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Table of Contents

No table of contents entries found.

Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The First Epistle General of Peter

Two epistles we have enrolled in the sacred canon of the scripture written by Peter, who was a most eminent apostle of Jesus Christ, and whose character shines brightly as it is described in the four Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, but, as it is painted by the papists and legendary writers, it represents a person of extravagant pride and ambition. It is certain from scripture that Simon Peter was one of the first of those whom our Lord called to be his disciples and followers, that he was a person of excellent endowments, both natural and gracious, of great parts and ready elocution, quick to apprehend and bold to execute whatever he knew to be his duty. When our Saviour called his apostles, and gave them their commission, he nominated him first in the list; and by his behaviour towards him he seems to have distinguished him as a special favourite among the twelve. Many instances of our Lord's affection to him, both during his life and after his resurrection, are upon record. But there are many things confidently affirmed of this holy man that are directly false: as, That he had a primacy and superior power over the rest of the apostles—that he was more than their equal—that he was their prince, monarch, and sovereign—and that he exercised a jurisdiction over the whole college of the apostles: moreover, That he as the sole and universal pastor over all the Christian world, the only vicar of Christ upon earth—that he was for above twenty years bishop of Rome—that the popes of Rome succeed to St. Peter, and derive from him a universal supremacy and jurisdiction over all churches and Christians upon earth—and that all this was by our Lord's ordering and appointment; whereas Christ never gave him any pre-eminence of this kind, but positively forbade it, and gave precepts to the contrary. The other apostles never consented to any such claim. Paul declares himself *not a whit behind the very chief apostles*, 2 Co. 11:5 and 12:11. Here is no exception of Peter's superior dignity, whom Paul took the freedom to blame, and *withstood him to the face*, Gal. 2:11. And Peter himself never assumed any thing like it, but modestly styles himself an *apostle of Jesus Christ*; and, when he writes to the presbyters of the church, he humbly places himself in the same rank with them: *The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder*, 5:1. See Dr. Barrow on the pope's supremacy.

The design of this first epistle is, I. To explain more fully the doctrines of Christianity to these newly-converted Jews. II. To direct and persuade them to a holy conversation, in the faithful discharge of all personal and relative duties, whereby they would secure their own peace and effectually confute the slanders and reproaches of their enemies. III. To prepare them for sufferings. This seems to be his principal intention; for he has something to this purport in every chapter, and does, by a great variety of arguments, encourage them to patience and perseverance in the faith, lest the persecutions and sad calamities that were coming upon them should prevail with them to apostatize from Christ and the gospel. It is remarkable that you find not so much as one word savouring of the spirit and pride of a pope in either of these epistles.

Chapter 1

The apostle describes the persons to whom he writes, and salutes them (v. 1, 2), blesses God for their regeneration to a lively hope of eternal salvation (v. 3-5), in the hope of this salvation he shows they had great cause of rejoicing, though for a little while they were in heaviness and affliction, for the trial of their faith, which would produce joy unspeakable and full of glory (v. 6-9). This is that salvation which the ancient prophets foretold and the angels desire to look into (v. 10-12). He exhorts them to sobriety and holiness, which he presses from the consideration of the blood of Jesus, the invaluable price of man's redemption (v. 13-21), and to brotherly love, from the consideration of their regeneration, and the excellency of their spiritual state (v. 22-25).

Verses 1-2

In this inscription we have three parts:—

I. The author of it, described, 1. By his name—*Peter*. His first name was *Simon*, and Jesus Christ gave him the surname of *Peter*, which signifies *a rock*, as a commendation of his faith, and to denote that he should be an eminent pillar in the church of God, Gal. 2:9. 2. By his office—*an apostle of Jesus Christ*. The word signifies *one sent, a legate, a messenger*, any one sent in Christ's name and about his work; but more strictly it signifies the highest office in the Christian church. 1 Co. 12:28, *God hath set some in the church, first apostles*. Their dignity and pre-eminence lay in these things:—They were immediately chosen by Christ himself,—they were first witnesses, then preachers, of the resurrection of Christ, and so of the entire gospel-dispensation,—their gifts were excellent and extraordinary,—they had a power of working miracles, not at all times, but when Christ pleased,—they were led into all truth, were endowed with the spirit of prophecy, and they had an extent of power and jurisdiction beyond all others; every apostle was a universal bishop in all churches, and over all ministers. In this humble manner Peter, (1.) Asserts his own character as an apostle. Hence learn, A man may lawfully acknowledge, and sometimes is bound to assert, the gifts and graces of God to him. To pretend to what we have not is hypocrisy; and to deny what we have is ingratitude. (2.) He mentions his apostolical function as his warrant and call to write this epistle to these people. Note, It concerns all, but especially ministers, to consider well their warrant and call from God to their work. This will justify them to others, and give them inward support and comfort under all dangers and discouragements.

II. The persons to whom this epistle was addressed, and they are described,

1. By their external condition—*Strangers dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia*, etc. They were chiefly Jews, descended (as Dr. Prideaux thinks) from those Jews who were translated from Babylon, by order of Antiochus king of Syria, about two hundred years before the coming of Christ, and placed in the cities of Asia Minor. It is very likely that our apostle had been among them, and converted them, being the apostle of the circumcision, and that he afterwards wrote this epistle to them from Babylon, where multitudes of the Jewish nation then resided. At present, their circumstances were poor and afflicted. (1.) The best of God's servants may, through the hardships of times and providences, be dispersed about, and forced to leave their native countries. Those of whom the world was not worthy have been forced to wander in mountains, in dens and caves of the

earth. (2.) We ought to have a special regard to the dispersed persecuted servants of God. These were the objects of this apostle's particular care and compassion. We should proportion our regard to the excellency and to the necessity of the saints. (3.) The value of good people ought not to be estimated by their present external condition. Here was a set of excellent people, beloved of God, and yet strangers, dispersed and poor in the world; the eye of God was upon them in all their dispersions, and the apostle was tenderly careful to write to them for their direction and consolation.

2. They are described by their spiritual condition: *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, etc. These poor strangers, who were oppressed and despised in the world, were nevertheless in high esteem with the great God, and in the most honourable state that any person can be in during this life; for they were,

(1.) *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. Election is either to an office: so Saul was the man whom the Lord chose to be king (1 Sa. 10:24), and our Lord says to his apostles, *Have not I chosen you twelve?* (Jn. 6:70); or it is to a church-state, for the enjoyment of special privileges: thus Israel was God's elect (Deu. 7:6), *For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth*; or it is to eternal salvation: *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*. This is the election here spoken of, importing God's gracious decree or resolution to save some, and bring them, through Christ, by proper means, to eternal life. [1.] This election is said to be *according to the foreknowledge of God*. Foreknowledge may be taken in two ways:—*First*, for mere prescience, foresight, or understanding, that such a thing will be, before it comes to pass. Thus a mathematician certainly foreknows that at such a time there will be an eclipse. This sort of foreknowledge is in God, who at one commanding view sees all things that ever were, or are, or ever will be. But such a prescience is not the cause why any thing is so or so, though in the event it certainly will be so, as the mathematician who foresees an eclipse does not thereby cause that eclipse to be. *Secondly*, Foreknowledge sometimes signifies counsel, appointment, and approbation. Acts 2:23, *Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*. The death of Christ was not only foreseen, but fore-ordained, as v. 20. Take it thus here; so the sense is, *elect according to the counsel, ordination, and free grace of God*. [2.] It is added, according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*. By the Father we are here to understand the first person of the blessed Trinity. There is an order among the three persons, though no superiority; they are equal in power and glory, and there is an agreed economy in their works. Thus, in the affair of man's redemption, election is by way of eminency ascribed to the Father, as reconciliation is to the Son and sanctification to the Holy Ghost, though in each of these one person is not so entirely interested as to exclude the other two. Hereby the persons of the Trinity are more clearly discovered to us, and we are taught what obligations we are under to each of them distinctly.

(2.) They were elect *through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*. The end and last result of election is eternal life and salvation; but, before this can be accomplished, every elect person must be sanctified by the Spirit, and justified by the blood of Jesus. God's decree for man's salvation always operates through sanctification of the Spirit and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. By sanctification here understand, not a federal sanctification only, but a real one, begun in regeneration, whereby we are renewed after the image of God and made new creatures, and

carried on in the daily exercise of holiness, mortifying our sins more and more, and living to God in all the duties of a Christian life, which is here summed up in one word, *obedience*, comprehending all the duties of Christianity. By *the Spirit* some would have the apostle to mean the spirit of man, the subject sanctified. The legal or typical sanctification operated no further than the purifying of the flesh, but the Christian dispensation takes effect upon the spirit of man, and purifies that. Others, with better reason, think that by spirit is meant the Holy Ghost, the author of sanctification. He renews the mind, mortifies our sins (Rom. 8:13), and produces his excellent fruits in the hearts of Christians, Gal. 5:22, 23. This sanctification of the Spirit implies the use of means. *Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth*, Jn. 17:17. *Unto obedience*. This word, as it is pointed in our translation, is referred to what goes before it, and denotes the end of sanctification, which is, to bring rebellious sinners to obedience again, to universal obedience, to obey the truth and gospel of Christ: *You have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit*, v. 22.

(3.) They were elected also to the *sprinkling of the blood of Jesus*. They were designed by God's decree to be sanctified by the Spirit, and to be purified by the merit and blood of Christ. Here is a manifest allusion to the typical sprinklings of blood under the law, which language these Jewish converts understood very well. The blood of the sacrifices must not only be shed but sprinkled, to denote that the benefits designed thereby are applied and imputed to the offerers. Thus the blood of Christ, the grand and all-sufficient sacrifice, typified by the legal sacrifices, was not only shed, but must be sprinkled and communicated to every one of these elect Christians, *that through faith in his blood they may obtain remission of sin*, Rom. 3:25. This blood of sprinkling justifies before God (Rom. 5:9), seals the covenant between God and us, of which the Lord's supper is a sign (Lu. 22:20), cleanses from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7), and admits us into heaven, Heb. 10:19. Note, [1.] God hath elected some to eternal life, some, not all; persons, not qualification. [2.] All that are chosen to eternal life as the end are chosen to obedience as the way. [3.] Unless a person be sanctified by the Spirit, and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, there will be no true obedience in the life. [4.] There is a consent and co-operation of all the persons of the Trinity in the affair of man's salvation, and their acts are commensurate one to another: whoever the Father elects the Spirit sanctifies unto obedience, and the Son redeems and sprinkles with his blood. [5.] The doctrine of the Trinity lies at the foundation of all revealed religion. If you deny the proper deity of the Son and Holy Spirit, you invalidate the redemption of the one and the gracious operations of the other, and by this means destroy the foundation of your own safety and comfort.

III. The salutation follows: *Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied*. The blessings desired for them are *grace and peace*. 1. *Grace*—the free favour of God, with all its proper effects, pardoning, healing, assisting, and saving. 2. *Peace*. All sorts of peace may be here intended, domestic, civil, ecclesiastical peace in the church, and spiritual peace with God, with the feeling of it in our own consciences. 3. here is the request or prayer, in relations to these blessings—that they may be multiplied, which implies that they were already possessed in some degree of these blessings, and he wishes them the continuation, the increase, and the perfection of them. Learn, (1.) Those who possess spiritual blessings in their own souls earnestly desire the communication of the same to others. The grace of God is a generous, not a selfish principle. (2.) The best blessings we can desire for ourselves, or one for another, are grace and peace, with the multiplication of them; therefore the apostles so often

make this their prayer in the beginning and end of their epistles. (3.) Solid peace cannot be enjoyed where there is no true grace; first grace, then peace. Peace without grace is mere stupidity; but grace may be true where there is for a time no actual peace; as Heman was distracted with terror, and Christ was once in an agony. (4.) The increase of grace and peace, as well as the first gift of them, is from God. Where he gives true grace he will give more grace; and every good man earnestly desires the improvement and multiplication of these blessings in himself and others.

Verses 3-5

We come now to the body of the epistle, which begins with,

I. A congratulation of the dignity and happiness of the state of these believers, brought in under the form of a thanksgiving to God. Other epistles begin in like manner, 2 Co. 1:3; Eph. 1:3. Here we have,

1. The duty performed, which is blessing God. A man blesses God by a just acknowledgment of his excellency and blessedness.

2. The object of this blessing described by his relation to Jesus Christ: *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Here are three names of one person, denoting his threefold office. (1.) He is *Lord*, a universal king or sovereign. (2.) *Jesus*, a priest or Saviour. (3.) *Christ*, a prophet, anointed with the Spirit and furnished with all gifts necessary for the instruction, guidance, and salvation of his church. This God, so blessed, is the God of Christ according to his human nature, and his Father according to his divine nature.

3. The reasons that oblige us to this duty of blessing God, which are comprised in *his abundant mercy*. All our blessings are owing to God's mercy, not to man's merit, particularly regeneration. He *hath begotten us again*, and this deserves our thanksgiving to God, especially if we consider the fruit it produces in us, which is that excellent grace of hope, and that not such a vain, dead, perishing hope as that of worldlings and hypocrites, but a lively hope, a living, strong, quickening, and durable hope, as that hope must needs be that has such a solid foundation as *the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. Learn, (1.) A good Christian's condition is never so bad but he has great reason still to bless God. As a sinner has always reason to mourn, notwithstanding his present prosperity, so good people, in the midst of their manifold difficulties, have reason still to rejoice and bless God. (2.) In our prayers and praises we should address God as *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; it is only through him that we and our services are accepted. (3.) The best of men owe their best blessings to the abundant mercy of God. All the evil in the world is from man's sin, but all the good in it is from *God's mercy*. Regeneration is expressly ascribed to the abundant mercy of God, and so are all the rest; we subsist entirely upon divine mercy. Of the nature of regeneration, see on Jn. 3:3. (4.) Regeneration produces a lively hope of eternal life. Every unconverted person is a hopeless creature; whatever he pretends to of that kind is all confidence and presumption. The right Christian hope is what a man is begotten again unto by the Spirit of God; it is not from nature, but free grace. Those who are begotten to a new and spiritual life are begotten to a new and spiritual hope. (5.) The hope of a Christian has this excellency, it is a living hope. The hope of eternal life in a true Christian is a hope that keeps him alive, quickens him, supports him, and conducts him to heaven. Hope invigorates and spirits up the soul to action, to patience, to fortitude, and perseverance to the end. The delusive hopes of the

unregenerate are vain and perishing; the hypocrite and his hope expire and die both together, Job 27:8. (6.) *The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* is the ground or foundation of a Christian's hope. The resurrection of Christ is the act of the Father as a Judge, of the Son as a conqueror. His resurrection demonstrates that the Father accepts his death in full discharge for our ransom, that he is victorious over death, the grave, and all our spiritual enemies; and it is also an assurance of our own resurrection. There being an inseparable union between Christ and his flock, they rise by virtue of his resurrection as a head, rather than by virtue of his power as a Judge. *We have risen with Christ*, Col. 3:1. From all this taken together, Christians have two firm and solid foundations whereon to build their hope of eternal life.

II. Having congratulated these people on their new birth, and the hope of everlasting life, the apostle goes on to describe that life under the notion of *an inheritance*, a most proper way of speaking to these people; for they were poor and persecuted, perhaps turned out of their inheritances to which they were born; to allay this grievance, he tells them they were new-born to a new inheritance, infinitely better than what they had lost. Besides, they were most of them Jews, and so had a great affection to the land of Canaan, as the land of their inheritance, settled upon them by God himself; and to be driven out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord was looked upon as a sore judgment, 1 Sa. 26:19. To comfort them under this they are put in mind of a noble inheritance reserved in heaven for them, such a one that the land of Canaan was but a mere shadow in comparison with it. Here note,

1. Heaven is the undoubted inheritance of all the children of God; all that are born again are born to an inheritance, as a man makes his child his heir; the apostle argues, *If children, then heirs*, Rom. 8:17. God giveth his gifts unto all, but the inheritance to none but his children; those that are his sons and daughters by regeneration and adoption receive the promise of eternal inheritance, Heb. 9:15. This inheritance is not our purchase, but our Father's gift; not wages that we merit, but the effect of grace, which first makes us children and then settles this inheritance upon us by a firm unalterable covenant.

2. The incomparable excellencies of this inheritance, which are four:—(1.) It is incorruptible, in which respect it is like its Maker, who is called the *incorruptible God*, Rom. 1:23. All corruption is a change from better to worse, but heaven is without change and without end; the house is eternal in the heavens, and the possessors must subsist for ever, *for their corruptible must put on incorruption*, 1 Co. 15:53. (2.) This inheritance is undefiled, like the great high priest that is now in possession of it, who is *holy, harmless, and undefiled*, Heb. 7:26. Sin and misery, the two grand defilements that spoil this world, and mar its beauty, have no place there. (3.) It fadeth not away, but always retains its vigour and beauty, and remains immarcescible, ever entertaining and pleasing the saints who possess it, without the least weariness or distaste. (4.) *"Reserved in heaven for you,"* which expression teaches us, [1.] That it is a glorious inheritance, for it is in heaven, and all that is there is glorious, Eph. 1:18. [2.] It is certain, a reversion in another world, safely kept and preserved till we come to the possession of it. [3.] The persons for whom it is reserved are described, not by their names, but by their character: *for you*, or us, or every one that is *begotten again to a lively hope*. This inheritance is preserved for them, and none but them; all the rest will be shut out for ever.

