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Fearless Eagle Publishing, Toronto, Ontario

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Preface

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

The penman of this epistle appears plainly to be the same who wrote the foregoing; and, whatever difference some learned men apprehend they discern in the style of this epistle from that of the former, this cannot be a sufficient argument to assert that it was written by Simon who succeeded the apostle James in the church at Jerusalem, inasmuch as he who wrote this epistle calls himself *Simon Peter, and an apostle* (v. 1), and says that he was *one of the three apostles that were present at Christ's transfiguration* (v. 18), and says expressly *that he had written a former epistle to them*, 3:1. The design of this second epistle is the same with that of the former, as is evident from the first verse of the third chapter, whence observe that, in the things of God, we have need of *precept upon precept, and line upon line*, and all little enough to keep them in remembrance; and yet these are the things which should be most faithfully recorded and frequently remembered by us.

Chapter 1

In this chapter we have, I. An introduction, or preface, making way for, and leading to, what is principally designed by the apostle (v. 1-4). II. An exhortation to advance and improve in all Christian graces (v. 5-7). III. To enforce this exhortation, and engage them seriously and heartily to comply with it, he adds, 1. A representation of the very great advantage which will thereby accrue to them (v. 8-11). 2. A promise of the best assistance the apostle was able to give to facilitate and forward this good work (v. 12-15). 3. A declaration of the certain truth and divine origin of the gospel of Christ, in the grace whereof they were exhorted to increase and persevere.

Verses 1-4

The apostle Peter, being moved by the Holy Ghost to write once more to those who from among the Jews were turned to faith in Christ, begins this second epistle with an introduction, wherein the same persons are described and the same blessings are desired that are in the preface to his former letter; but there are some additions or alterations which ought to be taken notice of, in all the three parts of the introduction.

I. We have here a description of the person who wrote the epistle, by the name of *Simon*, as well as *Peter*, and by the title of *servant*, as well as that of *apostle*. *Peter*, being in both epistles, seems to be the name most frequently used, and with which he may be thought to be best pleased, it being given him by our Lord, upon his confessing *Jesus to be Christ the Son of the living God*, and the very name signifying and sealing that truth to be the fundamental article, the rock on which all must build; but the name *Simon*, though omitted in the former epistle, is mentioned in this, lest the total omission of that name, which was given him when he was circumcised, should make the Jewish believers, who were all zealous of the law, to become jealous of the apostle, as if he disclaimed and despised circumcision. He here styles himself *a servant* (as well as an apostle) *of Jesus Christ*; in this he may be allowed to glory, as David does, Ps. 116:16. The service of Christ is the way to the highest honour, Jn. 12:26. Christ himself is *King of kings, and Lord of lords*; and he makes all his servants *kings and priests unto God*, Rev. 1:6. How great an honour is it to be the servants of this Master! This is what we cannot, without sin, be ashamed of. To triumph in being *Christ's servant* is very proper for those who are engaging others to enter into or abide in the service of Christ.

II. We have an account of the people to whom the epistle is written. They are described in the former epistle as *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, and here as *having obtained precious faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*; for the faith here mentioned is vastly different from the false faith of the heretic, and the feigned faith of the hypocrite, and the fruitless faith of the formal professor, how orthodox soever he is. It is *the faith of God's elect* (Tit. 1:1), wrought by the Spirit of God in effectual calling. Observe, 1. True saving faith is a precious grace, and that not only as it is very uncommon, very scarce, even in the visible church, a very small number of true believers among a great multitude of visible professors (Mt. 22:14), but true faith is very excellent and of very great use and advantage to those who have it. *The just lives by faith*, a truly divine spiritual life; faith procures all the necessary supports and comforts of this excellent life; faith goes to Christ, and buys the wine and milk (Isa. 55:1) which are the proper nourishment of the new creature; faith buys and brings home the tried gold, the heavenly

treasure that enriches; faith takes and puts on the white raiment, the royal robes that clothe and adorn, Rev. 3:18. Observe, 2. Faith is alike precious in the private Christian and in the apostle; it produces the same precious effects in the one and in the other. Faith unites the weak believer to Christ as really as it does the strong one, and purifies the heart of one as truly as of another; and every sincere believer is by his faith justified in the sight of God, and that from all sins, Acts 13:39. Faith, in whomsoever it exists, takes hold of the same *precious* Saviour, and applies the same precious promises. 3. This precious faith is obtained of God. Faith is the gift of God, wrought by the Spirit, who raised up Jesus Christ from the dead. 4. The preciousness of faith, as well as our obtaining it, is through the righteousness of Christ. The satisfactory meritorious righteousness and obedience of Christ gives faith all its value and preciousness: and the righteousness of such a person cannot but be of infinite value to those who by faith receive it. For, (1.) This Jesus Christ is God, yea, *our* God, as it is in the original. He is truly God, an infinite Being, who has wrought out this righteousness, and therefore it must be of infinite value. (2.) *He is the Saviour of those that believe*, and as such he yielded this meritorious obedience; and therefore it is of such great benefit and advantage to them, because, as surety and Saviour, he wrought out this righteousness in their stead.

III. We have the apostolical benediction, wherein he wishes for the multiplication and increase of the divine favour to them, and the advancement and growth of the work of grace in them, and that peace with God and in their own consciences (which cannot be without *grace*) may abound in them. This is the very same benediction that is in the former epistle; but here he adds,

1. An account of the way and means whereby *grace and peace are multiplied*—it is *through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ*; this acknowledging or believing in *the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent*, is the great improvement of spiritual life, or it could not be the way to life eternal, Jn. 17:3.

2. The ground of the apostle's faith in asking, and of the Christian's hope in expecting, the increase of grace. What we have already received should encourage us to ask for more; he who has begun the work of grace will perfect it. Observe, (1.) The fountain of all spiritual blessings is the divine power of Jesus Christ, who could not discharge all the office of Mediator, unless he was God as well as man. (2.) All things that have any relation to, and influence upon, the true spiritual life, the life and power of godliness, are from Jesus Christ; *in him all fulness dwells*, and it is from him that we receive, *and grace for grace* (Jn. 1:16), even all that is necessary for the preserving, improving, and perfecting of grace and peace, which, according to some expositors, are called here in this verse *godliness and life*. (3.) Knowledge of God, and faith in him, are the channel whereby all spiritual supports and comforts are conveyed to us; but then we must own and acknowledge God as the author of our effectual calling, for so he is here described: *Him that hath called us to glory and virtue*. Observe here, The design of God in calling or converting men is to bring them to *glory and virtue*, that is, *peace and grace*, as some understand it; but many prefer the marginal rendering, *by glory and virtue*; and so we have effectual calling set forth as the work of the glory and virtue, or *the glorious power, of God*, which is described Eph. 1:19. It is the glory of God's power to convert sinners; this is the power and glory of God which are seen and experienced in his sanctuary (Ps. 63:2); this power or virtue is to be extolled by all *that are called out of darkness into marvellous light*, 1 Pt. 2:9. (4.) In the fourth verse the apostle goes on to encourage their faith and hope in looking for an increase of grace and peace, because the same glory and virtue are employed and evidenced in

giving the promises of the gospel that are exercised in our effectual calling. Observe, [1.] The good things which the promises make over are exceedingly great. Pardon of sin is one of the blessings here intended; how great this is all who know any thing of the power of God's anger will readily confess, and this is one of those promised favours in bestowing whereof *the power of the Lord is great*, Num. 14:17. To pardon sins that are numerous and heinous (every one of which deserves God's wrath and curse, and that for ever) is a wonderful thing, and is so called, Ps. 119:18. [2.] The promised blessings of the gospel are very precious; as the great promise of the Old Testament was *the Seed of the woman*, the Messiah (Heb. 11:39), so the great promise of the New Testament is the *Holy Ghost* (Lu. 24:49), and how precious must the enlivening, enlightening, sanctifying Spirit be! [3.] Those who receive the promises of the gospel *partake of the divine nature*. They are *renewed in the spirit of their mind, after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness*; their hearts are set for God and his service; they have a divine temper and disposition of soul; though the law is *the ministration of death*, and *the letter killeth*, yet the gospel is *the ministration of life*, and *the Spirit quickeneth those who are naturally dead in trespasses and sins*. [4.] Those in whom the Spirit works the divine nature are freed from the bondage of corruption. Those who are, by the Spirit of grace, *renewed in the spirit of their mind*, are translated into *the liberty of the children of God*; for it is the world in which *corruption reigns*. Those who are *not of the Father, but of the world*, are under the power of sin; the world lies in wickedness, 1 Jn. 5:19. And the dominion that sin has in the men of the world is through lust; their desires are to it, and therefore it rules over them. The dominion that sin has over us is according to the delight we have in it.

Verses 5-11

In these words the apostle comes to the chief thing intended in this epistle—to excite and engage them to advance in grace and holiness, they having already obtained precious faith, and been made partakers of the divine nature. This is a very good beginning, but it is not to be rested in, as if we were already perfect. The apostle had prayed that grace and peace might be multiplied to them, and now he exhorts them to press forward for the obtaining of more grace. We should, as we have opportunity, exhort those we pray for, and excite them to the use of all proper means to obtain what we desire God to bestow upon them; and those who will make any progress in religion must be very diligent and industrious in their endeavours. Without *giving all diligence*, there is no gaining any ground in the work of holiness; those who are slothful in the business of religion will make nothing of it; we must strive if we will *enter in at the strait gate*, Lu. 13:24.

I. Here we cannot but observe how the believer's way is marked out step by step. 1. He must get *virtue*, by which some understand *justice*; and then the *knowledge, temperance, and patience* that follow, being joined with it, the apostle may be supposed to put them upon pressing after the four cardinal virtues, or the four elements that go to the making up of every virtue or virtuous action. But seeing it is a *faithful saying, and constantly to be asserted, that those who have faith be careful to maintain good works* (Tit. 3:8), by *virtue* here we may understand *strength and courage*, without which the believer cannot stand up for good works, by abounding and excelling in them. The righteous must be bold as a lion (Prov. 28:1); a cowardly Christian, who is afraid to profess the doctrines or practise the duties of the gospel, must expect that Christ will be ashamed of him another day. "Let not your hearts fail you in the evil day, but show yourselves valiant in standing against all opposition,

