LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE ONE

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:1-4

The subject of 1 Peter is the Christian life under the government of God. The book of 2 Peter is a continuation of 1 Peter, and it also emphasizes God's government. However, in this Epistle we also see God's provision. Therefore, we may say that the subject of 2 Peter is the divine provision and the divine government.

With God's government there is God's provision. God grants us His provision so that we may cooperate with His government. In other words, if we would carry out God's government, we need God's provision; that is, we need the divine supply. In 2 Peter the writer first presents the divine supply. We see how God's power provides all the supply for our need. This is the main significance of this book. Furthermore, the Epistle of 2 Peter shows us a continuation of the picture of God's government unveiled in 1 Peter. Therefore, what we have in 2 Peter is the divine provision and the divine government.

SIMON PETER, A SLAVE AND AN APOSTLE

Second Peter 1:1 and 2 are the introduction to this Epistle. Verse 1 says, "Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Simon is Peter's old name, and Peter is his new name given by the Lord (John 1:41-42). Simon refers to his old man by birth; Peter, to his new man by regeneration. The two names are combined here as one to

signify that the old man, Simon, has now become the new man, Peter.

The name Simon Peter may be an allusion to the old universe and the new universe. This Epistle indicates that under God's government the old universe will be changed into the new universe (3:10-13). We may say that the new heaven and new earth are represented by Peter and that the old universe is represented by Simon. In the four Gospels we see Simon as the old man representing the old creation. Now in Peter's Epistles we see a new man, a new person, representing the new universe.

In 1:1 Peter refers to himself as "a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ." In the first Epistle he mentions only that he is an apostle; he does not say anything about being a slave. But here Peter says that he is both a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ. The word "slave" indicates Peter's submission to the Lord, and the word "apostle," the Lord's commission to him. Submission and commission imply a two-way traffic between us and the Lord. When we submit ourselves to Him, He will commit something to us. With a slave there is submission, but with an apostle there is the Lord's commission.

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN ALLOTTED LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH

The word "those" in 1:1 refers to the Jewish believers in dispersion in the Gentile world. In 1 Peter 1:1, Peter refers to them as "the chosen pilgrims of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."

In 2 Peter 1:1, Peter speaks of those "who have been allotted like precious faith." As the children of Israel were allotted a piece of the good land (Josh. 14:1-5), we have been allotted like precious faith. This implies that all the things which relate to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), including the divine nature (v. 4) partaken of by the believers through the like precious faith according to the precious and exceedingly great promises, are the real inheritance given to the believers by God in the New Testament.

The children of Israel with their twelve tribes were to possess the good land. The Lord told Joshua to make an allotment of land to each of the twelve tribes. This was done through the Urim and the Thummim, which were on the breastplate worn by the high priest. By means of the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim, God could speak to His people. God used the Urim and the Thummim to reveal His will. It was through the Urim and the Thummim that Joshua came to know God's instructions concerning which lot should go to each tribe. Once again, Peter uses an Old Testament term to describe a New Testament reality.

We know that the good land, the portion of the children of Israel in Old Testament times, typifies the all-inclusive Christ. Now, according to the New Testament, our portion is Christ. Colossians 1:12 refers to Christ as our portion: "Giving thanks to the Father, who qualified you for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." As the good land was the portion of the Old Testament saints, so Christ is the portion of the New Testament believers. Furthermore, in the Old Testament the good land was allotted to the twelve tribes, and in the New Testament precious faith is allotted to us.

The phrase "allotted like precious faith" causes a difficult problem for translation and exposition. How can faith be our allotted portion? According to the Bible, Christ is our portion. This means that it is Christ who has been allotted to us. But here Peter says that we have been allotted like precious faith. How are we to understand this? To speak of Christ being our portion may be somewhat doctrinal. It is more experiential to say that faith is our portion. If Christ is merely Christ to us and not also faith, we would not be able to participate in Him or share in Him. In order for us to partake of Christ, He must become our faith.

In 1:1 Peter speaks of the allotment of "like" precious faith. The Greek word rendered "like" literally means of equal value or honor; hence, equally precious. It does not mean equal in measure, but equal in value and honor to all

the receivers. All the portions of the precious faith are equal not in measure, quantity, but equal in quality. For example, the portion of the good land allotted to each of the twelve tribes differed in size. Judah received a larger portion than Benjamin did. But although the allotments were different in size, they were equal in quality. The quality of the land was the same for each tribe. For this reason, each allotment was equally precious. The principle is the same with the like precious faith.

We have seen that our portion today includes all things which relate to life and godliness. This includes the divine nature, of which the believers partake through the like precious faith according to the precious and exceedingly great promises. All these elements put together make up our portion. Please remember that our allotment comprises all things relating to life and godliness, including the divine nature partaken of by us. All this is the inheritance given by God to those who believe in Christ.

What is our real inheritance? Our inheritance is all things relating to life inwardly and godliness outwardly. Our portion includes the divine nature, of which we partake through the common faith, which is equally precious. When we put together these different items--faith, divine nature, precious and exceedingly great promises, life, and godliness--we have the totality of our allotted inheritance.

Peter also says that the believers have been allotted like precious faith "with us." The pronoun "us" refers to the Apostle Peter and all the other believers in the Jewish land. All the believers in the Gentile world share the same precious faith to substantiate the blessing of life of the New Testament with all those in the Jewish land as their common portion allotted to them by God.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF OUR GOD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST

Verse 1 ends with the phrase "in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." The preposition "in"

here may mean in the sphere of or by means of. We have been allotted like precious faith in the sphere of or by means of the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our God and Savior are both Jesus Christ. This indicates Jesus Christ is God to be our Savior. He is the very God whom we worship becoming our Savior to save us. At Peter's time this designated and separated the believers in Christ from the Jews, who did not believe that Jesus Christ was God, and from the Romans, who believed that Caesar, not Jesus Christ, was their God.

The righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, is an important matter that requires a proper understanding. Notice that here Peter speaks of the righteousness not only of our God, but also of our Savior. From what Paul says in Romans we can see that the righteousness of God is one thing and that the righteousness of Christ is another. But here Peter combines these two kinds of righteousness when he speaks of the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Is this the righteousness of God, or is it the righteousness of Christ? Of course, most of us would say that it is both the righteousness of God and of Christ. But how can the righteousness of Christ become the righteousness of God?

The Greek word for righteousness in 1:1 may also be rendered justice. Our God is righteous, just. In His justice, He has allotted the precious faith as a divine portion equally to all believers in Christ, both Jew and Gentile without respect of persons. And now He is not only our God but also our Savior. Thus, His righteousness now is not the righteousness merely of God, nor merely of Christ but the righteousness of both our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. As our Savior, His righteousness is His righteous act, His death on the cross in absolute obedience (Phil. 2:8), accomplishing propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), enabling us to be justified by God (Rom. 5:18). As our God, His righteousness is His justice in that, based upon the righteous act, the redemption of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24-25) justifies all the believers in Christ (Rom. 3:26) both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:30). In and by

means of such a twofold righteousness, the righteousness of both our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, the precious faith, the precious substantiation of the New Testament blessing, has been allotted equally to all believers among all nations.

Let us consider this matter very carefully. Because of the incarnation, God is not merely our God; He is also our Savior. This is the reason Peter speaks of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, His righteousness is not only the righteousness of God or the righteousness of Christ; it is the righteousness of both our God and our Savior. As our Savior, Christ's righteousness consists in His righteous act. Romans 5:18 says, "So then, as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men." This righteous act was Christ's death on the cross in absolute obedience to God. Through His crucifixion, Christ accomplished propitiation for the sins of the whole world and made it possible for us to be justified by God. Now God in His righteousness justifies all believers in Christ. The righteous act of Christ is the basis upon which God now justifies us. Therefore, the righteousness of Christ as our Savior is His death on the cross for the accomplishment of our redemption. As God, His righteousness consists of His justifying all believers based upon Christ's redeeming death.

By this we see that in 1:1 two kinds of righteousness--the righteousness of God and the righteousness of Christ--are put together. The righteousness of Christ accomplished redemption. Now God in His righteousness justifies us. It is in the sphere of this twofold righteousness and by means of this twofold righteousness that the precious faith has been allotted equally to all believers.

Peter's word concerning the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, is rich in what it indicates and implies. The common thought among the Jews at Peter's time was that God gave them certain blessings for their enjoyment. Those blessings were given according to their own righteousness. The Jews thought that if they lived

and acted righteously, they would have their own righteousness before God. That was the righteousness according to the law. Hence, it is called the righteousness of the law. This means that our own righteousness is the righteousness of the law. Paul refers to this in Romans 10:3: "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, did not submit to the righteousness of God." In Philippians 3:9 Paul declared that his desire was to be found in Christ, "not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God based on faith." It is not according to this kind of righteousness, the righteousness of the law, that God has allotted us our New Testament portion. The New Testament portion is allotted to us by God in and by the kind of righteousness that is both the righteousness of God and the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of God is versus our own righteousness, and the righteousness of Christ is versus the righteousness of the law.

We have spoken concerning four kinds of righteousness: our righteousness, God's righteousness, the righteousness of the law, and the righteousness of Christ. We have received the allotment of like precious faith not by our righteousness or the righteousness of the law, but by the righteousness of God and the righteousness of Christ. This twofold righteousness is the means in which and by which God has allotted to us our New Testament portion. We need to be clear that the portion, the allotment, is one thing and that this twofold righteousness is another thing. The portion is the inheritance God has allotted us, and the righteousness is the means or instrument by which the inheritance has been allotted.

We have seen that the New Testament inheritance is all things relating to life and godliness, including the divine nature. This inheritance also involves faith and the precious and exceedingly great promises. When all these items are added together, we have the New Testament inheritance. By what means has God given us this portion? In what sphere has He allotted it to us? We must

be impressed with the fact that it is by means of and in the sphere of a twofold righteousness, the righteousness of God and of our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is not allotted by the righteousness of man, which is also the righteousness of the law. It is by the righteousness of God, which is the righteousness of Christ.

Peter's word regarding the righteousness of our God and Savior indicates that the dispensation has changed. In the Old Testament the basis upon which people were blessed was their righteousness according to the law. This means that they were blessed according to man's righteousness, which is also the righteousness of the law. But now, in the New Testament, God gives us a wonderful portion not because of our own righteousness according to the law, but because of His righteousness according to Christ's redemption. Here Peter seems to be saying, "Jewish brothers, you must know that the dispensation has changed. Don't go back to the law. God has allotted our New Testament inheritance to us not according to the righteousness we may have by keeping the law, but according to His own righteousness fulfilled by the death of Christ. Christ's righteousness fulfills God's righteousness. It is by this kind of righteousness that God gives the New Testament blessing. Therefore, the age has changed. Don't go back to the law or to Moses--come to Christ. What we have is not our righteousness according to the Mosaic law. It is God's righteousness fulfilled by the righteous act of Christ on the cross. It is in this righteousness and by this righteousness that God has allotted us equally our New Testament inheritance." I hope that we all shall have a clear understanding concerning this twofold righteousness.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE TWO

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:1-4

In the previous message we began to consider 1:1-4. We paid particular attention to the words "allotted" and "righteousness" in 1:1. Let us now go on to consider the meaning of faith in this verse.

FAITH--THE SUBSTANTIATION OF THE SUBSTANCE OF THE TRUTH

Faith is the substantiation of the substance of the truth (Heb. 11:1), which is the reality of the contents of God's New Testament economy. The contents of God's New Testament economy are composed of the "all things which relate to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3), that is, the Triune God dispensing Himself into us as life within and godliness without. The like precious faith, allotted to us by God through the word of God's New Testament economy and the Spirit, responds to the reality of such contents and ushers us into the reality, making its substance the very element of our Christian life and experience. Such a faith is allotted to all the believers in Christ as their portion, which is equally precious to all who have received it. As such a portion from God, this faith is objective to us in the divine truth. But it brings all the contents of its substantiation into us, thus making them all with itself (faith) subjective to us in our experience. It can be compared to the scenery (truth) and the seeing (faith) that are objective to the camera (us). But when the light (the Spirit) brings the scenery to the film (our spirit) within the camera, both the seeing and the scenery become subjective to it.

We have pointed out that faith is the substantiation of the substance of the truth. Let us take as an illustration the substantiating of the existence of a wooden table by a blind man through his sense of touch. Although the wooden table is substantial, the blind man cannot see it. But by touching the table with his hand, he substantiates that table to himself. In this way the wooden table becomes real to him. Therefore, his touching is the substantiating, and this substantiating makes the substance of the table real to him. This may be used as an illustration of faith being the substantiation of the substance of the truth.

In God's New Testament inheritance there are many riches, many blessings. However, our natural mentality is blind to all these riches and blessings. Therefore, God would say, "Exercise your faith. Let your faith substantiate the substance of all of My New Testament blessings." The reality or substance of God's New Testament blessings is the truth. Faith is actually the substantiation of the reality of the substance of the truth, and the truth itself is the content of God's New Testament economy.

Many of us are familiar with the term "God's economy." The Greek word for economy, *oikonomia*, means household management, arrangement, hence, dispensation, plan. God's economy, God's plan, is to dispense Himself into us. Therefore, God's New Testament economy is simply for God's dispensing. This economy has a content, this content has a reality, and this reality is the truth revealed in the Bible. The Bible is not merely a book of doctrine; it is a revelation of the truth, which is the reality of the content of God's dispensation. This reality has a substance. Only faith can substantiate this substance. Hence, we see once again that faith is the substantiation of the substance of the reality of the New Testament dispensation.

The content of God's New Testament economy is composed of the "all things which relate to life and godliness" (1:3). We have seen that this is actually the Triune God dispensing Himself into us as our life within

and godliness without. In the Life-study of 1 Timothy we pointed out that the faith is the content of the complete gospel according to God's New Testament economy. Hence, the faith is objective, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:19; 2:7, 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21; 2 Timothy 2:18; 3:8; 4:7; and Titus 1:13. The truth is the reality of the content of the faith, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:15, 18, 25; 3:7, 8; 4:4; Titus 1:1 and 14. Godliness is a living that is the expression of God, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:2, 10; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 5:4; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:5, 12; Titus 1:1; and 2:12. The faith equals the content of God's economy, of His dispensation. The truth is the content, the reality, of the faith according to God's economy. Eternal life is the means and power to carry out the divine realities of the faith, and godliness is a living that expresses the divine reality, an expression of God in all His riches. Subjective faith is the response to the truth of the objective faith; it receives and participates in the divine realities.

The like precious faith, allotted to us by God through the word of God's New Testament economy and the Spirit, responds to the reality of such a content and ushers us into this reality. It makes the substance of God's economy the element of our Christian life and experience. Such a faith is allotted to all the believers in Christ as their portion. This faith is objective to us in the divine truth, but it brings all the content of its substantiation into us. The substantiating is the faith, and this faith brings into us whatever it substantiates. In this way, faith causes everything substantiated by it to become subjective to us in our experience.

We may use a camera as an illustration. Suppose you want to photograph a particular scene. The scene corresponds to the truth, and our experience of seeing this scene corresponds to faith. Both the scene and the seeing are objective to the camera, for neither has come into the camera. But light makes it possible for the scene to be impressed on the film. The light corresponds to the Spirit, and the film corresponds to our spirit. In this way both the

scene and the seeing enter into the camera and become subjective to it. The camera "clicks," the light gets in, and the scene is brought into the camera and impressed on the film. We are the "camera," and our spirit is the film. Now the scene and the seeing are subjective to us. This is faith.

Faith implies all the items in the "scenery" of the New Testament inheritance according to the New Testament economy. In the New Testament we see a complete picture of this scenery. But this scenery is outside of us. How can it get into us? It comes in through our seeing and through the Spirit's work. This was our experience when we were saved and regenerated. We heard the preaching of the gospel, there was a "click" of the shutter of the "camera," and the light came into us. As a result, the divine scenery was impressed on our spirit.

Sometimes we preach the gospel to others, and they do not experience this "click." As we are preaching, some may say to themselves, "I don't agree with what you are saying." Others may tell us, "I don't care about this." Still others may respond, "This person is crazy. What is he talking about?" There is no positive response. But eventually, by the Lord's mercy, the divine light with the divine scenery may enter into certain ones. The scenery is then impressed on the film and can never be erased. Even if we try to change our minds, we cannot remove the scene that has been impressed on the "film" of our spirit.

Many of us can testify that we came to believe in the Lord for no apparent reason. We heard the preaching of the gospel, and there was a "click" within us. Spontaneously we believed in the Lord. Formerly, we may have argued about God and Christ. We may have said, "Is there really a God? Perhaps there is a God, but how can Jesus of Nazareth be God in the flesh? I don't believe that the man Jesus is God." Nevertheless, when we experienced a "click," we automatically began to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Then we could confess, "I don't know why, but now I believe that Jesus is God. Hallelujah, Jesus Christ is my God! Praise the Lord!"

Many of us can testify that we have had this kind of

experience. At a certain time there was a "click" within us. At that very moment, God's allotment of like precious faith came into us. From that time onward, we have had faith in the Lord.

I experienced this "click" of faith when I was saved and regenerated. Although I was born into Christianity I did not experience salvation until I was nineteen. One afternoon, out of curiosity, I went to hear a young woman preach the gospel. While she was speaking, I experienced "click" after "click." That day I was strongly and thoroughly saved.

We all have had the experience of the divine scenery being impressed on the film of our spirit through the click of the camera. The degree may differ, but the essence is the same. We all have had that little "click," and now we all have the like precious faith.

This faith is the real portion of God's allotment. It is the reality of the New Testament economy allotted to us in and by the righteousness of God, which is also the righteousness of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This twofold righteousness--the righteousness of God and of Christ--is the sphere in which and the means by which the New Testament portion has been allotted to us.

THE MULTIPLICATION OF GRACE AND PEACE

In verse 2 Peter goes on to say, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." The first part of this verse may also be rendered, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you." Grace and peace came to us through the God-allotted faith, which substantiates the life-blessing of the New Testament. This faith was infused into us through the word of God, which conveys to us the real knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In the sphere of, by means of, the full knowledge, the increasing and increased knowledge, of God and of Jesus our Lord, the grace and peace which we have received will be multiplied.

The full knowledge of the Triune God is for our

participation and enjoyment in His divine life and divine nature. It is in contrast to the killing knowledge of the human logic of philosophy, which invaded the church in its apostasy.

THE DIVINE POWER GRANTING US ALL THINGS RELATING TO LIFE AND GODLINESS

In 1:3 Peter says, "As His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us to His own glory and virtue." Chapter two shows that this Epistle, like 2 Timothy, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude, was written in the time of the church's degradation and apostasy. Hence, apostasy was the background of this book. The burden of the writer was to inoculate the believers against the poison of apostasy. God's salvation is to impart Himself in His Trinity into the believers to be their life and life supply. This is God's economy, God's dispensation. The apostasy distracted the believers from the economy of God by leading them into the human logic of puzzling philosophies. It was not the exercise of partaking of the tree of life that gives life, but of participating in the tree of knowledge that brings in death (Gen. 2:9, 16-17). Thus the serpent deceived and seduced Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). In order to inoculate against this death-poison in his healing Epistle, Peter first prescribed the divine power as the strongest and most effective antidote. This provides the believers with all things related to the generating and supplying divine life (not the killing knowledge) and the God-expressing godliness (not the show of human wisdom). This rich divine provision, which is covered in detail in the following verses (1:3-11), is more than sufficient for the believers to live a proper Christian life and overcome the satanic apostasy.

In 1:3 the word "divine" denotes the eternal, unlimited, and almighty divinity of God. Hence, divine power is the power of the divine life related to the divine nature.

Here the word "granted" means imparted, infused, planted. All things which relate to life and godliness have been imparted to us, infused into us, by the all-inclusive

life-giving Spirit, who has regenerated us and who indwells us (2 Cor. 3:6, 17; John 3:6; Rom. 8:11).