III. This inheritance being described as future, and distant both in time and place, the apostle supposes some doubt or uneasiness yet to remain upon the minds of these people, whether they might not possibly fall short by the way. "Though the

happiness be safe in heaven, yet we are still upon earth, liable to abundance of temptations, miseries, and infirmities. Are we in such a safe state that we shall certainly come thither?" To this he answers that they should be safely guarded and conducted thither; they should be kept and preserved from all such destructive temptations and injuries as would prevent their safe arrival at eternal life. The heir to an earthly estate has no assurance that he shall live to enjoy it, but the heirs of heaven shall certainly be conducted safely to the possession of it. The blessing here promised is preservation: You *are kept*; the author of it is *God*; the means in us made use of for that end are our own *faith* and care; the end to which we are preserved is *salvation*; and the time when we shall see the safe end and issue of all is *the last time*. Note, 1. Such is the tender care of God over his people that he not only gives them grace, but preserves them unto glory. Their being kept implies both danger and deliverance; they may be attacked, but shall not be overcome. 2. The preservation of the regenerate to eternal life is the effect of God's power. The greatness of the work, the number of enemies, and our own infirmities, are such that no power but what is almighty can preserve the soul through all unto salvation; therefore the scripture often represents man's salvation as the effect of divine power, 2 Co. 12:9; Rom. 14:4. 3. Preservation by God's power does not supersede man's endeavour and care for his own salvation; here are God's power and man's faith, which implies an earnest desire of salvation, a reliance upon Christ according to his invitations and promises, a vigilant care to do every thing pleasing to God and avoid whatever is offensive, an abhorrence of temptations, a *respect to the recompence of reward*, and persevering diligence in prayer. By such a patient, operating, conquering faith, we are kept under the assistance of divine grace, unto salvation; faith is a sovereign preservative of the soul through a state of grace unto a state of glory. 4. This salvation is *ready to be revealed in the last time*. Here are three things asserted about the salvation of the saints:—(1.) That it is now prepared, and made ready, and reserved in heaven for them. (2.) Though it be made ready now, yet it is in a great measure hidden and unrevealed at present, not only to the ignorant, blind world, that never enquire after it, but even to the heirs of salvation themselves. *It does not yet appear what we shall be*, 1 Jn. 3:2. (3.) That it shall be fully and completely *revealed in the last time*, or at the last day of judgment. *Life and immortality are now brought to light by the gospel*, but this life will be revealed more gloriously at death, when the soul shall be admitted into the presence of Christ, and behold his glory; and even beyond this there will be a further and a final revelation of the amplitude and transcendency of the saints' felicity at the last day, when their bodies shall be raised and re-united to their souls, and judgment shall pass upon angels and men, and Christ shall publicly honour and applaud his servants in the face of all the world.

Verses 6-9

The first word, *wherein*, refers to the apostle's foregoing discourse about the excellency of their present state, and their grand expectations for the future. "In this condition *you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, or a little while, if need be, you are made sorrowful through manifold temptations,*" v. 6.

I. The apostle grants they were in great affliction, and propounds several things in mitigation of their sorrows. 1. Every sound Christian has always something wherein he may greatly rejoice. Great rejoicing contains more than an inward placid serenity of mind or sensation of comfort; it will show itself in the countenance and conduct, but especially in praise and gratitude. 2.

The chief joy of a good Christian arises from things spiritual and heavenly, from his relation to God and to heaven. In these every sound Christian greatly rejoices; his joy arises from his treasure, which consists of matters of great value, and the title to them is sure. 3. The best Christians, those who have reason greatly to rejoice, may yet be in great heaviness through manifold temptations. All sorts of adversities are temptations, or trials of faith, patience, and constancy. These seldom go singly, but are manifold, and come from different quarters, the effect of all which is great heaviness. As men, we are subject to sorrows, personal and domestic. As Christians, our duty to God obliges us to frequent sorrow: and our compassion towards the miserable, the dishonour done to God, the calamities of his church, and the destruction of mankind, from their own folly and from divine vengeance, raise, in a generous and pious mind, almost continual sorrow. *I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart*, Rom. 9:2. 4. The afflictions and sorrows of good people are but for a little while, they are but for a season; though they may be smart, they are but short. Life itself is but for a little while, and the sorrows of it cannot survive it; the shortness of any affliction does much abate the heaviness of it. 5. Great heaviness is often necessary to a Christian's good: *If need be, you are in heaviness*. God does not afflict his people willingly, but acts with judgment, in proportion to our needs. There is a conveniency and fitness, nay, an absolute necessity in the case, for so the expression signifies: *it must be*; therefore no man should be *moved by these afflictions*. *For yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto*, 1 Th. 3:3. These troubles, that lie heavy, never come upon us but when we have need, and never stay any longer than needs must.

II. He expresses the end of their afflictions and the ground of their joy under them, v. 7. The end of good people's afflictions is *the trial of their faith*. As to the nature of this trial, it is *much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire*. The effect of the trial is this, it will *be found unto praise, honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*. Note, 1. The afflictions of serious Christians are designed for the trial of their faith. God's design in afflicting his people is their probation, not their destruction; their advantage, not their ruin: a *trial*, as the word signifies, is an experiment or search made upon a man, by some affliction, to prove the value and strength of his faith. This trial is made upon faith principally, rather than any other grace, because the trial of this is, in effect, the trial of all that is good in us. Our Christianity depends upon our faith; if this be wanting, there is nothing else that is spiritually good in us. Christ prays for this apostle, *that his faith might not fail*; if that be supported, all the rest will stand firm; the faith of good people is tried, that they themselves may have the comfort of it, God the glory of it, and others the benefit of it. 2. A tried faith is much more precious than tried gold. Here is a double comparison of faith and gold, and the trial of the one with the trial of the other. Gold is the most valuable, pure, useful, and durable, of all the metals; so is faith among the Christian virtues; it lasts till it brings the soul to heaven, and then it issues in the glorious fruition of God for ever. The trial of faith is much more precious than the trial of gold; in both there is a purification, a separation of the dross, and a discovery of the soundness and goodness of the things. Gold does not increase and multiply by trial in the fire, it rather grows less; but *faith* is established, improved, and multiplied, by the oppositions and afflictions that it meets with. *Gold* must perish at last—*gold that perisheth*; but *faith* never will. *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*, Lu. 22:32. The trial of faith will be found to praise, and honour, and glory. Honour is properly that esteem and value which one has with another, and so God and man will honour the saints. Praise is the expression or declaration of that esteem; so Christ

will commend his people in the great day, *Come, you blessed of my Father*, etc. Glory is that lustre wherewith a person, so honoured and praised, shines in heaven. *Glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good*, Rom. 2:10. If a tried faith be found to praise, honour, and glory, let this recommend faith to you, as much more precious than gold, though it be assaulted and tried by afflictions. If you make your estimate either from present use or the final event of both, this will be found true, however the world may take it for an incredible paradox. 4. Jesus Christ will appear again in glory, and, when he does so, the saints will appear with him, and their graces will appear illustrious; and the more they have been tried the more bright they will then appear. The trial will soon be over, but the glory, honour, and praise will last to eternity. This should reconcile you to your present afflictions: *they work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

III. He particularly commends the faith of these primitive Christians upon two accounts:—

1. The excellency of its object, the unseen Jesus. The apostle had seen our Lord in the flesh, but these dispersed Jews never did, and yet they believed in him, v. 8. It is one thing to believe God, or Christ (so the devils believe), and another thing to believe in him, which denotes subjection, reliance, and expectation of all promised good from him.

2. On account of two notable productions or effects of their faith, *love* and *joy*, and this joy so great as to be above description: *You rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. Learn,

(1.) The faith of a Christian is properly conversant about things revealed, but not seen. Sense converses with things sensible and present; reason is a higher guide, which by sure deductions can infer the operation of causes, and the certainty of events; but faith ascends further still, and assures us of abundance of particulars that sense and reason could never have found out, upon the credit of revelation; it is *the evidence of things not seen*.

(2.) True faith is never alone, but produces a strong love to Jesus Christ. True Christians have a sincere love to Jesus, because they believe in him. This love discovers itself in the highest esteem for him, affectionate desires after him, willingness to be dissolved to be with him, delightful thoughts, cheerful services and sufferings, etc.

(3.) Where there are true faith and love to Christ there is, or may be, *joy unspeakable and full of glory*. This joy is inexpressible, it cannot be described by words; the best discovery is by an experimental taste of it; it is *full of glory*, full of heaven. There is much of heaven and the future glory in the present joys of improved Christians; their faith removes the causes of sorrow, and affords the best reasons for joy. Though good people sometimes walk in darkness, it is often owing to their own mistakes and ignorance, or to a fearful or melancholy disposition, or to some late sinful conduct, or perhaps to some sad occurrence of providence, that sinks their comfort for the present, yet they have reason to rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of their salvation, Heb. 3:18. Well might these primitive Christians rejoice with the joy unspeakable, since they were every day *receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls*, v. 4. Note, [1.] The blessing they were receiving: *The salvation of their souls* (the more noble part being put for the whole man), which salvation is here called *the end of their faith*, the end wherein faith terminates: faith helps to save the soul, then it has done its work, and ceases for ever. [2.] He speaks of the present time: You are now actually *receiving the end of your faith*, etc. [3.] The word used alludes to the games at which the conqueror received or bore away from the judge of the contest a crown or reward, which he carried about in triumph; so the

salvation of the soul was the prize these Christians sought for, the crown they laboured for, the end they aimed at, which came nearer and more within their reach every day. Learn, *First*, Every faithful Christian is daily receiving the salvation of his soul; salvation is one permanent thing, begun in this life, not interrupted by death, and continued to all eternity. These believers had the beginnings of heaven in the possession of holiness and a heavenly mind, in their duties and communion with God, in the earnest of the inheritance, and the witness of the divine Spirit. This was properly urged to these distressed people; they were on the losing side in the world, but the apostle puts them in the mind of what they were receiving; if they lost an inferior good, they were all the while receiving the salvation of their souls. *Secondly*, It is lawful for a Christian to make the salvation of his soul his end; the glory of God and our own felicity are so connected that if we regularly seek the one we must attain the other.

Verses 10-12

The apostle having described the persons to whom he wrote, and declared to them the excellent advantages they were under, goes on to show them what warrant he had for what he had delivered; and because they were Jews, and had a profound veneration for the Old Testament, he produces the authority of the prophets to convince them that the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ was no new doctrine, but the same which the old prophets did enquire and search diligently into. Note, I. Who made this diligent search—*the prophets*, who were persons inspired by God either to do or to say things extraordinary, above the reach of their own studies and abilities, as foretelling things to come, and revealing the will of God, by the direction of the Holy Spirit.

II. The object of their search, which was *salvation*, and *the grace of God which should come unto you*; the general salvation of men of all nations by Jesus Christ, and more especially the salvation afforded to the Jews, *the grace that should come to them* from him who was *not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. They foresaw glorious times of light, grace, and comfort, coming upon the church, which made the prophets and righteous men desire to see and hear the things which came to pass in the days of the gospel.

III. The manner of their enquiry: they *enquired and searched diligently*. The words are strong and emphatic, alluding to miners, who dig to the bottom, and break through not only the earth, but the rock, to come to the ore; so these holy prophets had an earnest desire to know, and were proportionably diligent in their enquiries after the grace of God, which was to be revealed in the days of the Messiah: their being inspired did not make their industrious search needless; for, notwithstanding their extraordinary assistance from God, they were obliged to make use of all the ordinary methods of improvement in wisdom and knowledge. Daniel was a man greatly beloved and inspired, yet he understood by books and study the computations of time, ch. 9:2. Even their own revelation required their study, meditation, and prayer; for many prophecies had a double meaning: in their first intention they aimed at some person or event near at hand, but their ultimate design was to describe the person, sufferings, or kingdom of Christ. Observe, 1. The doctrine of man's salvation by Jesus Christ has been the study and admiration of the greatest and wisest of men; the nobleness of the subject, and their own concern in it, have engaged them, with most accurate attention and seriousness to search into it. 2. A good man is much affected and pleased with the grace and mercy of God to others, as well as to himself. *The prophets* were highly delighted with the prospects of mercy to be shown

both to Jews and Gentiles at the coming of Christ. 3. Those who would be acquainted with this great salvation, and the grace that shines therein, must enquire and search diligently into it: if it was necessary for an inspired prophet to do so, much more for persons so weak and injudicious as we are. 4. The grace that came by the gospel excels all that was before it; the gospel dispensation is more glorious, evident, intelligible, extensive, and effectual, than any dispensation that ever did precede it.

IV. The particular matters which the ancient prophets chiefly searched into, which are expressed in v. 11. Jesus Christ was the main subject of their studies; and, in relation to him, they were most inquisitive into,

1. His humiliation and death, and the glorious consequences of it: *The sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow*. This enquiry would lead them into a view of the whole gospel, the sum whereof is this, *that Christ Jesus was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification*.

2. The time, and the manner of the times, wherein the Messiah was to appear. Undoubtedly these holy prophets earnestly desired to see the days of the Son of man; and therefore, next to the thing itself, their minds were set upon the time of its accomplishment, so far as the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, had signified any thing towards that purpose. The nature of the times was also under their strict consideration, whether they would be quiet or troublesome times, times of peace or times of war. Learn, (1.) Jesus Christ had a being before his incarnation; for his Spirit did then exist in the prophets, and therefore he whose that Spirit then was must be in being also. (2.) The doctrine of the Trinity was not wholly unknown to the faithful in the Old Testament. The prophets knew that they were inspired by a Spirit that was in them; this Spirit they knew to be the Spirit of Christ, and consequently distinct from Christ himself: here is a plurality of persons, and from other parts of the Old Testament a Trinity may be collected. (3.) The works here ascribed to the Holy Ghost prove him to be God. He *did signify*, discover, and manifest to the prophets, many hundred years *beforehand*, *the sufferings of Christ*, with a multitude of particular circumstances attending them; and he did also *testify*, or give proof and evidence beforehand, of the certainty of that event, by inspiring the prophets to reveal it, to work miracles in confirmation of it, and by enabling the faithful to believe it. These works prove the Spirit of Christ to be God, since he is possessed of almighty power and infinite knowledge. (4.) From the example of Christ Jesus learn to expect a time of services and sufferings before you are received to glory. It was so with him, and *the disciple is not above his Lord*. The suffering time is but short, but the glory is everlasting; let the suffering season be ever so sharp and severe, it shall not hinder, but *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

V. The success with which their enquiries were crowned. Their holy endeavours to inform themselves were not slighted, for God gave them a satisfactory revelation to quiet and comfort their minds. They were informed that these things should not come to pass in their time, but yet all was firm and certain, and should come to pass in the times of the apostles: *Not unto themselves, but to us*; and we must report them, under the infallible direction of the Holy Ghost, to all the world. *Which things the angels, etc.*

You have here three sorts of students, or enquirers into the great affair of man's salvation by Jesus Christ:—1. *The prophets*, who *searched diligently* into it. 2. The apostles, who consulted all the prophecies, and were witnesses of the accomplishment of them, and so reported what they knew to others in the preaching of the gospel. 3. The angels, who most attentively pry into

these matters. Learn, (1.) A diligent endeavour after the knowledge of Christ and our duty will certainly be answered with good success. The prophets are answered with a revelation. Daniel studies, and receives information: the Bereans search the scriptures, and are confirmed. (2.) The holiest and best of men sometimes have their lawful and pious requests denied. It was both lawful and pious for these prophets to desire to know more than they were permitted to know about the time of the appearance of Christ in the world, but they were denied. It is lawful and pious for good parents to pray for their wicked children, for the poor to pray against poverty, for a good man to pray against death; yet, in these honest requests, they often are denied. God is pleased to answer our necessities rather than our requests. (3.) It is the honour and practice of a Christian to be useful to others, in many cases, rather than to himself. The prophets ministered to others, not unto themselves. *None of us liveth to himself*, Rom. 14:7. Nothing is more contrary to man's nature nor to Christian principles than for a man to make himself his own end, and live to himself. (4.) The revelations of God to his church, though gradual, and given by parcels, are all perfectly consistent; the doctrine of the prophets and that of the apostles exactly agree, as coming from the same Spirit of God. (5.) The efficacy of the evangelical ministry depends upon the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The gospel is the ministration of the Spirit; the success of it depends upon his operation and blessing. (6.) The mysteries of the gospel, and the methods of man's salvation, are so glorious that the blessed angels earnestly desire to look into them; they are curious, accurate, and industrious in prying into them; they consider the whole scheme of man's redemption with deep attention and admiration, particularly the points the apostle had been discoursing of: *Which things the angels desire to stoop down and look into, as the cherubim did continually towards the mercy-seat.*

Verses 13-23

Here the apostle begins his exhortations to those whose glorious state he had before described, thereby instructing us that Christianity is a doctrine according to godliness, designed to make us not only wiser, but better.

I. He exhorts them to sobriety and holiness.

1. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, etc.*, v. 13. As if he had said, "Wherefore, since you are so honoured and distinguished, as above, *Gird up the loins of your mind*. You have a journey to go, a race to run, a warfare to accomplish, and a great work to do; as the traveller, the racer, the warrior, and the labourer, gather in, and gird up, their long and loose garments, that they may be more ready, prompt, and expeditious in their business, so do you by your minds, your inner man, and affections seated there: *gird them*, gather them in, let them not hang loose and neglected about you; restrain their extravagances, and let the loins or strength and vigour of your minds be exerted in your duty; disengage yourselves from all that would hinder you, and go on resolutely in your obedience. *Be sober*, be vigilant against all your spiritual dangers and enemies, and be temperate and modest in eating, drinking, apparel, recreation, business, and in the whole of your behaviour. Be sober-minded also in opinion, as well as in practice, and humble in your judgment of yourselves." *And hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*. Some refer this to the last judgment, as if the apostle directed their hope to the final revelation of Jesus Christ; but it seems more natural to take it, as it might be rendered, "Hope perfectly, or thoroughly, for the grace that is brought to you in or by the revelation of Jesus Christ; that is, by the gospel,

which brings life and immortality to light. Hope perfectly, trust without doubting to that grace which is now offered to you by the gospel." Learn, (1.) The main work of a Christian lies in the right management of his heart and mind; the apostle's first direction is to gird up the loins of the mind. (2.) The best Christians have need to be exhorted to sobriety. These excellent Christians are put in mind of it; it is required of a bishop (1 Tim. 3:2), of aged men (Tit. 2:2), the young women are to be taught it, and the young men are directed to be sober-minded, Tit. 2:4, 6. (3.) A Christian's work is not over as soon as he has got into a state of grace; he must still hope and strive for more grace. When he has entered the strait gate, he must still walk in the narrow way, and gird up the loins of his mind for that purpose. (4.) A strong and perfect trust in God's grace is very consistent with our best endeavours in our duty; we must hope perfectly, and yet gird up our loins, and address ourselves vigorously to the work we have to do, encouraging ourselves from the grace of Jesus Christ.

