

April to June 2020

About the Authors



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“The Epistle of Jude” (April)

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“Knowing the Church” (May)

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Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy:
“The Second Epistle of Peter” (June)

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

JUDE 1

1 TIMOTHY 6:12

“... *them that are sanctified ...
preserved ... called.*”

A CALL TO ARMS (I)

The epistle of Jude, though one of the shortest in the New Testament, is powerfully significant and relevant for us today. The major theme of the epistle is apostasy. It is a rousing call to arms for all Christians to defend the faith against falsehood, error, and compromise. It is easy, in our eagerness to dive into the conflict, to pass quickly over the opening address as though it were a mere formality – but this would be a serious mistake. The Holy Spirit has guided Jude to choose his words carefully, as he identifies the readers to whom this epistle is addressed. Jude is writing to those who are “*sanctified... preserved... called*” (Jude 1).

Those who are “*sanctified by God the Father*” (Jude 1) are those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and purified from sin by the act of God’s grace. What is in view here is not the ongoing process of sanctification (Jude does not address “those who are now being sanctified”), but the beginning of that process in the wondrous transformation of a sinner destined for hell, into a saint destined for heaven. Those who are “*preserved in Jesus Christ*” (Jude 1) are those who are kept or guarded by God’s power – “safe in the arms of Jesus,” as expressed in the words of a famous hymn (cf. John 10:28). Those who are “*called*” are those who have experienced that irresistible, inward call of God (cf. John 6:44) by the mysterious working of His Spirit. Now there is a certain amount of overlap between these descriptions: in a sense they are synonymous, for all those who are called are inevitably sanctified, and all who are sanctified are inevitably preserved. Yet there is a reason these particular descriptions are chosen.

Notice, in the first place, the *expansiveness* of the description. Jude is not addressing some elite group of super-Christians; the epistle is directed to all who have experienced God’s salvific work. Apostasy is a problem for every Christian, and not just for theologians! No Christian can sit idly by, expecting others to defend the faith on his behalf.

Therefore, as we begin this study, dear reader, recognize that this epistle is God’s Word directed to you. Our Captain has sounded the trumpet – will you remain in your tent, while the battle rages?

THOUGHT: Defending the faith is my duty, not someone else’s.

PRAYER: Lord, help me not to be complacent concerning my duty.

A CALL TO ARMS (II)

Notice, in the second place, the emphasis of the description. Sanctified, preserved, called – this is all God’s work; the emphasis is on Him. Surrounded on every side by apostasy and confusion, it is surely a great encouragement to be reminded of God’s infallible work of sanctification, preservation, and calling. At the same time, however, God’s work in us brings with it a responsibility for us. As the apostle Paul puts it, “... *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you...*” (Phil 2:12-13) – we have the responsibility to work out what God has worked in us.

So it is here, as well. God has worked to sanctify us, to cleanse us from sin and to set us apart for Himself; now we have the responsibility to lead separated lives and keep ourselves pure. God has promised to preserve us; now we have the responsibility to guard ourselves, to watch and pray, to resist the devil, to flee from temptation. God has called us to salvation and service; now it is our responsibility to remain faithful to that calling, and to fulfil it. We are reminded from the outset that we must learn to recognize not only God’s work in us, but also our consequent responsibility. Everyone who has been saved through the gospel, must be prepared to defend that very gospel.

Jude continues his greeting by expressing his prayer that “*mercy... and peace, and love, be multiplied*” (Jude 2) to his readers. How we need God’s mercy, for “*it is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed*” (Lam 3:22)! How we need His peace, for it is this that will “*keep [our] hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*” (Phil 4:7)! How we need His love, “*because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*” (Matt 24:12) in these last days.

Dear reader, Jude’s call to arms is presented to us as the solemn duty of every Christian. We have been sanctified, preserved, and called by God’s grace and power. We are abundantly assured of His mercy, peace, and love. What further motive or encouragement do you need, O ye who linger far from the battle-front?

THOUGHT: Read John 4:34. What is God’s appointment for you?

PRAYER: Father, help me to abide in Thy will.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3

JUDE 3

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

*"... though we walk in the flesh,
we do not war after the flesh ..."*

THE ARENA OF BATTLE (I)

The form of the battle, to which Christians are called, is described in verse 3: *"earnestly contend for the faith."* Jude, writing out of sincere love for the brethren (*"beloved"*), giving all diligence to write unto them something truly beneficial, identified this as the particular need of the church: not so much that they should be reminded of the truth of the doctrines of the common salvation, but that they should be exhorted to defend those true doctrines against error and falsehood.

The arena of battle, therefore, is not a physical one. God forbid that Christians should ever engage in physical violence in the name of Christ! Jesus Himself taught against this, see, for example, John 18:36. No, Christ and His truth are not to be defended by physical conflict; ours is a spiritual battle: a conflict of truth against error. This is described by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. We are set against *"imagination,"* against false and prideful *"knowledge,"* doing battle in the arena of *"thought."*

We live in a time where truth is under attack as never before. Post-modernism has chipped away at the very idea of truth; the advent of the internet, and now social media, has flooded us with a deluge of information, much of it false or misleading. More than ever, then, Christians must take seriously the concept and the question of truth. We must not easily be blown about by gossip and rumour, or the latest fashion in philosophy. We must oppose the modern portrayal of truth as something fluid, subjective, and changeable. We must resist the pessimism of this post-truth age, where it seems that nothing can really be trusted.

Instead, Christians must recognize that we have an infallible, objective standard and source of truth – a *"faith"* (referring here not to the act of believing but to the thing believed) that comes to us as a written revelation from God. It is this truth that we are called to proclaim; not merely as a proposition to be intellectually accepted, but as a standard to be observed and practised in life (cf. Matt 28:20a). It is this truth against which we are to measure all that we hear (cf. Acts 17:11). It is for this truth we are called *"to earnestly contend"* (Jude 3).

THOUGHT: *"... the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a lover and a defender of Thy truth.

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

JUDE 3

MATTHEW 28:18-20

“... *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*”

THE ARENA OF BATTLE (II)

It is important for us to consider, also, the description of this faith that we are called upon to defend. It is “*the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 3).

The durability of the faith. It is the faith “*once*” – that is, once for all – delivered unto the saints. It is not malleable. It is not subject to alteration according to human fancy, nor does it adjust itself to the prevailing cultural winds. It is therefore something that we are called to preserve intact. A man-made system, when a weakness is identified, is often defended against attack by an update aiming to address that weakness. This is familiar to us from our use of computer software. Constant updates are a defence against new threats. But God’s Word is quite different. It is unchanging, as He is unchanging (cf. Mal 3:6). It never needs to be “updated.” We are to defend it, not by modifying it to align with the times, but by declaring it and obeying it as truth unchanging.

The divine origin of the faith. This is the faith once for all “*delivered*” (Jude 3) to the saints. In our modern world we may perhaps think of “delivery” as synonymous with “convenience”: something delivered to our doorstep. That is not the idea here. The emphasis lies on the faith as something that did not originate from man, but from God; something that He has delivered to us for a specific purpose. The faith that is *delivered* to us is the faith that we did not invent, but which has been *entrusted* to us.

The duty associated with the faith. The faith once delivered “*unto the saints*” (Jude 3) is thus the faith that has specifically been entrusted to the saints. It is given to us not only for our personal benefit and growth; it is entrusted to us as a precious treasure which we are called to defend. God did not deliver His truth to *angels*, and charge *them* with the proclamation and defence of the gospel! He delivered His word to the *saints*. He delivered His word to *you*. Dear reader, do you recognize this sacred trust? You have a mission from God, which even angels cannot fulfil!

THOUGHT: The “Great Commission” is my commission.

PRAYER: Open my eyes to see the duty that has been entrusted to me!

THE ENEMY WITHIN

In verse 4, Jude explains the particular motivation behind his urgent exhortation to “*earnestly contend for the faith*” (Jude 3). There are adversaries of the truth, enemies of the faith, and they have “*crept in unawares*” (Jude 4). They are not only without the church, attacking her doctrine and practice; they are within.

Note the description of these men. They are “*ungodly men*” (Jude 4), that is, they do not truly know God, and have no true relationship with Him. Whatever their claims, no matter the superficial piety of their walk, or the apparent spirituality of their talk, they cannot lead anyone to God. In the last day, the Lord will say to them, “*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt 7:23).

Yet, in their ungodliness, these men are far more than merely ignorant. They actively pervert the grace of God, set forth in the gospel, “*turning [it] ... into lasciviousness*” (Jude 4), a license to indulge in sinful lusts. These are they whose twisted argument is roundly refuted by the apostle Paul: “*Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid*” (Rom 6:1-2a). But they have thrown off all shackles (so-called) of submission to God. They deny God as their sole sovereign Lord, and elevate themselves in His stead. They deny “*our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Jude 4), and therefore ought to have no part with us. Indeed, they will have no part in that heavenly company, for the Lord Jesus has said, “*Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven*” (Matt 10:33).

The situation is serious. These men, in all their wickedness, now appear and act as a canker or rot attacking the visible church from within. Such heretics and false teachers will surely face judgment - their condemnation has been “*before of old ordained*” (Jude 4). But remember, God's decree does not negate our responsibility. We cannot simply sit back and wait for these enemies of the faith to be judged! We must act now, to defend the faith. Dear reader, beware of such ungodly men. Beware of following their pernicious ways. Beware also of sitting idly by while they lead others to destruction.

THOUGHT: An enemy within is more harmful than an enemy without.

PRAYER: Thy people are in danger, O Lord, protect Thy flock!

MONDAY, APRIL 6

JUDE 5

NUMBERS 14:1-30

“... the Lord ... afterward destroyed
them that believed not.”

THE JUDGMENT OF APOSTASY (I)

Having stated the purpose of his epistle and the urgent need for his exhortation, Jude now emphasizes the judgment that inevitably follows apostasy, by way of several examples. These are historical examples, taken from the record of scripture.

The first example is that of the Israelites, after the exodus from Egypt. After witnessing for themselves God's power displayed in the plagues, and seeing the proof of God's intention to deliver His people from bondage; after experiencing God's miraculous provision in the wilderness of all their needs (heat, shade, food, water); after receiving from God's own hand His perfect law and assurance of His continuing presence with them - after all this, there remained among the people those who “*believed not*” (Jude 5).

The sad story is recounted in Numbers 13-14. Twelve spies were sent out to bring back a report on the promised land. Ten of them brought back an evil report of a land unconquerable, filled with walled cities and defended by giants; and this evil report was believed by all the people of Israel. Those who had cheered and celebrated the destruction of the Egyptian host in the Red Sea, now determined to “*make a captain, and... return into Egypt*” (Num 14:4). They even maligned God, and accused Him of a murderous deception (Num 14:3). What wickedness! In consequence of their rebellion “*all that were numbered... from twenty years old and upward*” would die in the wilderness, and never enter the land of promise (Num 14:29-30).

A great multitude had left Egypt, marching under the banner of the LORD; yet, of all the 603,550 that were numbered (Num 1:45-46), only two (Joshua and Caleb) believed God. The rest were those who “*believed not*” (Jude 5), who were destroyed. Though outwardly numbered among God's people, the vast majority in fact did not believe! And their unbelief was made manifest, and they were judged for their apostasy. Is it not so today? A mere outward profession will not truly save anyone, and there will be “many” on that day who will find themselves dismissed from the Lord's presence (cf. Matt 7:22-23).

THOUGHT: Do I truly know the Lord? Do I truly believe?

PRAYER: Grant that I may be numbered with Thy people on that day.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

JUDE 6

ISAIAH 14:12-15

“... thou hast said in thine heart ...

I will be like the most High.”

THE JUDGMENT OF APOSTASY (II)

The second example Jude gives is that of the angels who sinned against God. The full details of this shocking event are not revealed to us. But we know that in God's pure and perfect creation, there was a pure and perfect creature, an angel of great beauty and brilliance, but in whom *“iniquity was found”* (Ezek 28:15). Scripture describes the devil's sin of pride: *“thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High”* (Isa 14:13-14).

This was a shocking defection. Even an angel, who had beheld the most High sitting on His throne; even an angel, knowing himself without doubt to be a creature, and not his own creator; even an angel sinned, apostatised, rebelled, and fell away. What is more, the devil was the head of a large number of angels who likewise rebelled against God. There were not a few angels who *“kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation”* (Jude 6) – angels who began among the number of God's heavenly host, but left that glorious estate of their own volition. These will not escape judgment, but are *“reserved in everlasting chains”* (Jude 6).

Again, as in the previous example of the Israelites who left Egypt in that great exodus, the point pressed home by Jude is the fallacy of thinking that all who *appear* to be of God, *are* of God. Apostasy was present, incipient, in the hearts of the Israelites. Even though they left as one company marching under one banner, there were some among them who would later show their true colours, defecting openly from the Lord. There were enemies within. Likewise the angels. Even this blessed host of spirit beings, created pure, was corrupted by apostasy. Even in their hearts, the seeds of rebellion could be sown; so that when the devil sinned against God, and fell to his ruin, he was not alone.

These examples are meant to put us in remembrance of the danger and the reality of the apostasy which is even now in our midst. Christian reader, take heed!

THOUGHT: Apostasy is real and dangerous.

PRAYER: God, help me to examine my heart for any seed of rebellion.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

JUDE 7

GENESIS 19:1-25

*“Even as Sodom and Gomorrha ...
are set forth for an example ...”*

THE JUDGMENT OF APOSTASY (III)

The third example given by Jude is that of Sodom and Gomorrah. These were ancient cities situated near what is now the Dead Sea – the region was not always dead, but was *“well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt”* (Gen 13:10).

While the region then was outwardly lush, fertile, and fruitful, the spiritual condition of the people was another matter entirely. Indeed, *“the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly”* (Gen 13:13). They gave themselves *“to fornication, and going after strange flesh”* (Jude 7), all sorts of immorality and perversion. Genesis 19 gives us a glimpse of the wickedness of those cities.

Sodom and Gomorrah were judged by God for their wickedness: *“the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire... out of heaven,”* and God *“overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground”* (Gen 19:24-25). It was an *absolute* destruction, and an *abiding* destruction. The plain, which was once well-watered everywhere, is to this day barren and lifeless, covered with sand and dust. Jude warns us (in Jude 7) that this judgment was intended by God *“for an example,”* and the fire which rained down upon Sodom was a picture of the *“eternal fire”* that is God’s just punishment for unrepentant sinners.

Yet how sad it is, that mankind today ignores God’s warning and overlooks this sober example! The Dead Sea remains today as a scar on the face of the earth, a stark reminder of the reality of God’s wrath and judgment; yet millions treat it as a tourist destination, and float in the salty waters, heedless of the weight of their sins. Indeed, the very sin, for which the city of Sodom is eponymous, has become widespread and accepted in modern society. But the example remains, though it be not regarded: God does not take these sins lightly, and anyone who thinks that the grace of God can be turned into an excuse for lasciviousness (cf. Jude 4) is in grave danger of *“the vengeance of eternal fire”* (Jude 7).

THOUGHT: God’s grace leads us to repentance, not sin (cf. Rom 2:4).

PRAYER: God, most just and holy, help me not to take sin lightly!

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

JUDE 5-7

1 CORINTHIANS 10:11

*“Now all these things ...
are written for our admonition ...”*

THE JUDGMENT OF APOSTASY (IV)

It is instructive for us to consider the import of the examples used by Jude in verses 5 to 7 of his epistle. Jude is writing to Christians, in the New Testament era. He is addressing the danger of apostasy in the New Testament church. He gives a warning to his readers concerning certain men who have crept into the church. Yet in his writing, in his address, and in his warning to the New Testament church, he makes liberal use of the Old Testament.

Jude uses the example of the Israelites and their tragic rebellion on the brink of entering the promised land, as well as the example of the apostasy among the angelic host, to show that the seeds of such defection may be present in the church - to prove the possibility of such danger creeping into the church “*unawares*” (Jude 4). He uses the example of Sodom and Gomorrah to prove that God indeed hates such carnal indulgence and sensual lust - to prove that those who try to turn “*the grace of our God into lasciviousness*” are indeed “*ungodly men*,” no matter what they may profess or claim.

It is sometimes felt by Christians that the Old Testament is not all that relevant for us today. The detailed records of Israel’s storied history may seem distant and far removed from our present situation. But this is the inspired Word of God, which “*shall stand for ever*” (Isa 40:8); and He has seen to it that “*all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (1 Cor 10:11).

Jude’s use of the Old Testament, and his desire to “*put [us] in remembrance*” of these things, ought to convince us of the enduring relevance of the entirety of God’s Word. No part of it is to be overlooked or dismissed; all of it is to be studied reverently, and obeyed diligently. In many ways it is precisely the failure to learn from the lessons of biblical history that breeds complacency in the church and paves the way for apostasy to creep in and take root.

THOUGHT: “*All scripture... is profitable*” (2 Tim 3:16).

PRAYER: Lord, admonish me by Thy Word!

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

JUDE 8-19

2 CORINTHIANS 11:12-15

“... *Satan himself is transformed
into an angel of light.*”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (I)

Having put his readers in remembrance concerning the danger of apostasy, and its certain judgment at the hands of the thrice-holy God, Jude turns to describe the nature and character of apostasy. This is a long section, taking up almost half of the epistle's total length, but it is an important section.

It is a well-known dictum that to know one's enemy in any conflict is advantageous, if not crucial, to victory. This is all the more so in the spiritual realm, for the great enemy of souls is “*a murderer from the beginning... a liar, and the father of it*” (John 8:44). He is “*as a roaring lion... seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet 5:8). And he will not hesitate to use deception and disguise to achieve his murderous, soul-devouring ends – “*Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light,*” and so likewise are “*his ministers ... transformed as the ministers of righteousness*” (2 Cor 11:14-15).

It is not by accident that these “*certain men,*” of whom Jude warns in verse 4, have “*crept... unawares*” into the church, they have deliberately infiltrated the flock, to prey on the sheep. They are not silent, but vocal. They are not content to be solitary voices, but seek “*to draw away disciples after them*” (Acts 20:30). They rise up as teachers of truth, but peddle lies for their own profit, and lead many to destruction. There is a great need therefore to expose these apostates for who they are; to strip away their veneer of spirituality and reveal the actual rottenness within. This Jude endeavours to do from verse 8 all the way to verse 19, and the extended description only highlights the great need for Christians to be neither complacent nor undiscerning.

Dear reader, God warns us in His Word that “*in the last days perilous times shall come*” (2 Tim 3:1), and that the “*latter times*” will abound with “*seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils*” (1 Tim 4:1). These are not warnings to take lightly. Indeed, there is much in professing Christendom today that is not of God, but of the devil. There is a great need for discernment: let us therefore pay close attention to the character of apostasy, as described for us in these verses.