All things relating to life and godliness are the various aspects of the divine life, typified by the riches of the produce of the good land in the Old Testament. These are the substance of our faith's substantiation allotted to us by God as our portion for our inheritance. Life is within for us to live, and godliness is without as the outward expression of the inward life. Life is the inward energy, inward strength, to bring forth the outward godliness, which leads to glory and results in glory.

The little word "as" at the beginning of verse 3 is significant. It indicates that grace and peace will be multiplied to us in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord as, or according to, the impartation of all things relating to life and godliness through the divine power. Grace and peace are multiplied to us according to what the divine power imparts to us. Without the imparting through the divine power there would be no way for grace and peace to be multiplied to us.

The word "through" in verse 3 indicates that the impartation into us of all the things of life is through the full knowledge of God, which is conveyed and revealed to us through His word. This becomes the faith (objective) in which our faith (subjective) is produced.

GLORY AND VIRTUE

In 1:3 the pronoun "Him" refers to God who is our Savior and our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 1-2). He has called us to His glory and virtue by His glory and virtue. His disciples saw His glory and virtue (v. 16; John 1:14) and were attracted by them. Then through this glory and virtue they were called by Him to this very glory and virtue. It is the same with all believers in Christ.

Glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor. Literally, the Greek word rendered "virtue" means excellency. Virtue denotes the energy of life to overcome all obstacles and to carry out all excellent

attributes. Glory is the divine goal; virtue is the energy and strength of life to reach the goal. This virtue with all things relating to life has been given to us by the divine power, but it needs to be developed on the way to glory.

In 1:4 Peter continues, "Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises, that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust." The Greek word translated "through" here is *dia.* It also means on account of, on the basis of, because of, and here is used in the instrumental sense becoming causal.

The relative pronoun "which" in this verse refers to glory and virtue in verse 3. Through and on the basis of, on account of, because of, the Lord's glory and virtue, by and to which we have been called, He has given us His precious and exceedingly great promises, such as in Matthew 28:20; John 6:57; 7:38-39; 10:28-29; 14:19-20, 23; 15:5; and 16:13-15. God has called us to His glory and virtue. Because of this glory and virtue, God has given us promises. All these promises are being carried out in His believers by His life-power, as the excellent virtue, unto His glory.

We have emphasized the fact that God has called us to His glory and virtue. But this calling is something that needs to be worked out. Although we have been called into God's glory and virtue, are we actually in this glory, and are we participating in this virtue? The correct answer is that sometimes we are in the glory and sometimes we participate in this virtue. Therefore, how can God's calling of us to His glory and virtue be worked out? It is worked out through His promises.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Through the precious and exceedingly great promises, we, the believers in Christ, who is our God and Savior, have become partakers of His divine nature in an organic union with Him. We have entered this union through faith and baptism (John 3:15; Gal. 3:27; Matt. 28:19). The virtue (energy of life) of this divine nature carries us into His

glory (godliness becoming the full expression of the Triune God).

Based upon the glory and virtue to which we have been called by God, God gives us promises. Furthermore, through this process, this procedure, God has given us promises. He promises us that He will be responsible to work out this glory and virtue. As we have seen, glory as the expression is the goal, and virtue is the energy of life. Virtue is the excellent attributes of God becoming to us the energy of life. This means that we have the energy and strength to reach glory. By God's promises we have the energy to express His glory. One of these promises is found in 2 Corinthians 12:9, where the Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you." How great and how precious is this promise! Surely this promise is able to work out glory and virtue.

Through these promises we may become partakers of the divine nature. We receive the divine life simply by believing. There was a "click," and the divine life came into us. The nature is the substance of the life. Although we received the life at the time we believed, the nature must be continually enjoyed by us. This enjoyment requires the grace of God. The more we enjoy the divine nature, the more we have His virtue, and the more we are brought into His glory.

To partake of the divine nature is to enjoy what God is. In order that we may enjoy all that He is, God will do many things for us according to His promises. This will enable us to enjoy His nature, what He is. We have seen that one of His promises is that His grace is sufficient for us. God's sufficient grace will work within us day by day so that we may enjoy the divine nature.

Toward the end of verse 4 Peter speaks of "having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust." In his first Epistle Peter told the believers that Christ had redeemed them from their vain manner of life (1 Pet. 1:18-19), so that they should abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Pet. 2:11) and no longer live in the flesh in the lusts of men (l Pet. 4:2). Now in his second Epistle he unveils to them

the energy, the strength, by which they are enabled to escape the corruption in lust and the result of this escape. The energy is the virtue of the divine life, and the result is the partaking of the divine nature, the enjoying of all the riches of what the Triune God is. In partaking of the divine nature and in the enjoyment of all that God is, all the riches of the divine nature will be fully developed, as described in 1:5-7. Having escaped the corruption of lust in the world, the barriers to the growth of the divine life in us, we are freed to become partakers of the divine nature, enjoying its riches in its development to the fullest extent by the virtue of God unto His glory.

The divine nature refers to the riches of what God is. Whatever God is, is in His nature. Therefore, when we partake of the divine nature, we partake of the divine riches. Having received the divine life at the time of our regeneration, we must go on to enjoy what God is.

The riches of what God is are the content of the living hope mentioned in 1 Peter 1:3. According to His great mercy, God the Father has regenerated us unto a living hope. This living hope is actually a hope of life. Having this hope of life, we expect to enjoy daily the riches of the divine life. Actually, to enjoy the divine life is simply to partake of the divine nature. Therefore, partaking of the divine nature is related to our living hope of enjoying all the riches of the divine life.

When we were regenerated, we were enlivened by God, or we may say that we were "lifed" by Him. The divine life came into the center of our being. From that time onward, we have had a living hope, a hope of life. Our hope is that every part of our being will be enlivened. Regeneration, therefore, has brought in a living hope. Regeneration is unto the enjoyment of the riches of the divine life, and the riches of this life are the divine nature. Hence, to partake of the divine nature is to enjoy the riches of God.

This enjoyment is both for the present and for eternity. For eternity we shall continue to partake of the divine nature. This is illustrated by the tree of life and the river of water of life in Revelation 22:1 and 2. Out from the throne

of God and the Lamb, the river of life flows. This signifies God flowing out to be the enjoyment of His redeemed ones. That flowing river will saturate the entire city of New Jerusalem. Furthermore, the tree of life that grows along the river will supply the redeemed ones with God as their life-supply. This is a picture of what it means to partake of the divine nature.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE THREE

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:1-4

Second Peter 1:1 indicates that we all have been "allotted like precious faith." We have seen that faith is the substantiation of the substance of the truth (Heb. 11:1), which is the reality of the contents of God's New Testament economy. God's economy is a matter of the Triune God dispensing all that He is into us. When we preach to others concerning the dispensing of the riches of the Triune God according to the New Testament, the Spirit will work in the hearts of the listeners, and there will be a certain kind of response. This response is produced through the hearing of the truth conveyed by our preaching. This response can be compared to the click made by the shutter of a camera in taking a photograph. As a result of this response, this click, faith is produced. Then faith substantiates the substance of the reality of the contents of God's New Testament economy.

We need to have a clear understanding of what faith is. It should become easy for us to say that faith is the substantiation of the substance of God's economy, and God's economy is to dispense Himself into our being as our life and life supply. We need to know this, experience it, enjoy it, and practice it continually.

FAITH, OUR PORTION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT INHERITANCE

Such a faith has been allotted by God to all believers in Christ as their portion. Faith has become our portion of the New Testament inheritance. In 1:1 why is it that Peter

does not say that God has allotted us a portion of the inheritance, but instead says that God has allotted faith to us? How can faith be allotted as a portion of the inheritance? In order to answer these questions we need to see that faith is not merely a means; it is also a portion. A means is an instrument through which we obtain something, but the portion is the very thing we obtain. In 1:1 faith is not a means; rather, it is the very thing, the object, we receive. Therefore, in this verse faith equals the inheritance. Faith is an allotted portion of the New Testament inheritance. Yes, according to the New Testament, faith in a certain sense is a means. In particular, faith is the means by which we receive salvation and eternal life. But in 1:1 Peter does not consider faith as a means. He considers faith an allotment, a portion of the New Testament inheritance allotted to us by God.

We still need to see how faith in 1:1 is equal to the New Testament inheritance. Our portion is Christ, and Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God. Therefore, our portion is Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God. This Christ is revealed in the New Testament, and He is conveyed to us through the New Testament. The entire New Testament is a container of the Christ who embodies the Triune God. Eventually, this container also conveys Christ to us. By what way is Christ conveyed to us through the Word? Christ is conveyed mainly by the way of the preaching or teaching of the Word. The preaching and the teaching of the apostles always conveyed Christ to others. This means that Christ came to the listeners through what was preached and taught by the apostles.

The Triune God is embodied in Christ, and Christ is contained in the New Testament. Then this Christ is conveyed to us through the preaching and teaching of the Word. The New Testament contains Christ, and those who preach the New Testament bring this container to us. Through this means this container conveys Christ to us. Faith, then, comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the Word. The function of the Word is to convey Christ to us. Therefore, Christ comes to us through the preaching

and teaching of the word of the New Testament.

Our all-inclusive Christ is not only the Word, but He is also the life-giving Spirit. While Christ is preached to us through the Word and conveyed to us by the Word, He simultaneously cooperates with the preachers of the Word to work as the Spirit. This means that as He is being conveyed into those who listen to the preaching of the Word, He works within them as the Spirit. Then He "clicks" within them, and faith is produced in them. The issue of the faith produced within us is that whatever Christ is according to the word of the New Testament is imparted to us. As a result, we have the reality of Christ.

Faith and Christ are one. The faith which is the response to the content of the Word is actually Christ. This means that the response is one with that to which it is responding. In other words, faith (our response) and Christ are one. When in our experience our response and the Christ conveyed to us through the preaching of the Word become one, faith is produced within us.

It is very difficult to define what this faith is. It is hard to analyze it or explain how much of it is Christ and how much is our own believing. Actually, our faith and the Christ who is the object of our faith are one. This is the portion of the New Testament inheritance God has allotted to us.

ALL THINGS RELATED TO LIFE AND GODLINESS

This allotment contains all things related to life and godliness, including the divine nature and the precious and exceedingly great promises. But how can these promises be counted among the content of the allotment? Let us use the illustration of a will in answering this question. Suppose your father's will says that you have a certain inheritance. Your inheritance is what is written in your father's will. The will not only tells you about certain things; it tells you that these things are your portion. Furthermore, this will is a fulfilled promise. Therefore, the will, a fulfilled promise, includes all the items of your inheritance. In this sense, the will, the promise and the inheritance are all one. In like manner, concerning the

things related to life and godliness, including the divine nature, the promises actually are the will. The New Testament is a testament, not merely a covenant. In today's terms, it is a new will. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are a will telling us of the items of our rich inheritance. Hence, the will and the inheritance are one.

An inheritance without a will would be lacking something very important. If we did not have the New Testament, which is a new will, how would we know what God has promised us concerning our inheritance? The allotted faith, our portion, includes all things related to life and godliness. As we have seen, it also includes the divine nature and the promises. All this is included in the allotted faith, in the portion God has allotted to us.

THE GIVING OF PRECIOUS AND EXCEEDINGLY GREAT PROMISES

Second Peter 1:4 says, "Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises, that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust." The words "through which" are difficult to understand. The relative pronoun "which" in verse 4 refers to glory and virtue in verse 3. Through and on the basis of the Lord's glory and virtue, by and to which we have been called, God has given us His precious and exceedingly great promises.

According to verse 3, the Lord has called us not only by His glory and virtue, but also to His glory and virtue. The disciples saw the Lord's glory. During the time He was with them, they saw the virtue in His conduct and daily living. They also saw His glory on the mount of transfiguration. I believe that they also saw the Lord's glory at other times, for example, when He fed the five thousand and when He called Lazarus out of the tomb. Having seen the Lord's glory and virtue, the disciples were attracted. This means that they were called by the Lord's glory and virtue. After the Lord's resurrection, on the day

of Pentecost, Peter was full of glory and virtue. The disciples were in a situation that was full of glory and full of virtue, the very glory and virtue to which they had been called.

Through this glory and virtue God has given us promises. The Greek preposition rendered "through" in verse 4 is in the instrumental sense becoming causal. For this reason, some versions render the Greek word "because of." This means that because of the glory and virtue God has given us the precious and exceedingly great promises. Because we all have been called to glory and virtue, God has given us promises in order that He may work out this virtue and glory for us.

According to verse 4, God has given us precious and exceedingly great promises so that through these we may become partakers of the divine nature. We already have the divine life. When faith was produced in us at the time we believed in the Lord, the divine life was imparted into us. Although we have the divine life, a long process is necessary for us to enjoy the divine nature.

There is a difference between life and nature. The divine nature is what God is. We enjoy the divine nature by living the divine life. How can we live the divine life? We live the divine life by God's promises. We need to live by the divine life so that we may be partakers of the divine nature. To partake of the divine nature simply means to enjoy the divine nature.

After we experienced the "click," all things pertaining to life and godliness were imparted into us. Now we have the divine life. This divine life is for us to live a life that expresses God. We express God as our godliness. Godliness is simply God expressed by us in our living by the divine life.

The impartation into us of all things which relate to life and godliness is through the full knowledge of God, the One who has called us by and to His own glory and virtue. How can we live a life that expresses God as our godliness? We live it through our knowing of Him. Therefore, we need to know the One who has called us by His glory and virtue and to His glory and virtue. Furthermore, through this

glory and virtue He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises.

Because of the glory and virtue, God has given us the promises. This also means that God has promised us that He will carry out His glory and virtue for us. Hence, His promises were given through the glory and the virtue, that is, because of the glory and virtue.

As we have seen, the word "through" in verse 4 is first instrumental and then causal. It is first a means, and then spontaneously it becomes a cause. The Greek preposition translated "through" also means on account of, on the basis of. Because of, on account of, on the basis of, the fact that God has called us to His glory and virtue, He has given us promises. By these promises He assures us that He will work out the virtue so that we may reach His glory.

PARTAKING OF THE DIVINE NATURE

God has given us these promises so that through them we may become partakers of the divine nature. He has called us to His glory and virtue and He has given us the promises for the purpose that we may enjoy the divine nature. To have eternal life is a matter once for all, but to partake of the divine nature is a continual matter. Although we have the divine life once for all, we cannot enjoy the divine nature once for all. During the entire course of our Christian life on earth and even in eternity, we shall still be partaking of the divine nature.

We have seen that the divine nature denotes all that God is. We may use eating food as an illustration of partaking of the divine nature. When you eat chicken, you partake of the chicken nature. What the chicken is becomes your nourishment. When you eat chicken, you are actually eating the chicken nature, which includes various nourishing elements. These elements or ingredients are the constituents of the nature. The principle is the same with the divine nature. Through God's promises, we are partaking of God's nature with all the divine ingredients. Just as we do not eat food once for all, so we do not partake of the divine nature once for all. We eat food daily,

and for

eternity we shall be partaking of the divine nature. This is portrayed by the tree of life and the river of water of life in Revelation 22. To eat the fruit of the tree of life is to partake of God's nature. God's nature is holy, loving, righteous, kind, and pure. Actually God's nature is all-inclusive. The more we partake of the divine nature, the more we have holiness, love, righteousness, kindness, and all manner of divine attributes. These attributes then become our virtues, which eventually will consummate in God's glory.

OUR COOPERATION WITH GOD'S OPERATION

Becoming a partaker of the divine nature has a condition, and this condition is that we escape the corruption which is in the world by lust. Lust is a barrier that keeps us from enjoying the divine nature. Christ died to redeem us from the vain manner of life (1 Pet. 1:18-19), and now we should abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Pet. 2:11) and no longer live in the flesh in the lusts of men (1 Pet. 4:2). As redeemed ones, we should abstain from lusts. This is to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

God has given us promises that He will work out the virtue and glory so that we may partake of the divine nature. This is God's operation. But God's operation requires our cooperation, and our cooperation is to abstain from a lustful life and thereby escape the corruption which is in the world by lust. Then having escaped this corruption, we are ready to become partakers of the divine nature. By this we see that escaping the corruption in the world qualifies us to partake of the divine nature.

God has allotted to us a portion that includes the divine life and all things pertaining to life and godliness. Based upon the fact that God has called us to His own glory and virtue, He has given us promises. He has promised to operate within us in order to carry out His virtue and glory. But God's operation needs our cooperation. We cooperate with God's operation by abstaining from fleshly lusts. For example, in the matter of shopping we need to escape the corruption that is in the

world through lust. When we need a particular thing, we should go to the store and buy it. But there is no need for us to spend time in the store looking around at other things. That would be to live according to our lusts. If we live according to the lusts of the flesh, we cannot become those who enjoy the divine nature. We cannot enjoy the divine nature if we indulge in certain worldly entertainments. In order to become partakers, enjoyers, of the divine nature we need to fulfill the condition of escaping the corruption that is in the world by lust.

HAVING THE LIFE AND NATURE OF GOD

We have seen that the divine nature denotes what God is, that it includes the ingredients, the constituents, of God's being. Because we are children of God born of Him, we possess God's life and also His nature for our enjoyment. Because I have proclaimed this truth according to the Bible, some have condemned me and falsely accused me of teaching deification. They say that I am deifying myself and teaching that the church is God and should be worshipped as a part of God. We utterly repudiate this false accusation! A child born of Chinese parents will certainly be Chinese. Then what about us who have been born of God? Through our new birth, regeneration, we have been born of God, and we are God's children. Because we have been born of God, in life and nature we are the same as God. In this sense, those who are born of God are divine. But we definitely do not participate in the Godhead, and we definitely do not become an object of worship. We have God's life and nature, but we do not become part of the Godhead.

Certain early church fathers taught concerning the deification of the believers. But they did not teach that the believers attained to the Godhead or that they would ever be worshipped as God. Rather, they meant that Christians, those who have been regenerated of God, have God's life and nature. We, the regenerated ones, are the same as God in life and nature, but we are not the same as God in position in the Godhead. Concerning this, we need to be

very careful. Actually, I do not use the word deification. It would be heretical to teach deification in the sense of claiming that believers attain to the Godhead. But it is according to the Scriptures to teach that because we have been born of God, we possess the divine life and the divine nature and that, in these two aspects, we have become the same as God. We definitely cannot participate in the Godhead or have the position to be worshipped by others as God; nevertheless; through regeneration we have God's life and nature.

We need to come back to the pure Word of God and tell others that whoever believes in the Son of God is born of God and has the right, the authority, to become a child of God. As such, he has the right also to partake of, to enjoy, the nature of God. Therefore, we have God's life, we are enjoying God's nature, and we have the position of God's children. But we definitely do not have the position of the Godhead, the position to be worshipped by others as God.

Daily we should partake of the divine nature and enjoy what God is, the contents, the ingredients, of His being. By what way do we enjoy the divine nature? First, we enjoy the divine nature by the full knowledge of the One who has called us by His glory and virtue and to His glory and virtue. Because of this, He has given us many precious and exceedingly great promises. Second, we need to escape the corruption that is in the world by lust; that is, we need to abstain from lustful living. Indulging the lusts of the flesh annuls our right to enjoy God's nature. But if we escape the corruption that is in the world by lust, we shall cooperate with the God who is now operating in us according to His promises to carry out His virtue and glory. If we cooperate with God's operation, we shall become those who enjoy the divine nature.

We have the position, the ability, and the provision to become partakers of the divine nature. As we enjoy God's nature, a part of this nature becomes our holiness, and other parts become our humility, love, kindness, and other virtues. These excellent virtues will eventually consummate in glory. What a marvelous privilege this is!