and resisting every enemy, world, flesh, devil, yea, and death too." We have need of virtue while we live, and it will be of excellent use when we come to die. 2. The believer must add *knowledge* to his virtue, prudence to his courage; there is a knowledge of God's name which must go before our faith (Ps. 9:10), and we cannot approve of the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, till we know it; but there are proper circumstances for duty, which must be known and observed; we must use the appointed means, and observe the accepted time. Christian prudence regards the persons we have to do with and the place and company we are in. Every believer must labour after the knowledge and wisdom that are profitable to direct, both as to the proper method and order wherein all Christian duties are to be performed and as to the way and manner of performing them. 3. We must add *temperance* to our knowledge. We must be sober and moderate in our love to, and use of, the good things of this life; and, if we have a right understanding and knowledge of outward comforts, we shall see that their worth and usefulness are vastly inferior to those of spiritual mercies. Bodily exercises and bodily privileges profit but little, and therefore are to be esteemed and used accordingly; the gospel teaches sobriety as well as honesty, Tit. 2:12. We must be moderate in desiring and using the good things of natural life, such as meat, drink, clothes, sleep, recreations, and credit; an inordinate desire after these is inconsistent with an earnest desire after God and Christ; and those who take more of these than is due can render to neither God nor man what is due to them. 4. Add to temperance *patience*, which must *have its perfect work*, or we cannot *be perfect and entire, wanting nothing* (Jam. 1:4), for we are born to trouble, and must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of heaven; and it is this tribulation (Rom. 5:3) which worketh patience, that is, requires the exercise and occasions the increase of this grace, whereby we bear all calamities and crosses with silence and submission, without murmuring against God or complaining of him, but justifying him who lays all affliction upon us, owning that our sufferings are less than our sins deserve, and believing they are no more than we ourselves need. 5. To patience we must add *godliness*, and this is the very thing which is produced by patience, for that works experience, Rom. 5:4. When Christians bear afflictions patiently, they get an experimental *knowledge of the loving-kindness of their heavenly Father, which he will not take from his children, even when he visits their iniquity with the rod and their transgression with stripes* (Ps. 89:32, 33), and hereby they are brought to the child-like fear and reverential love wherein true godliness consists: to this, 6. We must add *brotherly-kindness*, a tender affection to all our fellow-Christians, who are children of the same Father, servants of the same Master, members of the same family, travellers to the same country, and heirs of the same inheritance, and therefore are to be loved with a pure heart fervently, with a love of complacency, as those who are peculiarly near and dear to us, in whom we take particular delight, Ps. 16:3. 7. *Charity*, or a love of good-will to all mankind, must be added to the love of delight which we have for those who are the children of God. God has made of one blood all nations, and all the children of men are partakers of the same human nature, are all capable of the same mercies, and liable to the same afflictions, and therefore, though upon a spiritual account Christians are distinguished and dignified above those who are without Christ, yet are they to sympathize with others in their calamities, and relieve their necessities, and promote their welfare both in body and soul, as they have opportunity: thus must all believers in Christ evidence that they are the children of God, who is good to all, but is especially good to Israel.

II. All the forementioned graces must be had, or we shall not be *thoroughly furnished for all good works*—for the duties of the first and second table, for active and passive obedience, and for those services wherein we are to imitate God as well as for those wherein we only obey him—and therefore to engage us to an industrious and unwearied pursuit of them, the apostle sets forth the advantages that redound to all who successfully labour so as to get these things to *be and abound in them*, v. 8–11. These are proposed,

1. More generally, v. 8. The having *these things make not barren* (or slothful) *nor unfruitful*, where, according to the style of the Holy Ghost, we must understand a great deal more than is expressed; for when it is said concerning Ahaz, the vilest and most provoking of all the kings of Judah, *that he did not right in the sight of the Lord* (2 Ki. 16:2), we are to understand as much as if it had been said, He did what was most offensive and abominable, as the following account of his life shows; so, when it is here said that the being and abounding of all Christian graces in us will make us neither inactive nor unfruitful, we are thereby to understand that it will make us very zealous and lively, vigorous and active, in all practical Christianity, and eminently fruitful in the works of righteousness. these will bring much glory to God, by bringing forth much fruit among men, being *fruitful in knowledge, or the acknowledging of our Lord Jesus Christ*, owning him to be their *Lord*, and evidencing themselves to be his servants by their abounding in the work that he has given them to do. This is the necessary consequence of adding one grace to another; for, where all Christian graces are in the heart, they improve and strengthen, encourage and cherish, one another; so they all thrive and grow (as the apostle intimates in the beginning of v. 8), and wherever grace abounds there will be an abounding in good works. How desirable it is to be in such a case the apostle evidences, v. 9. There he sets forth how miserable it is to be without those quickening fructifying graces; for he who has not the forementioned graces, or, though he pretends or seems to have them, does not exercise and improve them, *is blind*, that is, as to spiritual and heavenly things, as the next words explain it: *He cannot see far off*. This present evil world he can see, and dotes upon, but has no discerning at all of the world to come, so as to be affected with the spiritual privileges and heavenly blessings thereof. He who sees the excellences of Christianity must needs be diligent in endeavours after all those graces that are absolutely necessary for *obtaining glory, honour, and immortality*; but, where these graces are not obtained nor endeavoured after, men are not able to look forward to the things that are but a very little way off in reality, though in appearance, or in their apprehension, they are at a great distance, because they put them far away from them; and how wretched is their condition who are thus blind as to the awfully great things of the other world, who cannot see any thing of the reality and certainty, the greatness and nearness, of the glorious rewards God will bestow on the righteous, and the dreadful punishment he will inflict on the ungodly! But this is not all the misery of those who do not *add to their faith virtue, knowledge*, etc. They are as unable to look backward as forward, their memories are slippery and unable to retain what is past, as their sight is short and unable to discern what is future; they forget that they have been baptized, and had the means, and been laid under the obligations to holiness of heart and life. By baptism we are engaged in a holy war against sin, and are solemnly bound to fight against the flesh, the world, and the devil. Often call to mind, and seriously meditate on, your solemn engagement to be the Lord's, and your peculiar advantages and encouragements to lay aside *all filthiness of flesh and spirit*.

2. The apostle proposes two particular advantages that will attend or follow upon diligence in the work of a Christian: stability in grace, and a triumphant entrance into glory. These he brings in by resuming his former exhortation, and laying it down in other words; for what in v. 5 is expressed by *giving diligence to add to faith virtue*, etc., is expressed in v. 10 by *giving diligence to make our calling and election sure*. Here we may observe, (1.) It is the duty of believers *to make their election sure*, to clear it up to themselves that they are the chosen of God. (2.) The way to make sure their eternal election is to make out their effectual calling: none can look into the book of God's eternal counsels and decrees; but, inasmuch as *whom God did predestinate those he also called*, if we can find we are effectually called, we may conclude we are chosen to salvation. (3.) It requires a great deal of diligence and labour to make sure our calling and election; there must be a very close examination of ourselves, a very narrow search and strict enquiry, whether we are thoroughly converted, our minds enlightened, our wills renewed, and our whole souls changed as to the bent and inclination thereof; and to come to a fixed certainty in this requires the utmost diligence, and cannot be attained and kept without divine assistance, as we may learn from Ps. 139:23; Rom. 8:16. "But, how great soever the labour is, do not think much of it, for great is the advantage you gain by it; for," [1.] "By this you will be kept from falling, and that at all times and seasons, even in those hours of temptation that shall be on the earth." When others shall fall into heinous and scandalous sin, those who are thus diligent shall be enabled to walk circumspectly and keep on in the way of their duty; and, when many fall into errors, they shall be preserved sound in the faith, and stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. [2.] Those who are diligent in the work of religion shall have a triumphant entrance into glory; while of those few who get to heaven some are scarcely saved (1 Pt. 4:18), with a great deal of difficulty, *even as by fire* (1 Co. 3:15), those who are *growing in grace*, and *abounding in the work of the Lord*, shall have an *abundant entrance into the joy of their Lord*, even that everlasting kingdom where Christ reigns, and they shall *reign with him for ever and ever*.

Verses 12-15

I. The importance and advantage of progress and perseverance in grace and holiness made the apostle to be very diligent in doing the work of a minister of Christ, that he might thereby excite and assist them to be diligent in the duty of Christians. If ministers be negligent in their work, it can hardly be expected that the people will be diligent in theirs; therefore Peter *will not be negligent* (that is, at no time or place, in no part of his work, to no part of his charge), but will be exemplarily and universally diligent, and that in the work of a remembrancer. This is the office of the best ministers, even the apostles themselves; they are *the Lord's remembrancers* (Isa. 62:6); they are especially bound to make mention of the promises, and put God in mind of his engagements to do good to his people; and they are the people's remembrancers, making mention of God's precepts, and putting them in mind of the doctrines and duties of Christianity, that they may remember God's commandments, to do them. And this the apostle does, though some persons might think it needless, inasmuch as they already knew those things that he writes about, and were established in the very truth that he insists upon. Observe, 1. We need to be put in mind of what we already know to prevent our forgetting it, and to improve our knowledge, and reduce all to practice. 2. We must be established in the belief of the truth, that we may not be shaken by every wind of doctrine, and especially in that which is the present truth, the truth more peculiarly necessary for us to know in our day, that which belongs to our peace, and which is more

especially opposed in our time. The great doctrines of the gospel, *that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved, and all that believe in God must be careful to maintain good works*—these are truths the apostles insisted on in their day; *these are faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptation* in every age of the Christian church. And, as these must be constantly affirmed by ministers (Tit. 3:8), so the people are to be well instructed and established therein, and yet must, after all their attainments in knowledge, be put in mind of such things as cannot be too clearly known nor too firmly believed. The most advanced Christians cannot, while in this world, be above ordinances, nor beyond the need of those means which God has appointed and does afford. And, if the people need teaching and exhortation while they are in the body, it is very meet and just that ministers should, as long as they are in this tabernacle, instruct and exhort them, and bring those truths to their remembrance that they have formerly heard, this being a proper means to stir them up to be diligent and lively in a course of gospel-obedience.

II. The apostle, being set upon the work, tells us (v. 14) what makes him earnest in this matter, even the knowledge he had, not only that he must certainly, but also that he must shortly, *put off this tabernacle*. Observe, 1. The body is but the tabernacle of the soul. It is a mean and movable structure, whose stakes can be easily removed, and its cords presently broken. 2. This tabernacle must be put off. We are not to continue long in this earthly house. AS at night we put off our clothes, and lay them by, so at death we must put off our bodies, and they must be laid up in the grave till the morning of the resurrection. 3. The nearness of death makes the apostle diligent in the business of life. Our Lord Jesus had shown him that the time of his departure was at hand, and therefore he bestirs himself with greater zeal and diligence, because the time is short. He must soon be removed from those to whom he wrote; and his ambition being that they should remember the doctrine he had delivered to them, after he himself was taken away from them, he commits his exhortation to writing. The apostle had not any great opinion of oral tradition. This was not so proper a means to reach the end he was in pursuit of. He would have them always to remember these things, and not only to keep them in mind, but also to make mention of them, as the original words import. *Those who fear the Lord make mention of his name*, and talk of his loving-kindness. This is the way to spread the knowledge of the Lord and this the apostle had at heart: and those who have the written word of God are thereby put into a capacity to do this.