THOUGHT: I am living in the last days.

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to be sober and vigilant against the foe!

SATURDAY, APRIL 11

JUDE 8

PSALM 31:5-6

*"I have hated them that regard
lying vanities ..."*

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (II)

Jude begins his litany of characteristics by describing the apostates as "*filthy dreamers*" (Jude 8). They are dreamers, because there is really no truth to what they say. Now dreams often have a certain allure; we think of them sometimes with fondness, and we are familiar with the idea of day-dreaming or fantasising about the things we desire. Nevertheless, we must all acknowledge the danger of failing to distinguish between dream and reality. The one who dreams he can fly, and believes it, is in great danger.

This is the danger of the "dreams" promoted by these false teachers. On the one hand they are cleverly-crafted fictions, designed to appeal to man's sinful nature. On the other hand those who believe in these dreams, and live according to them, are led to ruin by them. Such is the "dream" that God's grace can be exploited as an excuse for lawlessness and carnal indulgence. Such is the "dream" that we can claim Christ for our Saviour, while we remain lord of our own lives. These are in fact "*filthy*" dreams, for they misrepresent God. They misrepresent His grace, by obscuring His holiness and justice; and they misrepresent His sovereignty, by exalting the idea of free will and autonomy.

The fact is that God is a God of truth (Deut 32:4), and so God's people should be lovers of and seekers after truth. Lies are *de facto* defections from the divine nature, and therefore cannot be taken lightly, nor blithely overlooked; especially not when they are promoted in the guise of divine truth. Hence the strident call to arms with which Jude opens his epistle. O ye Christians, will you not rise to the defence of God's truth? The so-called churches of Christendom have dreamers instead of leaders, and liars instead of pastors!

Dear reader, in our weakness we are prone to being led astray by such dreams that may seem attractive to us. We must guard our own minds, by taking heed to the biblical exhortation: "*whatsoever things are true... think on these things*" (Phil 4:8). And we must seek to help others from being led astray, by earnestly contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

THOUGHT: I must be careful not to believe in dreams or in lies.

PRAYER: O great Shepherd, use me in the defence of truth.

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (III)

In the pursuit and promotion of their dreams, these apostates “*defile the flesh, despise dominion*” (Jude 8). This corresponds to the description of them in verse 4, as “*turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness*” and “*denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

It has become a popular saying that “God loves you and accepts you just as you are.” A well-known preacher and pastor writes, “You don’t have to worry about your sin because you are worshipping your forgiver. You don’t have to worry about your sickness because you are worshipping your healer.” Now it is certainly true that there are many who mistakenly allow guilt to keep them from Christ, as though they need to be perfect before they can be forgiven. But the danger of the teaching that sin is no longer a problem because of God’s grace, is that it obscures the continuing struggle against sin that is the believer’s daily reality in this life (cf. Rom 7:14-25), and obviates the continuing need for believers to “*work out*” their own salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12). Just as the availability of healing medicine does not negate our responsibility to care for our own health, so also the offer of forgiveness in Christ does not eliminate our duty to mortify the flesh with its corruptions (cf. Col 3:4-5).

Again, it has become fashionable to deride religion as nothing more than a set of man-made rules. This is to be expected from the irreligious. What is strange is the adoption of this fashion even by those who claim to be the preachers of true religion, who themselves “*despise dominion*” and teach their followers to rejoice in their supposed liberty from the law of God. Peter elaborates scathingly on Jude’s description: “*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage*” (2 Pet 2:19).

Dear reader, we are indeed exhorted to “*stand fast... in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*” (Gal 5:1), but with this comes the warning, “*only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh*” (Gal 5:13). True liberty is freedom to obey God, not to ignore His law.

THOUGHT: Freedom to do whatever I want is anarchy, not liberty.

PRAYER: Search me, O God, by the searchlight of Thy law.

MONDAY, APRIL 13

JUDE 8-10

2 PETER 2:9-12

“... they are not afraid to
speak evil of dignities.”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (IV)

Not only do these apostate false teachers, in their own lives and in their teaching, “defile the flesh” and “despise dominion,” they are outspoken in their blasphemy against spiritual “dignities” (Jude 8) or majesties. The word in this context refers to the powers of the spiritual realm, the “principalities” and “powers” and “rulers of the darkness of this world” (Eph 6:12). Against these spiritual powers Christians engage in legitimate conflict; we “wrestle” with them. But the apostates of whom Jude warns, appear to go further in their spiritual conflict with the powers of darkness.

It has become increasingly common to hear so-called Christian preachers insult the devil, calling him “foul spirit” and commanding him to depart, belittling him as an enemy, and speaking as though they have power over him. Now all this may seem impressive, especially to those who are young and immature in the faith. The reality that Jude seeks to press home, however, is that those who behave in this way are in fact blaspheming the one true “dignity,” the divine majesty of God Himself, because they presume (without warrant) to speak on His behalf, and to wield authority over the spiritual realm in His name.

This is something even “Michael the archangel” (Jude 9) would not do. Michael, in his high office, did not dare to “bring against him [the devil] a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee,” not because he feared the devil, but because he feared God. Even the archangel did not presume to rebuke the devil in his own name, for that would be to usurp God’s authority. Instead he appealed to God’s authority, as he himself is subordinate to it. The hypocrisy of the false teachers is thus exposed. They “speak evil of those things which they know not” – and yet, for all their grandiose claims of spiritual power, in their lives of carnal indulgence they show themselves to be still in bondage to sin; “brute beasts” who, even as they rebuke the devil, dance to his tune.

The prevalence and popularity of these apostates is a sober reminder of our need of discernment in these last days. Do not be taken in by impressive spiritual claims, but check them against scripture!

THOUGHT: True spirituality is proved by obedience to God’s Word.

PRAYER: Father, keep me humble even as I serve Thee.

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

JUDE 11

GENESIS 4:1-12

“... Am I my brother's keeper?”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (V)

Once again, Jude turns to the Old Testament to furnish examples of the character of apostasy. These false teachers presently threatening the church, Jude says, have “*gone in the way of Cain*” (Jude 11), walking in step with the very first (human) murderer recorded in scripture.

The “*way of Cain*” is described in detail in Genesis 4:1-12. It is the way of pride and self-will. In the first place, Cain's behaviour reveals his lack of any sense of obligation to God. While Abel took care to offer the “*firstlings*” of his flock, and their “*fat*,” Cain simply and carelessly “*brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD*” (Gen 4:3-4). Abel, by faith, obeyed God and brought an acceptable sacrifice; Cain proudly assumed that anything he cared to offer, God was obliged to accept. Both were evidently aware of God's requirements – God said to Cain, “*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?*” (Gen 4:7) – but Cain disregarded them.

In the second place, Cain's behaviour reveals his lack of any sense of obligation to his fellow man. Seething with anger and resentment at God and at his brother, Cain murdered Abel in the field. And when questioned by God as to his brother's whereabouts, he retorted, “*I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?*” (Gen 4:9). The word “*keeper*” has the sense of “*guardian*.” Cain was denying any responsibility for his brother's well-being. In effect, he said to God, “*Why should you ask me where my brother is? It is of no concern to me where he is, or how he is. If something has happened to him, it is not my affair.*”

The apostates, of whom Jude warns, are similar in their character to Cain. Full of themselves, they have no thought for truly honouring God; they make up lies about Him, and do not submit their teaching to the authority of His Word. Nor have they any sense of care for their fellow man, but freely exploit others for their own gain. Theirs is a pitiless self-obsession. Dear reader, let us never dismiss our obligation to God, for we are all His creatures, and ought to obey Him. Let us never ignore our obligation to others, for we are all made in the image of God, and He commands us to love one another.

THOUGHT: I am God's creature, and my brother's keeper.

PRAYER: Lord, may I fulfil my responsibilities to Thee and others.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

JUDE 11

NUMBERS 22:1-35

“... they ... ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward ...”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (VI)

The second character mentioned by Jude is Balaam. The account of Balaam is recorded in Numbers 22-24; with an epilogue of sorts, mentioning Balaam's death, in Numbers 31. Balaam was a false prophet who was hired by Balak, king of the Moabites, to curse the people of Israel, so that they could be defeated in battle.

The “*error of Balaam*” (Jude 11) is unrestrained greed and covetousness. When Balaam was approached by Balak's men, God spoke to Balaam and told him in no uncertain terms, “*thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed*” (Num 22:12). Yet “*Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable,*” and promised Balaam, “*I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me*” (Num 22:15, 17). Now Balaam's response revealed his wicked and covetous heart. He said, “*If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God... [but] tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more*” (Num 22:18-19).

Note that Balaam did not simply say, “God has forbidden me from going with you.” He spoke of Balak's “*house full of silver and gold,*” because that was the treasure on which his heart was set. And he asked Balak's men to stay the night, hoping that God might speak “*more*” to him, in other words, hoping that God would change His mind and allow Balaam to curse His people, so that Balaam could get rich!

This, Jude reminds us, is the same covetous heart of the false teachers plaguing the church. They will do anything for money - even curse God's people. They are like the hireling leading the shepherd's flock to the abattoir, eagerly anticipating the payment he will receive for their slaughter. But, dear reader, let us take heed to God's warning against such covetousness: “*... they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*” (1 Tim 6:9-10).

THOUGHT: “*Thou shalt not covet...*” (Exod 20:17).

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to guard my heart against covetousness.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

JUDE 11

NUMBERS 16:1-35

“... they have ... perished in the
gainsaying of Core.”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (VII)

The third character mentioned by Jude is Core (or Korah). The word “*gainsaying*” (Jude 11) has the sense of opposition or rebellion, and refers here to that rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron which was instigated by Korah and others. The incident is recorded for us in Numbers 16.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, together with 250 “*princes of the assembly*,” confronted Moses and Aaron and charged them with taking too much upon themselves (in terms of their holy service to God), and elevating themselves “*above the congregation of the LORD*” (Num 16:1-3). They complained that Moses had made himself “*a prince*” over them (Num 16:13), when in reality they sought that prestige and authority for themselves. They were an Old Testament echo of the apostates who “*despise dominion*” (Jude 8).

The sin of rejecting anyone whom God has appointed to a position of authority is very serious in God’s eyes. The command had been given to Israel, “*Honour thy father and thy mother*” (Exod 20:12); and the duty enjoined in that commandment extends beyond the family to the whole society. Moses was God’s appointed leader, and Aaron God’s appointed priest. To oppose them was to oppose God – and to court His judgment. Just as Sodom was destroyed by brimstone and fire out of heaven, as an example to all generations, so also Korah was made an example by God. “*And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods*” (Num 16:32).

The false teachers now infiltrating and polluting the church, Jude warns, will perish for their rebellion just as certainly as Korah did for his. Dear reader, beware of anyone who seeks to stir up dissent in the church, and anyone who sows seeds of discontent against the leaders of the church. Yes, even godly pastors and elders are capable of error, and sometimes need to be rebuked or corrected; but there are biblical, God-honouring ways to do this. Note well Jude’s warning concerning these apostates: “*Woe unto them!*” (Jude 11). And woe to all who follow them!

THOUGHT: I must honour those whom God has placed over me.

PRAYER: Help me, O Lord, to honour my father and my mother.

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

JUDE 12

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

“... *spots in your feasts
of charity* ...”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (VIII)

Following his depiction of the apostates in the echo of Old Testament characters, Jude turns to a series of metaphorical descriptions, in verses 12 and 13. There are five such descriptions in total: spots, clouds, trees, waves, and wandering stars.

Spots. The word “*spots*” here refers not so much to a stain or blemish, but a hidden danger. The picture is that of a rock hidden under the waves, posing a danger to passing ships. The presence of these men who have crept into the church, Jude says, constitutes a hidden but very real danger to the spiritual life of the church.

The danger is emphasized by reference to the church’s “*feasts of charity*” (Jude 12). There was apparently a practice in the early church to have a communal meal before partaking of the Lord’s Supper; and it was called a feast “*of charity*,” probably because the practice was for the rich to bring more food to share with the poor. The Apostle Paul deals with the abuse of this practice by the Corinthian church, where the Corinthians were grouped in their cliques and fed themselves without thought for the poor, and to excess, such that Paul said “*one is hungry, and another is drunken*” (1 Cor 11:20-21). They were despising the solemn sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

In light of this, we can readily understand Jude’s deliberate mention of these “*spots*” in the context of the church’s “*feasts of charity*.” In the first place, these were times when the unity and mutual love of the church was meant particularly to be displayed – yet here are the apostates, Jude says, feasting “*with you*,” yet not truly of you: a hidden danger threatening the security of the church. In the second place, this was a solemn occasion, a divine ordinance – yet here again are the apostates, Jude says, “*feeding themselves without fear*.” But they should be afraid: “*For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body*” (1 Cor 11:29). Those who participate in the spiritual life of the church, falsely claiming to have spiritual life themselves, are in danger of profaning the sacred ordinances of God.

THOUGHT: Am I truly a member of the body of Christ?

PRAYER: O God, give me discernment against spiritual danger.

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

JUDE 12

JOHN 4:6-14

“... whosoever drinketh of the
water that I shall give him
shall never thirst ...”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (IX)

Clouds. We may picture a weary traveller wandering in a desert waste, parched and thirsty. He has wandered long in the dryness and heat, and is close to despair and death. Finally, looking up, he sees a cloud on the horizon. He is filled with hope, that perhaps he might have at last the water he so desperately seeks. But he will be disappointed, for this is a cloud “*without water*” (Jude 12).

This is the picture of the apostates that Jude presents with this metaphor. Countless people around the world are spiritually parched, seeking meaning and purpose, relief from the guilt of sin, and assurance of life and eternity. False teachers appear like clouds on the horizon, offering hope to these thirsty millions, but they do not satisfy. They provide no life-giving water; nothing to quench the deep spiritual need of humanity. Jesus said, “*whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst*” (John 4:14). Those whom Jude describes here can make no such claim. They are themselves lost, “*carried about of winds*,” and those who follow them will be led here, there, and everywhere, with not a drop in return for their loyalty.

Trees. Why are these apostates unable to provide any spiritual nourishment or refreshment for others? Because they themselves are utterly destitute of any spiritual life whatsoever. They are trees “*whose fruit withereth*,” or trees in autumn, bereft of leaves and fruit, bare and skeletal. And what they appear on the outside, they are inside: completely “*without fruit*” at all, “*twice dead*,” totally dead – and without any prospect of life whatsoever, since they are “*plucked up by the roots*.”

Dear reader, take heed. There are many today claiming to show men the way to life, who themselves have never found life, and likely never will. Yet there are millions who need life, and are looking for life. If this perishing multitude cannot find “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6) from these false teachers, will they at least be able to find the Lord Jesus through you?

THOUGHT: Why is religious hypocrisy such an abomination to God?

PRAYER: Father, help me truly to walk in the Spirit.

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (X)

Waves. Anyone who has stood on the beach on a windy day will have seen the waves surging against the shore. The sea is full of ceaseless activity, the waves are constantly in motion. The picture here is that of "*raging waves*" (Jude 13) that are particularly loud and boisterous. This is an excellent description of some of the false teachers operating today. One cannot help but picture the familiar modern scene of an expensively-dressed televangelist prancing and raving his way across a spotlighted stage before an audience of thousands, or ten thousands.

They rage indeed, these waves, and yet all their foaming and frothing is in the end only to their own shame. Hear what the Lord Jesus said of them: "*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matt 7:22-23).

Wandering stars. In the past, especially, stars were far more than just pretty lights in the sky. Their position and course across the heavens were predictable, and they were therefore very useful for navigation. Not so for these "*wandering stars*" (Jude 13) as Jude describes them. They may appear luminous, but it is dangerous to follow them. They chart no fixed course. As they wander in darkness now, so they will wander for eternity. Their place is reserved in "*outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt 8:12).

We see in these five pictures, then, the danger of apostasy: both to the apostates themselves, and to those led astray by them. They may be found within the church, yet are not truly of the people of God; they appear luminous and loud, but their teaching is destitute of spiritual substance; having no life, and having forsaken the only true Source of life, they can lead others only to death, to the very shame and darkness which they do now and will forever occupy. From these lies only "*the faith... once delivered unto the saints*" (Jude 3) can set us free.

THOUGHT: Complacency can be as deadly as apostasy.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy perfect Word. Help me to study it!

MONDAY, APRIL 20

JUDE 14-15

HEBREWS 6:1-9

*“Behold, the Lord cometh ...
to execute judgment upon all ...”*

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (XI)

After comparing the apostates to the Old Testament characters of Cain, Balaam, and Korah, and describing them metaphorically in a series of vivid images, Jude now borrows the words of Enoch to emphasize once again their certain destruction.

It is interesting that Jude chooses the prophecy of Enoch, which is not elsewhere recorded in scripture. Moreover, Jude deliberately places Enoch as *“the seventh from Adam”* (Jude 14). It seems that Jude cites Enoch’s prophecy in line with what he has stated earlier – these apostates *“were before of old ordained to this condemnation”* (Jude 4). Their condemnation, in other words, has been certain from the beginning: even Enoch proclaimed it, *“the seventh from Adam,”* so close in time that Adam was in all likelihood still alive when Enoch made this prophecy. (A simple addition of the numbers as given in Genesis 5 reveals that Adam’s death occurred a mere 57 years before Enoch’s translation.)

Enoch’s prophecy concerned the final judgment. The just and holy God will not allow sin to go unpunished, but He has appointed from the beginning a day of judgment; a day when He will come with His myriads of saints *“to execute judgment upon all”* (Jude 15). Notice however that while *“all”* will be judged, He will not *“convince”* (that is, convict or find guilty) all. Only those who are *“ungodly among them”* will be convicted for their ungodly deeds and ungodly words, because they have rejected the atonement of Christ.

God has made a way of salvation that is available for all. The blood of Christ is sufficient to cover the debt of sin for the whole world, all these apostates included. But these *“certain men”* who creep into churches, claiming to be under-shepherds of Christ and teachers of His Word, while preying on the flock, have stubbornly and finally rejected salvation. They *“were once enlightened”* (Heb 6:4), but they have fallen away, having never truly believed at all, and now they *“crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame”* (Heb 6:6). Of this they will surely be convicted, on that appointed day.

THOUGHT: I will one day stand before God to be judged.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the gift of righteousness in Christ!

TUESDAY, APRIL 21

JUDE 16

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-10

“... we should not lust
after evil things ...”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (XII)

Jude now turns to a final series of descriptions, from verses 16 to 19. These are more direct descriptions, and it is here especially where we ought to examine ourselves, to see if we possess or display any of these dangerous characteristics.

