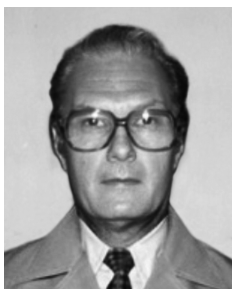


July to September 2022

by Rev Dan Ebert III (1931-2012)

About the Author



Rev Dan Ebert III, missionary from the USA to the Philippines was a linguist and pioneer in this missions field. Venturing into the island of Palawan, never before penetrated by Christian missionaries, he lived and worked among the “stone age” natives, listened and deciphered their language, and “Romanised” it in writing. With his team of workers, he translated the New Testament into Palawano, a monumental task that took the better part of twelve years.

In the 1980s, Rev Ebert taught at the Fundamental Baptist Bible Institute in Manila, and was a Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theology at the Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore.

Having served the Lord faithfully as a missionary since 1955, Rev Ebert went home to be with the Lord on 26 August 2012 in Kentucky, USA.

“INSTRUCTIONS TO THE SAINTS”

A Study of the Epistle to the Philippians

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul, writing from prison, addressed “*all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi*” (Phil 1:1). All of us who are in Christ are saints. We are not made so either by our actions, or by the decree of some church official. We become saints by God's grace through faith. The Apostle Paul brought out this truth by constantly addressing Christians as saints. He referred to both the Roman and Corinthian Christians as those “*called to be saints*” (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Now, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote to “*all the saints...at Philippi*,” and all who will follow them, sending words of instruction on “saintly living.” As we read and study, may we be challenged to live the kind of life that shows the world what God has made us in Christ.

FRIDAY, JULY 1

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-5

EXODUS 19:5-8

*“Thy word is a
lamp unto my feet...”*

CALLED TO BE SAINTS

“He certainly was a real saint, a blessing to everyone.” Such a statement is sometimes heard when an elderly Christian passes on. Such a person is generally one who had a quiet, gentle manner, bearing the difficulties of life with joy and exhibiting godliness in his daily life.

Rather than saying such a person was a saint, it would be better to say that he lived as a saint should live. Scripture clearly teaches that all believers are saints. The New Testament word “*saint*” is derived from the word “holy,” so saints are literally the “holy ones.” Christ died to make us holy (Col 1:22). When we accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we are made holy and called saints (Col 1:12).

The reason that only a few people today are referred to as being “saintly” is that Christians often fail to exhibit God’s holiness. Although we are made saints by God’s power, we are responsible to live in such a way as to reflect this holiness (1 Pet 1:15).

The Apostle’s heart was filled with joy because the Philippians lived as saints should. They had accepted Christ as Saviour, followed Him as Lord and were obedient to His Word. These saints were obeying the scriptural admonition to always “*follow that which is good*” (1 Thess 5:15). There is nothing that brings greater joy to a Bible teacher than to see those he loves and nurtures following the Lord (Phil 2:2).

We too, as saints of the Lord, should be obedient Christians. Our lives should not only bring joy and encouragement to those who faithfully teach us the Word of God, but we must also bear a testimony of holiness to those still outside of Christ.

In the coming days, we shall meditate upon the instructions in Philippians concerning how saints should live in order to exhibit God’s holiness. May God challenge our hearts to obey these instructions.

THOUGHT: Who are the “*saints*”?

PRAYER: Father, may I desire to reflect God's holiness in my daily life.

SATURDAY, JULY 2
PHILIPPIANS 1:5-8
2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-20

*“Blessed are the undefiled
in the way, who walk
in the law of the LORD.”*

A MISSIONARY HEART

Christians can express their love for the Lord in many ways. The Apostle Paul was thankful for the Philippian Christians and the way they actively expressed their love. From the beginning of their salvation, they were interested in seeing others saved. One of the ways they expressed this interest was in their “*fellowship*” (Phil 1:5) with Paul. This fellowship was in the form of financial support and prayer. We can talk about our concern for the lost and the “whitened harvest fields” but a real concern takes concrete steps of action. And the Philippian Christians had taken such steps (2 Cor 8:7-8).

Paul showed his deep concern for the believers in Philippi by stating that he had them in his heart (Phil 1:7). How important it is for us to feel a deep concern for believers in places other than our own. The Apostle’s concern was so strong that even when he was not physically present with the young churches, he felt as if he were (1 Thess 2:17). The believers were partakers with Paul of God’s sovereign, saving grace. He never forgot the unity this grace made possible.

Paul was confident that as a result of the missionary endeavour many lives would be greatly changed. It is a great joy to see someone come to Christ. Salvation means a new life, a changed manner, an eternal goal (2 Cor 5:17). We can be confident that the God who saved us will continue the work of making His children Christ-like in all they do. This work will continue until we see Jesus face to face (Phil 1:6).

May all of us, like the great Apostle of old, stand before God as those who have a great love for the churches of the world. May we bear a deep concern especially for churches in new missions fields as they struggle to maintain a testimony to their new-found faith. May we continue to pray for them, as well as for ourselves, that the work God is doing in us will be evidenced in our daily lives.

THOUGHT: Is the Lord’s work in my heart evidenced in my life?

PRAYER: Father, give me a true missionary heart.

CHRISTIAN LOVE

There are certain virtues that must be a part of every believer's life if he is to grow spiritually. Although the Apostle was in prison, he continued to pray concerning this need. The particular virtue he was concerned about in this prayer was love.

As we grow spiritually, our love for the brethren and the Lord will also grow. The worldly idea of love is based on and guided by one's emotions. But true Christian love is guided by the Holy Scripture. Christian love is a love that is filled with "*knowledge*," compassion and concern for the needs of others, while being directed by a correct understanding of godly things.

Not only must our love be guided by a proper knowledge of what is right, it must also involve the use of discernment. Discernment selects and applies to each situation in life the information that is furnished by knowledge from God. Cold, clinical, unused knowledge, even of divine things, is of little value. Our Christian knowledge must constantly be applied to our lives.

Christian maturity is always marked by action based on knowledge of God's truth (Heb 5:14). Love that is truly Christian is directed by a deep knowledge of God's Word which causes us to act properly. When guided by such love, we are able to "*approve things that are excellent*" (Phil 1:10). This means that we will be able to recognise the proper action for a Christian in any given situation.

The result of following such guidelines is that we will be able to finish the course of life "*sincere and without offence*" (Phil 1:10). We will have a clear conscience before God (Acts 24:16). And our lives will be marked with the fruits of righteousness and thus bring honour to the God who has saved us.

THOUGHT: Love guided by Scripture brings joy and satisfaction.

PRAYER: Father, guide me to love in Thy way.

MONDAY, JULY 4

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14

1 PETER 1:6-8

*“Thou hast commanded us
to keep thy precepts diligently.”*

JOYFUL IN SUFFERING

There are times when difficulties come into the life of the believer or the local church for which there seems to be no good purpose. In such times it is important for us to remember that God has a purpose in everything that happens to the Christian. As children of the Almighty God, we are under His providential care. Whether we can see what God is doing or not, He is working in and through His people to accomplish His higher purpose.

In the early days of the gospel, the young churches greatly depended on the Apostle Paul's ministry. When he was imprisoned, the church was without their much-needed teacher. There was no question that God could have freed him. In fact, at an earlier time, God had freed Paul from prison (Acts 16:25-26). But this time it was a part of God's purpose and plan that he remained imprisoned. What the church may have viewed as a disaster was used of God for great blessing (Phil 1:12).

Paul, fastened in prison between two guards, witnessed constantly of God's saving grace. His testimony was spread by the guards among all those who dwelt in Caesar's palace (Phil 1:13). Historians tell us that within 100 years after Paul's imprisonment, more than half of those who lived in Rome were believers. No doubt that great turning to the Lord began with Paul's imprisonment (Phil 1:13).

When the Apostle was first imprisoned, many believers seemed to lose heart. But when they heard that despite Paul's situation, he continued to have a good testimony, they too regained their former zeal. Many believers then were bold to live for God despite the threat of persecution.

When we, like Paul, have confidence in God's care, we are not only able to joyfully live for Him in times of difficulty, we also encourage other Christians to do so.

THOUGHT: Why did God not free Paul from prison?

PRAYER: Father, may I always believe that all things are possible with Thee, and may I always trust in Thee.

TUESDAY, JULY 5

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18

ROMANS 16:17-18

*“O that my ways were directed
to keep thy statutes!”*

A PROPER MOTIVE

Scripture often speaks of the need to carefully observe those who come to us preaching the Gospel. We are told to consider their motives and the results of their ministry. It would be nice to think that everyone who preaches in the name of Jesus is burdened for the lost. But this portion of Scripture reminds us that there are some evil men who preach and teach from selfish motives.

Some preach to cause *“envy and strife”* (Phil 1:15), that is to say, to bring about rivalry or partisanship within the church. The object of this is to further their own group or particular desires. They are contentious men, hoping to undermine other teachers whom they see as rivals who stand in the way of their personal success. Such strife-causing is listed in the Scripture as a work of the flesh (Gal 5:20; James 3:14-15). Therefore, men who use their teachings to forward their own ambitions are totally unqualified for leadership in the church. Thankfully, there are many who preach because of a love for the Lord, His Church, and the lost. Surely this is the only proper motive for teaching the Word of God (2 Cor 5:14).

Paul was happy that in any case the Gospel was being preached. However, he was not excusing nor approving those who had improper motives. Often, he spoke against such selfish men who preached out of personal ambition (1 Tim 6:3-5). But he had confidence that God could overrule and bring men and women to Himself, even in spite of the preacher’s false motives.

As God’s people, we must praise Him every time a soul is saved. But within our churches we must observe the actions of those who preach. Let us look, for our examples, at those who obey Scripture both in preaching and living (Phil 3:17-19). And let us be concerned that the church be led by men who live the message they preach. Only in this way will the faith be shared properly and defended against error.

THOUGHT: Are all who preach the gospel men of good will?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the salvation of souls whoever the evangelist is.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 6
PHILIPPIANS 1:19-20
EPHESIANS 6:12-17

*“I will praise thee
with uprightness of heart...”*

BOLDNESS IN THE LORD

Difficulties often come unexpectedly into the Christian's life. Sometimes it is extremely hard to see God's hand in those things. Such, no doubt, was the case when the Apostle Paul had his ministry to the local churches interrupted by his imprisonment. But he saw certain good results as many of his palace guards came to know the Lord (Phil 1:12-13). But what about his own life and future? These were not clear to Paul. In this situation, he was much like Christians today. In times of trouble, we often do not know how the situation will turn out.

Although we often cannot see the end result of difficulties, we know that God is working in all things. Paul said, *“...I know that this shall turn to my salvation...”* (Phil 1:19). He was not speaking about salvation from sin here, but his deliverance through these times of trial. There was the possibility that God might release Paul from prison. On the other hand, he knew that no matter what happened, it would be for the best because God's hand was upon him (Rom 8:28).

The Apostle was encouraged because Christians were praying for him. Surely, we can find strength as the fellowship of believers upholds us in prayer in times of trouble. And we should be faithful to pray for one another, especially in time of need (Eph 6:18). The Christian does not need to feel shame when suffering for the cause of Christ (2 Tim 1:8). Our Lord Himself was despised and rejected when He came to bring salvation to the world. So, we also may meet trials and testings as we endeavour to follow Him.

May we, like the Apostle Paul, face times of difficulty in our lives with great boldness, knowing that God will meet our every need. May we desire only that others will see Christ in us as we live joyfully for the Lord despite the problems of life (Phil 1:20).

THOUGHT: How can we help one another in time of trouble?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for always meeting my needs as I live for Thee.

THURSDAY, JULY 7

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

*“I will keep thy statutes:
O forsake me not utterly.”*

BETWIXT TWO

Sometimes the difficulties and pressures of life seem almost too much to bear. Often the Christian sings out with the poet:

“There’s a longing in my heart for Jesus
There’s a longing in my heart to see His face,
I’m weary, oh so weary, of trav’ling here below
There’s a longing in my heart for Him.”

The Apostle expressed this feeling by saying, *“to die is gain”* (Phil 1:21), and *“to be with Christ...is far better”* (Phil 1:23). Paul certainly suffered far more for the Gospel of Christ than most of us ever will (1 Cor 4:11-13). Surely, we all agree it will be a glorious day when we are with the Lord and are like Him (1 John 3:2). Yes, the joys of heaven often call loudly as we find it necessary to face difficulties and sorrows. Yet we, like the Apostle, must recognise the need to live on for the Lord (Phil 1:24) on this earth.

The Lord has a purpose for the life of every Christian. Living in obedience enables us to bear spiritual fruit and fulfil God’s purpose for our lives. We must remember that we are the only witness the Lord has to a lost and dying world. There is much to be done as the time of salvation slowly draws to a close and the day of judgment nears. Besides a witness to the lost, the Apostle recognised that the struggling young churches needed him (Phil 1:25). We also are needed to encourage other believers both by our words and our lives (Acts 5:32). As troubles come our way, let us live on for the Lord, seeing our responsibility to the church as well as to those still lost in sin.

We, like the Apostle, may at times be very much betwixt these two choices. Yet the choice is not ours but God’s (Phil 1:22). And when the battle of life is over, He will finally call us home to eternal joy and rest (Phil 1:21).

THOUGHT: What was Paul’s dilemma?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the blessed hope of the Second Coming of Christ.

FRIDAY, JULY 8

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-28

2 TIMOTHY 1:7-13

*“Thy word is a...
light unto my path.”*

BE FAITHFUL

In Philippians 1:27-28, we see three things we must do in order to be faithful Christians. First, as citizens of heaven our manner of life should be worthy of the Gospel which we believe. It has well been said that our actions speak louder than our words. The basis of a good Christian testimony is obedience. It is that which the Lord requires of His people above all else (1 Sam 15:22).

Second, we must stand fast in our doctrinal position. At the time of the writing of this letter to the Philippians, Paul was in prison and a great persecution was looming on the horizon. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, challenged each believer to “*stand fast*” (Phil 1:27). Surely, we need such a challenge today when confusion is everywhere. Part of standing firm is to hold fast to the teachings committed to us. If we are to maintain a good testimony, we must not waver either in our standards or in our doctrinal beliefs (2 Thess 2:15).

Often the church is attacked in what appear to be small areas of doctrine. It would be easy to give in on these “small” matters of faith to avoid unpleasant confrontations. And there are some today who would encourage us to avoid any confrontation, even over major doctrinal matters. But the Apostle knew that compromising in any area ultimately leads to wandering from the truth. So, we are challenged to stand fast in faith (1 Cor 16:13).

Finally, we should never be “*terrified*” (Phil 1:28), that is, controlled by fear. When we live in obedience and hold fast to proper doctrines, we are encouraged by an awareness of the presence of the Lord. He is our helper and will provide all our needs, thus enabling us to meet the persecutions which come as we live for Him (Heb 13:6).

So let us be faithful in our manner of living, and in our doctrinal beliefs. Then we can boldly face persecution and difficulties and never be afraid to live for the Lord.

THOUGHT: In what three areas are we challenged to be faithful?

PRAYER: Father, truly, when Thou art for us, none can be against us.

SATURDAY, JULY 9

PHILIPPIANS 1:29

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-13

*“With my whole heart
have I sought thee...”*

SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE

The child of God is often called to suffer, because nothing will convince onlookers of the reality and power of true religion as suffering will, when it is borne with Christian fortitude. And how great the compensations are!

God can keep us in such perfect peace. He can make lonely times, when it seems no one is near, so full of sweet fellowship and communion. He can give refreshment to the spirit when the body is deprived of sleep.

Not everyone can be trusted with suffering. Some cannot stand the fiery ordeal. They would speak rashly and complainingly. So, the Master has to select with careful scrutiny the branches which can stand the knife; the jewels which can bear the wheel. It is given to some to preach, to others to work, but to others to suffer. Accept it as a gift from His hand. Look up and take each throb of pain, each hour of agony, as God's gift. Dare to thank Him for it. Look inside the envelope of pain for the message it enfolds. It is a rough packing-case, but there is treasure in it.

And can you not minister to other sufferers? Can you not write letters of comfort, or pray for them, or devise little alleviations and surprises for those who have not what you have? Suffering is on Christ's behalf; it must, then, be intended as part of that great ministry for the world in which He, with His saints, is engaged. There is a sense in which all suffering, borne in the spirit of Calvary, helps men, not in the way of atonement or propitiation, of course, but by the exhibition of the power of God's grace in the sufferer.

(F.B. Meyer)

THOUGHT: Is my suffering a gift from God?

PRAYER: Father, may I see Thy loving Hand even as it sends pain, difficulties and calamities.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 10

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

PSALM 133

“...O let me not wander
from thy commandments.”

BE LIKEMINDED

True Christian unity does not come from organisations, programmes or other human measures. It comes from having a common view of the provision Christ has made for our spiritual life. Four of these provisions are listed in Philippians 2:1-2. The points are given in the form of thought-provoking questions which demand an affirmative answer.

First of all, we find “*consolation in Christ*” (Phil 2:1). “*Consolation*” means comfort or encouragement. When we come to know Christ in a real way through a study of Scripture, we are comforted and encouraged by His presence.

Second, we experience the “*love*” of Christ (Phil 2:1). This love causes us to be concerned about the lost and thus to live more fervently for God (2 Cor 5:14). A greater understanding of God’s love enables us to put the needs of our brothers in Christ ahead of our own (Gal 5:13). All of these things become part of our lives because we come to realise that God expressed His love toward us when we were helpless sinners (Rom 5:8).

Third, we have in Christ that wonderful “*fellowship of the Spirit*” (Phil 2:1). The Holy Spirit makes us a new creation in Christ and enables us to share the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

Finally, in Christ we develop a tender compassionate spirit which reflects the manner of our Lord. Being merciful is the mark of a true believer. It is based on the fact that God showed us mercy when we were unworthy of His care (Col 3:12-13).

As these wonderful truths of what we have in Christ become real to us, they result in genuine Christian unity. We become “*likeminded*” (Phil 2:2). In this way our relationship with other believers reflects that unity which comes from what Christ has done for us. Let us strive to exhibit this true unity to those around us.

THOUGHT: On what is true Christian unity based?

PRAYER: Father, may my true love for Thee be seen in my obedience.

MONDAY, JULY 11
PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4
1 JOHN 4:18-21

“Blessed art thou, O LORD:
teach me thy statutes.”

CHRISTIAN HARMONY

The oneness that Christians have can only be seen when we are able to live in harmony. Philippians 2:3-4 enumerates several attitudes that are essential to our living in such harmony.

The Scripture often reminds us of the importance of our motives. Here in Philippians, we are challenged not to do anything motivated by “*strife or vainglory*” (Phil 2:3). Strife speaks of factionalism, and vain glory is empty pride and boastfulness. Anything done to further “our side” or enable us to feed our personal pride is worthless as far as God is concerned. This attitude destroys Christian harmony.

We should, instead, serve the Lord with a “*lowliness of mind*” (Phil 2:3). Such an attitude enables us to look on our brethren as better than ourselves and to see the needs of others as more important than our own (Phil 2:3). Since all service to God is only possible by His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, it is only proper that we serve in humility of mind.

Another requirement in maintaining harmony is for us not to be too concerned with our own lives. Scripture reminds us that the Lord gave up everything in order to save us (Phil 2:7-8). The Apostle Paul forsook all the advantages of life that were his by birth to follow the Lord (Phil 3:7). We, likewise, should be careful not to devote ourselves to worldly ambitions and pursuits.