Verses 16-18

Here we have the reason of giving the foregoing exhortation, and that with so much diligence and seriousness. These things are not idle tales, or a vain thing, but of undoubted truth and vast concern. The gospel is not a *cunningly devised fable*. These are not the words of one who hath a devil, nor the contrivance of any number of men who by cunning craftiness endeavour to deceive. The way of salvation by Jesus Christ is eminently the counsel of God, the most excellent contrivance of the infinitely wise Jehovah; it was he that invented this way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ, whose power and coming are set forth in the gospel, and the apostle's preaching was a making of these things known. 1. The preaching of the gospel is a making known the power of Christ, that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. He is the mighty God, and therefore can save from both the guilt and the filth of sin. 2. The coming of Christ also is made known by the preaching of the gospel. He

who was promised immediately after the fall of man, as in the fulness of time to be born of a woman, has now come in the flesh; and whosoever denies this is an antichrist (1 Jn. 4:3), he is actuated and influenced by the spirit of anti-christ; but those who are the true apostles and ministers of Christ, and are directed and guided by the Spirit of Christ, evidence that Christ has come according to the promise which all the Old-Testament believers died in the faith of, Heb. 11:39. Christ has come in the flesh. Inasmuch as those whom he undertakes to save *are partakers of flesh and blood, he himself also took part of the same*, that he might suffer in their nature and stead, and thereby make an atonement. This coming of Christ the gospel is very plain and circumstantial in setting forth; but there is a second coming, which it likewise mentions, which the ministers of the gospel ought also to make known, when he shall come in the glory of his Father with all his holy angels, for he is appointed to be Judge both of quick and dead. He will come to judge the world in righteousness by the everlasting gospel, and call us all to give account of all things done in the body, whether good or evil. 3. And though this gospel of Christ has been blasphemously called a *fable* by one of those wretches who call themselves *the successors of St. Peter*, yet our apostle proves that it is of the greatest certainty and reality, inasmuch as during our blessed Saviour's abode here on earth, when he took on him the form of a servant and was found in fashion as a man, he sometimes manifested himself to be God, and particularly to our apostle and the two sons of Zebedee, who *were eye-witnesses of his divine majesty, when he was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light, exceedingly white, as snow, so as no fuller on earth can whiten them*. This Peter, James, and John, were eye-witnesses of, and therefore might and ought to attest; and surely their testimony is true, when they witness what they have seen with their eyes, yea, and heard with their ears: for, besides the visible glory that Christ was invested with here on earth, there was an audible voice from heaven. Here observe, (1.) What a gracious declaration was made: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*—the best voice that ever came from heaven to earth; God is well pleased with Christ, and with us in him. This is the Messiah who was promised, through whom all who believe in him shall be accepted and saved. (2.) This declaration is made by God the Father, who thus publicly owns his Son (even in his state of humiliation, when he was in the form of a servant), yea, proclaims him to be his beloved Son, when he is in that low condition; yea, so far are Christ's mean and low circumstances from abating the love of the Father to him that his laying down his life is said to be one special reason of the Father's love, Jn. 10:17. (3.) The design of this voice was to do our Saviour a singular honour while he was here below: *He received honour and glory from God the Father*. This is the person whom God delights to honour. As he requires us to give honour and glory to his Son by confessing him to be our Saviour, so does he give glory and honour to our Saviour by declaring him to be his Son. (4.) This voice is from heaven, called here *the excellent glory*, which still reflects a greater glory upon our blessed Saviour. This declaration is from God the fountain of honour, and from heaven the seat of glory, where God is most gloriously present. (5.) This voice was heard, and that so as to be understood, by Peter, James, and John. They not only heard a sound (as the people did, Jn. 12:28, 29), but they understood the sense. God opens the ears and understandings of his people to receive what they are concerned to know, when others are like Paul's companions, who only heard a sound of words (Acts 9:7), but understood not the meaning thereof, and therefore are said not to hear the voice of him that spoke, Acts 22:9. Blessed are those who not only hear, but understand, who believe the truth, and feel the

power of the voice from heaven, as he did who testifieth these things: and we have all the reason in the world to receive his testimony; for who would refuse to give credit to what is so circumstantially laid down as this account of the voice from heaven, of which the apostle tells us, (6.) It was heard by them *in the holy mount*, when they were with Jesus? The place wherein God affords any peculiarly gracious manifestation of himself is thereby made holy, not with an inherent holiness, but as the ground was holy where God appeared to Moses (Ex. 3:5), and the mountain holy on which the temple was built, Ps. 87:1. Such places are relatively holy, and to be regarded as such during the time that men in themselves experience, or may, by warrant from the word, believingly expect, the special presence and gracious influence of the holy and glorious God.

Verses 19-21

In these words the apostle lays down another argument to prove the truth and reality of the gospel, and intimates that this second proof is more strong and convincing than the former, and more unanswerably makes out that the doctrine of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a mere fable or cunning contrivance of men, but the wise and wonderful counsel of the holy and gracious God. For this is foretold by the prophets and penmen of the Old Testament, who spoke and wrote under the influence and according to the direction of the Spirit of God. Here note,

I. The description that is given of the scriptures of the Old Testament: they are called a *more sure word of prophecy*. 1. It is a prophetic declaration of the power and coming, the Godhead and incarnation, of our Saviour, which we have in the Old Testament. It is there foretold *that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*. His power to destroy the devil and his works, and his being made of a woman, are there foretold; and the great and awful Old Testament name of God, *Jehovah* (as read by some), signifies only *He will be*; and that name of God (Ex. 3:14) is rendered by many, *I will be that I will be*; and, thus understood, they point at God's being incarnate in order to the redemption and salvation of his people as what was *to come*. But the New Testament is a history of that whereof the Old Testament is a prophecy. *All the prophets and the law prophesied until John*, Mt. 11:13. And the evangelists and the apostles have written the history of what was before delivered as prophecy. Now the accomplishment of the Old Testament by the New, and the agreeableness of the New Testament to the Old, are a full demonstration of the truth of both. Read the Old Testament as a prophecy of Christ, and with diligence and thankfulness use the New as the best exposition of the Old. 2. *The Old Testament is a more sure word of prophecy*. It is so to the Jews who received it as the oracles of God. Following prophets confirmed what had been delivered by those who went before, and these prophecies had been written by the express command, and preserved by the special care, and many of them fulfilled by the wonderful providence of God, and therefore were more certain to those who had all along received and read the scriptures than the apostle's account of this voice from heaven. *Moses and the prophets* more powerfully persuade than even miracles themselves, Lu. 16:31. How firm and sure should our faith be, who have such a firm and sure word to rest upon! All the prophecies of the Old Testament are more sure and certain to us who have the history of the most exact and minute accomplishment of them.

II. The encouragement the apostle gives us to search the scriptures. He tells us, *We do well if we take heed to them*; that is, apply our minds to understand the sense, and our hearts to believe the truth, of this sure word, yea, bend ourselves to it, that we

may be moulded and fashioned by it. The word is that form of doctrine into which we must be cast (Rom. 6:17), *that formulary of knowledge* (Rom. 2:20) by which we are to regulate our thoughts and sentiments, our words and confessions, our whole life and conversation. If we thus apply ourselves to the word of God, we certainly do well in all respects, what is pleasing to God and profitable to ourselves; and this indeed is but paying that regard which is due to the oracles of God. But, in order to this giving heed to the word, the apostle suggests some things that are of singular use to those who would attend to the scriptures to any good purpose. 1. They must account and use the scripture as a light which God hath sent into and set up in the world, to dispel that darkness which is upon the face of the whole earth. The word is a lamp to the feet of those who use it aright; this discovers the way wherein men ought to walk; this is the means whereby we come to know the way of life. 2. They must acknowledge their own darkness. This world is a place of error and ignorance, and every man in the world is naturally without that knowledge which is necessary in order to attain eternal life. 3. If ever men are made wise to salvation, it is by the shining of the word of God into their hearts. Natural notions of God are not sufficient for fallen man, who does at best actually know a great deal less, and yet does absolutely need to know a great deal more, of God than Adam did while he continued innocent. 4. When the light of the scripture is darted into the blind mind and dark understanding by the Holy Spirit of God, then the *spiritual day dawns and the day-star arises in that soul*. This enlightening of a dark benighted mind is like the day-break that improves and advances, spreads and diffuses itself through the whole soul, till it makes perfect day, Prov. 4:18. It is a growing knowledge; those who are this way enlightened never think they know enough, till they come to know as they are known. To give heed to this light must needs be the interest and duty of all; and all who do truth come to this light, while evil-doers keep at a distance from it.

III. The apostle lays down one thing as previously necessary in order to our giving heed to, and getting good by, the scriptures, and that is the knowing that all prophecy is of divine origin. Now this important truth he not only asserts, but proves. 1. Observe, No scripture prophecy is of private interpretation (or a man's own proper opinion, an explication of his own mind), but the revelation of the mind of God. This was the difference between the prophets of the Lord and the false prophets who have been in the world. The prophets of the Lord did not speak nor do any thing of their own mind, as Moses, the chief of them, says expressly (Num. 16:28), *I have not done any of the works* (nor delivered any of the statutes and ordinances) *of my own mind*. But false prophets *speak a vision of their own heart, not out of the mouth of the Lord*, Jer. 23:16. The prophets and penmen of the scripture spoke and wrote what was the mind of God; and though, when under the influence and guidance of the Spirit, it may well be supposed that they were willing to reveal and record such thing, yet it is because God would have them spoken and written. But though the scripture be not the effusion of man's own private opinion or inclination, but the revelation of the mind and will of God, yet every private man ought to search it, and come to understand the sense and meaning thereof. 2. This important truth of the divine origin of the scriptures (that what is contained in them is the mind of God and not of man) is to be known and owned by all who will give heed to the sure word of prophecy. That the scriptures are the word of God is not only an article of the true Christian's faith, but also a matter of science or knowledge. As a man not barely believes, but knows assuredly that that very person is his particular friend in whom he sees all the proper, peculiar, distinguishing marks and

characters of his friend, so the Christian knows that book to be the word of God in and upon which he sees all the proper marks and characters of a divinely inspired book. He tastes a sweetness, and feels a power, and sees a glory, in it truly divine. 3. The divinity of the scriptures must be known and acknowledged in the first place, before men can profitably use them, before they can give good heed to them. To call off our minds from all other writings, and apply them in a peculiar manner to these as the only certain and infallible rule, necessarily requires our being fully persuaded that these are divinely inspired, and contain what is truly the mind and will of God.

IV. Seeing it is so absolutely necessary that persons be fully persuaded of the scripture's divine origin, the apostle (v. 21) tells us how the Old Testament came to be compiled, and that, 1. Negatively: *It came not by the will of man*. Neither the things themselves that are recorded, and make up the several parts of the Old Testament, are the opinions of men, nor was the will of any of the prophets or penmen of the scriptures the rule or reason why any of those things were written which make up the canon of the scripture. 2. Affirmatively: *Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. Observe, (1.) They were holy men of God who were employed about that book which we receive as the word of God. If Balaam and Caiaphas, and others who were destitute of holiness, had any thing of the spirit of prophecy, upon occasion, yet such persons were not employed to write any part of the scriptures for the use of the church of God. All the penmen of the scriptures were holy men of God. (2.) *These holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost* in what they delivered as the mind and will of God. The Holy Ghost is the supreme agent, the holy men are but instruments. [1.] The Holy Ghost inspired and dictated to them what they were to deliver of the mind of God. [2.] He powerfully excited and effectually engaged them to speak (and write) what he had put into their mouths. [3.] He so wisely and carefully assisted and directed them in the delivery of what they had received from him that they were effectually secured from any the least mistake in expressing what they revealed; so that the very words of scripture are to be accounted the words of the Holy Ghost, and all the plainness and simplicity, all the power and virtue, all the elegance and propriety, of the very words and expressions are to be regarded by us as proceeding from God. Mix faith therefore with what you find in the scriptures; esteem and reverence your Bible as a book written by holy men, inspired, influenced, and assisted by the Holy Ghost.