2. *As obedient children*, etc., v. 14. These words may be taken as a rule of holy living, which is both positive—"You ought to live *as obedient children*, as those whom God hath adopted into his family, and regenerated by his grace;" and negative—"You must *not fashion yourselves according to the former lusts, in your ignorance.*" Or the words may be taken as an argument to press them to holiness from the consideration of what they now are, children of obedience, and what they were when they lived in lust and ignorance. Learn, (1.) The children of God ought to prove themselves to be such by their obedience to God, by their present, constant, universal obedience. (2.) The best of God's children have had their times of lust and ignorance; the time has been when the whole scheme of their lives, their way and fashion, was to accommodate and gratify their unlawful desires and vicious appetites, being grossly ignorant of God and themselves, of Christ and the gospel. (3.) Persons, when converted, differ exceedingly from what they were formerly. They are people of another fashion and manner from what they were before; their inward frame, behaviour, speech, and conversation, are much altered from what they were in times past. (4.) The lusts and extravagances of sinners are both the fruits and the signs of their ignorance.

3. *But as he who hath called you*, etc., v. 15, 16. Here is a noble rule enforced by strong arguments: *Be you holy in all manner of conversation.* Who is sufficient for this? And yet it is required in strong terms, and enforced by three reasons, taken from the grace of God in calling us,—from his command, *it is written*,—and from his example. *Be you holy, for I am holy.* Learn, (1.) The grace of God in calling a sinner is a powerful engagement to holiness. It is a great favour to be called effectually by divine grace out of a state of sin and misery into the possession of all the blessings of the new covenant; and great favours are strong obligations; they enable as well as oblige to be holy. (2.) Complete holiness is the desire and duty of every Christian. Here is a two-fold rule of holiness: [1.] It must, for the extent of it, be universal. We must *be holy*, and be so *in all manner of conversation*; in all civil and religious affairs, in every condition, prosperous or reverse; towards all people, friends and enemies; in all our intercourse and business still we must be holy. [2.] For the pattern of it. We must *be holy, as God is holy*: we must imitate him, though we can never equal him. He is perfectly, unchangeably, and eternally holy; and we should aspire after such a state. The consideration of the holiness of God should oblige as to the highest degree of holiness we can attain unto. (3.) The written word of God is the surest rule of a Christian's life, and by this rule we are commanded to be holy every way. (4.) The Old-Testament commands are to be studied and obeyed in the times of the New Testament; the apostle, by virtue

of a command delivered several times by Moses, requires holiness in all Christians.

4. *If you call on the Father*, etc., v. 17. The apostle does not there express any doubt at all whether these Christians would call upon their heavenly Father, but supposes they would certainly do it, and from this argues with them to *pass the time of their sojourning here in fear*: "If you own the great God as a Father and a Judge, you ought to live the time of your sojourning here in his fear." Learn, (1.) All good Christians look upon themselves in this world as pilgrims and strangers, as strangers in a distant country, passing to another, to which they properly belong, Ps. 39:12; Heb. 11:13. (2.) The whole time of our sojourning here is to be passed in the fear of God. (3.) The consideration of God as a Judge is not improper for those who can truly call him Father. Holy confidence in God as a Father, an awful fear of him as a Judge, are very consistent; to regard God as a Judge is a singular means to endear him to us as a Father. (4.) The judgment of God will be without respect of persons: *According to every man's work*. No external relation to him will protect any; the Jew may call God Father and Abraham father, but God will not respect persons, nor favour their cause, from personal considerations, but judge them according to their work. The works of men will in the great day discover their persons; God will make all the world to know who are his by their works. We are obliged to faith, holiness, and obedience, and our works will be an evidence whether we have complied with our obligations or not.

5. The apostle having extorted them to *pass the time of their sojourning in the fear of God* from this consideration, that they *called on the Father*, he adds (v. 18) a second argument: *Because or forasmuch as you were not redeemed with corruptible things*, etc. Herein he puts them in mind, (1.) That they were redeemed, or bought back again, by a ransom paid to the Father. (2.) What the price paid for their redemption was: *Not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ*. (3.) From what they were redeemed: *From a vain conversation received by tradition*. (4.) They knew this: *Forasmuch as you know*, and cannot pretend ignorance of this great affair. Learn, [1.] The consideration of our redemption ought to be a constant and powerful inducement to holiness, and the fear of God. [2.] God expects that a Christian should live answerably to what he knows, and therefore we have great need to be put in mind of what we already know, Ps. 39:4. [3.] Neither silver nor gold, nor any of the corruptible things of this world, can redeem so much as one soul. They are often snares, temptations, and hindrances to man's salvation, but they can by no means purchase or procure it; they are corruptible, and therefore cannot redeem an incorruptible and immortal soul. [4.] The blood of Jesus Christ is the only price of man's redemption. The redemption of man is real, not metaphorical. We are bought with a price, and the price is equal to the purchase, for it is the precious blood of Christ; it is the blood of an innocent person, a lamb without blemish and without spot, whom the paschal lamb represented, and of an infinite person, being the Son of God, and therefore it is called the blood of God, Acts 20:28. [5.] The design of Christ in shedding his most precious blood was to redeem us, not only from eternal misery hereafter, but from a vain conversation in this world. That conversation is vain which is empty, frivolous, trifling, and unserviceable to the honour of God, the credit of religion, the conviction of unbelievers, and the comfort and satisfaction of a man's own conscience. Not only the open wickedness, but the vanity and unprofitableness of our conversation are highly dangerous. [6.] A man's conversation may carry an appearance of devotion, and may plead antiquity, custom, and tradition, in

its defence, and yet after all be a most vain conversation. The Jews had a deal to say from these heads, for all their formalities; and yet their conversation was so vain that only the blood of Christ could redeem them from it. Antiquity is no certain rule of verity, nor is it a wise resolution, "I will live and die in such a way, because my forefathers did so."

6. Having mentioned the price of redemption, the apostle goes on to speak of some things relating both to the Redeemer and the redeemed, v. 20, 21.

(1.) The Redeemer is further described, not only as a Lamb without spot, but as one, [1.] That was *fore-ordained before the foundation of the world*, fore-ordained or foreknown. When prescience is ascribed to God, it implies more than bare prospect or speculation. It imports an act of the will, a resolution that the thing shall be, Acts 2:23. God did not only foreknow, but determine and decree, that his Son should die for man, and this decree was before the foundation of the world. Time and the world began together; before the commencement of time there was nothing but eternity. [2.] That was *manifested in these last days for them*. He was manifested or demonstrated to be that Redeemer whom God had fore-ordained. He was manifested by his birth, by his Father's testimony, and by his own works, especially by his resurrection from the dead, Rom. 1:4. "This was done in these last times of the New Testament and of the gospel, for you, you Jews, you sinners, you afflicted ones; you have the comfort of the manifestation and appearance of Christ, if you believe on him." [3.] That was raised from the dead by the Father, who gave him glory. The resurrection of Christ, considered as an act of power, is common to all the three persons, but as an act of judgment it is peculiar to the Father, who as a Judge released Christ, raised him from the grave, and gave him glory, proclaimed him to all the world to be his Son by his resurrection from the dead, advanced him to heaven, crowned him with glory and honour, invested him with all power in heaven and earth, and glorified him with that glory which he had with God before the world was.

(2.) The redeemed are also described here by their faith and hope, the cause of which is Jesus Christ: "*You do by him believe in God*—by him as the author, encourager, support, and finisher of your faith; your faith and hope now may be in God, as reconciled to you by Christ the Mediator."

(3.) From all this we learn, [1.] The decree of God to send Christ to be a Mediator was from everlasting, and was a just and merciful decree, which yet does not at all excuse man's sin in crucifying him, Acts 2:23. God had purposes of special favour towards his people long before he made any manifestations of such grace to them. [2.] Great is the happiness of the last times in comparison with what the former ages of the world enjoyed. The clearness of light, the supports of faith, the efficacy of ordinances, and the proportion of comforts—these are all much greater since the manifestation of Christ than they were before. Our gratitude and services should be suitable to such favours. [3.] The redemption of Christ belongs to none but true believers. A general impetration is asserted by some and denied by others, but none pretend to a general application of Christ's death for the salvation of all. Hypocrites and unbelievers will be ruined for ever, notwithstanding the death of Christ. [4.] God in Christ is the ultimate object of a Christian's faith, which is strongly supported by the resurrection of Christ, and the glory that did follow.

II. He exhorts them to brotherly love.

1. He supposes that the gospel had already had such an effect upon them as to purify their souls while they obeyed it through the Spirit, and that it had produced at least an *unfeigned love of the brethren*; and thence he argues with them to proceed to a higher degree of affection, to love one another with a pure heart fervently, v. 22. Learn, (1.) It is not to be doubted but that every sincere Christian purifies his soul. The apostle takes this for granted: *Seeing you have*, etc. To purify the soul supposes some great uncleanness and defilement which had polluted it, and that this defilement is removed. Neither the Levitical purifications under the law, nor the hypocritical purifications of the outward man, can effect this. (2.) The word of God is the great instrument of a sinner's purification: *Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth*. The gospel is called truth, in opposition to types and shadows, to error and falsehood. This truth is effectual to purify the soul, if it be obeyed, Jn. 17:17. Many hear the truth, but are never purified by it, because they will not submit to it nor obey it. (3.) The Spirit of God is the great agent in the purification of man's soul. The Spirit convinces the soul of its impurities, furnishes those virtues and graces that both adorn and purify, such as faith (Acts 15:9), hope (1 Jn. 3:3), the fear of God (Ps. 34:9), and the love of Jesus Christ. The Spirit excites our endeavours, and makes them successful. The aid of the Spirit does not supersede our own industry; these people purified their own souls, but it was through the Spirit. (4.) The souls of Christians must be purified before they can so much as love one another unfeignedly. There are such lusts and partialities in man's nature that without divine grace we can neither love God nor one another as we ought to do; there is no charity but out of a pure heart. (5.) It is the duty of all Christians sincerely and fervently to love one another. Our affection to one another must be sincere and real, and it must be fervent, constant, and extensive.

2. He further presses upon Christians the duty of loving one another with a pure heart fervently from the consideration of their spiritual relation; they are all *born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible*, etc. Hence we may learn, (1.) That all Christians are born again. The apostle speaks of it as what is common to all serious Christians, and by this they are brought into a new and a near relation to one another, they become brethren by their new birth. (2.) The word of God is the great means of regeneration, Jam. 1:18. The grace of regeneration is conveyed by the gospel. (3.) This new and second birth is much more desirable and excellent than the first. This the apostle teaches by preferring the incorruptible to the corruptible seed. By the one we become the children of men, by the other the sons and daughters of the Most High. The word of God being compared to seed teaches us that though it is little in appearance, yet it is wonderful in operation, though it lies hid awhile, yet it grows up and produces excellent fruit at last. (4.) Those that are regenerate should love one another with a pure heart fervently. Brethren by nature are bound to love one another; but the obligation is double where there is a spiritual relation: they are under the same government, partake of the same privileges, and have embarked in the same interest. (5.) The word of God lives and abides for ever. This word is a living word, or a lively word, Heb. 4:12. It is a means of spiritual life, to begin it and preserve in it, animating and exciting us in our duty, till it brings us to eternal life: and it is abiding; it remains eternally true, and abides in the hearts of the regenerate for ever.

Verses 24-25

The apostle having given an account of the excellency of the renewed spiritual man as born again, not of corruptible but

incorruptible seed, he now sets before us the vanity of the natural man, taking him with all his ornaments and advantages about him: *For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass*; and nothing can make him a solid substantial being, but the being born again of the incorruptible seed, the word of God, which will transform him into a most excellent creature, whose glory will not fade like a flower, but shine like an angel; and this word is daily set before you in the preaching of the gospel. Learn, 1. Man, in his utmost flourish and glory, is still a withering, fading, dying creature. Take him singly, all flesh is grass. In his entrance into the world, in his life and in his fall, he is similar to grass, Job 14:2; Isa. 40:6, 7. Take him in all his glory, even this is as the flower of grass; his wit, beauty, strength, vigour, wealth, honour—these are but as the flower of grass, which soon withers and dies away. 2. The only way to render this perishing creature solid and incorruptible is for him to entertain and receive the word of God; for this remains everlasting truth, and, if received, will preserve him to everlasting life, and abide with him for ever. 3. The prophets and apostles preached the same doctrine. This word which Isaiah and others delivered in the Old Testament is the same which the apostles preached in the New.

Chapter 2

The general exhortation to holiness is continued, and enforced by several reasons taken from the foundation on which Christians are built, Jesus Christ, and from their spiritual blessings and privileges in him. The means of obtaining it, the word of God, is recommended, and all contrary qualities are condemned (v. 1–12). Particular directions are given how subjects ought to obey the magistrates, and servants their masters, patiently suffering in well doing, in imitation of Christ (v. 13 to the end).

Verses 1-3

The holy apostle has been recommending mutual charity, and setting forth the excellences of the word of God, calling it an *incorruptible seed*, and saying that it *liveth and abideth for ever*. He pursues his discourse, and very properly comes in with this necessary advice, *Wherefore laying aside all malice*, etc. These are such sins as both destroy charity and hinder the efficacy of the word, and consequently they prevent our regeneration.

I. His advice is to lay aside or put off what is evil, as one would do an old rotten garment: "Cast it away with indignation, never put it on more."

1. The sins to be put off, or thrown aside, are, (1.) *Malice*, which may be taken more generally for all sorts of wickedness, as Jam. 1:21; 1 Co. 5:8. But, in a more confined sense, malice is anger resting in the bosom of fools, settled overgrown anger, retained till it inflames a man to design mischief, to do mischief, or delight in any mischief that befalls another. (2.) *Guile*, or deceit in words. So it comprehends flattery, falsehood, and delusion, which is a crafty imposing upon another's ignorance or weakness, to his damage. (3.) *Hypocrisies*. The word being plural comprehends all sorts of hypocrisies. In matters of religion hypocrisy is counterfeit piety. In civil conversation hypocrisy is counterfeit friendship, which is much practised by those who give high compliments, which they do not believe, make promises which they never intend to perform, or pretend friendship when mischief lies in their hearts. (4.) *All envies*; every thing that may be called *envy*, which is a grieving at the good and welfare of another, at their abilities, prosperity, fame, or successful labours. (5.) *Evil speaking*, which is detraction, speaking against another, or defaming him; it is rendered *backbiting*, 2 Co. 12:20; Rom. 1:30.

2. Hence learn, (1.) The best Christians have need to be cautioned and warned against the worst sins, such as malice, hypocrisy, envy. They are but sanctified in part, and are still liable to temptations. (2.) Our best services towards God will neither please him nor profit us if we be not conscientious in our duties to men. The sins here mentioned are offences against the second table. These must be laid aside, or else we cannot receive the word of God as we ought to do. (3.) Whereas it is said *all malice, all guile*, learn, That one sin, not laid aside, will hinder our spiritual profit and everlasting welfare. (4.) Malice, envy, hatred, hypocrisy, and evil-speaking, generally go together. Evil-speaking is a sign that malice and guile lie in the heart; and all of them combine to hinder our profiting by the word of God.

II. The apostle, like a wise physician, having prescribed the purging out of vicious humours, goes on to direct to wholesome and regular food, that they may grow thereby. The duty exhorted to is a strong and constant desire for the *word of God*, which

word is here called *reasonable milk*, only, this phrase not being proper English, our translators rendered it *the milk of the word*, by which we are to understand food proper for the soul, or a reasonable creature, whereby the mind, not the body, is nourished and strengthened. This milk of the word must be *sincere*, not adulterated by the mixtures of men, who often corrupt the word of God, 2 Co. 2:17. The manner in which they are to desire this sincere milk of the word is stated thus: *As new-born babes*. He puts them in mind of their regeneration. A new life requires suitable food. They, being newly born, must desire the milk of the word. Infants desire common milk, and their desires towards it are fervent and frequent, arising from an impatient sense of hunger, and accompanied with the best endeavours of which the infant is capable. Such must Christians' desires be for the word of God: and that for this end, that they may grow thereby, that we may improve in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, 2 Pt. 3:18. Learn, 1. Strong desires and affections to the word of God are a sure evidence of a person's being born again. If they be such desires as the babe has for the milk, they prove that the person is new-born. They are the lowest evidence, but yet they are certain. 2. Growth and improvement in wisdom and grace are the design and desire of every Christian; all spiritual means are for edification and improvement. The word of God, rightly used, does not leave a man as it finds him, but improves and makes him better.

