

# Lessons on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter

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*Dedication*

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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## Holiness – 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1Pe 1:13-2:3 NASB)

What is Holiness?

Holiness is the concept that divides the average Christian from the deep Christian.

We see this here in the use of the phrase (v23) "born again." This is a common phrase of Christians in the twentieth century. We forget that it is seldom used in the New Testament. Indeed, except for this passage, it is used only one other time in the New Testament - in John, chapter 3. The story is familiar; it is Nicodemus, the devout Pharisee, seeking out Jesus by night. To all other applicants he says, "Repent," or "What does the Law say?" To Nicodemus, he says "You must be born again." The phrase applies not so much to the sinner finding the Lord, but the devout man serving him.

The word "holy" has its roots in a Greek word which means "different" or "set apart." It does not mean "pious" or "sanctimonious." We are holy because we are set apart; we are set apart in the imitation of God. (See verse 16). As Thomas a Kempis put it,

"...many people, although they often hear the Gospel, feel little desire to follow it, because they lack the spirit of Christ. Whoever desires to understand and take delight in the words of Christ must strive to conform his whole life to Him.

Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity, if you lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity? Lofty words do not make a man just or holy; but a good life makes him dear to God."

If we are to be holy, we must accept what Peter says in verse 17: we are strangers here. This world is not my home, I'm just passing through.

How do we practice Holiness?

Peter speaks immediately about self control (verse 17). He puts it in practical terms for us. There is a reason for this. Dietrich Bonhoeffer nailed it this way:

(Picturing a conversation between a pastor and a churchman)

"I have lost the faith I once had."

"You must listen to the Word as it is spoken to you in the sermon."

"I do, but I cannot get anything out of it, it just falls on deaf ears as far as I'm concerned."

"The trouble is, you don't really want to listen."

"On the contrary, I do."

And here they generally break off, because the pastor is at a loss what to say next. He only remembers the first half of the proposition: "Only those who believe obey." But this does not help, for faith is just what this particular man finds impossible. The pastor feels himself confronted with the ultimate riddle of predestination. God grants faith to some and withholds it from others. So the pastor throws up the sponge and leaves the poor man to his fate. And yet this ought to be the turning point of the interview. It is the complete turning point. .... It is now time to take the bull by the horns and say, "Only those who obey believe." Thus the flow of the conversation is interrupted, and the pastor can continue, "You are disobedient, you are trying to keep some part of your life under your own control. That is what is preventing you from listening to Christ and believing in his grace. ..."

Only those who believe obey. Only those who obey believe. This is the root of self control.

There is another aspect: the fear of the Lord. We are much taken with the idea that God is a gentle giant of whom we need have no fear. This comes of not studying the Old Testament; the Jesus of the New Testament, meek and humble, is none other than the Jehovah of the Old Testament - in the flesh. Our ancestors knew better: "Fear God - and Dread Naught."

I once pounded the daylights out of a kid twice my size. He started the fight - and if it had been up to me, it would have quickly become a foot race! But my father had issued me stern instructions: "Never start a fight - and always finish one." I didn't know what that kid would have done to me - but I had a very clear idea of what Dad could.

Lastly, Peter commends to us the art of mental practice. It is good for us to exercise our minds over the Scripture - reading it, reading what others have thought about it, in all ways becoming prepared to defend it. "Girding up the loins of our minds.." as he has it here, means mental exercise - in preparation for combat.

What is the result of Holiness?

The first and greatest result of holiness is the love of our brothers. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to love someone when you don't suspect them of anything? Paul told Titus, "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." (Titus 1:15) When we see our fellow Christians as they can become - holy children of God, to be raised as Christ was raised - they become much more precious. Our purity, our holiness, flows out of us as love for our fellow Christians.

There is more to it. We also rid ourselves of those things which hinder our fellowship in the church. Peter is about to begin a magnificent word picture of the church. Before he does, however, he begins by detailing particular sins which wreck a church. They're worth our attention in some detail.

### Deceit

It is no great curiosity that deceit comes from those who appear beautiful. "O that deceit should dwell in such a gorgeous palace," laments Juliet. We naturally distrust those whose appearance is foul - and make the mistake of trusting those whose appearance is fair. And when do people appear more fair than in their "Sunday best?"

Deceit destroys trust. It's a characteristic of deceit that the deceiver doesn't always lie, and doesn't always lie outright. Sometimes it's the whole truth, often just a shade off the truth, and only occasionally the outright lie. But it destroys trust. And trust is the virtue which the Christian must have in his church home, for the Christian is "saved by hope" (Romans 8:24). If you cannot trust the Christian you can see, how can you trust the Christ you cannot?

### Envy

"Envy," says Dorothy Sayers, "is the sin of the Have-Nots against the Haves." The world having a surplus of Have-Nots, and a shortage of Haves (at least by definition of the Have-Nots), we seem to have a surplus of envy.

Envy hits hardest in a democracy. In the cherished words of the Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal," and we seem determined therefore to make sure that none rises above any other.

- ✚ Envy is a multipurpose sin - we can envy wealth, faith, talent, opportunity - you name it. Whatever someone else has, and I don't, I can envy.
- ✚ Envy is essentially destructive. Instead of saying either "Isn't God gracious to grant such (talent, wealth, etc.) to so-and-so", we say, "If I don't have it, he can't have it (or use it) either."

## Slander

It is an interesting thought, as Paul has it to Timothy, that slander has its roots in idleness. (1 Tim 5:13). Slander is the sin of the cockroach - sneaking around, hiding from the light, denying in public what is spoken in private. The slanderer, confronted, denies. Is it not because slander is something we wander into, in idleness, rather than something we plan? The thoughts of the idle are impure; they therefore cannot conceive of purity in others.

In these four areas we see the destruction of a church. In deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander we see the sins which are directed against the collected members of the church. They are subtle attacks; since the time of Adam, Satan has been known to be subtle. These are the things that a church must lay aside if it is to be the church which will be the bride of Christ.

## Hypocrisy

We most commonly think of the hypocrite as the "Sunday Christian" - but the word means anyone who is play acting; living the lie. In Nave's Topical Bible, this passage by Solomon is classified under hypocrisy:

For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice, And I saw among the naive, *And* discerned among the youths A young man lacking sense, Passing through the street near her corner; And he takes the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and *in* the darkness. And behold, a woman *comes* to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart. She is boisterous and rebellious, Her feet do not remain at home; *She is* now in the streets, now in the squares, And lurks by every corner. So she seizes him and kisses him And with a brazen face she says to him: "I was due to offer peace offerings; Today I have paid my vows. "Therefore I have come out to meet you, To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you. "I have spread my couch with coverings, With colored linens of Egypt. "I have sprinkled my bed With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. "Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with caresses. "For my husband is not at home, He has gone on a long journey; He has taken a bag of money with him, At the full moon he will come home." With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him. Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool, Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know that it *will cost him* his life. Now therefore, *my* sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.  
(Pro 7:6-27 NASB)

The Living Bible paraphrases the last verse thus: "If you want to find the road to hell, look for her house." This is hypocrisy - the constant life of pretending, and hoping that one victim doesn't find the next. A church of living stones needs no plastic rocks.

## Submission – 1 Peter 2:13-25

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. *Act* as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

(1Pe 2:13-25 NASB)

The Problem of "Submission"

To the modern American ear, the word "submission" has a foul ring. We view it as the result of defeat and surrender, and our reply is "There is no substitute for victory." In the first of two lessons on submission, Peter begins to give us the virtue of submission. To understand it in our time, there are some preliminary principles that we must review.

### Contract or Covenant?

The logical phrase "if . . . then . . ." can be used in two ways. In the first, we can picture the auto mechanic saying, "if you pay me fifty dollars, then I will lube and oil your car." In the second, picture your father saying, "if you miss the nail with that hammer, then your thumb is going to really hurt."