Chapter 2

The apostle, having in the foregoing chapter exhorted them to proceed and advance in the Christian race, now comes to remove, as much as in him lay, what he could not but apprehend would hinder their complying with his exhortation. He therefore gives them fair warning of false teachers, by whom they might be in danger of being seduced. To prevent this, I. He describes these seducers as impious in themselves, and very pernicious to others (v. 1-3). II. He assures them of the punishment that shall be inflicted on them (v. 3-6). III. He tells us how contrary the method is which God takes with those who fear him (v. 7-9). IV. He fills up the rest of the chapter with a further description of those seducers of whom he would have them beware.

Verses 1-3a

I. In the end of the former chapter there is mention made of holy men of God, who lived in the times of the Old Testament, and were used as the amanuenses of the Holy Ghost, in writing the sacred oracles; but in the beginning of this he tells us they had, even at that time, false prophets in the church as well as true. In all ages of the church, and under all dispensations, when God sends true prophets, the devil sends some to seduce and deceive, false prophets in the Old Testament, and false Christs, false apostles, and seducing teachers, in the New. Concerning these observe, 1. Their business is to bring in destructive errors, *even damnable heresies*, as the business of teachers sent of God is to show the way of truth, even the true way to everlasting life. There are damnable heresies as well as damnable practices; and false teachers are industrious to spread pernicious errors. 2. Damnable heresies are commonly brought in privily, under the cloak and colour of truth. Those who introduce destructive heresies *deny the Lord that bought them*. They reject and refuse to hear and learn of the great teacher sent from God, though he is the only Saviour and Redeemer of men, who paid a price sufficient to redeem as many worlds of sinners as there are sinners in the world. 4. Those who bring in errors destructive to others bring swift (and therefore sure) *destruction upon themselves*. Self-destroyers are soon destroyed; and those who are so hardened as to propagate errors destructive to others shall surely and suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

II. He proceeds, in the second verse, to tell us the consequence with respect to others; and here we may learn, 1. Corrupt leaders seldom fail of many to follow them; though the way of error is a pernicious way, yet many are ready to walk therein. Men drink in iniquity like water, and are pleased to live in error. *The prophets prophesy falsely, and the people love to have it so*. 2. The spreading of error will bring up an evil report on the way of truth; that is, the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, who is *the way, the truth, and the life*. The Christian religion is from the God of truth as the author, leads to true happiness in the enjoyment of the true God as the end, and works truth in the inward part as the means of acceptably serving God. And yet this way of truth is traduced and blasphemed by those who embrace and advance destructive errors. This the apostle has foretold as what should certainly come to pass. Let us not be offended at any thing of this in our day, but take care that we give no occasion to the enemy to blaspheme the holy name whereby we are called, or speak evil of that way whereby we hope to be saved.

III. Observe, in the next place, the method seducers take to draw disciples after them: they use *feigned words*; they flatter, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple, inducing them to yield entirely to the opinions which these seducers endeavour to propagate, and sell and deliver themselves over to the instruction and government of these false teachers, who make a gain of those whom they make their proselytes, serving themselves and making some advantage of them; for all this is through covetousness, with a desire and design to get more wealth, or credit, or commendation, by increasing the number of their followers. The faithful ministers of Christ, who show men the way of truth, desire the profit and advantage of their followers, that they may be saved; but these seducing teachers desire and design only their own temporal advantage and worldly grandeur.

Verses 3b-6

Men are apt to think that a reprieve is the forerunner of a pardon, and that if judgment be not speedily executed it is, or will be, certainly reversed. But the apostle tells us that how successful and prosperous soever false teachers may be, and that for a time, yet their *judgment lingereth not*. God has determined long ago how he will deal with them. Such unbelievers, who endeavour to turn others from the faith, are condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on them. The righteous Judge will speedily take vengeance; the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. To prove this assertion, here are several examples of the righteous judgment of God, in taking vengeance on sinners, proposed to our serious consideration.

I. See how God dealt with the angels who sinned. Observe, 1. No excellency will exempt a sinner from punishment. If the angels, who excel us vastly in strength and knowledge, violate the law of God, the sentence which that law awards shall be executed upon them, and that without mercy or mitigation, for God did not spare them. Hence observe, 2. By how much the more excellent the offender, by so much the more severe the punishment. These angels, who had the advantage of men as to the dignity of their nature, are immediately punished. There is no sparing them for a few days, no favour at all shown them. 3. Sin debases and degrades the persons who commit it. The angels of heaven are cast down from the height of their excellency, and divested of all their glory and dignity, upon their disobedience. Whoever sins against God does a manifest hurt to himself. 4. Those who rebel against the God of heaven shall all be sent down to hell. There is no place nor state between the height of glory and the depth of misery in which they shall be allowed to rest. If creatures sin in heaven, they must suffer in hell. 5. Sin is the work of darkness, and darkness is the wages of sin. The darkness of misery and torment follows the darkness of sin. Those who will not walk according to the light and direction of God's law shall be deprived of the light of God's countenance and the comforts of his presence. 6. As sin binds men over to punishment, so misery and torment hold men under punishment. The darkness which is their misery keeps them so that they cannot get away from their torment. 7. The last degree of torment is not till the day of judgment. The sinning angels, though in hell already, are yet reserved to the judgment of the great day.

II. See how God dealt with the old world, even in much the same way that he dealt with the angels. He spared not the old world. Here observe, 1. The number of offenders signifies no more to procure any favour than the quality. If the sin be universal, the punishment shall likewise extend to all. But, 2. If there be but a few righteous, they shall be preserved. God does

not destroy the good with the bad. In wrath he remembers mercy. 3. Those who are *preachers of righteousness* in an age of universal corruption and degeneracy, *holding forth the word of life* in an unblamable and exemplary conversation, shall be preserved in a time of general destruction. 4. God can make use of those creatures as the instruments of his vengeance in punishing sinners which he at first made and appointed for their service and benefit. He destroyed the whole world by water; but observe, 5. What was the procuring cause of this: *it was a world of ungodly men*. Ungodliness puts men out of the divine protection, and exposes them to utter destruction.

III. See how God dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah; though they were situated in a country like the garden of the Lord, yet, if in such a fruitful soil they abound in sin, God can soon turn a fruitful land into barrenness and a well-watered country into dust and ashes. Observe, 1. No political union or confederacy can keep off judgments from a sinful people. Sodom and the neighbouring cities were no more secured by their regular government than the angels by the dignity of their nature or the old world by their vast number. 2. God can make use of contrary creatures to punish incorrigible sinners. He destroys the *old world by water*, and Sodom by fire. He who keeps fire and water from hurting his people (Isa. 43:2) can make either to destroy his enemies; therefore they are never safe. 3. Most heinous sins bring most grievous judgments. Those who were abominable in their vices were remarkable for their plagues. Those who are sinners exceedingly before the Lord must expect the most dreadful vengeance. 4. The punishment of sinners in former ages is designed for the example of those who come after. "Follow them, not only in the time of living, but in their *course and way of living*." Men who live ungodly must see what they are to expect if they go on still in a course of impiety. Let us take warning by all the instances of God's taking vengeance, which are recorded for our admonition, and to prevent our promising ourselves impunity, though we go on in a course of sin.

Verses 7-9

When God sends destruction on the ungodly, he commands deliverance for the righteous; and, if he rain fire and brimstone on the wicked, he will cover the head of the just, and they shall be hid in the day of his anger. This we have an instance of in his preserving Lot. Here observe, 1. The character given of Lot; he is called *a just man*; this he was as to the generally prevailing bent of his heart and through the main of his conversation. God does not account men just or unjust from one single act, but from their general course of life. And here is a just man in the midst of a most corrupt and profligate generation universally gone off from all good. He does not follow the multitude to do evil, but in a city of injustice he walks uprightly. 2. The impression the sins of others made upon this righteous man. Though the sinner takes pleasure in his wickedness, it is a grief and vexation to the soul of the righteous. In bad company we cannot escape either guilt or grief. Let the sins of others be a trouble to us, otherwise it will not be possible for us to keep ourselves pure. 3. Here is a particular mention of the duration and continuance of this good man's grief and vexation: it was *from day to day*. Being accustomed to hear and see their wickedness did not reconcile him to it, nor abate of the horror that was occasioned by it. This is the righteous man whom God preserved from the desolating judgment that destroyed all round about him. From this instance we are taught to argue that God knows how to deliver his people and punish his enemies. It is here presupposed that the righteous must have their temptations and trials. The devil and his instruments will thrust sore at them, that they may fall; and, if we will get to heaven, it must be

through many tribulations. It is therefore our duty to reckon upon and prepare for them. Observe here, (1.) *The Lord knows those that are his*. He has set apart him who is godly for himself; and, if there is but one in five cities, he knows him; and where there is a greater number he cannot be ignorant of nor overlook any one of them. (2.) The wisdom of God is never at a loss about ways and means to deliver his people. They are often utterly at a loss, and can see no way; he can deliver a great many. (3.) The deliverance of the godly is the work of God, that which he concerns himself in, both his wisdom to contrive the way and his power to work out the deliverance *out of temptation*, to prevent their falling into sin and their being ruined by their troubles. And surely, if he can deliver out of temptation, he could keep from falling into it if he did not see such trials to be necessary. (4.) God makes a very great difference in his dealings with the godly and the wicked. When he saves his people from destruction, he delivers over his enemies to deserved ruin. The unjust has no share in the salvation God works out for the righteous. The wicked are *reserved to the day of judgment*. Here we see, [1.] There is a day of judgment. *God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world*. [2.] The preservation of impenitent sinners is only a reserving of them to the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Verses 10-22

The apostle's design being to warn us of, and arm us against, seducers, he now returns to discourse more particularly of them, and give us an account of their character and conduct, which abundantly justifies the righteous Judge of the world in reserving them in an especial manner for the most severe and heavy doom, as Cain is taken under special protection that he might be kept for uncommon vengeance. But why will God thus deal with these false teachers? This he shows in what follows.

I. *These walk after the flesh*; they follow the devices and desires of their own hearts, they give up themselves to the conduct of their own fleshly mind, refusing to make their reason stoop to divine revelation, and to *bring every thought to the obedience of Christ*; they, in their lives, act directly contrary to God's righteous precepts, and comply with the demands of corrupt nature. Evil opinions are often accompanied with evil practices; and those who are for propagating error are for improving in wickedness. They will not sit down contented in the measure of iniquity to which they have attained, nor is it enough for them to stand up, and maintain, and defend, what wickedness they have already committed, but they *walk after the flesh*, they go on in their sinful course, and increase unto more ungodliness and greater degrees of impurity and uncleanness too; they also pour contempt on those whom God has set in authority over them and requires them to honour. These therefore despise *the ordinance of God*, and we need not wonder at it, for they are bold and daring, obstinate and refractory, and will not only cherish contempt in their hearts, but with their tongues will utter slanderous and reproachful words of those who are set over them.

