

STUDIES IN II PETER

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- 1. A TITLE OF HONOR Based on II Pet. 1:1**

In the old days when people traveled in coaches the driver would charge three fares. The first class, second class, and third class. All passengers were placed in the same coach and those who paid the first class fare would often complain that there was no difference, and that they receive no better accommodations than those who paid less. The driver would urge them to be patient and they would soon see the difference. When the coach came to a steep hill the driver stopped and announced, "All first class passengers keep your seats; all second class passengers get out and walk; all third class passengers get out and push."

In the journey through life all people still fall into these same categories: The parasites, the passivites, and the pusherites. The tendency of our age is to think that the ideal is to be a first class parasite, but the Bible is clear from Genesis to Revelation that the goal of the believer, and true success, is to be a third class pusherite. Before the Disciples of Christ learned this they were eager to become first class passengers. They debated among themselves as to who was to be the greatest. James and John even asked Jesus outright for seats at His right and left hand in glory. Jesus at that point laid down a principle that made Christianity the most unique and effective movement under the sun. He said, as He pointed out the contrast of the world's values and His own, in Mark 10:42-45, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Jesus refused to be a first class passenger and a privileged parasite. He came to seek, to save, and to serve. The idea of service was dominant in the Old Testament, and the great prophecies of the coming Messiah portrayed Him as the suffering Servant. Israel was

chosen, not for privilege, but for service, and Jesus likewise called His disciples, not to be privileged characters, but to be servants. This is the greatest and highest title available to those in the kingdom of God. That is why you will find the Apostles proud to declare themselves to be servants of God. It was only a handful of men who gained the distinction of being Apostles, but it is of interest to note that when they listed their titles they put the title of servant before that of Apostle.

Paul begins his Epistle to the Romans, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle." He begins Titus, "Paul, a servant of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ." James begins his letter, "James a servant of God..." Jude begins, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ." Peter begins his second letter, "Simon Peter, a servant and Apostle of Jesus Christ." Servant was the title of honor, the title that even the Apostles chose to put before their unique office of Apostle. Jesus succeeded in teaching them that the way to true greatness is the way of the servant.

This was no easy lesson to communicate. Peter was the most stubborn student of all. You recall the night in the upper room when Jesus washed the disciple's feet? It was customary for a host to wash the dusty feet of guests before they ate, but apparently none of the disciples were going to stoop to this humble task. They sat down to eat with unwashed feet. Jesus, seeing that no one was going to perform this service, rose and laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, and proceeded to wash His disciples feet like a servant of the house. The others may have been shocked and surprised, but Peter was offended. He said to Jesus, "You shall never wash my feet." He was not going to be party to such indignity. He considered Jesus to be his Lord and not his servant. But when Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me," Peter yielded. Jesus said that He did this as an example of what they were to do and be. They were to be, above all

else, servants.

This concept was the key to their becoming the foundation on which the church could be built. The very essence of the Christian life is found in service. This is an idea that clashes, however, with the value system of the world, and the modern day church has tended to neglect this basic truth. The church has promoted leadership rather than servanthood, and has reaped the reward of reversing the values of Christ. Bishop Stephen Neill, deeply involved in recruiting youth for missions and the ministry, said, "To tell a man that he is called to be a leader, or that he is being trained to be a leader, is the best way of insuring his spiritual ruin, since in the Christian world ambition is more deadly than any other sin, and, if it is yielded to, makes a man unprofitable in the ministry."

It was not by leadership that the church turned the world upside down. It was by service, and the only way the church can regain its powerful influence in the world is by means of service. Not all Christians can be leaders, but all can be servants.

The purpose of all the gifts of the Spirit is to make great servants. Former President Dwight Eisenhower said, "The struggle between communism and freedom is a struggle of ideas. To win in such a battle our ideas must be better." The only ideas that can win this battle of ideas are the ideas of Christ, and the idea of servanthood is one of the key weapons for victory. This truth applies to all the conflicts of life. The winner will be the best servant. Joseph and Daniel were lead to high places of leadership in foreign lands because they were willing to be servants to those people.

E. Stanley Jones said, "That religion will hold the world which is willing to serve most and to become the servant of all." Only as the Christian concept of servanthood is practiced by Christians, and made the ideal of our society, can we hope to be victorious. Our ideas of government are based on the Biblical principle of service.

Leaders exist to serve the people. In Romans 13 Paul says three times that rulers are the servants of God. Servanthood is the primary virtue of the leaders in both the church and the state. On the other hand, the vice that corrupts both church and state is the power that demands and compels people to serve them. This is why Jesus told us to call no man master. We have one Master and that is Christ. He is the only one capable of being Lord with total power without using that power to oppress. When any man or group seeks to become master rather than servant, anti-christ is at work.

Probably the most outstanding example of a government that was toppled because it refused to be a servant, rather than a master, is that of Egypt when it oppressed the Jews. God sent Moses to the head of the government, to Pharaoh himself to plead for freedom. His hardness of heart led to the necessity of threats. One plague after another put the pressure on Pharaoh, but the economic loss was too great, and he would not let Israel go. It took the violence of the destruction of all the first born of Egypt to get Pharaoh to respond to the will of God. The principle here is clearly written in historical events. The government that oppresses rather than serves will certainly not endure, but will suffer the judgment of God.

It is the Christian duty to strive to keep the government of his nation as a servant. The truly great men in American history were great servants. The church has a great responsibility in teaching and in providing an environment in which people are trained to be servants. We can serve God, the world, our nation, and ourselves, all at the same time by practicing what Jesus taught. This involves meeting every need that we are capable of meeting. All men need Christ, therefore, soul-winning is the most essential and universal service we can perform. But nothing is so small that it will go unnoticed by God who scans the world for servants. Jesus said that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unrewarded. No service goes unnoticed by Him who is the Servant of all men.

Jesus is the only one who ever performed a great service for every human being.

**Service is our watchword, service for our King;
Service, fruitful service, daily ours to bring.
Service for the needy, service for the lost;
Self upon the altar, counting not the cost.
Service in the home-land, where'er sounds the call;
Sacrificial service, reaching unto all;
Service pure, exalted; loyal and unpriced;
Loving, loving channels, bearing forth the Christ.
Service o'er the ocean, serving not for gain;
Meeting every duty, be it toil or pain;
Service that is Christly, giving up to God
Every selfish motive; treading where Christ trod.**

Jesus spent His life in service. He went about teaching, preaching, and healing. Everywhere He went He met the needs of people, and in his acts of service He was teaching the importance of servanthood. At the wedding of Cana He performed His first miracle to meet the need of lack of wine. You recall that Mary said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." This is the very essence of service, for service like this makes us the instruments of God's will in the world. The servants could not make water into wine. Jesus never asks anyone to do what they cannot do. He asks them to fill the water pots with water, for that they could do. He asks them to dip out and carry to the steward of the feast, and this they could do. They probably felt foolish carrying water to the steward, but as good servants they took orders and did what Jesus told them. The result was they became partners with Jesus in a miracle.