Do you see the difference? Both sentences have the same structure. The first, however, is the result of an exchange of value. It's a contract. It's quite binding; it gets your oil changed - but both of you had to agree if the contract is to be valid.

The second is a law of nature (which is to say, a law of God). There is no sense bargaining with God about it ("How about best two out of three strokes?"). It exists, because He says it exists. If you follow its terms, things will be good. If not, not. That is the defining characteristic of a covenant.

We are the people of a covenant, the New Covenant (New Testament). We are not the people of "The New Contract." What Peter describes under the heading of submission is part of God's covenant relationship. We shall see this throughout. Submission is not a "bargain" with God; it is the way spiritual relationships work.

## The Problem of Pride

To see why submission is so important, look at its opposite: Pride. We have raised Pride from the pit of sin to the pinnacle of virtue in our country. We admire the arrogant; if you think not, watch a football game on TV - and look at the "heroes."

"Pride," said C.S. Lewis, "is the completely anti-God state of mind." Why? Pride is essentially competitive: "I'm better than you are - nyah, nyah, nyah!" If my life revolves around being better than any other person - what do I do when I meet God? How can I be "better" than God? If I am to have a deeper spiritual relationship with God, I must get rid of this barrier of Pride.

### The Covenant Solution: Submission

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake . . ." (verse 13) - there is the key. Submission is not to the powers around us but to the Lord himself. By accepting God's submission, we are training ourselves to the will of God.

One way to look at this is the athletic model. Suppose you want to be a great athlete - a major league football player. You will need to train long and hard, for the competition will be tough. At each step along the way you will have a coach, telling you what you should and should not do. If you want the rewards, you must submit to the discipline involved. Submission is not so much surrender as training in the will of God.

Athletes do not make a bargain with the coach and so become stronger. They accept the natural laws around them (the "covenant" relationship again!) and work within them to become stronger. This is just what the Christian must do in submission: train his will to become stronger for God.

## The Character of Submission

### Submission as a Voluntary Act

We have a running joke around our house. "I am Lord and Master of my house - and I have my wife's permission to say so." My wife is, in fact, submissive to me (and she's in the classroom when I say it). Her submission is entirely voluntary. She accepts the covenant relationship with her Lord and Savior. Therefore, she submits to me, at His command. Because His "Word is Truth," such submission is a prime cause of the happy marriage we enjoy together.

Note that I am not "entitled" to her submission. There is no contract; there is a covenant. A covenant relationship says, "I submit to you because things work best that way; that's how God designed it; that's what He commands." If I too am in that covenant relationship, I follow God's command too. The result is a happy marriage. It's not the result of a bargain, but God's covenant.

## Submission as "Setting in Order"

A key phrase is found in verse 17: "Show proper respect to everyone." It happens that I am not enthused about Bill Clinton as president. But I feel obliged to pay proper respects (should I have occasion) to the President of the United States. It is proper.

What does "proper" mean? In this sense, it involves a fair recognition of the responsibilities of others. That man is your boss? That's a responsibility; respect it. Bill is the President? That's a great responsibility, respect it.

In the Army, there is a saying: "You salute the uniform, not the man." It is not mine to judge whether a man is fit for his position; who am I "to judge another man's servant?" (How particularly true in the church! See Romans 14:4) It is mine to respect the position another holds - whether boss, king or elder.

## Submission and Reward

Peter makes a key point in verses 19-20: If we suffer for God's sake, it is God who will reward us. That point determines how we are to be rewarded.

Suppose I am unjustly accused - and the motive is because I follow Christ. Do I whine and complain? Or do I take the Lord's own attitude about it:

**"Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**  
(Mat 5:11-12 NASB)

It all works together: submit to the Lord, submit for His sake - and be rewarded.

## Submissive Evangelism

Peter has a logical argument to make here. Let's lay it out in steps:

1. You are a servant - indeed the slave - of the Lord. It is the nature of the human being to take a master of one sort or another, be that pride, the flesh, the world or the Lord. You have chosen Jesus.
2. It is the command of your Lord, express and direct, that you are to spread the Gospel. For some, this is a call to travel. For most of us, it's a call to evangelize those closest to us.
3. We may lack eloquence. We may lack the brilliance of mind to defeat God's enemies in debate. But there is a weapon that each of us has every day. That weapon is our conduct. By our conduct we may put to shame the lies of Satan, spread by fools.

4. Therefore, by your submissive behavior, you show those to whom you submit what your Lord has done. If nothing else, they see the change in your life. It may take a long time, but example overcomes. Submit then, to those to whom submission is due.

It's interesting to note who the "king" in this passage is. It's Caesar Nero, the ruler who started one of the greatest persecutions of Christians. It took almost 300 years, but goodness triumphed over the weapons of Satan (sometimes our suffering bears fruit after we leave the planet!) Purity of character is a weapon against which Satan has no defense.

### Jesus, the Example

The author of Hebrews puts it this way: "Because of his humble submission his prayer was heard: son though he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering . . ." (Hebrews 5:8, New English Bible). Our Lord prayed in the garden that his suffering might pass from him, yet "not my will but thine be done" is the phrase that shines in that dark hour.

We, the servants of Christ, are not superior to Him. If he had to suffer what God had planned, can we object to suffering? If that suffering comes in submission, as it did to Christ (see verse 21), are we willing to learn obedience in the school of suffering? That is submission. That is a mighty weapon in God's arsenal. The question is, will you allow him to use it?

## Christian Witness 1 Peter 3:13-22

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

(1Pe 3:13-22 NASB)

Arthur Conan Doyle's famed detective, Sherlock Holmes, once solved a case by noting the character of a witness. The character was so reliable as to be remarkable. In fact, the witness had been invited to the scene of the crime solely for the purpose of establishing an alibi. His character was such that the police accepted without question his version of events. The clue to Holmes was that the witness was so reliable that it was "elementary" that he had been called there for that purpose.

We are like Doyle's witness. We have been called to be the witnesses of Christ, and in this passage Peter tells us how to do it.

### The Preparation of the Witness

"Do not fear; do not be frightened." Fear is a normal part of the human existence. Without it, jugglers would try three bottles of nitroglycerine. I still think the guy who juggles running chain saws is nuts. We need to understand that courage is not the absence of fear; it is the overcoming of fear.

There is an element of high comedy in the Christian's life. We go through life with such fear of so many things - and often forget to fear God. Picture Charlie Chaplin, running berserk through a minefield, bullets whizzing overhead - as he tries to get away from a bumblebee. When we let the bumblebees of this world distract us, we forget the minefields that Satan lays.

The solution is to fear God; or, as Peter puts it here, to set apart our hearts for Christ as Lord. We must keep our mind on Him, and rely on Him both as Lord and as Saviour.

This will not be easy; but as Peter says, "even if you suffer for what is right, you are blessed." There are many ways in which that is true. One of them, central to the character of the witness, is

that the witness is now prepared to face even greater trials. Suffering is the basic training of the Christian soldier.

But - we don't like to suffer. May I suggest a change of attitude? Do you remember the movie *The Wizard of Oz*? You might not recall, but the scenes before Dorothy lands in Oz are shot in black and white. Only in Oz do we see color. Many years ago I had the reverse experience. Betty and I visited the town of Pendleton, Oregon. The town was drab; the people in the Laundromat suspicious and unfriendly; over everything hung the color of dirty ash and factory town. We went from color to black and white.

But we were just passing through. We left; we never came back. It makes a lot of difference whether you are "in trouble" or "going through trouble."

### Credibility of the Witness

If a witness is to be credible - "able to be believed" - there are certain requirements.