Finally, Christian harmony is further strengthened by a concern for others. As we become less concerned with ourselves, we have time to be more concerned about the spiritual needs of our brethren. As we see ourselves as less important, the Lord and His people and work become more important. Then we can, together, “*make a joyful noise unto the LORD*” as we worship and serve Him (Col 3:16). When all our actions in the local church are to benefit others, we develop true Christian unity and God is glorified.

THOUGHT: What are our actions that strengthen true Christian unity?

PRAYER: Father, help me to love others because Thou lovest me.

TUESDAY, JULY 12
PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8
JAMES 1:22-25

*“With my lips have I declared
all the judgments of thy mouth.”*

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST

The previous passage has challenged us to maintain a proper Christian attitude. We should never be motivated by pride in self or associates, whether they are family or friends. However, this attitude which shows true Christian love and which leads to biblical unity is contrary to the fallen human nature. The following instructions give us a key to living with this new type of outlook.

We must have the same attitude that Jesus had (Phil 2:5). Our mind controls our actions and to a great extent our emotions. We cannot live in humility and obedience to Christ without the active role of our minds. How did Christ think? The following verses give us a description of the Lord's outlook which was evidenced in His humility. Although the Lord Jesus is God, He did not see His exalted position as something to cling to at any cost (Phil 2:6-7; John 1:1). The Lord saw the salvation of the lost as far more important than His own rightful position in heaven. So, in His great love, He left the glories (which had eternally been His) to give His life a ransom (Matt 20:28).

He who was the very God *“made himself of no reputation”* (Phil 2:7). This means that He emptied Himself of His rights and privileges. He took upon Himself *“the form of a servant”* (Phil 2:7). He who is God lowered Himself to serve. As we see the attitude of Christ, we are reminded of His love for us. If the Lord who was rich became poor that He might save us, how much more should we esteem others better than ourselves in order to serve Him?

THOUGHT: How did our Lord view personal position and privilege?

PRAYER: Father, help me to truly love Jesus and have His humble attitude.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 13

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11

ISAIAH 45:22-25

*“I have rejoiced in
the way of thy testimonies...”*

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW

We have been challenged by Scripture to humility and unity. We have our Saviour's example. He who is God laid aside His position, became a servant of men, and died in order that we might live. Scripture instructs us to let *“this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 2:5). We are to think about things the way Jesus did. The whole purpose of all that Christ did from the time He left heaven's glory until He returned to heaven was to save those who would believe (John 3:16-18). We might say the purpose of the incarnation was His death. The acceptability of His sacrifice was shown in the resurrection. And the resurrection assures eternal life to all believers.

Having completed the plan of salvation, God the Father returned the self-humbling Christ to His place at the Father's right hand (Eph 1:20-21). His sacrifice is complete. It never needs to be made again (Heb 9:24-26). On the basis of this perfect sacrifice, Christ will someday return for us.

Since the ascension of our Lord, the world has seemed to go on as it has for centuries. Only a small remnant of believers has endeavoured to live in such a way as to spread the testimony of the Man of Galilee. This small band of God's people have generally been ridiculed, persecuted, and rejected. The Bible's teachings about the return of the Lord and the final Judgment have been the most ridiculed of all.

However, as Christians go through life endeavouring to live for the Lord, they are reminded of the certainty of His return and the ultimate vindication of the Gospel message. For the day is coming when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11; Rom 14:11). Christ will be shown forth to the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:3-6).

How important it is for us, who will someday share His glory, to live for Him. In light of coming victory, let us be faithful.

THOUGHT: What is the hope of every believer?

PRAYER: Keep me faithfully living for Thee, Father.

FINISHING THE COURSE

Throughout Scripture we are continually reminded of the importance of obedience. We see this theme once again as Paul reminded his readers that continual obedience to God’s Word is necessary. This is true whether Paul was present or absent. Our Christian activity should not depend on the presence or absence of the pastor, church leader, or fellow Christian, but on the assurance that God’s presence is always with us.

We should constantly live in obedience as we *“work out your own salvation”* (Phil 2:12). Scripture views the Christian life as one of service. Each of us has a course to complete and this is the ultimate objective of the Christian life (Phil 3:14). We should look on the Christian life as a race to be run, a goal to be reached (Heb 12:1). The Apostle wished to finish his course joyfully (Acts 20:24). At the end of his life, he knew that he had run well and finished the work God had laid out for him (2 Tim 4:7). When Scripture speaks of working out our salvation, it is referring to the need for us to finish the course of the new life which we have by faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9).

It should encourage us to remember that we are not working out the purpose of our life alone. We are able to live for God and move toward the final goal because of the power of God working in us (Eph 3:20). He is working in us to bring about that which is pleasing to Him and which will accomplish His eternal purpose (Phil 2:13).

We learn from Scripture that one of God’s purposes in our lives is that men come to the truth (1 Tim 2:3-4). So, as we live in obedience, we complete God’s purpose in our life and lead others to the truth concerning salvation in Christ. Let us endeavour to finish the course set before us.

THOUGHT: What does it mean for me to work out my own salvation?
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Phil 4:13).

FRIDAY, JULY 15

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-16

PSALM 119:105-112

*“I will...have
respect unto thy ways.”*

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE

These are days when many people seem to be dissatisfied with life. And this is often expressed by quarrelling and complaining. However, these attitudes should not be seen in a Christian. Part of having a good testimony is learning to have a thankful attitude.

We are encouraged to do all things without “*murmurings and disputings*” (Phil 2:14). “*Murmuring*,” of course, is grumbling and complaining. It is the worldly attitude of “I’ll do it, but I won’t like it.” “*Disputings*” refer to arguing, complaining and even doubting. The complaining Christian is one who is self-centred and lacking in humility. This attitude sometimes even leads to doubting the truth itself. So, as we serve the Lord wherever we are, these sinful attitudes should not be a part of our lives. We should instead do everything in a joyful and happy manner (Phil 2:14).

As we face life with an uncomplaining, joyful attitude, our growth toward a Christ-like life continues. To be “*blameless*” (Phil 2:15) is to be free of censure, and to be “*harmless*” (Phil 2:15) is to be honest in heart, and pure in motive. We are alienated by sin, but God’s power has transformed our lives, giving us the ability to live for Him (Col 1:21-22). This change that has taken place should be reflected in our manner of living.

The world system is crooked and warped so far as spiritual and moral things are concerned. The values, objectives and desires of the world have been badly twisted by sin. When we reject the world’s values and live joyfully before the Lord, we shine forth in this sinful world (Phil 2:15; Matt 5:14-16). The light we hold forth is the Word of Life (Phil 2:16). Such a testimony will enable us to bear witness to the glorious light of the Gospel in this dark and sinful world.

THOUGHT: What attitude toward service will help me grow to be more Christ-like?

PRAYER: Father, I am “*a new creature*” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), help me to live as one.

AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

The entire life of the Lord Jesus Christ had as its purpose service to others. He came to give Himself a ransom for sinners (Matt 20:28). In His earthly ministry He subjected Himself completely to the will of the Father.

Since our Saviour lived for others with no thought for Himself, we should live with this same outlook. For this reason, the Apostle Paul was joyfully sacrificing his life for the cause of the Church. In this portion, the Old Testament temple sacrifices are used as an illustration of how the Christians should live as a sacrifice for the cause of the Gospel.

In the Old Testament, the drink offering was poured out over and around the sacrificial lamb (Lev 23:18). The Apostle saw these offerings as a picture of the Christian life being offered in the service of the Church. The lives of all believers who truly serve the Lord are being slowly poured out on the altar of Christian sacrifice (Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6). Paul's fellowship in the gospel with the Philippian believers was to him an offering to the Lord. We too, as Christians, should practise sacrificial living which brings to the world a stirring testimony to the truth of the Gospel.

Such sacrificial living brings great joy and satisfaction into the life of a child of God (Phil 2:17b-18). We are reminded that the burdens of life are never more than we can bear. Service to the Lord brings satisfaction to the Christian's heart (Matt 11:28-30). As the world struggles for personal gain and security, the Christian can find rest and contentment in serving the Lord. The world labours for that which perishes, but we labour for an inheritance that has eternal value (Col 3:23-24). May we labour faithfully, serving in our local church and witnessing in our daily life, and may we know the full joy of Christian service.

THOUGHT: Why can the Christian be joyful in service?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for full joy and satisfaction as I dedicate myself to serving Thee.

CAREFUL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

There are times when the hectic schedule of life seems to press down upon us. No doubt the Apostle Paul regularly felt these same pressures. He saw as his own personal responsibility the care of all the churches (2 Cor 11:28). In the earlier days of his ministry, he tried to revisit all the churches which had begun through his evangelistic ministry (Acts 15:36).

Paul did not try to bear the heavy weight of responsibility alone. Even in his early journeys he took Barnabas and others with him. He knew there needed to be fellowship, and that this fellowship had to be based on obedience to Scripture (1 John 1:7). Despite the obvious shortage of workers, and the great amount of work, Paul was careful concerning his associations in the service of the Lord. In fact, it was in Philippi where the Apostle refused the help of a young girl who did not know the Lord (Acts 16:16-18).

We, too, must be careful with whom we fellowship in the Gospel. Remember, if we would serve the Lord, we must do it with the mind of Christ, looking at life the way Jesus did (Phil 2:5). It is important that we only fellowship and work for the Lord with those who are "*likeminded*" (Phil 2:20). We know others are "*likeminded*" not because they say so, but because they live for God (Phil 2:22). Timothy was qualified to be a companion of Paul because he lived in a way that showed his agreement with the Apostle's faith and teaching. And he showed his oneness with Paul in spiritual matters by following Paul's example.

We, too, must follow the examples of those who walk in obedience to the Gospel and find our Christian fellowship with them (Heb 13:7). Only in this way will we be able to fulfill the plan that God has for our lives and see the work of the Church move forward.

THOUGHT: With whom should we fellowship in the work of the Gospel?
PRAYER: Father, may I be faithful to Thee although in these final days there may be few who are "*likeminded*."

MONDAY, JULY 18

PHILIPPIANS 2:24-30

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-15

"...I will not forget thy word."

INFORMED CHRISTIANS

In difficult times the believer can receive great encouragement from the fellowship of the saints. The early Christian churches lived under tremendous persecution and hardship. The men who did the work of the ministry among the struggling young churches worked under unbelievable difficulties (1 Cor 4:11-12). Many of them, such as Trophimus, Timothy, and Epaphroditus suffered serious physical illness during their ministries (Phil 2:26; 1 Tim 5:23).

The workers in the early church found great strength in their fellowship with the churches. The believers at Philippi were greatly concerned about Epaphroditus, a missionary from among them. And he, in turn, was concerned about them (Phil 2:26). This concern was expressed in an informed prayer life. Despite the shortage of workers, the Apostle Paul thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi so the concerned and praying Christians there would be informed about his situation.

Surely we should have the same concern for our pastors, missionaries, and fellow believers. Scripture often challenges us to show this concern for one another by prayer. Certainly we will not pray with any real fervour unless we are informed about those for whom we are praying. So it is important for the prayer life of our local churches that we be informed about the needs, plans and blessings of our church and its missionaries.

Epaphroditus risked his life for the cause of the Gospel. God had spared him. Now he would inform the church and they would all rejoice together. We cannot weep with those who weep or rejoice with those who are joyful if we do not know the situation of believers in our fellowship. Let us care enough to be informed about our church programmes and workers in order that we might truly fellowship together in the Gospel.

THOUGHT: What is necessary for a really effective prayer life?

PRAYER: Father, may I have real, godly care and concern for those whom I pray for.

TUESDAY, JULY 19
PHILIPPIANS 2:26
EZRA 9:5-15

*“Deal bountifully with thy servant,
that I may live, and keep thy word.”*

FULL OF HEAVINESS

Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25) has been identified with Epaphras in the Epistle to the Colossians. Here, he is represented as sorrowful, even to agony, because his friends had heard of his illness, and he would have wished that no one should be burdened on his account. But in the other epistle, he was represented as always striving for the saints in prayer.

It is very beautiful to discover his unwillingness to have his sickness published. When we are in trouble it is best not to speak much of it, save to God. “Only inexperienced sufferers are voluble; those familiar with the secrets of anguish are silent.” Let us anoint the head, and wash the face, that we may not appear unto men to fast, but to the Father who is in secret; and our Father who seeth in secret will Himself reward openly. The Comforter will draw near, will whisper His own consolations, and amid much sorrow we shall be calm and strong.

But with Epaphras there was probably another thought. He knew that the Philippians were bearing a very heavy load of sorrow. It was a hard and difficult fight for them, as for him. And, with much generosity, he was most unwilling that the news of his illness should add a feather-weight to their grief.

This eagerness to conceal pain, lest it should add sorrow to those who already have almost as much as they can bear, is very characteristic of noble souls. And we may quote here Robert Hall’s words, on recovering from a keen paroxysm of anguish: “I have not complained, have I, sir? No, and I will not complain.” How much of God’s strength and comfort we miss in our incessant endeavour to secure the support which notoriety for pain and privation may bring from our fellows!

(F.B. Meyer)

THOUGHT: Who would I go to first when trouble comes my way?

PRAYER: Father, may I lean on Thy comfort and strength, and not man’s.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 20
PHILIPPIANS 3:1-2
PSALM 16

*“Open thou mine eyes,
that I may behold wondrous
things out of thy law.”*

REJOICE IN THE LORD

Throughout history, the Christian Church has faced the problems which come from living for God in a sinful world. The Philippian Church had a number of such problems. Not only was Paul in prison, but Epaphroditus had been very ill and near death. Now the Apostle had to warn the church about another problem: soon false teachers would come. However, despite the many difficulties, it was important that the troubles of the moment not hide from the Christian's mind the eternal blessings which are his (2 Cor 4:17).

We are always encouraged to rejoice in the Lord (Phil 4:4). We must keep in mind the greatness of our blessings in the gospel (Rom 15:29). Even in the midst of trials, we can have joy unspeakable (1 Pet 1:8). We must continually remind ourselves that the Lord's hand is upon us. There is no such thing as good or bad luck in the life of the Christian. The Lord knows all about us, even to the number of hairs on our head. And He cares greatly for us (Mark 10:30-31). Our life is planned by our heavenly Father and as we live in obedience to Him, we have spiritual victory.

We can rest in the Lord even in the midst of spiritual danger. However, it is important for us to be aware that danger exists so that we may avoid it. For this reason, the Apostle wrote a warning to us (Phil 3:2). The false teachers about which the Scripture warns are wicked, deceitful persons. Scripture calls them “*dogs*,” “*evil workers*,” and sees them bringing great danger to the church (Rom 16:17-18).

So, today's meditation has two messages for us. First, we must be informed concerning spiritual dangers so we can avoid them. And second, we must be aware of God's blessings so we can live joyfully from day to day.

THOUGHT: How can I be joyful in the face of difficulties?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that the difficulties of life are but for a moment.

THURSDAY, JULY 21

PHILIPPIANS 3:3-9

PSALM 15

*“I am a stranger in the earth:
hide not thy commandments from me.”*

THE CHRISTIAN’S CONFIDENCE

Scripture clearly states that all human beings on some level recognise the existence of God. Only the fool attempts to deny that there is a Creator (Ps 53:1). However, because of man’s sinfulness, he prefers to form a god that fits his own image rather than meet God on His terms (Rom 1:21-23). Man-made religions all attempt to meet God on the basis of human attainment. Their followers place great confidence in family backgrounds, education, and human accomplishments.

The Apostle Paul might have had such confidence. He was knowledgeable in the ways of Judaism and the customs of his people. He zealously followed his religion and the social restrictions it imposed. His family background placed him among the upper class. Surely if salvation could have come from religious activity and a good family background, Paul would have had it all (Phil 3:4-6).

But man cannot meet God on the basis of his own merit (Isa 64:6). Salvation is a gift of God, given through faith in Jesus Christ. True believers find their confidence and joy in God’s provision and not in religious endeavours (Phil 3:3). Since God is a spirit, true worship must be spiritual rather than physical. True worship comes from the heart.

Although efforts to find one’s own righteousness are doomed to fail, the Christian has a quiet confidence in God. He knows that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8-9). We have assurance that salvation is ours eternally, because it depends on God’s faithfulness and holiness, not our own.

Let us then leave behind pride in worldly attainments and religious activities. Let us, like the Apostle, see our own righteousness as worthless refuse (Phil 3:7). And let us find our peace and confidence for eternity in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: In what do Christians place their confidence?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy blessing of forgiving my transgressions (Ps 32:1).

FRIDAY, JULY 22

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11

PSALM 52

*“Thou hast rebuked the proud
that are cursed, which do err
from thy commandments.”*

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

Scripture constantly reminds us that we do not become Christians by performing certain religious rites. Salvation is by God’s grace alone. It is God’s power that makes us a new creation and enables us to live in obedience to Him (2 Cor 5:17). The Apostle speaks of this saving and changing power as the “*power of his (Christ’s) resurrection*” (Phil 3:10). He longs to experience a greater practical knowledge of this resurrection power (Phil 3:10).

Scripture clearly points out that the entire truth of the Christian faith rests on the fact of the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection, Christians would be people to be pitied, because their faith would be in vain (1 Cor 15:12-19). Our justification was made possible by Christ’s resurrection (Rom 4:25). And it is through this same resurrection that God has empowered the believer to live a new life of obedience (Eph 2:5).

As we come to know Christ in an experiential way, the power of the resurrection becomes a reality in our daily lives. As this power changes our lives, the world sees the righteousness of Christ in us and rebels against it. Then we must learn another aspect of the Christian life. Those who share in the joy of the resurrection are also called on to share in suffering (Phil 3:10; 2 Cor 4:10). Even as Christ was rejected, so too it is expected that the Christian who lives for God will be rejected and will suffer (2 Cor 4:10).

The more we come to know the Lord and experience the “*power of his resurrection,*” the more we exhibit God’s holiness and witness to His saving power. Such a testimony results in others coming to know Christ, but it also often results in persecution. When this happens, may we, like the disciples of old, rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for Him.

THOUGHT: What is living proof that I really know the Lord?

PRAYER: “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim 3:12). Prepare me for this, Father.

SATURDAY, JULY 23
PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14
PSALM 130

*“Remove from me
reproach and contempt;
for I have kept thy testimonies.”*

THE CHRISTIAN’S GOAL

The Christian’s position in Christ is secure by God’s grace. We are pictured as being seated in heaven with Christ (Eph 2:5-6). But lest there be any sense of misunderstanding or self-satisfaction, we must remember that the Christian life is a daily struggle to fully realise our potential in Christ. We have not yet attained spiritual maturity. Our faith is not a group of theoretical teachings, but a reality exhibited by a changed life and we must daily pursue the goal of becoming more like Christ.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the longing to reach the goal that God had set before him (Phil 3:12). Like him, we too should want to come to a full realisation of all that our salvation means. We must not remain babes-in-Christ but grow to be mature believers who are an inspiration and an example to those who observe our lives. We are helped to move toward this goal by fellowship with the local church (Heb 10:23-25). It is in the church that we are under the guidance of pastors and teachers of God’s Word, and thus move toward maturity (Eph 4:11-13). Fellowship with, and in, the Bible-believing church plays an important part in reaching our Christian goal.

We are further helped in our growth by a personal study of the Scripture. God’s Word guides our way as we live from day to day (Ps 119:105). As we study the Word of God, we must also apply it to our daily lives, for it is this obedience which brings spiritual growth.

So we must press toward the goal which Christ has set before us (Phil 3:14). As we fellowship, study and practise Christian principles, the power of God moves us toward *“the prize”* (Phil 3:14). Then at the end of life’s way, we will be able to say with the Apostle of old: *“...I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”* (2 Tim 4:7b).

THOUGHT: What things aid me in my spiritual growth?