III. He adds an argument from their own experience: *If so be, or since that, or forasmuch as, you have tasted that the Lord is gracious*, v. 3. The apostle does not express a doubt, but affirms that these good Christians had tasted the goodness of God, and hence argues with them. "You ought to lay aside these vile sins (v. 1); you ought to desire the word of God; you ought to grow thereby, since you cannot deny but that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." The next verse assures us that the Lord here spoken of is the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence learn, 1. Our Lord Jesus Christ is very gracious to his people. He is in himself infinitely good; he is very kind, free, and merciful to miserable sinners; he is pitiful and good to the undeserving; he has in him a fulness of grace. 2. The graciousness of our Redeemer is best discovered by an experimental taste of it. There must be an immediate application of the object to the organ of taste; we cannot taste at a distance, as we may see, and hear, and smell. To taste the graciousness of Christ experimentally supposes our being united to him by faith, and then we may taste his goodness in all his providences, in all our spiritual concerns, in all our fears and temptations, in his word and worship every day. 3. The best of God's servants have in this life but a taste of the grace of Christ. A taste is but a little; it is not a draught, nor does it satisfy. It is so with the consolations of God in this life. 4. The word of God is the great instrument whereby he discovers and communicates his grace to men. Those who feed upon the sincere milk of the word taste and experience most of his grace. In our converses with his word we should endeavour always to understand and experience more and more of his grace.

Verses 4-12

I. The apostle here gives us a description of Jesus Christ as a living stone; and though to a capricious wit, or an infidel, this description may seem rough and harsh, yet to the Jews, who placed much of their religion in their magnificent temple, and who understood the prophetic style, which calls the Messiah *a stone* (Isa. 8:14; 28:16), it would appear very elegant and proper.

1. In this metaphorical description of Jesus Christ, he is called a stone, to denote his invincible strength and everlasting duration, and to teach his servants that he is their protection and security, the foundation on which they are built, and a rock of

offence to all their enemies. He is the living stone, having eternal life in himself, and being the prince of life to all his people. The reputation and respect he has with God and man are very different. He is disallowed of men, reprobated or rejected by his own countrymen the Jews, and by the generality of mankind; but chosen of God, separated and fore-ordained to be the foundation of the church (as ch. 1:20), and precious, a most honourable, choice, worthy person in himself, in the esteem of God, and in the judgment of all who believe on him. To this person so described we are obliged to come: *To whom coming*, not by a local motion, for that is impossible since his exaltation, but by faith, whereby we are united to him at first, and draw nigh to him afterwards. Learn, (1.) Jesus Christ is the very foundation-stone of all our hopes and happiness. He communicates the true knowledge of God (Mt. 11:27); by him we have access to the Father (Jn. 14:6), and through him are made partakers of all spiritual blessings, Eph. 1:3. (2.) Men in general disallow and reject Jesus Christ; they slight him, dislike him, oppose and refuse him, as scripture and experience declare, Isa. 53:3. (3.) However Christ may be disallowed by an ungrateful world, yet he is chosen of God, and precious in his account. He is chosen and fixed upon to be the Lord of the universe, the head of the church, the Saviour of his people, and the Judge of the world. He is precious in the excellency of his nature, the dignity of his office, and the gloriousness of his services. (4.) Those who expect mercy from this gracious Redeemer must come to him, which is our act, though done by God's grace—an act of the soul, not of the body—a real endeavour, not a fruitless wish.

2. Having described Christ as the foundation, the apostle goes on to speak of the superstructure, the materials built upon him: *You also, as living stones, are built up*, v. 6. The apostle is recommending the Christian church and constitution to these dispersed Jews. It was natural for them to object that the Christian church had no such glorious temple, nor such a numerous priesthood; but its dispensation was mean, the services and sacrifices of it having nothing of the pomp and grandeur which the Jewish dispensation had. To this the apostle answers that the Christian church is a much nobler fabric than the Jewish temple; it is a living temple, consisting not of dead materials, but of living parts. Christ, the foundation, is a living stone. Christians are lively stones, and these make a spiritual house, and they are a holy priesthood; and, though they have no bloody sacrifices of beasts to offer, yet they have much better and more acceptable, and they have an altar too on which to present their offerings; for they offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Learn, (1.) All sincere Christians have in them a principle of spiritual life communicated to them from Christ their head: therefore, as he is called a living stone, so they are called lively, or living stones; not dead in trespasses and sins, but alive to God by regeneration and the working of the divine Spirit. (2.) The church of God is a spiritual house. The foundation is Christ, Eph. 2:22. It is a house for its strength, beauty, variety of parts, and usefulness of the whole. It is spiritual foundation, Christ Jesus,—in the materials of it, spiritual persons,—in its furniture, the graces of the Spirit,—in its connection, being held together by the Spirit of God and by one common faith,—and in its use, which is spiritual work, to offer up spiritual sacrifices. This house is daily built up, every part of it improving, and the whole supplied in every age by the addition of new particular members. (3.) All good Christians are a holy priesthood. The apostle speaks here of the generality of Christians, and tells them they are a holy priesthood; they are all select persons, sacred to God, serviceable to others, well endowed with heavenly gifts and graces, and well employed. (4.) This holy priesthood must and will offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. The spiritual sacrifices which Christians are to offer are their bodies, souls, affections,

prayers, praises, alms, and other duties. (5.) The most spiritual sacrifices of the best men are not acceptable to God, but through Jesus Christ; he is the only great high priest, through whom we and our services can be accepted; therefore bring all your oblations to him, and by him present them to God.

II. He confirms what he had asserted of Christ being a *living stone*, etc., from Isa. 28:16. Observe the manner of the apostle's quoting scripture, not by book, chapter, and verse; for these distinctions were not then made, so no more was said than a reference to Moses, David, or the prophets, except once a particular psalm was named, Acts 13:33. In their quotations they kept rather to the sense than the words of scripture, as appears from what is recited from the prophet in this place. He does not quote the scripture, neither the Hebrew nor Septuagint, word for word, yet makes a just and true quotation. The true sense of scripture may be justly and fully expressed in other than in scripture—words. *It is contained*. The verb is active, but our translators render it passively, to avoid the difficulty of finding a nominative case for it, which had puzzled so many interpreters before them. The matter of the quotation is this, *Behold, I lay in Zion*. Learn, 1. In the weighty matters of religion we must depend entirely upon scripture—proof; Christ and his apostles appealed to Moses, David, and the ancient prophets. The word of God is the only rule God hath given us. It is a perfect and sufficient rule. 2. The accounts that God hath given us in scripture concerning his Son Jesus Christ are what require our strictest attention. *Behold, I lay*, etc. John calls for the like attention, Jn. 1:29. These demands of attention to Christ show us the excellency of the matter, the importance of it, and our stupidity and dulness. 3. The constituting of Christ Jesus head of the church is an eminent work of God: *I lay in Zion*. The setting up of the pope for the head of the church is a human contrivance and an arrogant presumption; Christ only is the foundation and head of the church of God. 4. Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone that God hath laid in his spiritual building. The corner-stone stays inseparably with the building, supports it, unites it, and adorns it. So does Christ by his holy church, his spiritual house. 5. Jesus Christ is the corner-stone for the support and salvation of none but such as are his sincere people: none but Zion, and such as are of Zion; not for Babylon, not for his enemies. 6. True faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to prevent a man's utter confusion. Three things put a man into great confusion, and faith prevents them all—disappointment, sin, and judgment. Faith has a remedy for each.

III. He deduces an important inference, v. 7. Jesus Christ is said to be the chief corner-stone. Hence the apostle infers with respect to good men, "To you therefore who believe he is precious, or he is an honour. Christ is the crown and honour of a Christian; you who believe will be so far from being ashamed of him that you will boast of him and glory in him for ever." As to wicked men, the disobedient will go on to disallow and reject Jesus Christ; but God is resolved that he shall be, in despite of all opposition, the head of the corner. Learn, 1. Whatever is by just and necessary consequence deduced from scripture may be depended upon with as much certainty as if it were contained in express words of scripture. The apostle draws an inference from the prophet's testimony. The prophet did not expressly say so, but yet he said that from which the consequence was unavoidable. Our Saviour bids them search the scriptures, because they testified of him; and yet no place in those scriptures to which he there refers them said that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Yet those scriptures do say that he who should be born of a virgin, before the sceptre departed from Judah, during the second temple, and after Daniel's seventy weeks, was the

Messiah; but such was Jesus Christ: to collect this conclusion one must make use of reason, history, eye-sight, experience, and yet it is an infallible scripture—conclusion notwithstanding. 2. The business of a faithful minister is to apply general truths to the particular condition and state of his hearers. The apostle quotes a passage (v. 6) out of the prophet, and applies it severally to good and bad. This requires wisdom, courage, and fidelity; but it is very profitable to the hearers. 3. Jesus Christ is exceedingly precious to all the faithful. The majesty and grandeur of his person, the dignity of his office, his near relation, his wonderful works, his immense love—every thing engages the faithful to the highest esteem and respect for Jesus Christ. 4. Disobedient people have no true faith. By disobedient people understand those that are unpersuadable, incredulous, and impenitent. These may have some right notions, but no solid faith. 5. Those that ought to be builders of the church of Christ are often the worst enemies that Christ has in the world. In the Old Testament the false prophets did the most mischief; and in the New Testament the greatest opposition and cruelty that Christ met with were from the scribes, pharisees, chief priests, and those who pretended to build and take care of the church. Still the hierarchy of Rome is the worst enemy in the world to Jesus Christ and his interest. 6. God will carry on his own work, and support the interest of Jesus Christ in the world, notwithstanding the falseness of pretended friends and the opposition of his worst enemies.

IV. The apostle adds a further description, still preserving the metaphor of a stone, v. 8. The words are taken from Isa. 8:13, 14, *Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself—and he shall be for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence*, whence it is plain that Jesus Christ is the Lord of hosts, and consequently the most high God. Observe,

1. The builders, the chief-priests, refused him, and the people followed their leaders; and so Christ became to them *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*, at which they stumbled and hurt themselves; and in return he fell upon them as a mighty stone or rock, and punished them with destruction. Mt. 12:44, *Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder*. Learn, (1.) All those that are disobedient take offense at the word of God: *They stumble at the word, being disobedient*. They are offended with Christ himself, with his doctrine and the purity of his precepts; but the Jewish doctors more especially stumbled at the meanness of his appearance and the proposal of trusting only to him for their justification before God. They could not be brought to seek justification by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; *for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone*, Rom. 9:32. (2.) The same blessed Jesus who is the author of salvation to some is to others the occasion of their sin and destruction. *He is set for the rising and fall of many in Israel*. He is not the author of their sin, but only the occasion of it; their own disobedience makes them stumble at him and reject him, which he punishes, as a judge, with destruction. Those who reject him as a Saviour will split upon him as a Rock. (3.) God himself hath appointed everlasting destruction to all those who *stumble at the word, being disobedient*. All those who go on resolutely in their infidelity and contempt of the gospel are appointed to eternal destruction; and God from eternity knows who they are. (4.) To see the Jews generally rejecting Christ, and multitudes in all ages slighting him, ought not to discourage us in our love and duty to him; for this had been foretold by the prophets long ago, and is a confirmation of our faith both in the scriptures and in the Messiah.

2. Those who received him were highly privileged, v. 9. The Jews were exceedingly tender of their ancient privileges, of being

the only people of God, taken into a special covenant with him, and separated from the rest of the world. "Now," say they, "if we submit to the gospel—constitution, we shall lose all this, and stand upon the same level with the Gentiles."

(1.) To this objection the apostle answers, that if they did not submit they were ruined (v. 7, 8), but that if they did submit they should lose no real advantage, but continue still what they desired to be, *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood*, etc. Learn, [1.] All true Christians *are a chosen generation*; they all make one family, a sort and species of people distinct from the common world, of another spirit, principle, and practice, which they could never be if they were not chosen in Christ to be such, and sanctified by his Spirit. [2.] All the true servants of Christ are a royal priesthood. They are royal in their relation to God and Christ, in their power with God, and over themselves and all their spiritual enemies; they are princely in the improvements and the excellency of their own spirits, and in their hopes and expectations; they are a royal priesthood, separated from sin and sinners, consecrated to God, and offering to God spiritual services and oblations, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [3.] All Christians, wheresoever they be, compose one holy nation. They are one nation, collected under one head, agreeing in the same manners and customs, and governed by the same laws; and they are a holy nation, because consecrated and devoted to God, renewed and sanctified by his Holy Spirit. [4.] It is the honour of the servants of Christ that they are God's peculiar people. They are the people of his acquisition, choice, care, and delight. These four dignities of all genuine Christians are not natural to them; for their first state is a state of horrid darkness, but they are effectually called out of darkness into a state of marvellous light, joy, pleasure, and prosperity, with this intent and view, that they should show forth, by words and actions, the virtues and praises of him who hath called them.

(2.) To make this people content, and thankful for the great mercies and dignities brought unto them by the gospel, the apostle advises them to compare their former and their present state. Time was when they were not a people, nor had they obtained mercy, but they were solemnly disclaimed and divorced (Jer. 3:8; Hos. 1:6, 9); but now they are taken in again to be the people of God, and have obtained mercy. Learn, [1.] The best people ought frequently to look back upon what they were in time past. [2.] The people of God are the most valuable people in the world; all the rest are not a people, good for little. [3.] To be brought into the number of the people of God is a very great mercy, and it may be obtained.

V. He warns them to beware of fleshly lusts, v. 11. Even the best of men, *the chosen generation, the people of God*, need an exhortation to abstain from the worst sins, which the apostle here proceeds most earnestly and affectionately to warn them against. Knowing the difficulty, and yet the importance of the duty, he uses his utmost interest in them: *Dearly beloved, I beseech you*. The duty is to abstain from, and to suppress, the first inclination or rise of fleshly lusts. Many of them proceed from the corruption of nature, and in their exercise depend upon the body, gratifying some sensual appetite or inordinate inclination of the flesh. These Christians ought to avoid, considering, 1. The respect they have with God and good men: They are *dearly beloved*. 2. Their condition in the world: *They are strangers and pilgrims*, and should not impede their passage by giving into the wickedness and lusts of the country through which they pass. 3. The mischief and danger these sins do: *"They war against the soul"*; and therefore your souls ought to war against them." Learn, (1.) The grand mischief that sin does to man is this, it *wars against the soul*; it destroys the moral liberty of the soul; it weakens and debilitates the soul by impairing its

faculties; it robs the soul of its comfort and peace; it debases and destroys the dignity of the soul, hinders its present prosperity, and plunges it into everlasting misery. (2.) Of all sorts of sin, none are more injurious to the soul than *fleshly lusts*. Carnal appetites, lewdness, and sensuality, are most odious to God, and destructive to man's soul. It is a sore judgment to be given up to them.

VI. He exhorts them further to adorn their profession by an honest conversation. Their conversation in every turn, every instance, and every action of their lives, ought to be honest; that is, good, lovely, decent, amiable, and without blame: and that because they lived among the Gentiles, people of another religion, and who were inveterate enemies to them, who did already slander them and constantly spoke evil of them *as of evil-doers*. "A clean, just, good conversation may not only stop their mouths, but may possibly be a means to bring them to glorify God, and turn to you, when they shall see you excel all others in good works. They now call you evil-doers; vindicate yourselves by good works, this is the way to convince them. There is a day of visitation coming, wherein God may call them by his word and his grace to repentance; and then they will glorify God, and applaud you, for your excellent conversation, Lu. 1:68. When the gospel shall come among them, and take effect, a good conversation will encourage them in their conversion, but an evil one will obstruct it." Note, 1. A Christian profession should be attended with an honest conversation, Phil. 4:8. 2. It is the common lot of the best Christians to be evil spoken of by wicked men. 3. Those that are under God's gracious visitation immediately change their opinion of good people, glorifying God and commending those whom before they railed at as evil-doers.

Verses 13-25

The general rule of a Christian conversation is this, it must be honest, which it cannot be if there be not a conscientious discharge of all relative duties. The apostle here particularly treats of these distinctly.

I. The case of subjects. Christians were not only reputed innovators in religion, but disturbers of the state; it was highly necessary, therefore, that the apostle should settle the rules and measures of obedience to the civil magistrate, which he does here, where,

1. The duty required is submission, which comprises loyalty and reverence to their persons, obedience to their just laws and commands, and subjection to legal penalties.

2. The persons or objects to whom this submission is due are described, (1.) More generally: *Every ordinance of man*.

Magistracy is certainly of divine right; but the particular form of government, the power of the magistrate, and the persons who are to execute this power, are of human institution, and are governed by the laws and constitutions of each particular country; and this is a general rule, binding in all nations, let the established form of be what it will. (2.) Particularly: *To the king, as supreme*, first in dignity and most eminent in degree; the king is a legal person, not a tyrant: *or unto governors, deputies, proconsuls, rulers of provinces, who are sent by him*, that is, commissioned by him to govern.

3. The reasons to enforce this duty are,

(1.) *For the Lord's sake*, who had ordained magistracy for the good of mankind, who has required obedience and submission (Rom. 13), and whose honour is concerned in the dutiful behavior of subjects to their sovereigns.

(2.) From the end and use of the magistrate's office, which are, to punish evil-doers, and to praise and encourage all those that do well. They were appointed for the good of societies; and, where this end is not pursued, the fault is not in their institution but their practice. [1.] True religion is the best support of civil government; it requires submission for the Lord's sake, and for conscience' sake. [2.] All the punishments, and all the magistrates in the world, cannot hinder but there will be evil-doers in it. [3.] The best way the magistrate can take to discharge his own duty, and to amend the world, is to punish well and reward well. (3.) Another reason why Christians should submit to the evil magistrate is because it *is the will of God*, and consequently their duty; and because it is the way to put to silence the malicious slanders of ignorant and foolish men, v. 15. Learn, [1.] *The will of God is*, to a good man, the strongest reason for any duty. [2.] Obedience to magistrates is a considerable branch of a Christian's duty: *So is the will of God*. [3.] A Christian must endeavour, in all relations, to behave himself so as to put to silence the unreasonable reproaches of the most ignorant and foolish men. [4.] Those who speak against religion and religious people are ignorant and foolish.