II. This he aggravates, by setting forth the very different conduct of more excellent creatures, even the *angels*, of whom observe, 1. *They are greater in power and might*, and that even than those who are clothed with authority and power among the sons of men, and much more than those false teachers who are slanderous revilers of magistrates and governors; the good angels vastly exceed us in all natural and moral excellences, in strength, understanding, and holiness too. 2. Good angels are accusers of sinful creatures, either of their own kind, or ours, or both. Those who are allowed to behold the face of God, and

stand before his throne, cannot but have a zeal for his honour, and accuse and blame those who dishonour him. 3. *Angels bring their accusations of sinful creatures before the Lord*; they do not publish their faults, and tell their crimes to their fellow-creatures, in a way of calumny and slander; but it is before the Lord, who is the Judge, and will be the avenger, of all impiety and injustice. 4. Good angels mingle no bitter revilings nor base reproaches with any of the accusations or charges they bring against the wickedest and worst of criminals. Let us, who pray that God's *will may be done on earth as it is in heaven*, imitate the angels in this particular; if we complain of wicked men, let it be to God, and that not with rage and reviling, but with compassion and composedness of mind, that may evidence that we belong to him who is meek and merciful.

III. The apostle, having shown (v. 11) how unlike seducing teachers are to the most excellent creatures, proceeds (v. 12) to show how like they are to the most inferior: they are *like the horse and mule, which have no understanding*; they are *as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed*. Men, under the power of sin, are so far from observing divine revelation that they do not exercise reason, nor act according to the direction thereof. They *walk by sight, and not by faith*, and judge of things according to their senses; as these represent things pleasant and agreeable, so they must be approved and esteemed. Brute-creatures follow the instinct of their sensitive appetite, and sinful man follows the inclination of his carnal mind; these refuse to employ the understanding and reason God has given them, and so are ignorant of what they might and ought to know; and therefore observe, 1. Ignorance is the cause of evil-speaking; and, 2. Destruction will be the effect of it. These persons shall be utterly destroyed in their own corruption. Their vices not only expose them to the wrath of God in another world, but often bring them to misery and ruin in this life; and surely such impudent offenders, who *glory in their shame*, and to whom openness in sin is an improvement of the pleasure of sinning, most justly deserve all the plagues of this life and the pains of the next in the greatest extremity. Therefore whatever they meet with is the just *reward of their unrighteousness*. Such sinners as sport themselves in mischief deceive themselves and disgrace all they belong to, for by one sort of sins they prepare themselves for another; their extravagant feastings, their intemperance in eating and drinking, bring them to commit all manner of lewdness, so that their *eyes are full of adultery*, their wanton looks show their own impure lusts and are designed and directed to kindle the like in others; and this is what they *cannot cease* from—the heart is insatiate in lusting and the eye incessant in looking after what may gratify their unclean desires, and those who are themselves impudent and incessant in sin are very diligent and often successful in deceiving others and drawing others into the same excess of riot. But here observe who those are who are in the greatest danger of being led away into error and impiety, even the *unstable*. Those whose hearts are not established with grace are easily turned into the way of sin, or else such sensual wretches would not be able to prevail upon them, for these are not only riotous and lascivious, but *covetous* also, and these practices their hearts are exercised with; they pant after riches, and the desire of their souls is to the wealth of this world: it is a considerable part of their work to contrive to get wealth; in this their hearts are exercised, and then they execute their projects; and, if men abandon themselves to all sorts of lusts, we cannot wonder that the apostle should call them *cursed children*, for they are liable to the curse of God denounced against such *ungodly and unrighteous men*, and they bring a curse upon all who hearken and adhere to them.

IV. The apostle (v. 15, 16) proves that they are *cursed children*, even such covetous persons as *the Lord abhors*, by showing, 1.

They *have forsaken the right way*; and it cannot be but such self-seekers must be out of the right way, which is a self-denying way. 2. They have gone into a wrong way: they have erred and strayed from the way of life, and gone over into the path which leads to death, and takes hold of hell; and this he makes out by showing it to be *the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor*. (1.) That is a way of unrighteousness into which men are led by the wages of unrighteousness. (2.) Outward temporal good things are the wages sinners expect and promise themselves, though they are often disappointed. (3.) The inordinate love of the good things of this world turns men out of the way which leads to the unspeakably better things of another life; the love of riches and honour turned Balaam out of the way of his duty, although he knew that the way he took displeased the Lord. (4.) Those who from the same principle are guilty of the same practices with notorious sinners are, in the judgment of God, the followers of such vile offenders, and therefore must reckon upon being at last where they are: *they shall have their portion* with those in another world whom they imitated in this. (5.) Heinous and hardened sinners sometimes meet with rebukes for their iniquity. God stops them in their way, and opens the mouth of conscience, or by some startling providence startles and affrights them. (6.) Though some more uncommon and extraordinary rebuke may for a little while cool men's courage, and hinder their violent progress in the way of sin, it will not make them forsake the way of iniquity and go over into the way of holiness. If rebuking a sinner for his iniquity could have made a man return to his duty, surely the rebuke of Balaam must have produced this effect; for here is a surprising miracle wrought: *the dumb ass*, in whose mouth no man can expect to meet with reproof, is enabled to speak, and that with a human voice, and to her owner and master (who is here called a *prophet*, for the Lord appeared and spoke sometimes to him, Num. 22:23, 24, but indeed he was among the prophets of the Lord as Judas among the apostles of Jesus Christ), and she exposes *the madness* of his conduct and opposes his going on in this evil way, and yet all in vain. Those who will not yield to usual methods of reproof will be but little influenced by miraculous appearances to turn them from their sinful courses. Balaam was indeed restrained from actually *cursing the people*, but he had so strong a desire after the honours and riches that were promised him that he went as far as he could, and did his utmost to get from under the restraint that was upon him.

V. The apostle proceeds (v. 17) to a further description of seducing teachers, whom he sets forth,

1. As *wells*, or fountains, *without water*. Observe, (1.) Ministers should be as wells or fountains, where the people may find instruction, direction, and comfort; but (2.) False teachers have nothing of this to impart to those who consult them: the word of truth is the water of life, which refreshes the souls that receive it; but these deceivers are set upon spreading and promoting error, and therefore are set forth as empty, because there is no truth in them. In vain then are all our expectations of being fed and filled with knowledge and understanding by those who are themselves ignorant and empty.

2. As *clouds carried with a tempest*. When we see a cloud we expect a refreshing shower from it; but these are clouds which yield no rain, for they are driven with the wind, but not of the Spirit, but the stormy wind or tempest of their own ambition and covetousness. They espouse and spread those opinions that will procure most applause and advantage to themselves; and as clouds obstruct the light of the sun, and darken the air, so do these *darken counsel by words without knowledge* and wherein there is no truth; and, seeing these men are for promoting darkness in this world, it is very just that the mist of darkness should

be their portion in the next. Utter darkness was prepared for the devil, the great deceiver, and his angels, those instruments that he uses to turn men from the truth, and therefore for them it is reserved, and that for ever; the fire of hell is everlasting, and the smoke of the bottomless pit rises up for ever and ever. And it is just with God to deal thus with them, because (1.) They allure those they deal with, and draw them into a net, or catch them as men do fish; and, (2.) It is *with great swelling words of vanity*, lofty expressions, which have a great sound, but little sense. (3.) They work upon *the corrupt affections* and *carnal fleshly lusts of men*, proposing what is grateful to them. And, (4.) They seduce persons who in reality avoided and kept at a distance from those who spread and those who embraced hurtful and destructive errors. Observe, [1.] By application and industry men attain a skilfulness and dexterity in promoting error. They are as artful and as successful as the fisher, who makes angling his daily employment. The business of these men is to draw disciples after them, and in their methods and management there are some things worth observing, how they suit their bait to those they desire to catch. [2.] Erroneous teachers have a peculiar advantage to win men over to them, because they have sensual pleasure to take them with; whereas the ministers of Christ put men upon self-denial, and the mortifying of those lusts that others gratify and please: wonder not therefore that truth prevails no more, or that errors spread so much. [3.] Persons who have for a while adhered to the truth, and kept clear of errors, may by the subtlety and industry of seducers be so far deceived as to fall into those errors they had for a while *clean escaped*. "Be therefore always upon your guard, maintain a godly jealousy of yourselves, search the scriptures, pray for the Spirit to instruct and establish you in the truth, walk humbly with God, and watch against every thing that may provoke him to give you up to a reprobate mind, that you may not be taken with the fair and specious pretences of these false teachers, who promise liberty to all who will hearken to them, not true Christian liberty for the service of God, but a licentiousness in sin, to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts." To prevent these men's gaining proselytes, he tells us that, in the midst of all their talk of liberty, they themselves are the vilest slaves, for they are the servants of corruption; their own lusts have gotten a complete victory over them, and they are actually in bondage to them, making *provision for the flesh*, to satisfy its cravings, comply with its directions, and obey its commands. Their minds and hearts are so far corrupted and depraved that they have neither power nor will to refuse the task that is imposed on them. They are conquered and captivated by their spiritual enemies, and yield their members servants of unrighteousness: and what a shame it is to be overcome and commanded by those who are themselves *the servants of corruption, and slaves to their own lusts!* This consideration should prevent our being led away by these seducers; and to this he adds another (v. 20): it is not only a shame and disgrace to be seduced by those who are themselves the slaves of sin, and led captive by the devil at his pleasure, but it is a real detriment to those who have clean escaped from those who live in error, for hereby their latter end is made worse than their beginning. Here we see, *First*, It is an advantage to escape the pollutions of the world, to be kept from gross and scandalous sins, though men are not thoroughly converted and savingly changed; for hereby we are kept from grieving those who are truly serious and emboldening those who are openly profane; whereas, if we run with others to the same excess of riot and abandon ourselves to the sins of the age, we afflict and dishearten those who endeavour to walk as becomes the gospel, and strengthen the hands of those who are already engaged in open rebellion against the Most High, as well as alienate ourselves more from God, and harden our hearts against him. *Secondly*,

Some men are, for a time, *kept from the pollutions of the world, by the knowledge of Christ*, who are not savingly renewed in the spirit of their mind. A religious education has restrained many whom the grace of God has not renewed: if we receive the light of the truth, and have a notional knowledge of Christ in our heads, it may be of some present service to us; but we must receive the love of the truth, and hide God's word in our heart, or it will not sanctify and save us. *Thirdly*, Those who have, for a time, escaped the pollutions of the world, are at first ensnared and entangled by false teachers, who first perplex men with some plausible and specious objections against the truths of the gospel; and the more ignorant and unstable are hereby made to stagger, and brought to question the truth of doctrines they have received, because they cannot solve all the difficulties, nor answer all the objections, that are urged by these seducers. *Fourthly*, When men are once entangled, they are easily overcome; therefore should Christians keep close to the word of God, and watch against those who seek to perplex and bewilder them, and that because, if men who have once *escaped are again entangled, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning*.