We see here, in the first place, the seriousness of murmuring and complaining. This is something to which we are all prone! Yet the characterisation of these apostates as “*murmurers*” and “*complainers*,” ought to spur us away from leniency in mortifying our own discontentment. Such discontentment with God’s provision, God’s appointment, and God’s law, is already a rebellion against His authority. It leads one to the end exemplified by the Israelites, the fallen angels, and the lawless inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha (cf. Jude 5-7). It is the first step on the road to apostasy.

The second step, as it were, is described by Jude as “*walking after*” one’s own lusts. This follows on the heels of discontent, for having quenched the influence of God’s Spirit, we are eager to submit ourselves to the direction of our own lusts. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, “*the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other*” (Gal 5:17). Once we begin to indulge the flesh by the expression of discontentment, the lusts of the flesh will quickly begin to drown out the convicting work of the Spirit. We may find ourselves on a dangerous path leading us outside the bounds God has placed on our desires.

The third and final stage in this apparent progression laid out by Jude is the outspoken attempt by these apostates to promote self and to gather a following. They speak “*great swelling words*” about themselves, seeking to attract disciples by their proud boasting. They have “*men’s persons in admiration*,” that is, they flatter and charm, in order to gain “*advantage*” in terms of favour with others. They play the political game that if by any means they may increase their own popularity. Dear reader, let us not think ourselves immune to this slippery slope, but “*watch and pray*” (Matt 26:41), lest we fall into temptation.

THOUGHT: Are these characteristics of the apostates found in me?

PRAYER: Preserve me from discontentment, from lust, and from pride.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22

JUDE 17-18

2 PETER 3:1-13

*"The Lord is not slack
concerning his promise ..."*

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (XIII)

There is a note of hope, however, sounded by Jude in the midst of the grim reality he has been emphasizing of the danger facing the church. In verse 17 the theme of "*remembrance*" (cf. Jude 5) is picked up again - but whereas in verse 5 the "*remembrance*" was one of *alarm*, the remembrance in verse 17 is one of *assurance*.

Considering all the examples of apostasy that have been given (the frightening and detailed portrait that has been painted of the apostates and their great wickedness, and the bleak picture that has been drawn of the condition of the church as a whole), one might be tempted to think that the situation has somehow spiralled out of control. Could it be that God's plan has somehow been *thwarted*, or that it is being actually *threatened*? Is it possible that these apostates might really destroy the church?

It is to this sort of questioning that Jude gives answer in verses 17 to 18. "*Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time...*" In other words, none of this signifies a *failure* in God's plan, but all is in fact a *fulfilment* of His eternal purpose! The same Lord who promised to the Apostle Peter, "*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matt 16:18), also promised through the same Apostle, "*there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts*" (2 Pet 3:3, cf. Jude 18). Likewise the Apostle Paul also predicted, "*in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron*" (1 Tim 4:1-2).

Dear reader, nothing can thwart or even threaten God's plan. The church may seem to be in a mess, and confusion may appear to reign in so-called Christendom. But God has already told us in His Word that the last days will be a time of great falling away from the faith (cf. 2 Thess 2:3). Let us therefore not despair, but press on in contending for the faith, knowing that God is still on the throne!

THOUGHT: "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom 8:31).

PRAYER: I thank Thee for the patience and comfort of the scriptures.

THURSDAY, APRIL 23

JUDE 19

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

“... if any fellowship
of the Spirit ...”

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTASY (XIV)

These apostates of whom Jude warns are the very ones predicted by the Apostles. The final description given by Jude is of the apostates as those who “*separate themselves*” – the final and inevitable conclusion of apostasy. The Apostle Paul had said to the Corinthians, “*there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*” (1 Cor 11:19). God has ordained that heresies and false doctrines should be a means of proving and testing, in order that those who are truly “*approved*” should be “*made manifest*.”

Now Christians are indeed called to “*separate themselves*.” We are to separate from unbelievers: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers... come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord...*” (2 Cor 6:14-17; but cf. 1 Cor 5:9-10). And we are to separate from disorderly believers: “*we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly*” (2 Thess 3:6).

What these apostates are doing, however, is quite different. They do not “*separate themselves*” in the same sense that Christians are commanded to be separate. Instead of a *biblical* separation from *unbelief*, theirs is, as it were, an *unbiblical* separation from *true belief*. They creep into churches (Jude 4); they begin to voice their dissent, promulgate their false teachings, and attract others to their cause (Jude 16); then they “*separate themselves*” from the true church (Jude 19). This they do, because they are “*sensual, having not the Spirit*.” Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they are unable to receive the truth of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:14). They do not participate in that “*fellowship of the Spirit*” (Phil 2:1) that leads true believers to be “*likeminded ... of one accord, of one mind*” (Phil 2:2).

Dear reader, what is needed in these last days is both unity and division: unity in the truth, and division from falsehood. Let us therefore be diligent students of scripture, prayerful and thoughtful, so that we neither unite with that from which we ought to separate, nor separate from that with which we ought to unite.

THOUGHT: Unity has its place, so does division.

PRAYER: Father, give me discernment to serve Thee rightly!

CONTENDING AGAINST APOSTASY (I)

Following his long characterisation of the apostates, Jude now turns finally to the matter of believers and their duty in the face of apostasy. We are to *“earnestly contend for the faith”* (Jude 3), but how? In these four verses (Jude 20-23), Jude lays out our duty with respect to ourselves (Jude 20-21), and our duty with respect to others (Jude 22-23).

This section opens with a contrast: *“But ye, beloved...”* (Jude 20) - emphasizing the Christian’s duty in distinction from the practice of the apostates. They do not do this, Jude says, but you must! You must not be like them; instead you must be like this. You must be *“building up yourselves on your most holy faith,”* instead of separating yourselves from the truth.

The word *“building”* here has the idea of a continual process of construction and growth. A Christian should never be stagnant or backsliding, but always growing and progressing. Dear reader, we have been given by God a most precious gift, a perfect and infallible book, a written revelation of truth: a *“most holy faith”* (Jude 20), pure and separate from all error. It has been entrusted to us, remember: once for all *“delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3). Of this solemn responsibility Jude reminds us, with the simple addition of the possessive pronoun *“your.”* The company of *“saints”* mentioned in verse 3, includes you! This unchanging truth has been entrusted to *you*, it is *your “most holy faith.”* The unshakeable, unmoveable foundation has been laid, and *you* are now accountable for building upon it.

Do you take your study of God’s Word seriously? You must, if you have any sense at all of the privilege of holding in your hands the written revelation of God. Build your life on this truth: study it, understand it, and obey it. With such a sure foundation before you, why would you build your life on anything else? You see the danger facing the church, the deception and destruction wrought by wolves seeking to fatten themselves at the expense of the flock. If you would contend for *the* faith, you must first affirm that it is *your* faith, and build your own life upon it. Anything less would be hypocrisy.

THOUGHT: Is “the faith” really “my faith”?

PRAYER: God, help me to be a faithful, obedient student of Thy Word.

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

JUDE 20

EPHESIANS 6:10-19

*“Praying always ...
in the Spirit ...”*

CONTENDING AGAINST APOSTASY (II)

The work of *“building up”* (Jude 20) ourselves on our *“most holy faith,”* however, is not a work that any one of us can do alone. This is simply not a construction project that can be accomplished purely by human effort! Not only did the apostates fail because they never rightly understood God’s Word, nor rightly applied it to themselves, they failed also because they had no true communion with God, and no participation in the fellowship of His Spirit.

By contrast, we as believers are to be *“praying in the Holy Ghost”* (Jude 20), even as we seek to rightly divide the Word of Truth (cf. 2 Tim 2:15) and rightly obey it in our daily lives. We have been given, not just an infallible scripture in our hands, but an infallible Interpreter of this scripture in our hearts. God has not only given us His Word in writing, He has given us, through our great High Priest the Lord Jesus Christ, access into His very presence. Of these great gifts, we ought to avail ourselves.

Now it is evident that a soldier in an army needs something more than just his own individual girdle, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword. He needs a reliable line of communication with his commander, or else he cannot fight effectively. Hence after listing the *“armour of God”* (Eph 6:11-17) which the Christian is to put on, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to be *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”* (Eph 6:18). If we would *“earnestly contend for the faith”* (Jude 3) against apostasy, we must be in constant communion with God.

Dear reader, as you take seriously your study of God’s Word, take seriously also your time of prayer and communion with God. To *“come boldly unto the throne of grace”* (Heb 4:16) is for the Christian most needful, but sadly also most neglected. Even when we know not what to say, we have no excuse not to pray for we have within us our Comforter, who *“helpeth our infirmities”* and *“maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”* (Rom 8:26). *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16); but a man who does not pray, avails nothing.

THOUGHT: Do I pray as I ought to pray?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to pray!

CONTENDING AGAINST APOSTASY (III)

The two great holy helps God has given us are our *"most holy faith"* and the *"Holy Ghost"* (Jude 20). As we avail ourselves of these means of grace, our aim is to *"keep"* ourselves *"in the love of God"* (Jude 21). See again our personal accountability emphasized: keep *"yourselves."*

The word *"keep"* has the idea of carefully guarding and maintaining. What is it we are thus to guard and maintain? We are to guard and maintain ourselves *"in the love of God."* Now since it cannot be supposed that we bear the responsibility of maintaining God's love for us, the reference here must be to our love for God (which, of course, has its ultimate source in God's love for us). It is this love that we are to maintain diligently; and this is the crux of the issue when it comes to apostasy. If apostasy is a *"falling away"* from God, its opposite is a cleaving to God in love. Dear readers, in these last days, *"because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold"* (Matt 24:12), let this not happen to you, but *"keep yourselves in the love of God,"* and in its corollary the love of your neighbours (cf. Matt 22:36-40).

This we are to do, with a constant looking for *"the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."* It will be a help to us, constantly to keep in view the imminent return of the Lord, and the passing away of this world, because this world is full of things that tend to attract our affection away from our Saviour, where it belongs. Speaking of this consummation of God's love and mercy toward us in Christ, the Apostle John writes, *"every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure"* (1 John 3:3).

So the duty of earnestly contending for the faith, with respect to ourselves, involves a diligent, prayerful study of scripture, obedience to the great commandments of love for God and one's neighbour, and expectant hopeful watching for the return of our Lord. Dear reader, is yours such a life? Remember, there is no neutrality in our spiritual battle. To be *"lukewarm"* is to invite censure from the Lord (cf. Rev 3:16). If you are not in this manner earnestly contending for the faith, you are contributing to the damage caused by apostasy.

THOUGHT: Am I in danger of slipping from the love of God?

PRAYER: "Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for Thee."

MONDAY, APRIL 27

JUDE 22-23

2 TIMOTHY 2:24-26

“... *the servant of the Lord
must not strive ...*”

CONTENDING AGAINST APOSTASY (IV)

In earnestly contending for the faith, our duty with respect to others also opens with a contrast, a “*difference*” (Jude 22) or distinction, that must be made. There is a discernment that must be exercised, in other words; the same instrument cannot be used for every operation. We are to respond appropriately to each situation.

With some, we are to “*have compassion*” (Jude 22). Some who are in the grip of false teaching need gentle, compassionate counsel. They do not need to be loudly or openly denounced and condemned! They are deceived. They are bruised reeds, and if the Saviour would not break them (cf. Matt 12:20), how can we? Even an open denial of the Lord, as Peter’s, received a merciful restoration by the shores of Galilee! The Lord knew Peter’s heart. Peter was not an apostate, but a struggling, fallible saint. What such people need is gentle, patient, meek instruction in the truth, “*if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil*” (2 Tim 2:25-26).

With others, however, what is needed is not compassion, but “*fear*.” They are in great danger. They are as it were in the fire, and must be pulled out. As was the case with Lot, who “*lingered*” while the fire of judgment impended, and had to be taken by the hand and pulled out of Sodom (Gen 19:15-16), so it is with these. What such people need is to be rebuked sharply, “*that they may be sound in the faith*” (Titus 1:13). The time for “*compassion*” is past. If they are to be saved at all, it will be “*with fear*,” that is, by causing them to see the danger they are in, and fear it. At the same time, we must ensure that we ourselves are unspotted. We aim to pull them out, not join them in the flames!

Dear reader, you see that to “*earnestly contend for the faith*” (Jude 3) does not mean merely to argue, or debate; it is not simply an intellectual exercise, an exchange of opinion in the marketplace of ideas. It is a matter of life. We earnestly contend for the faith by living it out in our own lives, and seeking to exhort others – some, with patience and compassion; others, when needed, with fear – to do the same.

THOUGHT: Truth is for the whole of my life, not just my mind.

PRAYER: Father, help me truly to earnestly contend for the faith.

TUESDAY, APRIL 28

JUDE 24

JOHN 10:27-30

*“My sheep ...
shall never perish ...”*

OUR KEEPER FROM APOSTASY (I)

Jude concludes his epistle by turning back to where he began. Whereas Jude opened his epistle by affirming who believers are in light of the work of the triune God, he closes the epistle by focusing on God Himself. The sublime benediction of verses 24 and 25 turns our thoughts away from the mire and mess of the conflict, and to Him who is eternal and sovereign, and in whom ultimate victory and joy are secured and assured.

Just as Jude addressed his epistle to *“them that are... preserved in Jesus Christ”* (Jude 1), so now he affirms that God is the one *“that is able to keep you from falling”* (Jude 24). This is, in the first place, a humbling thought. Even as we reject these apostates, and repudiate their pride and their false teachings, we are reminded that, but for the grace of God, we are no better than they. If we have been preserved from apostasy, and kept from falling, it is not because of our own wisdom, our own discernment, our own steadfastness, or our own greatness! God is the one who has kept us from falling; we have no cause whatsoever to boast. Indeed, we ought to be admonished: *“let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor 10:12).

In the second place, this is also a most reassuring thought. In light of the danger and apostasy of these last days, it is encouraging to see ourselves as *“preserved in Jesus Christ”* (Jude 1) and to look to God, in all our contending for the faith, as the One who is able to keep us from falling. What a comfort it is to remember the words of the Lord Jesus: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand”* (John 10:27-29).

Dear reader, if the bleakness of the world’s spiritual condition weighs heavily on you, and you fear for the safety of your own soul, take heart. We are fallible, and we may stumble; but if we truly belong to Christ, we will not finally fall, because He is able to keep us from falling.

THOUGHT: If I have truly believed in Jesus, I am safe in His hand.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thou art able to keep me from falling.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

JUDE 24

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

“... but ye are washed,
but ye are sanctified,
but ye are justified ...”

OUR KEEPER FROM APOSTASY (II)

Again, just as Jude addressed his epistle to *“them that are sanctified by God the Father”* (Jude 1), so now he affirms that God is the One *“that is able... to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”* (Jude 24).

Once more we are humbled to remember that we are full of faults, weaknesses, heinous and terrible sins; but we have been washed, sanctified, *“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor 6:11). It is God and God alone who is able to present us *“faultless”* before His presence. Even as we seek to save others, some compassionately and patiently, others with great urgency, we are reminded that but for the grace of God in justifying, sanctifying, and washing sinners by the blood of Christ, all would be in vain.

And once again, this is a great encouragement to us also. Because God is the One who will present us *“faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,”* we are assured that nothing can stop this from happening. Having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and having faithfully, earnestly contended for the faith, we know that when we stand before His presence on the last day, we will be *“faultless.”* Not because we have been ourselves perfect, but because we stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and washed by His blood.

Dear reader, will it not be *“exceeding joy”* to stand thus in God’s presence? And if we are assured that such will indeed be our lot, can we not taste of that *“exceeding joy”* even now? Yes, we see apostasy on every side; yes, the spiritual battle is toilsome and wearying; yes, it seems sometimes that *“the godly man ceaseth”* and *“the faithful fail from among the children of men”* (Ps 12:1), but we have this promise of the one whose words are *“pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”* (Ps 12:6). No matter the bleakness of the day, Christians have reason to *“rejoice in the Lord always”* (Phil 4:4)!

THOUGHT: There is *“exceeding joy”* in looking always to God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to rejoice in Thee!

THURSDAY, APRIL 30

JUDE 25

EPHESIANS 1:3-6

“... that we should be
... to the praise
of the glory of his grace ...”

OUR KEEPER FROM APOSTASY (III)

The final affirmation of this sublime benediction is of God as “*the only wise God our Saviour*” (Jude 25). He is “*wise*” – omniscient and perfect in all His plans and designs (and there is none else like Him; He is the “*only wise God*”). His plan of salvation is a perfect plan. His decree of election and predestination is a perfect decree. And therefore His calling also is perfect in wisdom, and cannot be challenged. “*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified*” (Rom 8:29-30).

What we see around us, therefore, is part of the unfolding of the one eternal and perfectly wise plan of the “*only wise God*.” These apostates, for all their wickedness, and for all the damage they cause, have been “*before of old ordained to this condemnation*” (Jude 4). The apostasy of the last days has been “*spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Jude 17). Yet how unfathomable is the grace we have received, that we should be “*called*” (Jude 1) as part of that same divine plan of the “*only wise God*”!

We should be filled with praise and thanksgiving that this “*only wise God*” is indeed “*our Saviour*,” because of His sovereign grace and mercy toward us. We live now to glorify Him; and all we do, including our contending for the faith, is never for our glory but His. Truly, “*he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love... to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*” (Eph 1:4-6).

Dear reader, even in the heat of battle, never take your eyes off God. The ultimate result and aim in all our earnest contending for the faith is the glory of God; that all glory and majesty, dominion and power, might be ascribed to Him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, who reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

THOUGHT: Do I live as though my chief end is to glorify God?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to glorify Thee in all that I do.

FRIDAY, MAY 1

MATTHEW 16:13-18

1 PETER 2:9-10

*"Upon this rock
I will build my church."*

THE MEANING OF "CHURCH"

The English word "church," like the German *kirche* and the Scotch *kirk*, is derived from the Greek adjective, *kyriakon*, which means "the Lord's." It may refer to the Lord's people in general, to any particular group of the Lord's people, or to the building in which the Lord's people worship (1 Cor 11:20; Rev 1:10).

The word translated "church" in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. This noun is related to the verb *ekkaleo* which means "to call out." Although the term is used for a secular assembly (Acts 19:32, 41), in a specialised ecclesiastical sense, it refers to an assembly or a body of called-out people, separated unto God.

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (XXV:1).

The church is sometimes referred to in the Scriptures without the use of the word itself. Peter writes to the Christians in the wide area of what we now call Asia Minor, "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy*" (1 Pet 2:9-10).

In writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul classes them together with the entire invisible church (1 Cor 1:2). It is this invisible church as an entirety to which Paul refers when he writes, "[I] *now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church*" (Col 1:24).

THOUGHT: Is the Church a building or a people?

PRAYER: I love Thy Church, O Lord.