(4.) He reminds them of the spiritual nature of Christian liberty. The Jews, from Deu. 17:15, concluded that they were bound to obey no sovereign but one *taken from their own brethren*; and the converted Jews thought they were free from subjection by their relation to Christ. To prevent their mistakes, the apostle tells the Christians that they were free, but from what? Not from duty or obedience to God's law, which requires subjection to the civil magistrate. They were free spiritually from the bondage of sin and Satan, and the ceremonial law; but they must not make their Christian liberty a cloak or covering for any wickedness, or for the neglect of any duty towards God or towards their superiors, but must still remember they were *the servants of God*. Learn, [1.] All the servants of Christ are free men (Jn. 8:36); they are *free* from Satans' dominion, the law's condemnation, the wrath of God, the uneasiness of duty, and the terrors of death. [2.] The servants of Jesus Christ ought to be very careful not to abuse their Christian liberty; they must not make it a cover or cloak for any wickedness against God or disobedience to superiors.

4. The apostle concludes his discourse concerning the duty of subjects with four admirable precepts:—(1.) *Honour all men*. A due respect is to be given to all men; the poor are not to be despised (Prov. 17:5); the wicked must be honoured, not for their wickedness, but for any other qualities, such as wit, prudence, courage, eminency of employment, or the hoary head. Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, the prophets, and the apostles, never scrupled to give due honour to bad men. (2.) *Love the brotherhood*. All Christians are a fraternity, united to Christ the head, alike disposed and qualified, nearly related in the same interest, having communion one with another, and going to the same home; they should therefore love one another with an especial affection. (3.) *Fear God* with the highest reverence, duty, and submission; if this be wanting, none of the other three duties can be performed as they ought. (4.) *Honour the king* with that highest honour that is peculiarly due to him above other men.

II. The case of servants wanted an apostolical determination as well as that of subjects, for they imagined that their Christian liberty set them free from their unbelieving and cruel masters; to this the apostle answers, *Servants, be subject*, v. 18. By *servants* he means those who were strictly such, whether hired, or bought with money, or taken in the wars, or born in the house, or those who served by contract for a limited time, as apprentices. Observe,

1. He orders them to *be subject*, to do their business faithfully and honestly, to conduct themselves, as inferiors ought, with reverence and affection, and to submit patiently to hardships and inconveniences. This subjection they owe to their masters, who have a right to their service; and that *not only to the good and gentle*, such as use them well and abate somewhat of their right, but even to the crooked and perverse, who are scarcely to be pleased at all. Learn, (1.) Servants ought to behave themselves to their masters with submission, and fear of displeasing them. (2.) The sinful misconduct of one relation does not justify the sinful behaviour of the other; the servant is bound to do his duty, though the master be sinfully froward and perverse. (3.) Good people are meek and gentle to their servants and inferiors. Our holy apostle shows his love and concern for the souls of poor servants, as well as for higher people. Herein he ought to be imitated by all inferior ministers, who should distinctly apply their counsels to the lower, the meaner, the younger, and the poorer sort of their hearers, as well as others.

2. Having charged them to be subject, he condescends to reason with them about it.

(1.) If they were patient under their hardships, while they suffered unjustly, and continued doing their duty to their unbelieving and untoward masters, this would be acceptable to God, and he would reward all that they suffered for conscience towards him; but to be patient when they were justly chastised would deserve no commendation at all; it is only *doing well, and suffering patiently for that, which is acceptable with God*, v. 19, 20. Learn, [1.] There is no condition so mean but a man may live conscientiously in it, and glorify God in it; the meanest servant may do so. [2.] The most conscientious persons are very often the greatest sufferers. *For conscience towards God, they suffer wrongfully; they do well, and suffer for it*; but sufferers of this sort are praiseworthy, they do honour to God and to religion, and they are accepted of him; and this is their highest support and satisfaction. [3.] Deserved sufferings must be endured with patience: *If you are buffeted for your faults, you must take it patiently*. Sufferings in this world are not always pledges of our future happiness; if children or servants be rude and undutiful, and suffer for it, this will neither be acceptable with God nor procure the praise of men.

(2.) More reasons are given to encourage Christian servants to patience under unjust sufferings, v. 21. [1.] From their Christian calling and profession: *Hereunto were you called*. [2.] From the example of Christ, who *suffered for us*, and so became our *example, that we should follow his steps*, whence learn, *First*, Good Christians are a sort of people called to be sufferers, and therefore they must expect it; by the terms of Christianity they are bound to deny themselves, and take up the cross; they are called by the commands of Christ, by the dispensations of Providence, and by the preparations of divine grace; and, by the practice of Jesus Christ, they are bound to suffer when thus called to it. *Secondly*, Jesus Christ *suffered for you, or for us*; it was not the Father that suffered, but he whom the Father sanctified, and sent into the world, for that end; it was both the body and soul of Christ that suffered, and he suffered for us, in our stead and for our good, v. 24. *Thirdly*, The sufferings of Christ should quiet us under the most unjust and cruel sufferings we meet with in the world. He suffered voluntarily, not for himself, but for us, with the utmost readiness, with perfect patience, from all quarters, and all this though he was God—man; shall not we sinners, who deserve the worst, submit to the light afflictions of this life, which work for us unspeakable advantages afterwards?

3. The example of Christ's subjection and patience is here explained and amplified: *Christ suffered*, (1.) Wrongfully, and

without cause; for he *did no sin*, v. 22. *He had done no violence*, no injustice or wrong to any one—he wrought no iniquity of any sort whatever; *neither was guile found in his mouth* (Isa. 53:9), his words, as well as his actions, were all sincere, just, and right. (2.) Patiently: *When he was reviled, he reviled not again* (v. 23); when they blasphemed him, mocked him, called him foul names, he was *dumb, and opened not his mouth*; when they went further, to real injuries, beating, buffeting, and crowning him with thorns, *he threatened not; but committed both himself and his cause to God that judgeth righteously*, who would in time clear his innocency, and avenge him on his enemies. Learn, [1.] Our Blessed Redeemer was perfectly holy, and so free from sin that no temptation, no provocation whatsoever, could extort from him so much as the least sinful or indecent word. [2.] Provocations to sin can never justify the commission of it. The rudeness, cruelty, and injustice of enemies, will not justify Christians in reviling and revenge; the reasons for sin can never be so great, but we have always stronger reasons to avoid it. [3.] The judgment of God will determine justly upon every man and every cause; and thither we ought, with patience and resignation, to refer ourselves.

4. Lest any should think, from what is said, v. 21–23, that Christ's death was designed merely for an example of patience under sufferings, the apostle here adds a more glorious design and effect of it: *Who his own self*, etc., where note, (1.) The person suffering—Jesus Christ: *His own self—in his own body*. The expression *his own self* is emphatic, and necessary to show that he verified all the ancient prophecies, to distinguish him from the Levitical priests (who offered the blood of others, but he by *himself purged our sins*, Heb. 1:3), and to exclude all others from participation with him in the work of man's redemption: it is added, *in his body*; not but that he suffered in his soul (Mt. 26:38), but the sufferings of the soul were inward and concealed, when those of the body were visible and more obvious to the consideration of these suffering servants, for whose sake this example is produced. (2.) The sufferings he underwent were *stripes*, wounds, and death, *the death of the cross*—servile and ignominious punishments! (3.) The reason of his sufferings: He *bore our sins*, which teaches, [1.] That Christ, in his sufferings, stood charged with our sins, as one who had undertaken to put them away by *the sacrifice of himself*, Isa. 53:6. [2.] That he bore the punishment of them, and thereby satisfied divine justice. [3.] That hereby he takes away our sins, and removes them away from us; as the scape-goat did typically bear the sins of the people on his head, and then carried them quite away, (Lev. 16:21, 22), so the Lamb of God does first bear our sins in his own body, and thereby take away the sins of the world, Jn. 1:29. (4.) The fruits of Christ's sufferings are, [1.] Our sanctification, consisting of the death, the mortification of sin, and a new holy life of righteousness, for both which we have an example, and powerful motives and abilities also, from the death and resurrection of Christ. [2.] Our justification. Christ was bruised and crucified as an expiatory sacrifice, and *by his stripes we are healed*. Learn, *First*, Jesus Christ bore the sins of all his people, and expiated them by his *death upon the cross*. *Secondly*, No man can depend safely upon Christ, as having borne his sin and expiated his guilt, till he dies unto sin and lives unto righteousness.

5. The apostle concludes his advice to Christian servants, by putting them in mind of the difference between their former and present condition, v. 25. They *were as sheep going astray*, which represents, (1.) Man's sin: he goes astray; it is his own act, he is not driven, but does voluntary go astray. (2.) His misery: he goes astray from the pasture, from the shepherd, and from the

flock, and so exposes himself to innumerable dangers. (3.) Here is the recovery of these by conversion: *But are now returned*. The word is passive, and shows that the return of a sinner is the effect of divine grace. This return is from all their errors and wanderings, to Christ, who is the true careful shepherd, that loves his sheep, and laid down his life for them, who is the most vigilant pastor, and bishop, or overseer of souls. Learn, [1.] Sinners, before their conversion, are always going astray; their life is a continued error. [2.] Jesus Christ is the supreme shepherd and bishop of souls, who is always resident with his flock, and watchful over them. [3.] Those that expect the love and care of this universal pastor must return to him, must die unto sin, and live unto righteousness

Chapter 3

Wherein the apostle describes the duties of husbands and wives one to another, beginning with the duty of the wife (v. 1-7). He exhorts Christians to unity, love, compassion, peace, and patience under sufferings; to oppose the slanders of their enemies, not by returning evil for evil, or railing for railing, but by blessing; by a ready account of their faith and hope, and by keeping a good conscience (v. 8–17). To encourage them to this, he proposes the example of Christ, who suffered, the just for the unjust, but yet punished the old world for their disobedience, and saved the few who were faithful in the days of Noah (v. 18 to the end).

Verses 1-7

The apostle having treated of the duties of subjects to their sovereigns, and of servants to their masters, proceeds to explain the duty of husbands and wives.

I. Lest the Christian matrons should imagine that their conversion to Christ, and their interest in all Christian privileges, exempted them from subjection to their pagan or Jewish husbands, the apostle here tells them,

1. In what the duty of wives consists.

(1.) In *subjection*, or an affectionate submission to the will, and obedience to the just authority, of *their own husbands*, which obliging conduct would be the most likely way to win those disobedient and unbelieving husbands who had rejected the word, or who attended to no other evidence of the truth of it than what they saw in the prudent, peaceable, and exemplary *conversation of their wives*. Learn, [1.] Every distinct relation has its particular duties, which ministers ought to preach, and the people ought to understand. [2.] A cheerful *subjection*, and a loving, reverential respect, are duties which Christian women owe their husbands, whether they be good or bad; these were due from Eve to Adam before the fall, and are still required, though much more difficult now than they were before, Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:11. [3.] Though the design of the word of the gospel is to win and gain souls to Christ Jesus, yet there are many so obstinate that they will not be *won by the word*. [4.] There is nothing more powerful, next to the word of God, to win people, than a good conversation, and the careful discharge of relative duties. [5.] Irreligion and infidelity do not dissolve the bonds, nor dispense with the duties, of civil relations; *the wife* must discharge her duty *to her own husband*, though he *obey not the word*.

(2.) In *fear*, or reverence to their husbands, Eph. 5:33.

(3.) In a *chaste conversation*, which their unbelieving husbands would accurately observe and attend to. [1.] Evil men are strict observers of the conversation of the professors of religion; their curiosity, envy, and jealousy, make them watch narrowly the ways and lives of good people. [2.] A *chaste conversation*, attended with due and proper respect to every one, is an excellent means to win them to the faith of the gospel and obedience to the word.

(4.) In preferring the ornaments of the mind to those of the body. [1.] He lays down a rule in regard to the dress of religious women, v. 3. Here are three sorts of ornaments forbidden: *plaiting of hair*, which was commonly used in those times by lewd women; *wearing of gold*, or ornaments made of *gold*, was practised by Rebecca, and Esther, and other religious women, but

afterwards became the attire chiefly of harlots and wicked people; *putting on of apparel*, which is not absolutely forbidden, but only too much nicety and costliness in it. Learn, *First*, Religious people should take care that all their external behaviour be answerable to their profession of Christianity: *They must be holy in all manner of conversation*. *Secondly*, The outward adorning of the body is very often sensual and excessive; for instance, when it is immoderate, and above your degree and station in the world, when you are proud of it and puffed up with it, when you dress with design to allure and tempt others, when your apparel is too rich, curious, or superfluous, when your fashions are fantastical, imitating the levity and vanity of the worst people, and when they are immodest and wanton. The attire of a harlot can never become a chaste Christian matron. [2.] Instead of the outward adorning of the body, he directs Christian wives to put on much more excellent and beautiful ornaments, v. 4. Here note, *First*, The part to be adorned: *The hidden man of the heart*; that is, the soul; the hidden, the inner man. Take care to adorn and beautify your souls rather than your bodies. *Secondly*, The ornament prescribed. It must, in general, be something *not corruptible*, that beautifies the soul, that is, the graces and virtues of God's Holy Spirit. The ornaments of the body are destroyed by the moth, and perish in the using; but the grace of God, the longer we wear it, the brighter and better it is. More especially, the finest ornament of Christian women is *a meek and quiet spirit*, a tractable easy temper of mind, void of passion, pride, and immoderate anger, discovering itself in a quiet obliging behaviour towards their husbands and families. If the husband be harsh, and averse to religion (which was the case of these good wives to whom the apostle gives this direction), there is no way so likely to win him as a prudent meek behaviour. At least, a quiet spirit will make a good woman easy to herself, which, being visible to others, becomes an amiable ornament to a person in the eyes of the world. *Thirdly*, The excellency of it. Meekness and calmness of spirit are, in the sight of God, of great price-amiable in the sight of men, and precious in the sight of God. Learn, 1. A true Christian's chief care lies in the right ordering and commanding of his own spirit. Where the hypocrite's work ends, there the true Christian's work begins. 2. The endowments of the inner man are the chief ornaments of a Christian; but especially a composed, calm, and quiet spirit, renders either man or woman beautiful and lovely.

2. The duties of Christian wives being in their nature difficult, the apostle enforces them by the example, (1.) Of the holy women of old, who trusted in God, v. 5. "You can pretend nothing of excuse from the weakness of your sex, but what they might. They lived *in old time*, and had less knowledge to inform them and fewer examples to encourage them; yet in all ages they practised this duty; they were *holy women*, and therefore their example is obligatory; they *trusted in God*, and yet did not neglect their duty to man: the duties imposed upon you, of a quiet spirit and of subjection to your own husbands, are not new, but what have ever been practised by the greatest and best women in the world." (2.) Of Sara, who obeyed her husband, and followed him when he went from Ur of the Chaldeans, *not knowing whither he went*, and *called him lord*, thereby showing him reverence and acknowledging his superiority over her; and all this though she was declared a princess by God from heaven, by the change of her name, "*Whose daughters you are* if you imitate her in faith and good works, and do not, through fear of your husbands, either quit the truth you profess or neglect your duty to them, but readily perform it, without either fear or force, out of conscience towards God and sense of duty to them." Learn, [1.] God takes exact notice, and keeps an exact record, of the

actions of all men and women in the world. [2.] The subjection of wives to their husbands is a duty which has been practised universally by holy women in all ages. [3.] The greatest honour of any man or woman lies in a humble and faithful deportment of themselves in the relation or condition in which Providence has placed them. [4.] God takes notice of the good that is in his servants, to their honour and benefit, but covers a multitude of failings; Sara's infidelity and derision are overlooked, when her virtues are celebrated. [5.] Christians ought to do their duty to one another, not out of fear, nor from force, but from a willing mind, and in obedience to the command of God. Wives should be in subjection to their churlish husbands, not from dread and amazement, but from a desire to do well and to please God.

II. The husband's duty to the wife comes next to be considered.

1. The particulars are, (1.) *Cohabitation*, which forbids unnecessary separation, and implies a mutual communication of goods and persons one to another, with delight and concord. (2.) *Dwelling with the wife according to knowledge*; not according to lust, as brutes; nor according to passion, as devils; but according to knowledge, as wise and sober men, who know the word of God and their own duty. (3.) *Giving honour to the wife*—giving due respect to her, and maintaining her authority, protecting her person, supporting her credit, delighting in her conversation, affording her a handsome maintenance, and placing a due trust and confidence in her.

2. The reasons are, Because she is *the weaker vessel* by nature and constitution, and so ought to be defended: but then the wife is, in other and higher respects, equal to her husband; they are *heirs together of the grace of life*, of all the blessings of this life and another, and therefore should live peaceably and quietly one with another, and, if they do not, their prayers one with another and one for another will be hindered, so that often "you will not pray at all, or, if you do, you will pray with a discomposed ruffled mind, and so without success." Learn, (1.) The weakness of the female sex is no just reason either for separation or contempt, but on the contrary it is a reason for honour and respect: *Giving honour to the wife as unto the weaker vessel*. (2.) There is an honour due to all who are heirs of the grace of life. (3.) All married people should take care to behave themselves so lovingly and peaceably one to another that they may not by their broils hinder the success of their prayers.

Verses 8-15

The apostle here passes from special to more general exhortations.