PRAYER: *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Phil 4:13). Father, forgive my reliance on my own strength. May I always rely on the strength of Christ.

MATURE CHRISTIAN THINKING

Our meditation today is addressed to “*as many as be perfect*” (Phil 3:15). The word “*perfect*” as used in the New Testament means complete or mature. It is the opposite of immature or juvenile. This word is regularly used to refer to believers who have adult spiritual understanding. Such a mature believer is able to understand the deep spiritual truths of Scripture as they are revealed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:6-10).

Spiritual maturity is a pivotal point of the Bible’s message and the Christian life. All Christians are expected to become mature, understand God’s Word, and live in agreement with, and in obedience to, it (Col 1:28). The failure to go on to perfection (i.e. maturity) places the believer in a dangerous position (Heb 6:1-3). Scripture clearly warns us against spiritual lethargy (Heb 5:11-14).

Part of maturity is having a proper view of our own spiritual attainment. It is important for each of us to have proper thinking concerning ourselves. False pride in one’s spiritual advancement is a sure sign of immaturity as it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture (Rom 12:3). Part of the rich Christian fellowship which mature believers experience comes from like-mindedness or proper thinking concerning our own Christian maturity (Phil 1:27; 2:2, 15).

Although we have not yet attained that Christ-like stature which every believer should strive for, we can thank God for the growth we have experienced. Each Christian must be careful not to backslide or stand still so far as these things are concerned. We must avail ourselves of the power of God and the spiritual strength we have in Christ to stand firm (Eph 6:13). Let us remember that God has given us “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Pet 1:3). Then, in humility of heart and with confidence in the Lord, we can move forward with Him.

THOUGHT: What is a sign of true spiritual maturity?

PRAYER: Father, may I reflect Christian maturity by esteeming others better than myself (Phil 2:3).

MONDAY, JULY 25

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-19

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

*“Thy testimonies also are
my delight and my counsellors.”*

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

In this present day, we do not have much in the way of good examples set before us. The most popular figures held up for all to see often live most sinful lives. As Christians, we must guard ourselves and our children from such godless examples.

Scripture recognises the truth that we are influenced by the lives of others. We are therefore encouraged to look for examples in those who consistently live their faith. How true the popular saying that people's actions speak so loud that we cannot hear a word they say. The testimony of the Thessalonian church was widespread because their faith was shown in their lives (1 Thess 1:8-9). Christians who do not practise what they preach, no matter how impressive their preaching, are not good examples. So, we are encouraged to follow those who obey the Scripture's commands concerning daily living (Phil 3:17). We must not only live for Christ ourselves, but we must choose our companions from those who are living in obedience to Scripture. God could not walk with the Israelites because they were living in sin (Amos 3:3). We, likewise, should not spend time with those involved in sinful living.

Proper living is based on proper knowledge. If we are to live for God, and set godly examples, we must know God's Word. This is especially important in these days when sinful living is so readily accepted as the norm. It is only as diligent students of Scripture that we can know how to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord (1 Tim 4:13, 16).

The Apostle Paul was able to encourage other Christians to follow his example. The Thessalonians, upon their conversion, became followers of Paul's Christian example. They then in turn became examples to others around them (1 Thess 1:6-7). We, too, should so live for Christ that we will be examples of Christian conduct.

THOUGHT: Why did the testimony of the Thessalonian church spread?
PRAYER: Father, may my life be of use to Thee to help others learn of Christ.

TUESDAY, JULY 26

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

REVELATION 21:1-5

*“My soul cleaveth unto the dust:
quicken thou me according to thy word.”*

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

Some years ago, a story was written about a man without a country. In real life we often hear of stateless persons. How sad to have no home, no country one can call one's own. Our country is the place where our loyalties lie, the place whose customs dictate our actions. Our homeland shapes and forms our actions and this is reflected by our lives for all to see.

Scripture reminds us that the Christian's citizenship is in heaven. It often speaks of our heavenly home, the place to which the Christian pilgrim is traveling (John 14:1-4; Heb 11:13-16). We should live in such a way that our heavenly citizenship is reflected in our lives. When we live in this way, our treasures are stored up in heaven, rather than here on this perishing earth (Matt 6:21).

As citizens of heaven, we look forward to the coming of the Lord (Phil 3:20). In that glorious day, He will appear for all of us who are looking forward to our heavenly home (Heb 9:28).

As we think of heaven, we perhaps feel unworthy. So, Scripture informs us that when the Lord comes for us, we will be changed to be like Him and worthy of our new home (Phil 3:21). As often as Scripture speaks of heaven, it also speaks of our being changed to fit its glory.

Today we see the glories of heaven only dimly. At times we struggle to see ourselves as really worthy to walk the streets of gold. But the day is coming when we will clearly see the reality of all that God has done for us (1 Cor 13:12).

Someday, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed and be heaven bound (1 Cor 15:52). Let us live today in such a way that others will see reflected in us the joy of being a citizen of heaven.

THOUGHT: What set of values governs your daily actions?

PRAYER: Forgive me, Father, that I live as though this earth is my permanent home when I am a citizen of heaven.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 27

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

GALATIANS 6:1-9

*"I have declared my ways,
and thou heardest me..."*

BE CONCERNED

In our last meditation, we were made aware that this world is not our home. Christians, who are citizens of heaven, should be living with the return of the Lord always in view. The joy of an eternal future with the Lord should encourage us to stand fast in the faith (Phil 4:1). Such a consistent testimony is often used to bring others to Christ. For this reason, the adversary does all in his power to keep us from living in a way which reflects our final destination.

The verses which we look at today are very sad. We see citizens of heaven acting like sinners who have been unchanged by God's power. Two Christians attending the same church were in serious disagreement with one another. We know the disagreement was not over matters of Bible doctrine, because in such cases those causing trouble should be put from the fellowship (Rom 16:17). So, this disagreement must have been over matters of procedure or personal opinion (Phil 4:2).

Such division and bickering, however, cannot be allowed in the church. If squabbles and disagreements are allowed to continue it will soon affect everyone. Christians, then, cannot ignore a situation in the local church which shows a lack of Christian love and unity. So, all those who are loyal servants of the Lord must be concerned. It is the duty of Christians to be concerned about fellow church members in such a situation. Paul here was following the instructions for restoration which he wrote elsewhere to the Galatians (Gal 6:1). We whose names are written in the Book of Life must be concerned about one another's testimony. Such love and concern will strengthen the church and our testimony before the world.

THOUGHT: What should our attitude be toward disagreement in the church?

PRAYER: When one drifts into sin, the whole church is in danger. So, Father, help me and my church to be lovingly concerned.

THURSDAY, JULY 28

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8

ROMANS 5:1-5

“...teach me thy statutes.”

HOW TO BE AT PEACE

As we view the world today, we do not see a very encouraging scene. Wars, terrorism, financial difficulties and pandemics seem to be the rule of the day. In the midst of such turmoil, only those who know Christ as their Saviour can live with a sense of peace, that is, contentment in their lives. Scripture here speaks of three things that make the peace of God a reality in the Christian life.

First, we should be joyful in our daily lives (Phil 4:4). The Christians to whom this command was first written were living under great persecution. The Apostle Paul himself was actually in prison as he wrote these words. Yet these early Christians had learned an encouraging truth. The sufferings of the Christian last but for a moment in eternity's scheme of things (2 Cor 4:17). With such promises in mind, the difficulties of life can be faced with great joy.

Second, Christians facing the difficulties of life should learn to live in “*moderation*” (Phil 4:5). Moderation speaks of gentleness and consistency. It is the quality that means one does not easily have his feelings hurt, become easily angered by unfair treatment or quickly discouraged. The reminder is given: “*The Lord is at hand*” (Phil 4:5). We can live a consistent Christian life when we remember this truth.

Finally, we must be men and women of prayer (Phil 4:6). “*Be careful for nothing*” means not to be full of cares, i.e. not to worry. We take our burdens to the Lord and allow Him to give us strength to bear those burdens (Ps 55:22; 1 Pet 5:7).

When we are joyful, consistent and prayerful, then the peace of God will keep our hearts and minds safe from the troubles of this world (Phil 4:7). We will be able to think of the lovely things of God, and thus be filled with the wonder and joy of all He means to us as His children (Phil 4:8-9).

THOUGHT: How can I allow God's peace to rule in my heart?

PRAYER: Father, help me to remember that the troubles of today last but a moment when compared to eternity.

FRIDAY, JULY 29

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

PROVERBS 24:19-20

*“Make me to understand
the way of thy precepts...”*

BE ANXIOUS IN NOTHING

It has always been among men to worry and to be anxious, and perhaps more so today than ever, when the pressure of life is heavier and the constraint of circumstances more imperious. Are there not hours in which the clouds gather densely over the Ark of God, and the stoutest hearts tremble? When the Christian soul looks on his family of little ones, sleeping soundly, knowing that they will certainly awake hungry for food, and aware that the cupboard is bare, would he have no tinge of anxiety?

It is at such times that the Apostle bade us pray. Philippians 4:6: *“...let your requests be made known unto God.”* We do not have to agonise before Him, as though, like the priests of Baal, who cried and cut themselves, we shall move Him by our anguish. Calmly, quietly, simply, make your requests known. Take your burden into His presence and lay it down there. He is your Father. He who made the body, and gave it you, will see to the supply of its needs. Your health, your children, the condition of His Church, are all dear to Him who notices a falling sparrow, and by whom the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

We shall not escape life's discipline. We may expect to abound here, and to be abased there. But amid all, peace, God's white-winged sentinel-angel, shall come down to keep the heart with its affections, the mind with its thoughts. Worry, unrest, anxiety will stand without, as the noise of the street breaks in vain on the double windows of the city counting-house, whilst the child of God learns humbly and patiently the lesson of his Father's love. Careful for nothing; prayerful and thankful in everything.

(F.B. Meyer)

THOUGHT: Why do I not rest in my Lord?

PRAYER: Father, may I always look to Thee for the peace that my heart needs in a world where no peace can be found.

BE CONTENT

Contentment is a great Christian virtue. Scripture admonishes us to “*be content with such things as ye have*” (Heb 13:5). We are also reminded that “*godliness with contentment is great gain*” (1 Tim 6:6). We see such contentment present in the life of the Apostle Paul despite the fact that he often experienced great financial difficulties and physical hardships.

If we are striving for Christian maturity, then we also must learn contentment. The world always looks at things which can be seen, judging success by money, houses and other material gain. But as Christians, we should learn to look at the spiritual side of life (2 Cor 4:18). When we see the hand of God behind circumstances in our lives, we quickly learn to live at peace regardless of our situation. So, Paul knew how to live with prosperity as well as poverty (Phil 4:12). He always remembered that worldly goods have no eternal value (1 Tim 6:7). How much better to go through life as a slave knowing the Lord, than to live and die with great wealth and be eternally lost (1 Cor 7:20-24).

It is well to notice that the stirring words of Philippians 4:13 (“*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*”) were written in connection with the Scripture’s challenge to contentment. What a joy to know that in this world of uncertainty, God’s children can have contentment, or peace of heart, in every situation in life. One of the greatest testimonies of God’s grace is to live a life which exhibits the peace of God which passes all understanding.

God will supply all that His children actually need. His grace is then sufficient to allow us to live joyfully in all of life’s situations. Our prayers as believers should be to exhibit the assurance of God’s provision each day of our lives.

THOUGHT: How can I live at peace in times of physical need?

PRAYER: Father, help me to examine what I count as my “*treasure,*” for where my treasure is, there will my heart be also (Matt 6:21).

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SAINTS

The Apostle's encouragement and instructions to the saints now draws to a close. The believers in Philippi had sent a gift to Paul in order to share in the work of missions (Phil 4:18). This fellowship in living is an important part of the Christian life. We cannot live as saints if we are not concerned with the work God has given His people.

The fellowship of the saints is a wonderful thing. Zeal, peace and joy come as we live and work together for our Lord. But ultimately, it is God who supplies our every need. Our closest friend may fail us. Church leaders may disappoint us. Hopes and dreams may evaporate with the passing of time. But Jesus never fails (Phil 4:19). We, as God's saints, must keep our eyes fixed on our soon-coming Lord. Only then will the cares of the world fade away and God's power and joy take their place.

We must be careful to give praise to God alone for every spiritual victory and blessing, because it is He who makes these things a reality in the Christian life. He is our Heavenly Father and He exhibits His care for us every day (Phil 4:20; Matt 6:32b).

Closing this wonderful epistle of instructions to the saints, the Apostle sent greetings. The brethren with him also sent their greetings. Their love and fellowship had resulted in many in Caesar's palace coming to know Christ. How wonderful was the warm fellowship of the early Christian saints. Despite the difficulties of life, they communicated one with another, lending strength and encouragement when needed. Soon throughout the whole Roman Empire the fellowship of the saints had spread the glorious Gospel message.

By God's all-encompassing grace might we, the present saints of the Lord, so love one another, and so live for God that we may turn the world upside down for Christ.

THOUGHT: Where should the saints of God look for spiritual strength?
PRAYER: Father, even as I claim to love Thee, may I also keep (i.e. obey) Thy commandments.

“INSTRUCTIONS TO STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS”

A Study of 1 Peter 1-4

INTRODUCTION

The First Epistle of Peter, upon which this month's devotional readings are based, was written by the Apostle Peter. Most Bible scholars agree that the date of its writing was about AD 54-60. It was at that time that Nero, the Roman Emperor, was beginning a period of great persecution against the Christians. It is perhaps for this reason that the Holy Spirit inspired Peter with these words of encouragement for times of trouble as well as a challenge to remain true to the instructions of the Holy Scripture in our daily lives. It also serves to remind the believers that this sinful earth is not our home but only a place for us to labour for our Lord as we travel homeward to heaven.

MONDAY, AUGUST 1

1 PETER 1:1-2

PSALM 16

*“Remove from me
the way of lying...”*

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

The Apostle Peter originally wrote 1st Peter to Jewish Christians who were scattered far from their homeland. They had become pilgrims because they hoped someday to return to their homeland. They were also “*strangers*” (1 Pet 1:1) because they lived a life different from the people around them. Originally, they had kept their religion and culture by erecting synagogues in every town (Acts 13:5; 14:1; 18:4). This dedication to preserve their Jewish culture and distinctiveness served to remind them that they were pilgrims hoping to return home soon. But it also caused them to appear strange to their non-Jewish neighbours.

Back in Israel, when Jews became Christians, they were put out of their synagogue and cut off from Jewish life. In a sense, the Jewish Christians became double outcasts: pilgrims in the land in which they were scattered to because they were Jews, and strangers among their own Jewish people because of their faith in Christ.

As believers today we should be able to relate very well to these Jewish Christians of old. Scripture tells us that when we openly declare our faith in the promises of God, we make ourselves strangers and pilgrims on this earth (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11).

The purpose of Peter’s first epistle is to instruct us in living this life of a stranger and pilgrim. We are reminded of the difference between ourselves and those around us who do not know Christ (1 Pet 2:9). We are encouraged to face this suffering and ridicule even as our Saviour did (1 Pet 2:21). And finally, we are given encouragement as Scripture reminds us of our wonderful destination which is eternal glory with the Lord (1 Pet 5:10).

As the Jews of old gathered in their synagogues to study their heritage so must we constantly study Scripture and follow its precepts. If we do this, we will maintain our testimony as children of God who are strangers and pilgrims on this earth.

THOUGHT: What is the purpose of Peter’s first epistle?

PRAYER: Father, may I remember to live on earth as citizens of heaven.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2

1 PETER 1:3-6

PSALM 29

*"I have chosen
the way of truth..."*

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD

Because of all that we have in Christ, the Apostle Peter spoke of the believer as having *"joy unspeakable and full of glory"* (1 Pet 1:8). In 1 Peter 1:3-6, we are reminded of some of the things which give the Christian such great joy. Not only are we saved through the death of Christ, but because of His resurrection we are assured of our future place in heaven. In John 14:19, the Saviour reminded believers that He would be preparing a place for them in heaven, encouraging them with the promise, *"Because I live, ye shall live also."* Now in 1 Peter, the Apostle praises God for His abundant mercy towards all His children in giving this great hope (1 Pet 1:3). As pilgrims, we are reminded of the great inheritance awaiting us in heaven. Although life may be difficult at times, we should live for the God who not only saved us from the penalty of sin but has provided a home in heaven for us, as well as glories our minds could never imagine.

We belong to Christ and are kept by the power of the Almighty God and nothing can change our position in Him. According to 1 Peter 1:5, we are preserved by God until that day when Christ returns for us. On that day, we will have shown to us the complete wonder of our salvation. This same wonderful promise is given to us in 1 John 3:2.

So, the Apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called on us to rejoice in our salvation and all that it means both now and when we see Jesus. We can be joyful even though, for a time, we may suffer on this earth. We must remember that we do not belong here but are on our way to the heaven and glory that is ours in Christ. We can show the world the joy of being saved because we are heirs of the King of kings and Lord of lords, our great God, Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: What are some of the things for which God's people can rejoice?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the great inheritance in heaven awaiting the Christian pilgrim.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3

1 PETER 1:7-9

PSALM 34:1-11

“...thy judgments have
I laid before me.”

THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH

The difficulties of the Christian life have a purpose. There is no such thing as good or bad luck in the life of a child of God. Our God knows even when a little sparrow falls to the ground. He cares for us much more than the sparrows (Matt 10:29-30). So, all that happens to us, rather than being by chance, is by divine plan. When suffering comes into the life of an obedient child of God, often its purpose is to test our faith (1 Pet 1:7). The testing is not for God's satisfaction since He knows those who are His but in order that our faith may grow.

The testing of our faith is compared to the refining of gold which, when passed through the fire, has its impurities removed. As we follow God through trials, our faith grows and we become men and women of greater Christian character. And it is those of God's children whose faith has grown through their Christian experience who will have “*praise and honour and glory*” (1 Pet 1:7) from the Lord on that wonderful day when we see Him. It is no wonder then that Scripture encourages us to rejoice in our salvation even though fiery trials come upon us.

The Apostle Peter commended the believers for their faith (1 Pet 1:8). We are reminded of Thomas, the disciple of our Lord, who doubted reports of the resurrection. He refused to believe unless he could see with his own eyes proof of the risen Lord. On seeing the Lord, he fell on his knees and believed. The Lord told Thomas that special blessing would come to those who believed without being able to personally see Him (John 20:24-29). Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that faith gives us the power to know as reality those things we cannot see. And it is through this faith, which grows stronger under testing, that we are able to love the Lord and follow Him. Heaven and its joys become a clearer reality through a growing faith. This enables us to “*rejoice with joy unspeakable*” (1 Pet 1:8).

THOUGHT: What is the result of the testing of my faith?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the blessing of believing without seeing (John 20:29).

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4

1 PETER 1:7

PSALM 66:12

*“I have stuck unto
thy testimonies...”*

THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH

Faith untried may be true faith, but it is sure to be little faith, and it is likely to remain dwarfish so long as it is without trials. Faith never prospers so well as when all things are against her: tempests are her trainers, and lightnings are her illuminators. When a calm reigns on the sea, spread the sails as you will, the ship moves not to its harbour; for on a slumbering ocean the keel sleeps too. Let the winds rush howling forth, and let the waters lift up themselves, then, though the vessel may rock, and her deck may be washed with waves, and her mast may creak under the pressure of the full and swelling sail, it is then that she makes headway towards her desired haven. No flowers wear so lovely a blue as those which grow at the foot of the frozen glacier; no stars gleam so brightly as those which glisten in the polar sky; no water tastes so sweet as that which springs amid the desert sand; and no faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity. Tried faith brings experience. You could not have believed your own weakness had you not been compelled to pass through the rivers; and you would never have known God's strength had you not been supported amid the water-floods. Faith increases in solidity, assurance, and intensity, the more it is exercised with tribulation. Faith is precious, and its trial is precious too.