This same principle is seen in the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus broke the bread and told his disciples to distribute it. He did not ask any miracle of them, but only some service in doing what

they could do. When they did what they could do, they became partners with Christ in doing a miracle. Do whatever He asks-that is the secret of success and power. All God wants from us is obedience. He will work in power through our service to accomplish His will. The world does not understand much of what we believe, but they cannot fail to understand service. This is the power that will convince and convict, for in service we become channels of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Without an outlet for service we become insulated and the power of the Holy Spirit will not flow through us. Electricity will only flow in when there is a way to flow out, and the Holy Spirit's power follows this same law. Psychiatrists are discovering that mental disorder is largely due to the lack of an outlet. People are miserable who turn their attention in on their own problems. A life devoted to concentration on one's self leads to depression and loneliness. But when a person concentrates on the needs of others and becomes a servant of those needs, he becomes more alert, happy, and positive. This outlet seems to open and inlet, and he becomes a channel of power.

James A. Magner in Mental Health In A Mad World says that the effect of taking an interest in others is not unlike that of a gambler at a horse race. It makes a great difference to him which horse wins, for he has an investment in the outcome. For the non-gambler who is not financially committed there may not be the slightest concern over which one wins. The comparison he admits is faulty, but it does illustrate the psychological benefits of directing our attention and service toward those outside ourselves. The servant is not only great in the eyes of God, and good for the nation and community, he is a happier person within himself.

The best symbol of the Christian life is that of an ox between an altar and a plow showing it to be ready for either service or

sacrifice. E. Stanley Jones in his book **Christ Of The Round Table** tells of a prominent Indian official who attended one of his evangelistic meetings. He listened to the testimonies of his fellow townsmen of how they have been saved by Christ, and had left their idols, and conquered their evil passions. He finally stood and said that he too was saved, but not by Christ, but by his own religion. He thought that closed the subject, but the evangelist said, "I am glad to know you too are saved. I invite you to join us as we go to the outcaste quarters of our village. We will take food and clothing and most of all our friendship for these poor brothers. We will be glad to have you come. The Brahman was very uncomfortable, for if the shadow of an outcaste fell on him he would be defiled. So he said, "I am saved. I still say I am saved. But I am not saved that far."

If one is not saved that far, one is not saved at all. We are not truly children of God until we can, like Peter and the other Apostles, be proud to claim the title of honor-servant of Jesus Christ. God forbid that we who profess to be Christians are ever too busy to serve Christ and be servants ready to meet the needs of those about us. It is Christians who are too busy to be servants who are in large measure responsible for the chaos of our contemporary world. The only hope for recovery is for Christians to once again aim for the highest by becoming active servants of Christ. God has given every Christian a chance to be great by being of service to others. All of us can earn the greatest title God bestows on men-Servant, A Title Of Honor.

2. THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH Based on II Peter 1:1

In 1781 Sir William Herschel, the English astronomer, discovered the planet Uranus. He plotted the course that this new

planet should follow, but for some mysterious reason Uranus did not follow the predicted orbit. Other astronomers checked his calculations and found no mistake. It was necessary for the scientists to take a leap of faith and believe that some unknown and unseen star was responsible for deflecting Uranus from its normal orbit. For 60 years speculation about this unseen body was developed.

One astronomer was so certain of its reality that he wrote in 1846, "We see it as Columbus saw America from the shores of Spain." By faith he saw the unseen, and that very year a German scientist named Galle gazing through a new telescope equipped with more powerful lenses saw for the first time with the eye of flesh, the planet Neptune, which was responsible for the movements of Uranus. There it was, visible to the eye of sense in the very spot that the eye of faith had said it must be for 60 years.

Faith is not a leap in the dark, but it is a leap in the direction toward which the light is shining. Faith follows the path of evidence, and then leaps out ahead of the evidence in the belief that the evidence will eventually catch up and support, and justify the leap of faith. Leslie Weatherhead defines this faith of the intellect as "An attitude of complete sincerity, and loyalty to the trend of all the available evidence, plus a leap in the direction of that trend."

Faith is the basis of all progress into the unknown. Faith adventures into the unknown and unseen believing that there is more to reality than is presently known. Faith is not opposed to reason, but it is faster. It runs ahead and lays hold on truths which reason is not yet capable of seeing. Reason travels by horse and buggy, while faith flies as fast as the speed of light-the light of God's Word and revelation. The man of faith is always ahead of his time because he is always living on the basis of truths that go beyond the best that reason and sight have developed.

This is the ideal that faith makes possible, but we need to be careful not to make faith everything, and put all of our resources into a foundation, and have nothing left with which to build. The servant and Apostle Peter make it clear that faith is the foundation of the Christian life. In verse 1 he addresses Christians as those who have obtained like precious faith. In verse 5 where he begins the climb up the ladder of Christian character and effectiveness, he starts with faith, and says add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge etc. We see that faith is the foundation, and is absolutely essential as a basis from which to begin the climb, but it is not enough in itself for the full Christian experience.

We are saved by faith alone, and none of these additions are necessary for salvation. Faith alone can receive the free gift of God's grace, but no Christian can be content with being saved alone. Salvation is just the start of what God has for us. Too often people are content to stop at the start. There is a life to be lived for the glory of Him who saved us. We are to avoid barrenness and unfruitfulness, and the danger of falling by diligently adding to the foundation of faith all of these other values that Peter lists. Consider an airport as an illustration of the Christian life. The first thing you need is a runway. This is the foundation of an airport. It is to the airport what faith is to the Christian life. Everything else is just to increase the usefulness of an airport. If you build hangars, a tower, and a restaurant, but have no runway, you do not have an airport. The runway is the foundation, and all else must be built around it and added to it.

Therefore, before we can take any flights into the atmosphere of Christian experience we have to have the runway of faith, for it alone is the only adequate launching pad for adventurous aviation into the skies of God's blessings. Our runway of faith has already been laid by Jesus Christ, but as every good pilot learns all he can about the runway, so as wise Christians we should learn all we can

about the runway of faith. It is the foundation from which all our flights to the higher Christian life must be launched. Peter tells us two interesting and valuable things about faith in this first verse. The first is-

I. THE EQUALITY OF FAITH.

The Greek word for like precious means equal honor. This is the only place the word is used in the New Testament, but outside of the New Testament the word is used to describe the equality of men in terms of political privileges. Josephus the Jewish historian says that the Jews of Antioch were made equal in honor and privilege with the Gentiles who lived there. He used this same word that Peter uses here. Peter is writing to the Gentiles, and he says they have equal standing with the Jews before God by faith. In Acts 11:17 Peter describes his reaction to God's giving the Gentiles equality with the Jews by giving them the same the gift of faith. He writes, "For as much then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ: What was I, that I could withstand God?"