I. He teaches us how Christians and friends should treat one another. He advises Christians to *be all of one mind*, to be unanimous in the belief of the same faith, and the practice of the same duties of religion; and, whereas the Christians at that time were many of them in a suffering condition, he charges them to *have compassion one of another*, to *love as brethren*, to *pity* those who were in distress, and to *be courteous* to all. Hence learn, 1. Christians should endeavour to be all of one mind in the great points of faith, in real affection, and in Christian practice; they should be *like-minded one to another*, according to *Christ Jesus* (Rom. 15:5), not according to man's pleasure, but God's word. 2. Though Christians cannot be exactly of the same mind, yet they should have compassion one for another, and love as brethren; they ought not to persecute or hate one another, but love one another with more than common affection; they should love as brethren. 3. Christianity requires pity to the distressed, and civility to all. He must be a flagrant sinner, or a vile apostate, who is not a proper object of civil courtesy, 1 Co.

5:11; 2 Jn. 10:11.

II. He instructs us how to behave towards enemies. The apostle knew that Christians would *be hated* and evil-entreated of *all men for Christ's sake*; therefore,

1. He warns them not to return *evil for evil, nor railing for railing*; but, on the contrary, "when they rail at you, do you bless them; when they give you evil words, do you give them good ones; for Christ has both by his word and example called you to bless those that curse you, and has settled a blessing on you as your everlasting inheritance, though you were unworthy." To bear evils patiently, and to bless your enemies, is the way to obtain this blessing of God. Learn, (1.) To *render evil for evil, or railing for railing*, is a sinful unchristian practice; the magistrate may punish *evil-doers*, and private men may seek a legal remedy when they are wronged; but private revenge by duelling, scolding, or secret mischief, is forbidden Prov. 20:22; Lu. 6:27; Rom. 12:17; 1 Th. 5:15. To rail is to revile another in bitter, fierce, and reproachful terms; but for ministers to rebuke sharply, and to preach earnestly against the sins of the times, is not railing; all the prophets and apostles practised it, Isa. 56:10; Zep. 3:3; Acts 20:29. (2.) The laws of Christ oblige us to return blessing for railing. Mt. 5:44, "*Love your enemies, bless those that curse you, do good to those that hate you, and pray for those that persecute you*. You must not justify them in their sin, but you must do for your enemies all that justice requires or charity commands." We must pity, pray for, and love those who rail at us. (3.) A Christian's calling, as it invests him with glorious privileges, so it obliges him to difficult duties. (4.) All the true servants of God shall infallibly inherit a blessing; they have it already in a great degree, but the full possession of it is reserved to another state and world.

2. He gives an excellent prescription for a comfortable happy life in this quarrelsome ill-natured world (v. 10): it is quoted from Ps. 34:12–14. "If you earnestly desire that your life should be long, and your days peaceable and prosperous, keep your tongue from reviling, evil-speaking, and slandering, and your lips from lying, deceit, and dissimulation. Avoid doing any real damage or hurt to your neighbour, but be ever ready to do good, and to overcome evil with good; seek peace with all men, and pursue it, though it retire from you. This will be the best way to dispose people to speak well of you, and live peaceably with you." Learn, (1.) Good people under the Old and new Testament were obliged to the same moral duties; to *refrain the tongue from evil, and the lips from guile*, was a duty in David's time as well as now. (2.) It is lawful to consider temporal advantages as motives and encouragements to religion. (3.) The practice of religion, particularly the right government of the tongue, is the best way to make this life comfortable and prosperous; a sincere, inoffensive, discreet tongue, is a singular means to pass us peaceably and comfortably through the world. (4.) The avoiding of evil, and doing of good, is the way to contentment and happiness both here and hereafter. (5.) It is the duty of Christians not only to embrace peace when it is offered, but to seek and pursue it when it is denied: peace with societies, as well as peace with particular persons, in opposition to division and contention, is what is here intended.

3. He shows that Christians need not fear that such patient inoffensive behaviour as is prescribed will invite and encourage the cruelty of their enemies, for God will thereby be engaged on their side: *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous* (v. 12); he takes special notice of them, exercises a providential constant government over them, and bears a special respect and

affection to them. *His ears are open to their prayers*; so that if any injuries be offered to them they have this remedy, they may complain of it to their heavenly Father, whose ears are always attentive to the prayers of his servants in their distresses, and who will certainly aid them against their unrighteous enemies. *But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil*; his anger, and displeasure, and revenge, will pursue them; for he is more an enemy to wicked persecutors than men are. Observe, (1.) We must not in all cases adhere to the express words of scripture, but study the sense and meaning of them, otherwise we shall be led into blasphemous errors and absurdities: we must not imagine that God hath eyes, and ears, and face, though these are the express words of the scripture. (2.) God hath a special care and paternal affection towards all his righteous people. (3.) God doth always hear the prayers of the faithful, Jn. 4:31; 1 Jn. 5:14; Heb. 4:16. (4.) Though God is infinitely good, yet he abhors impenitent sinners, and will pour out his wrath upon those that do evil. He will do himself right, and do all the world justice; and his goodness is no obstruction to his doing so.

4. This patient humble behaviour of Christians is further recommended and urged from two considerations:—(1.) This will be the best and surest way to prevent suffering; for *who is he that will harm you?* v. 13. This, I suppose, is spoken of Christians in an ordinary condition, not in the heat of persecution. "Ordinarily, there will be but few so diabolical and impious as to harm those who live so innocently and usefully as you do." (2.) This is the way to improve sufferings. *"If you be followers of that which is good, and yet suffer, this is suffering for righteousness sake* (v. 14), and will be your glory and your happiness, as it entitles you to the blessing promised by Christ" (Mt. 5:10); therefore, [1.] "You need not be afraid of any thing they can do to strike you with terror, neither be much troubled nor concerned about the rage or force of your enemies." Learn, *First*, to follow always that which is good is the best course we can take to keep out of harm's way. *Secondly*, To suffer for righteousness sake is the honour and happiness of a Christian; to suffer for the cause of truth, a good conscience, or any part of a Christian's duty, is a great honour; the delight of it is greater than the torment, the honour more than the disgrace, and the gain much greater than the loss. *Thirdly*, Christians have no reason to be afraid of the threats or rage of any of their enemies. "Your enemies are God's enemies, *his face is against them*, his power is above them, they are the objects of his curse, and can do nothing to you but by his permission; therefore trouble not yourselves about them." [2.] Instead of terrifying yourselves with the fear of men, be sure to *sanctify the Lord God in your hearts* (v. 15); *let him be your fear, and let him be your dread*, Isa. 8:12, 13. *Fear not those that can only kill the body, but fear him that can destroy body and soul*, Lu. 12:4, 5. We sanctify the Lord God in our hearts when we with sincerity and fervency adore him, when our thoughts of him are awful and reverend, when we rely upon his power, trust to his faithfulness, submit to his wisdom, imitate his holiness, and give him the glory due to his most illustrious perfections. We sanctify God before others when our deportment is such as invites and encourages others to glorify and honour him; both are required, Lev. 10:3. "When this principle is laid deeply into your hearts, the next thing, as to men, is to be always ready, that is, able and willing, *to give an answer*, or make an apology or defence, of the faith you profess, and that *to every man that asketh a reason of your hope*, what sort of hope you have, or which you suffer such hardships in the world." Learn, *First*, An awful sense of the divine perfections is the best antidote against the fear of sufferings; did we fear God more, we should certainly fear men less. *Secondly*, The hope and faith of a Christian are defensible against all the world. There may be a

good reason given for religion; it is not a fancy but a rational scheme revealed from heaven, suited to all the necessities of miserable sinners, and centering entirely in the glory of God through Jesus Christ. *Thirdly*, Every Christian is bound to answer and apologize for the hope that is in him. Christians should have a reason ready for their Christianity, that it may appear they are not actuated either by folly or fancy. This defence may be necessary more than once or twice, so that Christians should be always prepared to make it, either to the magistrate, if he demand it, or to any inquisitive Christian, who desires to know it for his information or improvement. *Fourthly*, These confessions of our faith ought to be made *with meekness and fear*; apologies for our religion ought to be made with modesty and meekness, in the fear of God, with jealousy over ourselves, and reverence to our superiors.

Verses 16-17

The confession of a Christian's faith cannot credibly be supported but by the two means here specified—*a good conscience* and *a good conversation*. conscience is good when it does its office well, when it is kept pure and uncorrupt, and clear from guilt; then it will justify you, though men accuse you. *A good conversation in Christ* is a holy life, according to the doctrine and example of Christ. "Look well to your conscience, and to your conversation; and then, though men speak evil of you, and falsely accuse you as evil-doers, you will clear yourselves, and bring them to shame. Perhaps you may think it hard to suffer for well-doing, for keeping a good conscience and a good conversation; but be not discouraged, for it is better for you, though worse for your enemies, that you suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing." Learn, 1. The most conscientious persons cannot escape the censures and slanders of evil men; they will speak evil of them, as of evil-doers, and charge them with crimes which their very souls abhor: Christ and his apostles were so used. 2. A good conscience and a good conversation are the best means to secure a good name; these give a solid reputation and a lasting one. 3. False accusation generally turns to the accuser's shame, by discovering at last the accuser's indiscretion, injustice, falsehood, and uncharitableness. 4. It is sometimes the will of God that good people should suffer for well-doing, for their honesty and for their faith. 5. As well-doing sometimes exposes a good man to suffering, so evil-doing will not exempt an evil man from it. The apostle supposes here that a man may suffer for both. If the sufferings of good people for well-doing be so severe, what will the sufferings of wicked people be for evil-doing? It is a sad condition which that person is in upon whom sin and suffering meet together at the same time; sin makes sufferings to be extreme, unprofitable, comfortless, and destructive.

Verses 18-20

Here, I. The example of Christ is proposed as an argument for patience under sufferings, the strength of which will be discerned if we consider the several points contained in the words; observe therefore, 1. Jesus Christ himself was not exempted from sufferings in this life, though he had no guilt of his own and could have declined all suffering if he had pleased. 2. The reason or meritorious cause of Christ's suffering was the sins of men: *Christ suffered for sins*. The sufferings of Christ were a true and proper punishment; this punishment was suffered to expiate and to make an atonement for sin; and it extends to all sin. 3. In the case of our Lord's suffering, it was the just that suffered for the unjust; he substituted himself in our room and stead, and bore our iniquities. He that knew no sin suffered instead of those that knew no righteousness. 4. The merit and

perfection of Christ's sacrifice were such that for him to suffer once was enough. The legal sacrifices were repeated from day to day, and from year to year; but the sacrifice of Christ, once offered, purgeth away sin, Heb. 7:27; 9:26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14. 5. The blessed end or design of our Lord's sufferings was to bring us to God, to reconcile us to God, to give us access to the Father, to render us and our services acceptable, and to bring us to eternal glory, Eph. 2:13, 18; 3:12; Heb. 10:21, 22. 6. The issue and event of Christ's suffering, as to himself, were these, he was put to death in his human nature, but he was quickened and raised again by the Spirit. Now, if Christ was not exempted from sufferings, why should Christians expect it? If he suffered, to expiate sins, why should not we be content when our sufferings are only for trial and correction, but not for expiation? If he, though perfectly just, why should not we, who are all criminals? If he once suffered, and then entered into glory, shall not we be patient under trouble, since it will be but a little time and we shall follow him to glory? If he *suffered, to bring us to God*, shall not we submit to difficulties, since they are of so much use to quicken us in our return to God, and in the performance of our duty to him?

II. The apostle passes from the example of Christ to that of the old world, and sets before the Jews, to whom he wrote, the different event of those who believed and obeyed Christ preaching by Noah, from those that continued disobedient and unbelieving, intimating to the Jews that they were under a like sentence. God would not wait much longer upon them. They had now an offer of mercy; those that accepted of it should be saved, but those who rejected Christ and the gospel should be as certainly destroyed as ever the disobedient in the times of Noah were.

1. For the explication of this we may notice, (1.) The preacher—Christ Jesus, who has interested himself in the affairs of the church and of the world ever since he was first promised to Adam, Gen. 3:15. *He went*, not by a local motion, but by special operation, as God is frequently said to move, Gen. 11:5; Hos. 5:15; Mic. 1:3. *He went and preached*, by his Spirit striving with them, and inspiring and enabling Enoch and Noah to plead with them, and *preach righteousness to them*, as 2 Pt. 2:5. (2.) The hearers. Because they were dead and disembodied when the apostle speaks of them, therefore he properly calls them spirits now *in prison*; not that they were *in prison when Christ preached to them*, as the vulgar Latin translation and the popish expositors pretend. (3.) The sin of these people: They were *disobedient*, that is, *rebellious, unpersuadable, and unbelieving*, as the word signifies; this their sin is aggravated from the patience and *long-suffering of God* (which *once waited* upon them for 120 years together), *while Noah was preparing the ark*, and by that, as well as by his preaching, giving them fair warning of what was coming upon them. (4.) The event of all: Their bodies were drowned, and their spirits cast into hell, which is called a prison (Mt. 5:25; 2 Pt. 2:4, 5); but Noah and his family, who believed and were obedient, *were saved in the ark*.

2. From the whole we learn that, (1.) God takes exact notice of all the means and advantages that people in all ages have had for the salvation of their souls; it is put to the account of the old world that Christ offered them his help, sent his Spirit, gave them fair warning by Noah, and waited a long time for their amendment. (2.) Though the patience of God wait long upon sinners, yet it will expire at last; it is beneath the majesty of the great God always to wait upon man in vain. (3.) The spirits of disobedient sinners, as soon as they are out of their bodies, are committed to the prison of hell, whence there is no redemption. (4.) The way of the most is neither the best, the wisest, nor the safest way to follow: better to follow the eight in the ark than

the eight millions drowned by the flood and damned to hell.

Verses 21-22

Noah's salvation in the ark upon the water prefigured the salvation of all good Christians in the church by baptism; that temporal salvation by the ark was a type, the antitype whereunto is the eternal salvation of believers by baptism, to prevent mistakes about which the apostle,

I. Declares what he means by saving baptism; not the outward ceremony of washing with water, which, in itself, does no more than put away the filth of the flesh, but it is that baptism wherein there is a faithful answer or restipulation of a resolved good conscience, engaging to believe in, and be entirely devoted to, God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, renouncing at the same time the flesh, the world, and the devil. The baptismal covenant, made and kept, will certainly save us. Washing is the visible sign; this is the thing signified.

II. The apostle shows that the efficacy of baptism to salvation depends not upon the work done, but upon the resurrection of Christ, which supposes his death, and is the foundation of our faith and hope, to which we are rendered conformable by dying to sin, and rising again to holiness and newness of life. Learn, 1. the sacrament of baptism, rightly received, is a means and a pledge of salvation. *Baptism now saveth us*. God is pleased to convey his blessings to us in and by his ordinances, Acts 2:38; 22:16. 2. The external participation of baptism will save no man without an answerable good conscience and conversation. There must be the answer of a good conscience towards God.—*Obj.* Infants cannot make such an answer, and therefore ought not to be baptized.—*Answer*, the true circumcision was that of the heart and of the spirit (Rom. 2:29), which children were no more capable of then than our infants are capable of making this answer now; yet they were allowed circumcision at eight days old. The infants of the Christian church therefore may be admitted to the ordinance with as much reason as the infants of the Jewish, unless they are barred from it by some express prohibition of Christ.

III. The apostle, having mentioned the death and resurrection of Christ, proceeds to speak of his ascension, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, as a subject fit to be considered by these believers for their comfort in their suffering condition, v. 22. If the advancement of Christ was so glorious after his deep humiliation, let not his followers despair, but expect that after these short distresses they shall be advanced to transcendent joy and glory. Learn, 1. Jesus Christ, after he had finished his labours and his sufferings upon earth, ascended triumphantly into heaven, of which see Acts 1:9–11; Mk. 16:19. He went to heaven to receive his own acquired crown and glory (Jn. 17:5), to finish that part of his mediatorial work which could not be done on earth, and make intercession for his people, to demonstrate the fulness of his satisfaction, to take possession of heaven for his people, to prepare mansions for them, and to send down the Comforter, which was to be the first-fruits of his intercession, Jn. 16:7. 2. Upon his ascension into heaven, Christ is enthroned at the right hand of the Father. His being said to *sit* there imports absolute rest and cessation from all further troubles and sufferings, and an advancement to the highest personal dignity and sovereign power. 3. Angels, authorities, and powers, are all made subject to Christ Jesus: *all power in heaven and earth*, to command, to give law, issue orders, and pronounce a final sentence, is committed to Jesus, God—man, which his enemies will find to their everlasting sorrow and confusion, but his servants to their eternal joy and satisfaction.

Chapter 4

The work of a Christian is twofold—doing the will of God and suffering his pleasure. This chapter directs us in both. The duties we are here exhorted to employ ourselves in are the mortification of sin, living to God, sobriety, prayer, charity, hospitality, and the best improvement of our talents, which the apostle presses upon Christians from the consideration of the time they have lost in their sins, and the approaching end of all things (v. 1–11). The directions for sufferings are that we should not be surprised at them, but rejoice in them, only take care not to suffer as evil-doers. He intimates that their trials were near at hand, that their souls were in danger as well as their bodies, and that the best way to preserve their souls is to commit them to God in well-doing.

Verses 1-3

The apostle here draws a new inference from the consideration of Christ's sufferings. As he had before made use of it to persuade to patience in suffering, so here to mortification of sin. Observe,

I. How the exhortation is expressed. The antecedent or supposition is *that Christ had suffered* for us in the flesh, or in his human nature. The consequent or inference is, "*Arm and fortify yourselves likewise with the same mind, courage, and resolution.*" The word flesh in the former part of the verse signifies Christ's human nature, but in the latter part it signifies man's corrupt nature. So the sense is, "As Christ suffered in his human nature, do you, according to your baptismal vow and profession, make your corrupt nature suffer, by putting to death the body of sin by self-denial and mortification; for, if you do not thus suffer, you will be conformable to Christ in his death and resurrection, and will cease *from sin.*" Learn, 1. Some of the strongest and best arguments against all sorts of sin are taken from the sufferings of Christ. All sympathy and tenderness for Christ as a sufferer are lost if you do not put away sin. He dies to destroy it; and, though he could cheerfully submit to the worst sufferings, yet he could never submit to the least sin. 2. The beginning of all true mortification lies in the mind, not in penances and hardships upon the body. The mind of man is carnal, full of enmity; the understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, Eph. 4:18. Man is not a sincere creature, but partial, blind, and wicked, till he be renewed and sanctified by the regenerating grace of God.