Let not this, however, discourage those who are young in faith. You will have trials enough without seeking them: the full portion will be measured out to you in due season. Meanwhile, if you cannot yet claim the result of long experience, thank God for what grace you have; praise Him for that degree of holy confidence whereunto you have attained: walk according to that rule, and you shall yet have more and more of the blessing of God, till your faith shall remove mountains and conquer impossibilities.

(C.H. Spurgeon)

THOUGHT: I must thank God for the daily difficulties I face.

PRAYER: Father, though painful for me, may I always yield to Thy moulding Hand that I may grow thereby.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5

1 PETER 1:10-12

PSALM 40:1-10

*“I will run the way
of thy commandments...”*

GOD’S ETERNAL PLAN

Although we have not seen the Saviour as the disciples had, we can know Him intimately through a daily study of the Scriptures. This gives us a great advantage over the Old Testament believers who knew far less than we about the Saviour and God’s plan of salvation.

The Old Testament prophets did not clearly understand all that they wrote concerning Him. However, they studied the prophecies diligently trying to understand when Christ would come and learn more about the grace of God. But while their prophecies would encourage us and teach us of God’s eternal plan and marvelous grace, the major portion of the prophecy was hidden from the prophets themselves. No doubt it was with great wonder that the men of old wrote of both the Lord’s suffering and glorification. But the prophet learned they were not serving the believers of their day but also we who would come to Christ in the future. Even the angels longed to know more about the Saviour’s earthly ministry. It was a mystery kept by God until the appointed time of its revelation (Eph 3:9-10).

It was not until the Holy Spirit enlightened such saints as Anna and Simeon that any definite knowledge of the time of Christ’s coming was known (Luke 2:25-30). And when we read in Acts 2 of the filling of the Holy Spirit and the sending forth of the apostles with the Gospel message, we see the fulfilment of what Jesus said in Acts 1:8. Believers, as members of the body of Christ, are to spread the message of salvation.

What an awesome responsibility. To be placed in trust with the Gospel message. To hold knowledge that even the prophets of old and the angels of heaven did not fully understand. This is the responsibility that each of us as believers is given. We can take this responsibility with full assurance that the Lord is always with us and will enable us to carry out our task (Phil 4:13).

THOUGHT: How can I know the Saviour more intimately?

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to share the Gospel with someone today.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6

1 PETER 1:13-16

PSALM 101

*“Teach me, O LORD,
the way of thy statutes...”*

BE YE HOLY

1 Peter 1:13 calls to mind the men of Bible times with their long flowing robes which needed to be wrapped up around their waist before entering into any strenuous activity. So, believers are to “*gird up the loins*” (tie up the robes) of their minds in preparation for strenuous spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:12 speaks concerning this spiritual battle of the Christian against wickedness and the powers that would call one away from living for God.

As we face the battle of the Christian life, we must prepare our minds and be sober, that is to say, exercise self-discipline and self-control. We must be ready to meet the trials and temptations of life while we faithfully await the glories that will be ours when Jesus comes for us and we see Him. At the time of Christ’s return, we will be like Him because we will see Him in His glory (1 John 3:2). And it is with this great hope that we continually keep our hearts and minds prepared for Christian service.

We must live as obedient children refusing to follow our former ways. In times gone by, we believers lived in sin because we did not know Christ. But now that we are saved, we are no longer ignorant about spiritual things. We must not live according to the standards of the world, but must allow God to control our minds and follow His standards of conduct as taught in the Holy Scriptures (Rom 12:2). Verse 16 is a quote from Leviticus 11:44 reminding us that down through the ages the Holy God demanded that His people be holy also. To be holy is to be free from sin. Sin is caused by self-will. The desire to “get ahead,” gain wealth and prestige, have no place in the dedicated Christian life. Jesus Christ humbled Himself in order to save us (Phil 2:8-9). And we are now called to follow Him in this same holiness and humility in order to show the world the wonder of all that God has done for us.

THOUGHT: What is the standard and guideline of Christian action?

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to be holy for Thou art holy.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 7

1 PETER 1:17-21

ISAIAH 53:1-6

*“Give me understanding,
and I shall keep thy law...”*

PURCHASED WITH A GREAT PRICE

Throughout Scripture, we are taught that salvation is not conditioned on anything we do ourselves, but is absolutely free and without merit on our part. But Scripture always insists that the true believer must live in obedience.

We are reminded that the God whom we serve is the eternal Judge. His judgments are without favour and are according to absolute truth. The eye of God is on all the earth and we should live with this in mind. Our reverent trust and respect for the sovereign God is an important step to a life of obedience. To call God our Father and live in disobedience to His commands brings dishonour to His name. Once again in 1 Peter 1:17, the subject of our being strangers and pilgrims is brought up. We are reminded that in order to live in obedience to God we must never become comfortable or be at home in this sinful world.

God's love for us was expressed in the great price paid for our salvation. Silver and gold, the richness of earth, are all worthless compared to the gift of salvation. Our salvation was purchased by the only acceptable sacrifice: the life blood of Jesus Christ, the spotless Lamb of God.

So great is God's eternal love for us that He planned our way of escape from the penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ before we even existed. The death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ have given us a relationship with God that would have otherwise not been possible. We live each day free from the penalty of sin and on our way to heaven. But we also live each day under the watchful eye of that perfect Judge who made our salvation possible. We should ask ourselves daily: What does our loving heavenly Father see as He observes our lives? Does He see obedience that testifies of the priceless salvation provided for us, or does He see disobedience that brings shame on His holy name?

THOUGHT: What is the only acceptable price for our salvation?

PRAYER: May I, Father, as a true Christian pilgrim, never feel at home in this sinful world.

MONDAY, AUGUST 8

1 PETER 1:22-25

PSALM 15

*“Make me to go in the
path of thy commandments...”*

HONEST LOVE FROM OBEDIENT HEARTS

The true Christian heart is pure because of obedience to God’s truth. We were first purified by obedience to the Gospel message which told us that we were sinners and that we needed to place our trust in Christ for redemption from sin. We continue to keep our hearts pure by confessing our sins. They are then forgiven and we are cleansed, that is made pure by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7-9).

This purity of heart results in honest Christian love for our fellow believers. Such love is not based on mutual interests, compatible personalities or other such things which form the basis of worldly friendships. True honest Christian love is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we live in obedience to the Word. Throughout this age the church’s greatest testimony to the world has been the love of Christians for one another. When disobedience to God’s Word is permitted in the Christian’s life this love is smothered and the testimony destroyed.

Our destiny is sure. We have been born again into an eternal relationship with God (1 Pet 1:23). This happened when we heard God’s eternal Word and placed our faith in Christ. What a great contrast this Christian destiny is when compared with that of unsaved man who, for all his striving for accomplishment, is doomed to ultimate failure in his endeavours because of sin and his rejection of Christ.

In all this futility of human activity, God sees you and me as His witnesses because of our obedience to His Gospel. Our love and testimony to the truth through obedience is the only hope mankind has of coming to a knowledge of salvation. If we who have been redeemed allow our godly love for the brethren to be obscured by sin, then our greatest testimony is lost.

In these days of arguing and fault-finding among true believers, we must be careful not to be drawn into sin. Remember, the sign of a Spirit filled life is honest open love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

THOUGHT: How do I keep my heart pure before God?

PRAYER: Father, may I show Thy love by loving others (John 13:34).

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9
1 PETER 1:23
JOHN 1:12-13

*“Incline my heart
unto thy testimonies,
and not to covetousness.”*

BEING BORN AGAIN

The Apostle Peter most earnestly exhorted the scattered saints to love each other *“with a pure heart fervently”* (1 Pet 1:22) and he wisely fetched his argument, not from the law, nature, or philosophy, but from that high and divine nature which God hath implanted in His people. Just as some judicious tutor of princes might labour to beget and foster in them a kingly spirit and dignified behaviour, finding arguments in their position and descent, so, looking upon God’s people as heirs of glory, princes of the blood royal, descendants of the King of kings, earth’s truest and oldest aristocracy, Peter saith to them, “See that ye love one another, because of your noble birth, being born of incorruptible seed; because of your pedigree, being descended from God, the Creator of all things; and because of your immortal destiny, for you shall never pass away, though the glory of the flesh shall fade, and even its existence shall cease.”

It would be well if, in the spirit of humility, we recognised the true dignity of our regenerated nature, and lived up to it. What is a Christian? If you compare him with a king, he adds priestly sanctity to royal dignity. The king’s royalty often lieth only in his crown, but with a Christian it is infused into his inmost nature. He is as much above his fellows through his new birth, as a man is above the beast that perisheth. Surely, he ought to carry himself, in all his dealings, as one who is not of the multitude, but chosen out of the world, distinguished by sovereign grace, written among *“a peculiar people”* (1 Pet 2:9) and who therefore cannot grovel in the dust as others, nor live after the manner of the world’s citizens.

Let the dignity of your nature, and the brightness of your prospects, O believers in Christ, constrain you to cleave unto holiness, and to avoid the very appearance of evil.

(C.H. Spurgeon)

THOUGHT: Do I live like a child of the King of kings?

PRAYER: Help me to remember that Thou art my Abba, Father.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10

1 PETER 2:1-3

PSALM 32

*“Turn away mine eyes
from beholding vanity;
and quicken thou me in thy way.”*

MAINTAINING A HOLY LIFE

Since we have a new life in Christ, we should live in a holy manner, and with love toward other believers. There are two things we must do in order to maintain this good Christian testimony of holiness and brotherly love.

First, we must lay aside or give up sin. We notice that the sins enumerated in 1 Peter 2:1 would all interfere with love for the brethren. Guile is to deal with someone in a tricky manner while hypocrisy is to act contrary to our true feelings and intent. Guile is considered “normal” in many areas of the business world and people are often admired for the “slick deals” they make. Sometimes we cover up hypocrisy by calling it “diplomacy” but this, along with guile, is just another form of dishonesty which has no place in the Christian life. Envy, or jealousy is a very common sin which is often revealed through another sin, evil speaking. Some Christians find it very easy to speak evil of their fellow Christians. Yet the Holy Scripture challenges us to lay aside such sin.

The second step in maintaining a good Christian testimony is to study God’s Word. The example the Apostle gave us is a vivid one. Like a newborn baby desiring milk, so we should desire a knowledge of the Scriptures. It is only when we love and study God’s Word that we will grow spiritually.

Many Christians have continual trouble with sin. In Matthew 12:43-45, the Lord warns that we cannot get rid of evil without replacing it with good. The Christian who lays aside sin but does not replace it with actions pleasing to the Lord will find the desire for sin coming back. We must deal with sin by putting it away, asking God’s forgiveness and allowing the Holy Spirit to fill our lives with godly activity through a study of the Holy Scripture. In this way we grow to be more like Christ and become a real asset to the local church and the testimony of the Lord.

THOUGHT: How must I deal with sin?

PRAYER: Father, as I study Thy Word, may I taste and see that Thou art good (Ps 34:8).

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11

1 PETER 2:1-8

PSALM 118:14-28

*“Stablish thy word
unto thy servant...”*

A SPIRITUAL TEMPLE

The religious people of Jesus’ day looked to the beautiful temple in Jerusalem with its intricate rites as the centre of worship.

However, all of the temple ceremonies were instituted by God to point to the coming Messiah Jesus Christ and provide a covering for sin until His sacrifice was complete. With His coming, the temple and its sacrifices no longer served any spiritual purpose (Heb 10:9). Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman concerning the day when the temple in Jerusalem would no longer be the centre of biblical worship (John 4:21). The day of which Jesus spoke has come. Those who worship God do not look to a special geographical location, but worship Him in spirit and in truth. When we come to Christ by faith we become *“lively stones”* (1 Pet 2:5). That is to say each believer becomes a part of the spiritual temple which now takes the place of that physical temple in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit not only dwells in each believer, but as we gather together in Jesus’ Name, God is there in a special way (Matt 18:20).

The foundation stone of this spiritual temple is Jesus Christ. He was rejected and considered as worthless by the leaders of the old temple and by the rulers of this world. But He was the perfect sacrifice and thus became the foundation stone of the spiritual temple.

Because of men’s rejection of Christ, they fail to find peace with God. Rejecting salvation through faith, they seek it in religious ritual and good works, so Scripture says they stumble over the offering of salvation through Jesus Christ.

But we who believe are made a spiritual priesthood, able to offer up the sacrifice of praise and service to our God. Through Christ we have become God’s children and are allowed to share in great spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3). In Him we find all our needs supplied, all our hopes and happiness. While the world rejects Christ we find in Him all we need, both for this life and the life that is to come.

THOUGHT: How must I worship God?

PRAYER: Father, may I always keep my body (the temple of God) holy.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12

1 PETER 2:7

PSALM 34:1-11

“Behold,

*I have longed after thy precepts:
quicken me in thy righteousness.”*

HE IS PRECIOUS

As all the rivers run into the sea, so all delights centre in our Beloved. The glances of His eyes outshine the sun: the beauties of His face are fairer than the choicest flowers: no fragrance is like the breath of His mouth. Gems of the mine, and pearls from the sea, are worthless things when measured by His preciousness.

The Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus is precious, but he did not and could not tell us how precious, nor could any of us compute the value of God’s unspeakable gift. Words cannot set forth the preciousness of the Lord Jesus to His people, nor fully tell how essential He is to their satisfaction and happiness. Believer, have you not found in the midst of plenty a sore famine if your Lord has been absent? The sun was shining, but Christ had hidden Himself, and all the world was black to you; or it was night, and since the bright and morning star was gone, no other star could yield you so much as a ray of light. What a howling wilderness is this world without our Lord! If once He hideth Himself from us, withered are the flowers of our garden; our pleasant fruits decay; the birds suspend their songs, and a tempest overturns our hopes. All earth’s candles cannot make daylight if the Sun of Righteousness be eclipsed. He is the Soul of our soul, the Light of our light, the Life of our life.

Dear reader, what wouldst thou do in the world without Him, when thou wakest up and lookest forward to the day’s battle? What wouldst thou do at night, when thou comest home jaded and weary, if there were no door of fellowship between thee and Christ?

Blessed be His name, He will not suffer us to try our lot without Him, for Jesus never forsakes His own. Yet, let the thought of what life would be without Him enhance His preciousness.

(C.H. Spurgeon)

THOUGHT: What would my life be like without Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, may the thought that “Jesus is all the world to me” lead me on to a higher plane of holiness.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13

1 PETER 2:9-10

PSALM 4

*“Let thy mercies come also
unto me, O LORD...”*

A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

When the perfect sacrifice for sin was made by Christ, there was no longer the need for priests to make daily animal sacrifices. So, not only was the temple in Jerusalem replaced with a spiritual temple made up of believers, the old priesthood was also replaced. Believers become a royal priesthood able to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:5-6).

The old order of priests made daily sacrifices. How much more should we who are the new spiritual priests also make daily sacrifices. Our sacrifices are spiritual gifts to God. When we present our lives to Him for His use, we are offering an acceptable sacrifice (Rom 12:1). Another means of offering sacrifice is to use our lips to praise God (Heb 13:15-16). Therefore, when we tell others of God’s saving grace, we are offering sacrifices that are well pleasing to the Lord.

We are not only a royal priesthood but also a holy nation. That is, as believers God sees us as one united people set apart for His service. We are called a *“peculiar people”* (1 Pet 2:9). This means we are chosen of God as His special possession. The purpose of all these things is not only to give us special blessing, but to enable us to bear witness to God’s saving grace. Someone has said that all that some people will ever know about the Scriptures, they will read in our lives. God has equipped us to live for Him that we might show forth His greatness.

We are further reminded that at one time, so far as God was concerned, we had no real identity as a people (1 Pet 2:10). When we were helpless and spiritually worthless, Christ died for us and made us the people of God (Rom 5:6). When we were dead in our sins, worthy only of damnation, He showed us mercy. In recognition of this mercy, we should then live in a way which pleases God and testifies of God’s grace to those still dead in sin.

THOUGHT: What spiritual sacrifices can I offer to God?

PRAYER: I have been made part of the people of God, may I thus live for Thee, my God.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 14

1 PETER 2:11-12

PSALM 19:1-4

“...I trust in thy word.”

DANGER TO THE SOUL

Peter reminded us once again that, as God's children, heaven is our home and we are only travellers and strangers on this sin-cursed earth. Scripture warns us again and again of the very real spiritual danger of adopting the world's habits and becoming comfortable in this present world (1 Pet 2:11).

It is not strange or rare to find people who, though once strangers in a country, have come to like its customs so much that they become permanent residents. These people often adopt the manners and practices of the native peoples to such an extent that they are no longer distinguishable from them. How sad to see a child of God so entangled with the selfish desires of this world that he is indistinguishable from the unsaved around him. It is these very desires called “*fleshly lusts*” in 1 Peter 2:11 that we are specifically warned against.

Many people mistakenly feel that God has singled out all the “fun things” in life and arbitrarily called them sin. But Scripture explains that we are to abstain from fleshly desires because they war against the soul. Sin damages our spiritual well-being and robs us of our God-given inner joy and peace.

Modern psychiatrists and sociologists tell us that human beings can be happy and well-adjusted only when free from all social restraint. While their words seek to make God a liar, the result of their teaching proves that God is indeed right and these sins do war against the soul. There is more hopelessness, destroyed families, drug addiction, and wasted lives from this “restraint-free” teaching than the world has ever seen before.

As God's children we must not follow the manner of the world and our old nature because these things destroy the well-being of the human soul. Instead, we must act in accordance with our heavenly citizenship, refraining from sinful desires. Such Christ-like living alone brings peace to the soul and a witness to the world.

THOUGHT: What is the great danger to the Christian pilgrim?

PRAYER: Keep me, Father, away from my own sinful desires.

MONDAY, AUGUST 15

1 PETER 2:13-15

PSALM 47

“...take not the word of truth
utterly out of my mouth...”

DIVINE ORDER

These are days when chaos rather than order seems to rule in the hearts of men. Riots and protests are signs of the lawless attitude so prevalent today. The breaking of old and tried moral codes and customs has become a way of life. What is to be the Christian's position in all of this? In today's verses Scripture gives some very plain answers to these problems.

In 1 Peter 2:13-14, God speaks of a Christian's relationship with the government. We are instructed to be subject to the government and its laws whether these are given directly by the supreme head of state or by his representative. Scripture reminds us that all the governments of the earth rule only with God's permission (Dan 4:17; Rom 13:1). This does not mean that all rulers please God or are children of God, but that they will rule only so long as God permits.

Governments are supposed to administer the laws with justice. They are there “*for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well*” (1 Pet 2:14). Of course, not all governments are good or just. At the time these words were written, the Jewish nation was suffering under the oppression of their Roman conquerors. And yet God's commands are absolute. We do not obey our government because it is good, but because God says we, as His children, must obey.

There is only one cause for a Christian to disobey his government, and this is when freedom to worship God and witness is denied. Thus, it was in Acts 5:29 that the Apostle said we must obey God rather than man. When this freedom is denied, the Christian has the right to follow God even to martyrdom. But in all other instances, as servants of the true and living God, we are to obey those in authority, thereby helping to bring about stability of life that will enable the church to bear witness to God's saving grace.

THOUGHT: What should be the Christian's relationship with his government?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou move my government to be there “*for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well*” (1 Pet 2:14).