Peter is now writing to Gentile Christians, and he emphasizes the equality of faith. Faith is a runway that all have the equal privilege of using. God is no respecter of persons. He gives the gift of faith freely to all who receive His Son as Savior. Most new translations bring out the equality of faith that Peter refers to here. The RSV has it, "To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours." The NEB has it, "To those who share our faith and enjoy equal privilege with ourselves." And the Amplified has it, "To those who have obtained and equal privilege of like precious faith with ourselves."

God is the author of equality where it really counts. There are numerous inequalities among men in temporal matters, but all are

free to receive the gift of faith. All saved people are equal in the faith that Peter refers to, for it is saving faith, which is not of man, but the gift of God. All who receive it do so equally. There is no one who is more or less saved than another. All who are saved are equally saved. There are degrees of sanctifying faith, but not saving faith. This means all pilots in the realm of redemption have the same solid and precious runway. We all launch from the same foundation which is a gift of God. The second thing we see is-

II. THE EXCELLENCE OF FAITH.

It is not only a runway we can all use equally, it is in excellent condition. It is precious says Peter. It is of great value and to be highly treasured. Peter loved the word precious. He used it more than all the rest of the New Testament writers put together. In his first letter he calls the trial of our faith more precious than gold that perishes. He refers to the precious blood of Christ, and to Christ as the living stone chosen of God and precious. He says unto you which believe He, that is Christ, is precious. Now in this chapter in the first 4 verses he refers to precious faith, and to precious promises.

It is not hard to tell what Peter valued most in life. His value system was not materialistic at all, for all of the things he counted as precious revolved around Jesus. Faith was one of these precious values that all believers had in common, and so all believers were equally rich in the values that really matter. Faith is precious for at least two good reasons that the Bible stresses. It is precious because it is-

1. POWERFUL.

It is powerful first of all to save. "He that believes shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned." There is no power but the power of faith that can save. It alone makes the difference

between heaven and hell. Faith is also the power that enables the believer to persevere and overcome. "Faith is the victory that overcomes the world." Faith provides the energy necessary to endure to the end.

In September of 1949 a 19 year old Navy seaman by the name of William Toles of Rochester, Michigan was washed overboard from his carrier without a lifejacket. It was 4 in the morning, and he was far out to sea off the coast of Africa. No one saw him, and he knew his chances of being rescued were almost nil. Doubt and despair would have led to drowning, but he had the resource of faith. He kicked off his dungarees; tied knots in the legs, and used the seat to trap air in the legs to inflate them. He fashioned his own lifejacket, and then he prayed continually, "Please God-let me be rescued."

He gained such good control of his fears that he even tried to sleep by resting his head against the inflated leg of his dungarees, but the waves kept slapping him awake. By morning he was sick from the waves and from swallowing too much water, but he kept praying assured he would be found. At three in the afternoon he was spotted by sailors on an American Export Lines freighter and was rescued. The captain of the freighter could not explain what compelled him to switch the course of his ship from its usual course, which would have taken him several hundred miles away from the spot where Bill Toles was asking for God's help. Thousands of such experiences have happened to believers. The unbeliever will say it is coincidence, but the believer will recognize it as the power of faith which makes it so precious. To say that faith is powerful is an understatement. It is like saying that the H-bomb is really dynamite. Faith is the power that can rescue from the literal sea and from the sea of sin. It is also precious because it is-

2. PERMANENT.

Peter said in his previous letter that it is not like gold which perishes, but is everlasting and indestructible. It is this quality that makes it so precious. Quality makes a great difference in value. A diamond is carbon in a unique and permanent state which gives it a quality that makes it precious. Quantity cannot match it. What bride would be satisfied if her groom tried to please her with quantity, and brought her ten tons of coal rather than a diamond ring? She would not consider the coal precious, but she would the ring. The Christian faith is the diamond amidst the tons of the coal of natural faith.

Every person has some measure of natural faith. We trust in men, money, and machines, all of which is necessary, but none of which gives permanent assurance and security. Only Christian faith can give this, for it alone is based on the eternal righteousness of Christ. Christ is the foundation of the foundation of faith. Even a runway needs to have a foundation, and faith has its foundation in the righteousness of Christ says Peter.

We have only looked at a couple of the great values of faith. It's equality and excellence makes it precious. May God grant us the wisdom to exercise this precious gift, and experience in the present the unseen but certain victories of the future. Robert and Mary Moffat worked and prayed for 10 years in the Bechuana Mission of Africa without a convert. Mary was not limited to the dark present, however, for she had faith in the promise of God, and she said, "We may not live to see it, but as surely as tomorrow's sun will rise, the awakening will come."

Friends urged them to give it up, but she asked that a communion set be sent to them. This was fantastic faith or folly. Only the future could determine which. When the future spoke it spoke for faith. In 1829 a great spiritual awakening swept the mission. Prayer and Christian hymns filled the air, and for the first

time the Lord's table was prepared. The communion set that Mary ordered three years previous had just arrived the day before. If this was an isolated case we would not make much of it, but it happens all the time in Christian history because of believers who build their lives on the foundation of faith.

3. MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF MARVELOUS GRACE 1:2

A snowstorm made it impossible for a guess speaker to get to the church where he was to preach. Therefore, a local man was asked to come in as a substitute. The speaker began by explaining the meaning of substitute. If you break a window he said, and then place a cardboard there instead--that is a substitute. After his sermon, a woman came up to him, shook his hand and wishing to compliment him said, "You are no substitute. You are a real pane." Unfortunately, verbal communication does not reveal how a word is spelled, and so, if he heard "pain" rather than "pane" as she intended, he would have received a message just the opposite of what she meant to convey. We must constantly be aware of the complications of language if we hope to effectively communicate.

Words can be alike and yet be very different depending on the context. If I say you have good vision, or you have good sight, these words are very close in meaning. But if I say my daughter is a vision, and yours is a sight, I am in trouble, for some how they do not remain synonymous in this context.

When we come to the word grace, or charis in the Greek, we are dealing with one word that can mean opposite things depending upon the context. We miss the complexity of this word because in our English translations there are 11 different English words used to

translate this one Greek word. We are not even aware most often that charis is being used. The root idea of the word is that which is pleasing, or which gives pleasure. From there it develops numerous connections with various kinds of pleasure and favor. It's meaning becomes so diverse that it is hard to see how the same word can be used for so many things, and often with no apparent connection.

Our English word grace has followed the same pattern in a small way. You have a 30 day grace period on your insurance policy. This fits the idea of unmerited favor. They carry you for 30 days even though you don't deserve it, because you have not paid your premium. But what has this got to do with saying grace before you eat? You do not say unmerited favor, but you say thanks, which is your expression of favor to God. But if you say the swan has grace, you do not mean it has unmerited favor, or that it has thanks. You mean it has natural elegance, beauty of line and movement. It makes a favorable impression on us by its grace. We haven't begun to list all the meanings this word can have, but it is clear from these few examples, that the word has to be constantly redefined according to the context.