VI. The apostle, in the last two verses of the chapter, sets himself to prove that a state of apostasy is worse than a state of ignorance; for it is a *condemning of the way of righteousness*, after they have had some knowledge of it, and expressed some liking to it; it carries in it a declaring that they have found some iniquity in the way of righteousness and some falsehood in the word of truth. Now to bring up such an evil report upon the good way of God, and such a false charge against the way of truth, must necessarily expose to the heaviest condemnation; the misery of such deserters of Christ and his gospel is more unavoidable and more intolerable than that of other offenders; for, 1. God is more highly provoked by those who by their conduct despise the gospel, as well as disobey the law, and who reproach and pour contempt upon God and his grace. 2. The devil more narrowly watches and more closely confines those whom he has recovered, after they had once gone off from him and professed to be the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 12:45); they are kept under a stronger guard, and no wonder it should be so when they have licked up their own vomit again, returning to the same errors and impieties that they had once cast off and seemed to detest and loathe, and wallowing in that filthiness from which they appeared once to be really cleansed. Well, if the scripture gives such an account of Christianity on the one hand, and of sin on the other, as we have here in these two verses, we certainly ought highly to approve of the former and persevere therein, because it is a way of righteousness, and a holy commandment, and to loathe and keep at the greatest distance from the latter because it is set forth as most offensive and abominable

Chapter 3

The apostle drawing towards the conclusion of his second epistle, begins this last chapter with repeating the account of his design and scope in writing a second time to them (v. 1-2). II. He proceeds to mention one thing that induced him to write this second epistle, namely, the coming of scoffers, whom he describes (v. 3-7). III. He instructs and establishes them in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to judgment (v. 8–10). IV. He sets forth the use and improvement which Christians ought to make of Christ's second coming, and that dissolution and renovation of things which will accompany that solemn coming of our Lord (v. 11–18).

Verses 1-2

That the apostle might the better reach his end in writing this epistle, which is to make them steady and constant in a fiducial and practical remembrance of the doctrine of the gospel, he, 1. Expresses his special affection and tenderness for them, by calling them *beloved*, hereby evidencing that he *added to godliness brotherly-kindness*, as he had (ch. 1:17) exhorted them to do. Ministers must be examples of love and affection, as well as life and conversation. 2. He evinces a sincere love to them, and hearty concern for them, by writing the same thing to them, though in other words. It being safe for them, it shall not be grievous to him to write upon the same subject, and pursue the same design, by those methods which are most likely to succeed. 3. The better to recommend the matter, he tells them that what he would have them to remember are, (1.) *The words spoken by the holy prophets*, who were divinely inspired, both enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Ghost; and, seeing these persons' minds were purified by the sanctifying operation of the same Spirit, they were the better disposed to receive and retain what came from God by the holy prophets. (2.) *The commandments of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour*; and therefore the disciples and servants of Christ ought to regard what those who are sent by him have declared unto them to be the will of their Lord. What God has spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament, and Christ has commanded by the apostles of the New, cannot but demand and deserve to be frequently remembered; and those who meditate on these things will feel the quickening virtues thereof. It is by these things the pure minds of Christians are to be stirred up, that they may be active and lively in the work of holiness, and zealous and unwearied in the way to heaven.

Verses 3-7

To quicken and excite us to a serious minding and firm adhering to what God has revealed to us by the prophets and apostles, we are told that there will be *scoffers*, men who will *make a mock of sin*, and of salvation from it. God's way of saving sinners by Jesus Christ is what men will scoff at, and that *in the last days*, under the gospel. This indeed may seem very strange, that the New-Testament dispensation of the covenant of grace, which is spiritual and therefore more agreeable to the nature of God than the Old, should be ridiculed and reproached; but the spirituality and simplicity of New-Testament worship are directly contrary to the carnal mind of man, and this accounts for what the apostle seems here to hint at, namely, that scoffers shall be more numerous and more bold in the last days than ever before. Though in all ages those who were born and walked after the flesh persecuted, reviled, and reproached those who were born and did walk after the Spirit, yet in the last days there will be a

great improvement in the art and impudence of bantering serious godliness, and those who firmly adhere to the circumspection and self-denial which the gospel prescribes. This is what is mentioned as a thing well known to all Christians, and therefore they ought to reckon upon it, that they may not be surprised and shaken, as if some strange thing happened unto them. Now to prevent the true Christian's being overcome, when attacked by these scoffers, we are told,

I. What sort of persons they are: they *walk after their own lusts*, they follow the devices and desires of their own hearts, and carnal affections, not the dictates and directions of right reason and an enlightened well-informed judgment. This they do in the course of their conversation, they live as they list, and they speak as they list; it is not only their inward minds that are evil and opposite to God, as the mind of every unrenewed sinner is (Rom. 8:7), alienated from God, ignorant of him, and averse to him; but they have grown to such a height of wickedness that they proclaim openly what is in the hearts of others who are yet carnal; they say, "Our tongues are our own, and our strength, and time, and *who is lord over us?* Who shall contradict or control us, or ever call us to an account for what we say or do?" And, as they scorn to be confined by any laws of God in their conversation, so neither will they bear that the revelation of God should dictate and prescribe to them what they are to believe; as they will walk in their own way, and talk their own language, so will they also think their own thoughts, and form principles which are altogether their own: here also *their own lusts* alone shall be consulted by them. None but such accomplished libertines as are here described can take a seat, at least they cannot sit in the seat of the scornful. "By this you shall know them, that you may the better be upon your guard against them."

II. We also are forewarned how far they will proceed: they will attempt to shake and unsettle us, even as to our belief of Christ's second coming; they will scoffingly say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* v. 4. Without this, all the other articles of the Christian faith will signify very little; this is that which fills up and gives the finishing stroke to all the rest. The promised Messiah has come, he *was made flesh, and dwelt among us*; he is altogether such a one as is stated before, and has done all that for us which has been before taken notice of. These principles the enemies of Christianity have all along endeavoured to overturn; but as these all rest upon facts which are already past, and of which this and the other apostles have given us the most sure and satisfying evidence, it is probable that they will at last grow weary of their opposition to them; and yet, while one very principal article of our faith refers to what is still behind, and only has a promise to rest upon, here they will still attack us, even to the end of time. Till our Lord shall have come, they will not themselves believe that he will come; nay, they will laugh at the very mention of his second coming, and do what in them lies to put all out of countenance who seriously believe and wait for it. Now therefore let us see how this point stands, both on the believer's part and on the part of these seducers: the believer not only desires that he may come, but, having a promise that he will come, a promise that he himself has made and often repeated, a promise received and reported by faithful witnesses, and left upon sure record, he is also firmly and fully persuaded that he will come: on the other hand, these seducers, because they wish he never may, therefore do all that in them lies to cheat themselves and others into a persuasion that he will never come. If they cannot deny that there is a promise, yet they will laugh at that very promise, which argues much higher degrees of infidelity and contempt: *Where is the promise, say they, of his coming?*

III. We are also forewarned of the method of their reasoning, for while they laugh they will pretend to argue too. To this purpose they add that *since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*, v. 4. This is a subtle, though not a solid way of reasoning; it is apt to make impressions upon weak minds, and especially upon wicked hearts. *Because sentence against them is not speedily executed*, therefore they flatter themselves that it never will, whereupon *their hearts are fully set in them to do evil* (Eccl. 8:11); thus they act themselves, and thus they would persuade others to act; so here, say they, *"The fathers have fallen asleep*, those are all dead to whom *the promise was made*, and it was never made good in their time, and there is no likelihood that it ever will be in any time; why should we trouble ourselves about it? If there had been any truth or certainty in the promise you speak of, we should surely have seen somewhat of it before this time, some signs of his coming, some preparatory steps in order to it; whereas we find to this very day *all things continue as they were*, without any change, even *from the beginning of the creation*. Since the world has undergone no changes in the course of so many thousand years, why should we affright ourselves as if it were to have an end?" Thus do these scoffers argue. *Because they see no changes, therefore they fear not God*, Ps. 55:19. They neither fear him nor his judgments; what he never has done they would conclude he never can do or never will.

IV. Here is the falsehood of their argument detected. Whereas they confidently had said there had not been any change *from the beginning of the creation*, the apostle puts us in remembrance of a change already past, which, in a manner, equals that which we are called to expect and look for, which was the drowning of the world in the days of Noah. This these scoffers had overlooked; they took no notice of it. Though they might have known it, and ought to have known it, yet *this they willingly are ignorant of* (v. 5), they choose to pass it over in silence, as if they had never heard or known any thing of it; if they knew it, they did not like to retain it in their knowledge; they did not receive this truth in the love of it, neither did they care to own it. Note, It is hard to persuade men to believe what they are not willing to find true; they are ignorant, in many cases, because they are willing to be ignorant, and they do not know because they do not care to know. But let not sinners think that such ignorance as this will be admitted as an excuse for whatever sin it may betray them into. Those who crucified Christ did not know who he was; for *had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Co. 2:8); but, though ignorant, they were not therefore innocent; their ignorance itself was a sin, willing and wilful ignorance, and one sin can be no excuse for another. So it is here; had these known of the dreadful vengeance with which God swept away a whole world of ungodly wretches at once, they would not surely have scoffed at his threatenings of any after equally terrible judgment; but here *they were willingly ignorant*, they did not know what God had done because they had no mind to know it. Now therefore we shall proceed to consider the representation which the apostle here lays down both of the destruction of the old world by water and that which awaits this present world at the final conflagration. He mentions the one as what God has done, to convince and persuade us the rather to believe that the other both may be and will be.

1. We begin with the apostle's account of the destruction which has once already come upon the world (v. 5, 6): *By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*. Originally the world was otherwise situated, the waters were most wisely divided at the

creation and most beneficially for us; some of the waters had proper repositories above the firmament, here called the heavens (as it is also Gen. 1:8), and others, under the firmament, gathered together unto one place; there were then both sea and dry land, commodious habitation for the children of men. But now, at the time of the universal deluge, the case is strangely altered; the waters which God had divided before, assigning to each part its convenient receptacle, now does he, in anger, throw together again in a heap. *He breaks up the fountain of the great deep, and throws open the windows (that is, the clouds) of heaven* (Gen. 7:11), till the whole earth is overflowed with water, and not a spot can be found upon the highest mountains but what is *fifteen cubits under water*, Gen. 7:20. Thus he made known at once his terrible power and his fierce anger, and made an end of a whole world at once: *The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*, v. 6. Is not here a change and a most awful change! And then it is to be observed that all this was done by the word of God; it was by his powerful word that the world was made at first, and made in so commodious and beautiful a frame and order, Heb. 11:3, *Katepurtisthai*. *He said, Let there be a firmament*, etc., Gen. 1:6, 7. *And let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place*, etc., v. 9, 10. Thus he spoke, and it was done, Ps. 33:9. Thus, says our apostle, *by the word of the Lord the heavens were*, as they were of *old* (that is, at first creation) *and the earth* (as it was at first a terraqueous globe) *standing out of the water and in the water*. Not is it only the first frame and order of the world that is here said to be *by the word of God*, but the after-confusion and ruin of the world, as well as the utter destruction of its inhabitants, were also by the same word; none but that God who *stretched out the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth* could destroy and overthrow such a vast fabric at once. This was done by the word of his power, and it was also done according to the word of his promise; God had said that he would destroy man, even all flesh, and that he would do it by bringing a flood of waters upon the earth, Gen. 6:7, 13, 17. This was the change which God had before brought upon the world, and which these scoffers had overlooked; and now we are to consider,