- ✦ *Preparation:* In a sense, we are expert witnesses. We must study our subject and be prepared to give a defense of the faith. The expert must know the subject.
- ✦ *Poise:* Nothing so impresses hearers as a witness who is assured. We judge a person's honesty by the way they speak. Most of us are not convincing liars. The only sure way to have such poise is to have a clear conscience behind it.
- ✦ *Personality:* We are seen and judged by people. There is no getting around it. People examine our behavior and make their judgment of us - as witnesses - upon that. Let your actions show Christ, and your words will be believed. (Just don't forget to deliver the words, too!)
- ✦ *Delivery:* The most knowledgeable, assured and well behaved person will not be listened to - if the words are an attack. "Gentleness and respect" assure a hearing; anger and accusation do not. Think of it: how would you break the news to someone of a death in their family? If you would be gentle and respectful then, how much more so in telling them of the Christ?
- ✦ *Suffering:* In one sense, suffering itself brings credibility to the Christian witness. As my father assured me, "If a man's principles don't cost him anything, they aren't worth much." And if they cost him a lot? Put your life where your mouth is.

### The Testimony of the Witness

Having prepared the witness, and established his credibility, we are now ready to hear what he has to say. And what is the testimony you are called on to deliver?

It is not "what Jesus has done for me." As important as that may be to you; as telling a point as it may be in establishing your credibility it is not the testimony of the Christian witness.

Peter outlines, in example, the testimony of the witness:

- ✦ *Death* We testify that Jesus of Nazareth, born of woman, died on the cross - a death like yours and mine, physical death.
- ✦ *Burial* We testify that He was buried - just like the rest of us.

✚ *Resurrection* We testify that God, in His power, raised Jesus from the grave.

In these three facts we bring forth the essentials of the Gospel, the Good News: that God became man and lived on this planet. That He died as we die; was buried as we are buried - but rose again on the third day. And by these facts we establish one last thing:

✚ *Authority* We testify that He has ascended, and that all authority is given to him, and all power - including the power to forgive sin and save from hell. Heaven is His to reward; by His sacrifice we can avoid Hell itself.

You see the difference? One says, "Here is what Jesus HAS done for ME." The other says, "Here is what Jesus WILL do for YOU."

## Suffering for Christ – 1 Peter 4:1-19

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*. The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

(1Pe 4:1-19 NASB)

### On Suffering

Why do Christians suffer for the cause of Christ? We should concede the justice of suffering for our own sins; we might accept the idea that we live in a fallen world, and the consequence of sin is suffering - and not just for the sinner. But why should we suffer for being a Christian?

A number of ideas have been put forward. Bruce White suggests that the main purpose of suffering - as a Christian or otherwise - is to force us to re-evaluate our priorities. What a twentieth century, "management" phrase - "re-evaluate our priorities." But an older view has it this way:

"Wherever you are and wherever you turn, you will not find happiness until you turn to God. Why are you so distressed when events do not turn out as you wish and hope? Is there anyone on earth who enjoys everything as he wishes? Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else on earth. There is no one in the world without trouble or anxiety, be he King or Pope. Whose, then, is the happiest lot? Surely, he who is able to suffer for the love of God." - Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, On Human Misery.

You see his argument: you're going to suffer anyway - surely you should then suffer for the love of God rather than the lusts of this world. First and foremost it is the imitation of the Lord whom you have promised to imitate. "Arm yourselves with the same attitude" says Peter. Peter goes so far as to say that the man who suffers no longer lives his life for earthly desires, but for the love of God. The argument may make more sense in English if we look first at verses 3-5.

Take it as a history. You become a Christian. Suddenly, the drunken orgies, the all night carousing, the worship of sex, money and pride no longer are "good" but "bad." Your friends are astonished; they know you like a "good time." You've gone crazy; you are definitely "strange."

Strange you may be, but suffering certainly. Being cut off from your friends is suffering, the suffering of loneliness. It is an intense pressure, not limited to teenagers. But - once you have suffered, you are cut off from that life. You have passed your initiation test. You now begin to see yourself as a stranger, an alien - a stranger in a strange land.

There is a distressing aspect to this. We often entice someone to become a Christian by telling them how wonderful it is. But this is the "wonderful" of triumph, not of ease. Christ himself counsels us "anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27). Count the cost!

Verse 6 is somewhat puzzling. Some hold he is referring to Christ's descent to the dead (1 Peter 3:19), and this is my opinion; others hold that this is encouragement about those who are Christians who have died. Perhaps it refers to those who were dead in sin. Whichever theory you like, the result is the same. All will be judged.

Instructions - to the glory of God

Now Peter switches to practical instruction. He begins with the most general purpose virtue: self control. Self control, which is a fruit of the Spirit, is evidenced by being clear minded. This is an interesting conception, especially to this century.

You have met her (no offense, ladies). Any particular unpleasant point of Scripture is met with something like, "well, I just feel that a kind and loving God would NEVER ..." One never is certain: she never thinks. She "feels." Her mind is a cloud; we are cautioned (men and women) to be clear minded, for this is the basic method of self control. Let the mind rule the emotions. It clearly implies being intellectually prepared. That's one very good reason for reading and studying the Scriptures! It is the fount of self control.

Verse 8 is subject to much misinterpretation, I believe. It often is used to justify the cosmic bean counter theory of God. You know it well. Good deed bring brownie points; they wipe out demerits caused by bad deeds. At the end of your life we add them all up and if you have more brownie points than demerits, you get to heaven! A great theory which suffers only the slight defect of being completely false.

Peter's point is simply this. Love each other deeply; if you do, you will forgive freely. And if you forgive, Christ forgives - forgives your debtor and forgives you! Thus this deep love covers a multitude of sins.

Next, there is the neglected virtue of hospitality. Note the verb: "offer." Not be bullied into; offer without grumbling.

Peter closes this section with the idea of "administering God's grace." He closes with the key idea: "To him (Jesus) be the glory..." Do you know the name of the architect who designed the cathedral of Notre Dame? No one else does either. He did it to the glory of God. His entire purpose was to glorify God. So, if you speak, remember whose words you carry. If you serve, do it in His strength. If you do, God will be praised. "We are made a channel, where His grace is poured ... for the glory of the Lord" (Twila Paris).

Suffering for the Glory of the Lord

Peter now combines these two ideas:

You are going to suffer for Christ

Do all things to the glory of Christ

Therefore, suffer for the glory of Christ.

It recalls the passage in the Sermon on the Mount:

**"Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**  
(Mat 5:11-12 NASB)

And here Peter adds a practical note of warning: Don't suffer as a meddler. There is a temptation (I know it all too well) to "help" others. C. S. Lewis painted such a person in a classic phrase: "She lives for others. You can always tell the 'others' by their hunted look." If you are suffering as a meddler - now you have the word of warning!

Peter closes this section with an interesting thought. If we, the children of God, suffer as the children of God, how much more will the unbeliever suffer? This raises these thoughts:

- 1) Sometimes we suffer for our sins, even as Christians. Did you really expect the Lord to neglect the discipline of his children? (Something about contemporary family life in this too!)
- 2) If those who are outside of Christ are to suffer so greatly in comparison to us, what are we doing to prevent it?

3) The center of all Christian action is always "me" (see verse 17, ending statement). As Franklin Roosevelt once quoted a Chinese Christian, "Lord, reform thy world - beginning with me."

Five points toward the enemy

"So," concludes Peter - you are suffering for the cause of Christ; therefore you should do two things:

a) commit yourself to God

b) continue to do good.