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16

1 PETER 2:16-17

PSALM 144

*“So shall I keep thy law continually
for ever and ever.”*

FREE TO SERVE

The Lord told His disciples that by following Him they would learn more of the truth which would make them free (John 8:31-32). The truth of which the Lord spoke is now clearly recorded in the pages of the New Testament (John 17:17). And the freedom was from the bondage of sin and the hypocritical following of religious rituals and the Law.

Although we live as free men, it is important that this freedom not be used improperly (1 Pet 2:16). Christian liberty must never be used to hide sinful deeds and activities. We are free to serve the Lord and to show His love to a lost world.

We are to consider all men as having great value before God. Believers sometimes tend to look down on unregenerate sinners, especially those living in open, vile sin. But over and over again Scripture reminds us of the value God places on the human soul. We need to remember that man was created in the image of God, and although this image has been marred by sin, man is still a spiritual being of great value and concern to his Creator. We should then respect and value every human soul with which we come in contact.

This is an age of growing informality and lack of respect. Believers must be careful to hold God in reverential trust. Such an attitude is the basis for all spiritual wisdom (Prov 9:10). We must ever bow humbly before the Almighty God in full recognition of His power and greatness.

This thought of reverence toward God is continued in the admonition to honour those in authority. As we have already been reminded, ruling powers exist by God's permission. Therefore, it is only right that we, His people, obey those in authority. Honest Christian liberty causes us to live in deep humility, with love and concern for people and reverence toward God who made our own salvation possible.

THOUGHT: What attitude is the basis for all spiritual wisdom?

PRAYER: Father, may I live in humility knowing that Thou hast put the government over me, and Thou hast given me freedom.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17

1 PETER 2:18-20

PSALM 37:1-11

*“And I will walk at liberty:
for I seek thy precepts.”*

AN HONEST DAY’S WORK

Often what Scripture teaches as proper Christian action is quite contrary to the popular trend. This becomes apparent when Scripture teaches about employer-employee relationships.

The popular attitude among many workers today seems to be to do as little work for as much pay as possible. It is easy for the Christian employee to fall into this manner of thinking and thus lose an opportunity to be a witness for the Lord.

The word “*servant*” in 1 Peter 2:18 refers to an household help, and similar instructions are given to slaves in other portions of Scripture. If under the cruel laws of slavery of ancient Bible times, the Christian was instructed to be a testimony for the Lord, how much more should we live for God in our places of employment.

Christians must follow the instructions of their employer or superior, and this is to be done with an attitude of willingness and respect. In other portions of Scripture, the Christian worker is instructed to do a good job even if the boss is not there to see him (Col 3:22-25; Eph 6:7). Furthermore, the child of God must work well, not only for the employer who is fair and kind, but also for the one who is not. The Christian worker is to always do a good job regardless of the attitude of his employer and the treatment he receives because this is what God wants us to do. We are, after all, actually living and working for God. We do this as a testimony of His grace and not for personal gain.

We are reminded in closing that there is no merit in being treated badly if we deserve it. But if, after giving good service, we bear poor treatment in a Christ-like manner, this is noted by God and is a sacrifice acceptable to Him. A Christian’s reputation in his place of employment should be that of one who gives better than full value for the wages in a trustworthy and respectful manner.

THOUGHT: What must be the Christian’s attitude toward his employment?

PRAYER: Father, help me to do all things as unto Thee (Col 3:23).

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18

1 PETER 2:21-25

PSALM 22:1-15

*“I will speak of
thy testimonies also before kings,
and will not be ashamed.”*

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

The life of a stranger and a pilgrim is a difficult one. Although as Christians we are called to this difficult life, we can be encouraged by the example of endurance under suffering set for us by our Lord during His earthly ministry (1 Pet 2:23).

Quoting from the Old Testament, the Apostle reminded us of the complete innocence of the Lord. As He stood before His accusers, He was not only innocent of their accusations, but was not guilty of any sin (Isa 53:9). Yet when He was insulted, He did not insult in return, but remained silent. Being God and knowing all things, He could have answered by revealing their secret sins, but He did not. When caused to suffer terrible physical abuse, He did not retaliate. He could have called innumerable angels to His defence, but He did not because His purpose was to do the Father's will and give His life to save the lost (Matt 26:15-56).

Christ suffered unjustly, and He entrusted Himself to the just, righteous, impartial judgment of God the Father. He knew the Father would find His sacrifice acceptable and give victory over sin and death. This victory would then be passed to all who, by faith, would claim Christ as their Saviour. In taking our own sins upon Himself, He has freed us from sin's penalty and power and enabled us to live righteously as a testimony to God's great salvation.

We were all like rebellious sheep, and God brought us back to Himself by placing our sins on Jesus Christ. So, this chapter ends by reminding us of the great cost of bringing us back to the protection and guidance of our soul's Shepherd and Overseer. Considering the price paid for our salvation, and the great love that this reveals, we are reminded of the need to follow our Saviour. When our lives are patterned after the example of Christ, we are a testimony to this lost and dying world of our great salvation and the freedom it brings from sin.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to follow the example of Christ?

PRAYER: Father, may my life purpose be to do Thy will, not mine.

THE CHRISTIAN WIFE

It is necessary to submit ourselves to authority in order to be obedient to God's will. In our meditation on 1 Peter, we have already considered the Lord's command that we submit ourselves to governmental authorities, as well as to our employers. Now Scripture teaches wives to submit themselves to the authority of their husbands. This is not a matter of superior or inferior worth before God, but a recognition that in God's ordered universe, every relationship requires particular duties and responsibilities. When these duties and responsibilities are carried out, there is harmony and satisfaction. When they are not, there is chaos.

Scripture here gives encouragement to women of unbelieving husbands. Their life of subjection and Christian obedience can serve as a testimony to an unbelieving husband (1 Pet 3:1-2).

Another responsibility of the Christian wife is to dress properly. Much has been said concerning what proper dress is. It is obvious that this varies not only from culture to culture, but also from generation to generation. However, these instructions are for all Christian women anywhere and anytime. A Christian woman must not dress with the purpose that her clothing and jewellery attract attention (1 Pet 3:3). The women of Bible days often spent hours plaiting their hair in intricate patterns. This verse reminds us that Christian women need not follow the latest style, and certainly must never dress in the extreme of fashion.

For the believer, the “inner life” must be the point of attention, rather than clothing and jewellery. A Christian woman's character must be marked by a modest, quiet, and loving spirit. It was in accordance with these principles that the great women of Scripture adorned themselves. The clothing of these women was not important because the beauty of a godly life outshone the clothes which covered them. This is how it should be today with women who want to maintain a shining testimony for God.

THOUGHT: Wives must learn the truth of scriptural subjection.

PRAYER: Father, as a Christian woman, may I be adorned with a meek and quiet spirit.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20

1 PETER 3:7

PROVERBS 31:10-20

*“My hands also will I lift up
unto thy commandments,
which I have loved...”*

HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIFE

Husbands are commanded to love their wives in the same manner as Christ loved the Church (Eph 5:25). A Christ-like love is one that demands a practical expression. We know that the Lord loved the Church because He gave Himself to save it. It is this self-sacrificing love that husbands are commanded to show their wives.

In 1 Peter 3:7, we have instructions concerning the practical application of the husband's godly love for his wife. There is to be an understanding spirit concerning the wife's needs, problems and desires. Scripture reminds us that Jesus is touched by our infirmities or weaknesses (Heb 4:15). The Lord understands us in all that we are and do. It is the Christian husband's responsibility to endeavour to understand his wife in the same way. In this way, he shows a godly love toward his wife as he helps her concerning the needs in her life.

As the Christian husband recognises that God has placed the wife in subjection to him, he will respect and honour her for her godly position rather than take advantage of her and lord over her.

Through the death of Christ, the Christian husband and wife are bound together by God's gift of eternal life. So, the picture of Christian marriage given in the Scriptures is one of companionship together before the Lord. The wife is to take her place in submission to her husband. The husband, in recognition of his godly position, is to love her and to express this love with concern and understanding.

We cannot fail to notice the warning at the close of these instructions. The Apostle reminded us that disobedience to these commands concerning marriage would impede the life of prayer. On the other hand, as the husband and wife live together in love and harmony before the Lord their prayer life is strengthened. Such harmony in the home brings spiritual strength and blessing.

THOUGHT: Husbands, do you have an understanding spirit?

PRAYER: Father, help me to obey Thy Word and bless my home with peace and unity.

AGREEMENT IN CHRIST

It has been noted that the New Testament uses the word “*brother*” over 200 times to designate those who have personally accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour. Scripture now gives us instructions concerning living with our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are to be of “*one mind*,” literally, to think alike about things. This unity of thought comes to us through knowing and obeying God’s Word. Scripture has been given in order that we may be instructed in every area of life. These instructions enable us to live in obedience to God and give believers a unity of purpose which can become visible to the world.

We are to have “*compassion one of another*” (1 Pet 3:8). That is our feelings must be in tune with our fellow believers. We must cry with those in sorrow and rejoice with those experiencing blessing. This feeling of oneness and concern allows no jealousy at another’s success nor feeling of superiority when another fails. This is the honest action of one whose mind is really one with the Lord and other believers. There is a challenge to love our brothers and sisters in the Lord and be tender-hearted toward them. We must be “open hearted,” that is, be easily approachable to those in need of spiritual help.

Finally, we must be “*courteous*” (1 Pet 3:8), that is to say humble. It was the sin of pride that led to man’s downfall, and this continues to be man’s greatest area of weakness. So, there is a need to constantly humble ourselves (1 Pet 5:6). When we allow God’s Word to search our hearts and minds, we will see our own unworthiness before a holy and righteous God. We will then be filled with a spirit of humility, not only before God, but before our fellow men as well.

Perhaps the greatest summary of this subject is found in the tremendous challenge in the Epistle to the Philippians. There we are called upon to follow Jesus’ example. He who was God walked in lowliness, humility and obedience, in order that we might have eternal life (Phil 2:5-8). Let us so walk as believers that the world might see our Saviour’s love.

THOUGHT: Am I living in Christian humility before others?

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to walk in humility as my Lord walked.

MONDAY, AUGUST 22

1 PETER 3:9-12

PSALM 112

*“This is my comfort in my affliction:
for thy word hath quickened me.”*

WALKING IN MEEKNESS

In return for living a good Christian life, the believer may be insulted and dealt with in a very evil manner. But rather than striking back, we should instead return good for the evil done to us (1 Pet 3:9). The believer has a sure inheritance in Christ. As we live humbly before a world that ridicules us, show kindness to those who make us suffer, and live joyfully in a world of difficulty, we do so looking forward to the eternal glory which will someday be ours. As Scripture so beautifully states that “...our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

1 Peter 3:10-12 is a quotation from Psalm 34:12-16. As we read these words, we must remember that we are being taught concerning living for God in a sinful world. The word “good” in verse 10 is not necessarily synonymous with “easy” but refers to a life that is fruitful for the Lord. And to “love life” is to look upon our time on earth as a precious opportunity to serve the Lord.

There are certain characteristics found in the Christian who looks on life in such a way. We must be careful in our speech, remembering that the tongue can corrupt the whole body (James 3:6). We think sadly of the many lives ruined by idle, untrue words, often spoken carelessly with no sense of guilt before God (1 Pet 3:10).

The Christian life is not just the negative of turning from evil, but also energetically entering into such activities as Scripture calls “good.” The true Christian life is one of activity for God (1 Pet 3:11). In order to be assured of answered prayers and God’s rich blessing, we must live in obedience to Him. To be disobedient is to be outside of the circle of God’s blessing (1 Pet 3:12). Unconfessed sin is a reason for unanswered prayer (Ps 66:18). However, we have full assurance that walking in the light of God’s Word brings close fellowship with Him and continual cleansing (1 John 1:7).

THOUGHT: Am I quietly endeavouring to follow the life of righteousness?

PRAYER: Father, may I learn to control my tongue.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 23

1 PETER 3:13-16

PSALM 25:1-9

*“I remembered thy judgments of old,
O LORD; and have comforted myself.”*

DO NOT BE AFRAID

The meek, quiet attitude of the mature Christian usually causes even those who have no interest in the things of God to look kindly on the believer (1 Pet 3:13). *“A soft answer turneth away wrath...”* (Prov 15:1).

Although the Christian will have a greater chance for a peaceful life through gentleness, we are by no means guaranteed such peace. Often Satan has so warped the thinking of the unsaved that gentleness can be returned with hatred and persecution. But we do not need to be afraid when facing such persecution because we know the Lord’s blessing is upon us (1 Pet 3:14). And we have the promise that He is always with us as we live in obedience to His Word (Heb 13:5-6).

During times of persecution, we must *“sanctify”* or honour the Lord in our hearts. We do this by showing confidence in His promises to supply our needs and provide a way of victorious passage through difficult times (1 Cor 10:13). When our hearts and minds are filled with faith in the promises of God, we are strengthened in our times of persecution.

“Be ready always to give an answer...” (1 Pet 3:15). Many Christians are never asked about their faith. We must carefully note the context of this oft-quoted verse. The picture given is of a Christian who lives a godly life, being peaceful and kind, yet receiving persecution in return for his good. When, in the face of unjust persecution, the Christian continues to live in a gentle Christ-like manner, unbelievers cannot help but ask concerning his faith.

Such questions about the Christian faith must be answered in the same meekness and kindness that caused the question to be asked. Even when persecuted, God’s children must always be careful of their daily conduct. It is this careful walk in obedience to the Word of God that causes the unbeliever to feel ashamed of his unjust persecution (1 Pet 3:16). Let us remember that many unbelievers have been saved because of the loving conduct of a Christian in the face of unjust persecution.

THOUGHT: Do I show confidence in the promises of God?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be meek (Ps 147:6).

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24

1 PETER 3:17-18

PSALM 46

“Thy statutes have been my songs...”

A CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF SUFFERING

Many of the world's religions have made suffering a major part of their worship. It is common to find people refusing various comforts of life or undergoing self-inflicted suffering in an effort to somehow solve the universally recognised problem of sin. Sometimes these religious penitents are admired, other times they are called fools. But generally, it is agreed that they are sincere in their desire to solve the problem of sin which they know exists between man and God.

The sad thing about all this self-imposed religious suffering is that it is totally unnecessary. Jesus Christ has already suffered in order to solve this problem of sin and bring wayward mankind back to God. It was necessary for Christ to die only once to accomplish this task (1 Pet 3:18). This sacrifice of His own sinless body was such a perfect and complete payment for sin that no further sacrifice is necessary to bring sinful man to God. Through this one sacrifice, man can be presented holy before the righteous Creator (Heb 10:10). This great “once for all” sacrifice was made when Christ died on the cross and His body was placed in the grave. On the third day, He rose from the dead in order that all who accept Him as their Saviour may have new life and serve Him. To be saved from the penalty of sin then, man needs only to repent and accept Christ and the sacrifice He has made for him. This is the message of the Gospel that must be preached by all who believe (Luke 24:24-47).

God may call upon Christians to suffer for the faith. This is not penance for sin. It comes from opposition to the Gospel message and the righteousness it proclaims. At times, suffering comes into the life of believers because they belong to the Lord whom the world hated and crucified (John 15:18). The believer is asked to bear this suffering in a gentle Christ-like manner so that the unsaved might listen to the Gospel and come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to suffer for the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, I believe that the present sufferings cannot be compared to the coming glory (Rom 8:18).

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25
1 PETER 3:19-22
PSALM 86:11-17

*"I have remembered thy name,
O LORD, in the night,
and have kept thy law."*

GOD IS LONGSUFFERING

1 Peter 3:19 has presented a problem of interpretation for Bible scholars down through the centuries. Some have felt that Christ's preaching to the unsaved telling them the plan of salvation had indeed been accomplished. Others believe that the Lord was preaching to the saved of earlier times. And some have felt the verses are actually teaching that the spirit of Christ was in Noah as he preached to the multitudes of his day. It is not possible here to examine all these various interpretations.

But there are a number of points that are both clear and important as we continue to consider the Christian view of suffering. First of all, we see God's patience in dealing with disobedient mankind. While Noah built the ark, he preached concerning God's righteousness and the need for man to repent (2 Pet 2:5). Although men mocked, God gave them opportunity for 120 years to hear the message of salvation (Gen 6:3).

This example of the Lord's patience is still with us today. His return has been set in the future to give people a chance to hear the Gospel message. God loves and patiently waits for the very people who mock and persecute those who preach this message (2 Pet 3:9).

Along with God's longsuffering, we see Noah's faithfulness in preaching. Through those long years of ridicule, Noah had little in the way of results from his work. In fact, when the long-predicted punishment came, only eight were saved. What a small number for such a long ministry! Surely, by human standards, Noah's ministry would be considered a failure. Yet God considered him a great preacher of righteousness (Heb 11:7).

We must remember the Lord's admonition that relatively few of the world's millions will accept the narrow way of salvation (Matt 7:13-14). Yet, we must continue to bear witness to this one way which is Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The Lord will not judge our service on the human basis of visible results, but on the basis of obedience and faithfulness to Him.

THOUGHT: On what basis will the Lord judge my service?

PRAYER: Father, please be merciful to save my unsaved loved ones for Thou art *"not willing that any should perish"* (2 Pet 3:9).

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26

1 PETER 4:1-4

PSALM 141

“...I kept thy precepts.”

FREE FROM SIN

The sinless Christ, God incarnate, took upon Himself the form of a servant and was obedient unto the death of the cross. This suffering and death were for our sins. Because of this we should have the same manner of looking at things as the Saviour (Phil 2:5-8).

Since we were identified with Christ in His suffering and death, we are freed from the bondage of sin. We are empowered by God to live as those risen with Christ (Rom 6:5-8). We must live in such a manner that this freedom can be clearly seen by the world. Our guiding principle must no longer be our desire. That which guides us in our new life in Christ must be God's will as presented in His Word (1 Pet 4:2).

1 Peter 4:3 reminds us of the horrible state from which we were saved. Whether or not we were actively involved in such sins as mentioned here, we know the unsaved fallen nature of each individual is capable of such things. Before salvation, life was controlled by wickedness and personal desires (1 Cor 6:9-10). But after salvation, we must want nothing to do with such things (1 Cor 6:11). What a wonderful privilege to be free from sin and able to live a life of righteousness through the power of the cross.

The unsaved cannot understand the lack of desire for sinful pursuits on the part of the Christian. To refuse sin and pursue righteousness is to be marked as different from the world. This often brings persecution in the form of evil words concerning our activities. Throughout the ages, sinful men persecuted the servants of God because their lives and message spoke of God's righteousness and the coming judgment (Luke 6:22). The Lord Himself was faced with such hatred and reminded His followers that their lot would be the same (John 15:18). But having the “*mind of Christ*,” that is to say looking at things as Jesus did, we see such persecution for righteous living as just another chance to witness for God.

THOUGHT: Do I live as one whom God has freed from sin?

PRAYER: Father, Thou hast chosen me to be Thy witness, help me to be a courageous one.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27

1 PETER 4:5-6

PSALM 50:1-17

“Thou art my portion, O LORD...”

THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH

Throughout Scripture is the recurring theme of the coming judgment. An important part of the Gospel message is that God will judge both the living and the dead in the end times (Acts 10:42). All things are known and open before God who is prepared to judge in righteousness (Heb 4:13). Every word spoken shall be accounted for before the great and righteous Judge. This includes those evil words spoken against believers who would not join with the world in its sin (Matt 12:36). The Judge of all the earth is ready to judge. The day of judgment is very near (1 Pet 4:5). This eternal judgment will be undertaken by the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16). So, it has been well said that man will either accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour, or someday face Him as his final Judge.