2. What the apostle says of the destructive change which is yet to come upon it: *The heavens and the earth, which now are, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*, v. 7. Here we have an awful account of the final dissolution of the world, and which we are yet more nearly concerned in. The ruin that came upon the world and its inhabitants by the flood, we read, and hear, and think of, with concern, though those who were swept away by it were such as we never knew; but the judgment here spoken of is yet to come, and will surely come, though we know not when, nor upon what particular age or generation of men; and therefore we are not, we cannot be, sure that it may not happen in our own times: and this makes a very great difference, though it should be admitted that they were equal in every other respect, which yet must not be allowed, for there were some, though very few, who escaped that deluge, but not one can escape in this conflagration. Besides, we were not in reach of the one, but are not sure that we shall not be included in the other calamity. Now therefore to see the world to which we belong destroyed at once—not a single person only, not a particular family only, nor yet a nation (even that which we are most nearly interested in and concerned for), but the whole world, I say, sinking at once, and no ark provided, no possible way left of escaping for any one from the common ruin, this makes a difference between the desolation that has been and what we yet are to expect. The one is already past, and never to return upon us any more (for God has said expressly *that there shall never any more be a flood to destroy the earth*, Gen. 9:11–17);

the other is still behind, and is as certain to come as the truth and the power of God can make it: the one came gradually upon the world, and was growing upon its inhabitants forty days, before it made an utter end of them (Gen. 7:12, 17); this other will come upon them swiftly and all at once (2 Pt. 2:1): besides, there were in that overthrow (as we have said) a few who escaped, but the ruin which yet awaits this world, whenever it comes, will be absolutely a universal one; there will not be any part but what the devouring flames will seize upon, not a sanctuary left any where for the inhabitants to flee to, not a single spot in all this world where any one of them can be safe. Thus, whatever differences may be assigned between that destruction of the world and this here spoken of, they do indeed represent the approaching as the most terrible judgment; yet that the world has once been destroyed by a universal deluge renders it the more credible that it may be again ruined by a universal conflagration. Let therefore the scoffers, who laugh at the coming of our Lord to judgment, at least consider that it *may be*. There is nothing said of it in the word of God but what is within reach of the power of God, and, though they still should laugh, they shall not put us out of countenance; we are well assured that it will be, because he has said it, and we can depend upon his *promise*. They *err, not knowing* (at least not believing) *the scriptures, nor the power of God*; but we know, and we do or ought to depend upon, both. Now that which he has said, and which he will certainly make good, is that *the heavens and the earth which now are* (which we are now related to, which still subsist in all the beauty and order in which we see them, and which are so agreeable and useful to us, as we find they are) *are kept in store*, not to be, what earthly minds would wish to have them, treasures for us, but to be what God will have them, in his treasury, securely lodged and kept safely for his purposes. It follows, they are *reserved unto fire*. Observe, God's following judgments are more terrible than those which went before; the old world was destroyed by water, but this is reserved unto fire, which shall burn up the wicked at the last day; and, though this seems to be delayed, yet, as this wicked world is upheld by the word of God, so it is only reserved for the vengeance of him to whom vengeance belongs, who will at the day of judgment deal with an ungodly world according to their deserts, for the day of judgment is the day of *the perdition of ungodly men*. Those who now scoff at a future judgment shall find it a day of vengeance and utter destruction. "Beware therefore of being among these scoffers; never question but the day of the Lord will come; give diligence therefore to be found in Christ, that that may be a time of refreshment and day of redemption to you which will be a day of indignation and wrath to the ungodly world."

Verse 8

The apostle comes in these words to instruct and establish Christians in the truth of the coming of the Lord, where we may clearly discern the tenderness and affection wherewith he speaks to them, calling them *beloved*; he had a compassionate concern and a love of good-will for the ungodly wretches who refused to believe divine revelation, but he has a peculiar respect for the true believers, and the remaining ignorance and weakness that he apprehends to be in them make him jealous, and put him on giving them a caution. Here we may observe,

I. The truth which the apostle asserts—*that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day*. Though, in the account of men, there is a great deal of difference between a day and a year, and a vast deal more between one day and a thousand years, yet in the account of God, who inhabits eternity, in which there is no succession, there is no

difference; for all things past, present, and future, are ever before him, and the delay of a thousand years cannot be so much to him as the deferring of any thing for a day or an hour is to us.

II. The importance of this truth: This is the *one thing* the apostle would not have us ignorant of; a holy awe and reverential fear of God are necessary in order to our worshiping and glorifying him, and a belief of the inconceivable distance between him and us is very proper to beget and maintain that religious fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. This is a truth that belongs to our peace, and therefore he endeavours that it may not be hidden from our eyes; as it is in the original, *Let not this one thing be hidden from you*. If men have no knowledge or belief of the eternal God, they will be very apt to think him such a one as themselves. Yet how hard is it to conceive of eternity! It is therefore not very easy to attain such a knowledge of God as is absolutely necessary.

Verses 9-10

We are here told that *the Lord is not slack*—he does not delay beyond the appointed time; as God kept the time that he had appointed for the delivering of Israel out of Egypt, to a day (Ex. 12:41), so he will keep to the time appointed in coming to judge the world. What a difference is there between the account which God makes and that which men make! Good men are apt to think God stays beyond the appointed time, that is, the time which they have set for their own and the church's deliverance; but they set one time and God sets another, and he will not fail to keep the day which he has appointed. Ungodly men dare charge a culpable slackness upon God, as if he had slipped the time, and laid aside the thoughts of coming. But the apostle assures us,

I. That what men count slackness is truly *long-suffering*, and that *to us-ward*; it is giving more time to his own people, *whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world*, many of whom are not as yet converted; and those who are in a state of grace and favour with God are to advance in knowledge and holiness, and in the exercise of faith and patience, to abound in good works, doing and suffering what they are called to, that they may bring glory to God, and improve in a meetness for heaven; for God is not willing that any of these should perish, but that all of them should come to repentance. Here observe, 1.

Repentance is absolutely necessary in order to salvation. *Except we repent, we shall perish*, Lu. 13:3, 5. 2. God has no delight in the death of sinners: as the punishment of sinners is a torment to his creatures, a merciful God does not take pleasure in it; and though the principal design of God in his long-suffering is the blessedness of those *whom he has chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth*, yet his goodness and forbearance do in their own nature invite and call to repentance all those to whom they are exercised; and, if men continue impenitent when God gives them space to repent, he will deal more severely with them, though the great reason why he did not hasten his coming was because he had not accomplished *the number of his elect*. "Abuse not therefore the patience and long-suffering of God, by abandoning yourselves to a course of ungodliness; presume not to go on boldly in the way of sinners, nor to sit down securely in an unconverted impenitent state, as he who said (Mt. 24:48), *My Lord delayeth his coming, lest he come and surprise you*;" for,

II. *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*, v. 10. Here we may observe, 1. The certainty of the day of the Lord: though it is now above sixteen hundred years since this epistle was written, and the day has not yet come, it assuredly will

come. God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and he will keep his appointment. *It is appointed to men once to die, and after this the judgment*, Heb. 9:27. "Settle it therefore in your hearts that the day of the Lord will certainly come, and you shall certainly be called to give an account of all things done in the body, whether good or evil; and let your exact walking before God, and your frequent judging yourselves, evidence your firm belief of a future judgment, when many live as if they were never to give any account at all." 2. The suddenness of this day: *It will come as a thief in the night*, at a time when men are sleeping and secure, and have no manner of apprehension or expectation of the day of the Lord, any more than men have of a thief when they are in a deep sleep, in the dark and silent night. *At midnight there was a cry, Behold, the bridegroom comes*, (Mt. 25:6), and at that time not only the foolish, but also the wise virgins slumbered and slept. *The Lord will come in a day when we look not for him, and an hour when men are not aware*. The time which men think to be the most improper and unlikely, and when therefore they are most secure, will be the time of the Lord's coming. Let us then beware how we in our thoughts and imaginations put that day far away from us; but rather suppose it to be so much nearer in reality, by how much further off it is in the opinion of the ungodly world. 3. The solemnity of this coming. (1.) *The heavens shall pass away with a great noise*. The visible heavens, as unable to abide when the Lord shall come in his glory, shall pass away; they shall undergo a mighty alteration, and this shall be very sudden, and with such a noise as the breaking and tumbling down of so great a fabric must necessarily occasion. (2.) *The elements shall melt with fervent heat*. At this coming of the Lord it shall not only be very tempestuous round about him, so that the very heavens shall pass away as in a mighty violent storm, but *a fire shall go before him, that shall melt the elements* of which the creatures are composed. (3.) *The earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. The earth, and its inhabitants, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. The earth, and its inhabitants, and all the works, whether of nature or art, shall be destroyed. The stately palaces and gardens, and all the desirable things wherein worldly-minded men seek and place their happiness, all of them shall be burnt up; all sorts of creatures which God has made, and all the works of men, must submit, all must pass through the fire, which shall be a consuming fire to all that sin has brought into the world, though it may be a refining fire to the works of God's hand, that the glass of the creation being made much brighter the saints may much better discern the glory of the Lord therein. And now who can but observe what a difference there will be between the first coming of Christ and the second! Yet that is called *the great and dreadful day of the Lord*, Mal. 4:5. How much more dreadful must this coming to judgment be! May we be so wise as to prepare for it, that it may not be a day of vengeance and destruction unto us. O! what will become of us, if we set our affections on this earth, and make it our portion, seeing all these things shall be burnt up? Look out therefore, and make sure of a happiness beyond this visible world, which must all be melted down.

Verses 11-18

The apostle, having instructed them in the doctrine of Christ's second coming,

I. Takes occasion thence to exhort them to purity and godliness in their whole conversation: all the truths which are revealed in scripture should be improved for our advancement in practical godliness: this is the effect that knowledge must produce, or we are never the better for it. *If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. Seeing all these things must be dissolved,*