A story comes out of the First World War. David Beatty was an admiral in the British navy. One day he made his reputation in the minds of that generation with one phrase. The situation: he was chasing elements of the German fleet. In the exchange of fire, two of his six battlecruisers suddenly blew up. Beatty's reaction: "There seems to be something wrong with our ships today. Turn five points (toward the enemy)." He knew what he was there for. His fleet had suffered greatly - but the enemy was in site. We are in combat with Satan. When we suffer, we should not run, but commit ourselves to God and continue to do good.

## In Full Triumph - 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:1-11

Written at the end of Peter's life, his second epistle is a solemn warning about the perils of false teachers. But if you are to build a wall against apostasy, the bricks must first be sound.

### Salutation

**Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;**  
(2Pe 1:1-2 NASB)

### The writer

Though modern scholars see some other possibilities, the testimony of the ancient church<sup>1</sup> is that this was written by Peter, the apostle. The "who" of the author is important to us:

- ✚ He describes himself as a bond-servant (Greek *doulos*, or slave) of Christ. There is no sense in this of being the high and mighty Pope; rather, just another servant of our Lord.
- ✚ He then reminds us that it is his privilege to serve as an apostle, appointed by the Lord, an eyewitness of the Resurrection. The point is one of authority – and it takes authority of an apostle to deal with apostasy.
- ✚ Perhaps more important, he brings with him the personal authority of one who has seen the Transfiguration and the Ascension – an eyewitness to the glory of God.

### The audience

To whom does Peter address this letter? The phrase is difficult to translate; the King James says it is addressed to those who have received "like precious" faith. We may see two things:

- ✚ The faith itself is precious, not to be treated lightly. Here is the pearl of great price. Thus, he will argue later, it should not be tampered with.
- ✚ It's the same faith for the apostle as for the ordinary Christian. There is no "super faith" for a select few; it is "the faith." Thus defined, we can tell that there is tolerance in Christian liberty<sup>2</sup> – and there is apostasy.

This is not something Peter invented, as we shall see in later lesson. No, we received this faith by the righteousness of Christ. If he were not completely righteous, the sacrifice on the Cross would have been of no effect. Peter describes Christ in two ways:

- ✚ Christ our God – the one to be obeyed.
- ✚ Christ our Savior – the one to be praised and thanked.

### Salute

Having thus introduced himself, Peter provides the salutation customary in letters of the time – his good wishes for his readers. Specifically:

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<sup>1</sup> With the curious exception of Chrysostom, who somehow took Symeon Peter as different from Simon Peter.

<sup>2</sup> See Romans 14.

- ✚ Grace and peace. The word for grace (*charis*) means a gift; the root concept of peace is not the absence of conflict but the resolution of conflict. By God's gift on the Cross we are given peace with God – we are reconciled.
- ✚ We have this; he blesses us in that he prays it will be multiplied.<sup>3</sup> We are not given a static blessing, but rather one which grows as we mature in Christ, as we shall see.

How is this multiplication performed? By knowledge! Despite the modern tendency to “check your brain at the door, God wants your heart,” Peter gives us the key to such increase as being knowledge.

Note, please, that this is not the knowledge of some systematic theology textbook.<sup>4</sup> The knowledge in question is the knowledge of Christ. To know him better each day is to grow in grace and peace.

Strive

seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.

(2Pe 1:3-7 NASB)

By divine power

If you will glance at verse three, you will see that Christ's divine power is the source of *everything* pertaining to life and godliness. Life, as given here, means biological life.<sup>5</sup> This is not some vague, gaseous spiritual life of no relevance to us today, but rather the earthly life we live. How are we to live it? In godliness, also translated as piety. That's right, we are to be pious in this life! Have you ever heard such a thing? Well, you have now.

A pious life? How could I possibly attain such a thing? I'm not a monk, or a priest, or some sort of super-Christian. But remember – there is no separate kind of faith for the “super-Christian.” It's the same for all; apostle and ordinary Christian. We attain this (I say again) through the knowledge of Christ. In particular, Peter points out two things about Christ that we should know:

- ✚ His glory – the Greek is *doxa*, from which we get our word “doxology.” Glory is that which is praiseworthy in Christ; therefore we are to find the things for which we should praise him. This might be one reason we are to sing hymns and spiritual songs to him.<sup>6</sup>
- ✚ His excellence – older translations use the word “virtue.” It is a neglected concept, but it should not be. He is our model; the imitation of Christ our rule of life.

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek word is the root of our word “plethora.”

<sup>4</sup> Nor, for that matter, any of these lessons.

<sup>5</sup> Greek *zoe*, from which we get our word “zoo.”

<sup>6</sup> See Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

## Effect

The effect upon the Christian is remarkable. We have been “great and precious” promises, so great, in fact, that they are summed up in the idea that we have become partakers in the divine nature. We share, in some way, not just the attributes of God, but his essence. This is so strong in the true Christian that Peter phrases it “having escaped” – note the tense – the lusts of the world.<sup>7</sup>

## By Diligence Supply

So, then, what are we to do about this? Get to work, taking what God has done and amplifying it, adding to it what we can. Specifically,

- ✚ *Goodness* – the same word for virtue used to describe Christ.
- ✚ *Knowledge* – the Greek is *gnosis*, meaning the ordinary kind of knowledge acquired by study. “Study, to show yourself approved, ...”
- ✚ *Self control* – Previously translated temperance, it means that moderation in which all things are kept under control so that the lordship of Christ may show in everything you do.
- ✚ *Perseverance* – there is no good word to translate this; but it means something like “dogged persistence.”<sup>8</sup>
- ✚ *Godliness* – perhaps better translated piety. No one wants to thought pious these days – it’s not hip, cool and with it. Which says something about what it takes to be a real Christian, doesn’t it?
- ✚ *Brotherly kindness* – the affection in family relations; sometimes we can forgive anyone but those related to us. Hence the command.
- ✚ *Love* – the usual use of the word, as in unconditional, forgiving love.

An old illustration might serve. It is as if Christ has given you a mansion – and tells you to furnish it well. The mansion is our salvation; the fruits above are the furniture and curtains.

## Entrance to the Kingdom

For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

(2Pe 1:8-11 NASB)

## If

Note the connection, please, in verse 8. It is not just that these qualities make you useful, or fruitful. It is that they make you useful and fruitful in the knowledge of Christ. “I believe, that I may understand.” We all want knowledge to underlie our faith, but we sometimes forget that faith is necessary to understanding. Why? Because God will not reveal himself to one who does not believe, but reveals himself in proportion to our belief.

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<sup>7</sup> The NIV and other “phrase for phrase” translations, and paraphrases, put this in a future tense. Word for word translations (e.g., NASB, KJV) use this tense. The literal usage is “having escaped.” It does not appear to make a difference at first glance, but the point is important. If you’d like to know why, look up “Pelagianism” in any encyclopedia.

<sup>8</sup> “Like stink on a paper mill – always *there*” – Montague Hipple II. (Described as the first characteristic of a good salesman.) Greek *hupomone*.

And if you don't? You've forgotten your forgiveness, your purification. This takes to make you ungrateful, which makes you less forgiving (forgiven little? Forgiven much?) It gives Satan a handle on your life, especially when you sin again. Worst, you soon cease to praise the Lord – and therefore you do not recognize him for who he really is.

So work on it! Deliberately seek to grow those virtues.

### **In full triumph**

If you do, you receive the kingdom in abundance. Salvation is no longer just a fact but a fact of life. The resurrection of the dead goes from faint doctrine to fervent hope. Eternal life comes near to you; death ceases to hold such terrors.

If you do, you are assured of a rich welcome into the kingdom of heaven; as John Wesley put it, you will enter the gates of heaven “in full triumph.” Go in like one who has one the crown, not like one who barely escaped.