We do not have the language adequate to describe it. Praise the Lord that we human beings can have God's life, enjoy God's nature, live as God lives, express Him as our godliness, and have all the excellent virtues that will consummate in glory!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE FOUR

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(4)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:1-4

In this message I have the burden to consider further 2 Peter 1:1-4. Let us go back to these verses one by one.

FAITH AND THE INHERITANCE

Verse 1 says, "Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." In this long verse we all need a definite and clear understanding of two crucial points. The first concerns the allotment of the New Testament faith. This faith, which is the "like precious faith," is the same as the New Testament inheritance. The New Testament inheritance is nothing less than the Triune God Himself, the One who has been processed and has become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. Hence, the Triune God as the life-giving Spirit is the New Testament inheritance. Faith is actually the reflection of this inheritance. Therefore, faith is one with the New Testament inheritance. If we have faith, we also have this inheritance. Faith is the substantiation of the substance of the inheritance. Therefore, the New Testament faith and the New Testament inheritance are one.

If what God had done was merely to allot a New Testament inheritance to us, we would have something that is too objective, something not only outside of us but also far beyond us. It would, of course, be something that is for us, but it would not be able to reach us, and we would not be able to reach it. For this reason, there is the

need of substantiation, and this substantiation is a matter of faith.

Faith is not initiated by us, and it is not something that is out of us. On the contrary, faith is out of God, it is initiated by God, and it is allotted to us by God. In what way is faith allotted to us? Faith comes to us by the word in God's revelation. When this word is preached to us, it conveys the reality of the New Testament inheritance. Furthermore, as this word is preached to us, simultaneously the Spirit works with it. Actually, according to the Bible, the word and the Spirit are one. In John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." The word and the Spirit are one. The word is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the word (Eph. 6:17). Therefore, through the spoken word and by the working, the inspiring, of the Spirit, faith is produced within us. This is the way God allots to us the like precious faith. Through the spoken word and by the inspiring Spirit, God infuses faith into our being. Once this faith has been imparted into us, we have our portion of the New Testament inheritance.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF OUR GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

The second crucial point in verse 1 is related to the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. According to 1:1, the precious faith has been allotted to us in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Greek preposition translated "in" here means in the sphere of or by means of. In what sphere, or by what means, has this wonderful faith been allotted to us? It has been allotted to us in the sphere of the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This righteousness implies the righteous deed, the righteous act, of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 5:18). The Lord's righteous act was His death on the cross. The Lord's death on the cross was in absolute obedience to God and fulfilled all the requirements of God's righteousness. Therefore, His death is a righteous deed highly valued by God according to His own righteousness. Christ's righteous deed of dying on the

cross in obedience to God fulfilled God's righteousness and gave Him, the

righteous God, the legitimate position to justify all those who believe in this righteous deed of Christ. This righteousness, the righteousness of God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, is the sphere in which and also the means by which God has the liberty and position to allot Himself to us as our portion. This is the reason Peter says in verse 1 that we have been allotted the like precious faith in the righteousness of our God and Savior.

GRACE AND PEACE

In 1:2 Peter says, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." In this verse there are also two crucial points. The first is related to grace and peace. Because a wonderful portion--the Triune God Himself--has been allotted to us, grace and peace have come to us. Grace is our enjoyment of our portion of the New Testament inheritance, which is actually the processed Triune God. In simple terms, grace is the enjoyment of the Triune God. What, then, is peace? Peace is the condition that results from, issues from, grace. To have grace and peace is to have the enjoyment of the Triune God and the issue of this enjoyment. When we enjoy the Triune God, the result is a tranquil condition or situation with both God and man.

FULL KNOWLEDGE

The second crucial point in verse 2 concerns the words "in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." As in verse 1, the preposition "in" here means in the sphere of or by means of. According to verse 1, the allotment of the precious faith was given to us in the sphere of a twofold righteousness and by means of this righteousness, the righteousness of our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Now in verse 2 we see that grace and peace also come to us in a sphere and by a particular means--the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In verse 1 the sphere is a twofold righteousness, and in verse 2 the sphere is the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. The full knowledge of the Triune God is for our participation in and

enjoyment of His divine life and divine nature. It is not a mere doctrinal knowledge; it is an experiential knowledge, a knowledge that is full.

The Greek word rendered "full knowledge" is composed of the word *gnosis* plus the prefix *epi,* which means upon. This word indicates a thorough, experiential knowledge. This kind of knowledge is not superficial or general. Rather, it is a knowledge that is deep, thorough, and experiential. As we have pointed out, this is not simply a mental knowledge; it is experiential knowledge in our spiritual understanding and apprehension. The full knowledge of God and of Christ is a deep, practical, thorough, and experiential knowledge of God and our Lord. This full knowledge is both the sphere in which and the means by which the Triune God can be enjoyed by us in order that we may have a peaceful situation with Him and with all men.

THE MULTIPLICATION OF GRACE AND PEACE

In verse 2 Peter does not say simply that grace and peace will be added to us; he speaks of grace and peace being "multiplied in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." In his Epistles Paul does not say anything about grace and peace being multiplied to us. The words "to you" in this verse indicate that grace and peace come to us. After grace and peace come to us, they will be multiplied in the sphere of the full knowledge of God and our Lord and by the means of this full knowledge.

Grace and peace have come to us through the God-allotted faith, which substantiates the New Testament inheritance. This faith has been infused into us through the word of God, which conveys the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In the sphere of and by means of this full knowledge, the increasing and increased knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, the grace and peace which we have received will be multiplied.

The punctuation of 1:1-4 indicates that these four verses make up one long sentence. In verse 3 we have the continuation of the thought in verse 2: "As His divine

power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us to His own glory and virtue." Verse 3 begins with the word "As." This word is a literal translation of the Greek. The King James Version says, "According as," and both the American Standard Version and the New American Standard Version adopt the rendering "Seeing that." The King James Version says grace and peace be multiplied through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord according as His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. The American Standard Version indicates that grace and peace are multiplied in such a sphere, seeing that the divine power has granted to us all things.

In verse 3 Peter speaks of "His divine power." The pronoun "His" is singular, but in verse 2 there are two antecedents of this pronoun--God and Jesus our Lord. If we study the Word carefully and properly, we shall pay attention to the fact that in verse 2 we have two antecedents for the singular pronoun "His" in verse 3. This indicates that our Lord Jesus is God Himself and that our God is actually the Lord Jesus. Otherwise, Peter would have said, "As Their divine power has granted to us all things."

We have seen that grace is multiplied as, or according as, His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness. Life is within for us to live, and godliness is without as the outward expression of the inward life. Life is the inward energy, inward strength, to bring forth the outward godliness. All things relating to life within and godliness without have already been given to us by the divine power. Now grace must be multiplied according to the giving of this divine power.

In addition to this, we have been given "precious and exceedingly great promises" (v. 4). The New Testament contains many promises. Through regeneration, we have the divine life with the divine nature. Furthermore, all things pertaining to life and godliness have been given to us by the divine power. In addition. we have the promises

in the New Testament. It is by these promises that we may become partakers of the divine nature.

EXPERIENCING THE MULTIPLICATION OF GRACE

Now we can know the way to experience the multiplication of grace. We need to realize that all things which relate to life and godliness have already been given to us, and that inwardly we have the divine life with the divine nature. Through the promises given in the New Testament, we can become partakers of the divine nature. We simply need to open the Word and pray-read the promises. If we take the Word in this way, we shall experience the multiplication of grace.

It is not sufficient simply to learn about the multiplication of grace. We need to partake of the divine nature through the precious promises. Then grace will be multiplied to us. If we are faithful to take in the Word by drinking it as pure milk (1 Pet. 2:2), we shall experience an inward spiritual multiplication of grace. This is growth in grace.

The proper way to take the milk of the Word is to drink it. When we drink in the milk of the Word, it will then be digested and assimilated into our being. In this way, it will become part of us, and grace will be multiplied in us. The Lord is rich to all who call upon Him (Rom. 10:12). If we would partake of the riches of Christ, we need to call on His name and pray His Word into us. In this way grace will be multiplied within us.

Everything pertaining to life and godliness has been given to us by the divine power, and the precious promises have also been given to us. If we simply call on the name of the Lord and pray-read the word of His promises, eating and drinking of Him, we shall experience the multiplication of grace. This is the way to have a true Christian life which produces the genuine church life.

We have seen that in verses 1 and 2 there are two crucial points each. But in verse 3 there are at least six crucial matters: the divine power, all things, life, godliness, full knowledge, and being called to glory and virtue. It would be very good if we could have a full

message on each of these matters to cover them adequately.

THE POWER OF THE DIVINE LIFE

We have pointed out that the divine power in verse 3 is the power of the divine life related to the divine nature. It is beyond our ability to measure this divine power. In the realm of human power we are impressed by the kind of power it took to land a man on the moon. But how much more power was necessary to raise Christ to the third heaven, to the center and height of the universe!

Paul speaks clearly of this divine power in Ephesians 1 when he prays that we would know "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength, which He wrought in Christ in raising Him from among the dead, and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:19-20). This divine power has exalted Christ over all and has put everything under His feet. Now Christ is seated on the highest peak of the universe, far above everything on earth and "far above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1:21). In Ephesians 1 Paul goes on to indicate that this divine power has been applied to us (v. 22). Hallelujah, the very power, the divine power, that raised Christ from among the dead and seated Him at God's right hand in the heavenlies, far above all, has been applied to us!

I am not speaking something that is legendary or mythical, nor am I teaching something of philosophy. On the contrary, I am speaking according to the divine revelation in the holy Word. This revelation tells us that the divine power described in Ephesians 1 has been applied to us. In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter says that this divine power has granted us all things which relate to life and godliness. This means that all these things have been imparted, infused, and implanted into us by the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who has regenerated us and now indwells us (2 Cor. 3:6,17; John 3:6; Rom. 8:11).

Praise the Lord for what He has infused into us and implanted into us!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE FIVE

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(5)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:1-4

In this message we shall continue the review of 1:1-4.

LIFE AND GODLINESS

Second Peter 1:3 says, "As His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us to His own glory and virtue." The "all things" in this verse refer to all the aspects of the riches of the Triune God. These things pertain to the divine life, to *zoe*, not to the life that is for our pleasure. All things have been given, imparted, infused, into us so that we may live the divine life and also live out this life. The life is inward, but godliness is outward, for it is God Himself expressed.

In all of our living we should express God. We should testify of God and speak about Him. When God becomes our expression, this is godliness. In our conversation we should express God. If we are expressing God, surely we could not engage in gossip. We should have God in our being and also in our living. Our mind should be filled with Him, and the very fiber of our being should be constituted of Him. Then we shall have godliness, the outward expression of the inward life.

THROUGH THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE ONE WHO CALLED US

In 1:3 Peter uses the preposition "through" and says that the divine power has granted to us all things which

relate to life and godliness "through the full knowledge of Him." The impartation into us of all the things of life is through the full knowledge of God. This full knowledge is a deep, thorough, experiential knowledge.

The preposition "through" used in relation to full knowledge indicates that we need to pass through a process. If we have the practice of gossiping, this practice is an indication that we have not yet passed through the process leading to the full knowledge of the One who has called us. I do not think that if we have the full knowledge of the One who has called us to His glory and virtue, we shall waste our time gossiping.

The divine power has infused us with all things pertaining to life and godliness. However, this infusion, this impartation, requires that we have the full knowledge of God. If we do not pass through the process to gain the full knowledge, it will seem that what the divine power has planted in us has been in vain. The divine power is operating, but there is the need for us to cooperate with this operation.

Many Christians do not know anything about what the divine power has imparted to us. Likewise, many do not know that it is necessary for us to pass through the process to gain the full knowledge. There is the need for us to be trained by the Lord so that we may pass through the process to gain the full knowledge of the One who has called us. My desire in these messages is to help you pass through this process. We may use the illustration of a train and say that we are all on a train that is going through the passage of the deep, thorough, and experiential knowledge of the One who has called us.

In verse 3 Peter does not speak of the knowledge of God nor of the knowledge of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Instead, he speaks of the full knowledge of the One who has called us to His glory and virtue. Here Peter does not say that God has called us to heaven, nor even that He has called us to redemption or sanctification. In this verse Peter says that God has called us to His own glory and virtue. We need to have the full knowledge of this. We

must not be content to know it superficially. We can know the One who has called us to His own glory and virtue only by passing through a long process. Regarding this, we should be like tourists taking a slow train ride through a beautiful countryside. Such tourists like to ride slowly in order to have a good view of the scenery. In like manner, we need to consider 1:1-4 thoroughly and slowly. You may read through these verses quickly again and again and not see anything. Therefore, as we read these verses, we need to consider carefully everything included in them.

OUR COOPERATION WITH GOD'S OPERATION

We definitely need the full knowledge of the One who has called us for the purpose of bringing us into His glory and virtue. If we have such an experiential knowledge of Him, the divine power will operate in us effectively. Otherwise, the divine power will not be able to work in us. Even though this power is great, it will not be able to work in us if we do not fulfill the conditions for its operation. As we have seen, the condition we must fulfill is that of our cooperation with God's operation.

Many Christians do not know that God has called them to His own glory and virtue. It seems that in their theology there is no room for 2 Peter 1:3. Although the divine power is present and is working, it does not operate in those who do not render the proper cooperation. If we do not pass through the process to gain the full knowledge of the One who has called us, the divine power will not be able to operate in us.

I can testify that the divine power is working in me and that daily I cooperate with God. In the morning I open to Him and say, "Lord, I am here before You. Go on, Lord. I would not hinder You. Rather, I would give You a free way within me. Lord, whatever You speak to me I will proclaim." I can testify that the more I cooperate with the divine power within me, the more I am brought into God's glory, enjoy His virtue, and express this virtue as godliness.

GOD'S PROMISES

In 1:4 Peter continues, "Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises, that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust." We have seen that the preposition "through" here may also be rendered on account of or on the basis of. The relative pronoun "which" refers to the glory and virtue in verse 3. Through and on the basis of the Lord's glory and virtue, by and to which we have been called, God has given us His precious and exceedingly great promises.

It is not easy to know the meaning of the words "through which" as they connect verses 3 and 4. In order to have the proper knowledge of this, we need experience and also spiritual understanding. Here Peter is saying that through the divine glory and virtue God has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises. This indicates that if God had not called us to His own glory and virtue, there would be no need for Him to give us promises. But God has called us to His own glory and virtue. This goal is great, vast, profound. Who is able to reach God's own glory and virtue? None of us is able to arrive at this goal. Therefore, there is the need of God's word of promise to assure us, encourage us, strengthen us, and speed us on our way toward this goal.

Suppose Peter had said that God has called us to heaven. If heaven were the goal of God's calling, there would have been no need for God to give us promises. If heaven were the goal of God's calling, we could simply be happy and rejoice, live according to our pleasure, and then wait for heaven.

However, Peter does not say that God has called us to heaven. He says that God has called us to His own glory and virtue. When we hear about this, we may wonder how we can attain to such a goal. Knowing our need for assurance, encouragement, and strength, God has given us precious and exceedingly great promises. An example of these promises is the Lord's word to Paul in 2 Corinthians

12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." This promise was given to Paul to enable him to suffer the thorn in the flesh. In order to bear with a "thorn," we need the Lord's sufficient grace. This is an illustration of the fact that we need many promises to help us reach the goal of God's glory and virtue.

All the promises of God have been given to us through the glory and virtue to which God has called us. This is the reason Peter begins verse 4 with the words "through which." God's promises are words of assurance and encouragement. Through the glory and virtue which are the goal to which we have been called, God has given us the promises we need.

We have pointed out that the Greek preposition translated "through" in verse 4 is *dia* and that its use here is in the instrumental sense becoming causal. We have rendered this word literally in order to make our translation correspond to the Greek text. It would also have been correct to translate this word "on the basis of which" to indicate that God grants us the precious and exceedingly great promises on the basis of the glory and virtue to which He has called us.

We cannot reach the high goal of God's glory and virtue by ourselves. For this, we need the Lord. Because we do not know what lies ahead of us, God has given us precious promises. One of these great promises is in Matthew 28:20: "Behold, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age." No doubt, this promise was an encouragement to all the disciples.

The Lord's promises encouraged Peter and the other disciples on their way toward the goal of God's glory and virtue. When Peter and the eleven stood up to preach on the day of Pentecost, God's glory and virtue were with them. The disciples manifested divine virtues, not natural human virtues. In Acts 3 a poor man looked to Peter and John for a gift of money. Peter said to him, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Then Peter took him by the hand and lifted him up,

and immediately the lame man was healed. "He leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (v. 8). What did Peter and John express on that occasion? They manifested God's virtue and glory. This was carried out by the promise of the Lord that He would be with them all the days until the completion of this age.

In Matthew 28:20 the Lord seemed to be telling the disciples: "When you go out to disciple the nations, I shall go with you. Wherever you go, you will go with Me. You will be bringing Me with you." Therefore, on the day of Pentecost the disciples stood up with the Lord to preach the gospel. Furthermore, in Acts 3 Peter and John brought the Lord Jesus to a lame man. This was a fulfillment of the Lord's promise to be with them all the days until the completion of the age. By means of the Lord's promises the early disciples were encouraged to press on to reach God's glory and attain the divine virtues.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

According to 2 Peter 1:4, God has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises for a specific purpose. His purpose is that through these promises we may become partakers of the divine nature. Through the precious and exceedingly great promises, we, the believers in Christ, have become partakers of His divine nature in an organic union with Him. In Acts 2 and 3 Peter and the other disciples surely were partaking of the divine nature. It is no wonder then that when others looked at the disciples, they saw the expression of God. Because the disciples enjoyed God and partook of God, they were constituted of God.

Just as we are constituted physically of the food we eat, so the disciples were constituted of the God of which they partook. This should also be our experience today. If we enjoy God and partake of Him, we shall be constituted of Him. Of course, we shall never become God in the sense of attaining to the Godhead or becoming an object of

worship. However, we may be thoroughly constituted of God's nature.

We all are constituted physically of the food we eat. For example, someone may eat so much fish and be constituted of fish to such an extent that he even smells of fish. In like manner, we may become so constituted of God that we express God in all that we are and do. We may even give off a divine fragrance. If we partake of God day by day, eventually we shall partake of Him unconsciously. When others contact us, they will see in us the expression of the Triune God.

My desire is that all the saints in the Lord's recovery would be fully saturated with the nature of God. The more we are saturated with God, the more we shall express Him.

To be a partaker of the divine nature is to be a partaker of the elements, the ingredients, of God's being. When we partake of God, the aspects of what God is become our enjoyment. We partake of His righteousness, holiness, kindness, love, compassion. This is to enjoy the constituents of the divine nature. God's purpose in giving us the precious and exceedingly great promises is that we may become partakers of the divine nature.

THE CYCLE OF ESCAPING AND PARTAKING

In 1:4 there is a condition for becoming partakers of the divine nature: it is "having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust." The more we escape this corruption, the more we shall enjoy the nature of God. Likewise, the more we partake of the divine nature, the more we shall escape the corruption that is in the world by lust. This is a cycle, a cycle of escaping and partaking and of partaking and escaping. I can testify that because this cycle of partaking and escaping works within me in a strong, rapid way, it is difficult for me to take in any of the corruption of the world. I partake of the divine nature, and this divine nature strengthens me to stay away from corruption. Then the more I stay away from the corruption of the world, the more I enjoy the riches of the divine nature. This is the

experience of God's economy. What we have in 1:1-4 is actually a full picture of our enjoyment of God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE SIX

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(6)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:5-11

In this message we shall consider 1:5-11. This section of 2 Peter is concerned with development by the growth in life unto the rich entrance into the eternal kingdom.