II. How it is further explained, v. 2. The apostle explains what he means by being dead to sin, and ceasing from sin, both negatively and positively. Negatively, a Christian ought *no longer to live the rest of his time in the flesh*, to the sinful lusts and corrupt desires of carnal wicked men; but, positively, he ought to conform himself to the revealed will of the holy God. Learn, 1. The lusts of men are the springs of all their wickedness, Jam. 1:13, 14. Let occasional temptations be what they will, they could not prevail, were it not for men's own corruptions. 2. All good Christians make the will of God, not their own lusts or desires, the rule of their lives and actions. 3. True conversion makes a marvellous change in the heart and life of every one who partakes of it. It brings a man off from all his old, fashionable, and delightful lusts, and from the common ways and vices of the world, to the will of God. It alters the mind, judgment, affections, way, and conversation of every one who has experienced it.

III. How it is enforced (v. 3): *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles*, etc. Here the apostle argues from equity. "It is but just, equal, and reasonable, that as you have hitherto all the former part of your life served sin and Satan, so you should now serve the living God." Though those were Jews to whom the apostle wrote, yet the living among the Gentiles they had learned their way. Observe, 1. When a man is truly converted, it is very grievous to him to think how the time past of his life has been spent; the hazard he has run so many years, the mischief he has done to others, the dishonour done to God, and the loss he has sustained, are very afflicting to him. 2. While the will of man is unsanctified and corrupt, he walks continually in wicked ways; he makes them his choice and delight, his work and business, and he makes a bad condition daily worse and worse. 3. One sin, allowed, draws on another. Here are six named, and they have a connection and dependence one upon another. (1.) *Lasciviousness* or wantonness, expressed in looks, gesture, or behaviour, Rom. 13:13. (2.) *Lusts*, acts of lewdness, such as whoredom and adultery. (3.) *Excess of wine*, though short of drunkenness, an immoderate use of it, to the prejudice of health or business, is here condemned. (4.) *Revellings*, or luxurious feasting, too frequent, too full, or too expensive. (5.) *Banquetings*, by which is meant gluttony or excess in eating. (6.) *Abominable* idolatry; the idol-worship of the Gentiles was attended with lewdness, drunkenness, gluttony, and all sorts of brutality and cruelty; and these Jews living long among them were, some of them at least, debauched and corrupted by such practices. 4. It is a Christian's duty not only to abstain from what is grossly wicked, but also from those things that are generally the occasions of sin, or carry the appearance of evil. *Excess of wine* and immoderate feasting are forbidden as well as lust and idolatry.

Verses 4-6

I. Here you have the visible change wrought in those who in the foregoing verse were represented as having been in the former part of their life very wicked. They no longer run on in the same courses, or with the same companions, as they used to do. Hereupon observe the conduct of their wicked acquaintance towards them. 1. *They think it strange*, they are surprised and wonder at it, as at something new and unusual, that their old friends should be so much altered, and not run with as much violence as they used to do *to the same excess of riot*, to the same sottish excesses and luxury which before they had greedily and madly followed. 2. *They speak evil of them*. Their surprise carries them to blasphemy. They speak evil of their persons, of their way, their religion, and their God. Learn, (1.) Those that are once really converted will not return to their former course of life, though ever so much tempted by the frowns or flatteries of others to do so. Neither persuasion nor reproach will prevail with them to be or to do as they were wont to do. (2.) The temper and behaviour of true Christians seem very strange to ungodly men. That they should despise that which every one else is fond of, that they should believe many things which to others seem incredible, that they should delight in what is irksome and tedious, be zealous where they have no visible interest to serve, and depend so much upon hope, is what the ungodly cannot comprehend. (3.) The best actions of religious people cannot escape the censures and slanders of those who are irreligious. Those actions which cost a good man the most pains, hazard, and self-denial, shall be most censured by the uncharitable and ill-natured world; they will speak evil of good people, though they themselves reap the fruits of their charity, piety, and goodness.

II. For the comfort of the servants of God, it is here added,

1. That all wicked people, especially those who speak evil of such as are not as bad as themselves, shall *give an account*, and be put to give a reason of their behaviour, to him who is ready to judge, who is both able and duly authorized, and who will ere long judge and pass sentence upon all who shall then be found alive, and all such as being dead shall then be raised again, Jam. 5:8, 9; 2 Pt. 3:7. Observe, The malignant world shall in a little time give an account to the great God of all their evil speeches against his people, Jude 14, 15. They will soon be called to a sad account for all their curses, their foolish jests, their slanders and falsehoods, uttered against the faithful people of God.

2. That *for this cause was the gospel preached also to those that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit*, v. 6. Some understand this difficult place thus: *For this cause was the gospel preached* to all the faithful of old, who are now dead in Christ, that thereby they might be taught and encouraged to bear the unrighteous judgments and persecutions which the rage of men put upon them *in the flesh, but might live in the Spirit unto God*. Others take the expression, *that they might be judged according to men in the flesh*, in a spiritual sense, thus: The gospel was preached to them, to judge them, condemn them, and reprove them, for the corruption of their natures, and the viciousness of their lives, while they lived after the manner of the heathen or the mere natural man; and that, having thus mortified their sins, they might live according to God, a new and spiritual life. Take it thus; and thence learn, 1. The mortifying of our sins and living to God are the expected effects of the gospel preached to us. 2. God will certainly reckon with all those who have had the gospel preached to them, but without these good effects produced by it. God is ready to judge all those who have received the gospel in vain. 3. It is no matter how we are judged according to men in the flesh, if we do but live according to God in the Spirit.

Verses 7-11

We have here an awful position or doctrine, and an inference drawn from it. The position is that the *end of all things is at hand*. The miserable destruction of the Jewish church and nation foretold by our Saviour is now very near; consequently, the time of their persecution and your sufferings is but very short. Your own life and that of your enemies will soon come to their utmost period. Nay, the world itself will not continue very long. The conflagration will put an end to it; and all things must be swallowed up in an endless eternity. The inference from this comprises a series of exhortations.

1. To sobriety and watchfulness: *"Be you therefore sober*, v. 7. Let the frame and temper of your minds be grave, stayed, and solid; and observe strict temperance and sobriety in the use of all worldly enjoyments. Do not suffer yourselves to be caught with your former sins and temptations, v. 3. *An watch unto prayer*. Take care that you be continually in a calm sober disposition, fit for prayer; and that you be frequent in prayers, lest this end come upon you unawares," Lu. 21:34; Mt. 26:40, 41. Learn, (1.) The consideration of our approaching end is a powerful argument to make us sober in all worldly matters, and earnest in religious affairs. (2.) Those who would pray to purpose must *watch unto prayer*. They must watch over their own spirits, watch all fit opportunities, and do their duty in the best manner they can. (3.) The right ordering of the body is of great use to promote the good of the soul. When the appetites and inclinations of the body are restrained and governed by God's word and true reason, and the interests of the body are submitted to the interests and necessities of the soul, then it is not the

soul's enemy, but its friend and helper.

2. To charity: *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*, v. 8. Here is a noble rule in Christianity. Christians ought to love one another, which implies an affection to their persons, a desire of their welfare, and a hearty endeavour to promote it. This mutual affection must not be cold, but fervent, that is, sincere, strong, and lasting. This sort of earnest affection is recommended *above all things*, which shows the importance of it, Col. 3:14. It is greater than faith or hope, 1 Co. 13:13. One excellent effect of it is that it will *cover a multitude of sins*. Learn, (1.) There ought to be in all Christians a more fervent charity towards one another than towards other men: *Have charity among yourselves*. He does not say for pagans, for idolaters, or for apostates, but among yourselves. *Let brotherly love continue*, Heb. 13:1. There is a special relation between all sincere Christians, and a particular amiableness and good in them, which require special affection. (2.) It is not enough for Christians not to bear malice, nor to have common respect for one another, they must intensely and fervently love each other. (3.) It is the property of true charity *to cover a multitude of sins*. It inclines people to forgive and forget offences against themselves, to cover and conceal the sins of others, rather than aggravate them and spread them abroad. It teaches us to love those who are but weak, and who have been guilty of many evil things before their conversion; and it prepares for mercy at the hand of God, who hath promised to forgive those that forgive others, Mt. 6:14.

3. To hospitality, v. 9. The hospitality here required is a free and kind entertainment of strangers and travellers. The proper objects of Christian hospitality are one another. The nearness of their relation, and the necessity of their condition in those times of persecution and distress, obliged Christians to be hospitable one to another. Sometimes Christians were spoiled of all they had, and were driven away to distant countries for safety. In this case they must starve if their fellow-christians would not receive them. Therefore it was a wise and necessary rule which the apostle here laid down. It is elsewhere commanded, Heb. 13:1, 2; Rom. 12:13. The manner of performing this duty is this: it must be done in an easy, kind, handsome manner, *without grudging* or grumbling at the expense or trouble. Learn, (1.) Christians ought not only to be charitable, but hospitable, one to another. (2.) Whatever a Christian does by way of charity or of hospitality, he ought to do it cheerfully, and without grudging. *Freely you have received, freely give*.

4. To the improvement of talents, v. 11.

(1.) The rule is that whatever gift, ordinary or extraordinary, whatever power, ability, or capacity of doing good is given to us, we should minister, or do service, with the same *one to another*, accounting ourselves not masters, but only *stewards of the manifold grace*, or the various gifts, of God. Learn, [1.] Whatever ability we have of doing good we must own it to be the gift of God and ascribe it to his grace. [2.] Whatever gifts we have received, we ought to look upon them as received for the use one of another. We must not assume them to ourselves, nor hide them in a napkin, but do service with them *one to another* in the best manner we are able. [3.] In receiving and using the manifold gifts of God we must look upon ourselves as stewards only, and act accordingly. The talents we are entrusted with are our Lord's goods, and must be employed as he directs. And it is required in a steward that he be found faithful.

(2.) The apostle exemplifies his direction about gifts in two particulars—speaking and ministering, concerning which he gives

these rules:—[1.] *If any man*, whether a minister in public or a Christian in private conference, *speak* or teach, he must do it *as the oracles of God*, which direct us as to the matter of our speech. What Christians in private, or ministers in public, teach and speak must be the pure word and oracles of God. As to the manner of speaking, it must be with the seriousness, reverence, and solemnity, that become those holy and divine oracles. [2.] *If any man minister*, either as a deacon, distributing the alms of the church and taking care of the poor, or as a private person, by charitable gifts and contributions, *let him do it as of the ability which God giveth*. He who has received plenty and ability from God ought to minister plentifully, and according to his ability. These rules ought to be followed and practised for this end, *that God in all things*, in all your gifts, ministrations, and services, may be glorified, *that others may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Mt. 5:16), *through Jesus Christ*, who has procured and given these gifts to men (Eph. 4:8), and through whom alone we and our services are accepted of God (Heb. 13:15), to whom, Jesus Christ, *be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*. Learn, *First*, It is the duty of Christians in private, as well as ministers in public, to speak to one another of the things of God, Mal. 3:16; Eph. 4:29; Ps. 145:10–12. *Secondly*, It highly concerns all preachers of the gospel to keep close to the word of God, and to treat that word as becomes the oracles of God. *Thirdly*, Christians must not only do the duty of their place, but they must do it with vigour, and according to the best of their abilities. The nature of a Christian's work, which is high work and hard work, the goodness and kindness of the Master, and the excellency of the reward, all require that our endeavours should be serious and vigorous, and that whatever we are called to do for the honour of God and the good of others we should do it with all our might. *Fourthly*, In all the duties and services of life we should aim at the glory of God as our chief end; all other views must be subservient to this, which would sanctify our common actions and affairs, 1 Co. 10:31. *Fifthly*, God is not glorified by any thing we do if we do not offer it to him through the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ. *God in all things must be glorified through Jesus Christ*, who is the only way to the Father. *Sixthly*, The apostle's adoration of Jesus Christ, and ascribing unlimited and everlasting praise and dominion to him, prove that Jesus Christ is the most high God, over all blessed for evermore. Amen.

Verses 12-19

The frequent repetition of counsel and comfort to Christians, considered as sufferers, in every chapter of this epistle, shows that the greatest danger these new converts were in arose from the persecutions to which their embracing Christianity exposed them. The good behaviour of Christians under sufferings is the most difficult part of their duty, but yet necessary both for the honour of Christ and their own comfort; and therefore the apostle, having extorted them in the former part of this chapter to the great duty of mortification, comes here to direct them in the necessary duty of patience under sufferings. An unmortified spirit is very unfit to bear trials. Observe,

I. The apostle's kind manner of address to these poor despised Christians: they were his *beloved*, v. 9.

II. His advice to them, relating to their sufferings, which is,

1. That they should not think them strange, nor be surprised at them, as if some unexpected event befel them; for,

(1.) Though they be sharp and fiery, yet they are designed only to try, not to ruin them, to try their sincerity, strength, patience, and trust in God. On the contrary, they ought rather to rejoice under their sufferings, because theirs may properly be called

Christ's sufferings. They are of the same kind, and for the same cause, that Christ suffered; they make us conformable to him; he suffers in them, and feels in our infirmities; and, if we be partakers of his sufferings, we shall also be make *partakers of his glory*, and shall meet him with exceeding joy at his great appearing to judge his enemies, and crown his faithful servants, 2 Th. 1:7, etc. Learn, [1.] True Christians love and own the children of God in their lowest and most distressing circumstances. The apostle owns these poor afflicted Christians, and calls them his beloved. True Christians never look more amiable one to another than in their adversities. [2.] There is no reason for Christians to think strange, or to wonder, at the unkindnesses and persecutions of the world, because they are forewarned of them. Christ himself endured them; and forsaking all, denying ourselves, are the terms upon which Christ accepts of us to be his disciples. [3.] Christians ought not only to be patient, but to rejoice, in their sharpest sorest sufferings for Christ, because they are tokens of divine favour; they promote the gospel and prepare for glory. Those who rejoice in their sufferings for Christ shall eternally triumph and rejoice with him in glory.

(2.) From the fiery trial the apostle descends to a lower degree of persecution—that of the tongue by slander and reproach, v. 14. He supposes that this sort of suffering would fall to their lot: they would be reviled, evil-spoken of, and slandered for the name or sake of Christ. In such case he asserts, *Happy are you*, the reason of which is, "Because you have the spirit of God with you, to fortify and comfort you; and the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of glory, that will carry you through all, bring you off gloriously, and prepare and seal you up for eternal glory. This glorious Spirit *resteth upon you*, resideth with you, dwelleth in you, supporteth you, and is pleased with you; and is not this an unspeakable privilege? By your patience and fortitude in suffering, by your dependence upon the promises of God, and adhering to the word which the Holy Spirit hath revealed, *he is on your part glorified*; but by the contempt and reproaches cast upon you *the Spirit itself* is evil-spoken of and blasphemed." Learn, [1.] The best men and the best things usually meet with reproaches in the world. Jesus Christ and his followers, the Spirit of God and the gospel, are all evil-spoken of. [2.] The happiness of good people not only consists with, but even flows from their afflictions: *Happy are you*. [3.] That man who hath the Spirit of God resting upon him cannot be miserable, let his afflictions be ever so great: *Happy are you; for the Spirit of God*, etc. [4.] The blasphemies and reproaches which evil men cast upon good people are taken by the Spirit of God as cast upon himself: *On their part he is evil-spoken of*. [5.] When good people are vilified *for the name of Christ* his Holy Spirit is glorified in them.

2. That they should take care they did not suffer justly, as evil-doers, v. 15. One would think such a caution as this needless to such an excellent set of Christians as these were. But their enemies charged them with these and other foul crimes: therefore the apostle, when he was settling the rules of the Christian religion, thought these cautions necessary, forbidding every one of them to hurt the life or the estate and property of any one, or to do any sort of evil, or, without call and necessity, to play the *bishop in another man's charge*, or busy himself *in other men's matters*. To this caution he adds a direction, *that if any man suffer* for the cause of Christianity, and with a patient Christian spirit, he ought not to account it a shame, but an honour to him; and ought to glorify God who hath thus dignified him, v. 16. Learn, (1.) The best of men need to be warned against the worst of sins. (2.) There is very little comfort in sufferings when we bring them upon ourselves by our own sin and folly. It is not the suffering, but the cause, that makes the martyr. (3.) We have reason to thank God for the honour if he calls us out to suffer for

his truth and gospel, for our adherence to any of the doctrines or duties of Christianity.

3. That their trials were now at hand, and they should stand prepared accordingly, v. 17, 18.

(1.) He tells them that the time had come when *judgment must begin at the house of God*. The usual method of Providence has been this: When God brings great calamities and sore judgments upon whole nations, he generally begins with his own people, Isa. 10:12; Jer. 25:29; Eze. 9:6. "Such a time of universal calamity is now at hand, which was foretold by our Saviour, Mt. 24:9, 10. This renders all the foregoing exhortations to patience necessary for you. And you have two considerations to support you." [1.] "That these judgments will but *begin* with you that are God's house and family, and will soon be over: your trials and corrections will not last long." [2.] "Your troubles will be but light and short, in comparison of what shall befall the wicked world, your own countrymen the Jews, and the infidels and idolatrous people among whom you live: *What shall the end be of those who obey not the gospel of God?*" Learn, *First*, The best of God's servants, his own household, have so much amiss in them as renders it fit and necessary that God should sometimes correct and punish them with his judgments: *Judgment begins at the house of God*. *Secondly*, Those who are the family of God have their worst things in this life. Their worst condition is tolerable, and will soon be over. *Thirdly*, Such persons or societies of men as *disobey the gospel of God* are not of his church and household, though possibly they may make the loudest pretensions. The apostle distinguishes the disobedient from the house of God. *Fourthly*, The sufferings of good people in this life are demonstrations of the unspeakable torments that are coming upon the disobedient and unbelieving: *What shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel?* Who can express or say how dreadful their end will be?