### **First Defense**

This letter is about apostasy and false teaching. It might seem that Peter hasn't touched that topic yet. But he has. The first defense a Christian has against apostasy is the knowledge of Christ. Knowledge of doctrine? That's good, but first things first – the knowledge of Christ. If you have it, that fruit in your life will be ever increasing, and this produces triumph in the Christian life.

P. T. Barnum said that “you cannot cheat an honest man.” In the same sense, you cannot deceive a well trained Christian – one who knows Christ fully. You may not be able to name the heresy, but you'll be able to smell it.

## Stirring Memories - 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:12-21

Peter begins his argument against apostasy in three points:

1. His purpose is to stir you up with what you already know to be true.
2. What he is stirring within you is not someone's theory or another's fairy tale; rather, it's the plain truth.
3. This is made more sure by prophecy – but watch for the false prophet.

### Stir You Up

Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

(2Pe 1:12-15 NASB)

### To remind you

Peter is reminding us – and that carries with it some implications which are not always followed today:

- ✚ It implies that the faith *exists* – it's not something we need to “discover” or expand upon; it's already there.<sup>9</sup>
- ✚ This also implies that his listeners already know the faith. He is referring to the Gospels, of course, and other Scripture.
- ✚ We are “firmly established in the truth.” It is not something we devised but rather the firmness of our faith comes from the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> We need to remember we are not inventors of the faith.

In short, we are reminded of the importance of the *faith that is* – not what we want it to be. It's a fact; indeed, its essentials are held in common by all Christians.

### Stir you up

(Note: the NIV has this as “refresh your memory” – a very poor interpretation, not followed by most other translations. Peter's intent is much more than a reminder list.)

Peter knows his time is short; evidently Christ has made this clear to him. So he hastens to remind his readers of the faith they already have. It is convenient, then, to review the last lesson:

- ✚ God has given us everything we need – for life, and for godliness. It is God's good pleasure to do so, thus we have God's supply for God's purposes. He does this in many ways. For godliness, he has given us the Scriptures, that we might read them and meditate on them. He permits us to pray. He will have us praise him, so that we might know him. All this comes from God, the Holy One.

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<sup>9</sup> This is very contrary to the “emergent church” paradigm in which believers pick and choose what to believe. If you think not, ask your group if people who don't know Christ as Lord and Savior can be saved. You might be surprised at the results.

<sup>10</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17, for those who need the reference.

- ✚ He also promises you eternal life. Not just “later” but starting now, as Christ is formed in your heart.
- ✚ In response to this, the Christian is told to make every effort to bring forth the fruit of such a life. These are things like goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, brotherly love and indeed the divine love of all. If these are not shown in your life, you are fruitless.
- ✚ If these things are not your life, then you are blind, spiritually. A curious fact about the spiritually blind – they usually have a blind leader, as well.

These things are worthy of reminder; indeed, “stirring up.”

### After my departure

It is important for a teacher to recognize his mortality. You should not act like you are going to live on this earth forever, that there is plenty of time to get the message across. To the contrary: remember that your time is short. You may not get the privilege of finishing your lesson series. Redeem the time.

Indeed, be *diligent* about it. Give some thought to how to make your lessons live beyond you. The best way is to train up one or more teachers in your place. With the new consumer Christianity, “emergent church” movement, Bible teachers are largely viewed as obsolete.<sup>11</sup> But one ought to try.

The idea is simple: that at any time the teacher – you or your successor – can stir up the faithful. Not just intellectual remembrance, though that is important. (We used to teach kids their memory verses, remember?) We need to stir up the students emotionally, intellectually, in the will – and all of these with power.

### Cleverly Devised Tales

**For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"-- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.**

(2Pe 1:16-18 NASB)

### Mishandled Scripture

It is important for you to know that the Scripture is under attack today in many ways – and by people you might not expect to do so. Here are three ways such an attack is made today:

- ✚ One is the “Apostles as myth makers” theory of how we got the Bible. The idea is that the apostles made up much of the New Testament in order to guide the church, particularly with reference to the Resurrection. Peter specifically denies this. This theory dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New!
- ✚ A result of this which is now widely accepted even in “Bible-believing” churches is that the primary use of the Bible, along with devotional reading, is as a source of aphorisms and stories for the pulpit.

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<sup>11</sup> This teacher has been told for almost twenty years that Bible classes are anachronisms; within five years they will be completely gone. We just don’t know which five years, I suppose. Bible reading is now consigned to devotional reading only

It is, of course, properly used this way. But we now have those who hold that this is the *only* proper use. They usually don't proclaim it because of the trouble it stirs up.<sup>12</sup>

- ✚ Even more commonly we now have many interpretations of Scripture which are "personal and private" – "I'm glad that's true for you." The reference point of truth is my personal experience, not the fact based faith Peter describes.

### The Apostle's testimony

Peter makes it plain that this is wrong – and he's an eyewitness to the facts. In particular:

- ✚ He saw the glory of God (at the Transfiguration and Ascension).
  - ✚ He heard the voice of God there.
  - ✚ This happened at a specific time and place – not some private vision.
- In short, this is a matter of hard, cold fact – not somebody's fairy tale.

### Criteria for becoming "Scripture"

It may interest you to know the some of the criteria the early church used to decide (in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) just what books belonged in the Bible. Here are some they used:

- ✚ It had to be written under the authority of an apostle, if not by an apostle – one who was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ. That pretty much restricted it to first generation witnesses.
- ✚ It had to be considered inspired. Interestingly, there were many books that were considered inspired (for example, the letters of Polycarp, a student of John the Apostle) which were considered but eliminated as not being apostolic.
- ✚ Get this: it had to be of proven use in the *pastoral* work of the church. In short, where the church today would turn to pop psychology (or James Dobson) the church then used the Scriptures. This at least proves it can be done.

That last tells you something. It tells you that doctrine is important *in the daily work of the church* – not just as an obscure reference point in a brochure somewhere. It also tells you that the church's pastoral ministry, like all else, should be Christ centered, not "seeker-centered" or even pew-sitter centered.

### Prophetic Words

***So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***

**(2Pe 1:19-21 NASB)**

### The Lighthouse Principle

It is always dangerous to delve into prophecy, for any number of reasons. One in particular is that it often evokes strong divisive emotions in those who hear it. So why, then, does Peter encourage

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<sup>12</sup> Our preacher complains that it seems that the people who love the Bible the most, who study it most diligently, are the primary sources of disunity in the church. Perhaps it's because we love so much and hate to see the meat give way to the meringue.

us to do just that? Because it makes us all the more sure of the facts of the faith. Consider, if you will, the “lighthouse principle:”

- ✚ Lighthouses are never built in the harbor of your destination – rather, they are built on the rocks you want to avoid. Likewise, prophecy is not an end in itself, but points to Jesus Christ.
- ✚ If you have a chart – as we have the Bible – the lighthouse tells you where you are. Likewise, prophecy tells you where you are in the grand scheme of things.
- ✚ No matter how bright the lighthouse or how good your chart, if you’re going to make it to the dock, the lower lights need to be burning. No matter how brilliant your interpretation of prophecy, it must conform to the rest of Scripture.

### No private interpretation

There is a translational difficulty in verse 20. The word translated “interpretation” (in the Greek, *epilusis*) carries with it not just a technical meaning (as in, translate) but also the emotional impetus behind it. The warning is against those who “just know” what the right answer is, and become emotionally attached to it. The reason is simple: prophecy doesn’t come from man; nor should its interpretation. Indeed, you might consider the test of the Old Testament prophets:

**'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'** "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

**(Deu 18:20-22 NASB)**

This, I submit, is both clear and in right proportion. Mishandling the word of God is a most serious matter.