A man living on the boarder of Minnesota and Wisconsin was puzzled for years as to which state he actually lived in. Finally he got around to having a special survey made. When the surveyor reported to him that he lived in Wisconsin, he tossed his hat in the air and shouted, "Hooray! No more of those cold Minnesota winters!" Of course, redefining where you are located does not change the weather, but to redefine a word can change the whole atmosphere of a passage.

Grace is a warm and positive word usually, but it can be used in a cold and negative way. Charis means favor, and favor can be shown to those who do not deserve it, and thus, you have unmerited favor. Sound great doesn't it? But what if you were a student who worked

hard for a scholarship and fulfilled all the requirements, but the gift went to student x, who didn't do a thing, but whose sister was the wife of the teacher, and so got it because of connections? Here is a form of unmerited favor which we call favoritism. It is unjust because it favors someone at the expense of another more deserving. Greek citizens had to swear an oath not to show this kind of charis for or against a fellow citizen.

Charis, in this sense, is equivalent to the Hebrew idea of respect of persons. The Bible makes it clear that God is no respecter of persons. He shows no favoritism. That is why the universalism of God's grace is stressed in the New Testament. Christ died for all men. This avoids any danger of reading the negative idea of favoritism into God's grace.

The word is used this way in the New Testament, however. Paul, the apostle of positive grace, was a victim of negative grace. In Acts 24:27 we read, "Felix desiring to do the Jews a favor left Paul in prison." Here was favor, or grace, expressed for a selfish reason, and at the expense of another--namely Paul. In Acts 25:9 we see the same thing. Felix wishing to do the Jews a favor took their side against Paul. This is the kind of grace that corrupts. The poet put it--

When rogues like these (a sparrow cries)
To honors and employment rise,
I court no favor, ask no place
For such preferment is disgrace.

The paradox is that there is a grace which is a disgrace, for it is the receiving of unmerited favor which is unjust, because it is at the expense of others.

Now, as if this is not enough complexity, being able to mean either good or bad unmerited favor, we want to see that it can also mean merited favor. Most often Christians define grace as only

unmerited favor, but this is putting a limit on the word which the New Testament does not do. It should not be surprising that grace can also mean merited favor. It is logical that favor is going to be shown toward those who merit it. No man merits salvation, which is the greatest aspect of God's grace, but many are pleasing to God by their obedience, and God responds to them in grace.

To see this in operation, we need to go to the very first reference to grace in the New Testament. In Luke 1:30 the angel says, "Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God." Favor here is charis again. Mary was not sinless, but she was pure and lovely in character, and her life pleased God. She was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah because of her pure life. It is obvious she did not merit this honor in the sense that she was worthy, for no person could ever be worthy to give birth to the Son of God. On the other hand, she was not holy unfit to be Christ's mother, for she had a life pleasing to God, and the kind of life needed for His purpose. God did not favor her because she was less pure and righteous than others, but because of her exceptional purity and righteousness. She attracted God's favor by the beauty of her life.

The clearest example of merited favor is in connection with Christ Himself. Luke 2:52 says, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Favor is charis again. You can see how meaningless it would be to define grace here as unmerited favor. This would mean that Jesus was not worthy of the favor of God, but God granted it anyway. And men, out of the goodness of their hearts, showed favor to Christ, even though he did not deserve it. This, of course, would be sheer nonsense. Grace here means merited favor. Jesus by the inherent beauty, goodness, and harmony of his life, attracted the favor of God and man. Jesus had a quality of character that fully merited all the favor He received.

This is an aspect of grace that we are seldom aware of. We tend

**to think of grace as a one way street: God's grace toward us. But favor works both ways in the New Testament. If God favors us and gives us blessings, we in turn favor God, and respond with gratitude to His graciousness. Our response is described by this same word--charis. We respond with grace. Listen to Paul in--
I Cor. 15:57, "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory..."
II Cor. 2:14, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph."
II Cor. 8:16, "But thank to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus."
II Cor. 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift."**

In each case, do you know what the Greek word is for thanks? It is charis, the same word used all through the New Testament for grace and favor. Grace be to God Paul says over and over again as he expresses his love and gratitude for God's grace. Here is grace which is merited. God merits our favor in every way, and therefore, all of man's grace to God is merited grace. This, of course, is where grace gets its connection with prayer before meals. We express our favor and thanks to God for His favor and goodness to us. Therefore, to multiply in grace means to grow in thankfulness, among other things.

There are numerous passages where grace is the root idea in thanksgiving. The Greek word for thanksgiving is eucharist, and you see charis as the heart of it. The Lord's Supper is called the feast of the eucharist, or the feast of thanksgiving. It is our expression of grace for the great grace of God in giving us His Son. Grace at the very heart of the Gospel, as it is expressed in this poetic version of John 3:16.

**For God--the Lord of earth and heaven, so loved and longed to see forgiven,
The world--in sin and pleasure mad, that He gave the greatest gift**

He had--

His only begotten Son--to take our place: That whosoever--Oh what grace;

**Believeth--placing simple trust in Him--the righteous and the just,
Should not perish lost in sin, But have eternal life--in Him.**

When we feel great joy because we have experienced God's grace or favor, we are experiencing a form of grace in our joy, for the Greek word for joy is chara. When we feel joyful, we are feeling graceful, which means full of favor.

The word chara is used in the following Bible passages:Matt. 2:10, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy (chara)."

Matt. 5:12, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad (chara): for great is your reward in heaven..."

6Matt. 13:44 , "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hid in a field; when a man has found it, he hides, and for joy (chara) thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."Matt. 18:13 describes the Lord's joy (chara) at finding the lost sheep.

Matt. 25:21, 23, "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make the ruler over many things: enter into the joy (chara) of thy lord."We begin to see the relationship between joy and that which causes joy, namely, the favor and bounty which we receive from the Lord.

In the realm of redemption, all of God's grace is favor toward those who not only do not merit it, but who deserve His wrath. In the gift of Christ, and salvation in Him, there is nothing but God's love to account for it. There is much of the grace of God, however, that flows out to men on the basis of their obedience. In other words, we can win the favor of God, and grow in grace by acts and attitudes which please Him. Peter uses charis to refer to a clear case of

merited grace in I Peter 2:19-20. You would never know it, however, for charis is hidden behind the English word of commendable. He writes, "For it is commendable (charis), if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable (charis), before God."

Peter is saying, it is worthy of thanks, merit, and God's favor, if you, like Christ, suffer for righteousness sake. Grace does not lessen, but increases as we become more Christlike. God's grace flows forth, not only to sinners in abundance, but to the saints as well. Milton in Paradise Lost refers to God's grace as bountiful generosity to those who serve Him.