how holy should we be, that are assured of it, departing from and dying to sin, that has so corrupted and defiled all the visible creation that there is an absolute need of its dissolution! All that was made for man's use is subject to vanity by man's sin: and if the sin of man has brought the visible heavens, and the elements and earth, under a curse, from which they cannot be freed without being dissolved, what an abominable evil is sin, and how much to be hated by us! And, inasmuch as this dissolution is in order to their being restored to their primitive beauty and excellency, how pure and holy should we be, in order to our being fit for the *new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness!* It is a very exact and universal holiness that he exhorts to, not resting in any lower measure or degree, but labouring to be eminent beyond what is commonly attained—holy in God's house and in our own, holy in our worshipping of God and in our conversing with men. All our conversation, whether with high or low, rich or poor, good or bad, friends or enemies, must be holy. We must *keep ourselves unspotted from the world* in all our converses with it. We must be *perfecting holiness in the fear of God*, and in the love of God too. We must *exercise ourselves unto godliness* of all sorts, in all its parts, trusting in God and delighting in God only, who continues the same when the whole visible creation shall be dissolved, devoting ourselves to the service of God, and designing the glorifying and enjoyment of God, who endures for ever; whereas what worldly men delight in and follow after must all be dissolved. Those things which we now see must in a little while pass away, and be no more as they now are: let us look therefore at what shall abide and continue, which, though it be not present, is certain and not far off. This *looking for the day of God* is one of the directions the apostle gives us, in order to our being eminently *holy and godly in all manner of conversation*. "Look for the day of God as what you firmly believe shall come, and what you earnestly long for." *The coming of the day of God* is what every Christian must hope for and earnestly expect; for it is a day when Christ shall *appear in the glory of the Father*, and evidence his divinity and Godhead even to those who counted him a mere man. The first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he *appeared in the form of a servant*, was what the people of God earnestly waited and looked for: that coming was for *the consolation of Israel*, Lu. 2:25. How much more should they wait with expectation and earnestness for his second coming, which will be the day of their complete redemption, and of his most glorious manifestation! Then he shall *come to be admired in his saints, and glorified in all those that believe*. For though it cannot but terrify and affright the ungodly to see the visible heavens all in a flame, and the elements melting, yet the believer, whose *faith is the evidence of things not seen*, can rejoice in hope of more glorious heavens after these have been melted and refined by that dreadful fire which shall burn up all the dross of this visible creation. Here we must take notice, 1. What true Christians look for: *new heavens and a new earth*, in which a great deal more of the wisdom, power and goodness of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will be clearly discerned than we are able to discover in what we now see; for in these new heavens and earth, freed from the vanity the former were subject to, and the sin they were polluted with, only righteousness shall dwell; this is to be the habitation of such righteous persons as do righteousness, and are free from the power and pollution of sin; *all the wicked shall be turned into hell*; those only who are clothed with a righteousness of Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, shall be admitted to dwell in this holy place. 2. What is the ground and foundation of this expectation and hope—*the promise of God*. To look for any thing which God has not promised is presumption; but if our expectations are according to the promise, both as to the things we look for and the time

and way of their being brought about, we cannot meet with a disappointment; *for he is faithful who has promised*. "See therefore that you raise and regulate your expectations of all the great things that are to come according to the word of God; and, as to *the new heaven and new earth*, look for them as God has allowed and directed by the passages we have in this portion of scripture how before you, and in Isa. 65:17; 66:22, to which the apostle may be thought to allude."

II. As in v. 11 he exhorts to holiness from the consideration that *the heavens and the earth shall be dissolved*, so in v. 14 he resumes his exhortation from the consideration that they shall be again renewed. "Seeing you expect the day of God, when our Lord Jesus Christ will appear in his glorious majesty, and these heavens and earth shall be dissolved and melted down, and, being purified and refined, shall be erected and rebuilt, prepare to meet him. It nearly concerns you to see in what state you will be when the Judge of all the world shall come to pass sentence upon men, and to determine how it shall be with them to all eternity. This is the court of judicature whence there lies no appeal; whatever sentence is here passed by this great Judge is irreversible; therefore get ready to *appear before the judgment-seat of Christ*: and see to it,"

1. "That you be *found of him in peace*, in a state of peace and reconciliation with God through Christ, in whom alone God is *reconciling the world to himself*. All that are out of Christ are in a state of enmity, and reject and oppose the Lord and his anointed, and shall therefore *be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power*. Those whose sins are pardoned and their peace made with God are the only safe and happy people; therefore follow after peace, and that with all." (1.) Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2.) Peace in our own consciences, through the Spirit of grace witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. (3.) Peace with men, by having a calm and peaceable disposition wrought in us, resembling that of our blessed Lord.

2. That you be *found of Christ without spot, and blameless*. *Follow after holiness* as well as peace: and even spotless and perfect; we must not only take heed of all spots which are not the spots of God's children (this only prevents our being found of men without spot), we must be pressing towards spotless purity, absolute perfection. Christians must be *perfecting holiness*, that they may be not only blameless before men, but also in the sight of God; and all this deserves and needs the greatest diligence; he who does this work negligently can never do it successfully. "Never expect to be found at that day of God in peace, if you are lazy and idle in this your day, in which we must finish the work that is given us to do. It is only the diligent Christian who will be the happy Christian in the day of the Lord. Our Lord will suddenly come to us, or shortly call us to him; and would you have him find you idle?" Remember there is a curse denounced against him *who does the work of the Lord negligently*, Marg. Jer. 48:10. Heaven will be a sufficient recompence for all our diligence and industry; therefore let us labour and take pains in the work of the Lord; he will certainly reward us if we be diligent in the work he has allotted us; now, that you may be diligent, *account the long-suffering of our Lord to be salvation*. "Does your Lord delay his coming? Do not think this is to give more time to make provision for your lusts, to gratify them; it is so much space to repent and work out your salvation. It proceeds not from a want of concern or compassion for his suffering servants, nor is it designed to give countenance and encouragement to the world of the ungodly, but that men may have time to prepare for eternity. Learn then to make a right use of the patience of our Lord, who does as yet delay his coming. Follow after peace and holiness, or else his

coming will be dreadful to you." And inasmuch as it is difficult to prevent men's abuse of God's patience, and engage them in the right improvement thereof, our apostle quotes St. Paul as directing men to make the same good use of the divine forbearance, that in the mouth, or from the pen, of two apostles the truth might be confirmed. And we may here observe with what esteem and affection he speaks of him who had formerly publicly withstood and sharply reprov'd Peter. If a righteous man smite one who is truly religious, it shall be received as a kindness; and let him reprove, it shall be as an excellent oil, which shall soften and sweeten the good man that is reprov'd when he does amiss. What an honourable mention does this apostle of the circumcision make of that very man who had openly, *before all, reprov'd him*, as not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel! (1.) He calls him *brother*, whereby he means not only that he is a fellow-christian (in which sense the word brethren is used 1 Th. 5:27), or a fellow-preacher (in which sense Paul calls Timothy the evangelist a *brother*, Col. 1:1), but a fellow-apostle, one who had the same extraordinary commission, immediately from Christ himself, to preach the gospel in every place, and to disciple all nations. Though many seducing teachers denied Paul's apostleship, yet Peter owns him to be an apostle. (2.) He calls him *belov'd*; and they being both alike commissioned, and both united in the same service of the same Lord, it would have been very unseemly if they had not been united in affection to one another, for the strengthening of one another's hands, mutually desirous of, and rejoicing in, one another's success. (3.) He mentions Paul as one who had an uncommon measure of wisdom given unto him. He was a person of eminent knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel, and did neither in that nor any other qualification come behind any of all the other apostles. How desirable is it that those who preach the same gospel should treat one another according to the pattern Peter here sets them! It is surely their duty to endeavour, by proper methods, to prevent or remove all prejudices that hinder ministers' usefulness, and to beget and improve the esteem and respect in the minds of people towards their ministers that may promote the success of their labours. And let us also here observe, [1.] The excellent wisdom that was in Paul is said to be *given* him. The understanding and knowledge that qualify men to preach the gospel are the gift of God. We must seek for knowledge, and labour to get understanding, in hopes that it shall be given us from above, while we are diligent in using proper means to attain it. [2.] The apostle imparts to men according as he had received from God. He endeavours to lead others as far as he himself was led into the knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel. He is not an intruder into the things he had not seen or been fully assured of, and yet he does not fail to declare the whole counsel of God, Acts 20:27. [3.] The epistles which were written by the apostle of the Gentiles, and directed to those Gentiles who believed in Christ, are designed for the instruction and edification of those who from among the Jews were brought to believe in Christ; for it is generally thought that what is here alluded to is contained in the epistle to the Romans (ch. 2:4), though in all his epistles there are some things that refer to one or other of the subjects treated of in this and the foregoing chapter; and it cannot seem strange that those who were pursuing the same general design should in their epistles insist upon the same things. But the apostle Peter proceeds to tell us that in those things which are to be met with in Paul's epistles there are some things hard to be understood. Among the variety of subjects treated of in scripture, some are not easy to be understood because of their own obscurity, such are prophecies; others cannot be so easily understood because of their excellency and sublimity, as the mysterious doctrines; and others are with difficulty taken in because of the

weakness of men's minds, such are the things of the Spirit of God, mentioned 1 Co. 2:14. And here the unlearned and unstable make wretched work; for they wrest and torture the scriptures, to make them speak what the Holy Ghost did not intend. Those who are not well instructed and well established in the truth are in great danger of perverting the word of God. Those who have heard and learned of the Father are best secured from misunderstanding and misapplying any part of the word of God; and, where there is a divine power to establish as well as to instruct men in divine truth, persons are effectually secured from falling into errors. How great a blessing this is we learn by observing what is the pernicious consequence of the errors that ignorant and unstable men fall into—even their own destruction. Errors in particular concerning the holiness and justice of God are the utter ruin of multitudes of men. Let us therefore earnestly pray for the Spirit of God to instruct us in the truth, that we may know it as it is in Jesus, and have our hearts established with grace, that we may stand firm and unshaken, even in the most stormy times, when others are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.

III. The apostle gives them a word of caution, v. 17, 18, where,

1. He intimates that the knowledge we have of these things should make us very wary and watchful, inasmuch as there is a twofold danger, v. 17. (1.) We are in great danger *of* being seduced, and turned away from the truth. The unlearned and unstable, and they are very numerous, do generally wrest the scripture. Many who have the scriptures and read them do not understand what they read; and too many of those who have a right understanding of the sense and meaning of the word are not established in the belief of the truth, and all these are liable to fall into error. Few attain to the knowledge and acknowledgment of doctrinal Christianity; and fewer find, so as to keep in the way of practical godliness, which is the narrow way, which only leadeth unto life. There must be a great deal of self-denial and suspicion of ourselves, and submitting to the authority of Christ Jesus our great prophet, before we can heartily receive all the truths of the gospel, and therefore we are in great danger of rejecting the truth. (2.) We are in great danger *by* being seduced; for, [1.] So far as we are turned from the truth *so far are we turned out of the way to true blessedness*, into the path which leads to destruction. If men corrupt the word of God, it tends to their own utter ruin. [2.] When men wrest the word of God, *they fall into the error of the wicked*, men without law, who keep to no rules, set no bounds to themselves, a sort of free-thinkers, which the psalmist detests. Ps. 119:113, *I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love*. Whatever opinions and thoughts of men are not conformable to the law of God, and warranted by it, the good man disclaims and abhors; they are the conceits and counsels of the ungodly, who have forsaken God's law, and, if we imbibe their opinions, we shall too soon imitate their practices. [3.] Those who are led away by error *fall from their own steadfastness*. They are wholly unhinged and unsettled, and know not where to rest, but are at the greatest uncertainty, like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. It nearly concerns us therefore to be upon our guard, seeing the danger is so great.

2. That we may the better avoid being led away, the apostle directs us what to do, v. 18. And, (1.) We must *grow in grace*. He had in the beginning of the epistle exhorted us to add one grace to another, and here he advises us to grow in all grace, in faith, and virtue, and knowledge. By how much the stronger grace is in us, by so much the more steadfast shall we be in the truth. (2.) We must grow *in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. "Follow on to know the Lord. Labour to know him more clearly and

more fully, to know more of Christ and to know him to better purpose, so as to be more like him and to love him better." This is the knowledge of Christ the apostle Paul reached after and desired to attain, Phil. 3:10. Such a knowledge of Christ as conforms us more to him, and endears him more to us, must needs be of great use to us, to preserve us from falling off in times of general apostasy; and those who experience this effect of the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will, upon receiving such grace from him, give thanks and praise to him, and join with our apostle in saying, *To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*