sober; watch. Your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walks about, seeking someone to devour." To be sober is to have a clear mind of sobriety and self-control so that we may know, especially as disclosed in this chapter, God's purpose in disciplining us and His enemy's scheme to destroy us.

If we do not cast all our anxiety on the Lord, it will be difficult for us to be sober. Many saints become confused because of anxiety. If we hold on to our anxiety, our mind will not be sober. Instead of being sober, we may be under a thick cloud of confusion and have no sense of direction. If our mind is disturbed by anxiety, we cannot be sober. Our thinking will not be clear, but will be confused, mixed up. If our mind is in such a condition, it will be difficult for us to hear the Lord's speaking. Anxiety may also cause us to speak in a nonsensical manner. Therefore, if we would be sober, we must cast our anxiety on the Lord.

According to what Peter says in 5:8, we also need to watch. To watch is to be vigilant as in warfare, as soldiers on the frontier. Anxiety is a subtle enemy. Many times anxiety is Satan's incarnation. We need to be watchful and not allow anxiety to invade us. A country's defense requires watchfulness. Those in the defense department

are always watchful lest an enemy invade the country. This is also Peter's concept when he urges us to be sober and watchful.

Peter wrote verse 8 according to his experience. Peter may have been lacking in schooling, but he was rich in experience. When he was a young man, he was called by the Lord. After the Lord's resurrection, Peter learned much in the Spirit. Before the resurrection of Christ, Peter had heard and seen many things. However, he did not have the proper interpretation and understanding of those things. But after the Lord's resurrection, the Spirit came to be within Peter and upon him, and he began to understand what he had experienced during the three and a half years he was with the Lord. Peter, therefore, was a man full of experience. His writings are based not merely on doctrine, but also on experience. Because of his experience Peter could charge the saints to be sober and watchful.

As we have indicated, the word "watch" implies fighting. We are involved in a warfare, and we need to be vigilant. Do not let the enemy come in. Anxiety is a subtle enemy. Often the Devil is concealed within anxiety or lurks behind it. If you welcome anxiety, you will welcome Satan, the Devil. Therefore, you need to be watchful. The Lord Jesus also charged His disciples to watch and pray (Matt. 26:41). We need to watch, to be on the alert.

OUR ADVERSARY, THE DEVIL

The reason we need to be watchful is that our adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walks about, seeking someone to devour. Literally, the word "adversary" in Greek means an opponent (in a lawsuit). Here this word refers to Satan, who is our accuser (Rev. 12:9-10). The Greek word for Devil, *diabolos*, means accuser, slanderer. The Devil, who is Satan, accuses us before God and slanders us before men.

The Devil, the adversary, in verse 8 is related to the anxiety in verse 7. If we give way to anxiety, we shall also give way to the adversary, the Devil. We may even say that the anxiety in verse 7 is the adversary in verse 8.

An adversary is different from an enemy. An enemy is an opponent who is objective to us, outside of us. An adversary is a subjective opponent, an opponent within us. Satan is not only the enemy outside of us; he is also the adversary within us. Anxiety is a form of the Devil as our adversary. Whenever we are anxious or worried, we should say, "Satan, you are exposed. This anxiety is really you. Don't cover yourself with a cloak. I know who you are. This is not anxiety--this is you, the Devil. Satan, get away from me!"

According to the context, anxiety is actually the Devil. The Devil comes to us to attack under the cloak of anxiety. He pretends to be anxiety. Therefore, we need to be watchful, vigilant.

A ROARING LION SEEKING SOMEONE TO DEVOUR

In verse 8 Peter also says that the Devil is as a roaring lion walking about, seeking someone to devour. The word "roaring" indicates that this lion, the Devil, is howling in hunger. The words "walks about" indicate the Devil's constant and aggressive activity in seeking prey. There is a proverb which says that the Devil never sleeps. He is always busy and aggressive, seeking someone to devour.

Here Peter warns the suffering believers in persecution. If they would not be humbled under God's mighty hand and cast their anxiety on God, they will be devoured by the roaring lion, the Devil, their adversary. This teaches us that pride and anxiety make us delicious prey to fill the hunger of the roaring lion. In this respect Peter no doubt could not forget the Lord's warning to him regarding the Devil's desire (Luke 22:31).

Peter's writing in verse 8 is simple, short, and to the point. We all have something to learn of him especially in the giving of testimonies. Certain testimonies are long stories, filled with unnecessary details. Instead of long stories in the meetings, we need testimonies that are brief and to the point. Often this kind of testimony is most effective

STANDING FIRMLY IN THE FAITH

In verse ~ Peter says, "Whom withstand, firm in the faith. knowing that the same sufferings are being accomplished in your brotherhood in the world." To withstand here does not mean to resist nor to struggle against. It is to stand firmly as a rock on the ground of our faith before the roaring Devil. In this verse "the faith" actually means our faith. It refers to the believers' subjective faith their faith in God's protecting power and loving concern.

In verse 9 Peter says that the same sufferings are accomplished in our brotherhood in the world. According to the context of this chapter and the preceding one, these sufferings are sufferings in persecution. We have seen that the brotherhood is the aggregate of the brothers. the family of the brothers, the brothers in the feeling of brotherliness (2:17).