**Yet so much bounty is in God, such grace,
That who advances His glory, not their own,
Them He Himself to glory will advance.**

From this idea we go on to see that grace refers to the many gifts of God to His children. Grace is not only the generosity of the giver, and the gratitude of the receiver, it is the gift also. The Greek for gift is charisma. A gift is something with which you express favor, and so charis is the basic idea in the word gift. It could be translated gracious gift. In the well known Rom. 6:23, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord:" Gift is charisma, or gracious gift. Here we are in realm of redemption, and, as always, God's grace is totally unmerited. It is in contrast to the wages of sin. Wages imply merit or earned remuneration. Men merit, or deserve, death and damnation. They earn this by their life of sin. The gift of God, however, is not earned, but is a gift of unmerited favor. God's grace runs all through the New Testament under the word gift.

God's giving does not end with salvation, however. His grace is

sufficient for all of life, and He goes on giving gifts, as aspects of His grace. In II Cor. 1:11 Paul says, "You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks (eucharis) on our behalf for the blessing (charisma) granted us in answer to many prayers." All blessings are gifts of grace. Some are merited, and some are not.

We know the Bible says much about gifts, but we have not been conscious of the fact that these are parts of grace. Men with special gifts of God are called charismatic. They are full of grace. As we multiply in grace, we grow in our capacity to be used of God, for we acquire, develop, and perfect more gifts as channels of His grace. In I Peter 4:10 Peter says, "As each has received a gift (charisma) employ it for one another as good stewards of God's varied grace."

The whole of Christian service is an extension of God's grace. He gives it to us, and we pass it on. When we show favor we are being channels of God's grace. God's grace can be experienced through us. The giver, the receiver, the gift of power, love, joy, kindness, and innumerable other values are included in this marvelous word grace.

Now we can understand why Paul begins every one of his letters with grace, ends every one of them with grace and fills them with references to it, and builds his theology around it. Paul was the great Apostle of grace, and of the 155 references to it in the N.T., 130 of them are from his pen. Now we can understand why Peter also makes a big issue of it, and why he wants to see grace multiplied in the lives of believers, and why he in 3:18 ends his letter by urging them to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Grace is the source of all that is included in salvation and sanctification. Everything we are, and do, and will ever be, and do, depends on our growth in grace. Therefore, let our prayer be that which was left by the Duchess of Gordon among her papers when she died. "O Lord, give me grace to feel the need of Thy grace; give me grace to ask for Thy grace; and when in Thy grace Thou hast

given me grace, give me grace to use Thy grace."

This is a prayer very consistent with the theology of the N.T. for we read in Heb. 4:16 something quite similar. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." The point is, we need grace, not only as sinner who need to be saved, we need grace to be saints who are becoming what God wants us to be. It is cheap grace when we just trust in Christ to save us, and then do not call upon His grace to sanctify us and help us do his will.

I like the KJV and the RSV of our text of II Pet. better, for they translate it, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you.." Peter goes on to tell the Christians to add one virtue after another to their lives, but here he begins by saying don't just add grace, but let it be multiplied. The NIV means the same thing with its, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance..", but the word multiplied adds to the emphasis, and its absence subtracts from the sum that the word grace deserves.

A six year old boy ran home from school, and immediately went to the back of his house and grabbed his pet rabbit out of his cage. He shouted at it, 2 plus 2, and he kept it up until his mother came out and asked him what he was doing. He said, as he put the rabbit back in its cage with an attitude of contempt, "Our teacher told us today that rabbits multiply rapidly, but this dumb bunny can't even add." There was obviously some misunderstanding here about multiplying. But there is no such misunderstanding about multiplying in grace in the N. T.

No word in the N.T. carries more of the content of the Gospel than the word grace. Griffith Thomas said of it, "...perhaps the greatest word in the Bible because it is the word most truly expressive of God's character and attitude in relation to man." The

Interpreter's Bible without reservation says, "Grace is the greatest word in the New Testament, and in the human vocabulary."

Another author says, " Mastery of the Bible's teaching about Grace is the most important goal of the Christian Way of Life."To grow in grace, and to multiply grace, and have it in abundance is what the Christian life is all about according to the New Testament. To give God pleasure by our lives we need to be growing in grace, and this means giving favor, and not just receiving it.

The value of studying all aspects of grace is that we do not limit it to just one of its many beautiful meanings, and thereby lose much of what God wants us to receive as well as give. Unmerited favor is true and vital, but it is only one part of grace. We are to seek God's grace by meriting it as well. The whole idea of reward is based on grace. We please God by obedience and we win His grace and thus, are rewarded. His grace also covers His favor in doing all sorts of things for us that we cannot do ourselves. In fact I discovered on the internet that one author who studies grace in depth came to the conclusion that the best definition of grace is, "God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves!"

Let me share a quote from this author who calls himself brother Dan. He posted this on the internet for millions of people to read. I just read the thesaurus on my word processor regarding the word "grace". Let me try to explain what I just learned. First, there were several meanings given for grace: Elegance, Kindness, Mercy, Holiness, Invocation, and Beautify. Elegance is not a definition of grace we usually consider when we are discussing God's grace theology. But, let us consider the synonyms for elegance just for what illumination God may give us: polish, refinement, attractiveness, beauty, charm, and comeliness. In line with this is the definition 'beautify', and its synonyms: adorn, decorate, embellish, enhance, ornament, crown, and deck. At first glance, these two definitions with their synonyms may not seem to be all that

theologically significant in studying "grace". But, I believe that God would have us know that the true image of elegance and beauty are only found in His nature. He wants to polish and adorn us. We are His creation. He knows what we need most. God wants to refine, embellish, enhance and crown us with His Eternal, Holy and Sovereign character. When we discovered that Jesus was calling us, we were so ugly. In light of God's nature, we, like Adam, must run and hide and cover our ugly nakedness. But, God picks us up and begins to bring out our true beauty, to manifest His charm and comeliness in our broken spirits. We indeed are ornamented with the fruit of His Holy Spirit, if we allow Him to do His work in us.

John J. Clark wrote, "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, the cross, Jesus Christ living and incarnate. Costly Grace, on the other hand, is the treasure hidden in a field. For the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is a pearl of great price to buy which will cost us everything. It's the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus at which a disciple leaves his nets and follows. It is grace which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. Costly because it costs a man his life, it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. Costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, costly because it cost God the life of His Son: "You have been bought with a price" and what has cost God so much can't be cheap for us. It is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ, but it is grace because "My yoke is easy and my burden light".

He is illustrating the paradox of grace. It is so free, from one perspective, but so costly from another. It is a most multi-faceted virtue, with multiple meanings, which we are to be busy multiplying in our lives. So let us make the prayer of the Duchess of Gordon, that I read earlier, be our prayer. "O Lord, give me grace to feel the need of Thy grace; give me grace to ask for Thy grace; and when in Thy grace Thou hast given me grace, give me grace to use Thy grace."

4. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD based on II Pet. 1:2

Columbus was on his fourth voyage in 1504. His ships were grounded in St. Ann's Bay in Jamaica, and the natives revolted and refused to supply the Spaniard with food. There seemed to be no way of escaping the agonies of starvation. Columbus was looking at the almanac, and he learned that a total lunar eclipse was coming. On the evening it was due he called for the natives to assemble and told them that unless they repented and helped them God would blot out the moon, the sun, and the stars, in that order. He pointed to the moon which had already begun to darken. The natives were terrified and begged Columbus to intercede for them. Delivering food was resumed at once, and Columbus promised that disaster would be averted. The darkness passed, and nothing happened, of course, and the natives never revolted again.

Here is an example of the power of knowledge. Because Columbus understood the workings of God's creation, he was able to save his life and the lives of his men. Knowledge enabled him to dominate and manipulate the natives who were ignorant and superstitious. The weak are almost always weak because of ignorance, and the strong are almost always strong because of

superior knowledge. This is supported by Scripture, reason, history, and experience. Knowledge is power because it leads to the discovery of the means of power. America is the strongest nation in the world because of its superior technological knowledge, and because it has been able to tap the resources of power in God's creation. Only those nations that are also in possession of this knowledge are any challenge. In some nations wood is still the primary fuel. As nations advance they use greater sources of power right up to nuclear fuel. Growth in knowledge leads to growth in power. This is beyond dispute.

This being so, it follows that growth in the knowledge of God should lead to greater power in the spiritual realm. We do not need to speculate on this, for this is precisely what Peter and the whole of the Bible teaches. Paul longed to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. The two go together. In the knowledge of God and of Christ is the power to be and become all that we should be. Peter says in verse 2 that "grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Grace and peace are two major values for the Christian life, and Peter says they are multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Christ. Growing in grace and peace is a matter of knowing God better.

Then Peter goes on in verse 3 and says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him..." In verse 5 knowledge is one of the things that we are to diligently add to our faith. In verse 8 the goal of all is from the negative side that we shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then in 2:20 Peter says the power that enables men to escape the evil forces of the world is the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He closes this letter by writing, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." If we had nothing but II Peter, we could say that the knowledge of God is the power of God, and the means to all His

benefits and promises.

This means modern man is so close to the truth and yet so far. The worldly wise know that knowledge is power. In fact, knowledge has become their idol. The success of science in demonstrating the power of knowledge has led to knowledge and education being held forth as the panacea for all our problems, and the cure for all our diseases. Knowledge is the modern Messiah, which will bear our burdens and heal our diseases. Salvation through science is the only hope that millions even consider today.

The tragedy is that they have the right answer, but the wrong object. Knowledge is the answer, but not knowledge of the creation, but knowledge of the Creator. Modern man is making the same foolish mistake the ancient wise men made. Paul in Romans 1 says they had the revelation of God, and they could have chosen Him, but in their wisdom they became fools and chose the impersonal handiwork of God and ignored the personal love and purpose of God. Man is becoming an expert on the disease, but ignoring the cure completely. He has the right idea that knowledge is power, but he is blind to the highest and most necessary kind of power that man needs, which is spiritual power. He neglects the knowledge of God, the only source of such power. Modern men, in general, have a thirst for knowledge of everything, but what they most need they most neglect. They are like Mark Twain when he received an invitation to dine with the Emperor of Germany. His little daughter said to him innocently, "You'll soon know everybody except God, won't you papa?" This is the judgment on modern man. He is anxious to know everything and everyone but God.

God is being pushed out of the curriculum in the college of life for masses. There are too many supposedly more realistic and practical subjects to study. The feeling is that what cannot be known

according to the scientific method is not really knowledge, but myth and superstition. Science is like the self-sufficient college head who said, "I am the master of this college, and what I don't know isn't knowledge." God is excluded, and the result is man has been able to develop cures for almost everything but the major things, like sin and alienation from God. Science alone is like the medicine chest that one wrote about.

Is my finger bleeding and cut nearly off? In my medicine chest there's a cure for a cough.

Is a tooth shooting pins out in every direction? Here is something thats good for a hang nail infection.

Have I poison ivy and need for a lotion? Well, here, all unused, is a seasick potion.

My medicine chest's never known to fail me...It's bursting with cures for what doesn't ail me.

This is the weakness of science when it comes to the issue of solving the sin problem, which keeps individuals and the world in the same miserable mess in spite of all the scientific successes. Physical power is not enough, for man need spiritual power, and this can only be found in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. The task of the church is not to denounce science and growth in the knowledge of the natural. This is both futile and foolish, for man's mistake is not in studying God's creation. It is in neglecting to study God Himself. This would enable man to use his knowledge of creation for even more good to fulfill the purpose of its Creator. The Christian is not for the prevention of the knowledge of creation, but for the promotion of the knowledge of the Creator.

Over half a century ago Thomas Huxley praising the advances of science declared that the nation which sticks closest to the facts will dominate the future. Edward Miall, a member of Parliament agreed, but he added, "The greatest fact is God." This is what we must

believe and persuade others to believe; and not just non-Christians, but Christians as well. They are often the cause for the unbeliever ignoring God. Believers often have such a poor, small and pathetic conception of God that the unbeliever feels that He is an irrelevant fact. Goethe wrote, "As a man is, so is his God, therefore was God so often an object of mockery." Someone said that if a triangle had a god it would give him three sides. In other words, God created us in His image, and we tend to return the favor and reduce Him to our image. Emerson put it, "The god of the cannibal will be a cannibal, of the crusader a crusader, and of the merchant a merchant." Walter Bagehot wrote,

**The Ethiop gods have Ethiop lips,
Bronze cheeks, and woolly hair,
The Grecian gods are like the Greeks
As keen-eyed, cold, and fair.**

All of this is natural, and usually harmless, but it can lead to great danger, and even evil, as men develop a god to justify all they do. Willilam James, the great student of religious experience, said, "The God of many men is little more than the court of appeal against the damnatory judgment passed on their failures by the opinions of the world." A very non-subtle example of this is the little girl who insisted that there was a lion in her front yard. Her mother ordered her to go up to her bedroom and ask God to forgive her for lying. In a short time she returned with this happy report. She said, "God said never you mind Mary, that bid dog pretty near fooled me too." It is funny as a girl, but tragic if she continues to use God to justify her stubbornness as an adult.