SATURDAY, MAY 2

2 CORINTHIANS 11:2-3

EPHESIANS 5:21-32

*"I have espoused you
to one husband."*

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST (I)

There is a mystical union between believers and Christ. This union is entered into when a person is born again. This mystical union is more than mere natural fellowship. It is a union of a supernatural order in the Holy Spirit. That is why in the Scriptures the true church is known as (1) the bride of Christ, and (2) the body of Christ.

Throughout the Scriptures the marriage relationship is used metaphorically to signify the relationship between God and His people. In the Old Testament, Israel, as the people of God, are compared with a wife, and idolatry is frequently referred to as unfaithfulness to the marriage relationship. See especially the first three chapters of the prophecy of Hosea.

In a similar figure, Paul writes to the Church of Corinth, *"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"* (2 Cor 11:2-3).

The marriage relationship between Christ and His Church is described extensively in Ephesians 5:21-32. (See also 1 Cor 7; 11:1-16; 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:9-15; 3:11-12; Titus 1:6; 2:5; 1 Pet 3:7.)

Ephesians 5:21 emphasizes the need for Christians to submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God. He then introduces the discussion of the marriage relationship with the exhortation in verses 22 and 23.

Peter gives a similar injunction in 1 Peter 3:1 and 2.

Paul continues his analogy, *"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Eph 5:24-25).

THOUGHT: Have I been faithful to my spouse?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to be faithful unto Thee, and worship only Thee.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 3

EPHESIANS 5:21-32

COLOSSIANS 3:18-19

*"So ought men to love
their wives as their own bodies."*

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST (II)

Certainly, the analogy of the Church in relation to Christ is the analogy of the response of love. Such a loving marriage relationship is described by Paul in Colossians 3:18-19.

As it is natural that the husband should be the initiator in wedded love, so in the love between Christ and the Church, *"We love him, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). Just as one naturally is grieved when love is not met with responsiveness, but rather with coldness, so Christ is grieved by spiritual indifference. The Church by the promptings of the Holy Spirit must respond in love to the love of Christ. The whole context shows that the kind of submission and subjection which is here referred to is that of mutual love. Christ displays loving headship, and the Church responds with loving submission.

The purpose of the subjection of love in the Church to the love of Christ is further stated, *"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"* (Eph 5:26-27).

The love of Christ in the mystical union between Christ and the Church finds a vivid expression in the following words, *"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh"* (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5). *"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband"* (Eph 5:28-33).

THOUGHT: Have I been loving to my wife?

PRAYER: More love to Thee, O Lord!

MONDAY, MAY 4

EPHESIANS 5:25-33

REVELATION 19:6-9

*"The marriage
of the Lamb is come."*

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Nowhere in Scripture is the love of Christ for His Church put in stronger or more moving terms than in Ephesians 5:25 to 33. "Love" here is not *philia*, the love of friendship, nor is it *eros*, the classical Greek word for love between husband and wife. It is *agape*, the deep, strong, broad, ethical, spiritual word for the love of God (Rom 5:5). This love is to be found not only in the individual, but also in the true Church, which, as a body, is bound up in mystical union with Christ.

The consummation of this marriage relationship between Christ and His Church is predicted in Revelation 19:6-9, *"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."* This marriage supper of the Lamb will be held after the rapture of the Church, and just before the final battle of Armageddon.

After the millennial reign of Christ on earth, after the final rebellion of Gog and Magog, after the final judgment of the Great White Throne, after the present universe is destroyed by fire, and after the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, will come the New Jerusalem from heaven upon the new earth, *"having the glory of God"* (Rev 21:11). *"And there came unto me one of the seven angels... and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife"* (Rev 21:9). John had the first glimpse of the holy and heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, *"prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Rev 21:2, 10-11).

THOUGHT: The best wedding dinner is yet to be!

PRAYER: Lord, may Thou clothe me in the fine linen of Thy righteousness, clean and white, so that I might be worthy to partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

TUESDAY, MAY 5

EPHESIANS 4:1-13

EPHESIANS 5:21-33

*“For the edifying
of the body of Christ.”*

THE BODY OF CHRIST

As the bride of Christ, the Church is also His body. The bride and body metaphors are really one. Several times in Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul mentions the two metaphors together. In verse 23, he says that Christ is *“the saviour of the body”* in His relationship as the Husband of the Church. Again in verse 28, husbands who love their wives, love *“their own bodies.”* Verse 30 reminds us that *“we are members of his body,”* and verse 31 quotes Genesis 2:24 with reference to the marriage union.

The great spiritual lesson taught by the metaphor of the bride is the lesson of the purifying influence of the love of God in our hearts. Perhaps the strongest lesson taught by the metaphor of the body is the lesson of the mystical spiritual unity of believers, as members of the body of Christ (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25).

The unity of believers in the body of Christ is strongly emphasized by Paul: *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Eph 1:22-23, cf. Col 1:18); *“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Eph 4:2-6).

The purpose of the several gifts which Christ has given to different members of His body is *“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”* (Eph 4:12-13).

THOUGHT: Can the Church, the body of Christ, be sinlessly perfect in this present age?

PRAYER: Father, help me to grow in Christlikeness each day until I reach sinless perfection in the day of Christ's return.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

COLOSSIANS 3:1-15

1 CORINTHIANS 6:13-20

*“Your body is the temple
of the Holy Ghost.”*

THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

The unity of the body of Christ means Christian peace (Col 3:15). What a glorious thought, the peace of Christ, that calm poise of heart and mind which rests with a conscience completely yielded to God's will!

However, this does not mean that the believer will not face any problems in his life. Paul for instance experienced great anxiety in Troas (2 Cor 2:12-13) and in Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5-6). Nevertheless, God will bless His people with His peace that only He can give when they live a life that is in complete harmony with the will of Christ.

The unity of the body of Christ thus calls for the purity of the members. If we are personally members of the mystical body of Christ, it follows that our entire being, including our physical bodies, are members of Christ. And we must take care never to use our bodily parts as instruments of sin. Paul says, *“Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's”* (1 Cor 6:13-20).

THOUGHT: Can the Protestant Church which believes in salvation by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone, be united with the Roman Church which believes in salvation by works, which worships Mary and the saints?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I want to use the members of my body to glorify Christ and not to shame Him.

THURSDAY, MAY 7
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27
ROMANS 12:3-11

*“One body in Christ,
and every one members
one of another.”*

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Paul twice says that we, as members of the body of Christ, are “*members one of another*” (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). The most extended passage of Scripture dealing with the mutual interdependence of the members of the body of Christ is 1 Corinthians 12:12 to 27.

For the Church to function and grow harmoniously, every member of the Church must recognise that he needs other church members to grow in the Lord. No member in the body of Christ is dispensable or is more important than the other. Every believer has a special gift and a special function within the body of Christ. Paul thus argued, *“If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular”* (1 Cor 12:15-27).

THOUGHT: It takes two hands to clap.

PRAYER: Lord, help me be a team player in the body of Christ.

FRIDAY, MAY 8

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

EPHESIANS 4:11-12

*“For the edifying
of the body of Christ.”*

SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR CHURCH GROWTH (I)

There are spiritual gifts for all the individual members of the body of Christ (Rom 12:6). Each believer has his own gift from God, one of one kind and another of another (1 Cor 12:6-8; Eph 4:7-8).

There are four lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. The differences in these lists, and the manner in which each is given, suggest that no list is intended to be exhaustive, and that the gifts enumerated are not necessarily connected with particular offices or occupations.

The list in Romans 12:4-8 is as follows: (1) prophecy, (2) ministry (a very general term for service), (3) teaching, (4) exhorting (or consoling), (5) giving, (6) leadership, (7) showing mercy.

The list in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 is: (1) wisdom, (2) knowledge, (3) faith, (4) healing, (5) powers (probably meaning miracles), (6) prophecy, (7) discerning spirits, (8) languages (“*tongues*”), (9) translation of languages.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 there is a double list. In the first covering of the ground we have (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) teachers, (4) powers (miracles), (5) healing, (6) helps, (7) governments, (8) languages (“*tongues*”). As Paul goes over the ground again, we have no mention of “*helps*” or “*governments*” but we have the additional item “*interpret*.” It is thought that “*helps*” probably refers to several kinds of minor offices or ministries which developed in the early church. “*Governments*” is thought to indicate a differentiation in the eldership as between teaching elders (1 Tim 5:17) and ruling elders or governors of the church.

The list found in Ephesians 4:11 is very brief: (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) evangelists, (4) pastors and teachers. Each of these could be regarded as a special occupation or office.

THOUGHT: “The gifts of the Spirit are not the gifts of nature.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, help me discover my spiritual gift so that I might use it for the edification of the saints and to the glory of Thy name.

SATURDAY, MAY 9

1 CORINTHIANS 12:28-31

1 CORINTHIANS 3:6-9

*“We are labourers
together with God.”*

SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR CHURCH GROWTH (II)

Prophecy is the only spiritual gift found in all four lists. Apostles are mentioned in two of the lists (1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11). The gift of languages (*“tongues”*) and the gift of translation and healing are mentioned in the two lists found in 1 Corinthians 12. Teaching is found in the list in Romans 12, and in the second list in 1 Corinthians 12. In Ephesians 4:11 we find the gift called *“pastors and teachers.”* These two functions of shepherding and teaching are to be considered as one gift. Every pastor (shepherd) ought to be a teacher and every teacher ought to be a shepherd.

The office of the apostles is a very special one and is not perpetuated in the Church. There were only twelve Apostles involved in establishing the New Testament Church, and the writing of the New Testament Scripture. There is no longer any need for Apostles today since the Church is already established worldwide, and the Scriptures are already completed and canonised. Apart from the office of apostleship, *“ministry”* (Rom 12:7) might be considered a reference to the office of deacon. *“Governments”* (1 Cor 12:28) or governors could be a reference to ruling elders.

The gifts of the Spirit are manifold. We are not intended to have a complete list. The Spirit breathes where He chooses (John 3:8). The sign gifts such as apostleship, miracles, tongues, healing, etc. are evidently not for all times and places in the Church. Each member of the Church is given some gift as evidence of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (see Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 7:7; 12:7; Eph 4:7). The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the redeemed individual is referred to as a seal (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22), a distinctive mark of genuineness as a member of the body. The spiritual gifts are not to be used in isolation. Paul says of himself and Apollos, *“we are labourers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9). The gifts are for *“the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Eph 4:12).

THOUGHT: “The gifts of the Spirit are distributed by him at his own good pleasure.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for making me useful in Thy church.

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH (I)

In the Westminster Shorter Catechism the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are presented under the general heading of "the means of grace." WSC Qn 88: "What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, His ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation."

The outward formal and physical act of baptism and the Lord's Supper do not convey any spiritual blessing or benefit. There is nothing magical about the ceremonies of water baptism and the Lord's Supper.

One proof that the sacraments are not held to be external instruments in themselves for the conveying of the grace of God is the fact that the Word and prayer are also said to be "outward and ordinary means" in the same sense as the sacraments. WSC Qns 89 and 90: "How is the Word made effectual to salvation? The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation? That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practise it in our lives."

It is not the act of carrying the Bible that shows that one is saved. Salvation comes not by a possession of the Bible, but by understanding and obeying its divinely inspired words with the help of the Holy Spirit. With reference to the sacraments, the WSC Qn 91 teaches, "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of His spirit in them that by faith receive them."

THOUGHT: The sacraments are outward signs of an inward grace.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live by faith and not by sight.

MONDAY, MAY 11

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

TITUS 3:5

“This do in remembrance of me.”

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH (II)

There are two specific manners in which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a “means of grace.” Jesus said, *“this do in remembrance of me”* (1 Cor 11:24-25), with reference to both the bread and the cup. Paul adds, *“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come”* (v 26). So the Lord's Supper is a “means of grace” in reminding the communicants of Christ, and in showing forth to outsiders the fact of His death on the cross. It is to be perpetuated in the world until Christ comes again.

The sacraments are not necessary for salvation, but are useful (1) as visual aids to assist human minds to know what is taught in the Holy Scriptures, and (2) as a public testimony to the outside world of the meaning of faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, the phrase, “means of grace,” must not be mechanically interpreted to mean that the sacraments themselves impart salvation. It must be emphasized that Independent, Baptist and Presbyterian churches do not agree with the Roman Catholic error of salvation by works through the mechanical keeping of baptism and the mass.

So, what is a sacrament? A Christian sacrament is defined as “an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible [sensory] signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers” (WSC Qn 92). This definition, adhered to officially by Presbyterian bodies, has no peculiar denominational emphasis, but expresses the idea common to all Protestant bodies. In fact, as a mere definition, it is not unacceptable to Roman Catholics.

The chief points of emphasis in the definition are (1) that the sacraments are holy ordinances instituted by Christ, and (2) that the sacraments are effective in certain ways.

THOUGHT: The sacraments are “*mirrors* in which we may contemplate the riches of grace which God imparts to us.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me the spiritual truths of Thy Word through the visible signs of Thy holy sacraments.

TUESDAY, MAY 12

ROMANS 4:1-11

GENESIS 17:1-11

"He received the sign of circumcision."

THE SACRAMENTS AS SEALS (I)

The Sacraments are seals of the Covenant of Grace. The word, "*seal*," designates a visible mark that proves the validity of the arrangement, covenant, or promise, which it is understood to signify (see Gen 38:18, 25; Exod 28:11; cf. 1 Kings 21:8; Neh 9:38; Esther 8:8; Job 38:14; Jer 22:24; 32:10, 44; Dan 6:17). Even in our modern culture, an official seal is often used to authenticate an agreement or a testimony.

In the New Testament the word "*seal*" is used metaphorically for a firm testimony (John 3:33). Christ referred to the evidence of the genuineness of His claims as the "*seal*" of the Father upon Him (John 6:27). The stone at the door of the tomb where Christ was buried was literally "*sealed*" with the official Roman seal (Matt 27:66). The statement that "*The LORD will shew who are his*" (Num 16:5), is said to be the "*seal*" upon the foundation of the truth of God (2 Tim 2:19). The Corinthian Christians are the "*seal*" of Paul's apostleship (1 Cor 9:2). The missionary offering collected from the Gentile churches is the tangible evidence (a "*seal*") of the genuineness of their faith (Rom 15:28). The manifest presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is the "*seal*" or evidence of their regeneration (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22).

The custom of speaking of the sacraments as the seal of "Christ and the benefits of the new covenant," is based upon the fact that Paul refers to the sign of circumcision as the "*seal*" of the justification by faith which Abraham had when he was still in the state of uncircumcision (Rom 4:11). Paul refers to baptism as "Christian circumcision" (Col 2:11-12). The Lord's Supper is equally an outward act of testimony, showing forth "*the Lord's death*" (1 Cor 11:26). The sacraments are therefore the "*seal*" or outward sign of our relationship with Christ in regeneration.

THOUGHT: A sign does not save, it merely points to the Saviour.

PRAYER: (Praise the Lord for how He has saved you from your sins.)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13

COLOSSIANS 2:6-12

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

*“Ye were sealed with the holy
Spirit of promise.”*

THE SACRAMENTS AS SEALS (II)

It should be noted that in no case does a seal in itself serve as the efficient creditable cause of the validity of the arrangement, or promise or contract which it represents. Lawyers explain to us that a seal affixed to a document is “presumptive evidence” that the document is valid and to be taken at face value. By way of illustration, the diploma of the Far Eastern Bible College bears a golden seal. Before the diploma is awarded, the seal may be attached to the diploma at any time when it is presumed by the custodians of the seal that the student will complete or has completed his studies, and that the diploma will eventually be validated.

The seal of a diploma illustrates how the sacraments can truly be regarded as seals of our standing in Christ. No sacrament occurs at precisely the same time in which the individual believes and is justified. In the case of infant baptism, the seal is applied in the confident expectation and hope that the child will believe and be born again. In the case of those who come into the Christian faith as adults, not having been brought up in Christian nurture, and not having been baptized as infants, and in the case of all who partake of the Lord’s Supper, subsequent to the requisite self-examination (1 Cor 11:28), the seal is applied subsequent to the time when the individual is presumed to be born again. In no case does the seal accomplish that of which it is a sign, but in all these cases the seal is applied in obedience to the command of Christ, as an outward sign of the inward grace which is confidently expected in the case of infants, or believed to be actually received in the case of adults.

Since a sacrament is a sign wherein “Christ and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers,” there is thus no dispute about the fact that the sacraments *represent* that which accomplishes our salvation.

THOUGHT: “All signs are as it were dead, except life is given them by the word.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, let my life outwardly manifest the inward reality of a transformed heart and mind in Jesus Christ.

THURSDAY, MAY 14

MATTHEW 26:26-28

MARK 14:22-24

*“Jesus took bread, and blessed,
and brake it.”*

THE MEANING OF THE LORD’S SUPPER (I)

The Lord’s Supper is called the Lord’s Supper because it was instituted by the Lord Himself just before His death. The Lord’s Supper like Water Baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace. It is the external visible display of an internal invisible reality of our salvation. For example, when we go through the waters of baptism, we are publicly declaring what has already happened in our heart, namely, the washing away of sins, our new life in Christ, etc.

The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act. By way of illustration, the wedding rings which a married couple wear are signs and seals of an earlier exchange — the exchange of marriage vows. As forgetful people, the rings are needful reminders of the marriage vows that have been taken.

Note that water baptism and the Lord’s Supper do not save. They are just outward symbols of an inward reality. Just like the wedding ring. A ring does not make a person married. The vow to each other did.

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment, his death showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.”

The institution of the Lord’s Supper is recorded in all three synoptic gospels in Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:19-20. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we remember the Lord’s atoning work on the cross, and when we partake of it by faith, we receive spiritual help and blessing to live the Christian life.

THOUGHT: “The sacraments’ only aim is to make us look to Christ for everything requisite to our salvation.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, may Thou draw me closer to Thyself as I observe the sacraments that Thou hast instituted.

FRIDAY, MAY 15

JOHN 6:51-58

HEBREWS 7:27

*“My flesh... I will give
for the life of the world.”*

THE MEANING OF THE LORD’S SUPPER (II)

There are four views of the Lord’s supper: (1) Transubstantiation, (2) Consubstantiation, (3) Symbolical, and (4) Spiritual Presence.

Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic view. It says that the bread and cup literally become the body and blood of Christ. When the priest utters the words of Christ, *“This is my body”* and *“This is my blood,”* the bread and the wine *magically* become the *actual* body and blood of Christ. So you are actually eating real flesh and drinking real blood. Sometimes they put the wafer into a monstrance (a little glass showcase with a stand that can be carried around) to be worshipped as God. The wafer becomes God. This is idolatry. They also say that each time the Holy Communion is observed, Christ is crucified all over again. This goes against Hebrews 7:27 which tells us that Christ offered Himself once for all. His death is not repeatable.