The anxiety spoken of in 5:7 is related to persecution. When saints are under persecution, they are anxious, not knowing what will happen to them. This anxiety, this worry, may cause them to doubt the gospel they have heard. This may have a negative effect on their faith. For this reason, Peter charges the believers to withstand the Devil by remaining firm in the faith, that is, firm in their faith. Instead of doubting what we believe, we need to be firm in our faith, knowing that the same sufferings of persecution are being accomplished in the brotherhood throughout the world.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST PETER

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD AND ITS GOAL

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 5:5-14

THE HAND OF GOD IN HIS JUDGMENT

In 5:6 Peter says, "Therefore, be humbled under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." Preachers and teachers often quote the phrase "the mighty hand of God" without regard to what it means in the book of 1 Peter as a whole. As a result, this verse concerning the mighty hand of God has been misused.

We have seen that the entire book of 1 Peter is on God's government, and that God's government is administrated through His judgment. God's judgment is carried out in the environment arranged according to His sovereignty. For example, in order to judge Noah's generation, God arranged a great catastrophe, the flood. Only God could have done such a thing. The flood that terminated the human race at the time of Noah was brought about by the mighty hand of God. In 5:6 the mighty hand of God refers to God's administrating hand seen especially in His judgment.

God's hand is more mighty in His judgment than in His salvation. Of course, in saving us, God's hand is mighty. But we see much more of the might of His hand in His judgment. Suppose a certain brother continues to enjoy worldly entertainment long after he has been saved. Although he has truly been saved, he still loves the world. But one day he has a car accident, an accident arranged by the mighty hand of God, and that accident causes him to seek the Lord in a deeper way than he ever did before.

This is an illustration of God's hand exercised in judgment.

THREE MATTERS RELATED TO GOD'S MIGHTY HAND

According to Peter's word in 5:6-8, we need to do three things that are related to our experience of the mighty hand of God. First, we should humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. Second, we should cast all our anxiety on Him. Third, we need to be sober and watch. Everything that happens to us is under God's mighty hand. There is no need for us to worry or be anxious. We should simply humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and not resist it. Then we should cast all the troubles that cause our anxiety upon the Lord. Along with this, we need to be sober and watchful. If we cast all our anxiety on God, we shall have a sober mind, and we shall be clear about our situation. Furthermore, we shall be watchful regarding our adversary, the Devil, who walks about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. If we are watchful, we shall not be deceived when Satan incarnates himself in the form of anxiety. On the contrary, the adversary, the roaring lion, will be defeated by us. This is the proper understanding of this portion of the Word.

THE GOD OF ALL GRACE

In 5:10 Peter goes on to say, "But the God of all grace, who called you into His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you." "But," indicating a contrast. brings in comfort and encouragement to the suffering believers. The contrast is between the sufferings in verse 9 and the God of all grace in verse 10. If we had verse 9 without verse 10, we would be lacking in hope and encouragement. However, in 5:10 Peter seems to be saying to the suffering believers, "You and your brotherhood are suffering your adversary's threatening, the Devil's lion-roar, only for a little while. But the God of all grace, of the

bountiful and gracious supply of life that exceeds all your need, will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you."

In this verse all grace refers to the riches of the bountiful supply of the divine life in many aspects ministered to us in many steps of the divine operation on and in us in God's economy. The initial step is to call us, and the consummate one is to glorify us, as mentioned here, "who called you into His eternal glory." Between these two steps are His loving care while He is disciplining us, and His perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and grounding work in us. In all these divine acts, the bountiful supply of the divine life is ministered to us as grace in varied experiences. The God of such grace will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground the persecuted believers after they suffer a little while.

The term "the God of all grace" is unique, found in the New Testament only in 5:10. It may be common for Christians to speak of the God of mercy. But do you know of anyone who uses the expression the God of all grace? Peter does not say merely that God is the God of grace; he says that God is the God of *all* grace. In this expression once again Peter shows his characteristic use of adjectives. The suffering believers should be encouraged by the fact that, although they are suffering, their God is the God of all grace. Furthermore, He has called us into eternal glory, a glory that is unlimited in both space and time.

CALLED INTO ETERNAL GLORY IN CHRIST

Peter says that God has called us into His eternal glory in Christ. "In Christ" indicates that the God of all grace has gone through all the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish the complete and full redemption so that He may bring His redeemed people into an organic union with Himself. Thus they may participate in the riches of the Triune God as their enjoyment. All the steps of the divine operation are in Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the bountiful life supply to us. It is in this Christ, through

His all-inclusive redemption and based on all His achievements, that God can be the God of all grace to call us into His eternal glory and to perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us in the Triune God (1:1-2) as the solid foundation, thus enabling us to attain unto His glorious goal. What a miracle that fallen sinners can be brought into God's eternal glory! And how excellent is His perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and grounding work in us! This is all accomplished through His "all grace" which is the "true grace" (5:12).

According to what Peter says in 5:10, our sufferings are only for a little while, but God's glory is eternal. After we have suffered a little while, the God of all grace will personally perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us.

