

Grow in Grace and Knowledge

SECOND PETER, CHAPTER THREE

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you, in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour"—2 Peter 3:12

PETER, in writing to us—for his epistle is to all in Christ—clearly reveals his deep concern and love for his brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus, as he "stirs up their minds by way of remembrance."

Remembrance of what? Of the words of the Almighty as spoken by the holy prophets, and the commandments of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Paul, in 2 Tm. 3: 16-17, amplifies this:

for "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness;
"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Let us briefly consider this quotation in sequence—

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine."

Paul, in these few words, reminds us that the "doctrine," or what is taught, the instruction of the God-inspired Scriptures, is PROFITABLE: to our advantage or gain.

Through the mercy of our Father, we to a degree realize the profit, the gain, offered us in the Scriptures. It is from death to eternal life, with all its attendant glories and happiness.

In business, profit is that excess over outlay. When we compare the outlay we are called upon to make, serving our Creator to the best of our ability in faith and patience for this short mortal span—when we compare this to the ecstasy of hearing the words of the King—

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."
—truly the profit IS great when compared to our small outlay! The hearing of these words from the gracious lips of our Master will so overwhelm us with joy and gratitude that it will need his outstretched hand to raise us to our feet and draw us to those worthies at his right hand.

Let us often call to remembrance then that the Scriptures are PROFITABLE for doctrine, their teaching offers 'great gain.'

". . .for reproof . . ."

Realizing the pride of man, we see the need of first reproof or rebuking him; bringing home the lesson that man is a sinner, and as such is destined to return to the ground; that as a sinner he—

"Hath no pre-eminence above the beast: as the one dieth, so dieth the other, for all is vanity.
"All go to one place; all are of the dust and all turn to dust again (Ecc. 3:19-20).
And again (Ecc. 5:15)—
"As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry away in his hand."

So man must first be humbled and made to realize that his ways are not God's ways. He must be brought to the simplicity of a little child and taught God's ways.

"...for correction..."

We learned something of this in our childhood—that our parents had set certain standards or rules of conduct by which we were to abide. Often we were heedless or careless, and so suffered correction.

Sometimes the admonition was by word of mouth. On other occasions more severe methods of correction were used to bring home the lesson of **obedience to our parents**. By correction we learned that obedience brought peace, happiness, approval, things for our well-being; disobedience brought unhappiness and punishment.

As children of our Heavenly Father we are often in need of correction, our ways not being God's ways. Having been given understanding of the standards or rules of conduct of those things summed up in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, we are expected to render obedience—obedience to the decrees of God.

This is the basic and primary teaching of the Scriptures. It was required of Adam and Eve in Eden, but they disobeyed, and reaped death. Obedience gained favor with God for the worthies of Scripture, and distinguished them from the sinners, the disobedient.

"...for instruction in righteousness."

Obedience is righteousness. Obedience of course is linked with Faith; they cannot be separated in those who walk pleasing to our Heavenly Father. The obedient are the faithful. The faithful are the obedient.

True faith causes us to strive to do the decrees of our Creator; to refrain from those things displeasing to Him; and so be "obedient children." Obedience MANIFESTS our faith.

James, in ch. 2, defines this so very clearly. We can sum it up with v. 17—

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

In our Lord and Master we have the greatest example and proof of obedience to God, as Paul says of him (Heb. 5:8)—

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

The churches make much ado about the cross. But, brethren and sisters, let us never lose sight of the fact that it was his faith manifested by his obedience **before and up to** the cross that made him the "Lamb without spot and blemish"; that without this obedience, his death on the cross would have been in vain, both for himself and us.

Correction must come often to us who are so infinitely weaker than our Lord. We must recognize this and not be dismayed, recalling Paul's words in Heb. 12:57—

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

We must try to keep in mind always that this chastisement is not because we are castaways, but that He Who so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son does it for correction that we may fashion our characters closer to the divine pattern.

Having the same mortal flesh as you, my brethren and sisters, I know only too well how the flesh rebels and chafes on occasion under the cross of Christ.