A false knowledge of God is possibly even worse than lack of knowledge. We must avoid the practice of being chummy with God. It only reveals our ignorance and not a depth ;of Knowledge. It is often our false pretence that drives people away from God. Let us be

honest and admit that we are pilgrims with a long way to go, and let us stand in awe and silence before that which we already know of God. Let God be God and tremble, and do not cloud His light with the darkness of our ignorance. Do not hold the puny candle of your mind before the infinite depths of the mystery of God and pretend that you see. Be still and know that e is God, and that we, like Paul, only see through a glass darkly. Christopher P. Cranch wrote,

**Thou so far we grope to grasp Thee,
Thou so near we cannot clasp Thee;
All pervading Spirit flowing
Through the worlds, yet past our knowing;
Artist of the solar spaces
And these humble human faces..
Though all mortal races claim Thee;
Though all language fail to name Thee;
Human lips are dumb before Thee;
Silence only may adore Thee.**

Hab. 2:20 says, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

We must stress the majesty and mystery of God even as we grow in more and more intimate knowledge lest we become too familiar, and by loose language bring offense rather than glory. Let us never reduce God to our image, and our puny righteousness. We never will if we obey the words of Peter, and grow in the knowledge of God. This is the way to the mature, abundant, and powerful Christian life. The idea was not new with Peter, for the knowledge of God was also the very essence of Judaism. The knowledge of God is a key theme in the Old Testament. The whole purpose of the book of Proverbs was to help men understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. One knew nothing of importance until he knew God, for the fear of the Lord was the beginning of

knowledge.

When Israel lacked knowledge of God she lost all the values of life that made her useful to man and pleasing to God. For example, in Hos. 4:1-3 we read, "Here the Word of the Lord, O people of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, lying, killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bonds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish." It sounds like today's newspaper report on our own society. The difference is it states clearly the cause and solution for the mess. In verse 6 God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge I reject you.

When a nation departs from the knowledge of God every value of the good life departs from them, and evil and decay take their place. Grace and peace, and all the blessings of God come to the individual and the nation by the same means. They are found in the knowledge of God, and so the only true solution for personal, national, and international problems, is to grow in the knowledge of God. In Hos. 6:1,3,6 this is made clear: "Come, let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, that He may heal us; He has stricken, and He will bind us up...Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord....(God says,) for I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. God wants us to know Him. This is the essence of biblical religion.

God wants no part of thoughtless and mechanical ritual. To worship God right we must worship in spirit and in truth. We must be students we wrestle and struggle with language and ideas as we seek to know God in truth, and love Him with all of our mind as well as heart and soul. Christians need to become better students of God's Word. We should think of the church as a university, and not

merely a place for fellowship. We should be coming to church to learn what God has revealed about Himself. It is not enough just to get good feelings, for the goal of all we do in church is to grow in the knowledge of God.

I am convinced that American Christians are the greatest wasters of resources for knowing God in history. We have resources beyond the imagination of the Apostle Peter. We could know far more about God's Word than he did if we made diligent use of these resources. Our problem is that we do not invest our time in the study of His Word. The most important thing we can do in this world is to grow in the knowledge of God and of Christ our Lord.

Nathanial Michlem of Mansfield College, Oxford has written a poem of a blind girl who sewed by day and read her Braille Bible each night. Her fingers became callused and the letters in her Bible were no longer readable. Frantically she sought a way of restoring her sensitive touch by paring away the calluses. She discovered the pain was so great that she could not sew or read. Then came the evening when she raised her Braille Bible to her lips to kiss it farewell before she placed it on the shelf. She discovered that her sensitive lips quivering in sadness were able to distinguish the letters, and she could kiss the words into life again. She found a new method of knowing God's Word through her lips, and she went on growing in the knowledge of God. If your method of Bible study has become stale, and your mind callused and no longer sensitive to the Word of God, do not put your Bible on the shelf, but search for a new method to kiss the Word into life again. Experiment and never cease, for all the blessings and power for the abundant life can only be yours as you grow in the knowledge of God.

5. THE OIL OF PEACE Based on II Peter 1:2

Years ago a visitor returning from Dublin told of how he put MacDuncan, the village fool, to the test. He poured the contents of his purse out on the ground, and told him to take any coin he wished. MacDuncan's eyes lit up, and the people of the village gathered around for another demonstration of his consistent idiocy. He would brush the dust from each coin and study it with indecision and puzzlement. They roared with laughter after he again flung aside the gold and silver, and selected the shiniest copper to keep as his own.

A native told the visitor that he always takes the big coin of small value, and that he never learns. Before the visitor left Dublin he got alone with MacDuncan. He said to him, "People say when they offer you sixpence or a penny you always choose the penny. Do you not know the difference in their value?" "Certainly," replied the so-called fool." The difference I know, but if I took the sixpence do ye think they would try me again?" The village fool was really a very clever beggar who made fools out of the rest of the villagers by keeping them convinced he was a fool. His wisdom consisted in his ability to see that the slow but consistent flow of small income would bring him out ahead in the long run. He was not short sighted. He knew that success depended on keeping a good thing going.

This is essential not only for village fools, but for all those who would be fools for Christ. One of the toughest tests all of us need to pass is that of perseverance. We need to keep on going for Christ. Many make a good start for everyone who can endure to the end, and cross the finish line. It is not easy to keep a good things going. We are often tempted to grab the gold that glitters in the immediate present, and snatch the silver coin of sin, and cut off the consistent slow growth in Christlikeness.

In verse 9 Peter warns Christians that if they lack the virtues he lists here, they will be blind, shortsighted, and in danger of falling. As Christians we must be interested about a consistent Christian life of climbing. We must see far ahead, and live for the long run. It is not enough to own a plane. It must be maintained for continuous flying. If faith is the runway from which we launch into the higher Christian life, and grace is the fuel that empowers us for the flight, then in this analogy, peace represents the oil that keeps us going.

Peace is the lubricant that keeps a good thing going. It keeps us in flight, and protects us from the heat of frustration, and the wear and tare of worry and tension that can cause us to lose altitude, and even crash. No flight will keep going long without oil, and no Christian will climb far without the lubricant of peace. That is why Peter is concerned that Christians have peace multiplied to them along with grace. A solid runway of faith, and a full tank of grace with a low supply of peace can mean serious trouble. Grace and peace must be together, and must be multiplied.

A Kansas cyclone hit a farm house just before dawn. It lifted the roof off; picked up the bed on which the farmer and his wife slept, and set them down gently in a nearby field. The wife began to cry. "Don't be scared," her husband said, "We are not hurt." "I'm not scared," she sobbed, "I'm just happy. This is the first time in 14 years we have been out together." Some partners need a cyclone to get them together, but not grace and peace. They are always together, and this is a necessity. They are as close to each other as gas and oil. They are found together all through the New Testament. God is a God of grace, and a God of peace. All three persons of the Godhead are connected with peace.

Paul says of God the Father in I Thess. 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly." Rom. 16:20 says "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet.." God the Son is called the

Prince of Peace, and Paul says of Jesus in Eph. 2:14, "For He is our peace..." One of the fruits of the spirit is peace, and Paul in Rom. 14:17 says, "...the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Paul refers to the whole of the good news in Christ several times as the Gospel of peace. If we had time to quote all references to peace, you would recognize it to be a fundamental Christian word inseparably united with grace. Like love and marriage, horse and carriage, gas and oil, so grace and peace go together.