DEVELOPING THE SEED OF FAITH

Virtue

Verse 5 says, "And for this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge." The Greek word rendered "adding" literally means bringing in besides. Besides, along with, the precious and exceedingly great promises given to us by God, we should bring in all diligence to cooperate with the enabling of the dynamic divine nature for the carrying out of God's promises.

In verse 5 Peter urges us to supply bountifully in our faith virtue. What the divine power has given us in 1:3 and 4 is developed in verses 5 through 7. To supply virtue in faith is to develop virtue in the exercise of faith. The same principle applies to all the other items.

The word "supply" here actually means develop. Peter is telling us to develop what we already have. We have faith, and now in our faith we need to develop virtue.

The faith Peter mentions in 1:5 is the like precious faith allotted to us by God (1:1) as the common portion of the New Testament blessing of life for the initiation of the Christian life. This faith needs to be exercised that the virtue of the divine life may be developed in the following steps to reach its maturity. Faith in 2 Peter 1 may be

compared to a seed. On other occasions I have pointed out that in chapter one of 1 Peter the seed is the word with Christ in it as life. Now in 2 Peter 1 this seed becomes our faith, which, no doubt, is the like precious faith. This precious faith is one with Christ as the seed.

After a seed has been sown in the soil, it needs to be developed. The principle is the same with the development of the seed of faith. In our faith we need to develop virtue. Literally, the Greek word for virtue means excellency. It denotes the energy of the divine life issuing in vigorous action. If faith is regarded as the seed, virtue may be considered a root that comes out of this seed.

Knowledge

In 1:5 Peter also tells us to supply "in virtue knowledge." Virtue, the vigorous action, needs the bountiful supply of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (vv. 2, 3, 8) regarding the all things related to the divine life and godliness and the partaking of the divine nature (vv. 3-4) for our enjoyment in the following development. The knowledge which we should develop in our virtue includes the knowledge of God and of our Savior, the knowledge of God's economy, the knowledge of what faith is, and the knowledge of the divine power, glory, virtue, nature, and life. Actually, this is the knowledge of all things related to life and godliness. We must have this knowledge developed in our virtue. It is not adequate to have virtue without knowledge. I believe that knowledge also is a primary root that develops out of the seed of faith. With virtue and knowledge we have the growth of the seed.

Self-control

In verse 6 Peter continues, "And in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness." Self-control, or temperance, is the exercise of control and restraint over the self in its passions, desires, and habits. This needs to be supplied and developed in knowledge for the proper growth in life.

Once we have acquired knowledge, it is easy for us to become proud. For this reason, we need to develop in our knowledge self-control. Self-control implies restriction. As a tree grows, the roots spread out, but the trunk grows upward in a rather restricted manner. This is an illustration of the fact that along with the development of virtue and knowledge, we need the restriction that comes with self-control.

Endurance

According to Peter's word in verse 6, in our self-control we need to develop endurance. Self-control is to deal with ourselves; endurance is to bear with others and with circumstances. In order to live a proper Christian life, we need endurance toward those around us and also toward our environment and circumstances.

Godliness

In our endurance we need to develop godliness. Godliness is a living that is like God and expresses God. As we exercise control over the self and bear with others and with circumstances, godliness needs to be developed in our spiritual life so that we may be like God and express Him. If faith is the seed, virtue and knowledge the roots, self-control the trunk, then endurance and godliness are the branches. Here we see a rather full development: out of the seed come the roots, the trunk, and the branches. Eventually, in verse 7 we see brotherly love and love as the blossom and the fruit.

Brotherly Love and Love

In verse 7 Peter concludes, "And in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love, love." The Greek word rendered "brotherly love" is *philadelphia,* composed of *phileo,* to have affection for, and *adelphos,* a brother; hence, brotherly affection, a love of delight and pleasure. In godliness, the expression of God, this love needs to be supplied for the brotherhood (I Pet. 2:17; 3:8; Gal. 6:10), for our testimony

to the world (John 13:34-35) and for the bearing of fruit (John 15:16-17).

The Greek word for love in verse 7 is *agape,* the word used in the New Testament for the divine love, which God is in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). It is nobler than *phileo;* it adorns all the qualities of the Christian life (1 Cor. 13; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14). It is stronger in ability and greater in capacity than human love (Matt. 5:44, 46), yet a believer who lives by the divine life (2 Pet. 1:3) and partakes of the divine nature (v. 4) can be saturated with it and express it in full. Such a love needs to be developed in brotherly love, to govern it and flow in it for the full expression of God, who is this love. As we have seen, faith may be considered the seed of life, and this nobler love, the fruit (v. 8) in its full development. The six developments in between are the stages of its growth unto maturity.

Peter's thought in chapter one of his first Epistle is that the full salvation of the Triune God issues in holiness and brotherly love. Holiness is related to godliness. Hence, the issue of God's full salvation is the expression of God and the love for the brothers. According to some translations, the word love in 2 Peter 1:7 indicates a love not only for Christian brothers but for all men. According to this understanding, first we love the brothers and then we go on to love all men. However, I do not believe that this understanding is accurate.

We have pointed out that *agape* is nobler than *phileo*. In quality and perhaps also in quantity *agape* is greater than *phileo*. Sometimes we may love the brothers in a narrow, limited way with a certain amount of brotherly love. In our love we may have preferences and love certain brothers more than others. We may claim that we love all the saints, but our love for them is not the same. Because Peter was experienced and knew the situation among the saints, he did not stop with brotherly love but went on to speak of love, of *agape,* the deep and noble love with which God the Father loves all mankind, both believers and sinners.

In Matthew 5:44-47 the Lord Jesus said, "But I say to

you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may become sons of your Father who is in the heavens, because He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not also the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what are you doing extraordinary? Do not also the nations do the same?" As God sends rain upon both the just and the unjust, so we should love not only our brothers but also our enemies. It does not take much strength or energy for someone to love his own brother. But it does take a special strength and energy to love our enemies. We all need to have this noble love.

Actually, in the church life we may prefer a certain brother whom we regard as nice and love him, but we may not appreciate another brother as much. We may have love for both brothers, but that love is shallow. Therefore, we need a deeper, nobler love. This love is *agape*. When we have this kind of love, we love all the brothers the same, no matter what kind of brothers they may be.

In 1:5-7 we have the development from faith to love. This development includes virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, and godliness. Eventually, we have the full development and maturity from the seed of faith, through the roots of virtue and knowledge, the trunk of self-control, and the branches of endurance and godliness, to the blossom and the fruit of brotherly love and love.

"THESE THINGS" EXISTING IN US AND ABOUNDING

In verse 8 Peter goes on to say, "For these things, existing in you and abounding, constitute you neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The words "these things" refer to all the virtues covered in verses 5 through 7, from faith to love. Faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly love, and love should all exist in us. Nevertheless, these are only some of the "all things" that have been granted to us by the divine power. We need to see that all these things are included in the seed. This seed

contains the root, the trunk, the branches, the blossom, and the fruit.

The Greek word for "existing" is *huparcho*. It denotes the existence of certain things that belong to someone from the beginning and thus become his rightful possession to the present. This indicates that all the virtues mentioned in verses 5 through 7 are the possession of the believers and exist in them forever through their experience of partaking of the divine nature in all its riches.

Peter speaks of these virtues not only existing in us but also abounding. The divine virtues are not only existing in and possessed by the believers, but are also abounding and multiplying in them in the development and growth of the divine life. All the virtues already exist in the seed, and now they are waiting for the opportunity to abound. In order for the virtues in the seed to abound, the seed needs to be sown in the soil and then grow and develop until it blossoms and bears fruit.

CONSTITUTED NEITHER IDLE NOR UNFRUITFUL

Peter says that if these things exist and abound in us, they shall constitute us neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that the virtues of the divine life and divine nature are the constituents, the elements, of our spiritual constitution, our spiritual being, making us persons without the elements of idleness and unfruitfulness.

Being constituted is different from trying to correct ourselves, adjust ourselves, or improve ourselves. In order to be constituted we must have a certain element or constituent. The elements, the ingredients, of the divine nature are the constituents of which we need to be constituted.

Christians are often exhorted and taught to improve themselves. However, in the New Testament we are not exhorted to correct ourselves: we are exhorted to be constituted of the elements of the divine nature. Confucius may have taught people to improve, but he certainly did not teach them to be constituted of the divine nature.

There is a distinction between developing something and being constituted of something. Developing a matter implies that we already have something which needs to be developed. But being constituted of a particular element implies that something is about to be added to us that we do not already possess. We have faith as a seed that includes Christ as life. Actually, this seed is the Triune God. We have seen that we need to develop in our faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly love, and love. We also need to be constituted of all these elements that are developed.

Actually, our natural being needs to be reconstituted. From the time of our birth, we have been constituted a certain kind of person. Now that we have been regenerated, we need to be reconstituted; that is, we need to be constituted of the elements of the divine nature. We were constituted once in our natural life. Now in our new birth with our new life we need to be reconstituted of the divine nature. The divine nature is rich in ingredients, in constituents, with which we need to build up ourselves into a God-man, into a person mingled with the Triune God.

If we are constituted of the elements of the divine nature, we shall not be idle or unfruitful. Literally, the Greek word rendered "idle" means unworking; hence, idle. One may not be idle, but may still be unfruitful. To be fruitful requires more growth in life and more supply of life. Idleness and unfruitfulness are constituents of our fallen being; working, the energizing of life, and fruitfulness are the constituents of our spiritual constitution. Peter's use of the word "unfruitful" in verse 8 indicates that what is covered in verses 5 through 7 is the development of the growth of the divine life unto its maturity.

The word idle implies many things. It seems that it is a rather insignificant word. Actually, this word is very important and implies a great deal. We may say that gossiping is a sign of idleness. Anyone who gossips is idle. Such a one may not spend adequate time reading the

Word and praying, using the excuse that he is too busy. But such a one is not busy--he is idle.

UNTO THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

In verse 8 Peter speaks of not being idle or unfruitful "unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The constitution with the spiritual virtues as its constituents advances in many steps toward the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, with a view to the full realization of the all-inclusive embodiment of the Triune God. In this section of the Word, three prepositions are used regarding the relationship of the experience of life to spiritual knowledge: in, in verse 2, referring to the sphere of the knowledge; through, in verse 3, referring to the channel of the knowledge; and unto, in verse 8, referring to the knowledge in view as a goal. Our experiential knowledge of the Lord increases according to the degree of our growth in life.

BEING SHORTSIGHTED

In verse 9 Peter says, "For he in whom these things are not present is blind, being shortsighted, having forgotten the cleansing of his past sins." As in verse 8, "these things" refers to all the virtues covered in verses 5 through 7. The one in whom these things is not present is blind, being shortsighted. The Greek word rendered "short-sighted" comes from the root word that means to close the eyes due to strong light; hence, to be shortsighted. To be thus shortsighted is to be spiritually blind, unable to see something further in the divine life and divine nature of the Triune God dispensed into the believers as their bountiful supply.

Literally, the Greek word rendered "having forgotten" means taking forgetfulness, that is, willing to forget the experience of the cleansing of past sins. That cleansing was for us to go on in the divine life by partaking of the divine nature to reach its maturity. For one to forget the cleansing of his past sins does not mean that he denies the faithful profession he made when he believed in Christ and was baptized into Him, nor does it mean that he loses the assurance of salvation which he received at that time.

Rather, it is to neglect what the initiation of salvation meant to him.

DILIGENT TO MAKE OUR CALLING AND SELECTION FIRM

In verse 10 Peter continues, "Wherefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." Here to be diligent is to develop the spiritual virtues in the divine life, to advance in the growth of the divine life. This makes God's calling and selection of us firm.

If we are diligent to develop the virtues mentioned in verses 5 through 7, we shall confirm, make sure, our calling and selection. We shall never doubt that we have been called by God and selected by Him. However, some may question whether God has chosen them. The reason they have doubt concerning this matter is that they lack the virtues listed by Peter. But if we develop these virtues and are constituted of them, we shall have the confirmation that we have been called and selected. This is to make our calling and selection firm. Furthermore, in doing these things we shall never stumble, because we have been thoroughly constituted.

ENTRANCE INTO THE ETERNAL KINGDOM

In verse 11 Peter concludes, "For so shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The bountiful supply we enjoy in the development of the divine life and divine nature will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord. It will enable and qualify us to enter into the coming kingdom with all the riches of the divine life and divine nature as our excellent virtues unto the splendid glory of God. This is not merely to be saved to go to heaven.

The eternal kingdom in this verse refers to the kingdom of God given to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Dan. 7:13-14), which will be manifested at His coming back (Luke 19:11-12). It will be a reward to His faithful believers, who pursue the growth in His life unto maturity

and the development of the virtues of His nature, so that they may participate, in the millennium, in His kingship in

God's glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6). To enter thus into the eternal kingdom of the Lord is related to the entrance into God's eternal glory, to which He has called us in Christ (1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Thes. 2:12).

Second Peter 1:11 indicates that we may have an entrance richly and bountifully supplied into the kingdom of our Lord. However, a good number of Christians will not have such an entrance, because they have never built up this entrance by developing the divine seed unto maturity. If we are not constituted of the divine virtues, we shall not be able to build up such an entrance. But if we have the development of the divine life and are constituted of the elements of the divine nature, a rich and bountiful entrance into the coming kingdom will be supplied to us.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(7)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:5-11

In this message we shall review 1:5-11

DEVELOPING VIRTUE BY ENJOYING THE DIVINE NATURE

In verse 5 Peter says, "And for this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge." The word "virtue" refers to the virtue mentioned in verse 3, where Peter speaks of the One who has "called us to His own glory and virtue." Furthermore, this virtue is related to the divine nature (v. 4), which denotes the different aspects of the riches of what God is. The virtue in verses 3 and 5 is the issue of the experience of the divine nature, the enjoyment of the divine nature, in verse 4. When we partake of the divine nature, the different aspects of the riches of what God is, these riches become our virtues. For example, God is love, light, holiness, righteousness, and kindness. All these are God's attributes. Each divine attribute is also a virtue. When we enjoy what God is, we enjoy His holiness. Then this holiness becomes a virtue in us and with us. The principle is the same with the enjoyment of other divine attributes.

The essence or element of virtue is contained in faith as a seed. This seed is actually Christ Himself, and Christ is God in all that He is. Because all that God is, is in Christ, Christ is the embodiment of what God is. This Christ has become our inheritance. The response to, or reflection of, this embodiment within us is faith. Faith, then, is also our inheritance. Within faith as a seed are included all the

divine attributes, all the riches of what God is. Because we have this seed of faith with the divine nature, we must go on to develop this seed. The first thing that comes forth in this development is virtue. Therefore, virtue is the result of enjoying the divine nature, the result of enjoying what God is.

THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROCESSED GOD

In verse 5 Peter says that in our virtue we need to develop knowledge. Virtue requires the bountiful supply of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (vv. 2, 3, 8) regarding the things related to the divine life and godliness and to the partaking of the divine nature.

We may have a great deal of knowledge, but our knowledge may be shallow and superficial. We may not know life or know what like precious faith is. Moreover, we may not know anything regarding the divine nature, and we may even oppose it when it is pointed out from the Bible that believers may become partakers of the divine nature. Those with a superficial knowledge also may not know that godliness is the expression of God, that Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, and that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. To lack the knowledge of such matters is to be short of the knowledge of the depths of the truth in the Bible.

Some believers have been hindered or even spoiled by superficial knowledge. They may be fundamental in their doctrine, but they may he fundamental in a superficial way. Superficial fundamentalism may actually be a kind of "drug" that can dull the spiritual senses. A good number of Christians have been "drugged" by the influence of a superficial fundamentalism. For this reason, it is very difficult to speak with them about having Christ as our food and enjoyment. If you tell them that we can eat Christ, digest Christ, and assimilate Him so that He becomes the constituent of our being, they would say that such a teaching is heretical. They may react and say, "Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is on the throne in heaven. How can we eat Him, and how can He become the

constituent of our being?" They may even consider scriptural teachings such as these to be blasphemous.

Some with superficial knowledge also oppose the matter of mingling. The word "mingling" is used in the Old Testament. Leviticus 2 speaks of the mingling of oil with fine flour to make the meal offering. The concept of mingling, therefore, is surely according to the Scriptures.

Furthermore, in John 6 the Lord Jesus says that He is the bread, the living bread that came down from heaven to give life to the world, and that whoever eats Him will also live because of Him. Consider what happens to the food we eat. The food is digested, assimilated, and eventually mingled with our fibers and cells. Is it not true, then, that eating implies mingling? The digestion and assimilation of the food we eat definitely involves mingling. The food we eat is mingled with our very constitution. In the same principle, when we eat the Lord as the bread of life and digest and assimilate Him in our spiritual being, He is mingled with us and we with Him. However, certain Christians do not have this knowledge, which is a knowledge of the depths of biblical truth.

The knowledge spoken of in 1:5 is the full knowledge of God and of our Lord. We need a full knowledge not of the unprocessed God, the "raw" God, but of the processed God. The expression "processed God" refers to the God who became a man through incarnation, who lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, who died on the cross and was buried, who was resurrected, and who has ascended to the heavens. Incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are all a part of a long process. Because Christ has passed through such a process, no longer is He merely God with the element of divinity; He is also man with the element of humanity. Our Lord is both God and man. He has both the divine nature and the human nature. Moreover, He also includes the elements of human living, His all-inclusive death, and His life-imparting resurrection. Such a word concerning the processed God may sound alien or strange to those who have only a superficial knowledge of the Word. But

according to what Peter says in 1:5, we need to supply bountifully in our virtue the full knowledge of God.

If believers do not have the proper knowledge, how can they have the development described in 1:5-7? It is not possible to have this development apart from the full knowledge of God. With some believers there is hardly any development. They may not even have a full realization concerning the like precious faith, not knowing that this faith is the all-inclusive seed within them. They have never heard this kind of teaching. Their knowledge is not on this line, but is related instead to a superficial religious understanding.

SELF-CONTROL, ENDURANCE, AND GODLINESS

In verse 6 Peter goes on to say, "And in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness." Self-control is the exercise of control over the self in its passions, desires, and habits. In our knowledge we need to develop such a self-control.

In our self-control we need to develop endurance. Self-control is related to the self, but endurance is related to others and to our circumstances. As to ourselves, we must have self-control, and as to our circumstances, no matter what they may be, we need endurance. We need to have endurance with the members of our family, with our neighbors, and with various things that disturb us. For example, when you are bothered by something in your environment, you need endurance. We need to develop endurance in order to bear with others and with our circumstances.

In verse 6 Peter also says that in our endurance we need to develop godliness. Godliness means God-likeness, that is, being like God and expressing God. The Christian life should be a life that expresses God and bears God's likeness in all things. As we exercise control over the self and bear with others and with circumstances, we also need to develop godliness so that we may be like God and express Him.

In verse 7 Peter goes on to say, "And in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly Love." We have pointed out that in godliness, the expression of God, brotherly love, which is brotherly affection, needs to be supplied. We have also seen that the Greek word for "love" in verse 7 is *agape*, the word used in the New Testament for the divine love, which God is in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). This kind of love is nobler than brotherly love, and it is stronger in ability and greater in capacity than human love.

The brothers and sisters in the church life may love one another, but their love may be rather superficial. In their love there may be no life supply and no "antibiotic" to foster healing. This means that their love is lacking in *agape*. But in Peter's love for the brothers there is another element, and this element is the divine love, a love that supplies us with wisdom to love the brothers in a proper way. Sometimes we love others foolishly, in a way that can spoil them. We do not have the wisdom to love them in a way that will enable them to receive the life supply and be nourished. God's love is not only nourishing, but also contains a spiritual antibiotic that fosters healing and prevents illness. If we love the brothers with divine love, we shall infuse such an antibiotic into them. For example, you may realize that a brother has a certain shortage or weakness. You know that teaching or correction will not help the brother. This brother needs to be loved with a noble love. If you love him with this kind of love, he will receive the life supply and an antibiotic that can kill the "germs" within him. In the church life we need to love one another with discernment, not foolishly. We need to love the brothers with the high purpose of nourishing them and helping them to be healed.