How hard at times to accept correction in the right spirit! We must strive to keep in mind the picture given in Heb. 12:11:

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous;

"Nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

May correction stir up our minds to that "peaceable fruit of righteousness" granted to those who hear—

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

Then will we be of God, and perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

* * *

PETER, in vs. 3-4 of this chapter we are considering, forewarns of scoffers in the last days walking in their own lusts and saying—

"Where is the promise of his coming?—for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Brethren and sisters, we live in that very age—when these scoffers deride the returning of Christ to establish and rule on the throne of David, that—

"The kingdom of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord."

We laugh at the scoffers, for we are also living in the age when the fig-tree is budding, denoting the nearness of our Lord's return. We in our lifetime have seen so much prophecy fulfilled, above all that great latter-day sign of the return of Israel to their land, that we are convinced of the CERTAINTY of our Lord's return.

They are doubters and scoffers of his return because of IGNORANCE. We have had our eyes opened and tasted of God's glorious mercy in that He has given us UNDERSTANDING of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

There is a point here which some no doubt have experienced with me. It is doubt. Not a doubting or scoffing of the Gospel of the Kingdom, but a doubting of self, of the ability to carry on—the feeling of weakness, the load too heavy, the hill too steep to climb.

On these occasions the rejuvenating of the strength and spirit comes from a stirring up of our minds "by way of remembrance" of those words spoken by the holy prophets, and the commands of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Now God trieth no man beyond what he is able to bear, but He does correct us, and on such an occasion as this it could be we have been relying too much on our own concept of what **should** be.

Because we fail to see the PURPOSE of certain trials, we waste our strength resisting them, instead of trusting him who said—

"Come unto me, all ye that are heavy-laden."

We may trust too much in our own strength instead of implicitly trusting in the wisdom and help of our Heavenly Father. We may not have fitly learned to lean on our Mediator, who said—

"If ye shall ask anything in my Name, I will do it."

We have this assurance from the one who died for us, and who by example gave us the great lesson in Gethsemane—

"Not my will but Thine be done."

Let us learn not to doubt the wisdom and necessity of our trials, but have perfect faith that "all things work together for good to those that love and obey Him."

Recall the incident in Jer. 38:9, where the prophet was cast into the dungeon because he obediently spoke the Word of God. Jeremiah knew full well that trial was the lot of the follower of God, but could he—in the filth of that dungeon—see all the purpose of that ordeal?—that it was the **means to an end**, even the saving of another man's life.

Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, on hearing of Jeremiah's fate, went boldly to the king and pleaded for Jeremiah's life. Here was faith manifested by works. He believed Jeremiah to be a prophet of the one true God. That was the faith that moved him to righteous and courageous action.

By approaching the king on the prophet's behalf, he knew he could incur the wrath of the princes and suffer death or the same fate as Jeremiah.

We can imagine Ebed-melech with joy in his heart hastening to the dungeon on gaining the king's permission to take Jeremiah out: of his feelings as he instructed the prophet how to fasten the ropes; of that bond of brotherhood so feelingly established as the Ethiopian and the prophet grasped hands for that final lift from the dungeon.

We move on to what must have been a joyful episode in the life of Jeremiah, to the time when Jerusalem was overthrown by Babylon and when the Word of the Lord came to him saying—

"Go, speak to Ebed-melech . . .

"I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord; and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid.

"Thy life shall be for a prey unto thee, because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord" (Jer. 39:17-18).

In this incident in the lives of Jeremiah and Ebed-melech, we are taught that there IS purpose in our trials, in our testings. They are for the saving of our life if we endure in faith, and they can be the means whereby another is saved.

Also we learn that no matter how humble our position, if we are strong in faith we can extend in love the hand of help to each other in the hour of trial, offering the cup of cold water to the weary, strengthening with words of comfort, helping to lift each other from the quagmire of the world, the dungeon of death.

We live in the hope that the greatest of all prophets may come to us in that day of judgment, speaking the words—

"Thy life shall be for a prey (a spoil—the result of a victory) because thou hast put thy trust in the Lord."