### Modern False Prophets

Do we have false prophets in the modern church? I submit that indeed we do. Some examples may make this clear:

- ✚ There are some who claim to be a prophet outright. Joseph Smith and his interpretation of the golden hieroglyphics<sup>13</sup>; Jehovah’s Witness founder Russell; 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists founder Miller – the list is a long one.
- ✚ There are those who don’t explicitly claim to be a prophet – but act like one. A good example is the current Episcopalian church. When asked how they could support homosexuality, one bishop replied that this was the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ A third, more insidious version comes from those who tell us that the most reliable source of knowledge about God comes through our own experiences.<sup>14</sup> The idea is that the supreme arbiter of what is or is not truly the faith is the experience of the individual, not the word of God. This is rather subtle – and very widespread.

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<sup>13</sup> He evidently thought no one would be able to actually read them at the time. The Rosetta stone spoiled that.

<sup>14</sup> “Trust your feelings, Luke. Use the Force!”

All these folks are, in fact, Gnostic heretics. They preach the doctrine of “secret knowledge.” The primary difference today is that the secret knowledge is no longer said to be a revelation, but an effect of our own personal experience. There is absolutely no support for this view in the Scripture – yet it is common even in churches who used to declare themselves “Bible believing.” Now it’s Bible believing – if my own emotional experience validates it. Otherwise, I’m glad it’s true for you, because it’s not for me. But hear the word of the Lord<sup>15</sup>:

**But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.**  
**(2Ti 3:1-7 NASB)**

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<sup>15</sup> Especially verse 5

## False Teachers - 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2

Peter is rather blunt in describing the problem:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.  
(2Pe 2:1-3 NASB)

There will be...

The surprise to most Christians here is that false teachers will be among us. Since most Christians think that theology is for theologians, and it really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere, why the fuss? Christ states this as well.<sup>16</sup> We will have false teachers (and, by implication, preachers.)

How can this happen? Peter tells us here that they will smuggle in their false doctrine. In short, they will look like real teachers of the Scripture, but in their ego driven minds they have their own doctrine, which they see as superior to the faith as taught.

How do they get away with it? Peter tells us that *many* will follow them. In America, this is almost too easy to get away with. Being firmly of the *vox populi, vox Dei* train of thought, we assume that a preacher who has great success numerically must automatically be blessed by God. After all, if God wasn't with him, how could we have all those baptisms? One must ask: do butts in seats really equal souls in heaven? Is it OK to tell people what they want to hear and build a crowd that way? Paul tells us this:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.  
(2Ti 4:3-4 NASB)

More than that, what these men will teach are called "destructive heresies." Such men tend to destroy the church. Curiously, this is often accompanied by a plea from them for unity in the church – heresies first and foremost divide the church. To prevent them from being recognized as such you must persuade the sheep to be good sheep and follow blindly along. That's why Peter tells us that the first real defense of the church is the Christian's knowledge of Christ – if you know him, you will follow him, and not some heretic.

How to tell

So then, how do we know who the heretic is? There is more on this later, but I'd point out three characteristics Peter gives us:

- ✚ Greed. It may not be the primary motive (for some it is), but it's usually there. The faith teaches us to love the things of Christ; the heresy, the things of this world.

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 7:15-20

- ✚ They bring the way of truth into disrepute. People look at them from the outside of the church and wonder how we could be so blind. Unfortunately, this also prevents those outside from seeing the truth about Christ.
- ✚ They will even deny the Lord. Almost all heresies revolve around a distortion of the nature of Christ or his work. (Examples to follow.)

### Destructive heresies

So what possible difference could this make? Let me give you three examples:

1. Arianism. Arianism is the belief that God and Christ are, at root, two different essences. That somehow Jesus is the result of God playing around with Mary, resulting in a child who is godlike – but definitely inferior to, and distinct from, God. You can see how, if you pick and choose among Scriptures, this view could come about. But you probably can't see why it would make a difference. But it does. If Christ is not really God, why appeal to him in prayer? So you should only talk to God – who cannot really sympathize with us. How could he? He's not human! So we're left with following the rules and appeasing the frowning God. Want an example? Jehovah's Witnesses.

2. Eutychianism – the opposite heresy. Jesus is God but not really human. So all that business on the Cross was play-acting, and thus not effective at atonement. We don't really have the salvation promised, just some nice teaching. Now what are you going to do?

3. Pelagianism and its offshoot, semi-Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that original sin doesn't exist. Therefore, atonement for the whole human race is ineffective; man (via his free will) cooperates with God to achieve salvation. Semi-Pelagianism affirms original sin, but retains the idea that salvation is the joint venture of man and God. The usual result is that Christianity dissolves into a series of self-help sermons; after all, man doesn't need salvation (he can get that by seeking God himself) but does need improvement of his sinful nature.<sup>17</sup>

### God Rescues the Righteous

**For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,**

**(2Pe 2:4-9 NASB)**

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<sup>17</sup> I am, of course, utterly simplifying things in all three of these instances. Those with theological training will understand the difficulty of explaining both the correct nature of these heresies and the difficulty in getting the average, untrained Christian to understand them, let alone know why it makes a difference.

## The nature of the righteous

This section of Scripture contains some disturbing implications about the righteous:

- ✚ It implies that when such heresy invades the church, the righteous are few. If you've ever had the feeling that it's impossible to persuade everyone else that things are going horribly wrong, you might just be right.
- ✚ It implies that the wicked are powerful in those circumstances. You are not hunting out the occasional heretic; you are fighting against the odds.
- ✚ It implies that the righteous are *tormented* by what they see. One of the frustrations of the righteous in these circumstances is that the evil around you is very clear and agonizing; others just can't see what the fuss is about.

## The punishment of the wicked

It might seem that God is doing nothing about it. Indeed, that's one of the sources of doubt for the righteous – why isn't God dealing with these people? But notice the examples given:

- ✚ The wicked may be the spiritually powerful of their day, but God eventually will deal with them.
- ✚ Even if whole cities (or cultures) go this way, God will deal with them. As Lot's story makes clear, God wants to be merciful, but at some point his patience ends.
- ✚ Even, as with Noah, it involves the whole world. (Even so, Lord Jesus, come.)

## There is hope

How is this?

- ✚ First, God rescues the righteous. Throughout the Bible runs the theme of the remnant. Ultimately, those who persevere in righteousness will be kept by God.
- ✚ God condemns the wicked; they will not escape. It's just that he may still be patient with them, hoping for their repentance. He was patient with you, wasn't he?

Some scholars will bring forth the doctrine of "indefectibility" – the idea that the Holy Spirit will not allow the church to *remain* in error. It's just that the correction may be catastrophic in nature.

## Recognizing the False Teacher

I told you we weren't done with this.

and especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, *for* a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is

overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire."

(2Pe 2:10-22 NASB)

So just how do I recognize these false teachers?

### Character

May I point out three elements of character you should look for?

- ✚ Daring – these are the people who tell you that if the church is to survive, she must be willing to strike out in bold new directions. Watch this: the survival of the church depends not on its faithfulness, nor on the strength of God, but our willingness to accept these “new” doctrines.
- ✚ Arrogance – these are people who are curtly dismissive of the opposite view. It often happens that those who oppose them are experienced Christians – meaning, old. Their views are dismissed out of hand; after all, they’re just old fogies. (It’s not old vs. young; it’s the arrogance to look out for.)
- ✚ Slaves of depravity – something has a grip on their lives – something other than Jesus Christ. Often enough their secret sin is their common accusation of others.

### Actions

There are many possible actions which might identify such; Peter gives us these three:

- ✚ Carousing in broad daylight. In the plain sight of the world they party hearty. There is eventually no sense of shame; it’s not drunkenness, it’s being a regular guy to show the world that Christians are not hypocrites.
- ✚ Adultery. Sexual Puritanism is denounced – and “love” becomes the new standard of the church.
- ✚ Greed. Someone is always looking to profit from his service to the church.