(2.) He intimates the irremediable doom of the wicked: *If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear*, v. 18. This whole verse is taken from Prov. 11:31, *Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner?* This the Septuagint translates exactly as the apostle here quotes it. Hence we may learn, [1.] The grievous sufferings of good people in this world are sad presages of much heavier judgments coming upon impenitent sinners. But, if we take the salvation here in the highest sense, then we may learn, [2.] It is as much as the best can do to secure the salvation of their souls; there are so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties to be overcome, so many sins to be mortified, the gate is so strait and the way so narrow, that it is as much as the righteous can do to be saved. Let the absolute necessity of salvation balance the difficulty of it. Consider, Your difficulties are greatest at first; God offers his grace and help; the contest will not last long; be but faithful to the death, *and God will give you the crown of life*, Rev. 2:10. [3.] The ungodly and the sinner are unquestionably in a state of damnation. *Where shall they appear?* How will they stand before their Judge? Where can they show their heads? *If the righteous scarcely be saved*, the wicked must certainly perish.

4. That when called to suffer, *according to the will of God*, they should look chiefly to the safety of their souls, which are put into hazard by affliction, and cannot be kept secure otherwise than by *committing them to God*, who will undertake the charge, if we commit them to him in well-doing; for he is their Creator, and has out of mere grace made many kind promises to them of eternal salvation, in which he will show himself faithful and true, v. 19. Learn, (1.) All the sufferings that befall good people come upon them *according to the will of God*. (2.) It is the duty of Christians, in all their distresses, to look more to the

keeping of their souls than to the preserving of their bodies. The soul is of greatest value, and yet in most danger. If suffering from without raise uneasiness, vexation, and other sinful and tormenting passions within, the soul is then the greatest sufferer. If the soul be not well kept, persecution will drive people to apostasy, Ps. 125:3. (3.) The only way to keep the soul well is to commit it to God, in well-doing. Commit your souls to God by solemn dedication, prayer, and patient perseverance in well-doing, Rom. 2:7. (4.) Good people, when they are in affliction, have great encouragement to commit their souls to God, because he is their Creator, and faithful in all his promises.

Chapter 5

In which the apostle gives particular directions, first to the elders, how to behave themselves towards their flock (v. 1-4); then to the younger, to be obedient and humble, and to cast their care upon God (v. 5-7). He then exhorts all to sobriety, watchfulness against temptations, and stedfastness in the faith, praying earnestly for them; and so concludes his epistle with a solemn doxology, mutual salutations, and his apostolical benediction.

Verses 1-4

Here we may observe,

- I. The persons to whom this exhortation is given—to the presbyters, pastors, and spiritual guides of the church, elders by office, rather than by age, ministers of those churches to whom he wrote this epistle.
- II. The person who gives this exhortation—the apostle Peter: *I exhort*; and, to give force to this exhortation, he tells them he was their brother-presbyter or fellow-elder, and so puts nothing upon them but what he was ready to perform himself. He was also *a witness of the sufferings of Christ*, being with him in the garden, attending him to the palace of the high-priest, and very likely being a spectator of his suffering upon the cross, at a distance among the crowd, Acts 3:15. He adds that he was also *a partaker of the glory* that was in some degree revealed at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-3), and shall be completely enjoyed at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Learn, 1. Those whose office it is to teach others ought carefully to study their own duty, as well as teach the people theirs. 2. How different the spirit and behaviour of Peter were from that of his pretended successors! He does not command and domineer, but exhort. He does not claim sovereignty over all pastors and churches, nor style himself *prince of the apostles*, *vicar of Christ*, or *head of the church*, but values himself upon being an *elder*. All the apostles were elders, though every elder was not an apostle. 3. It was the peculiar honour of Peter, and a few more, to be the witnesses of Christ's sufferings; but it is the privilege of all true Christians to be partakers of the glory that shall be revealed.
- III. The pastor's duty described, and the manner in which that duty ought to be performed. The pastoral duty is three-fold:—1. *To feed the flock*, by preaching to them the sincere word of God, and ruling them according to such directions and discipline as the word of God prescribes, both which are implied in this expression, *Feed the flock*. 2. The pastors of the church must *take the oversight thereof*. The elders are exhorted to do the office of bishops (as the word signifies), by personal care and vigilance over all the flock committed to their charge. 3. They must be *examples to the flock*, and practise the holiness, self-denial, mortification, and all other Christian duties, which they preach and recommend to their people. These duties must be performed, *not by constraint*, not because you must do them, not from compulsion of the civil power, or the constraint of fear or shame, but from a willing mind that takes pleasure in the work: *not for filthy lucre*, or any emoluments and profits attending the place where you reside, or any perquisite belonging to the office, *but of a ready mind*, regarding the flock more than the fleece, sincerely and cheerfully endeavouring to serve the church of God; *neither as being lords over God's heritage*, tyrannizing over them by compulsion and coercive force, or imposing unscriptural and human inventions upon them instead of necessary duty, Mt. 20:25, 26; 2 Co. 1:24. Learn, (1.) The eminent dignity of the church of God, and all the true members of it.

These poor, dispersed, suffering Christians were the flock of God. The rest of the world is a brutal herd. These are an orderly flock, redeemed to God by the great Shepherd, living in holy love and communion one with another, *according to the will of God*. They are also dignified with the title of God's *heritage* or *clergy*, his peculiar lot, chosen out of the common multitude for his own people, to enjoy his special favour and to do him special service. The word is never restricted in the New Testament to the ministers of religion. (2.) The pastors of the church ought to consider their people as *the flock of God, as God's heritage*, and treat them accordingly. They are not theirs, to be lorded over at pleasure; but they are God's people, and should be treated with love, meekness, and tenderness, for the sake of him to whom they belong. (3.) Those ministers who are either driven to the work by necessity or drawn to it by filthy lucre can never perform their duty as they ought, because they do not do it willingly, and with a ready mind. (4.) The best way a minister can take to engage the respect of a people is to discharge his own duty among them in the best manner that he can, and to be a constant example to them of all that is good.

IV. In opposition to that filthy lucre which many propose to themselves as their principal motive in undertaking and discharging the pastoral office, the apostle sets before them the crown of glory designed by the great shepherd, Jesus Christ, for all his faithful ministers. Learn, 1. Jesus Christ is *the chief shepherd* of the whole flock and heritage of God. He bought them, and rules them; he defends and saves them for ever. He is also the chief shepherd over all inferior shepherds; they derive their authority from him, act in his name, and are accountable to him at last. 2. This chief shepherd will appear, to judge all ministers and under-shepherds, to call them to account, whether they have faithfully discharged their duty both publicly and privately according to the foregoing directions. 3. Those that are found to have done their duty shall have what is infinitely better than temporal gain; they shall receive from the grand shepherd a high degree of everlasting glory, *a crown of glory that fadeth not away*.

Verses 5-7

Having settled and explained the duty of the pastors or spiritual guides of the church, the apostle comes now to instruct the flock,

I. How to behave themselves to their ministers and to one another. He calls them *the younger*, as being generally younger than their grave pastors, and to put them in mind of their inferiority, the term younger being used by our Saviour to signify an inferior, Lu. 22:26. He exhorts those that are younger and inferior to *submit themselves to the elder*, to give due respect and reverence to their persons, and to yield to their admonitions, reproof, and authority, enjoining and commanding what the word of God requires, Heb. 13:17. As to one another, the rule is that they should all *be subject one to another*, so far as to receive the reproofs and counsels one of another, and be ready to *bear one another's burdens*, and perform all the offices of friendship and charity one to another; and particular persons should submit to the directions of the whole society, Eph. 5:21.; Jam. 5:16. These duties of submission to superiors in age or office, and subjection to one another, being contrary to the proud nature and selfish interests of men, he advises them to *be clothed with humility*. "Let your minds, behaviour, garb, and whole frame, be adorned with humility, as the most beautiful habit you can wear; this will render obedience and duty easy and pleasant; but, if you be disobedient and proud, God will set himself to oppose and crush you; for *he resisteth the proud*, when he *giveth grace to the*

humble." Observe, 1. Humility is the great preserver of peace and order in all Christian churches and societies, consequently pride is the great disturber of them, and the cause of most dissensions and breaches in the church. 2. There is a mutual opposition between God and the proud, so the word signifies; they war against him, and he scorns them; *he resisteth the proud*, because they are like the devil, enemies to himself and to his kingdom among men, Prov. 3:34. 3. Where God giveth grace to be humble, he will give more grace, more wisdom, faith, holiness, and humility. Hence the apostle adds: *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time*, v. 6. "Since God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble, therefore humble yourselves, not only one to another, but to the great God, whose judgments are coming upon the world, and must begin at the house of God (ch. 4:17); his hand is almighty, and can easily pull you down if you be proud, or exalt you if you be humble; and it will certainly do it, either in this life, if he sees it best for you, or at the day of general retribution." Learn, (1.) The consideration of the omnipotent hand of God should make us humble and submissive to him in all that he brings upon us. (2.) Humbling ourselves to God under his hand is the next way to deliverance and exaltation; patience under his chastisements, and submission to his pleasure, repentance, prayer, and hope in his mercy, will engage his help and release in due time, Jam. 4:7, 10.

II. The apostle, knowing that these Christians were already under very hard circumstances, rightly supposes that what he had foretold of greater hardships yet a coming might excite in them abundance of care and fear about the event of these difficulties, what the issue of them would be to themselves, their families, and the church of God; foreseeing this anxious care would be a heavy burden, and a sore temptation, he gives them the best advice, and supports it with a strong argument. His advice is to *cast all their care, or all care of themselves, upon God*. "Throw your cares, which are so cutting and distracting, which wound your souls and pierce your hearts, upon the wise and gracious providence of God; trust in him with a firm composed mind, *for he careth for you*. He is willing to release you of your care, and take the care of you upon himself. He will either avert what you fear, or support you under it. He will order all events to you so as shall convince you of his paternal love and tenderness towards you; and all shall be so ordered that no hurt, but good, shall come unto you," Mt. 6:25; Ps. 84:11; Rom. 8:28. Learn, 1. The best of Christians are apt to labour under the burden of anxious and excessive care; the apostle calls it, *all your care*, intimating that the cares of Christians are various and of more sorts than one: personal cares, family cares, cares for the present, cares for the future, cares for themselves, for others, and for the church. 2. The cares even of good people are very burdensome, and too often very sinful; when they arise from unbelief and diffidence, when they torture and distract the mind, unfit us for the duties of our place and hinder our delightful service of God, they are very criminal. 3. The best remedy against immoderate care is to *cast our care upon God*, and resign every event to the wise and gracious determination. A firm belief of the rectitude of the divine will and counsels calms the spirit of man. *We ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done*, Acts 21:14.

Verses 8-9

Here the apostle does three things:—

I. He shows them their danger from an enemy more cruel and restless than even the worst of men, whom he describes,

1. By his characters and names. (1.) He is an adversary: "*That adversary of yours*; not a common adversary, but an enemy that impleads you, and litigates against you in your grand depending cause, and aims at your very souls." (2.) *The devil, the grand accuser of all the brethren*; this title is derived from a word which signifies to strike through, or to stab. He would strike malignity into our natures and poison into our souls. If he could have struck these people with passion and murmuring in their sufferings, perhaps he might have drawn them to apostasy and ruin. (3.) He is *a roaring lion*, hungry, fierce, strong, and cruel, the fierce and greedy pursuer of souls.

2. By his business: *He walks about, seeking whom he may devour*; his whole design is to devour and destroy souls. To this end he is unwearied and restless in his malicious endeavours; for he always, night and day, goes about studying and contriving whom he may ensnare to their eternal ruin.

II. Hence he infers that it is their duty, 1. To *be sober*, and to govern both the outward and the inward man by the rules of temperance, modesty, and mortification. 2. To *be vigilant*; not secure or careless, but rather suspicious of constant danger from this spiritual enemy, and, under that apprehension, to be watchful and diligent to prevent his designs and save our souls. 3. To resist him *stedfast in the faith*. It was the faith of these people that Satan aimed at; if he could overturn their faith, and draw them into apostasy, then he knew he should gain his point, and ruin their souls; therefore, to destroy their faith, he raises bitter persecutions, and sets the grand potentates of the world against them. This strong trial and temptation they must resist, by being well-grounded, resolute, and stedfast in the faith: to encourage them to this,

III. He tells them that their care was not singular, for they knew that the like afflictions befel their brethren in all parts of the world, and that all the people of God were their fellow-soldiers in this warfare. Learn, 1. All the great persecutions that ever were in the world were raised, spirited up, and conducted, by the devil; he is the grand persecutor, as well as *the deceiver and accuser, of the brethren*; men are his willing spiteful instruments, but he is the chief adversary that wars against Christ and his people, Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:12. 2. The design of Satan in raising persecutions against the faithful servants of God is to bring them to apostasy, by reason of their sufferings, and so to destroy their souls. 3. Sobriety and watchfulness are necessary virtues at all times, but especially in times of suffering and persecution. "You must moderate your affection to worldly things, or else Satan will soon overcome you." 4. "If you would overcome Satan, as a tempter, an accuser, or a persecutor, you must resist him stedfast in the faith; if your faith give way, you are gone; therefore, *above all, take the shield of faith*," Eph. 6:16. 5. The consideration of what others suffer is proper to encourage us to bear our own share in any affliction: *The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren*.

Verses 10-14

We come now to the conclusion of this epistle, which,

I. The apostle begins with a most weighty prayer, which he addresses to God as *the God of all grace*, the author and finisher of every heavenly gift and quality, acknowledging, on their behalf, that God had already called them to be partakers of that eternal glory, which, being his own, he had promised and settled upon them, through the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ. Observe,

1. What he prays for on their account; not that they might be excused from sufferings, but that their sufferings might be moderate and short, and, *after they had suffered awhile*, that God would restore them to a settled and peaceable condition, and perfect his work in them—that he would establish them against wavering, either in faith or duty, that he would strengthen those who were weak, and settle them upon Christ the foundation, so firmly that their union with him might be indissoluble and everlasting. Learn, (1.) All grace is from God; it is he who restrains, converts, comforts, and saves men by his grace. (2.) All who are called into a state of grace are called to partake of eternal glory and happiness. (3.) Those who are called to be heirs of eternal life through Jesus Christ must, nevertheless, suffer in this world, but their sufferings will be but for a little while. (4.) The perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and settling, of good people in grace, and their perseverance therein, is so difficult a work, that only the God of all grace can accomplish it; and therefore he is earnestly to be sought unto by continual prayer, and dependence upon his promises.

2. His doxology, v. 11. From this doxology we may learn that those who have obtained grace from the God of all grace should and will ascribe glory, dominion, and power, to him for ever and ever.

II. He recapitulates the design of his writing this epistle to them (v. 12), which was, 1. To testify, and in the strongest terms to assure them, that the doctrine of salvation, which he had explained and they had embraced, was the true account of the grace of God, foretold by the prophets and published by Jesus Christ. 2. To exhort them earnestly that, as they had embraced the gospel, they would continue stedfast in it, notwithstanding the arts of seducers, or the persecutions of enemies. (1.) The main thing that ministers ought to aim at in their labours is to convince their people of the certainty and excellency of the Christian religion; this the apostles did *exhort and testify* with all their might. (2.) A firm persuasion that we are in the true way to heaven will be the best motive to stand fast, and persevere therein.

III. He recommends *Silvanus*, the person by whom he sent them this brief epistle, as a brother whom he esteemed faithful and friendly to them, and hoped they would account him so, though he was a minister of the uncircumcision. Observe, An honourable esteem of the ministers of religion tends much to the success of their labours. When we are convinced they are faithful, we shall profit more by their ministerial services. The prejudices that some of these Jews might have against *Silvanus*, as a minister of the Gentiles, would soon wear off when they were once convinced that he was a faithful brother.

IV. He closes with salutations and a solemn benediction. Observe, 1. Peter, being at Babylon in Assyria, when he wrote this epistle (whither he travelled, as the apostle of the circumcision, to visit that church, which was the chief of the dispersion), sends the salutation of that church to the other churches to whom he wrote (v. 13), telling them that God had *elected* or chosen the Christians at Babylon out of the world, to be his church, and to partake of eternal salvation through Christ Jesus, together with them and all other faithful Christians, ch. 1:2. In this salutation he particularly joins Mark the evangelist, who was then with him, and who was his son in a spiritual sense, being begotten by him to Christianity. Observe, All the churches of Jesus Christ ought to have a most affectionate concern one for another; they should love and pray for one another, and be as helpful one to another as they possibly can. 2. He exhorts them to fervent love and charity one towards another, and to express this by giving *the kiss of peace* (v. 14), according to the common custom of those times and countries, and so concludes with a

benediction, which he confines to those *that are in Christ Jesus*, united to him by faith and sound members of his mystical body. The blessing he pronounces upon them is *peace*, by which he means all necessary good, all manner of prosperity; to this he adds his *amen*, in token of his earnest desire and undoubted expectation that the blessing of peace would be the portion of all the faithful.