In John 6:53, Jesus told the disciples to eat His flesh and drink His blood. When He said this He did not mean a literal eating of His actual flesh and literal drinking of His actual blood. The context clearly tells us that the eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood is to be taken spiritually. It is a spiritual feeding. His sinless body will be crucified and His blood will be shed. Jesus was telling the people in John 6:53 to believe on Him — to partake of Him spiritually. The body and blood point to Christ’s work on the cross. When we believe all that Jesus has done for us on the cross, His shed blood and His resurrection from the dead, we shall be saved.

The Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation is thus idolatrous, superstitious, and blasphemous, and must be rejected.

THOUGHT: “The first object of the sacraments is to assist our faith towards God; the second, to testify our confession before men.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, I want to testify before my family and friends that Thou art my Lord and my Saviour.

SATURDAY, MAY 16

JOHN 6:51-58

HEBREWS 7:27

*"This do in remembrance
of Me."*

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (III)

The Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper comes from Martin Luther. Before his salvation, Luther was a very devout Roman Catholic monk. He said, "I was indeed a pious monk, and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it." By the grace of God, Luther came to realise that salvation is purely by faith and not works. He broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and started the Protestant movement preaching the good news of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone.

Although Luther rejected the Roman Catholic view of salvation, he did not reject the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation totally. Although he denied that the bread and cup literally and magically turned into the flesh and blood of Christ (to him the bread was still bread, and the wine was still wine), he believed that the body and blood of Christ were present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine.

Luther's view is called **consubstantiation**. Luther used an iron bar heated with fire as an illustration. The iron after it is heated remains iron, but now there is the element of heat, and the heat is in the iron itself, is with the iron, and is around the iron.

Luther like the Roman Catholics failed to understand that the body and blood are to be taken figuratively and spiritually. Christ is not physically present in the bread and the wine. As such, his view of consubstantiation which is similar to transubstantiation ought to be rejected as unbiblical as well.

THOUGHT: "The sacraments are aids of our faith and appendices of doctrine." (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy sacraments that assist me in understanding what Thou hast done to save me from my sins.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 17

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34

REVELATION 19:7-9

*"Ye do shew the Lord's
death till he come."*

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (IV)

Ulrich Zwingli was a Swiss Reformer who taught that the Lord's Supper was simply a **symbolic commemoration** of the Lord's work on the cross. He based it on the words of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 11:24, *"this do in remembrance of me."* Zwingli said that the bread and cup merely *represent* the body and blood of Christ. However, there is one shortcoming in his view: He failed to see the **spiritual presence** of Christ in the elements which was taught by Calvin.

Calvin agreed with Zwingli that the elements represent the body and blood of Christ. Calvin used the words "symbols," "signs," and "images," to explain the meaning of the bread and cup. Calvin also taught that the Lord's Supper is also a commemoration service. We do it to remember Christ and His work on the cross.

However, Calvin taught an additional significance. It is also a spiritual exercise. The whole ceremony is a sacred affair. All participants must take part in it in a reverential manner. There is no place for frivolity. It must be observed with a worshipful attitude. We must search our hearts, confess our sins, and renew our commitment to Christ. Those who do not partake in a worthy manner are liable to be chastised by God. The punishment could come in the form of an illness or even death.

If we come before the Lord's table humbly, sincerely, reverentially, and partake of the bread and cup by faith, we will receive a special blessing from heaven. Such benefits, Calvin said, cannot be explained but must be experienced. Hence, the Lord's Supper is not just a commemoration; it is also a spiritual exercise.

Of the four views on the Lord's Supper, Calvin's view is the biblical view.

THOUGHT: "Our sacraments contain that *Yea* and *Amen* of all the promises of God." (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that Thy promises are always true.

MONDAY, MAY 18

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-24

“Flee from idolatry.”

PURITY OF THE COMMUNION TABLE

The purity of the sacrament is vividly set forth in Paul’s injunction (1 Cor 10:14-22). What born-again Christian has not felt the very presence of the Holy Spirit of God in the mystical union of believers together with Christ at the communion table?

Paul emphasizes that the Lord’s table demands purity of faith and life. He draws the analogy, *“Behold Israel after the flesh [i.e. historically]: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles [i.e. communicants of false religions] sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God.”* Paul was, of course, referring to literal idolatry, but anything which comes between us and God is, spiritually, an idol. Any false doctrine which amounts to the denial of salvation through the blood of Christ, is a form of idolatry. “Modernism” is not a form of Christianity, it is another religion; it is idolatry.

Paul continues, *“I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.”* The two cannot be commingled. If it is the table of false religion, it is not the Lord’s table.

Alluding to the metaphor of the marriage relationship, the metaphor which speaks of idolatry as unfaithfulness, Paul concludes, *“Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?”*

Calvin, in his Institutes, draws the distinction between a true Church and that which is not a Church, in that a true Church, preaching the true Gospel, maintains the purity of the sacraments.

THOUGHT: “We cannot obtain the grace offered in the Sacraments, unless we are capacitated by faith.” (Calvin, *Antidote to the Council of Trent*)

PRAYER: Lord, may I observe Thy sacraments by faith, and not as work nor as routine.

TUESDAY, MAY 19

HEBREWS 8

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

*“Which are a shadow
of things to come.”*

SACRIFICES AND SACRAMENTS

The Old Testament sacrifices were “sacraments” in that they were fully equivalent to the New Testament sacraments in their spiritual efficacy. “The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New” (Westminster Confession 27:5). In and of themselves as outward actions, the Old Testament sacrifices accomplished nothing, but in their significance they represented the atonement which Christ was to accomplish on the cross. They are described as “*shadow*” (Col 2:17).

The Old Testament sacrifices are called the “copy” and “shadow” and “pattern.” The Old Testament priests are said to “*serve unto the example [copy] and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount*” (Heb 8:5). The Old Testament sacrifices are the “copy” of the things in the heavens, and the atonement accomplished by Christ on the cross is said to be the actual sacrifice pertaining to the heavenly reality itself (Heb 9:23).

There is a clear analogy between the Old Testament and New Testament “sacrifices” or “sacraments.” Paul himself made such a comparison in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. And it is the same analogy of the Old Testament ritual to the New Testament sacraments which Paul has in mind when he writes, “*ye are circumcised... by the circumcision of Christ [or Christian circumcision]: Buried with him in baptism*” (Col 2:11-12).

We must conclude then that in the Church, since the incarnation and the historical accomplishment of the atonement, there are but two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and that these two sacraments embody all the meaning and all the efficacy of the divinely ordered system of worship previously ordained by the Lord.

THOUGHT: Which is better — a photo or the person himself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy Son who came in person, in the flesh, to fulfil the Old Testament types and prophecies.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

NUMBERS 19

LEVITICUS 4:6

*“The priest shall dip his finger ...
and sprinkle of the blood.”*

WATER BAPTISM (I)

According to Reformed theology, the word for baptism when used literally does not always imply submerging or immersing. As a matter of fact, the meaning most common in the New Testament is the action of dipping and pouring or dipping and sprinkling. There is no objection to the thought that baptism may properly be performed by immersion, but we do not find in the New Testament even one instance in which it is clear that immersion was the mode used, nor do we find in the Old Testament ceremonial washings one instance in which immersion is implied.

In the Old Testament, the word “baptize” is used in the sense of dipping for the purpose of sprinkling. *“And the priest shall dip (baptize) his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD, before the vail of the sanctuary”* (Lev 4:6; 9:9; 14:16). The dipping (not immersing) is tied to the act of sprinkling. Another example of dipping and sprinkling is found in Numbers 19, especially verses 4, 13, 18 and 20 which give elaborate directions for the “water of sprinkling.”

When we read in Daniel 4:33 and 5:21, that Nebuchadnezzar “*was wet with the dew of heaven,*” the verb is *bapto*. Certainly the word does not mean that he was immersed.

From the above study of the Old Testament, we see that baptism does not necessarily mean immersion. What a word means is determined by how it is used in its context. In the Old Testament context of ceremonial or ritual cleansing, baptism is connected with the act of dipping and sprinkling.

THOUGHT: “Baptism testifies to us our purgation and ablution; the Lord’s Supper testifies our redemption. Water is a figure of ablution, and blood of satisfaction.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father in heaven, I thank Thee for cleansing me of all my sins through the precious blood of Thy beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THURSDAY, MAY 21

MARK 7:1-7

LUKE 11:38

*“By the washing of regeneration,
and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”*

WATER BAPTISM (II)

There is no instance of baptism recorded in the New Testament in which it is clear that immersion was the method used. There are several instances in which immersion is quite excluded by the context. In Luke 11:38 we read that *“when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed [literally ‘baptized’] before dinner.”* It was customary for the Jews to wash, that is to baptize, themselves before their meals. A fuller explanation is found in Mark 7:1-7. When the Pharisees saw that some of Jesus’ disciples ate with unwashed hands, they were astonished. Mark explains, *“the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash [or ‘baptize themselves’], they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing [baptism] of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.”* To wash a table by immersion would be problematical, to say the least.

We know from other Scriptures how the ancients were accustomed to washing their hands (eg. 2 Kings 3:11). The water for washing was kept in jars. A servant’s duty was to dip and pour on his master’s hands (2 Kings 3:11) and feet also (Luke 7:44). When the Jews came from the market place it was their custom to wash themselves, and for this act Luke uses the word *“baptize”* (Luke 11:38).

It is abundantly evident from Luke 11:38 and Mark 7:1-5 that the word *“baptize”* did not necessarily imply immersion.

THOUGHT: Quoting John Sung on the baptism question: “More faith less water, less faith more water.”

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for cleansing me spiritually from all my sins through Thy Word and the Blood of Thy Son.

FRIDAY, MAY 22

ACTS 8:26-39

ISAIAH 52:15-53:9

“So shall he sprinkle many nations.”

WATER BAPTISM (III)

In Acts 8:26-39, Philip preached the good news of Jesus Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch from Isaiah 53:7ff. What was the water which they saw as they drove along? The region along that road is desert country (Acts 8:26) and there is no natural body of water available for immersion. Tertullian in his treatise, “On Baptism,” refers to “the eunuch whom Philip baptized in the midst of his journey with chance water.” The presumption is that it was a shallow pool beside the road such as is often seen in desert country after a shower.

But what made the Ethiopian think of baptism? As Philip met him he was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, but we must remember that there were no chapter divisions in the ancient scrolls. He had doubtless just read the words of Isaiah 52:15, *“So shall he sprinkle many nations.”* He probably was familiar with Ezekiel 36:25-27, *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”* And the Ethiopian knew the Old Testament idea of ceremonial cleansing by the sprinkling of water. It is thus quite easy to see what caused the Ethiopian to ask for baptism.

The going down into the water was not a part of the baptizing for both of them went down into the water. Neither did the coming up out of the water constitute any part of the baptizing, for they both came up out of the water. The baptizing was an act quite distinct from going down and coming up. Wearing sandals (the custom then), they doubtless stepped down into the water (it may have been a few inches deep) and Philip baptized the eunuch, doubtless by dipping and pouring or sprinkling, as suggested by numerous Old Testament references.

THOUGHT: “Baptism is a pledge of eternal life before God, an outward sign of faith before men.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, I want to confess my faith before men in water baptism.

SATURDAY, MAY 23

ACTS 2:37-41

ACTS 9:18-19

“And arose, and was baptized.”

WATER BAPTISM (IV)

There is not one instance in the New Testament in which baptism itself is said to involve the going down into the water, or a coming up out of the water. In cases where movement to or from the water is mentioned, without exception, the baptism is an entirely separate action.

There are indeed in the New Testament a number of instances of baptism in which it seems highly improbable if not impossible, that immersion was the practice. On the day of Pentecost, *“they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41). In this case at least, baptism by immersion, with the limited water resources at hand, would have been extremely difficult for the apostles. On the other hand, baptism by sprinkling, after the manner of the Old Testament purifying ceremonies, would have been quite feasible.

In the conversion of Saul, and his subsequent baptism by Ananias, in Damascus, when his sight was restored after Ananias’ prayer, he *“arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened”* (Acts 9:18-19). Now whereas the word, he *“arose,”* need not be taken in a very limited sense, yet in the context, the most natural meaning is, he *“stood up and was baptized.”* If the baptism had required his going to some place where immersion could be performed, most naturally he would have partaken of food, on account of his weakened condition, before going out. Thus again baptism by sprinkling, according to the Old Testament pattern, is the most natural meaning.

In the baptism of the household of Cornelius, as soon as Peter perceived that the Holy Spirit was manifestly present in their lives, he said, *“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”* (Acts 10:47). It was no question of going out to some pool or lake or river, it was simply a question of someone bringing in water for the baptismal service.

THOUGHT: “Water more or less, the gospel is the best” (T. Tow).

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the good news of Jesus Christ that has saved me from my sins.

WATER BAPTISM (V)

The significance of the sacrament of baptism is stated plainly in Romans 6:1-5. Christian baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It is through the Gospel of His death, burial and resurrection that we have the cleansing of our sins and the newness of life imparted to us in regeneration (1 Cor 15:1-4).

In Romans 6:1-5, when Jesus was *"buried"* (v 4), He was not put down in the ground and covered up. His body was carried into a rock-hewn sepulchre and, doubtless, laid upon a niche or shelf as the custom was. The physical nature of His burial in no way resembled immersion in water. The word *"planted"* (v 5) does not mean to plant by putting into the ground, but the word is from *phuo*, to sprout forth. The beginning of our Christian life, its germination, was in the acceptance of the death of Christ on the cross.

Baptism directly signifies our acceptance of the atonement of Christ accomplished on the cross. But since it is through the atonement that sin is remitted, or cleansed away, it is entirely appropriate that baptism should be referred to as a "cleansing" or a "washing." Peter said on the day of Pentecost: *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). Baptism signifies the remission of sins through the atonement which Christ accomplished as that atonement is applied to us by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 22:16; 1 John 1:7).

THOUGHT: Whether immersion or sprinkling, Baptist or Presbyterian, let there be no division over the mode of baptism, but a mutual love and respect for one another in the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me Thy truth and Thy way.

MONDAY, MAY 25

PSALM 103:17-18

PROVERBS 22:6

*“His righteousness
unto children’s children.”*

INFANT BAPTISM (I)

Children are God’s gift to us (Ps 127:3). God Himself is interested in the physical and spiritual development of our children. His way of reminding us of His concern is in the ceremony of water baptism which is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Children of Christian parents are also recipients of this covenant sign and seal. Christian parents ought to have their babies baptised as soon as possible. God is pleased with this act, and will bless both parent and child accordingly.

This is where a proper understanding of God’s Covenant of Grace comes in. This Covenant of Grace is divided into two periods: (1) Old Testament and (2) New Testament. The central Figure of both Testaments is Jesus Christ. The people in the Old Testament were saved by looking forward to the cross (John 8:56), and those in the New Testament are saved by looking back at the cross. In the Old Testament, the ceremonies that identified the nation of Israel to God were the passover and circumcision. In the New Testament, since Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the passover and circumcision have been replaced by the Lord’s supper and water baptism respectively (Luke 22:14-20; Col 2:11-12).

The Old Testament rite of circumcision and the New Testament rite of baptism are quite similar. Paul in Colossians 2:11-12 calls water baptism *“the circumcision of Christ.”* Water baptism is Christian circumcision. When a Jew is circumcised, he is telling people that he believes in Jehovah, and that he is a member of the nation of Israel. When a believer goes through water baptism, he is telling everyone that he believes in Christ, and that he is a member of the Church. In the Old Testament, male babies when they reach eight days old are circumcised. Likewise in the New Testament, we baptise our babies as early as possible. They are within God’s covenant promises.

THOUGHT: The Biblical view of infant baptism (as opposed to the Roman Catholic) is not baptismal regeneration. Water Baptism simply does not save, whether it is adult baptism or infant baptism.

PRAYER: Lord, my heart is encouraged to know that Thou hath a keen interest in my children, that they should know Thee and Thy salvation.

TUESDAY, MAY 26

GENESIS 17:7-14

ACTS 2:38-39

*"The promise is unto you,
and to your children."*

INFANT BAPTISM (II)

Why were Jewish babies circumcised? And why are babies born to Christian parents baptised? It is because God is interested in the family unit. When God saves one in the family, He also desires to save all. God's covenant promises are given not only to the individual but also to those who are part of his household (Gen 17:7-14). This household concept is very important.

In the Old Testament we find the following instances where God saved not only a person, but also his family from destruction. Consider the Old Testament teaching on household salvation as found in the case of Noah (Gen 7:1), of Abraham (Gen 17:12-13, 23, 27), and of Lot (Gen 19:16). God included their respective families in His work of salvation or deliverance.

The same household salvation teaching is found in the NT. When Peter and Paul preached the gospel, they called not only individuals to salvation but also their family members (Acts 2:38-39; 16:31). Consider the following examples of household salvation: (1) Martha, Mary and Lazarus of Bethany (John 11:1), (2) Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:44-48; 11:14-16), (3) Lydia and her family (Acts 16:14-15), (4) the Philippian jailor and his family (Acts 16:31-33).

It must be said that salvation is not automatic. It does not mean that if one member of the family becomes saved, the rest automatically become saved. Each person of age must confess and believe in Christ for salvation. When we talk about household salvation, we are saying that God is deeply interested in the eternal destiny of our dear ones. We have a moral responsibility to preach the Gospel to them, and bear a Christlike testimony at home. When we prayerfully and diligently do our part, God will be faithful to do His part to bring them eventually to a saving knowledge of Himself.

THOUGHT: "Those who are baptized when mere infants, God regenerates in childhood or adolescence, occasionally even in old age." (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy covenant promises to me and my children.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

EXODUS 20:8-11

MARK 2:23-28

*“Remember the sabbath day,
to keep it holy.”*

KEEPING THE SABBATH (I)

The Sabbath command is a good law that comes from a good God. God requires of man to set aside one day a week for physical respite and spiritual refreshment. When we come to worship the Lord on Sunday, do we not find our bodies and spirits recharged for a new week of physical work and spiritual battle? The Sabbath is not to be a burden but a delight. It is not a holiday but a holy day (Isa 58:13-14).

Today, we keep the Sabbath on Sunday, the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2) commemorating Christ's resurrection. On this day, we gather for worship, fellowship, Bible study and evangelism.

While keeping the Sabbath, we do not keep it with a Pharisaical attitude. In Mark 2:23-24, the Pharisees charged Jesus and His disciples for breaking the sabbath. According to the Pharisees, the sabbath law was broken when the disciples plucked and rubbed the wheat grains in their hands. In their extra-biblical rabbinical laws, they listed the following as work forbidden on the sabbath: “The main classes of work are forty save one: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer and taking our aught from one domain into another. These are the main classes of work: forty save one” (Mishnah, Shabbath 7.2). The disciples were considered to have done #3 and #5 of the 39 activities. Jesus was culpable because He did not stop His hungry disciples. Was the Master wrong?