Love with Discernment

God's love is always with discernment. Matthew 5:45 tells us that God sends rain upon both the just and the

unjust. But He does this with wisdom. Sometimes He may withhold rain from a certain region. This does not mean that He does not love the people in that place. He loves them, but He loves them with discernment. Likewise, we should not withhold love from the saints. We should love all the brothers, but we should love them with discernment.

Our love for the saints should also always be according to a measure or within a limitation. If we love a brother excessively, that love may spoil him. We need to love him only to a certain extent. But another brother may be in need of a greater measure of love. To love others in this way is to love them not merely with brotherly affection but also with *agape*.

Love That Is Not Dependent on Our Emotional Tide

Often our brotherly love is dependent on the tide of our emotions. When our emotional tide is high, we love everyone. But when the tide of our emotion is low, we may not be willing to show love for anyone. When the emotional tide of some brothers is high, they will do almost anything to help you. But when the emotional tide is low, they are not willing to help at all. This kind of brother loves the saints, but he loves them according to the changeable tide of his emotion. That kind of love is not *agape*. The divine love does not depend on our emotional tide. Because this love has its source in the divine life, it does not change. We need to learn to love the brothers with this divine love, not with the love that depends on the tide of our emotions.

God's love is consistent. If we love others with this love, we shall also be consistent. Whenever someone contacts us, we shall be the same with respect to our love. We shall always love others with discernment and according to their need. We may realize that one brother needs a certain measure of love. Therefore, we shall measure out, mete out, that much love to him. But another brother may need a different measure of love to meet his need. This is a noble kind of love.

We need to have this divine love in our married life and

family life. Peter charges the husbands to assign honor to the wife (1 Peter 3:7). This requires a noble love.

It is common for sisters to love their husbands emotionally and without discernment or measure. When such a sister is happy or high in her emotion, she will love her husband accordingly. But if she is unhappy or angry, she will not love him. That kind of love is emotional and does not contain the element of *agape*. However, another sister, with more experience in the Lord, will consistently love her husband and children, but will always love with a measure and with discernment. This kind of love is surely a noble love.

It is not possible for our human love to be with the proper measure and discernment. This is the reason that, after speaking of brotherly love, Peter goes on to indicate that in our brotherly love we need to develop love. Some expositors have misinterpreted Peter here and have thought that he is telling us to develop first a love for the brothers and then a love for all men. This understanding, however, is too shallow. Peter's thought is that in our brotherly love there needs to be the element of *agape*, the divine love.

MATURITY AND KINGSHIP

In verses 8 through 10 Peter says that if all these virtues exist in us and abound, they shall constitute us neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he in whom these things are not present is shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing of his past sins. Therefore, Peter charges us to be diligent to make our calling and selection firm by developing all these virtues.

In verse 11 Peter concludes, "For so shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In this eternal kingdom we shall not be subjects--we shall be kings. But in order to be kings in the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need maturity in life. We Christians are destined to be kings in the Lord's

kingdom. However, how can someone be a king in the coming kingdom if he lacks the maturity in the divine life? It is impossible to be a king without this maturity. Even if the Lord would want to enthrone as a king someone who is not mature, that person would realize that he is not able to exercise the kingship. This indicates that even we ourselves know that we need to grow to maturity in order to be kings.

According to Peter's word in 1:5-11, to grow to maturity is to develop what we have already received. We have been allotted the wonderful like precious faith, and this faith is an all-inclusive seed. All the divine riches are in this seed, but we must be diligent to develop them into virtue. Then we need to develop in our virtue knowledge; in knowledge, self-control; in self-control, endurance; in endurance, godliness; in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. By developing these virtues we grow, and eventually we shall reach maturity. As a result, we shall be full of Christ, and, in Paul's words, we shall arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Then we shall be qualified and equipped to be kings in the coming kingdom.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE DIVINE PROVISION

(8)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 1:12-21

After a word of introduction (1:1-2), Peter speaks concerning the divine provision (1:3-21). The divine provision includes two matters: the impartation of the divine power (1:3-11) and the shining of the divine truth (1:12-21). Regarding the impartation of the divine power, we have two main points: all things related to life and godliness with the divine nature (vv. 3-4) and the development by the growth in life unto the rich entrance into the eternal kingdom (vv. 5-11). Regarding the shining of the divine truth, there are also two main points: the glory of the apostles' witnessing (vv. 12-18) and the light of the prophetic word (vv. 19-21). In this message we shall cover these two matters concerning the shining of the divine truth.

REMINDING THE SAINTS

Second Peter 1:12 says, "Wherefore I shall be ready always to remind you concerning these things, even though you know them and have been established in the present truth." By "these things" Peter means things such as the divine power, the things concerning life and godliness, the divine nature, and the development of the divine riches in our experience. Peter was always ready to remind the saints concerning these things, even though they had come to know them and had been established in the present truth, the truth which they already possessed.

By "the present truth" Peter means the truth which is present with the believers and which they have already

received and now possess. In the first section of this chapter (vv. 1-11), Peter uses the provision of the divine life for the proper Christian life to inoculate against apostasy. In the second section (vv. 12-21), he uses the revelation of the divine truth, as the second antidote, to inoculate against the heresy in the apostasy, a heresy similar to today's Modernism.

In verses 13 and 14 Peter says, "And I count it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by a reminder, knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is imminent, even as also our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me." The word "tabernacle" refers to the temporal body (2 Cor. 5:1). To put off the tabernacle is to put off the body, to be unclothed of the body (2 Cor. 5:4), to leave the body, to die physically. Peter, like Paul (2 Tim. 4:6), knew that he would leave the world by martyrdom, and he was ready for this. He remembered the Lord's word to him concerning his death, when He charged him to feed His sheep (John 21:15-19).

In verse 15 Peter continues, "And I will also be diligent, that after my exodus you may be able to have these things always in remembrance." By "exodus" or departure (the same Greek word is used in Luke 9:31), Peter means to leave the world. Once again, "these things" refer to what Peter has covered in 1:1-11.

NOT FOLLOWING CLEVERLY DEVISED MYTHS

In verse 16 Peter goes on to say, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we became eyewitnesses of that One's majesty." Myths were superstitious stories cleverly devised in Greek philosophy, which was related to the apostasy. The apostles preached and taught concerning the power and coming (Gk. *parousia*, presence) of the Lord Jesus Christ. To unbelievers, the preaching concerning the Lord's coming sounded very much like a myth or superstitious tale. But here Peter says that the apostles did not follow cleverly

devised myths when they made known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

EYEWITNESSES OF THE LORD'S MAJESTY

Concerning the word "eyewitnesses" Darby comments, "`Admitted into immediate vision of the glory,' a word used for full initiation into the mysteries." Peter realizes that he, James, and John were admitted to the highest degree of initiation at the Lord's transfiguration, admitted to be the initiated spectators of His majesty. Peter considers the Lord's transfiguration as a figure of His second coming, even as the Lord did in Luke 9:26-36. The Lord's transfiguration in glory was a fact, and Peter was in it. The Lord's coming back in glory will also be a fact as real as His transfiguration, and Peter will also be in it. This is not a cleverly devised myth passed on to the believers by the apostles.

Peter says that the apostles became eyewitnesses of the Lord's majesty. This majesty denotes magnificence, greatness in splendor, honor, and glory, even magnificent glory (2 Pet. 1:17), as appeared to the eyes of Peter and the other two disciples in the Lord's transfiguration (Matt. 17:2; Luke 9:32).

In verse 16 Peter seems to be saying, "We have told you that the Lord Jesus will come back in glory. This is not a tale or a myth. Even when He was on earth, the glory came out of Him, and He was transfigured. We saw His majesty when we were with Him on the mountain. We were eyewitnesses; we were initiated into a vision of His glory."

In this verse Peter combines the Lord's transfiguration with His coming back. This means that Christ's transfiguration is a prefigure of His coming. In Luke 9:26-36 the Lord Jesus also indicated that His transfiguration was a figure of His glory in His coming back.

In verses 17 and 18 Peter continues, "For He received from God the Father honor and glory, such a voice being borne to Him by the magnificent glory: This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight. And this voice we heard being borne out of heaven, being together with Him in the holy

mountain." Honor is a matter of position, and glory is a matter of state. On the mount of transfiguration, the Lord was in a position of honor and in a state of glory.

Peter says that a voice was borne to the Lord by the magnificent glory. This magnificent glory denotes the overshadowing cloud at the Lord's transfiguration (Luke 9:34-35), like the shekinah glory overshadowing the propitiation cover (Exo. 25:20; 40:34).

If we read the account in Matthew, Mark, and Luke concerning the Lord's transfiguration, we shall see that the magnificent glory in verse 17 refers to the overshadowing cloud. Peter, James, and John saw the cloud, and that cloud was the glory. Likewise, in ancient times, after the tabernacle had been erected, it was filled with the glory of God, for the cloud of God's glory overshadowed the tabernacle. It would have been difficult to discern the cloud from the glory, because the cloud was with the glory.

INOCULATING THE BELIEVERS AGAINST APOSTASY

This Epistle was written in the time of the church's degradation and apostasy. This apostasy was the background of this book. Peter's burden was to inoculate the believers against the poison of apostasy. Apostasy is a deviation from fundamental truth or belief. Approximately thirty years after the church had been established, apostasy began to creep in. There was a deviation from the track of fundamental belief. Certain ones were teaching heresy. One of these heresies was that the preaching concerning the coming back of the Lord Jesus in glory is a myth, a tale that is not believable or trustworthy. As we shall see when we come to chapter three, certain mockers said, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (3:4). These heretics and apostates regarded the teaching that the Lord would come back in glory to judge the earth as a superstitious tale.

The heretics at the time this Epistle was written can be compared to today's Modernists. The Modernists are a class of teachers who claim that the Bible is not inspired

by God and that the miracles recorded in the Bible are merely superstitious stories. For example, Modernists do not believe that the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea in a miraculous way. Instead, some Modernists think that the children of Israel walked through shallow water, water that was made shallow by the blowing of a strong wind. In like manner, Modernists do not believe that the Lord Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes. They explain this by saying that those in the crowd brought food with them and simply ate whatever they had brought. Even more serious, Modernists teach that Jesus was not born of a virgin and that He was not God. They claim that He died on the cross not for our redemption, but as a sacrifice for the kind of ism in which He believed. Furthermore, they do not believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In many respects, the Modernists of today and the heretics of the first century are similar.

In this Epistle Peter is giving the believers a strong testimony as an inoculation against heresy. This is the reason he points out that the Apostles did not follow cleverly devised myths when they spoke to them about the coming of the Lord Jesus. Peter seems to be saying, "Don't listen to the heretics. Along with John and James, I was an eyewitness of the Lord's majesty on the holy mountain. We were with Him when He was transfigured, and we heard the voice declaring, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight.' What we have told you is not a legend, myth, or superstitious tale. We testified of what we have seen and heard. We saw the Lord Jesus transfigured, and we know that as He was glorified in His transfiguration, so He will come again in glory. You need to receive our word and believe it."

TAKING HEED TO THE PROPHETIC WORD

In 1:19-21 Peter goes on to use the prophetic word found in the Old Testament to confirm their testimony. Both the Apostles' witness and the prophetic word in the Scriptures are the shining of the truth. This shining is part of the divine provision, the provision God has made by

His power so that His elect children may be able to stay away from heresy and apostasy.

In verse 19 Peter continues, "And we have the prophetic word made more firm, to which you do well to give heed as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." "And" indicates that in addition to the truth of the Lord's transfiguration covered in the preceding verses as the inoculation against superstitious myths, the truth of the prophetic word is used for a more sure confirmation. After speaking of his personal experience of the Lord's glory in His transfiguration, Peter goes on to use the word of the prophets to confirm his testimony and strengthen it.

Peter indicates that the believers do well to give heed to the prophetic word. This means that they were studying the Old Testament prophecies and giving heed to them.

Peter likens the word of prophecy in the Scripture to a lamp shining in a dark place. This indicates that this age is a dark place in the dark night (Rom. 13:12) and that all the people of this world are moving and acting in darkness. It also indicates that the prophetic word of the Scripture, as the shining lamp to the believers, conveys spiritual light to shine in their darkness (not merely knowledge in letters for mental apprehension) and guides them to enter into a bright day, even to pass through the dark night until the day of the Lord's appearing dawns.

The Greek words rendered "dark place" may also be translated murky place, a place that is squalid, dry, and neglected. This is a metaphor, illustrating the darkness in the apostasy. This age is a dark, murky, squalid place. But the prophetic word is a lamp shining in the darkness.

THE DAY DAWNING AND THE MORNING STAR ARISING

Peter says that we do well to give heed to the prophetic word until the day dawns and the morning star arises in our hearts. This also is a metaphor, illustrating a time coming which will be full of light, as a bright day dawning, with the morning star, before dawn, rising in the hearts of the believers, who are illuminated and enlightened by

giving heed to the shining word of the prophecy of Scripture. In the time of apostasy the believers do well to give heed in this matter so that the prophetic word, as a lamp, may shine through the darkness of apostasy until such a day dawns upon them. This will cause and encourage them to seek earnestly the Lord's presence and be watchful that they not miss the Lord in the secret part of His *parousia*, when He comes as a thief (Matt. 24:27; 2 Thes. 2:8). Hence, this metaphor should allude to the coming age, the age of the kingdom, as a day that will dawn at the appearing (the coming) of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:16) as the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2), whose light will shine to break through the gloom of the dark night of this age. Preceding this, the Lord will appear as the morning star (Rev. 2:28; 22:16) in the darkest hour of the night to those who are watchful and looking for His dear appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). They have been enlightened by the shining of the prophetic word, which is able to lead them to the dawning day.

It is correct to say that the dawning of the day in 1:19 refers to the time of the Lord's coming back. On that day, the Lord will shine as the Sun of righteousness. The time that is very close to the Lord's appearing may be likened to early morning, at which time the Lord Jesus will be the morning star to His watchful believers. Although all this is true, Peter is saying something even more. Actually, in 1:19 Peter covers two matters at the same time. He is saying that the entire world is a dark place and that this present age is a dark night. If we did not have the prophecies of the Bible, we also would be in darkness, for we would not have a lamp. But the prophetic word is our lamp shining in the darkness. As we give heed to this prophetic word, we receive the shining of the light. Eventually, this light will shine until a spiritual day dawns within us, and a morning star rises in our hearts. Therefore, Peter first is speaking of a spiritual day, a day that dawns within us. He also speaks of a future day, the day of the Lord's coming back.

Our experience confirms the fact that in 1:19 Peter

is speaking both of a spiritual day and the day of the Lord's coming. Many times we were in darkness and came to the prophecies in the Bible. As we studied the prophecies, a lamp began to shine within us. Spontaneously we had the sense that no longer were we in the night but in the day, for a spiritual day had dawned within us. We have not only the shining of a lamp, but also the dawning of a day. How pleasant it is for the morning star to rise up in our hearts! Although there may be darkness all around us, within us there is a morning star.

As we have pointed out, the dawning day in 1:19 also refers to a future day when the Lord Jesus will come back as the Sun of righteousness. Before His visible coming, He will be the morning star to those who watch for Him. Therefore, Peter's word in 1:19 applies both to our spiritual situation and to the Lord's coming.

THE PROPHETIC WORD SHINING WITHIN US

If we give heed to the prophecies of the Bible, we shall experience a lamp shining within us, enjoy the morning star rising in our hearts, and have a spiritual day dawning within us. We may remain in this condition until the actual time comes when the Lord Jesus appears as the morning star and there is the dawning of day with Him as the Sun of righteousness. I believe that this is the proper interpretation of 1:19.

Not long after I was saved, I began to read books on prophecy. During the years I was with the Brethren, I heard many messages on the prophecies in Daniel, Revelation, and other books. For more than half a century, my Christian life has been enlightened by these prophecies. Through Watchman Nee I became familiar with the writings of Pember, Govett, and Panton on prophecy. I can testify that the knowledge of these prophecies has helped to enlighten me. Although great changes have taken place in the world during the past fifty years, I have not been surprised, because of the light from the prophetic word in the Bible. I can also testify that, according to Peter's word,

I enjoy the morning star and the inward dawning of a spiritual day.

First we have the shining of the prophetic word, and then this shining becomes a day dawning within us. Outwardly we live in an age of darkness, but inwardly we are full of light. We may continue to enjoy the morning star and the dawning of a spiritual day until the time the Lord appears as the morning star to the watchful ones and dawns as the Sun of righteousness.

In these verses Peter seems to be saying, "Brothers, as Jewish believers you have much knowledge of the prophecies in the Old Testament, and you have heard our testimony concerning the Lord's coming. Now some heretics are trying to tell you that this is a superstition, that it is a tale, myth, or legend. Don't listen to them, and don't accept heretical teachings. You have our testimony, and you have the prophetic word shining within you. This prophetic word should shine within you until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."

THE PROPHECY OF SCRIPTURE NOT OF ONE'S OWN INTERPRETATION

In verse 20 Peter continues, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of one's own interpretation." Here "one's" refers to the prophet who spoke the prophecy or the writer who wrote the prophecy. Literally, the Greek word for "interpretation" means loosening, untying; hence, disclosure, exposition, solution. One's own interpretation means the prophet's or writer's own exposition or solution, which is not inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. Peter's thought here is that no prophecy of Scripture is of the prophet's or writer's own concept, idea, or understanding; that no prophecy comes from that source, the source of man; that no prophecy originates from the private and personal thought of any prophet or writer. This is confirmed and explained by the following verse.

BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Verse 21 says, "For no prophecy was ever borne by the

will of man, but men spoke from God, being borne by the Holy Spirit." "For" gives the explanation of the preceding verse. No prophecy of Scripture is of the prophet's or writer's solution, for no prophecy was ever borne or carried along by the will of man, but men spoke from God, being borne by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word translated "borne" also means carried along. The same word is used in verses 17 and 18. No prophecy was ever carried along by the will of man. Man's will, desire, and wish, with his thought and solution, are not the source from which any prophecy came. The source is God, by whose Holy Spirit men were carried along, as a ship by the wind, to speak out the will, desire, and wish of God.

Because the prophets were carried along by the Holy Spirit, what they uttered was not of their own interpretation or will. On the contrary, what they spoke was the will of God, the concept of God uttered by a prophet who was carried along by the Holy Spirit.

A RELIABLE AND TRUSTWORTHY WORD

Verses 20 and 21 prove that the prophetic word is altogether reliable and trustworthy. The prophecy in the Scriptures did not come from man's opinion. This prophecy is God's word, God's speaking. For this reason, we should believe whatever is prophesied in the Old Testament. Peter seems to be saying here, "The prophecy in the Bible is genuinely of God. Therefore, it is trustworthy. Do not listen to the heretical teachings of the apostates, of those who have deviated from the track of divine truth. Instead, you should give heed to the prophecies of the Old Testament and also hold to our testimony."

As we shall see, in 2:1 Peter says, "But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Here Peter says that there were false prophets among the people in times past and that in the future there will be false

teachers among the believers. These false teachers will bring in destructive heresies. Peter's word at the end of chapter one leads him to go on to speak of apostasy in chapter two. Peter's burden was to inoculate the believers against this apostasy.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE NINE

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 2:1-9

The first chapter of the Epistle of 2 Peter is on the divine provision. This provision includes two matters: life and light. The first part of chapter one emphasizes the divine life, and the second part emphasizes the divine light. The divine life is contained in the faith that has been allotted to us, and the divine light is contained in God's word, in the word of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Therefore, life and light are the two components of the divine provision.