### How bad is it?

I have left until the last the warning to the teachers who are like this.

- ✚ As Peter tells you, you’d be better off if you’d never heard of Christ. To know the truth and then turn your back on it – what will you expect of God?
- ✚ He explicitly tells you that you will be paid back – “harm for harm.”
- ✚ AND after that, the gloomy darkness of the dungeons of hell.  
People, the Lord is serious about this.

### Summary

May I leave you with a brief summary of what you need to know?

- ✚ You *will* have false teachers, like it or not.
- ✚ You can recognize them (by their fruits you will know them).
- ✚ God may not let you triumph over them, but he will provide for your rescue.
- ✚ If you are one of these false teachers, you have been warned.

## Day of the Lord - 2nd Peter 3

It is best if we read it through at once:

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

(2Pe 3:1-18 NASB)

### Day of Wrath

The reader will note that this lesson cannot possibly contain all that might be said about the Day of Wrath; indeed, end times in general. Moreover, there is substantial disagreement, some of it sinfully vehement, about the order of events and the meaning of various passages. We will therefore constrain ourselves to that which is almost universally agreed on, and which is also needful to understand Peter's teaching here.

### Prophesied

Peter begins his tale by telling us that the Day of Wrath is prophesied. Indeed it is. Beginning in the Old Testament<sup>18</sup>, then frequently amplified and repeated in the New Testament<sup>19</sup>, we have the

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<sup>18</sup> See, per Nave's Topical Bible, Isa\_2:12; Isa\_13:6; Isa\_13:9; Isa\_34:8; Jer\_46:10; Lam\_2:22; Eze\_30:3; Amo\_5:18; Joe\_2:1; Oba\_1:15; Zep\_1:8; Zep\_1:18; Zep\_2:2-3; Zec\_14:1

<sup>19</sup> See, per Nave's Topical Bible, Mal\_4:5; 1Co\_5:5; 2Co\_1:14; 1Th\_5:2; 2Pe\_3:10

solemn assurance that Christ returns and in the process delivers the wrath of God in the form of judgment on sinful man. The order of events is disputed, but the coming of the judgment is sure.

So why don't we hear about this from the pulpit? Pulpit topics have their fashions, and it is still an anathema among many preachers to "preach hellfire and brimstone." The theory is that people don't like that – and that their dislike is a good reason not to preach it. (We may draw a parallel concerning the sin of adultery; it too is unpopular – and not preached.) The matter resolves itself when the preacher sticks to the number one topic: Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.<sup>20</sup>

### New Heaven, New Earth

It is one of the Seven Last Things: the new heaven and the new earth. The phrase itself is found only in Revelation<sup>21</sup>, but the concept is throughout the Scriptures<sup>22</sup>. The idea is simple: at the end, God will destroy the existing physical reality and replace it. Those who are his children will be invited to inhabit it forever. All things will be purified, which is to say that all things will be judged and cleansed.

How is God going to do this? I have no idea. I just know that his Word says that it will happen. It is something without precedent in physical reality.

### Thief in the night

You can well imagine that Christian fanatics and scholars alike would be fascinated by the question, "when?" I can give you only a little information on the subject:

- ✚ First, it will happen when things are going along just like they always have. There's always someone screaming the end is near, so we must include that in the definition of "normal" as well. From the world's point of view, it will be a total surprise.
- ✚ At this event, or near it, there will be a separation between the righteous and the wicked. (There is much debate on more than one separation, in what order, and so on. My point is that there will be a separation.)
- ✚ So, considering all prophecy, we must remember that *no one* will know when.<sup>23</sup>

This is serious stuff. Please remember that it is said here in the context of talking about false teachers. It's Peter's warning to those who have taken their own way: a horrible judgment awaits you.

### Scoffers will come

Let us be specific about this: those who lead the people of the church will come with a sneering, scoffing attitude.

- ✚ They will use social pressure – from the pew or the pulpit, we are talking about those in authority – to belittle those who hold to the Scriptures.
- ✚ They will do so according to their own evil desires – "lusts" in some translations. "It's all about me." So throughout the centuries we have had what today might be called a "rock star church." (Watch those folks who are so proud of being so humble.)

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<sup>20</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:23

<sup>21</sup> Revelation 21:1-2

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Isaiah 66:22

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 24:36

✚ Most important, they will deny (or perhaps just refuse to speak about) the return of the Lord.<sup>24</sup>

### Deliberately overlook

How, one might reasonably ask, do they justify this? In our own age this is greatly helped by the anti-intellectual tenor of evangelical Christianity. “Check your brain at the door because God wants your heart.”<sup>25</sup> But the method is simple:

- ✚ They deliberately ignore the Word of God – the Scriptures. A good example is the modern church’s treatment of homosexuality.
- ✚ They forget the simple fact that God created the universe – and that therefore it is no great logical leap to think he might recreate it.
- ✚ Of course, they can point to the “failure” of those who believe the Scriptures; things are going on just like normal, right?

### Judgment is coming for such

It is a fairly obvious question: if God tells us that such people are in the church, why doesn’t he simply strike them dead? Their destruction is coming anyway, why not now? We may see two answers:

- ✚ First, there is the “wheat and tares” problem.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes you have to wait to discover just which is which, and ripping them out now might disorder the church.
- ✚ More than that, there is the patience of God. It is not his will that any should be lost, and that includes the apostates too. Time for repentance must be given.

### What we should do

Having described the problem (and ultimate solution) thoroughly there remains the question: what should we do about it in the meanwhile?

### Remember

Peter points out to us that he is stirring our memories. Here are three things to remember:

- ✚ First, the prophecies in the Scriptures. Many have been fulfilled at the first advent of Christ – giving us all the more reason to expect the rest to be fulfilled “soon.”
- ✚ Next, we should remember the patience of God. Indeed, we are to regard it as salvation – for if God doesn’t instantly toast the apostate, how much more patient will he be with ordinary sinners?
- ✚ Finally, we have the Scriptures themselves (see his remark about Paul) which we are not to neglect.

### Holy conduct and godliness

It is not just our memory but our conduct which is required. Again, three things:

- ✚ We are to pass our time waiting and hastening Christ’s return. The waiting is to be done expectantly (“even so, Lord Jesus, come”); but what about hastening? Perhaps he expects us to take the Gospel to every tongue, tribe and nation! Then the end will come.

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<sup>24</sup> Our own preacher’s recent sermon on heaven, which militantly failed to mention the resurrection of the dead, the Lord’s return or the judgment was rather disturbing on this account.

<sup>25</sup> See Mark 12:28-30 for the obvious rebuttal.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 13:24-20

- ✚ In the meanwhile, note that we are to be diligent to be found by Him in peace. In short, there is no prescription for church rebellion; rather, we are to strengthen the bond of peace all the more. There are the weapons of the Lord, and the weapons of the world.
- ✚ Our personal conduct should be, of course, spotless and blameless.

#### Be on your guard

As this is the end of the series, I may point out that nothing in Peter's letter tells us to raise revolt. We are not to divide the church – and ruin her witness to the world. But there is a final pair of “do and don't”:

- ✚ *Don't* be carried away by every little fad or “bold new thinking.” Test all things by the Scripture. Hold firm to Christ and the Word he has given you; let the false teacher's doctrine splash against that rock and drain away.
- ✚ *Do* continue to grow – first in grace, so that you might be both forgiven and forgiving. Also grow in the knowledge of Christ – it is the Christian's great defense against the apostate, the heretic and the false teacher.