The Gospel has been preached to many who believed and then departed from this life (1 Pet 4:6). They suffered the judgment of unbelieving sinful men while they were on this earth. These were righteous men who were falsely accused of evil, ridiculed and condemned as misfits and bigots. But now, having passed into eternity, these Christians have come to realise the full blessing of being alive with God. While the unsaved ridicule the believer and go out into final and eternal condemnation, the children of God go on to see the Saviour and be like Him (1 John 3:2).

These words bring another ringing challenge to those who know the truth. The Gospel message must be preached throughout the world. The great commission of our Lord compels those with a knowledge of salvation to take it forth to the lost, so that men might come to know Him as Saviour rather than face Him as their eternal Judge.

THOUGHT: Do I pray regularly for the lost?

PRAYER: Father, open the eyes of the unsaved to see Thy salvation, for it is *“...appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Heb 9:27).

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 28

1 PETER 4:7-9

PSALM 95

“...I have said that
I would keep thy words.”

LIVE AS GOD'S CHILDREN

As the final days of this age rapidly run out, the picture of the world is one of uncontrolled sin and self-serving. The Christian is challenged because as a stranger to such sinfulness, he is to be “sober-minded,” that is self-controlled (1 Pet 4:7). While the world gathers to follow sinful pursuit, we must, in light of the Lord's soon return, gather with our fellow Christians and encourage one another to live for God (Heb 10:25). Being sober will also cause us to have a strong and careful prayer life (1 Pet 4:7).

This Christian attitude of watchful prayer is critical in the last days as men reject the truth and follow Satan's lies (1 Tim 4:1). Perilous times are coming upon the Church and the believers. The time will come when men will be so involved in sin that they will no longer be able to understand true love (2 Tim 3:3). In contrast to this, Christians must exhibit strong godly love one for another (1 Pet 4:8). Such love “*shall hide a multitude of sins*” (James 5:20). This is similarly taught in Proverbs 11:13. This Old Testament book of wisdom points out that hatred tends to emphasise the faults of our fellowmen, but love among brethren causes a forgiving spirit, rather than a critical one, to prevail. As those of this sinful world fight, criticise, and endeavour to overcome one another, the Christian must present a picture of loving-kindness and be always ready to forgive (Matt 18:22).

An outgrowth of true Christian love is hospitality. We remember that there was no room for Jesus in the homes of the world so the King of kings and Lord of lords was born in a manger. As the final days of this age come upon us there will be less and less room for God's people on this earth. For this reason, hospitality, especially toward those travelling in the Lord's service, becomes a mark of God's people in a selfish world.

THOUGHT: Am I guilty of having a critical spirit?

PRAYER: Father, may I always be reminded of Thy Word in Psalm 133:1, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*”

MONDAY, AUGUST 29

1 PETER 4:10-11

PSALM 27

*“I intreated thy favour
with my whole heart...”*

GOOD STEWARDS

Often when we think of stewardship, our minds go to financial matters. But here the passage of Scripture is speaking of the many things God, in His grace, has given to equip His people for service. Each of us, as God’s children, has been given such a gift (1 Cor 12:7). And these gifts are not to be kept to one’s self, but have been given for use in the church (1 Pet 4:10). Our gifts may be different, but as we use them together in the fellowship of the church, the body grows and moves forward for God (1 Cor 12:14-31).

Guidance for the church should come only from those who have a knowledge of God’s Word (1 Pet 4:11). So far as spiritual things are concerned, God’s Word alone is truth (John 17:17). Therefore, it is only Scripture that brings us light as we continue on the pilgrim journey of life (Ps 119:105). For this reason, the Apostle Paul humbly taught the Word of God, being careful not to use either worldly wisdom or methods (1 Cor 2:1-5). We must be aware of the dangers of those who seek to replace the teaching of Scripture with worldly wisdom, and cause its message to be doubted (2 Pet 3:3).

Not only must all preaching and teaching be based on God’s Word, all service in the church must be done in God’s strength and grace (Rom 12:3). The purpose of all our work in the church is to bring honour and glory to God. The Psalmist constantly reminds us that God alone is worthy to be praised (Ps 63:1-3). Only when our service is motivated by a desire to bring glory to God alone are we good stewards of the spiritual gifts and blessings He has given to us.

THOUGHT: Have I used my gift to strengthen the church this past week?

PRAYER: Father, as I strive to be Thy good steward, I trust in Thy promise that: *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Phil 4:13).

TUESDAY, AUGUST 30

1 PETER 4:12-15

PSALM 33:1-12

*“...be merciful unto me
according to thy word.”*

REJOICING CHRISTIANS

Once again, the Apostle returned to the major theme of 1 Peter which is the suffering of God's people. We are reminded that it is not a strange thing that difficult trials beset believers as they go through life (1 Pet 4:12). It is to be expected that the world would hate the believer and the righteousness presented in the Gospel message (1 John 3:13). The Lord taught the disciples that since the world hated Him, it would also hate those who followed Him (John 15:18-19).

The scene has been set. The Christian pilgrim's life will proclaim the message of God's righteousness and will upset those round about. Some will, through the preaching of the Gospel, turn to Christ and be saved. But others will rail at the truth and do all in their power to quiet its presentation through the Christian's life. Thus Scripture warns us that to live a godly life will bring persecution (2 Tim 3:12).

This suffering for the cause of Christ brings blessings into the Christian's life. Going through temptation points out our own weaknesses and teaches us to rely on the Lord (2 Cor 12:10). Our faithfulness in times of persecution causes our spiritual perseverance to grow, giving us more patience and making us mature in the faith (James 1:2-4). It is a joy for Christians to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). And in that day when we see Christ in all His glory, we will have greater joy (1 Pet 4:13) The world may insult the Christian pilgrim, but at such times a special blessing from God rests upon each suffering saint (1 Pet 4:14; Matt 5:11).

A final exhortation is given us in 1 Peter 4:15. We should be sure our suffering is for righteous living and not for improper action. And such action as meddling in the affairs of others, i.e. being a busybody, is included in these forbidden activities.

It is a great shame to suffer for wrongdoing which brings dishonour to Jesus' name and hinders the cause of the Gospel, but on the other hand it is a great joy to suffer for Him.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to suffer for Christ?

PRAYER: Father, may I always rejoice in Thee!

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31

1 PETER 4:16-19

PSALM 43

*“I thought on my ways, and turned
my feet unto thy testimonies.”*

NEVER BE ASHAMED

In this world, man lives only for success. This is characterised by an easy life with little struggle or pain. In our devotional times together this month, we have been reminded that the Christian is a stranger to the world's manner of life. Suffering for the cause of Christ is to be expected. And in this final portion we are challenged not to be ashamed of the difficulties of life which come from following Christ.

The Apostle Paul who suffered much in his work of spreading the Gospel was never ashamed. He knew that for all eternity he was in God's hands (2 Tim 1:12). And so the Apostle rejoiced that he was considered worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (1 Pet 4:16).

However, suffering does not always come because of the believer's testimony for the Lord. It sometimes is allowed to come to the Christian's life by God because of its purifying effect to make us more like Christ (James 1:2-4). God will not tolerate sin. In the case of a believer, He chastens us when we disobey (Heb 12:6). This is a sign that we are His children (Heb 12:6-7). While such discipline is not pleasant to endure, it results in a life of righteousness and peace when we learn from it the lessons the Lord is teaching us (Heb 12:11).

Now if the Lord so judges sin in the life of His own children, how terrible will be the final judgment on those who refuse the Gospel (1 Pet 4:17-18). Paul spoke about that horrible time when the righteous Judge will descend in vengeance on those who have persecuted the church and rejected the Gospel (2 Thess 1:6-9).

Therefore, the suffering Christian pilgrim can take comfort in the knowledge that despite the wickedness of the world, God is still on the throne. He is able to deliver His people from every temptation and will complete in us the great work that He has begun (Phil 1:6). We can then commit our souls to His keeping, looking forward to that grand and glorious day when He shall call us to be with Himself.

THOUGHT: Do I always remember that God will not tolerate sin?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee, that Thou art able to deliver me!

“WARNING FOR END TIMES”

A Study of 1 Peter 5 and 2 Peter

INTRODUCTION

Our present month's readings are based on the last chapter of Peter's first epistle as well as his second epistle. The first epistle ended with words of challenge and encouragement to the suffering church. As the second epistle was written, Peter saw his life drawing to a close. He expressed concern that his teachings be remembered as eye-witness accounts of the Lord's ministry which would ever be with the church. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle to write words both of encouragement and warning to the believers. He warned us against false teachers who would arise from within the church and endeavour to destroy the truth of the Gospel and encouraged us to look toward the glories that await us in Christ.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

1 PETER 5:1-4

PSALM 23

*“I made haste, and delayed not
to keep thy commandments.”*

A CHALLENGE TO CHURCH LEADERS

Despite suffering and difficulty it is necessary that the Church persevere in its testimony for Christ. Those given the responsibility of church leadership are challenged to take up the work given them by God. From the beginning, spiritual men have been challenged to “*feed the flock*,” that is, to teach the Scriptures to the Church (1 Pet 5:2). Jesus so challenged Peter (John 21:15). Paul passed on this challenge to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:28). The same ringing challenge to teach the Word came to young Timothy (2 Tim 4:2). Teaching the Scriptures becomes especially important because much of the Church will turn away from sound doctrine in the final days (2 Tim 4:3).

Perhaps in times of great difficulty some would wish not to have the responsibilities of church leadership. But there is the need to willingly take on such work when it is given by God (1 Pet 5:2).

Church leaders must follow Christ’s example of quiet humility. A proud, haughty leader has no place in the church (Mark 10:42-45). Leaders and teachers must live a life that will serve as an example to others (1 Pet 5:3). The Apostle Paul challenged others to observe his own life and example (2 Tim 3:10). The actions of Church leaders are judged more sternly because of the influence their words and lives have on others (James 3:1). However, those who faithfully teach the Word will also receive a special commendation from the Lord (1 Pet 5:4).

All believers must recognise the importance of God-given leaders. They must be given respect since someday they must give an account (Heb 13:17). If we are faithful to do this, then when the Lord returns, we will share in the Chief Shepherd’s special commendation (Matt 10:41).

THOUGHT: What is the great challenge to spiritual men of the church?

PRAYER: Father, may I constantly pray for the leaders of my church.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

1 PETER 5:5-7

JOB 5:8-17

*“The bands of the wicked
have robbed me: but I
have not forgotten thy law.”*

REST IN JESUS

Humility is a recurring subject throughout Scripture. The Lord told the Israelites He had taken them into the wilderness to teach them humility (Deut 8:2). The idea of our text, *“God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble,”* (1 Pet 5:5) no doubt comes from Job 22:29. This same idea is also taught in James 4:6.

The need for a humble spirit is taught so often because only in humility of heart and mind can we truly boast and rest in the Lord (Ps 34:2). This quality was a hallmark of the ministry and life of Jesus Christ. He who was God and worthy of all honour humbled Himself to bring about our salvation. And we are challenged to have that same mind, that is to say, we must have the same manner of looking at things (Phil 2:5-8).

The haughty, self-willed person has no place in God’s service. One who must have his own way, easily has his feelings hurt, or constantly is in disagreement with the church, will only cause damage to the Lord’s work no matter how talented he may be. It is only as we humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God that He can lift us up, empower us, and truly use us for His service (1 Pet 5:6; James 4:10).

It is only when we recognise the majesty of God and our own insufficiency that we can rest in God and the certainty of His purpose. The days of scheming, planning and working for our own ends will then be over as we come to rest in Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). It is only in humility of heart that we can truly cast all our cares on the Saviour. When we see ourselves as able to do nothing, but that God working through us, we are able to do all things, then we are truly resting in Him (1 Pet 5:7; Phil 4:13).

THOUGHT: What attitude do I need to truly rest in the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, help me to imitate the humility of Christ my Saviour.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

1 PETER 5:8-9

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-12

*“At midnight I will rise
to give thanks unto thee...”*

BEWARE OF THE DEVIL

For the first time in his Epistle, Peter brought up the subject of the Church's major adversary. We are taught in Scripture that the confusion on the religious scene today comes from Satan. Those who follow false religions are actually worshippers of Satan and his demons (Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20). Throughout the ages, Satan has endeavoured to lead mankind astray through these false religions and their teachers. In a final act of desperation, it was the Devil who tempted the Lord in the hope of keeping Him from finishing the work of salvation (Matt 4:1).

Having failed to keep Christ from the cross, Satan then endeavoured to keep the Church from witnessing to its power and purpose. He can do this most effectively by rendering the believer unfit or disinterested in bearing witness. Like a roaring, hungry lion, our adversary looks for ways in which to overpower us (1 Pet 5:8). He lays snares and traps to catch the unwary as they walk along life's way. Christians who neglect church attendance, spend a large amount of their time in close friendship with the unsaved, and allow themselves to constantly be near the sinful pursuits of the world, are open to Satan's traps. Such traps will cause them to lose their Christian testimony and effective witness (1 Tim 3:7).

It is the duty of every believer to steadfastly resist Satan by the power we have in Christ (1 Pet 5:9). We are encouraged by the knowledge that the power of God which is in us is far greater than that of our adversary (1 John 4:4b). As we live in obedience to Scripture and have fellowship in a Bible-believing church, we are strengthened by God and are able to resist the attacks of Satan. When we walk in obedience, we can resist him in the power of God, knowing that he has no choice but to flee (James 4:7).

THOUGHT: How does Satan endeavour to keep the Church from its appointed tasks?

PRAYER: Father, in order that Satan may flee from me, may I always resist him in Thy strength.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 4

1 PETER 5:10-11

DEUTERONOMY 6:17-25

*"I am a companion of
all them that fear thee..."*

ALL GLORY TO GOD

Satan, the Christian's adversary, is diligently working to keep us from living for God. This can be a frightening and discouraging fact. But to the suffering Christian, Scripture gives many promises. Our eternal destiny does not lie in our own hands, but in the hands of the God of all grace (1 Pet 5:10). The all-sufficiency of God's grace is a subject of Scripture that must greatly encourage us. Our gracious God has called us to an eternal reward in Christ (1 Cor 1:9).

While there is suffering for *"a while"* on this earth, the end is sure and glorious. This *"light affliction"* lasts just a brief moment on the scale of eternity. At the end of life's way will be the glory God has purchased for us (2 Cor 4:17). Such a promise must keep us faithfully serving the Lord even when life's road seems rough (1 Pet 5:10).

As we go through life living in obedience to God, we have a wonderful assurance from Scripture. It is God who will make us mature, strong, and steadfast (1 Pet 5:10). He will complete the work that He has begun in us (1 Thess 5:23-24). As we battle against Satan and the flesh, it is God's power that keeps us safe until the coming glory (1 Cor 1:8).

Someday we will see Christ in His glory and understand His power. But for now, we continue on in full assurance that He who keeps us will not fail. We can live joyfully when we recognise that the eternal power of God is at work. It is the mighty power that keeps us safe and assures us of His promises as we live for Him. Not only can we rest in this truth, it must cause us to be careful to give God the praise both now and forever more (1 Pet 5:11; 1 Tim 6:16).

THOUGHT: What are some of Scripture's promises to suffering Christians?

PRAYER: Father, it is so comforting to know that I can depend on Thee to keep me till that final day of redemption.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

1 PETER 5:12

PSALM 15

*“The earth, O LORD,
is full of thy mercy...”*

COMPANIONSHIP IN CHRIST

It appears that Peter took the pen in his own hand to finish his Epistle (1 Pet 5:12). Silas, or Silvanus as he was sometimes called, was a fellow companion and preacher with Paul (Acts 15:40). Here in Peter's first epistle, he was commended for his faithfulness to the Lord (1 Pet 5:12). It is good to have as friends those who are faithful.

The Apostle reminded the believers that the Gospel which he preached and which they believed is the truth. Later he taught that false teachers would arise as the end drew near. So, we must be exhorted to stand fast and we must also exhort one another to do so (Heb 10:25; 1 Cor 16:13). One of the great strengthening factors in these final days is to fellowship with God's faithful people, to have real Christian companionship within the true Church of God (Heb 10:23-25).

Peter exhibited his feelings of Christian oneness as he took time to send greetings. The believers at Babylon sent their greetings through his Epistle. They, too, were the elect of God, even as many true believers who would read Peter's words down through the centuries. Could these believers in Babylon actually be the young church at Rome, then faithful but who in later years would become so cold and lifeless (Rev 14:8; 16:19)? Did they perhaps, in the pride of the accomplishments of their great civilisation, become careless in their companionships and defence of the faith (1 Pet 5:13)?

The Christian greeting of a holy kiss is often mentioned in Scripture (1 Pet 5:14). It soon began to be misused. The church fathers spoke of it as having become hypocritical. Today, the warm greeting of a hand shake, coupled with goodwill and concern, serve to show our Christian love. We need the strength of one another's concern and fellowship. May God always keep the importance of this truth before us.

THOUGHT: What is a great strengthening factor to me in these final days?

PRAYER: Father, may I constantly remember to exhort others to good work.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

2 PETER 1:1-2

PSALM 4

“...teach me thy statutes.”

PEACE FROM GOD

In many of the letters of the New Testament, the Apostles used the greeting that had become so much a part of the early Christian faith: “*Grace to you and peace from...the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom 1:7). This same greeting is now used by Peter (2 Pet 1:2).

By God’s grace we are not only saved, but also preserved and strengthened so that we can live for Him (Eph 2:5; 2 Tim 2:1). No matter how difficult the testing and trials of life, it is God’s all sufficient grace that enables us to live with joy and the assurance of victory (2 Cor 12:9).

Peace can mean the absence of war. The believer once at war with God is now at peace (Rom 5:1, 10). But peace can also mean an inner tranquility, a calm assurance that all is well with our souls. The Psalmist said that God gives His people peace (Ps 29:11). The Apostle Paul spoke of the peace which passes all understanding, that is, a peace which is beyond the concept of our finite minds (Phil 4:7). These are days of turmoil and difficulty. Change and uncertainty are the rule of the day. It is good in times like these to remember that in Christ we can have peace. His peace enables us to feel secure in the midst of the present uncertainties and difficulties.

We are challenged to live a gentle, humble life which allows God’s gift of peace to rule in our lives (Col 3:12-15). As we learn more of Christ and yield our lives to Him, peace in the midst of difficulty becomes our portion (2 Pet 1:2). Then, like the Apostles of old, we can move forward boldly for God in full knowledge that He will meet our heart’s need for peace and comfort. And this inner peace which radiates from our lives will be a testimony of God’s all sufficient grace to all whom we meet.

THOUGHT: What enables me to live with joy and the assurance of victory?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the peace Thou givest me, a peace that passes all understanding.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

2 PETER 1:3-4

PSALM 107:1-15

*“Thou hast dealt well
with thy servant, O LORD,
according unto thy word.”*

GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

It is God's divine power working in us that enables us to live godly lives. However, we are again challenged by the truth that what God has provided for us can be experienced in its fullest extent only through a knowledge of Him. As we study the Scriptures and come to know more of the Saviour, we are able to experience the power He has provided for godly living. Believers only grow spiritually as their knowledge of God increases (2 Pet 1:3).

It is no wonder then that the Apostle Paul prayed that God would fill the believers with a knowledge of His will (Col 1:9). As God's people, we must continually study His Word in order to know more of Him and His will for our lives. The second epistle of Peter deals with some difficult and, in a sense, even frightening information. But we who know God through a knowledge of His Word will find peace and rest in all He has promised us.

In order to live a Christ-like life in a sinful wicked world, God has given us great promises of spiritual power. He has given us a new nature. Formerly, we were slaves to the corruption of the world through our own sinful desires. But having come to know Christ we are now new creations in Him (2 Cor 5:17). We no longer have to conform to the world but can have our minds renewed as we learn the things of God. We can think like the Lord concerning the world, its difficulties and temptations (Phil 2:5).