Chapters two and three of 2 Peter are on God's government. In the messages on 1 Peter we had much to say regarding God's governmental judgment. Chapters two and three of 2 Peter continue to show us how God exercises His governmental judgment. In 2 Peter 2 we see God's judgment on the false teachers (2:1-3), God's judgment of old on both angels and men (vv. 4-9), and the evils of the false teachers and their punishment under God's judgment (vv. 10-22). In this message we shall cover 2:1-9. Let us consider these verses one by one.

FALSE TEACHERS BRINGING IN DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES

Second Peter 2:1 says, "But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them

bringing upon themselves swift destruction." After presenting to the believers the rich provision of the divine life and the shining enlightenment of the divine truth, thus providing for the maintenance of life and inoculating against the poison of apostasy, the Apostle Peter faithfully indicates as a warning to the believers in this chapter the awful contents of the apostasy and its dreadful result. This warning is a close parallel to that given in Jude 4-19.

In the Old Testament there were not only genuine prophets speaking God's word, which is like a lamp shining upon us, but there were also false prophets among the people. In 2:1 Peter says that there will be also false teachers among us, those who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.

The Greek words rendered "secretly bring in" may also be translated "bring in by smuggling." Literally, the Greek means to bring in alongside, to bring in sideways, to introduce a new subject for which the hearers are not prepared. Here it denotes the false teachers bringing in and introducing their false teachings alongside the true ones. These false teachings are called destructive heresies, or, literally, heresies of destruction.

"Heresy" is an anglicized Greek word, *hairesis,* which means choices of opinion of doctrine different from that usually accepted, "self-chosen doctrines alien from the truth" (Alford), thus causing division and producing sects. This word is also used in Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22; 1 Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20; and Titus 3:10 in the adjective form, *hairetikon,* heretical. Here it denotes the false and heretical doctrines brought in by the false teachers, the heretics, similar to the doctrines of today's Modernism.

Heresy involves three matters: opinion, the causing of divisions, and the producing of sects. Therefore, opinion, divisions, and sects are the three constituents of heresy. Heresy, of course, is not constructive. Instead of building up the church, heresy destroys the church. For this reason, Peter speaks of destructive heresies, or heresies of destruction.

DENYING THE MASTER

In Peter's words the false teachers even deny the Master who bought them. The word "Master" implies the Lord's Person and His redemptive work. The false teachers at Peter's time, like today's Modernists in their apostasy, denied both the Lord's Person as the Master and His redemption, by which He purchased the believers.

A type of Modernism that was prevailing fifty years ago was called Buchmanism, after a man named Buchman, a professor at Oxford University. Buchman put out a book entitled *For Sinners Only*. When we were in China, we criticized this book and opposed it because it did not say anything concerning the blood of Jesus. When Buchman became elderly, he was the leader of a movement called Moral Rearmament. Buchman may be regarded as a false teacher, one who denied the Master and His redemption.

BRINGING UPON THEMSELVES SWIFT DESTRUCTION

Peter says that the false teachers will bring upon themselves swift destruction. No doubt, this means that destruction will come upon them.

In this Epistle Peter uses three different Greek words concerning the consequence of the apostasy under God's judgment. *Apollumi* signifies to destroy utterly; in middle voice, to perish, as in 3:6, 9. The idea is not extinction, but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being. Its usage in Matthew 10:28; 22:7; Mark 12:9; Luke 17:27, 29; John 3:16; 10:28; 17:12; 1 Corinthians 10:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; and Jude 5, 11 unveils more of God's governmental judgment.

Apoleia, akin to *apollumi,* indicates loss of well-being, not of being, ruin, destruction, or perdition (physical, spiritual, or eternal). It is used for "destruction" in 2:1 (twice), 3; 3:7, 16. The same word denotes different results of God's varied judgments (see second paragraph of note 17^2 in 1 Pet. 1). In cases such as those described in 2 Peter 2:1, 3; 3:7; John 17:12; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; and Revelation 17:8, 11. it denotes

eternal perdition. In cases such as those described in 2 Peter 3:16 and Heb. 10:39, it denotes the punishment of God's governmental discipline, not eternal perdition. In Matthew 7:13 and 1 Timothy 6:9, it denotes a principle for any case.

Phthora denotes corruption unto destruction, destruction that comes with corruption, destroying by means of corrupting, of morality, soul, and body. It is used for "corruption" in 1:4; 2:12, and 19, and for "corrupting" in 2:12. The verb form, *phtheiro*, is used in future passive voice for "shall be corrupted" in 2:12, and in present passive voice for "are being corrupted" in Jude 10. Its significance can be further seen in Romans 8:21; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 15:33; 2 Corinthians 7:2; 11:3; Galatians 6:8; Revelation 11:18; and 19:2.

CAUSING THE WAY OF TRUTH TO BE REVILED

In verse 2 Peter continues, "And many will follow their licentiousness, because of whom the way of the truth will be reviled." The way of the truth is the path of the Christian life according to the truth, which is the reality of the contents of the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18; Titus 1:1). It is designated by other titles according to its various virtues, like the straight way (2 Pet. 2:15; see Heb. 12:13), the way of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:21; Matt. 21:32), the way of peace (Luke 1:79; Rom. 3:17), the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), the way of God (Matt. 22:16; Acts 18:26), the way of the Lord (John 1:23; Acts 18:25), and the way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22). It was slandered as the way of heresy (Acts 24:14).

Because of the false teachers, the way of the truth will be reviled. Since the way of the truth is the way of reality, and the way of reality is the way of God's economy, this means that the false teachers will cause the entire revelation of the New Testament to be reviled.

GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL JUDGMENT

In verse 3 Peter goes on to say, "And by covetousness with fabricated words they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Peter's first Epistle

stressed God's governmental judgment (1 Pet. 4:17-18). This is continued in the second Epistle. Under God's government the fallen angels were caught and are being kept for judgment (2:4), and the age of the deluge and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were all judged (vv. 5-9). But God will especially mete out serious judgment to the New Testament heretics (v. 10). And all the ungodly will be judged and destroyed at the day when the heavens and earth will be burned by fire (3:7). Because of this, the God of justice and holiness has begun His governmental judgment from His own household--the believers.

In verse 3 Peter indicates that as God exercised judgment upon the false teachers of old, that is, in ancient times, as illustrated in 2:4-9, so He will also exercise judgment upon today's false teachers. Peter says that for such ones the judgment is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber. God's judgment is not idle. This judgment will come upon the false teachers, and they will be destroyed.

THE JUDGMENT ON THE FALLEN ANGELS

In 2:4-9 Peter speaks concerning God's judgment of old on both angels and men. Verse 4 says, "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but delivered them to gloomy pits, having cast them down to Tartarus, being kept for judgment." These angels are the fallen angels (see notes 19^{2} in 1 Pet. 3 and 4^{1} in Rev. 12), who were the first fallen ones in the universe in the sequence of historical facts recorded in this chapter. These angels have been delivered to gloomy pits, having been cast down to Tartarus. Tartarus is a deep and gloomy pit, where the fallen angels are detained as in a prison (see note 19^{3} in 1 Pet. 3).

In Tartarus the fallen angels are being kept for judgment or kept unto judgment. This will be the judgment of the great day (Jude 6), which will probably be the judgment of the great white throne, executed upon all the dead, upon the demons, and probably also upon the fallen angels (Rev. 20:11-15). It is logical for all the angels,

demons, and men who have joined Satan in his rebellion to be judged at the same time, in the same way, and with the same result, immediately after their evil leader is judged and cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). Into that place they also will be cast (see second paragraph of note 17[2] in 1 Pet. 1).

THE CASE OF NOAH AND THE WORLD OF THE UNGODLY

In verse 5 Peter says, "And did not spare the ancient world, but guarded Noah, the eighth, a herald of righteousness, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly." To say that Noah was the eighth means that he was one of the eight (1 Pet. 3:20). Here Peter says that Noah was a herald of righteousness. To be righteous and godly or unrighteous and ungodly is crucial with respect to God's governmental judgment (2 Pet. 2:5-9). To be righteous is to be right with man before God, and to be godly is to express God before man. This was the manner of life Noah and Lot lived, which spared them from God's governmental judgment according to His righteousness.

Noah did not preach the gospel, but he preached God's righteousness over against the corruption of his generation. As we have pointed out, Peter speaks of righteousness because his emphasis is on God's government. Noah's preaching of righteousness was related to God's government. God told Noah that He would wipe out the world and that Noah should preach righteousness to his generation. God exercised His judgment upon that corrupted generation by bringing a flood upon the world of the ungodly.

THE CASE OF LOT AND THE JUDGMENT OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Verse 6 continues, "And having reduced to ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He condemned them to ruin, having set an example to those who intend to live an ungodly life." To live an ungodly life is to live in the flesh in the lusts of men, not in the will of God; it is to work out

the desire of the nations (1 Pet. 4:2-.3) and to live in a vain, ungodly manner of life (1 Pet. 1:18).

In verses 7 and 8 Peter says, "And rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless (for that righteous man making his home among them, in seeing and hearing, tormented his righteous soul day after day with their lawless works)." In these verses Peter uses three cases: the case of the fallen angels, the case of Noah and his generation, and the case of Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cases are presented according to their biblical sequence. In Genesis first the fallen angels are judged by God, then there is the judgment of Noah's generation, and later there is the judgment upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Peter tells us in 2:7 that righteous Lot was oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless. The word "lawless" here means unprincipled; it is a different word in Greek from lawless in verse 8. The lawless here especially denotes those who violate the law of nature and conscience. As God judged the lawless ones in Sodom and Gomorrah, He will also judge today's sodomites.

In verses 7 and 8 Peter uses the word "righteous" three times in speaking of righteous Lot, that righteous man, and his righteous soul. This word is used in relation to God's government. Likewise, the Greek words rendered lawless in verses 7 and 8 are also used here as governmental terms.

THE LORD DELIVERING THE GODLY OUT OF TRIAL AND KEEPING THE UNGODLY UNDER PUNISHMENT

In verse 9 Peter says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." The godly are those like Noah and Lot who live a godly life, in contrast to an ungodly life. The unrighteous are those who live an unrighteous life, in the licentious manner of the lawless, like those in Noah's time and those in Sodom and Gomorrah. The day of judgment will be the day of the final judgment of the great white throne. The unrighteous ones

who lived at the time of Noah and Lot must still face the judgment at the great white throne. After that judgment has been carried out, they will be cast into the lake of fire.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE TEN

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 2:10-22

In this message we shall consider the evils of the false teachers and their punishment under God's judgment (2:10-22).

THE EXPOSURE OF THE FALSE TEACHERS

In 2:10 Peter says, "And especially those who go after the flesh in defiling lust, and despise lordship. Darers, self-willed, they do not tremble while reviling dignities." From here to the end of the chapter, the exposure returns to the false teachers and their followers, a continuation of the exposure in verses 1 through 3. In God's governmental dealing, they will be especially kept under punishment for the day of judgment because they go after the flesh, indulging in defiling lust and corrupting luxury for pleasure, and despise the Lord's government, rebelling against His authority (vv. 10, 13-14, 18). Thus, they become persons like animals without reason (v. 12), spots and blemishes to the believers as God's treasure (v. 13), Balaam, in forsaking the straight way for unrighteous gain (v. 15), springs without water and mists driven by a storm (vv. 17-19), and dogs and sows that become defiled both inwardly and outwardly (vv. 20-22).

DESPISING LORDSHIP

Peter says that the false teachers despise lordship. Here "lordship" must refer to the lordship of Christ, which is the center of the divine government, dominion, and authority (Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16).

Peter also says that the false teachers are self-willed and do not tremble while reviling dignities. They are self-willed in that they are self-pleasing, seeking pleasure for self. The Greek word rendered "dignities" literally means glories. It probably refers both to angels and men in power and authority (v. 11; Jude 9; Titus 3:1-2).

In verse 11 Peter continues, "Whereas angels, being greater in strength and power, do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord." Here "angels" and "them," referring to dignities in verse 10, are mentioned in a general way. But in Jude 9 regarding the same case, the archangel Michael and the Devil are singled out. Because Michael realized that in the angelic order the Devil was higher than he, he did not dare to bring a reviling judgment against him. The words a "reviling judgment" in 2:11 actually mean a condemnation. To refrain from bringing a reviling judgment against them before the Lord is to keep the order of authority in God's government.

ANIMALS WITHOUT REASON

In verse 12 Peter goes on to say, "But these, as animals without reason, having been born natural for capture and corruption, reviling in things of which they are ignorant, shall also in their corrupting be corrupted." Here "animals" literally means living creatures (including man) and refers to men living as animals. The King James Version adopts the rendering "natural brute beasts."

"Without reason," or "irrational" here means having no sense of moral issues. The highest sense within man is his spirit with the conscience as its leading part. Conscience governs man under God's government since man's fall. Some have "ceased from feeling" (Eph. 4:19) by giving up the consciousness of their conscience through their denial of God (Rom. 1:23-32). The first century heretics, like the Sadducees in ancient Judaism (Acts 23:8) and the Modernists of today, are in this category. They have denied the Lord to the uttermost so that their conscience is seared

and has lost its consciousness (1 Tim. 4:2). as if they do not even have a spirit (Jude 10, 19). Thus, they become as animals without reason, as creatures of instinct, born natural to be captured, through their lust, by Satan the destroyer of man, that they may be corrupted unto destruction.

Peter says that those who become as animals without reason have been born for capture and corruption. The word "for" literally means unto and indicates that they are destined to be captured for corruption, to be made slaves of corruption (v. 19). But by the supply of life through the divine provision (1:3-4) we are able to escape this corruption that brings in destruction.

Peter tells us that the false teachers will also "in their corrupting be corrupted." This means that while they are corrupting others, they themselves will also be corrupted.

FURTHER DETAILS

Verse 13 says, "Suffering unrighteousness as the wages of unrighteousness, counting luxury in the day to be pleasure; spots and blemishes, reveling in their deceits, feasting together with you." In verse 13 some manuscripts read "receiving the wages of unrighteousness." Here unrighteousness refers to unrighteous doings. Peter uses the word "unrighteousness" in this verse in a governmental way.

According to verse 13, the false teachers are spots and blemishes. This means that the lust-indulging heretics are to genuine believers, who are God's treasure, like spots and blemishes to precious gems.

Furthermore, these false teachers revel in their deceits. They are happy, beside themselves with pleasure, whenever they deceive others. They revel in the fact that they cause others to be deceived.

Verse 14 continues, "Having eyes full of adultery and not ceasing from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart practiced in covetousness, children of curse." These details also describe the false teachers.

FORSAKING THE STRAIGHT WAY

Verse 15 says, "Forsaking the straight way, they have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." The straight way here, as the way of the truth (v. 2) and the way of righteousness (v. 21), is to live an upright life without crookedness or bias, without unrighteousness.

Having gone astray, the false teachers followed the way of Balaam. Balaam was not a false prophet of the Gentiles, but a real prophet. However, Balaam was one who loved the wages of unrighteousness (Num. 22:5, 7; Deut. 23:4; Neh. 13:2; Rev. 2:14).

Verse 16 says, "But had reproof of his own transgression--a dumb beast of burden, speaking with a man's voice, restrained the madness of the prophet." This refers to Balaam, who was restrained by a donkey, a beast of burden, speaking with a human voice. This verse says that this miraculous speaking restrained the madness of the prophet. This indicates that the prophet Balaam was mad in his pursuit of money, in his pursuit of the wages of unrighteousness. Therefore, God used the miraculous speaking of a beast of burden to restrain him.

SPRINGS WITHOUT WATER AND MISTS DRIVEN BY A STORM

Verse 17 continues, "These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept." Here we see that the heretical teachers are dried up. They are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. They are waterless clouds carried along by winds (Jude 12), having nothing of life to meet the need of the thirsty ones.

Peter says that the "gloom of darkness has been kept" for these false teachers. This also refers to God's governmental dealing and indicates that a particular place has been prepared for them.

In verse 18 Peter says, "For uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice by fleshly lusts, in sensuality, those who are barely escaping from them who live in

error." The Greek word rendered "sensuality" also means licentiousness, as in verse 2. The word "live" also means to behave, to conduct themselves.

SLAVES OF CORRUPTION

Verse 19 says, "Promising freedom to them, while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom anyone has been overcome, by this one he has been enslaved." In this verse the Greek word rendered "corruption" is *phthora* and denotes corruption unto destruction, destruction that comes with corruption, destroying by means of corrupting.

The false teachers promised freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. They have been overcome by Satan, and now they are enslaved by the one who has overcome them.

ENTANGLED AND OVERCOME

Verse 20 says, "For if having escaped the defilements of the world by the full knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and having again been entangled in these, they are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first." This verse indicates that, at least to some extent, the false teachers had the full knowledge of Christ. However, they again became entangled, and therefore the last state became worse for them than the first.

THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In verse 21 Peter goes on to say, "For it were better for them not to have fully known the way of righteousness, than fully knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them." This means that it would have been better for them if they had not known anything concerning the Lord than to have turned back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

In verse 21 Peter speaks of the way of righteousness. The way of righteousness is to live a life that is right with both God and man. This is another aspect of the way of the truth (v. 2) and the straight way (v 15). This is the way to

live a life according to God's justice, a way that can take His governmental judgment (vv. 3, 9) for His kingdom of righteousness (Rom 14:17; Matt. 5:20). Peter in his Epistles stresses both the manner of life and the way of life, because his writings are based on the governmental point of view of God's administration. In order to fit in with the government of Him who is holy and righteous, God's people need to live in a manner of life that is holy, pure, good, and excellent (1 Pet. 1:15; 3:16, 2; 2:12; 2 Pet. 3:11), not licentious or vain (2:7; 1 Pet. 1:18), in His straight way of righteousness and truth.

A TRUE PROVERB

Verse 22 concludes, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb: The dog has turned to its own vomit, and the washed sow to wallowing in the mud." Here Peter is quite strong and uses two kinds of animals, a dog and a sow, to describe the unclean, false teachers. Dogs and sows are unclean animals, according to the ordinances of God's holiness (Lev. 11:4, 7; Matt. 7:6). Dogs have a habit of eating filthy things. They vomit what they eat and turn to their own vomit to become filthied inwardly. Sows wallow in the mud to make themselves filthy outwardly. The God-denying heretics eventually become like these dirty animals, making themselves filthy both inwardly and outwardly. What serious judgment they deserve according to God's righteousness in His governmental administration! Because the defilement of the false teachers is very contagious, the believers' contact with them is prohibited (2 John 9-11).

We have seen that in 2:10-22 Peter exposes the evils of the false teachers and their punishment under God's judgment. Because the false teachers go after the flesh, indulge in defiling lust, corrupt luxury for pleasure, despise the Lord's government, and rebel against His authority, in God's governmental dealing they will be especially kept under punishment for the day of judgment. We have seen that they become like animals without reason, spots and blemishes, Balaam. springs without water and mists

driven by a storm. and dogs and sows. Peter is unique in giving us such a description of the evil condition of the false teachers.

DEGRADATION AND APOSTASY

Chapter two of 2 Peter proves that this Epistle was written during the degradation of the church. The church had become degraded through apostasy. Apostasy is a deviation from the right track of God's truth. This apostasy was the background of this Epistle. Peter's burden was to inoculate the believers against the poison of apostasy.

The Epistle of 2 Peter was probably written between A.D. 65 and 68, approximately thirty years after the establishment of the church in Jerusalem. During those years, the church became degraded, and apostasy crept in.

The Epistles of 2 and 3 John were also written during a time of apostasy. However, those Epistles were written about a quarter of a century later than 2 Peter, that is, approximately A.D. 90. Thus, five books--2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude--were written during a time of the church's degradation in apostasy.