The word "Himself" indicates God's personal activity in the work of grace. The Greek word rendered "perfect" literally means restore. It implies repairing, adjusting, putting in order again, mending, perfectly joining together, thoroughly equipping, well furnishing, and, thus, perfecting, completing, educating. In Greek the word "establish" literally means to set fast, to confirm. The same word was used by the Lord in His charge to Peter in Luke 22:32. The meaning of "strengthen" is very close to that of establish. Literally, the Greek word rendered "ground" means to lay a basis for. It is a derivation of the word that means foundation. Hence, it is to ground solidly, as in Matthew 7:25, Ephesians 3:17, and Hebrews 1:10.

There is a progress in the four divine acts of grace. Perfecting leads to establishing, establishing to strengthening, and strengthening to grounding in the God of all grace--the Triune God in His dispensation (1:1-2) as the solid foundation.

First God perfects us. Through the suffering of persecution we are perfected. Then after perfecting us, God establishes us. When we are established, we no longer wander, and we are no longer changeable. After God establishes us, He strengthens us, empowers us, and eventually, He grounds us in Himself as the Triune God.

In 5:11 Peter says. "To Him he the glory and the might

unto the ages of the ages. Amen." To the God of all grace, the One who perfects, establishes, strengthens, and grounds us, be glory and might.

In 5:12-14 we have the conclusion of this Epistle. In verse 12 we have the testimony of the true grace of God, and in verses 13 and 14 we have Peter's greetings.

THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD

First Peter 5:12 says, "Through Silvanus, the faithful brother, as I account him, I wrote to you briefly, entreating and fully testifying that this is the true grace of God; in which stand." Peter was an eyewitness (5:1), testifying what he had seen and experienced. He testifies that what he has written in his Epistle as an account of God's grace is true.

Peter wrote this Epistle to pilgrim believers in order to entreat them and testify to them of the grace of God. In 5:12 he indicates that what he has written positively concerning God's doings is the true grace. We have seen that Peter speaks of grace being multiplied, of varied grace, of all grace, and here, of true grace. Furthermore, regarding the excellent manner of life, Peter twice says that this is the true grace of God (2:19-20). In 5:12 Peter entreats the believers to stand in the true grace. We need to stand in the true grace of God and withstand the Devil.

The true grace in this verse refers to the "all grace" in verse 10, in which the apostle charged the believers to stand. This book was written mainly to show the persecuted believers God's governmental purpose in their sufferings. That they may pass through those sufferings, God will supply them with all the multiplied, varied, and true grace (5:10; 1:2; 4:10), which is sufficient to enable them to participate in the sufferings of Christ and for Christ (2:21; 3:14-17; 4:12-16), and will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground them in the Triune God and bring them into His eternal glory.

THE CO-CHOSEN IN BABYLON

In 5:13 Peter says. "The co-chosen in Babylon and Mark

my son greet you." The Greek word rendered "the co-chosen" and its article are feminine. It may refer to Peter's wife, who traveled with him (1 Cor. 9:5), or to a prominent sister in the Lord, who had been co-chosen by God not only with the receivers of this Epistle, but also with Peter and all the other believers. Some suppose that it refers to the church.

Through the centuries the great teachers have held two different interpretations of the name Babylon as used in 5:13: one is figurative, referring to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire; the other literal, referring to Babylon, a large city on the Euphrates. The reasons for the latter are more logical than for the former. First, it seems that Peter had no reason to use a figurative name to hide the city of his whereabouts. Second, all the names he used for the places in the address of his Epistle (1:1) were literal. Third, in the New Testament the name Rome is clearly mentioned (Acts 19:21; 28:14, 16; Rom. 1:7, 15), at least up to the time when Paul's last Epistle, 2 Timothy, was written (2 Tim. 1:17), probably after 1 Peter. It is when John's Revelation, a book of figures, was written, about A.D. 90, that the figurative name Babylon the Great was used for the city of Rome (Rev. 17:5; 18:2).

MARK, PETER'S SON

The name Mark in verse 13 refers to John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25), the writer of the Gospel of Mark. As Peter's spiritual son, he was there in Babylon with him. Later he was taken to Paul by Timothy (2 Tim. 4:11).

PETER'S GREETINGS

In 5:14 Peter concludes, "Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ." At the beginning of this Epistle Peter says, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied." At the end he says, "Peace to you all who are in Christ." Peace results from grace; it issues from the enjoyment of the Triune God. Such enjoyment of God as the multiplying and multiplied grace (1:2), the varied grace (4:10), the all grace (5:10), and the true grace (5:12)

as the reality of the contents of the Christian life under the government of God issues and results in a condition of peace with both God and man.

Peter's writing is not at all superficial. It is deep in truth and very experiential. We see this even in what Peter says regarding peace. Peter's understanding of peace is deep. However, most Christians today think of peace in a very shallow way.

According to 5:14, Peter's desire is that peace be with all who are in Christ. Peter stresses the fact that the believers are in Christ (3:16; 5:10). It is of God and through our faith and baptism that we are in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; John 3:5; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). This results in an organic union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19) and makes us one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17).