* * *

PETER, in vs. 5-7, speaks of things the scoffers are willingly ignorant of. We at the moment are not concerning ourselves with the scoffers, but are intent on refreshing our minds with those things vital to salvation.

We know that the world that perished in the Flood was all flesh excepting those shut in the ark with Noah. And likewise we are fully persuaded that the "heavens and the earth" that is "reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" refers to those in high places, governments, nations and peoples who will, when Michael the great Prince stands up, suffer that "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."

These will experience the Armageddon terrors, and the great judgment of the Almighty God, ere the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

Peter continues by saying—

"Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a 1000 years, and a 1000 years as one day."

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Here we have an example of patience, the Almighty in patience endures the wickedness of this world, not willing that any should perish—tolerating for the time the many wicked for the sake of the repentant few who seek Him.

Those seeking Him must do so in patience—"patient continuance in well doing."

We have "suffered reproof," God having opened our eyes to the truth that all things of this world are vanity and vexation of spirit, that we are of the dust, and left to ourselves would return to dust everlastingly.

Through knowledge and baptism we have been born again to a better hope. As newborn babes we have to grow and learn, a slow process for this mortal flesh.

A patient Father watches over us, correcting and instructing us that we might grow up "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

If we wish to train a climbing plant, we do it gradually over a period of time, being gentle and careful with the tender shoot lest we bruise or break it. As it grows and strengthens, we carefully move pressure and bend it to the desired shape.

Our Father likewise in great patience fashions us to His will. If we feed on the Word of Truth we will grow in strength and respond to the training of His correction.

I am sure we all realize how great is our need of His patience. How fortunate for us that He is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance!

He is not slack concerning His promise. For those worthies asleep, some so many centuries, it will only seem as a day when they come forth to the resurrection. When they awake from sleep it will be to them but the passing of a night and the awakening to a new day.

Peter continues by assuring that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in that time when God will judge the nations, when their works shall be burnt up and their power pass away. Their wisdom in which they trust will be shown as foolishness with God.

If we are truly children of the day and not of the night, the day of the Lord will not overtake us as a thief, but as Peter exhorts we will remember what manner of people we ought to be, looking for and hastening—or urging each other on—to the coming of the day of the Lord, looking eagerly to the fulfilment of the promise of the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The "new heavens"—the new powers set up by the greater Son of David, when the law will go forth from Zion and every knee will bow and acknowledge the one True God in that yearly pilgrimage to the great temple of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Then the prophetic picture of Isaiah will be fulfilled—

"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God;

"To comfort all who mourn in Zion;

"To give them beauty for ashes, oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;

"That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified" (Isa. 61:2-3).

And a "new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." War will be learnt no more, the lamb and the lion shall lay down together, they shall not hurt or harm, the curse shall be lifted from the earth, the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the rose. In the words of the Psalmist—

"He shall come down like rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth.

"In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.

"He shall save the children of the needy and shall break in pieces the oppressor.

"Men shall be blessed in him and all nations shall call him blessed."

* * *

IN the concluding verses of this chapter, Peter brings Paul to his side by directing us to Paul's epistle, to emphasize the diligence which must be ours, even though we know these things and the Truth of God.

He warns us not to be led away by the error of the wicked and fall from our own steadfastness; not to wrest the Scriptures to our own destruction, but ever strong to give heed to the doctrine that it may profit us—be our gain—bringing each one to the mountain of the Lord so gloriously portrayed by Isaiah—

"And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

veil "And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people and the that is spread over all nations;

"He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces;

"And the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it.

save "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him and He will us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation"

—Isa. 25:6-9.

To this glorious time, beloved brethren and sisters, we look forward in patience and faith and hope, resting on God's immutable promise, and seeking the comfort and guidance and strength of His Word.

Peter's final words of exhortation to us form perhaps his deepest and most important message of all, defining the way—the ONLY way—whereby we may attain unto these joyful and eternal things—

"GROW IN GRACE, and the KNOWLEDGE of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"To him be glory both now and forever. Amen:"

—R. H.