Jesus and His disciples did not violate the Sabbath law. What they violated were the extra-biblical, man-made, foolish laws of the Pharisees.

THOUGHT: The Lord God is not a slave-driver, but a loving Master.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy good law of rest on the Sabbath.

THURSDAY, MAY 28

MARK 2:23-28

1 SAMUEL 21:1-6

*“The Son of man
is Lord also of the sabbath.”*

KEEPING THE SABBATH (II)

In Mark 2:25-28, Jesus rebutted the accusations of the Pharisees by citing the example of David who ate of the shewbread that only the priests were allowed to eat. David was hungry, and Ahimelech the priest, knowing the law for sure, did not forbid David and his men to fill their stomachs (1 Sam 21:1-6, cf. Lev 24:9). Ahimelech “broke” the ceremonial law of Leviticus 24:9, but was blameless. David likewise “broke” that law by eating of the ceremonial bread, and was guiltless as well. If Ahimelech and David were innocent, how could Jesus be guilty? Moreover, Jesus Himself is the Lord of the Sabbath! The higher law of necessity overrides the lower law of ceremony. It ought to be noted that Jesus in this particular instance did not even depart from a God-given ceremonial law, but a man-made rabbinical tradition. The charges of the Pharisees were totally baseless and without merit. Jesus did not break the law but kept it perfectly — His active obedience.

Jesus laid down a wonderful principle for Sabbath-keeping when He said, *“The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath”* (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was instituted not as a burden but as a benefit to man. Thus any legalistic application of the Sabbath law contradicts its God-given role for man (cf. Luke 11:46).

The puritans, in their overemphasis on the doctrine of sanctification, became legalistic. Instead of stressing on the spirit of the law, they put an undue emphasis on the letter of the law. Calvin has rightly commented, “The point of it is that it is wrong to turn the sabbath to man’s destruction, since God instituted it for his sake. The Pharisees saw Christ’s disciples busy in a holy work, they saw them exhausted and famished by their journey, yet they were angry that these hungry men should refresh their weary bodies with a few grains of corn. Is it not an ignorant perversion of God’s will to demand the observance of the sabbath to man’s hurt when God intended it to help him?” (New Translation, Harmony, 2:30). What insight and wisdom!

THOUGHT: Sabbath is a day of worship.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be found in Thy house every Lord’s Day.

KEEPING THE SABBATH (III)

How do we keep the Christian Sabbath, which is the Lord's Day, holy? Here are instructions from the Westminster Larger Catechism:

Q 116: What is required in the fourth commandment?

A: The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, and in the New Testament called the Lord's day.

Q 117: How is the Sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?

A: The Sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably to despatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

(As Christians, we should not be working on the Lord's Day unless they are works of necessity, eg. doctor, nurse, policeman, fireman, soldier. A gynaecologist cannot tell his patient: "Please do not go into labour on Sunday!")

THOUGHT: In certain countries, their "Sabbath" is on a Friday. Is God angry at His people if they were to worship on a Friday?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a worshipful spirit every day of the week.

SATURDAY, MAY 30

ISAIAH 58:13-14

ROMANS 14:4-8

“Call the Sabbath a delight.”

KEEPING THE SABBATH (IV)

Q 118: Why is the charge of keeping the Sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors?

A: The charge of keeping the Sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own.

Q 119: What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A: The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.

It is interesting to note that the Westminster theologians did not give a list of specific do's and don'ts in their exposition of the Sabbath command, but laid down a list of biblical principles we might apply to ensure that we keep the Sabbath holy and wholly:

1. Put God first (Isa 58:13; Matt 6:33). “Worship is the mother of all virtues.”
2. The Sabbath is made for the benefit of man (Mark 2:27). Allowed on the Sabbath are the works of necessity, of mercy, of service to God.
3. Christian freedom and non-judgmentalism (Rom 14:4-8, John 4:21-24). Sanctifying the Sabbath is an attitude or a spirit we must cultivate. Have a spirit of desiring to please God in all that we do, and be a good testimony for Him on the Lord's Day, and every day of the week.

THOUGHT: “The Sabbath was not prescribed as a day of idleness, but a season when we should collect our whole energies for meditation upon the works of God.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Lord, may I worship and serve Thee with all my heart, soul, mind and strength on the Sabbath day.

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

The worship of God in His house must be done in God's way. "The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture" (WCF 21.1).

God requires us to worship Him in His way. Any worship not instituted by God will not be accepted. For example, Nadab and Abihu were punished by God because they *"offered strange fire... which he commanded them not"* (Lev 10:1). God does not allow us to worship Him according to our whim and fancy. He requires us to worship Him according to the principles of worship He has set forth in the Scriptures.

The regulative principle involves two vital doctrines of the Christian faith. The first is the doctrine of *God's nature*. 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40 tells us that the God we worship is a God of *decency and order*, and not confusion. God is not pleased with any form of worship that is chaotic, wild, and uncontrolled. *Spiritual maturity* is an important element. The more spiritually minded we are, the more sensitive we will be to the holiness of God. It is not so much a matter of rules and regulations, but of spirituality. If our hearts and minds are biblically tuned to God and His Word, we do not need anyone to give us a list of do's and don'ts, we will automatically know what God wants us to be and what He wants us to do. We will naturally desire what God desires. Read 1 Corinthians 2:15-16.

The regulative principle also involves the doctrine of *separation*. This principle is taught in Romans 12:1-2. Although the Church is in the world, she must not be of the world, and that includes her form of worship.

THOUGHT: Say "No" to Contemporary Christian Music (CCM).

PRAYER: Lord, may I always render to Thee acceptable and spiritual worship.

MONDAY, JUNE 1

2 PETER 1:1

ACTS 15:7-20

*“And God ... giving them the Holy Ghost
even as he did unto us ...
purifying their hearts by faith.”*

LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH

The author “*Simon Peter*” began this epistle by describing himself as “*a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 1:1). “Simon,” his old name, was reminiscent of his life as a fisherman of Galilee. “Peter,” the name which Jesus gave him (John 1:40-42), depicts the transformation he has undergone after meeting Jesus, the Saviour. He was also very happy to proclaim his new vocation as Christ’s “*servant*” and “*apostle*.” Are you happy about your new life in Christ? Do you witness to others about your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ?

Peter and the rest of the Apostles had great experiences as they lived and walked with Christ. They sat with Him, talked with Him, and ate with Him. They also tasted the glory and power of Christ manifested through His miracles. They were also specially trained and equipped by the Lord to lay the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20). Yet, Peter said that our faith is like the faith of the apostles. Therefore, he addressed his readers as “*them that have obtained like precious faith with us*” (2 Pet 1:1).

Though we are not given the apostolic office and its accompanying power and experiences, our faith and spiritual standing are in no way less glorious than the Apostles’ or the first century Christians’. This is what the Apostle Peter meant when he said we “*have obtained like precious faith with us*.” If we believe as the Apostles and the early Christians believed, if we believe in the apostolic doctrines that were committed to them by Christ and are now revealed in the New Testament, then we can be sure that our spiritual standing before God is as certain as theirs. All such believers share the “*like precious faith*.”

Take note also that the Apostle said that all believers “*have obtained*” the same faith as the Apostles. We have not earned our faith, but “*obtained*” it as an allotment or free gift. Our faith is a gift, “*through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*.” In the divine righteousness of Christ, we all stand by faith. The faith that the Apostles and all of us share is precious indeed.

THOUGHT: Faith is a precious gift of God’s grace.

PRAYER: May I always rejoice in the faith that I have received in Christ.

TUESDAY, JUNE 2
2 PETER 1:2
NUMBERS 6:24-26

*“And of his fulness
have all we received,
and grace for grace.”*

MULTIPLIED GRACE AND PEACE

Those who have trusted in Jesus can always expect to have multiplying provisions of divine grace and peace. So Peter wrote, *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you”* (2 Pet 1:2). These two divine blessings are so necessary in a believer’s life.

“Grace” brings to us the goodness of God that we do not deserve. *“Grace”* is God’s favour to the undeserving. It guarantees His forgiveness, His preservation of our souls and His provisions. Grace truly gives us more than we deserve. It makes us more than what we can be on our own in our life. So Paul wrote, *“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”* (2 Cor 9:8).

“Peace” is the result of God’s grace manifested through the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ. First, through Christ we have peace with God. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:1). Second, through Christ we also receive the peace of God. *“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Phil 4:7).

Both grace and peace will be multiplied. As our lives move forward through rough and tough days, we can expect more of His grace and more of His peace. The Scripture gives us no reason to think that these blessings will sometimes be scarcely given to us. Instead, as Peter said, they will be multiplied in our lives.

Peter also said that it is *“through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord”* that we will receive the abundant grace and peace. We can grow more and more in the knowledge of God and His only begotten Son as we read, believe and obey His Word, which is the revelation of God. A Bible-oriented life will certainly have more of God’s grace and peace.

THOUGHT: God gives much grace that we may receive more grace.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live in full awareness of Thy ceaseless grace and peace.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

2 PETER 1:3

EPHESIANS 1:19-23

*“Thy people shall be willing
in the day of Thy power.”*

THE FULL PROVISION BY CHRIST’S DIVINE POWER

Are you anxious about tomorrow? Have you been asking yourself hopelessly, “Will my faith survive?” “Will I be able to overcome temptations?” “Will I be able to provide for my family?” Peter has a wonderful piece of news for you in today’s verse. This very assuring truth will help you to drive away doubt, anxiety and fear.

The assurance is affirmed by mentioning two great facts. The first piece of information Peter shares with us is that *“his divine power”* (2 Pet 1:3) is at work for us. Can you truly fathom this infinite power of Christ at work for you? His limitless, irresistible, all-conquering, divine power far surpasses our comprehension. If such a great power is working for you, there is no reason to be agitated even in your most distressing situation. It will make a way for you even though a sea of troubles is before you. Let us say like Paul, *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (2 Cor 12:9b-10).

The second piece of comforting information in 2 Peter 1:3 is that *“all things”* are already *“given unto us.”* Here, the phrase *“all things,”* in the original language, is emphatically placed. It is Peter’s desire that we will not miss the knowledge of God’s full provision for our life and godliness. None of His children is exempted from obtaining the fully sufficient provisions of Christ’s divine power. All our needs, both physical and spiritual, are already taken care of. Nothing shall prevent their arrival.

But if we are ignorant of our Almighty Lord who cares for us, we will fail to tap on His wonderful provisions. So we are reminded at the end of the verse that it is *“through the knowledge of him”* that we will fulfil the ultimate purpose of our calling as Christians, which is *“glory and virtue.”*

As we live in the intimate knowledge of Christ, we will experience the full provisions of His power for a glorious and virtuous life.

THOUGHT: The glorious power of Christ will lead us to glory.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for all the great prospects of Thy power.

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

2 PETER 1:4

JOHN 5:36-47

“For all the promises of God

in him are yea,

and in him Amen.”

EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

God has given us not only *“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”* (2 Pet 1:3), but also His precious Word *“whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises”* (2 Pet 1:4). Praise God that He has preserved every *“jot”* and *“tittle”* of His inspired Word (Matt 5:18). The Apostle Peter bore witness to God’s commitment to preserve His Word for us: *“The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you”* (1 Pet 1:24b-25). In our verse for meditation today, Peter said that all promises *“are given unto us.”* Peter used the perfect tense of the verb to imply God’s permanent bestowal of all His promises. Because God preserves His inspired Word through the ages till the end of times, we can be absolutely sure that we have all His exceedingly great and precious promises today.

The promises in the Bible are *“exceeding great and precious.”* Several reasons can be seen from the verse why the biblical promises are referred to as *“exceeding great and precious.”* First, they are God’s promises, and therefore His divine attributes are inherent in His promises. They are pure, true and faithful. *“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen...”* (2 Cor 1:20). Many things that men promise may never be given, but all of God’s promises will be fulfilled.

Second, the promises of God are timeless. Believers of every age and generation can say that the biblical promises *“are given unto us.”* Their relevance and efficiency shall not wane with time. With time, circumstances may change, but the promises of God are sufficient to help us to meet new challenges, needs and troubles.

Third, as the first word of verse 4 *“whereby”* suggests, the promises are given to lead us to *“glory and virtue”* that are mentioned in the preceding verse (2 Pet 1:3). This purpose is further explained at the end of the verse: *“that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

THOUGHT: Forsake worldliness, embrace God’s promises.

PRAYER: Lord, remind me that Thy promises are mine to enjoy.

FRIDAY, JUNE 5
2 PETER 1:5-8
PHILIPPIANS 4:8

*"If there be any virtue,
and if there be any praise,
think on these things."*

ADD AND ABOUND!

True faith is dynamic. It is full of spiritual actions, growth and productivity. We are challenged in today's text to be what we are meant to be as believers.

The faith, which God's grace has created in us (Eph 2:8), has opened before us an immense opportunity to flourish in the exercise of spiritual virtues. We must not be negligent of this great possibility to *"be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Pet 1:4). We are challenged to give *"all diligence"* to excel in our spiritual progress. This is a call for immediate effort to progress. No more procrastination, hesitation or delaying.

There are two verbs in our text that are of special significance. They are *"add"* (2 Pet 1:5), and *"abound"* (2 Pet 1:8). The Greek word for *"add"* literally means "bringing in alongside." In other words, we must make sure that the spiritual qualities mentioned in this passage are brought into our life attitude and actions. We must be active in making these attributes our nature. The Greek word for *"abound"* means "to bring forth in abundance." The form and meaning of the verb call us to continual commitment to spiritual progress. We must get better with each passing moment. If we do not progress, we regress. So we must strive for better spiritual habits and virtues.

Peter particularly mentioned seven spiritual qualities that we should be diligent to add to our faith. In the list of seven spiritual qualities, the first is *"virtue."* It is moral excellence. The second is *"knowledge,"* the practical knowledge for spiritual living. The third is *"temperance,"* which denotes self-control. The fourth is *"patience,"* that is perseverance, bearing all the difficulties to make progress. The fifth is *"godliness,"* to have all our thoughts, desires, and actions directed to the glory of God. The sixth is *"brotherly kindness,"* a warm, affectionate, and caring attitude to fellow members of the church. Ultimately, *"charity,"* which is willing to sacrifice one's own comfort and safety for the sake of others.

THOUGHT: I must strive for spiritual excellence.

PRAYER: Father, "more like the Master, I would ever be."

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

2 PETER 1:8-9

JOHN 15:1-8

*“Herein is my Father glorified,
that ye bear much fruit.”*

NOT BARREN, BUT FRUITFUL!

In the preceding verses, Peter taught us how to strive for spiritual refinement and excellence. Now he assured us in verse 8 that such spiritual cultivation will make us very useful and productive in the Lord's vineyard. *“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

True believers who know the Lord Jesus and His will concerning them must abound in spiritual qualities and fruitfulness. They cannot be idle or barren. The word *“barren”* means ineffective. All the wonderful Christian graces in us will not allow us to be inactive or unfruitful. Instead, those virtues will make us very zealous and lively, and vigorous and active. All who truly know Jesus Christ as their Lord must be eminently fruitful in practical Christianity as they serve Him. Bearing much fruit among men will bring much glory to God.

In verse 9, the Apostle sounded a strong rebuke to those who neglect spiritual refinement and fruitfulness. He said, *“But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.”* Believers who are not fruitful in spiritual aspects are those who do not have far-sightedness. They are myopic. They live with immediate earthly pleasure in view rather than with eternal values or the rewards ahead of them. Worse still, as they live with this world's pleasure in view, they appear to have forgotten that they are already cleansed from sins, and this easily reinforces their present attitude.

This sad estate of Christianity was the result of the influence of false teachers whom the Apostle Peter condemned in the chapters following. Even today we see this phenomenon. Not a few Christians live in sin, being influenced by false teachings of some men who hold teaching offices in the churches. Faith and sin do not dwell together; they are strange bedfellows. Spiritual excellence will drive away old sins.

THOUGHT: Heirs of blessings must be a blessing to others.

PRAYER: May I be a blessing to someone today!

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 7

2 PETER 1:10-11

1 THESSALONIANS 1:3-5

*"God hath ... chosen you to
salvation through sanctification
of the Spirit and belief of the truth."*

MAKE YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE

Verse 10 exhorts us to confirm our calling and election. These are two facets of God's plan of salvation. "*Election*" refers to His sovereign, eternal choice of individuals to belong to Himself. "*Calling*" refers to His action in time by which the election is made evident. Our election took place before the world was made; our call takes place when we are converted. Chronologically, there is first election, then calling, then we realise we were chosen in Christ from all eternity.

We cannot make our calling and election more sure than they already are; God's eternal purposes can never be thwarted. But we can confirm them by growing in likeness to the Lord. By manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, we can provide unmistakable evidence that we truly belong to Him. A holy life proves the reality of our salvation.

Living a holy life will keep us from falling. It is not a question of falling into eternal perdition; the work of Christ delivers us from that. Rather it refers to falling into sin, into disgrace, into disuse. If we fail to progress in divine things, we are in danger of wrecking our lives. But if we walk in the Spirit, we will be spared from being a castaway in His service. God guards the Christian who moves forward for Him. The peril lies in spiritual idleness and blindness.

Not only is there safety in constant spiritual progress, there is also the promise of richly-provided entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Verse 11 does not refer to the fact of our entrance but the manner of it. The only basis of admission to the heavenly kingdom is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But some will have a more abundant entrance than others. There will be degrees of reward. And the rewards are here said to depend on the degree of one's conformity to the Saviour.

(by William MacDonald)

THOUGHT: (Read Revelation 22:12.)

PRAYER: May I be so diligent in walking after Thee, Lord, that I have no occasion to stray from Thee.

MONDAY, JUNE 8

2 PETER 1:12-13

EZEKIEL 33:2-9

*"To write the same things to you,
to me indeed is not grievous,
but for you it is safe."*

PUTTING YOU IN REMEMBRANCE

Repeating a matter is not considered a good practice. If a pastor repeats a matter frequently, he is often charged with nagging. However, Peter said, "... I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things ..." (2 Pet 1:12). The Apostle appeared to be very convinced that there is much value in repeating a matter. He said it again in the following verse: "Yea, I think it meet ... to stir you up by putting you in remembrance" (2 Pet 1:13).

Peter is not alone in asserting the significance of reminding the congregation frequently of things that are pertinent to their beliefs and purity. Paul instructed Titus, a young pastor: "*This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly*" (Titus 3:8a).

It is not uncommon for people to complain against a godly and faithful pastor who reiterates continuously from the pulpit a certain issue that threatens the purity of doctrine and life. Nonetheless, a good pastor, like a faithful watchman, continues to alert the people about the impending danger. A pastor who dares not warn repeatedly may appease a grumpy crowd and receive their loud applause, but he is most certainly performing it to the dissatisfaction of the Lord. Preachers who refrain from repeated warning and teaching will be severely dealt with by the Lord. To such, He will say, "*His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter*" (Isa 56:10-11).