FIGHTING FOR THE DEEPER TRUTHS

It is important for us to realize that the element of apostasy continues today. Because a number of basic truths have been given up, even by those who apparently are fundamental believers, there is the need for us in the Lord's recovery to fight the battle for the truth. At the time of Martin Luther it was necessary to fight regarding justification by faith. It certainly was worthwhile for Luther to fight that battle. But today we need to fight for the deeper truths revealed in the Word of God. We believe not only in all the genuine items held by fundamental Christians, but also in the deeper truths. We definitely believe that the Bible is fully inspired by God word for word. We would follow the literal translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 to say that all Scripture is God-breathed. We believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God. He is true God and

true man. We believe in Christ's incarnation and in His death on the cross for our redemption. According to the Scriptures, we believe that the Lord's death was all-inclusive. Through His crucifixion He terminated the old creation, including us with our flesh and our fallen nature. We fully believe in the Lord's resurrection and ascension. We believe that the Lord is now on the throne. But we also believe that He is not limited to the throne, for as the life-giving Spirit He dwells in our spirit. We believe in every aspect of what Christ is and of what He has done, is doing, and will do. We also believe in all that Christ has attained and obtained. Furthermore, according to the Bible, we believe in transformation and in being constituted of the element of God for the rearrangement of our being. We may say that all this is our deeper faith. In a time of apostasy, we believe and testify the full revelation of the pure Word of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 3:1-9

In this message we come to chapter three of 2 Peter. In 3:1-9 we see God's judgment on the heretical mockers. In this Epistle we have not only false teachers but also mockers. These mockers may be the false teachers themselves or those who are influenced by the teachings of the false ones. Both the false teachers and the heretical mockers will be judged by God. Let us now consider 3:1-9 verse by verse.

In verse 1 Peter says, "This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you, in both of which I stir up your pure mind by a reminder." Here we see that Peter's aim was to stir up the pure mind of the saints. In order to understand God's governmental dealings, we need a pure mind.

In verse 2 Peter continues, "To remember the words spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior by your apostles." The words spoken by the prophets are the contents of the Old Testament, the Scriptures (v. 16; 1:20), and the commandments by the apostles are the contents of the New Testament, the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). Peter uses both to confirm and strengthen his writings as an inoculation against the heretical teachings in the apostasy. In his first Epistle, concerning the full salvation of God, he refers to both the prophets and the apostles (1 Pet. 1:9-12). Then in the second Epistle, concerning the shining of the divine truth, he refers again to both (1:12-21). Here in verse 2 Peter does this for the third time. Therefore,

Peter's teaching is based upon the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament, the two sections of the Holy Word. This indicates that what Peter says here actually refers to the entire Bible. His reminder is based upon both the prophecies of the Old Testament and the teachings of the New Testament.

MOCKERS IN THE LAST DAYS

Verse 3 says, "Knowing this first, that in the last days mockers will come with mocking, going on according to their own lusts." The "last days" denotes the closing period of the present age (2 Tim. 3:1; Jude 18). This period began from the end of the so-called apostolic age, in the latter part of the first century, and will last until Christ's second appearing. In verse 3 Peter tells us that in the last days mockers will come. These mockers may be the false teachers in 2:1. Their mocking is part of the apostasy and is according to their lusts.

According to verse 4, these mockers say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." The promise of the Lord's coming was given to the fathers by the holy prophets in the Old Testament (Psa. 72:6-17; 110:1-3; 118:26; Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 14:3-9; Mal. 4:1-3). But the mockers said, with a mocking tone, "Where is the promise of His coming?" It is possible that they used the pronoun "His" in a contemptuous manner. The mockers said that everything has continued unchanged from the beginning of creation.

FULLY IGNORANT OF THE WORD OF GOD

In verses 5 and 6 Peter fights back: "For this is hidden from them by their own willfulness, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth, subsisting out of water and through water, through which the world then, being flooded by the water, perished." Here Peter points out that the mockers willingly ignore the record in the Old Testament concerning God's judgment by the flood. That flood was a serious judgment. Nevertheless, the mockers

willingly ignored the record in the Bible about it. Literally, the Greek words rendered "this is hidden from them by their own willfulness" mean "this escapes them by their own willfulness"; that is, they are willfully ignorant of this. Hence, it escapes their notice. The heretical mockers ignore willfully and deny purposely the word of God spoken by the prophets in the Scriptures. Therefore, Peter reminds the believers to remember the holy words spoken by both the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles (vv. 1-2).

The promise concerning the Lord's coming (v. 4) is the word of God. The mockers should not ignore that it was by the word of God that the heavens and the earth came into existence (Heb. 11:3), and it is by the same word that the heavens and the earth are being kept (Heb. 1:3) for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:7). Therefore, the mockers should be assured that by the word of God all the material universe, including them, will be judged by the coming of the Lord.

Peter says in verse 5 that by the word of God the heavens were of old. The words "were of old" mean existed from ancient times. In the beginning, that is, of old, the heavens and the earth were created by God (Gen. 1:1). By the word of God (Psa. 33:6) the heavens came into existence first, and then the earth (Job 38:4-7).

In verse 5 Peter speaks of the earth "subsisting out of water and through water." As in Colossians 1:17, the Greek word rendered "subsisting" literally means standing together, standing with (in juxtaposition, side by side). First the earth came into existence in Genesis 1:1, and then from Genesis 1:9, also by the word (the speaking) of God (Psa. 33:9), the earth began to subsist out of water and through water, that is, to stand together with water in juxtaposition, partly emerging out of water and partly submerged under water. This is the way the earth came into existence.

The relative pronoun "which" in verse 6 refers to water in verse 5. The earth subsisted out of water and through water in an orderly condition. But through the same water

it was judged and destroyed by the flood at Noah's time (Gen. 7:17-24). This indicates that all things have not remained as they were from the beginning of creation.

JUDGMENTS BY WATER AND FIRE

The Greek word for world, *kosmos*, denotes order, a system, the world with its inhabitants. The earth in the preceding verse became the world in this verse, not merely the earth, but the earth with its inhabitants in a system. This refers to the world in Noah's age, which was judged by God with the flood due to the sinfulness and ungodliness of that age (Gen. 6:5-7, 11-13, 17). This book is concerned mainly with the divine government and all its judgments. The first judgment on the world was the one executed by the flood in Noah's day, which cleared up that ungodly world. This thought must have been in Peter while he was writing this verse. It implies that this age of apostasy will also be judged on the day of the Lord's appearing, as it was judged in the day of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39). The word "then" in verse 6 refers to the age of Noah.

The word "flooded" in verse 6 refers to the flood of Noah's time, the flood that caused the earth to be destroyed. The word "perish" means destroyed, demolished, laid waste (Gen. 6:13, 17). The earth, therefore, did not remain the same, but had a change, a cataclysm, by being flooded with water, and was destroyed. Here we see Peter's strong argument against the heretical mockers. They said that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." But actually a cataclysm came upon the earth because of the ungodliness of its inhabitants. This implies that the present world will not remain as it is, but will also have a cataclysm by the Lord's coming with His judgment upon the rebellious, including the false teachers and the heretical mockers in the apostasy.

In verse 7 Peter goes on to say, "But the heavens and the earth now, by the same word, have been reserved for fire, being kept unto the day of judgment and destruction

of ungodly men." In this verse the word "now" is in contrast with "then" in verse 6. It refers to the present heavens and earth, which remain by the word of God (Gen. 8:22), not to be destroyed again by water (Gen. 9:11), but to be burned by fire on the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

In verse 7 Peter speaks of the "same word." The false and heretical teachings in the apostasy are a deviation from the word of God spoken by the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament. Hence, the antidote administered by Peter's inoculation against the poison of the apostate teachings is the holy word with the divine revelation, which he emphasizes repeatedly.

According to Peter's word, the heavens and the earth "have been reserved for fire." The word "reserved" means kept in store. The fire here is the fire that will burn up the heavens and the earth (v. 10) at the end of the millennium when the judgment of the great white throne is come (Rev. 20:11). God's initial judgment upon the universe was by water (2 Pet. 3:6), but His consummate judgment will be by fire. Water only washes away the filthiness from the surface, but fire changes the nature of the entire substance. This indicates further that the heavens and the earth will not remain the same as they are, but will be cleared up by fire, and that the ungodly false teachers and mockers will be judged and destroyed under the divine government.

The judgment in verse 7 denotes the judgment of the great white throne, which will follow the millennium and precede the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 20:11--21:1). Through that judgment all the ungodly will be cast into the lake of fire for destruction. Since it will be the final judgment upon men and demons, it is of the greatest concern to the government of God in the universe.

A THOUSAND YEARS AS ONE DAY

Here Peter skips over the millennium, the period of time from the Lord's coming to the judgment of the great white throne. To Peter, as to the Lord, that one thousand years will be as one day (v. 8), a short time. Peter is

dealing here with God's governmental judgment. The millennium will not be for this purpose in God's dispensation.

Here Peter speaks concerning the "mountain peaks" of the Lord's coming and of God's final judgment, but not of the "plain" of the millennial kingdom that lies between the "peak" of the Lord's coming and that of the final judgment. In this Epistle Peter is concerned with God's judgment, not with the peaceful kingdom of the thousand years. For this reason he passes over the matter of the millennial kingdom.

In verse 8 Peter says, "But do not let this one thing be hidden from you, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Literally, the Greek word rendered "be hidden from you" means escape you, that is, escape your notice.

With the Lord God, who is eternal, the sense of time is very different from what it is with man. Hence, for the fulfillment of His word, especially the word of His promise, time is not the crucial matter. The crucial matter is the fact. Whatever God has promised will eventually become a fact. We should not be troubled by the sense of delay according to our reckoning of time.

Verse 9 says, "The Lord does not delay regarding the promise, as some count delay, but is longsuffering toward you, not intending any to perish, but all to come to repentance." Here Peter says that the Lord does not delay, or is not tardy, regarding the promise, as some count delay, tardiness. The mockers must have been those who count the Lord's delay as tardiness. They may have accused Him of being idle, since tardiness is a delay that is related to idleness.

In verse 9 Peter says that the Lord is longsuffering toward us. The Lord's heart is set not on the time of the fulfillment of His promise, but on His people, whom He possesses peculiarly as a treasure (1 Pet. 2:9; Titus 2:14), so that none of us, His precious redeemed ones, would be punished by His governmental judgment, but have a prolonged season to repent so that we may be spared from His punishment.

The words "to perish" in verse 9 mean to be destroyed. Since "you" in this verse refers to the believers in Christ, "to perish" refers not to the eternal perdition of the unbelievers, but to the punishment of God's governmental discipline of the believers (1 Pet. 4:17-18; cf. 1 Thes. 5:3, 8). Likewise, the word "all" refers to the believers. Furthermore, "repentance" here is repentance unto salvation (2 Pet. 3:15), repentance for not being watchful for the day of the Lord's coming (v. 10) and not living a life in a holy manner and in godliness (v. 11).

We need to realize that the Lord's heart is not set on the time of the fulfillment of His promise, but is set on His people. If necessary, the Lord can wait for another day, another period of a thousand years, to fulfill His promise. Today many Christians are saying that the Lord Jesus will come back soon. However, the Lord's coming may not be as soon as people think. In Revelation 22 the Lord said, "I come quickly." Nevertheless, nearly two thousand years have passed since the Lord spoke that word. To Him, this is only two days, for with the Lord a thousand years are as one day.

Do not listen to those who set a time for the Lord's coming back. In the past some predicted the time of the Lord's coming. In the last century one group of people believed that the Lord Jesus was coming on a particular day. They made themselves ready and even put on white robes. Of course, nothing happened.

After World War I, a number of books were written on the prophecies concerning the Lord's coming. Some Bible teachers claimed that, according to their view of the world situation, the Lord's coming was at hand. But more than fifty years have passed since those writings appeared, and the Lord Jesus still has not come. We need to he reminded, therefore, of Peter's word concerning a thousand years being as one day to the Lord.

When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will not only judge the negative things, hut will also receive His bride. This means that He will come both as the Judge and as the Bridegroom. Hence in order for the Lord to come as the

Bridegroom, the bride must be prepared for Him. Is the bride ready for the Bridegroom's coming? Is it possible for the Lord to come today as the Bridegroom? Because the bride is not yet ready, we may say that it is possible that the Lord's coming will not be as soon as some figure. The bride can be prepared only through growth in life, and this takes time. Higher forms of life require more time to develop than lower forms do. The higher a certain life is, the longer it will take to grow. Because the bride must be prepared for the Bridegroom and because this preparation is through the growth in life, a growth that requires time, it is not likely that the Lord Jesus will come back right now.

My point here is that we should not be bothered or surprised by any delay concerning the Lord's coming. Do not blame the Lord and say, "Lord, you said in Revelation 22 that You were coming quickly. Why, then, has it been so long?" Instead of blaming the Lord for delaying His coming, we should be diligent to prepare ourselves to meet Him. We should also minister life to others so that they may grow and be prepared. This is the only way to hasten the Lord's coming back.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

(4)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 3:10-12

In the books of 1 and 2 Peter only two chapters are crucial concerning the divine life. The first one and a half chapters of 1 Peter and the first half of chapter one of 2 Peter are important in this regard. The remainder of the material in these Epistles is related to God's government.

In this message we shall consider 3:10-12, where Peter speaks concerning God's judgment on the heavens and the earth. This, of course, is part of God's governmental dealings. Although these verses are not directly related to the growth in life, they may help us to pursue the growth in life. Also, it will be helpful for us to understand properly what Peter has written in these verses.

THE DAY OF THE LORD COMING AS A THIEF

In 3:10 Peter said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements burning with intense heat will be dissolved, and the earth and the works in it will be burned up." The day of the Lord will come mostly in the sense of judgment (1 Thes. 5:2) for God's government. Peter's word about the day of the Lord is mainly a warning. In the New Testament the day of the Lord is mentioned mainly in relation to the Lord's judgment (1 Cor. 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:8). The day of the Lord for His judgment 1 Thes. 5:3-4) will come before the millennium (Rev. 18:1; 19:11; 20:4-6).

In the day of the Lord the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved, and the earth and

the works in it will be burned up. This will take place after the millennium (Rev. 20:7, 11). Peter's word regarding the day of the Lord in verse 10 indicates that again he passes over the one thousand years of the millennium, just as he did earlier in this chapter when he spoke of the Lord's coming in verse 4 and the judgment of the white throne in verse 7. The word "roar" indicates a rushing sound or noise. This may be a proclamation of a great change in the universe from the old to the new. The "elements" here are the physical elements of which the heavens are composed.

We may compare the words "dissolved" and "burned up" in this verse with "roll up" and "changed" in Hebrews 1:12, "fled away" and "no place found for them" in Revelation 20:11, and "passed away" in Revelation 21:1. The "burning with intense heat" to dissolve the heavens and the earth is the procedure God will use to roll up the heavens and the earth and put them away so that they may be changed from the old to the new (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). This will be God's final and consummate dealing with His creation in His government. All the material things in God's final dealing will pass away, but His eternal word will abide forever (Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:25). The word of His prophecy will remain and be fulfilled at His appointed time for the accomplishment of His eternal will, regardless of the changes that occur in the physical universe.

In 3:10 "works" may include both God's works of nature and man's works of art.

We have pointed out that the term "the day of the Lord" mainly signifies judgment. Hence, the day of the Lord equals the judgment of the Lord. This day of judgment will come as a thief in the night.

Peter says in verse 10 that in the day of the Lord the heavens will pass away. As in 3:7, Peter passes over the millennium because he is dealing here with God's governmental judgment. The millennium will not be for this purpose in God's dispensation.

If we have a thorough study of both the Old and New Testaments, we shall see that the day of the Lord will

probably last about seven years. It is nearly the same as the last week of the seventy weeks spoken of in Daniel 9:24-27. The first sixty-nine weeks, a period of four hundred eighty-three years, ended when the Lord Jesus was crucified, when He, the Messiah, was "cut off." There is now a gap between the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth week. We are not told in the Bible how long this interval will be. But we do know that after this interval, there will be a period of seven years, which will be the seventieth week, before the millennium. The coming of the Lord will take place during these years.

THE LORD'S COMING

In 3:4 the mockers said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" The Greek word for "coming" is *parousia,* which literally means presence. According to the New Testament, the Lord's *parousia,* His coming, will not last merely an hour or a day. Rather, it will last for a period of time. Through detailed study of the Scriptures we have come to see that the Lord's *parousia* will probably begin at the middle of the seventieth week, that is, in the middle of the last seven years before the millennium. Furthermore, it will probably begin from the time the Lord leaves the throne of God in the third heaven and descends to the air wrapped in a cloud (Rev. 10). This means that the Lord's *parousia* will take place during the last three and a half years of this age.

According to chapter twelve of Revelation, the man-child will be raptured to the throne of God. Revelation 12:5 says, "And she brought forth a son, a man-child, who was about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." To be "caught up" is to be raptured. The rapture of the man-child will be to the throne of God, and it will be before the one thousand two hundred sixty days (v. 6), which will be the time of the great tribulation of three and a half years (forty-two months, Rev. 12:14; 13:5; 11:2). After the rapture of the man-child, there will he a period of three and a half years, or forty-two months. We need to notice the fact that

the man-child will be raptured not to the air, but to the throne of God, where the Lord Jesus is today. Therefore, for the man-child to be raptured to the throne of God means that the man-child will be in the presence of the Lord, in the *parousia* of the Lord. This proves that, in the midst of the seventieth week, the Lord Jesus will still be at the throne of God in the third heaven.

Chapter fourteen of Revelation speaks of the one hundred forty-four thousand firstfruit. Revelation 14:1 says, "And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." These one hundred forty-four thousand "who have been purchased from the earth" (Rev. 14:3) have been "purchased from among men as firstfruit to God and to the Lamb" (v. 4). These will be the first ripe ones in God's field and will be reaped before the harvest as ***firstfruit*** to God and to the Lamb. The harvest will be reaped later in verses 14 through 16. This means that the one hundred forty-four thousand will be raptured to the heavens before the harvest, just as the ***firstfruits*** of the good land were reaped and brought into the temple of God before the harvest (Lev. 23:10-11; Exo. 23:19). The events recorded in Revelation 14:6-13, all of which will take place during the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21), indicate clearly and prove strongly that the firstfruit in Revelation 14:1-5 will be raptured before the great tribulation, and the harvest in verses 14 through 16, which includes the majority of believers, will be raptured after the great tribulation. The firstfruit will be raptured to the heavens and will be with Christ there. After this rapture, there will be a period of three and a half years, the second half of the seventieth week.

Revelation 12 and 14 both speak of the same period of time. These chapters give us the ground to say that, at the earliest. the *parousia* of the Lord will begin from the middle of the seventieth week. After the raptures of the man-child and of the one hundred forty-four thousand firstfruit. the Lord Jesus will leave the third heaven with

these overcoming saints and descend to the air. Instead of coming directly to the earth, He will remain in the air enclosed in a cloud. In Revelation 10:1 Christ is clothed with a cloud, but in Revelation 14:14 He is on the cloud. This latter verse corresponds to 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and indicates that the Lord's coming back is then to be made public. This means that first the Lord's *parousia* will be hidden. Then, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:8 there will be the appearing of His *parousia*. The Lord's coming, therefore, will be hidden before it appears openly. His coming involves a period of time. First it will be in secret, and then it will appear to the public. It will be probably at the end of the seventieth week that the Lord's *parousia* will appear. At this time the Lord will no longer be clothed with the cloud, as in Revelation 10, but will be sitting on the cloud, seen openly, as in Revelation 14. That will be the appearing of His *parousia*, the appearing of His coming. The best way to translate 2 Thessalonians 2:8 is to follow a literal rendering and speak of the appearing of His coming.

If we have at least a general idea concerning the Lord's coming, we shall know why Peter says that the day of the Lord will come as a thief. Not only will the Lord Himself come as a thief, but even the day of the Lord will come in this way. The coming of that day will be hidden, not open.