Because the Spirit of God lives in us, we are able to live in obedience to God. We can remain free from the entanglements of the world around us and the sorrow it brings (Rom 8:9). As we study the Scripture and learn more of the God of our salvation, we are better prepared to live for Him in these final days.

THOUGHT: How can I know God in a more intimate way?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the indwelling of Thy Holy Spirit, for then I am enabled to live in obedience to Thy Word.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

2 PETER 1:4

PSALM 1

*“Teach me good
judgment and knowledge...”*

HAVING ESCAPED THE CORRUPTION

Banish for ever all thought of indulging the flesh if you would live in the power of your risen Lord. It were ill that a man who is alive in Christ should dwell in the corruption of sin. *“Why seek ye the living among the dead?”* said the angel to Magdalene. Should the living dwell in the sepulchre? Should divine life be immured in the charnel house of fleshly lust? How can we partake of the cup of the Lord and yet drink the cup of Belial? Surely, believer, from open lusts and sins you are delivered: have you also escaped from the more secret and delusive lime-twigs of the Satanic fowler? Have you come forth from the lust of pride? Have you escaped from slothfulness? Have you clean escaped from carnal security? Are you seeking day by day to live above worldliness, the pride of life, and the ensnaring vice of avarice? Remember, it is for this that you have been enriched with the treasures of God. If you be indeed the chosen of God, and beloved by Him, do not suffer all the lavish treasure of grace to be wasted upon you. Follow after holiness; it is the Christian’s crown and glory. An unholy church! it is useless to the world, and of no esteem among men. It is an abomination, hell’s laughter, heaven’s abhorrence. The worst evils which have ever come upon the world have been brought upon her by an unholy church. O Christian, the vows of God are upon you. You are God’s priest: act as such. You are God’s king: reign over your lusts. You are God’s chosen: do not associate with Belial. Heaven is your portion: live like a heavenly spirit, so shall you prove that you have true faith in Jesus, for there cannot be faith in the heart unless there be holiness in the life.

“Lord, I desire to live as one
Who bears a blood-bought name,
As one who fears but grieving Thee,
And knows no other shame.”

(C.H. Spurgeon)

THOUGHT: Am I living like a child of God? Or a child of the devil?

PRAYER: Father, forgive my waywardness. I return to Thee as the prodigal son returns to his loving and all-forgiving father.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

2 PETER 1:5-9

PSALM 119:57-64

*“...I have believed
thy commandments.”*

ADD TO YOUR FAITH

The basis of our entire relationship with God is faith. By faith in Jesus Christ, we are justified and have peace with God (Rom 5:1). Scripture challenges us to build upon our faith that which is of real spiritual value (James 2:18). We must do this with all diligence (2 Pet 1:5).

2 Peter 1:5-7 gives a list of qualities that must be part of every Christian life. Notable is the need for a knowledge of the Scripture. Without the lamp of God's Word, the Christian cannot see through the maze of sin and entrapment which fill this world (Ps 119:105).

Temperance, that is self-control, is a basic characteristic of a Christ-like life. Self-control comes as we submit our own feelings and desires to the power and control of the Holy Spirit. It has been well said that Christians who lose their tempers also lose their testimonies.

Biblical patience means enduring in the face of turmoil and temptations. It is standing fast in the faith when others seem to fall by the way. The Scripture closely ties the Christian virtue of patience with that of suffering. Job is held up as a good example of patience, as were the prophets who faithfully spoke for the Lord (James 5:10-11). It is when we go through suffering for the Lord that our patience is built up and we learn to stand firm in the faith (Rom 5:3; James 1:3).

If these qualities are continually increasing in our lives, then we will have a proper Christian testimony (2 Pet 1:8). But if we are not growing in these things, we are living as if God had not saved us from sin (2 Pet 1:9). We must continually exhibit the truth that through faith in Christ we are dead to sin and alive unto God. We do this by refusing to allow sin to control us, and by exhibiting, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christian qualities.

THOUGHT: Can I name five qualities that every Christian life must show?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy assurance that Thou wilt teach me patience that I may stand firm.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

2 PETER 1:10-11

PSALM 37:1-9

*“Before I was afflicted I went astray:
but now have I kept thy word.”*

AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE

The preceding verse speaks of the sad state of believers who live as if they had not been saved from sin. Turning now to faithful Christians, the Apostle showed his love and affection by calling them brethren. He then gave a strong challenge concerning the Christian life. We must constantly remember that God has called us by His grace not only to salvation but also to a life of holiness (Eph 2:8-10).

While salvation is by God’s grace alone, the good works that follow are proof that we have been saved. Nowhere in the Scripture is the idea ever presented that, having been saved by grace, the Christian can continue to live in sin. But always we receive the strong challenge to live a holy life as evidence of our freedom from sin (Rom 6:1-2).

If we follow after holiness and obedience we will never fall into the snare of the Devil (1 Tim 3:7). Our salvation is not in question here. That is in the hands of God and therefore sure. But Christian living is the responsibility of God’s people. If we do not follow after the things of the Spirit, we will suffer loss in that day when we stand before the Lord (1 Cor 3:15).

As we spend our time on earth endeavouring to grow spiritually and obeying the Lord, we have a glorious hope awaiting us. A grand entrance into heaven awaits the faithful servant of God. Theirs will not be the fearful *“saved, yet so as by fire”* of the slothful Christian who will *“suffer loss”* (1 Cor 3:15). But instead, they will receive an abundant entrance into God’s eternal kingdom. To hear the Lord say, *“well done,”* and with this to enter into all of the eternal joys purchased at Calvary will be the reward of those who faithfully live for God while here on earth (Matt 25:21).

THOUGHT: What is good evidence of my freedom from sin?

PRAYER: Keep me obeying Thee, Father, that Satan’s snare may be kept away from me.

REMEMBER THE TRUTH

The writers of Scripture often remind us of truth we already know. Peter saw it as the solemn duty of the teacher to remind believers of Biblical truths (2 Pet 1:12). Jude spoke of putting believers "*in remembrance*" of what they "*once knew*" (Jude 1:5), that is to say, knew already. There is a need to continually be stirred up by being reminded of the teachings of God's Word (2 Pet 1:13).

Like all great teachers of the Word, Peter was concerned that the church might leave the truth. Paul spoke to the Ephesians about this same concern. He knew that men, like ferocious wolves, would attack the flock of God; they were not strangers from without, but those who would sneak in unawares, men from among themselves. Paul pleaded with the church to "*watch*," and to remember what he had taught them (Acts 20:29-31).

If the church does not continually give "*earnest heed*" to the truth committed to it, these truths will slip away (Heb 2:1). The church will become apostate and there will be no escape from the penalty of sin (Heb 2:3). How sad to have known the truth and, because of indifference, fail to pass it on to our progeny. One can drive through the beautiful countryside of New England in the United States and see the tall steeples of hundreds of old churches. They stand silent, their testimony muted, the heresy of universalism their only standard. Yet these very churches were built by great Christians of another day. But they let the truth slip, they failed to remind themselves of that which they already knew. Now their progeny lives prosperous, proud and self-satisfied, but lost for all eternity.

So it could be of our descendants as well if we do not remember the truth and defend the Faith delivered to us so long ago.

THOUGHT: What are the writers of Scripture reminding me of today?

PRAYER: Father, may I earnestly heed Thy Truth lest it slips away.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

2 PETER 1:15-18

PSALM 44:1-9

*“The proud have forged
a lie against me...”*

EYE WITNESSES

It was the desire of Peter to see that the Church had a record of his testimony after his death (2 Pet 1:15). The Holy Spirit fulfilled this desire by inspiring him and other Apostles to write the New Testament. They had much to tell the Church. They had been eyewitnesses of the Lord's actions. Peter, on the Mount of Transfiguration, had seen the Lord in His glory (2 Pet 1:16). He had actually heard the voice of God the Father from heaven (2 Pet 1:17-18).

And so the Bible is different from the many other religious books that have come and gone. The books of the Egyptian gods now gather dust in museums, their fables unheeded, their myths forgotten. The Mormons follow a book obviously copied, at least in part, from one such book. But the Holy Scripture was written by men who, with their own eyes, had seen the truth of which they wrote. The Apostle John spoke of seeing, experiencing, and handling the truth as it was revealed by Christ (1 John 1:1). It was that which the Apostles had seen concerning salvation that they wrote about (1 John 4:14).

Some say the Bible is a good book but the facts are not always straight. The disciples, they say, hoped so much that Jesus would live again that they really imagined that He did. But the writers of the New Testament claim consistently that they saw with their own eyes the entire ministry of Christ, including His death, resurrection and ascension. If the New Testament's witness concerning Christ is not true, then by their own words the Apostles are not good men but liars and frauds (1 Cor 15:15). John finished his Gospel by writing these words: *“This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true”* (John 21:24). The Holy Scripture was written by eyewitnesses to the ministry and majesty of the Lord that we, His people, might follow Him in truth.

THOUGHT: What was the basis of the Apostle's claim that their writings concerning Christ were true?

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thee for Thy Word was written by eyewitnesses of the Truth.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

2 PETER 1:19-21

PSALM 119:33-40

*“...I will keep thy precepts
with my whole heart.”*

A MORE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY

Peter had just finished relating the fact that he had been an eyewitness to the ministry of our Lord. He had seen Christ glorified and heard the voice of God the Father in the Mount of Transfiguration. These were blessed experiences that would not be entered into by his hearers. Lest there be some sense of disappointment at having missed out on these things, the Apostle reminded us of a tremendous truth. We have a more sure word of prophecy. With the passing of time, the clarity and meaning of experiences may fade or become confused in our memories. But the Word of the unchanging God remains constant (2 Pet 1:19).

In these days of religious confusion and change, it is a good thing to heed the message of the unchanging Scripture. Only God's Word gives light in this darkened world. There is no other way for God's people to know about Him and His commands for their lives (Ps 119:130). We must follow the teachings of the Scripture until that great and final day when Jesus returns. The time of the Lord's return is often referred to as the dawning of a new day after the night of sin's darkness (Rom 13:12).

As men drift from the truth of God, how important it is to hold fast to His Word. The theologies and philosophies of men come and go. New ideas replace old, only to be discarded as the sinful minds of men devise new, more acceptable ideas about God and man (Rom 1:21-23).

The Holy Scripture is different from all other writings. It is not from the mind of men, not even holy men. But these holy men spoke only as the Holy Spirit moved them to do so. The Scripture is not men's ideas about God, but God's revelation of Himself to men. The Word, miraculously preserved for the Church, is our light. Only in following its truth can we live in obedience to the God of our salvation.

THOUGHT: What makes the Scripture different from other writings?

PRAYER: I am so blessed to have Thy Word, the Word of the unchanging God that remains forever. I thank Thee, Father.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

2 PETER 2:1-3

DEUTERONOMY 13:1-11

*“Their heart is as fat as grease;
but I delight in thy law.”*

WOLVES AMONG THE SHEEP

The warning theme of Second Peter is now sounded. We must study and obey the Scripture which is God’s revealed truth because “*perilous times*” are coming (2 Tim 3:1). These times will be characterised by increased religious activity which will not follow Bible truth, but which will instead lead men to “*depart from the faith*” (1 Tim 4:1).

We are reminded that in Old Testament times false prophets rose up among God’s people. They were not the hated, godless Canaanites, or Philistines. They were Israelites. These men grew up having heard the truth. But they not only rejected it, they also deliberately tried to destroy it.

In the same way, there will be such men in the church of Jesus Christ. They will be men known in the church who had learned the truth and had fellowshiped with God’s people (2 Pet 2:1). Like the heretics of old, they will not just reject the truth, but they will set out to destroy the faith. They will use their influence within the church to teach heresy, attempting to lead people from the truth of the Holy Scripture. They will even go so far as to deny the Lord who died to offer them eternal salvation.

As the end draws near, many will follow these false teachers. Having rejected the truth, they will be lovers of themselves and become involved in great sin. Their actions will cause the true faith to be ridiculed and held in disrepute (2 Pet 2:2). Yet their conscience will be so hardened that they will feel no shame for their actions (1 Tim 4:2).

These wicked men think they are winning a great victory over those who know and love the truth. But their judgment is already prepared for them (2 Pet 2:3). In the meantime, we must be on our guard, studying and defending the faith against those who would destroy it.

THOUGHT: From what rather unexpected place will some false teachers come?

PRAYER: In such dangerous days, help me, Father, to take heed to Thy Word.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

2 PETER 2:4-9

PSALM 11

*“It is good for me
that I have been afflicted;
that I might learn thy statutes.”*

GOD WILL JUDGE

We have just been warned that wicked men will rise up in the church and lead people away from the truth. As we look around us today, there seem to be more churchmen speaking against the truth than for it. Leaders of major denominations and the World Council of Churches openly and unashamedly deny every major tenet of the Christian Faith. As prophesied in Scripture, they replace the truth with man-made philosophies and objectives. As we endeavour to fight against these trends, we often feel overwhelmed by the wickedness and apostasy around us.

But the Holy Spirit reminds us that God is still on the throne. Throughout history He has punished evil doers who sought to destroy His truth. The rebellious angels were not spared but even at this moment are awaiting judgment (2 Pet 2:4). In Noah's day, the entire world was destroyed because of its wickedness and rebellion against God's message of righteousness (Gen 6:12-13). The great cities of Sodom and Gomorrah felt God's wrath against sin when the fires of judgment poured down upon them (Gen 19:24-25). This destruction was brought about to make an example for those who would consider following the same wickedness (2 Pet 2:6). How shocking to hear that the same sins practised in those two wicked cities are openly condoned today by leaders in many large church denominations.

Even as Lot was surrounded with wickedness, so we feel ourselves inundated by a flood of evil brought about by men who deny the truth. But God not only will punish those wicked men, He will also deliver those who belong to Him (2 Pet 2:8-9; Ps 34:17). As we faithfully follow the truth, we can be sure that God's judgment will not only fall on the wicked but that, in His mercy, those who belong to Him will be sustained and given final vindication.

THOUGHT: With what do liberal churchmen replace the Truth of the Scripture?

PRAYER: Father, Thou knowest how to deliver Thy people from wickedness. How I must trust in Thee.

ARROGANT MEN

The Scripture continues with a description of those evil men who rejected the Gospel and endeavoured to lead God's people away from the truth. Of all those reserved for final condemnation, these false teachers were especially singled out. They despised not only the authority of the church, but also the very Lord of all creation (2 Pet 2:10). Jude described the men of Sodom and Gomorrah in the same manner (Jude 7-9). Rebelling against the Word of God, these men eventually became slaves to the most twisted sins. Such false teachers had no respect for anyone or anything. Even angels, far more powerful beings than mere men, show a respect that these men do not know (2 Pet 2:11).

Although arising from within the church, these teachers were so utterly lacking in faith that they blasphemed anything they did not understand. We must remember that God does not choose to reveal all knowledge. Some things are, in His perfect plan, kept secret (Deut 29:29). The date of the Lord's return is one of these secret things. The false teachers were numbered among those who ridiculed the Lord's return (2 Pet 3:3-4). We were shocked to read a book some time ago written by a high official of the Church of England scoffing at the Lord's return as well as the virgin birth and other major Christian truths. We waited in vain for that once great church body to expel the heretic. But there was complete silence concerning the matter. Scripture warns the church against this type of false teacher.

According to the Scripture, such apostates are no better than wild animals led only by their senses. They bring great spiritual destruction, leading the unwary astray. But their judgment is already prepared and they will perish in their sins (2 Pet 2:12). The church must be constantly on its guard against any teacher who does not stand fully for the truth as presented in the Holy Scriptures and as taught by the believing church down through the centuries.

THOUGHT: Name one Bible truth that is ridiculed by false teachers today.

PRAYER: Father, Thou always punishes evil, none can escape Thy wrath. May I be warned.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

2 PETER 2:13-14

PSALM 36

*“Thy hands have made me
and fashioned me...”*

SPOTS AND BLEMISHES

The Lord Jesus was a sacrifice without spot or blemish. That is to say, He was sinless and had no shortcomings. He was the perfect sacrifice made to save His people from sin to enable them to live a life of purity. Such a life testifies of God’s righteousness to the world (Eph 5:27).

However, within the church are false teachers whose character is just the opposite of the Lord’s. Scripture pictures them as being spots and blemishes among God’s people (2 Pet 2:13; Jude 12). These wicked men are without shame and perform their godless works where all can see. They remain within the church, while they brazenly teach false doctrines and encourage gross sinfulness (2 Pet 2:13).

Having rejected God’s truth, these false teachers become such slaves to sin that they cannot even rest from their immoralities (2 Pet 2:14). As we look around us today, we are amazed at churchmen who advocate “free-love,” “homosexuality,” and other unthinkable sins which are strongly condemned in the Scripture. Yet Peter warned us that such men would be found within the church organisations.

They will see it as a part of their work to beguile “*unstable souls*” (2 Pet 2:14). Those who are not well grounded in the Scripture, those who have just recently heard the truth, or those believers entangled in the world, become their prey. They are greedy men, coveting positions of leadership, fame, and money. They use their church positions to find entrance to the ruling circles of this sinful world.

Scripture gives strong instructions to God’s people as to how we must deal with men such as those described here. They are to be marked and no one is to fellowship with them. Despite their worldly prestige and talents, they serve only themselves and not the Lord (Rom 16:17-18). In these final days, let us be careful of those who despoil God’s flock and lead them away from the truth.

THOUGHT: What eventually enslaves false teachers?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be alert and to mark those who would lead believers astray.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 18

2 PETER 2:15-16

PSALM 49:1-12

*"...give me understanding, that I
may learn thy commandments."*

THE MEN OF BALAAM

Peter continued teaching a most unpleasant subject. Men would arise from within the organised church who would not believe the truth. They would deliberately attempt to lead people astray, enticing the unwary into those sinful practices forbidden in the Scripture (2 Pet 2:14). Surely we see such men around us today. Peter informed us that these men were accursed of God (2 Pet 2:14).

Having known the truth, these false teachers deliberately reject it. Throughout their careers they pervert the right ways of the Lord (Acts 13:10). We should not be amazed to find church men fighting against any display of the Christian faith. It was members of the World Council of Churches who spoke against having a Christian display at Christmas time in the town square of a New England village. It is church men who insisted on so-called "rights for homosexuals" which will allow them to teach little children that their perverted lifestyle, so strongly condemned in Scripture, is proper.

Peter explained that having left the right way they had followed the ways of the false prophet Balaam. Two characteristics of Balaam were his greed and the fact that his teaching led the people of God into immorality (Num 22:7; 25:1-3).

False teachers often use their abilities of speech and persuasion to convince those who are unlearned in the Scripture. People are easily misled by such men. Yet Peter reminded us that God used a lowly beast of burden to rebuke the false prophet of old (2 Pet 2:16). In light of this we should not be afraid to allow God to use us to rebuke those who would despoil the church today. For too long the majority of God's people have remained silent in the face of false teaching. It is the work not only of church leaders but also of all Christians to refute those who teach error (Titus 1:9). Someday when the Lord returns, He will judge these men (Jude 15). As we wait for His return, let us go courageously about the Father's business.

THOUGHT: What are two characteristics of Balaam?

PRAYER: Father, help me to boldly rebuke the false teachers.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

2 PETER 2:17-18

PSALM 37:27-40

“...I have hoped in thy word.”

EMPTY WELLS

Only through a knowledge of the Word of God can we live the holy lives to which we have been called. Jesus noted that the learned Sadducees of His day were unable to understand the truth because they did not know the Scripture. It is only in the Scripture that we find God's revelation of Himself and the truth concerning spiritual things. For this reason, the teachers of the church are challenged to preach God's Word and all believers are to study it (2 Tim 2:15).