Have you been unhappy about your pastor's repeated mentioning of certain doctrinal errors? When the pastor repeats a warning or reminder, have you bothered to find out its seriousness? Are you feeling unhappy because the repeated issue is a matter that you are not willing to accept?

THOUGHT: "When an old dog barks, a wise man harks."

PRAYER: O Lord, grant me grace to hear with submissiveness and obedience those who watch over my soul.

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

2 PETER 1:12-15

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-11

*“Nevertheless to abide in the flesh
is more needful for you.”*

AS LONG AS I AM IN THIS TABERNACLE

A true servant of the Lord is a man who is caught in between two desires. First, he desires intently to be with his blessed Master in His heavenly home. This is especially so when he is old or when his day of death is drawing near. Second, he desires that he will have more time on earth to care for the flock, which has been under his shepherding.

Peter was fully aware that his time on earth was nearing the end. He said in verse 14, *“Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.”* However, he was not at all despondent. He was all the more determined to make full use of his remaining days for the benefit of God’s people.

Dear reader, each day brings us closer to our graves. This knowledge should stir our hearts to be diligent in the things of the Lord. We should not put off serving the Lord to a later period. Now is the time for us to serve the Lord. Tomorrow may not be ours. This was also the attitude of our Lord Jesus during the days of His earthly ministry. He said, *“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work”* (John 9:4).

What is very fascinating about Peter is that he had planned for the ministry of the Word to continue most efficiently even after his lifetime. He wrote, *“Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance”* (2 Pet 1:15). One of his biggest contributions to the church on earth was this epistle of 2 Peter.

The Reformers left a great legacy behind: the Reformation doctrines. Dear reader, what legacy do you want to leave behind when you have to leave your tabernacle on earth? We are here now in our tabernacle to be a blessing in Christ to many. Let us do it well for our generation and also for the generation to come.

THOUGHT: Nearness of death makes God’s servants more diligent.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to make my life count for Thee while I have breath.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

2 PETER 1:16-18

MATTHEW 5:1-9

*"They shall see the Son of man
coming in the clouds of heaven
with power and great glory."*

THE GLORIOUS RETURN OF CHRIST IS NO FABLE

Peter did not entertain any doubt about *"the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet 1:16). As he wrote in the preceding verses, it was his desire to affirm the doctrinal truths that were under attack so that his readers would continue to proclaim them even after his death (2 Pet 1:12-15). Peter's first firm assertion was that the apostolic teachings about the coming of Jesus in power were not *"cunningly devised fables."* There were false teachers who scoffed at the promise of Christ's return (2 Pet 3:3ff). So Peter affirmed that Jesus' return in power is a true fact.

Peter referred to Jesus' return as *"the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Though the miracles which Jesus performed in His first coming manifested His power, the full revelation of His power and glory is yet to come. Now that He is resurrected and ascended into the glory of heaven, He shall come again to earth in power (Matt 24:30b).

Some might have been doubtful whether the One who was crucified could come again in matchless glory. So Peter gave three reasons why his teaching about Christ's glorious return is not a myth. He drew his reasons from Christ's experience on the Transfiguration Mount, which he had seen with John and James (*"we"* and *"eyewitnesses"*). This account is recorded in Matthew 17.

The first reason is that they have seen *"his majesty"* (2 Pet 1:16). The Greek word translated as *"majesty"* carries the idea of splendour and grandeur. Many may not think of Jesus, the Crucified, as a glorious King who will return in His majesty. But Peter corrected their doubt about Jesus' majesty; and assured that He will return in majesty. The second reason is that Peter witnessed Jesus receiving *"from God the Father honour and glory."* The third reason is that they also heard the voice of the Father speaking from His *"excellent glory"* that: *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (cf. John 1:14). His experience of Christ's glory on the Mount was a foretaste of Christ's return in glory.

THOUGHT: We shall see Christ's glory, though we were not with Him on the Transfiguration Mount.

PRAYER: *"Even so, come, Lord Jesus"* (Rev 22:20).

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

2 PETER 1:19

PSALM 19:7-9

“The Scripture cannot be broken.”

A MORE SURE WORD

Do you remember Peter’s discussion of his mountain-top experience of Christ’s glory in the preceding passage (2 Pet 1:16-18)? That experience was a very convicting experience about Christ’s future return in glory. Now he said that there is something *“more sure,”* and it is *“the word of prophecy.”* In the Old Testament there are many prophecies concerning Christ’s return. Peter wanted us to pay close attention to all that the Word of God says, for it is absolutely true.

Have you noted Peter’s emphasis of the nature of God’s Word? He was teaching us that there is nothing in this world that is perfectly true and trustworthy, except God’s Word. We can trust every word of God. Many of its prophecies have already been fulfilled, such as Christ’s First Advent. The rest of the prophecies that have to do with His Second Advent will certainly be fulfilled.

Jesus said, *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled”* (Matt 5:18). The certainty of God’s Word transcends time. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus said, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”* Luke, the Gospel writer, recorded Jesus as saying, *“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail”* (Luke 16:17).

In verse 16, Peter assured us that in teaching Christ’s coming in power, the Apostles *“have not followed cunningly devised fables.”* We can be sure about it because it is consistent with the prophecies of the Scriptures, as foretold by the Old Testament prophets.

How can we know whether a teaching is right or wrong? By carefully examining it against the clear teachings of the Scripture! Only the Scripture can determine the authenticity of a teaching. *“Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way”* (Ps 119:128).

THOUGHT: *“Thy law is the truth”* (Ps 119:142b).

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to walk in Thy truth.

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

2 PETER 1:19

2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6

*“For the commandment is a lamp;
and the law is light; and reproofs
of instruction are the way of life.”*

YOUR LIGHT IN THE DARK PLACE

The perfectly trustworthy Scripture that we have today is God’s special provision for our blessing. Peter reminded us that *“whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.”* God placed the Word of God in our hands that we may *“take heed”* to all that is recorded in it. The right attitude to God’s Word is not a doubtful, critical approach to all that it says, but a believing and obedient approach. If you heed what the Scripture says, *“ye do well”* (James 2:8).

In 2 Peter 1:19, the Apostle attempted further to explain the blessings of God’s Word. He said that it is *“as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”*

This world is a dark and murky place. It may have made considerable progress in technology and efficiency, but morally and spiritually, it is getting darker and darker. The Scripture often refers to the world as a dark place (John 1:5; Eph 6:12; 1 Thess 5:4ff; 1 John 2:8).

In this dark world, it is the Word of God that gives us light. *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Ps 119:105). If the Word of God governs our lives, we will have plenty of light to move forward through the darkness of falsehood and sin in this world. If we ignore the light of the Scripture, we will grope in the pit darkness of this sinful world, not knowing our direction.

The Scripture is our guide through this dark world *“until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”* The *“day star”* is Christ. He is called *“the bright and morning star”* in Revelation 22:16. He is also the *“Sun of righteousness”* (Mal 4:2). His coming will bring about the *“day dawn.”* To all those who have in their hearts the faith and expectation of Christ’s return, the Word of God is a light through this dark world till He returns and the *“day”* of eternity dawns. The Word of God not only assures us of Christ’s return, but also leads us through this dark world till we meet Him one day.

THOUGHT: Use the Scripture’s light to dispel the darkness around me.

PRAYER: *“O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me.”*

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

2 PETER 1:20-21

2 TIMOTHY 3:15-17

“They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

THE BIBLE IS THE SPIRIT’S BOOK

If the Bible is for our benefit to help us to walk in His light through this dark world (2 Pet 1:19), then it must be studied with utmost diligence. Today’s passage teaches us how to benefit from it by delineating some important facts that we should know as we approach the Bible.

“Knowing this first,” wrote Peter, *“that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation”* (2 Pet 1:20). Now if the Scripture is sure and sufficient in itself (2 Pet 1:19a), we must know that no portion of the Scripture is to be interpreted according to the reader’s ideas and opinions. We must avoid interpreting the Scripture to fit our own pre-conceived ideas.

We must come to the Scripture knowing that it is God’s revelation. It is not a compilation of human ideas, neither a book to be critiqued by some scholars. Peter said it even more candidly in the next verse: *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”* In other words, the Scripture is not a human invention.

Peter did not deny the human instrumentality in writing the Scripture. He told us that it is the *“holy men of God”* (2 Pet 1:21) who wrote the Bible. He called them *“holy men of God,”* because they were faithful prophets who executed the office committed by the Spirit. They *“were moved by the Holy Ghost.”* The Greek word translated *“moved”* is a maritime metaphor which has the idea of *“being like a ship which is carried along by the wind.”* In other words, the faithful men of God, under the leading and control of the Spirit, wrote the Bible.

We must not approach the Bible with a casual or careless attitude. We must remember that when we read the Bible, we are reading the words of God. We must esteem it highly by believing and obeying it. Let us also ask for the Spirit’s illumination that we may interpret and apply the Bible correctly as He intended when He wrote it.

THOUGHT: The Bible is the Word of God.

PRAYER: Father, open my eyes to see the truth in Thy Word.

FALSE TEACHERS AMONG YOU

The Word of God before us is the truth. That is wonderful news. But among us there are *“false teachers”* (2 Pet 2:1) and that is really bad news. These men are capable of taking the truth in their hands and distorting it to teach us false doctrines. This is a danger that has been creeping around since the time of Adam. Peter said, *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you.”*

God warned Israel through Moses: *“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams...”* (Deut 13:1-3). Regardless of this warning, the Israelites allowed the false prophets to flourish in the land and to lead them astray.

There were good prophets like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who constantly laboured to expose the false prophets. However, people at large followed the counterfeit ministries of the false prophets. The attraction was mainly the soothing and non-confrontational messages they preached. They promised God's blessings without requiring a change from their sinful lifestyles. They preached false peace (cf. Jer 6:14). They offered the message that people wanted to hear.

Though the teachings of the false teachers may be popular, the Apostle Peter warned us that their teachings are *“damnable heresies.”* How would the false teachers manage to propagate their falsehood, when the Bible can easily expose it? Peter told us that they shall bring in the heresies *“privily.”* In other words, they will bring them in secretly alongside the truth. Not all that they say will be false. They will not throw out the truth immediately. But before long, they will replace the truth with error.

THOUGHT: False teachers will be in my church too. Am I vigilant?

PRAYER: Lord, give me grace to test every teacher and his teaching, that I may guard my soul and others' from damnable heresies.

MONDAY, JUNE 15

2 PETER 2:1-2

JEREMIAH 6:16-17

*“Many false prophets shall rise,
and shall deceive many.”*

DESTRUCTIVE DOCTRINES

Why should we be wary of the false teachers? Why should we separate ourselves from someone who differs from us concerning the doctrines? Can we not all live and serve together by putting aside some of these doctrinal differences?

We should never co-operate with those who teach false doctrines. First, because they are persistent deniers of Christ (2 Pet 2:1b). They will appear in the Church that is bought by the Lord with His blood, only to deny Him. We all know that Peter, who wrote this epistle, denied our Lord in the face of strong temptation. However, he did not persist in his denial. Unlike Peter, the false teachers will be persistent in their negation and denial of Christ.

Second, their denial will *“bring upon themselves swift destruction”* (2 Pet 2:1c). The word *“swift”* means “sudden,” although not necessarily “soon.” The destruction is firstly spiritual and then physical. Persistent following of the false teachers can mean that we are also actually devoid of all the spiritual blessings, such as salvation from eternal peril. Eternal peril abides with all those who continually deny our Lord Jesus.

Another disastrous outcome of the false teachers is that *“many shall follow their pernicious ways”* (2 Pet 2:2a). They often receive widespread following. They will be so popular that a great number of people will be drawn to their destructive teachings.

Peter also told us that *“by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of”* (2 Pet 2:2). The enormous number of people following their false ways will cause others to judge them to be right and the way of the truth which the faithful few follow to be evil. Jesus reminded us that *“strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matt 7:14). That many will be deceived is a terrible outcome of the false doctrines!

THOUGHT: “Truth may be blamed, but can never be shamed.”

PRAYER: Guard my soul, O Lord, from damnable heresies.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

2 PETER 2:3

1 TIMOTHY 6:3-5

“... supposing that gain is godliness:
from such withdraw thyself.”

COVETEOUSNESS, FEIGNED WORDS AND MERCHANDISE!

In 2 Peter 2:3, as Peter continued his discussion of the false teachers who will infiltrate the churches with their damnable heresies, he mentioned their three characteristics. Peter’s description of false teachers is widely seen in modern Christendom.

They are covetous people. They move about doing their things “*through covetousness*.” False teachers are very interested in making money for themselves. In truth, personal gain is their goal. They turn churches and ministries into a moneymaking business. They offer their services on the basis of monetary gain. They are like the false leaders whom Micah the prophet has described: “*The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us*” (Mic 3:11).

The Apostle also told us how they will succeed in making money. The false teachers do their activities “*with feigned words*.” The Greek word that Peter used here is “*plastos*,” from which we get our English word “*plastic*.” Plastic words! Carefully fabricated and moulded words to help them obtain monetary gain. This will be a far cry from the Apostle Paul who wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:5: “*For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness.*”

In their pursuit for money they will not care much for the safety of the souls. They will be more than willing to “*make merchandise of you*” (2 Pet 2:3). Those who use Christian ministry as a means to make money will exploit the people. They are not ministers, but merchants.

Certainly every labourer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7; 1 Tim 5:17-18). But a good minister of the Gospel should never use the ministry for self-gain. What a heinous crime it is for a pastor to exploit his flock! Truly, “*their damnation slumbereth not*” (2 Pet 2:3).

THOUGHT: Is material prosperity a true sign of piety?

PRAYER: O Lord, make me rich in truth and holiness!

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

2 PETER 2:3-6

JUDE 4-7

*“For when they shall say,
Peace and safety; then sudden
destruction cometh upon them.”*

DAMNATION SLUMBERETH NOT

Peter's main goal in chapter 2 of this epistle is obviously to warn the church against the infiltration of false teachers. He warned us not to tolerate them. He was not at all hesitant to warn at the end of verse 3 that the “*damnation*” of the false teachers “*slumbereth not.*” These false teachers may be prospering, but their damnation is sure. The Apostle cited three events from the Old Testament as proof of divine judgment that will come upon the false teachers.

The Fallen Angels (2 Pet 2:4): Peter said, “*God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.*” This is proof that God will judge also those false teachers. The story of the angelic rebellion and their banishment from heaven is recorded in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Some of these fallen angels are now kept in “*hell*” for the final “*judgment.*” If God judged the rebellious angels, He will judge rebellious men too.

The World of Noah (2 Pet 2:5): After Noah preached 120 years (Gen 6:3), God punished the unrepentant world with a flood. The whole of mankind, except Noah's family of eight, was killed. People of Noah's time and our time are very similar in their rebellious lifestyle. If God punished the lawless then, He will punish the same today.

Sodom and Gomorrha (2 Pet 2:6): These two cities were filled with flagrant sins of sexual immorality. All sorts of sexual perversions existed there. In spite of Abraham's intercessory prayer, they were destroyed by fire. If God reduced the proud, sensuous people of Sodom and Gomorrha to ashes, He will also punish the unrepentant sinners of our age.

After citing God's wrath in the above incidents, Peter said that they were “*an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly*” (2 Pet 2:6). Every one who takes his sins lightly, or promotes falsehood in a casual manner must be warned to repent. Otherwise, God's wrath will be poured on him.

THOUGHT: “Let another's shipwreck be my beacon.”

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 19:13.)

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

2 PETER 2:7-8

JEREMIAH 9:1-6

*“Rivers of waters run down mine eyes,
because they keep not thy law.”*

VEXATION OF THE JUST LOT

Lot was Abraham's nephew. When God called Abraham to the Promised Land, Lot went with him. He also followed Abraham's faith. God blessed both of them. When their wealth increased, they had to separate from one another. Lot then chose to go to Sodom, which was a fertile and prosperous place. However, the city's sin was so grievous. Genesis 13:13 says, *“But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.”* Sadly, Lot made his choice without proper spiritual discernment. However, God brought a war to unsettle Lot, but he went right back into that sin city with his family.

Considering only the account in Genesis, one may find it difficult to prove beyond doubt that Lot was a just man. Nonetheless, the Lord reveals to us through the Apostle Peter that Lot was a just man. Lot's decision to live in a sin-filled city was a spiritually disastrous decision, especially for his family members. Lot was *“vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked”* (2 Pet 2:7). The Greek word for *“vexed”* suggests deep distress and oppression within Lot's heart. He was tortured within, seeing all the heinous acts committed around him. In the end, he also had to painfully witness his wife and children being contaminated by the materialism and wickedness of that city. They too were punished by God.

Every true Christian who chooses to live in the midst of worldliness and falsehood will have to share the vexation that Lot experienced. When genuine Christians live in compromise because of much materialistic advantage, they will also be grieved to witness the spiritual degeneration occurring around them. Then they will also painfully witness spiritual tragedies happening to those close to them.

Many a Christian is like Lot. They do not condone the falsehood and worldliness in their heart, but they refuse to move out of its influence. How sad that they choose to live in misery! The biblical command is to separate ourselves from unbelief and error (2 Cor 6:14-18).

THOUGHT: “Vexation treads on the heels of vanity.”

PRAYER: O Lord, may my heart be strong to discard all that is false.

FRIDAY, JUNE 19

2 PETER 2:7-9

1 THESSALONIANS 5:9-10

*“God ... will with the temptation
also make a way to escape.”*

THE LORD KNOWS HOW TO DELIVER THE GODLY

It was Lot's choice that brought the vexation of Sodom's sins upon him. Today many are in a similar situation as Lot's. But there are also some believers who are experiencing the distressing cruelties of sin, though they did not choose to be there. Some were already married to their unbelieving spouses when they came to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Such people often go through many sad circumstances due to the ungodly ways of the unbelieving spouses and other family members. They are often tormented by what is happening around them. There are also Christians who are terribly troubled by the ungodly behaviour of fellow students in the school or fellow employees in the work place.

The society that we live in is fast becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. Many immoral things are displayed or committed in public places, in our neighbourhood, in public vehicles, etc. When we are in these places we feel very frustrated and troubled. Furthermore, the professing church has become a weak testimony to the world. Few men are courageous enough to stand up for the truth and to rebuke sin. Most people in the churches are undiscerning and compromising.