We have pointed out that in 3:10 Peter says that in the day of the Lord the heavens will be burned. This will take place after the millennium. The day of the Lord will come before the millennium, but the burning of the heavens will be after the millennium. This is the reason we say that here Peter passes over the millennium, a period of a thousand years, and regards the burning of the heavens and the earth as the last matter that will take place in the day of the Lord.

At this point I would ask you to consult the chart printed on page 111. On this chart we can see a diagram of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24-27. First we have a period of seven weeks, then a time of sixty-two weeks, and finally, after a gap of undetermined length, the last week, the seventieth week. The seventieth week will be followed

by

the thousand years of the millennial kingdom. At the end of the millennium two events will take place, perhaps at the same time: the burning of the heavens and the earth, and the judgment at the white throne. According to the diagram, the day of the Lord will begin preliminarily at the start of the last seven years, and the Lord's *parousia* will begin at the middle of these years. Before the middle of the seventieth week, certain natural calamities will take place, as in the sixth seal. The Lord's day, as we can see from the diagram, will be open and will not be completed until the end of the millennium, at which time there will be the judgment on Gog and Magog.

Now we can understand that the day of the Lord is a day of judgment. This day of judgment will begin from the start of the last week, the seventieth week. During this period of time, God will judge heaven, earth, and those living on earth, according to what is written in the book of Revelation. Then in the middle of the seventieth week the man-child and the one hundred forty-four thousand will be raptured to the third heaven. Following that, the Lord's *parousia* will begin. The Lord will bring His presence down to the air, and He will be concealed for a time in the cloud. This will be the hidden part of His *parousia*. Then, probably at the end of the seven years, the Lord's *parousia* will be made public, and the Lord Himself will descend to earth to exercise judgment upon Antichrist and his army. The Lord will also cause Satan to be bound and cast into the abyss, where he will be kept for a thousand years. Also, the Lord will sit on His throne in Jerusalem to judge the nations. Through that judgment, the situation of those on earth will be cleared up. The Christians will have been judged at the judgment seat of Christ, the Jews will have been judged, and the nations will have been judged at Christ's throne of glory. As a result, everything will be made ready for the peaceful kingdom that will last for a thousand years. However, at the end of the millennium, Satan will be released from his prison and will instigate the rebellion of Gog and Magog. Christ will then judge Gog and Magog, and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire.

This will take place at the end of the millennium. Then there will be the judgment at the white throne and the burning of the heavens and the earth. After this, the day of the Lord will be completed, and eternity will be ushered in with the new heaven and the new earth.

HOLY MANNER OF LIFE AND GODLINESS

In verse 11 Peter goes on to say, "All these things being thus dissolved, what kind of persons ought you to be in holy manner of life and godliness." All things, both in the heavens and on the earth, have been defiled by the rebellion of Satan and the fall of men. Although all things whether on earth or in the heavens have been reconciled to God through Christ by His blood (Col. 1:20), the heavenly things having been purified by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:23), they still need to be cleared up by being burned up in God's governmental dealing so that they may become new in nature and appearance in God's new universe (2 Pet. 3:13). Thus, what kind of persons ought we, the children of the holy God, to be in holy manner of life and godliness; that is, what kind of transformation ought we to have to live a life in the manner of God's holy nature and godliness to express Him so that we may be qualified to match His holy government? How wonderful that the divine power has provided us with all things that are needed to live such a life in the holy manner and godliness (1:3).

EXPECTING AND HASTENING THE DAY OF GOD

In verse 12 Peter says, "Expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens, being set on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements burning with intense heat are melted." While we live a transformed life in a holy and godly manner, we are expecting, awaiting, and hastening the coming of the day of God. Knowing that God is so holy as to dissolve all things, we ought to be in a holy manner of life and godliness as we expect and hasten the coming of the day of God. Not only do we expect the day of God--we would hasten it.

THE DAY OF GOD

The day of God is the day of the Lord (v. 10), and the day of the Lord is the day of Jehovah to the children of Israel in the Old Testament (Isa. 2:12; Joel 1:15; 2:11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14, 18; 2:2-3; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:1, 5). The "day" in such terms is mainly used in the sense of judgment for governmental dealings. Before the Lord comes it is "man's day" in which man judges until the Lord comes (1 Cor. 4:3-5). Then it will be the day of the Lord," which will begin from the Lord's *parousia* (with all its judgments) and will end with the judgment upon men and demons at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). The Lord's *parousia* will start when the overcoming saints will be raptured to the throne of God in the heavens before the great tribulation of three and one-half years (Rev. 12:5-6; 14:1). Then, with the overcomers, His *parousia* will come to the air (Rev. 10:1). Along with that, all the natural calamities of the sixth seal and the first four trumpets will be meted out to smite the heavens with their heavenly bodies and the earth with the things on it (Rev. 6:12-17; 8:7-12).

Then the great tribulation will begin; it will last for three and one-half years with the woes and plagues of the last three trumpets and the seven bowls (Matt. 24:21-22, 29; Rev. 8:13--9:21; 11:14; 15:5--16:21). That will be a time of trial to the inhabitants of the whole earth (Rev 3:10), including the Jews (Isa. 2:12; Zech. 14:1-2; Mal. 4:1, 5; Joel 1:15-20; 2:1, 11, 31) and the believers in Christ who will be left in the tribulation (Rev. 12:17). Before the end of the great tribulation, the dead saints will be resurrected and raptured together with the majority of the living believers, who will have passed through the great part of the tribulation, to meet with the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; Rev. 14:14-16). Following this, all the believers will be judged by the Lord at His judgment seat in the air (2 Cor. 5:10).

About this time, the great Babylon will be destroyed on the earth (Rev. 17:1--19:3). Then the Lord will have His wedding feast with the overcoming saints (Rev. 19:7-8). Immediately after this, the Lord with His bride, composed

of the overcoming saints as His army, will fight and defeat the Antichrist and his army, the army of Satan. They will seize the Antichrist and his false prophet and cast them alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:11-21). Following this, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss, the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3). Then the Lord will come with His saints to the earth (Zech. 14:4-5; Jude 14; 1 Thes. 3:13) and will judge the nations (the living--Matt. 25:31-46; Joel 3:2). After this will be the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6).

Following the thousand years, Satan will be loosed from the abyss to instigate part of the nations, Gog and Magog in the north of the eastern hemisphere, to rebel the last time against God. They will be subdued and burned, and the deceiving Devil will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10). Following this, the heavens and the earth will be fully cleared up by being burned up (2 Pet. 3:7, 10). Then will come the final judgment upon men (the dead) and demons, and probably also the fallen angels, at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). That will be God's consummate dealing with His old creation in His universal government, in addition to so many judgments and dealings executed within the day of the Lord to clear up the old universe. Then a new universe will begin with a new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:1), in which there will be no more judgment of God's governmental dealing, for no unrighteousness will be there. Therefore, not counting the one thousand years, the day of the Lord will be very short, probably not more than seven years, of which the last week (seven years) of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24-27 will be the main part.

It is not correct to consider the day of God and the day of the Lord as two different days and claim that the day of the Lord ends with the millennial kingdom and that the day of God begins with the burning of the heavens and the earth followed by the judgment of the great white throne. Actually, because the judgment of the great white throne will still be executed by the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1), it will also be in the day of the Lord. God

does not judge anyone; He has given all judgment to the Lord (John 5:22).

In 3:12 the relative pronoun "which" refers to the coming of the day of God. The coming of the day of God is to execute judgment upon every part of the old creation to clear it up. On account of the coming of such a day, the heavens will no longer be able to stand and remain as they have been, but will be dissolved, their elements melting in the intense heat of the burning fire. Therefore, Peter says that "the heavens, being set on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements burning with intense heat are melted."

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND PETER

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

(5)

Scripture Reading: 2 Pet. 3:13-18

In this message we shall consider 3:13-18. In verse 13 we have the expectation of the new heavens and the new earth filled with God's righteousness; in 14 to 16, the preparation for the coming judgment; and in 17 and 18, the conclusion, where we are told to be on guard and grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord.

NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

In 3:13 Peter says, "But according to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." The Greek word rendered "dwells" may also be translated "makes its home." Because this Epistle is on the government of God, eventually it tells us that there will be a new universe where righteousness will dwell. This indicates that everything will be altogether under God's government. Nothing will be wrong; nothing will be unjust or unrighteous. Thus, there will be no need for any further governmental judgment of God.

After all the material things are dissolved, God's promise as His everlasting word will still exist for His redeemed people to trust in and stand upon, with the expectation of a new universe. We should not set our hope on the visible elements, but on what the word of God promises as our destiny, that is, the new heavens and a new earth, which have not yet come into our view.

The new heavens and new earth will be the old heavens and old earth renewed and transformed through the

burning of God's judging fire, just as the new man is our old man renewed and transformed (Col. 3:9-10; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Righteousness is the main factor based upon which God's governmental judgment is meted out to all creatures in His old creation. Hence, in these two books concerning God's government this matter is stressed repeatedly (1 Pet. 2:23, 24; 3:12, 14; 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:1; 2:5, 7-8, 21; 3:13). The main thing we see in John's writings is God's love expressed in His life; in Paul's writings, God's grace distributed in His dispensation; and in Peter's writings, God's righteousness maintained in His government. God's life, dispensation, and government are the basic structures of the ministry of these three apostles. Life is of love, dispensation is by grace, and government is based upon righteousness. This righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and earth and it will saturate God's new universe prevailingly to maintain it absolutely under God's righteous order, so that there will be no need ever of any further judgment.

DILIGENT TO BE FOUND IN PEACE

In verse 14 Peter goes on to say, "Wherefore, beloved, since you expect these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and without blemish." To be found by the Lord in peace is to be found right in His eyes with both God and man at His coming. Peace is the fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11; Isa. 32:17). Because this book emphasizes righteousness for God's governmental dealing, it charges the believers who are walking in the way of righteousness (2:21) to pursue peace (Heb. 12:14), so that they may be prepared for the Lord's coming with judgment. In 4:14 Peter exhorts us to be found by the Lord in peace "without spot and without blemish." The heretics, who forsake the straight way and follow the way of unrighteousness (2:15), are spots and blemishes among the believers (2:13). But the believers, who are pursuing peace as the fruit of righteousness in God's government, should be without spot and without blemish, like the Lord, who is the Lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:19).

SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION

In order to prepare for the coming judgment, we should not only be found in peace, but we should also be saved from destruction. Concerning this, Peter says in 3:15 and 16: "And count the longsuffering of our Lord to be salvation, even as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them concerning these things, in which some things are hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable twist, as also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." The mockers count, or consider, the Lord's longsuffering toward the believers as delay, tardiness, or slackness (v. 9). This is their twisting of the Lord's word spoken by the prophets in the Scriptures and the apostles in their teachings. Hence, Peter charges the believers to count the Lord's longsuffering as salvation instead of delay, not twisting the prophets' prophecies nor the apostles' teachings, including Peter's and also Paul's, that they may not be judged unto destruction, as the heretics will at the Lord's coming. It is by doing this and by being diligent to be found by the Lord in peace that the believers prepare themselves for the Lord's coming with judgment.

The Lord's longsuffering in the delay regarding His promise should be counted as prolonged opportunity for the believers to repent unto salvation. Salvation in 3:15 is not salvation in its initial stage, but salvation in its completing stage. The Lord has delayed His coming with the intention that many of His elect may not miss the topmost portion of His full salvation.

In 3:15 and 16 Peter refers to Paul's writings. Peter was not the only apostle to teach that the Lord's longsuffering should be counted salvation instead of delay, with the confirmation of the prophets' prophecy. Paul as another of the apostles also teaches the same thing in his writings, which are based upon the prophetic word of the Old Testament. Peter refers to this fact to strengthen his writing.

In verse 16 Peter gives a warning not to twist the

Scriptures. We should twist neither the writings of the Apostle Paul nor the writings of the Apostle Peter, for both are part of the Scriptures of the New Testament. Those who twist the Scriptures will suffer destruction.

Since Peter's antidote to inoculate against the heretical teachings of the apostasy is the holy word spoken by the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles, he cannot miss the writings of the Apostle Paul, which are the greatest part of the apostles' teachings for constituting the New Testament. In his writing, which is also a part of the apostles' teachings and the constituents of the New Testament, Peter has repeatedly in both his Epistles referred to the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles (1 Pet. 1:9-12; 2 Pet. 1:12-21; 3:2). Now he refers to the Apostle Paul in the strongest way, saying that Paul in all his writings speaks some things which are hard to understand, concerning the things of which Peter speaks in his writing, and that to twist Paul's writings is equivalent to twisting the Scriptures as the heretics do, resulting in destruction, that is, in being judged by the Lord at His coming back.

This is a strong warning to both the believers and the heretics in the apostasy.

PETER'S VIEW OF GOD'S ECONOMY

In 3:16 Peter speaks of "these things." In his two Epistles of only eight chapters Peter has covered the entire economy of God, from eternity past before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:2, 20) to the new heavens and new earth in eternity future (2 Pet. 3:13). He unveils the crucial things related to God's economy, which the prophets prophesied and the apostles preached (1 Pet. 1:10-12), from four sides as follows:

(1) From the side of the Triune God:

God the Father has chosen a people in eternity according to His foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9) and has called them to His glory (1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3). Christ, foreknown by God before the foundation of the world, but manifested in the last times has redeemed God's chosen

people (1 Pet. 1:18-19, 2) by His vicarious death (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18) through His resurrection in life and ascension in power (1 Pet. 1:3; 3:21-22). The Spirit, sent from heaven, has sanctified and purified those whom Christ has redeemed (1 Pet. 1:2, 12, 22; 4:14). (The angels long to look into these things--1 Pet. 1:12.) The Triune God's divine power has provided them with all things relating to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4), guarding them unto full salvation (1 Pet. 1:5). God also disciplines them (1 Pet. 5:6) by some of His varied governmental judgments (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:23; 4:5, 6, 17; 2 Pet. 2:3, 4, 9; 3:7), and He will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground them by His all grace (1 Pet. 5:10). The Lord is longsuffering toward them that they all may have opportunity to repent unto salvation (2 Pet. 3:9, 15). Then Christ will appear in glory with His full salvation for those who love Him (1 Pet. 1:5, 7-9, 13; 4:13; 5:4).

(2) From the side of the believers:

The believers, as God's possession, have been chosen by God (1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9), called by His glory and virtue (1 Pet. 2:9; 3:9; 2 Pet. 1:10), redeemed by Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19), regenerated of God through His living word (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and saved through the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 3:21). They are now being guarded by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5), being purified to love one another (1 Pet. 1:22), growing by feeding on the milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2), developing in life the spiritual virtues (2 Pet. 1:5-8), and being transformed and built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to serve God (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9). They are God's chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, peculiar people for His private possession to express His virtues (1 Pet. 2:9), being disciplined by His governmental judgment (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:19-21; 3:9, 14, 17; 4:6, 12-19; 5:6, 9), living a holy life in an excellent manner and godliness to glorify Him (1 Pet. 1:15; 2:12; 3:1-2), ministering as good stewards of His varied grace for His glorification through Christ (1 Pet. 4:10-11) (under the elders' exemplary shepherding--1 Pet. 5:1-4), and expecting and hastening the coming of the Lord (1 Pet. 1:13; 2 Pet. 3:12) to be richly supplied with an

entrance into the eternal kingdom of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:11). They are expecting further the new heavens and new earth with God's righteousness for their eternity (2 Pet. 3:13), and they are growing continually in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

(3) From the side of Satan:

Satan is the believers' adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walking about, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

(4) From the side of the universe:

The fallen angels were condemned for eternal judgment (2 Pet. 2:4); the ancient ungodly world was destroyed by a flood (2 Pet. 2:5; 3:6); the ungodly cities were reduced to ashes (2 Pet. 2:6); the false teachers and heretical mockers in the apostasy and the living mankind will all be judged unto destruction (2 Pet. 2:1, 3, 9-10, 12; 3:3-4, 7; 1 Pet. 4:5); the heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 11); and all the dead men and the demons will be judged (1 Pet. 4:5). Then the new heavens and the new earth will come as a new universe, in which God's righteousness will dwell for eternity (2 Pet. 3:13).

A COMMENDATION OF PAUL'S WRITINGS

Paul in his writings also speaks "these things" (except the new heavens and the new earth). Hence, Peter refers to Paul's writings to strengthen his writings, especially concerning God's governmental and disciplinary judgment upon the believers. Paul also strongly and repeatedly emphasizes this matter in his writings (1 Cor. 11:30-32; Heb. 12:5-11; 2:3; 4:1; 6:8; 10:27-31, 39; 12:29; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). This should be the reason that Peter highly commends Paul's writings.

What beauty and excellency are in this commendation! Although the Corinthians attempted to divide Peter and Paul according to their own divisive preference (1 Cor. 1:11-12), Peter commends Paul, and says that both of them teach the same things, "these things," and that Paul's writings should not be twisted, but be regarded as "the rest of the Scriptures" and receive the same respect as the Old

Testament. For Peter to make such a commendation is a great thing, for it was he who was rebuked by Paul to his face regarding the New Testament faith (Gal. 2:11-21). This indicates that Peter was bold in admitting that the early apostles, like John, Paul, and himself, although their style, terminology, utterance, aspects of their views, and presentations of their teachings differed one from another, participated in the same unique ministry, the ministry of the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:8-9; 4:1). Such a ministry ministers to people, as its focus, the all-inclusive Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God, who, after passing through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, dispenses Himself through the redemption of Christ and by the operation of the Holy Spirit to His redeemed people as their unique portion of life, life supply, and everything, for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the full expression, the fullness, of the Triune God, according to the eternal purpose of the Father.

In 3:16 Peter says that the unlearned and unstable twist Paul's writings and also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. This indicates that the mockers (2 Pet. 3:3) and their followers must have twisted the Scriptures and the apostles' teachings.

According to the context, "destruction" in verse 16 refers not to eternal perdition, but to the punishment of the divine governmental discipline.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE EPISTLE

In 3:17 and 18 we have the conclusion of this Epistle. In verse 17 Peter says, "You, therefore, beloved, knowing these things before, be on your guard lest being carried away by the error of the lawless, you fall from your own steadfastness." Here Peter tells us to be on our guard because of the apostasy, the heretical teachings, that may carry us away to destruction by twisting the apostles' writings or the Scriptures. The Greek word rendered "carried away" here is the same word used in Galatians

2:13 concerning Peter, Barnabas, and other Jewish believers. In verse 17 "the lawless" must refer to the false teachers and mockers (2 Pet. 2:1; 3:3) as the early heretics. Peter is concerned lest the saints fall from their own steadfastness. To fall from our steadfastness is to become unstable.

In verse 18 Peter concludes, "But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and unto the day of eternity. Amen." The word "grow" indicates that what Peter has written in his two Epistles is a matter of life. To grow in grace is to grow by the bountiful supply of eternal life provided by the divine power (1:3-4), and to grow in the knowledge of the Lord is to grow by the realization of what Christ is. This is to grows by the enjoyment of grace and realization of truth (John 1:14, 17).

Grace is the Triune God being life and the life supply to us. We need to grow in this life supply, in this nourishment. Therefore, to grow in grace means to grow in this inward source of the supply of life. At the beginning of this Epistle Peter speaks of grace, and now at the end he charges us to grow in this grace.

Peter also encourages us to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The realization of the knowledge of our Lord equals truth, the reality of all that He is, as in John 1:14 and 17. Peter charges the believers to grow not only in grace but also in this truth.

Peter ends this Epistle with the word, "To Him be the glory both now and unto the day of eternity." The pronoun "Him" refers to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Since such a praise is one that is rendered to God (Rom. 11:36; 16:27), this indicates that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is God.