## Heresies - Ancient and Modern

The well educated reader must be offered an apology: this is by no means a solid theology course session on heresies. It in fact can offer little more than a survey of heresies ancient and modern, with but the following justification:

- ✚ We hope to dispel the notion that “it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.” It does matter. There is a right answer.
- ✚ We also plan to show that what you believe does in fact affect the life of the ordinary Christian on a daily basis.
- ✚ Finally, to the extent possible, we intend to demonstrate that heresy is not some ancient problem, but a modern one.

### Heresies: the Divinity of Christ

A couple of ancient heresies:

#### Nestorianism

The Nestorians (somewhat like the Arians, below) believed that Jesus Christ had two *separate* natures:

- ✚ One was the gentle Jesus, friend of the sinner – a human nature.
- ✚ The other was Christ – the stern God of the Old Testament.

Their prime question was, “How could God be a three day old baby?” But see the consequences of this belief: if this is so, how can God (the Christ part) understand my human deficiencies? Jesus might, but God can’t – and therefore I need to appease the Christ while I applaud the Jesus. I’m still dealing with God at arms length. What does that do to your prayer life?

#### Arianism

This heresy holds that Christ is separate and *less than* God. He is not an eternal being, but the highest of created beings. (This is a central belief in Mormonism). Jesus had a human soul, but this was replaced by the *Logos* when Christ entered into him.

If this is so, how can Christ connect us with God? How can he forgive – if he is not God, he is not the one morally offended when we sin?

The truth is simple: Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is, always was, and always will be God. I may not be able to explain how, but I know it’s the truth.

### Heresies: the Humanity of Christ

OK, if his divinity pleases you, what about his humanity? Was he really human like us?

#### Eutychianism

This heresy holds that Christ’s humanity is somehow different from our humanity. It’s therefore held that he couldn’t really suffer the way we do; in fact, his actions just before the Cross are held to be some sort of “example only.” But this has its consequences:

- ✚ If he’s really not like us, how could we possibly be expected to follow his example?

✚ If he didn't really suffer, is the atonement real? And are we really saved?

### Apollinarianism

Didn't like that last one? This variant holds that he really did have a human body like ours, and emotions like ours, but his mind was purely divine. In other words, he wasn't really tempted like we are – for how could anyone tempt God? So any record of his being tempted was simply play-acting for our benefit, then. Which, of course, means that he is again not to be used as an example for withstanding temptation. (Which quickly degenerates into the only response to temptation is giving in to it.)

### Docetism

You have to have a little help to fall for this one. It's a Gnostic heresy – the kind that comes with a special revelation only to the chosen few, those in the know (hence Gnostic). This one says that Christ only appeared to have a human body – it was really just an illusion. Which means:

- ✚ There's no sense imitating an illusion.
- ✚ Illusions don't suffer and die; therefore there is no atonement.
- ✚ There is therefore no salvation.
- ✚ There is thus no way that those of us who aren't illusory bodies could ever be resurrected from the dead.

### Heresies: The Nature of Sin

Sometimes the error isn't about Christ, but about the fundamental nature of man, or sin, or judgment, or matter. Here are three that concern the nature of sin:

#### Sin and grace: Antinomianism

(Anti = against; noma = law). This is one which is commonly thrown around as an accusation against other denominations. It can be argued that the Christian is not under the law, but grace. Therefore, the Christian need not obey any laws of morality – everything's permissible, right? But hear the common form:

- ✚ "When I sin, God increases his grace and forgives me."
- ✚ "Therefore, by sinning, I cause God's grace to increase."
- ✚ "More of God's grace is a good thing."
- ✚ "Therefore, as long as I believe, it's better to do what I please than to try to follow God's laws."

You can see this can go both ways. Augustine put it, "Love God – and do as you please." That's the correct view; you don't follow laws once your heart follows God. But often we have heard this as justification!

(This is sometimes summed up by "God will forgive me; it's his hobby, you know.")

### Original Sin: Pelagianism

Pelagianism is a happy view. It holds that there is no original sin, or, more commonly put, that people are basically good. Therefore, moral perfection is obtainable in this life by man's efforts alone. Adam was nothing more than a bad example – which implies that Christ is nothing more than a good example. Thus, the existence of free will implies that we are capable of leading a sinless life – if we could only be properly coached. So the church's job is to coach us in how to lead a sinless life.

This particular view – which denies the existence of the concept of original sin – is not found very much today. But its offshoot, Semi-Pelagianism, is very much with us.

### Original Sin – Semi-Pelagianism

This view ignores original sin in the abstract, but starts with the idea that man, unaided by God, makes the first step toward salvation. Thus, salvation is not really the work of God, but of man and God working together. God's role is simply to increase man's faith and guard it; man does the real work ("work out your salvation in fear and trembling.")<sup>27</sup>

This view is rather fuzzy to start with, and it keeps coming back in various forms. It's particularly popular now because it justifies the emergent church movement's penchant for self-help sermons. Unfortunately, it's rather hard to nail down because its proponents don't really think in these terms. They see it as determining what the church's target market wants, and giving it to them. This means that Semi-Pelagianism is very popular right now – but its proponents would not recognize themselves as such.

Historically, this label has been used frequently to call the other denomination a bunch of heretics.

### Modern Heresy

#### Things that split the church today

May I point out, please, a few of the modern heresies?

- ✚ *Prosperity Gospel.* This is the idea that God wants you to be rich; all you need to do to get rich is do good works. The best work is giving money to the church. The potential for abuse is clear, but consider also that this is a form of salvation by works. For if you consider God's approval best expressed in the fatness of your wallet, then buying God's approval is really a good investment. (A form of Semi-Pelagianism, sort of.)
- ✚ *Political Gospel.* Righteousness must be upheld in the political arena, therefore the good Christian is a Republican (if righteousness means mostly sexual righteousness) or a Democrat (if righteousness means mostly charitable – if forced – giving to the poor.) This is a disease that particularly afflicts democracies. The heresy comes in presuming that the state, which is temporal, is the primary agent of things eternal. Render unto Caesar, indeed.
- ✚ *Many pathways.* This heresy holds that people outside of Christianity will be saved if they are righteous enough. The argument is that Christ will judge them fairly; some will be righteous and therefore saved, even though they didn't accept or never heard the Gospel. Can you see the concept of earning salvation in this? Or do you think that all have sinned and thus deserve hell? Perhaps salvation is by grace!
- ✚ *Therapeutic Deism.* Another form of Semi-Pelagianism, this holds that what people really need to hear from the church is the way to get better. The prime focus of the church is now in pop psychology, fixing your relationships, finances, etc. By doing this, Christians will lead happy, fulfilled lives. Note the difference: no one claims this technique will make you sinless. Just happy and

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<sup>27</sup> But see Philippians 2:12-13.

fulfilled. Christ is just a happy addition to the really important stuff; the Scripture, a handy source of quotations to make the really important points.

#### Reasons why heresy abounds

So why does this stuff sound so familiar? Why is it that the evangelical churches have this problem today? I submit the following reasons:

- ✦ We no longer teach or preach exegetically, but topically. The Scripture is now a secondary source of teaching. Our students, therefore, have come to see the Scriptures as mere footnotes.
- ✦ Consequently, the Scriptures are no longer honored in the church. Those of sufficient antiquity will recall a time when most churches had two pulpits, so that when the Scripture was read, the listener understood its solemn import. In some churches one pulpit was reserved for the Scriptures alone.
- ✦ The anti-intellectual bias of our time (in the churches) means that age and scholarship have been discarded in favor of the “bold new idea.” Interestingly, that idea is often brought forward with the idea that we should believe it not because it is true, but because it’s the only way the church can survive. (No sense of history, either.)
- ✦ We now have Christians who no longer consciously follow Christ, or try to grow in him – but rather follow their feelings.

The first defense against heresy is a church full of Christians who are growing in the knowledge of Christ. And that is the first thing the heretics attack.