Peter continued now with a description of false teachers in the church. Since they deny the truth of God's Word, they were like wells without water (2 Pet 2:17). Their high-sounding words and appeals to human intellect and feelings came from hearts filled with pride (2 Pet 2:18). Their words were empty of any spiritual value or truth. These false teachers were most apt to take new or untaught believers into error. In the early church, such men taught that the grace of God was licence to sin. Today, they go a step further and teach that there is no such thing as sin! How sad when these who have just heard the Gospel are taught by such false teachers and miss the truth of God's call to holiness. We need to remind ourselves how important it is to fellowship in churches where such false teachers are not tolerated, lest we be guilty of leading young Christians into the care of such dangerous men as described here.

Severe judgment is waiting for those men in that final day. In the meanwhile, we must continue to be on our guard against those teaching error. Churches are responsible to mark such men and have nothing to do with them (Rom 16:17-18). And if a church organisation tolerates false teachers in their midst, true believers must separate themselves from such a group or else they will be partakers in their sin (2 Cor 6:17).

THOUGHT: Why are teachers in the church challenged to preach God's Word?

PRAYER: Father, may I be alert to darkness and have no fellowship with it.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

2 PETER 2:19-22

PSALM 52

*“I know, O LORD,
that thy judgments are right...”*

SERVANTS OF CORRUPTION

Although not written from a Christian perspective, the book entitled, *The Myth of Sexual Freedom*, does unwittingly acknowledge a biblical truth. People who practise sin may think of themselves as being free, but they are not. Having rejected biblical moral restraints, they have created for themselves societies enslaved by immorality, drug addiction, and every kind of wickedness. The truth of Peter’s writings is brought shockingly into focus as we realise that many of those advocating such wickedness in the name of moral freedom are “men of the church.”

These are men who have had opportunity to know the truth. Some grew up in fundamental churches and, as young men, they sat at the feet of great teachers of the Word. What a horrible state, to have known the truth, and then to reject God’s freedom for slavery to sin.

We are reminded of Cain, who knew what it meant to walk in the very presence of God and His people. Yet he turned and walked away, never having believed. He remained a man marked forever by his sin. Cain’s only sorrow was that his penalty was very severe. He felt no remorse over the lost fellowship with his Creator.

False teachers follow in the footsteps of Cain. They leave the fellowship of true believers to teach false doctrines and ridicule the faith. Often, they continue to carry the title “Reverend” or “Pastor” but they have no relationship with Christ (Matt 7:21-23). Although these men knew the truth and the joy of Christian fellowship, they exercise no faith in Christ for salvation. Their departure from the truth and from fellowship with true believers is evidence that they never believed (1 John 2:18-19). So they returned to the horror of the sin-cursed world having left behind God’s offer of the freedom through faith in Christ. Having rejected the Gospel of salvation, there is no hope left for them.

THOUGHT: Modern happenings bring Peter’s writings clearly into focus.

PRAYER: Father, may I embrace Bible truth and not reject it.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

2 PETER 3:1-2

PSALM 56

“...*thou in faithfulness
hast afflicted me.*”

STIR UP YOUR MINDS

Peter was deeply concerned that God’s people might forget the truth, especially concerning the last days. He again stated that the purpose in writing this second epistle was to “*stir up*” our minds (2 Pet 3:1). It is important to remember that there will arise in the church men who will endeavour to lead the flock astray.

With this danger in view, we find many warnings concerning false prophets and teachers throughout the Scripture. The prophets of old were one in warning against non-biblical teachers and their practices. They challenged God’s people to uproot and drive from their midst all such heretics. Jesus spoke of the false Christs and prophets which would arise to attempt to confuse the church in the latter days.

Despite all the warnings, the people of God have generally been slow to act against false teachers. Even today the church is filled with a spirit of toleration. There seems to be little or no awareness of God’s warning against such complacency.

False teachers bring great danger to the church. Not the least of these dangers is the leading astray of those who are untaught in the Scripture. False teachers in Bible colleges and seminaries lie in wait to convince impressionable young people that it is not “intellectually honest” to see the Scripture as inerrant or God’s truth as absolute.

In these difficult days it is important to allow the Holy Scripture to “*stir up*” our minds and build up our courage to do that which is right. Unity which overlooks the false teachers in our midst is not Christian. Such action will lead to the shipwreck of many souls. May the Lord stir us up to take a stand against those who would destroy the testimony of the church and lead astray those for whom Jesus died.

THOUGHT: Of what danger was the Apostle Peter warning in this passage?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou impress on every one of us that unity which overlooks false teachers in our midst is not Christian unity.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

2 PETER 3:3-4

PSALM 71:1-14

*“Let, I pray thee,
thy merciful kindness
be for my comfort...”*

SCOFFERS ARE COMING

In the final days of this age there will be much religious activity. Men will have a *“form of godliness”* but deny its power (2 Tim 3:5). Those who follow religion without the truth of God have nothing of spiritual value. As a result, they will become scoffers of the truth (2 Pet 3:3). Jude refers to these unbelievers of the last times as mockers. Certainly, as we have already noted, we see such a situation today. Often those leading movements against the Bible are theologians and church officials. Because these men are proud of their intellectual attainments and sure that man alone is captain of his own fate, they cannot admit to an all-powerful God who alone controls their eternal destiny. Thinking that man is sufficient in himself, these false teachers deny there is a coming judgment where man will have to give an account to his Maker.

Rejecting the truth of God, they form their own ideas concerning spiritual matters and ridicule all who have faith in the Gospel. The most ridiculed tenet of the Christian faith is the Second Coming of the Lord. This *“blessed hope”* (Titus 2:13) of the Christian spells eternal doom for the unbeliever. The scoffers deny the Second Coming on the basis that no major cataclysm has taken place during man’s history and they therefore expect none now. They see the world as continuing on in the same direction. They imagine progress toward eternal peace and prosperity despite the reality of continual war and suffering.

Such false teachers and scoffers are signs of the last times. We must be ever mindful of these teachings of the Scripture concerning them. The Lord has said, *“Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me...”* (Rev 22:12). Despite the scoffers’ protests, the Lord’s return and eternal judgment are sure. Let us be bold enough to proclaim this truth in the face of those who would ridicule the Gospel in these final days.

THOUGHT: What is one of the signs of the last times?

PRAYER: Father, Thy Word has warned of *“evil workers”* (Phil 3:2), may I heed Thy warning.

WILLINGLY IGNORANT

In today's text, the Apostle continued to discuss those who scoff at the truth of the Scripture especially in regard to the return of the Lord and the coming judgment. Their argument against the Lord's return showed their ignorance of sacred history. Nothing ever changes, the scoffers claim. There are no supernatural acts, no judgments from God. Man simply continues on in his own way.

Mankind has constantly refused God's revelation of Himself and His work. Instead, he has chosen to be spiritually ignorant (Rom 1:18-20). Peter pointed out that this was also true of these scoffers. Their claim that nothing changes from its normal pattern is wrong. God has intervened in the affairs of man. First, He created all things by the power of His word (2 Pet 3:5; Gen 1:2-26). Then He brought judgment when men refused the message concerning righteousness and salvation. This is what happened during the days of Noah when God judged the earth with a flood (2 Pet 3:6).

The flood was not the final judgment. It was to serve as a warning to future generations that God punishes disobedience. God has continued to deal with sinful men, sending His prophets to preach the truth. His Word, with which the heavens and earth were once created, continues to maintain the creation until the day of final judgment.

As God's people suffer and their message is rejected and ridiculed, there is the constant reminder that God will bring all to account. Those who bring tribulation and suffering on God's church will pay the penalty of their unbelief. Men may scoff, but an eternal judgment is coming. The end result will be terrible. The unbelievers will be shut out forever from the presence of God (2 Pet 3:7; 2 Thess 1:6-9).

In light of this truth we, like Noah of old, must continue to share God's message of salvation and righteousness with the lost.

THOUGHT: In what way was the flood to serve future generations?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that whatever happens *“the foundation of God standeth sure”* (2 Tim 2:19).

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

2 PETER 3:8-9

PSALM 90:1-12

“...thy law is my delight.”

THE LONGSUFFERING LORD

The Psalmist constantly made a contrast between man's limited time and God's eternity. Man is like grass, his life lasting a short time then withering away (Ps 103:15-16). God, on the other hand, is eternal, therefore His mercy and grace never fail.

In this portion, God's eternity is viewed in another way. Because God is eternal, He views time differently from man. Man's short life causes him to be constantly concerned with the pressure of time. But God's eternal existence gives time a different perspective. Thus, Peter quoted the Psalmist in saying that a day or a thousand years are the same to God, they are but a drop in eternity (2 Pet 3:8; Ps 90:4).

Because the Second Coming of Christ and the impending judgment have been so long delayed, man thinks that it will probably not take place. Unbelievers scoff at what they see as the failure of the prophets' message. The failure, however, is not with God but with unbelieving mankind. Without faith they cannot begin to understand the eternal God nor His love and concern for the lost.

While man scoffs, God in His mercy patiently waits. In loving kindness, the eternal Creator has placed the final judgment in the future in order to give sinful man an opportunity for salvation. In Noah's day, God showed the same mercy and longsuffering (1 Pet 3:20). But at the appointed time, the flood came and sin was judged. The Judge of all the earth takes no pleasure in the death of wicked men, but would have all to come to the truth (Ezek 18:23). So, He waits in mercy and grace. And while waiting, He appoints His people to preach the message of salvation and coming judgment, even as the prophets before them. The judgment is sure. The end is at hand. We must be about the Father's business.

THOUGHT: Why is the Second Coming not here yet?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy mercy, for it “*is from everlasting to everlasting upon them*” who fear Thee (Ps 103:17).

ALL BURNED UP

The final judgment is a subject seldom taught in churches these days. Yet the Scripture is filled with warnings concerning this coming event. The prophet Isaiah spoke of God's final judgment which would cause the normal functions of our solar system to cease (Isa 13:10-11). Micah also raised his voice concerning that terrible day (Mic 1:2-4).

During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus joined His voice with that of the prophets, warning against the coming judgment. This subject continued to be taught in the early church, as well as by great Christian teachers down through the years. The faithful evangelists of a few decades ago were ridiculed as preachers of "fire and brimstone," because of their constant warnings about the coming judgment of God. But such preaching served to turn many to Christ and brought many believers back to the paths of righteous living.

Today's church does not like to hear such old-fashioned preaching. Comfortable Christians do not show much interest in the consummation of this age. But the day is coming! Sad to say, even for some believers, it will be more like "*a thief in the night*" than a return of the Shepherd.

Peter reminded us of that great and terrible day of the Lord. Everything will be burned up. The horrible description of this verse sounds very much like the "super novas" described by astronomers: A time when a star such as our sun finally comes to the end of its life and destroys itself and all the planets which orbit around it.

Scripture tells us that with a tremendous noise and an all-consuming heat, the earth and all the works of man shall come to an end. We are reminded of the words of our Lord: "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*" Since the only thing of eternal value is God's revelation of Himself, we who know Him should build our lives on the eternal Word.

THOUGHT: Am I ready for the coming judgment?

PRAYER: Father, someday all the wealth of this world will be worthless. Let me live today for Thee.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

2 PETER 3:11-12

DANIEL 7:9-14

“...I will meditate
in thy precepts.”

LOOKING TOWARD JUDGMENT

For the Christian, thoughts of the Second Coming and the impending judgment are always coupled with God’s command to live righteously. The Apostle John reminded us how we are to live so as to have confidence at the Lord’s coming. How sad for the Christian who will feel shame when the loving Saviour comes. One of the evidences of a true belief in the Second Coming is a life of purity (1 John 2:28; 3:3).

The Lord, in His parables, often spoke of the servant waiting for his master’s return. The happy servant is that one found doing good when his master comes. It is obvious that those servants who do not act properly are not really expecting their master to return. As Christians we should be looking expectantly for our Lord (Titus 2:13).

As believers we live our lives against a backdrop of the coming destruction of this wicked world system (2 Pet 3:12). Since this is true, it should affect our outlook on life. Of what value are large holdings in a world that is soon to be utterly destroyed by God’s judgment? Of what value is a prestigious position in a world system that will soon pass away? In what way should we invest the years of our lives or how should we encourage and prepare our children to invest their years, if we truly believe the Lord will soon return?

The unfaithful servant will suffer great loss in that final day. To be “*saved... as by fire*” (1 Cor 3:15) will be the lot of those of God’s people who invest their lives in that which will be destroyed in the final judgment. As we look forward to the coming of the Lord, let us use our lives wisely. Let us invest our time, efforts and abilities in the things which have eternal value. Let us encourage our children to serve the Lord and prepare for His soon coming. Only in this way can we properly prepare ourselves and our family for the future.

THOUGHT: How should I live in light of the Lord’s soon return?

PRAYER: Father, let me lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

2 PETER 3:13-14

PSALM 99

*“Let my heart be sound
in thy statutes...”*

A NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

Throughout the Holy Scripture, God’s judgment against the wicked has been loudly proclaimed (Acts 3:22-23). However, for God’s people there has been the constant promise of a new home and the triumph of righteousness. This new home will be a wonderful place where there is no need for a sun, because there will be light from the glory of God our Saviour (Isa 60:19; Rev 21:23). It is according to this promise of the Scripture that we live each day looking forward to the new heaven and earth which God will prepare for His people (2 Pet 3:13). And as we look forward to the glory of eternity with the Lord, we know that by His grace we will be worthy to be with Him. *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”* we will be changed to be like Christ (1 Cor 15:52; 1 John 3:2).

Mockers and false teachers have no hope of eternity with God. As a result, they live as slaves to sin. Believing that there is no hereafter and no judgment, they live only for the present and their own desires (Jude 17-19; Luke 12:19).

Those who look forward to the Lord’s return must live differently. We need to build up our Christian strength and be in constant prayer. We must be deeply concerned with how Christ will find us when He comes. Peter encouraged us to be at peace in the Lord. Peace comes by being satisfied with the situation in which the Lord places us. When we no longer join in the worldly struggle for excessive wealth, prestige, and success, and when we put our main effort toward spiritual things, we have peace in our Lord (1 Tim 6:8-10). Even in these final days, as difficulties come upon the church, we who bear witness to God’s righteousness will have peace as we rest in Him (Heb 13:5).

It is with this spirit of contentment, and with this concern for spiritual gain, that we will be spotless at His coming (2 Pet 3:14).

THOUGHT: What is sinful man’s only hope?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for Thy gift of eternal life through faith in Thy Son Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

2 PETER 3:15-16

PSALM 101

*“My soul fainteth
for thy salvation...”*

TWISTING THE SCRIPTURE

False teachers have claimed that the delay of the Lord's return proves it to be an empty promise. But Peter repeated the message that God's longsuffering towards sinners is the reason for the delay in the Lord's return. Paul also spoke of God's mercy in holding back the consummation of this age to give sinners an opportunity to hear the Gospel (2 Pet 3:15; Rom 2:4).

We notice Peter's reference to the inspiration of Paul's writings. What he wrote was not his own wisdom but that which was given to him. The great value placed on the Holy Scripture by men of God is shown here in that Peter was familiar with the details of Paul's inspired writings.

For believers, the message concerning the Lord's return is a challenge to live for God. But for those who do not believe, the message is simply a point of ridicule and something to be disproved. Very early in the history of the church false teachers had begun to twist the Scripture. They made many other unfounded attacks by twisting Paul's inspired writings. Evidently in the area of the Second Coming this same twisting was encountered. Some had taught that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim 2:18). Such false teachers confused those who were weak in their knowledge of the Scripture. Now others had come in and were mocking the very idea of the Second Coming and the resurrection.

For a second time these false teachers are accused of rejecting anything they do not understand (2 Pet 3:16; 2:12). They do not understand that the God of all creation is too great to be completely understood by man (Rom 11:33). They reject the opportunity to come to a knowledge of God by faith. Instead of using Scripture to bring salvation, they misuse it and bring spiritual death to themselves and their followers. Let us, on the other hand, be found dwelling in the truths of God's Word.

THOUGHT: Why has the Lord not yet returned?

PRAYER: Father, may I be alert to false prophets among Thy people.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

2 PETER 3:17-18

PSALM 103:1-13

“...I hope in thy word.”

BE YE STEADFAST

The second epistle of Peter now comes to a close. Sometimes the words against false teachers in the church have been harsh and loud. But there is a reason for this clear denunciation of those who twist the Scripture. The believers must be warned against them. It is important that the church be prepared for these things before they come. To the informed Christian, it should neither seem strange nor shocking that men within the organised church teach things contrary to sound doctrine. Time and time again the Scripture has warned us against this very thing. And as we have seen, such false teachers have actually become powerful in some parts of the church.

No Christian is so strong that continual contact with false teachers will not affect him. So, the warning is again sounded, they shall also “*be led away*” (Luke 21:24). The clever appeal to human intellect and pride makes these false teachers a danger even to believers. For this reason, we must mark them and keep them away from our fellowship. We must in this way guard ourselves and the flock of God from those who would lead the church from the truth of the Gospel as delivered to the saints of old (2 Tim 1:13-14).

We must, however, do more than just warn and protect the church from false doctrine. We ourselves must grow in the faith, ever learning more of the Holy Scripture (2 Pet 3:18). The entire life of every believer must be lived aggressively for the Lord. When we speak, it should be those things which agree with the proper doctrine (Titus 2:1). We must be students of God’s Word in these final days (2 Tim 2:15). Only then will we be able to defend the faith and build up the saints. Let us remember that the Lord is coming soon and will give a commendation to those who faithfully do these things (Matt 25:21).

THOUGHT: Why must I beware of false teachers?

PRAYER: Father, “*the word of the Lord endureth for ever*” (1 Pet 1:25). May I treasure it and live according to it.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

2 PETER 3:18

PSALM 73:25-28

*“All thy commandments
are faithful ...”*

GROW IN GRACE

“*Grow in grace,*” not in one grace only, but in all grace. Grow in that root-grace: *faith*. Believe the promises more firmly than you have done. Let faith increase in fulness, constancy, simplicity. Grow also in *love*. Ask that your love may become extended, more intense, more practical, influencing every thought, word, and deed. Grow likewise in *humility*. Seek to lie very low, and know more of your own nothingness. As you grow *downward* in humility, seek also to grow *upward* – having nearer approaches to God in prayer and more intimate fellowship with Jesus. May God the Holy Spirit enable you to “*grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.*” He who grows not in the knowledge of Jesus, refuses to be blessed. To know Him is “*life eternal,*” and to advance in the knowledge of Him is to increase in happiness. He who does not long to know more of Christ, knows nothing of Him yet. Whoever hath sipped this wine will thirst for more, for although Christ doth satisfy, yet it is such a satisfaction, that the appetite is not cloyed, but whetted. If you know the love of Jesus – as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so will you pant after deeper draughts of His love. If you do not desire to know Him better, then you love Him not, for love always cries, “Nearer, nearer.” Absence from Christ is hell; but the presence of Jesus is heaven. Rest not then content without an increasing acquaintance with Jesus. Seek to know more of Him in His divine nature, in His human relationship, in His finished work, in His death, in His resurrection, in His present glorious intercession, and in His future royal advent. Abide hard by the Cross, and search the mystery of His wounds. An increase of love to Jesus, and a more perfect apprehension of His love to us is one of the best tests of growth in grace.

(C.H. Spurgeon)

THOUGHT: I must grow in faith and in humility.

PRAYER: Father, may I love Thee more and more with each passing day.