Today's passage has reserved great consolation for all who are troubled. 2 Peter 2:9 says, *“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations...”* God will surely deliver us by His mercy. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Though God has been patient with us, we are also reminded by Scripture that unprecedented troubles will be poured onto this earth. The days of Great Tribulation are drawing near. Will we suffer the horror of His wrath? God did not judge the old world until Noah and his family were in the ark. Likewise He did not punish Sodom until Lot was led out of that city. It is my belief that the Lord will take us unto Himself before the great tribulation of His wrath comes upon this earth. *“I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth”* (Rev 3:10).

THOUGHT: Saints may feel the stroke of death, but not its sting.

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to look beyond my vexations unto the glorious triumph that Thou hast promised.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

2 PETER 2:9

ROMANS 2:1-16

*“For all these things God will
bring thee into judgment.”*

THE UNJUST FOR THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

The “*unjust*” (2 Pet 2:9) or the wicked may seem to flourish for a while. They seem to get greater advantage in this world. This makes one wonder whether God has forgotten their evil deeds.

Peter firmly told us that the Lord “*knoweth how ... to reserve the unjust...*” (2 Pet 2:9). The Lord knows the wicked and their deeds. He will not forget the acts of men and will give them due punishment for their deeds. Delay in executing His judgment does not mean God has forgotten their misdeeds. He remembers them and will judge them on the day of His choosing.

The Lord’s present action is “*to reserve the unjust.*” He keeps them for the day of judgment. They cannot escape His judicial act. He exercises His control over them, even though they live in rebellion against Him. He will remember them as He has reserved them “*unto the day of judgment.*” Their final judgment is coming. From now till then, they are reserved “*to be punished.*” The punishment of the wicked is no myth. Neither is it a metaphorical speech. God will punish the rebellious and unrepentant sinners. Their eternal punishment is sure.

In Revelation 20:11-15, we read about the impending punishment of the unjust. “*And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*”

THOUGHT: Who can hide from His wrath on judgment day?

PRAYER: O Father, I fear the day of judgment, and so I cling to Christ my Redeemer.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 21

2 PETER 2:9-12

COLOSSIANS 3:5-10

*"For a bishop must be blameless,
as the steward of God; not selfwilled ...
not given to filthy lucre."*

SELF-WILLED APOSTATES

Peter exposed the rebellious conduct of the false teachers who were gaining grounds in the early church. They were portrayed as carnal, self-promoting persons who showed no respect for authority.

The apostates were men who *"walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness ..."* (2 Pet 2:10). The phrase *"walk after"* portrays them as persistently following a certain course. They were men who lived in unrestrained lust of their flesh. Their activities were *"unclean"* or defiling.

The next description of the apostates is that they *"despise government"* (2 Pet 2:10). They were challenging the authorities or those in power. This is certainly the opposite of what the Apostles taught the early church concerning believers' attitude towards leadership. The apostolic teaching concerning our attitude toward the government is to submit (Rom 13:1). We are also exhorted to pray (1 Tim 2:1-4) and to show them respect (1 Pet 2:11-17). The same attitude is also encouraged at home toward parents (Eph 6:1-4), at workplaces toward employers (Eph 6:5-8) and in church toward leaders (Heb 13:17-18).

Peter continued to portray the false teachers as arrogant and presumptuous men who talked strange things for their own glory. In their daring speeches, they would *"speak evil of dignities."* This could well be a description of their reviling against the angels. Then Peter reminded us that even the angels did not revile against the fallen angels. If the good angels avoid any rash accusation of those fallen ones, how much more should we avoid maligning authorities!

Their inconsiderate and puffed up speech and action made them look like *"brute beasts."* They acted irrationally. They did not show the discernment and sensibility that were expected of spiritual men. They also liked to talk about things that were beyond their knowledge. Such apostates *"shall utterly perish in their own corruption."*

THOUGHT: *"A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit"* (Matt 7:17).

PRAYER: Deliver me and my church, O Lord, from corrupt men and their devices.

MONDAY, JUNE 22

2 PETER 2:13-14

ROMANS 13:13

*"Lust not after her beauty in thine heart;
neither let her take thee with her eyelids."*

CHRISTIAN REVELLERS?

Many churchgoers are seen together with the crowd that gathers to view erotic and violent movies, to enjoy worldly and sensual singers and dancers. These professing Christians also engage in night activities of the pubs, clubs and other wild parties.

It is also not uncommon in these days for para-church organisations and churches to offer worldly kind of music, dance and party. Their Christian performers in their activities appear and act like those on the worldly entertainment scenes. They "christianise" whatever new things are in the entertainment scene, so that the crowd that craves to revel will not have to stay away from the church!

The message of Peter is most relevant to the church of our time. In no uncertain terms Peter said that the unrepentant church-going revellers *"shall receive the reward of unrighteousness"* (2 Pet 2:13).

What are these revellers like? They *"count it pleasure to riot in the day time"* (2 Pet 2:13b). The Greek word for "riot" suggests they enjoy revelling in carnal and sensual pleasures. The phrase *"riot in the day time"* suggests that they engage in such sensual and luxurious lifestyle openly in the eyes of man. They take pleasure to be known for their carnality.

In disgust Peter exclaimed, *"Spots they are and blemishes"* (2 Pet 2:13). The term "spots" portrays them as "stained characters" and the other term "blemishes" describes them as men who are not qualified to be God's servants. Debauchery of these men is so abominable before God because they go about *"sporting themselves with their own deceivings"* (2 Pet 2:13). They exhibit their carnal aspirations *"while they feast with you."* In verse 14, Peter exposed their actual character. He said that they have *"eyes full of adultery."* They not only appear lustful but they also look with lustful eyes. So they *"cannot cease from sin."* These immoral apostates go about *"beguiling unstable souls."* They endanger people's souls as well as money. Peter called them *"cursed children."*

THOUGHT: Christianity and sensuality are strange bedfellows.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me grace to flee the lust of my flesh.

TUESDAY, JUNE 23

2 PETER 2:15-16

REVELATION 2:14

*“Wilt thou not cease to pervert
the right ways of the Lord?”*

THE WAY OF BALAAM

In today's reading, the discussion on the danger of covetousness continues. Covetousness is the insatiable craving for more money, power and prestige. This can drive a man to commit many an evil. We are cautioned that *“the love of money is the root of all evil”* (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus also warned, *“Take heed, and beware of covetousness”* (Luke 12:15).

To illustrate the evilness of covetousness, Peter related the story of Balaam found in Numbers 22-25. (Take time to read these chapters.) He was a Gentile prophet who tried to curse Israel for the money offered by Balak, the king of the Moabites. Though prophet Balaam knew it was wrong to join king Balak, he still jumped at the opportunity to make more money. God rebuked him, even through the mouth of his donkey. He would not listen.

When Balaam tried to curse Israel, God turned his curse into a blessing (Deut 23:4-5). Although he failed to curse the Jews because of God's intervention, Balaam taught king Balak what to do to defeat Israel. He advised Balak to lure Israel into lustful sins and thus getting Israel to provoke their Lord, which in turn would spell destruction for Israel. He did it all for the money that king Balak promised.

One interesting thing to note about Balaam was that he was given understanding of God's will, and yet he chose to sin and also to cause Israel to sin. Many apostates possess these characteristics of Balaam. In these last days we see many popular preachers and teachers exhibiting similar characteristics, such as covetousness, conscious departure from God's revealed will and the Bible, and promotion of a carnal lifestyle. Such men may become popular and rich. But what they receive are *“wages of unrighteousness”* (2 Pet 2:15). Another person who had received a similar wage is Judas Iscariot. *“Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out”* (Acts 1:18).

THOUGHT: The love for money burns many.

PRAYER: Father, may I be satisfied with Thy goodness that I may not crave the rewards of iniquity.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24

2 PETER 2:17-19

ROMANS 6:16-22

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you,
Whosoever committeth sin
is the servant of sin.”*

WELLS WITHOUT WATER, CLOUDS WITHOUT RAIN!

The strong condemnation of false teachers continues in today’s reading. In the strongest terms, Peter warned and exposed the wickedness of such men. It is therefore required of all faithful men to be like Peter. Good ministers of the Word are those who fearlessly preach against erroneous doctrines that creep into the Church. False teachers often hide themselves by calling for more “love and tolerance.” But they would not get enough “love” from Peter to hide their wicked teachings and practices.

Once again Peter boldly portrayed them as unprofitable men. They were like *“wells without water,”* and *“clouds that are carried with a tempest.”* Concerning true believers, Jesus said, *“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:38). These men are just the opposite. They appear like a well, but do not have the benefits of a well. They also appear like clouds bringing rain for thirsty grounds but in reality they bring no shower. Like those passing clouds, that are blown away by the wind into darkness forever, they also vanish without bringing any shower of spiritual blessings.

If they have nothing wonderfully spiritual to offer, how do they attract followers? Peter gave several answers. First, *“they speak great swelling words of vanity”* (2 Pet 2:18). They are good orators, but without truth. Their impressive eloquence attracts people. Second, *“they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness”* (2 Pet 2:18). They give sufficient room for their followers to continue their lustful pursuits. Instead of putting away sins, they make provision for sinful lifestyles. They were like many modern preachers who avoid preaching against sin, blaming that such an approach would put people on “a guilt trip.” Through their *“wantonness”* they are also able to defile even those who have cleansed themselves from error for a while. Peter further confirmed this truth in verse 19: *“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”*

THOUGHT: Temporary reformation of life is not true regeneration.

PRAYER: Father, may the power of Christ’s blood and His Word constantly sanctify my life.

THURSDAY, JUNE 25

2 PETER 2:20-22

PSALM 36:1-4

*“For this is the will of God,
even your sanctification.”*

THE DOG TO ITS OWN VOMIT, THE SOW TO THE MIRE!

The discussion about what appears to be a temporary reformation continues here in our text for today. It is possible even for unregenerate men to exercise self-control and put off some wicked ways. However, if they are reforming without genuine repentance or faith that can produce obedience, they would soon return to their old ways or similar sinful practices.

Holiness is not just refusing to do some evil deeds. It is constant yielding in obedience to God. It is also a strong hatred toward sin. They professed a kind of knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was also exhibited by their partial or temporary avoiding of sin. Many people who have been to church and have heard the Gospel know what it is to live like a Christian. Then they try to live like a genuine Christian without repentance.

But when *“they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning”* (2 Pet 2:20). They become such a dishonour and shame to Christ and the Church that Peter wished that *“it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them”* (2 Pet 2:21).

Peter then moved on to tell us why it was better that they had never been on the Lord's side. The Apostle set himself to prove that a state of apostasy is worse than a state of ignorance, because apostasy ridicules the way of righteousness. Their carnal living seems to declare that the way of Christ allows the way of sin. This is blasphemy. Since genuine Christianity would not permit licentious living, their habits are an evidence of their unregenerate condition. Though a dog or a pig is cleansed outwardly, its inward natural animal disposition remains, compelling it to do the vile things it normally does. So are those apostates who are not truly born again.

THOUGHT: He who learns Christ, unlearns sin.

PRAYER: May my words and actions always bring glory to Christ. May I hate every evil way that causes shame to my Lord.

FRIDAY, JUNE 26

2 PETER 3:1-7

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

*“Waiting for the coming
of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

BE MINDFUL THAT JESUS IS COMING AGAIN!

Christians’ memories need to be awakened frequently. Even good Christians who are very accustomed to the truths of God sometimes become spiritually lethargic and asleep. Such a situation can be fully utilised by the Devil and his servants. So Peter said, *“I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful ...”* (2 Pet 3:1-2).

The Apostle wanted the believers to be mindful of *“the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour”* (2 Pet 3:2). It is important that we believers constantly study the Word of God and re-read it again and again. Otherwise, we can become an easy prey to the apostates.

He also wanted them to be especially certain about the prophecies concerning the Lord’s return. This is because *“there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?”* (2 Pet 3:3-4a). Their argument would be that *“since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”* (2 Pet 3:4b). In other words, the scoffers would say that nothing has changed here on earth since its creation, so nothing will change.

Peter explained that the Lord’s promise is not void, as the apostates would have us believe. He said that they *“willingly are ignorant”* (2 Pet 3:5) of certain facts. In other words, they choose what they want to believe. They deliberately ignore certain Scriptural data that are pertinent.

Two Scriptural records were cited to confirm that the Lord’s promise concerning His return will not fail. Peter cited the creation account to prove the power of God’s Word. At His word, all things came into existence. The Apostle then cited Noah’s flood. Those who scoffed at Noah’s warning of the flood finally perished. These incidents warn us of the foolishness of doubting the clear Scriptural promises of His return.

THOUGHT: Jesus may come today!

PRAYER: Father, may I live each day in the hope of Jesus’ return.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

2 PETER 3:8-10

MATTHEW 24:42

*“That he might present it
to himself a glorious church.”*

BE NOT IGNORANT, THE LORD WILL COME SOON!

Once again the Apostle exposed the foolish ignorance of the scoffers. They were ignorant not only of what God has done in the past, but also of what He is doing now and what He will do in the future.

It is also significant that we do not think of God's words without considering His attributes. For example, if we consider the immortality and eternality of God, we can better understand the reason for the apparent delay in His return. Peter then explained, *“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”* (2 Pet 3:8; Ps 90:4). If a thousand years are like one day to God, how can we accuse Him of delaying the fulfillment of His promise of Christ's return?

The scoffers did not understand the eternality of God. Neither did they understand His attribute of mercy and long-suffering. Peter said, *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9).

God “delays” the coming of the Lord Jesus not because He has no plan or He has failed in His plan. The truth is that Jesus has not come yet, because all things are happening according to His will. He has not yet come because He is *“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9). It is worth observing that God also showed great patience in the time of Noah before He destroyed the world with the flood.

Do not waste the opportunity that the Lord has given to you to repent. The Scripture reminds us that *“every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure”* (1 John 3:3). Are you pure? Have you been living in sin and worldliness? Then the Lord would like you to know that you should not linger any more in sin and rebellion.

THOUGHT: Return to Jesus before He returns for His people!

PRAYER: O Father, grant me grace that I *“may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ”* (Phil 1:10).

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 28

2 PETER 3:11-14

1 THESSALONIANS 3:13

*“... that ye may be blameless
in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

BE DILIGENT TO BE HOLY UNTO HIS COMING!

Peter's emphasis in this passage is *“what manner of persons”* (2 Pet 3:11) we ought to be in the light of Jesus' impending return. In 2 Peter 3:11, he urged: *“seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved ... ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”* Living for the glory and pleasure of this world is not worth it, as all that are in the world will soon be dissolved.

We are a people of a better world. Here, we are *“strangers and pilgrims”* (1 Pet 2:11). We have to be different. It is our *“holy conversation and godliness”* (2 Pet 3:11) that make us different from the people of this world.

In 2 Peter 3:12, Peter admonished us that since *“the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,”* we should be *“looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.”* We must be heavenly minded, instead of earthly minded. Instead of being concerned about laying up treasures on earth, we must be zealous about our treasures in heaven.

We shall see calamities abounding year after year. We should not be too sorrowful. When we see this earth steadily running into chaos, we must *“look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet 3:13). Our hope and our passion for His presence must increase. Then we shall be *“found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”* (2 Pet 3:14). If we do not walk in the light of the promise of new heaven, there will be serious spiritual setbacks in our lives.

When the Lord returns, how will He find us? Concerning the apostates, we are told that *“spots they are and blemishes”* (2 Pet 2:13). But we who have the hope of our Lord's return must be *“without spot, and blameless”* (2 Pet 3:14).

THOUGHT: “Signs of the times are everywhere,
For the Lord is coming in the air;
Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky,
Lift up your head, redemption draweth nigh.”

PRAYER: *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (Rev 22:20).

MONDAY, JUNE 29

2 PETER 3:15-16

MATTHEW 5:18

“The law of the LORD is perfect.”

WRESTING WITH THE SCRIPTURE

Meddling with the inspired words of the Scripture began in the time of the Apostles. Peter said it very clearly: *“As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction”* (2 Pet 3:16). He classified Paul’s epistles as Scripture, the inspired Word of God.

Then Peter said that some have *“wrested”* them. The Greek word for *“wrest”* (*streblousin*) carries the idea of “twisting,” “stretching on the rack,” “torturing,” etc. In other words, the apostates were meddling with the written Word of God. This certainly suggests that they were altering the words of the Scripture. They not only did this to the Pauline epistles, but also with other parts of the Scripture.

Peter’s statements about the corruption of the words of the Scripture, as early as the first century, must alarm us against blindly agreeing with the textual critics who say that the older the manuscript, the better it is. It is certainly more important to consider the source of the manuscript to know whether it is accurate or corrupt. If a manuscript comes from a people who are known for their perverted beliefs and practices, we can most assuredly conclude that the changes are rather the result of their wresting the Scripture.

Though apostate men have tried to *“wrest”* the Scripture, in his first epistle Peter reminded us that *“the word of God ... liveth and abideth for ever”* (1 Pet 1:23). He again said, *“the word of the Lord endureth for ever”* (1 Pet 1:25). Peter boldly stood against the Scripture twisters. He condemned their actions.

May we not look at the Scripture with a critical attitude. May our attitude toward the Scripture be characterised by faith rather than by unbelief.

THOUGHT: “The Bible stands like a rock undaunted ‘mid the raging storms of time.”

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy Word, kept pure in all ages.

TUESDAY, JUNE 30

2 PETER 3:17-18

1 PETER 2:1-2

*“The righteous shall flourish
like the palm tree.”*

BEWARE AND GROW

In a spirit of love (*“beloved”*), the Apostle cautioned the readers against *“the error of the wicked”* (2 Pet 3:17). The erroneous teachings and deeds of the apostate are very influential and persuasive. So Peter warned, *“beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness”* (2 Pet 3:17).

Mingling with those who live wickedly is dangerous. The word *“wicked”* can mean lawless. These are men who do not live in obedience to the authority of the commandments of God’s Word. They sweep along many an unsuspecting believer into error. For this reason it is important that Christians practise separation from those who teach error or live contrary to the Scripture. This is the crux of Peter’s message in verse 17.

Peter’s call to *“beware”* is to guard oneself constantly. Even those who appear to be strong spiritually should be aware that if they do not guard themselves they can easily be led astray. *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor 10:12).

If we protect ourselves from the danger of unscriptural men, we do have an opportunity to grow. So Peter commanded us to *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 3:18). To grow in the grace of God, we must humbly yield ourselves to God (James 4:6). Peter also urged us to grow in the *“knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”* Our knowledge of Christ will increase through the learning of His Word as well as through our obedient walk with Him.

The prospect of a man who guards himself against the errors of the wicked and then allows himself to grow in His grace and the knowledge of Christ is tremendous. As Peter ended his epistle, he expectantly said, *“To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen”* (2 Pet 3:18).

THOUGHT: If a Christian does not grow consistently, he will degenerate soon.

PRAYER: Help me to grow, Lord, in Thy grace and knowledge, till I meet Thee in glory.

Notes

Notes

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