Peace is both freedom from outward disturbance and a lack of disturbance within. Both are great values, but Peter and the rest of the New Testament uses the word primarily to refer to the inner peace of the soul. Even a pagan recognizes the distinction between external and internal peace. Epictetus, the ancient philosopher, wrote, "You see that Caesar seems to provide us with great peace; no longer are there campaigns, battles, great gangs of robbers, and pirates; one can travel whenever he pleases and sail from East to West. But can Caesar provide us with peace from fever too...from love..craving? He cannot. From sorrow? He cannot. From envy? No, he cannot secure us against anyone of these at all. Only the inward peace of a philosopher's mind.....renders the world a place of peace."

The peace of mind cults are nothing new. For many centuries men have recognized the power of the mind to produce tranquility. Do not laugh at the principles of the peace of mind cults, for they are sound, and they do work, even in the lives of unbelievers. They are simply using the principles of Scripture, but they substitute some other value in the place of God. Biblical peace is a matter of the mind being focused on God and His sufficiency, and not on the dark facts of life. Scripture says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." Jesus said that so much lack of peace is due to focusing our minds upon the needs of tomorrow

when we should be concentrating on our adequacy for today in Christ. Christian peace, like the philosophical peace of those outside of Christ, is largely a matter of the mind, but the major difference is the object on which the mind is focused. The philosopher finds his peace in reason, but the Christian finds his peace in the author of reason, which is God.

The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. It is a comprehensive word, and it expresses the ideal state of life. It is the life of completeness, wholeness, health, and harmony. One can only have such a life when one is secure in the knowledge that he has a life in harmony with God. To know God is the essence of peace, as it is the essence of grace. Both multiply, as Peter says, through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. In Job 22:21 we read, "Aquaint thyself now with God, and be at peace..." To be aware of a personal God who cares for us in this infinite universe is the beginning of biblical peace.

**At peace with God! How great the blessing
In fellowship with Him to be,
And from all stains of sin set free,
How rich am I such wealth possessing.**

The Roman year formerly began in March because Romulus so appointed it because he loved Mars, the god of war. But Pompilius changed it to January in honor of Janus, the peaceful god of the door and new beginnings. Jesus did more than this for peace. He was, and is, the door to new life in peace with God. Jesus instituted a new age of peace in which God and man are reconciled through His death upon the cross.

**By Christ on the cross, peace was made;
My debt by His death was all paid;
No other foundation is laid**

For peace, the gift of God's love.

The Gospel begins as a message of peace. When John the Baptist was born, his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed his ministry would be one of peace. In Luke 1:77-79 we read of how he is to prepare the way for the coming Prince of Peace. "To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sin, through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The Christian way is the way of peace, for Christ is our Way, and Christ is our Peace.

The message of the angels in Luke 2:13 is, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth for men whom He favors." Let us not forget the distinction between external and internal peace, for Jesus says He did not come to bring external peace. On the contrary, His coming brought much trial and tribulation into the lives of His followers. The peace that can be ours is peace with God, and the peace of God. Peace with God is a matter of salvation, and the peace of God is a matter of sanctification. The latter is the peace that Peter has in mind for multiplication in the Christian life.

**Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin,
The blood of Jesus whispers, peace within.**

Herbert Lockyer says, "Alas, not all who are at peace with God, have peace within! They have the title to it, but fail to enjoy their inheritance." Christians almost always try and operate with an inadequate supply of the oil of peace, and because of this there is no smooth steady climb, but a constant stopping for repairs. F. B. Meyer said, "If we allow worries, anxieties, careworn questions to brood in our hearts, they will soon break up our peace, as swarms of tiny gnats will make a paradise uninhabitable."

But how can we exterminate the gnats that ruin our peace in a world so full of trouble, and real things to worry about? How can peace be multiplied when the facts of life subtract it at a frightening rate? How can anyone have inner peace in this world of wickedness and war? The question is easier asked than answered, and easier answered than applied, but the committed Christian has no alternative but to seek to gain more and more of the oil of peace that he might keep navigating higher and higher into the pure white clouds of Christlikeness.

First let's be honest and recognize that the burning up of the oil of peace in the heat of anxiety is not helpful but harmful. Herbert Gray in his book *The Secret Of Inward Peace* writes, "I once heard a man say to another, 'how can you keep so calm and unruffled while all these terrible things are happening...bombs on our dear country; ruin falling on our houses; women and children being maimed and killed; whole nations enslaved; and our very existence as a nation threatened? Don't you know these things? Have you no feelings?' Gray says this would be his answer: 'Well, if you can prove to me that by being all "het up" and running around emotionally distressed I shall make things any better, I will take to such courses. But if by so doing I shall only make things worse for others and let my own person be weakened, I will try to keep my inward peace.' He will trying to obey Jesus and be the light of the world, and not the heat.

There is always the danger of a false peace which arises because of ignorance and indifference. This is not the peace of Christ, for He knew the full story of evil, and the pathetic state of man, and yet in calmness and compassion He did all in His power to be the answer, and He succeeded. Jesus experienced life just as we do with all of its positive and negative aspects. Yet in the midst of the negatives Jesus had peace because His life and mind were focused on the positive. There is no other way to gain the oil of peace and inner security but

by having a mind centered on Christ and His will. Paul says in Rom. 8:6, "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." Peace is a matter of the mind, and the subjects the mind consistently considers. The carnal mind is focused on things, and like a motor with no oil they burn up with the friction of frustration. The spiritually minded person is receptive to the things of God, and meditates on the truth, hopes, and promises of God, and thereby the oil of peace is multiplied, and so they keep on enduring to the end.

Thomas a Kempis wrote, "All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace." Oil is only found by digging, and so also with the oil of peace. If you want to strike oil, you have to go deep. If you are unwilling to dig deep into God's Word, and think deeply about all of its implications for life, then you have no one to blame but yourself if the frictions of life cause a breakdown, and you lose attitude in your flight. God will keep you in perfect peace when your mind is stayed on Him. May God grant you the wisdom to maintain an adequate supply of the oil of peace by keeping your mind focused on Him and His Word. This was secret of the peace of Christ. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." It is by having His mind that we will always have a supply of the oil of peace.

6. THE POWER OF GOD Based on II Peter 1:3

In may of 1883 strange noises were heard over a hundred miles away coming from the island of Krakatoa between Java and Sumatra. Some Dutchmen chartered a boat and visited the island to investigate. They heard rumbling deep in the earth, and saw geysers of steam shooting up here and there. They left the island, and three months later this island paradise blew sky high. In the words of

Lewis Dunnington it was, "The most awful, cataclysmic contortion of the earth's crust that the world had ever experienced." Cracks opened up again and again, and ocean water poured into Molten white hot lava until 14 square miles of the island was hurled into the sky. The Royal Society of London said, "It made the mightiest noise which, so far as we can ascertain, has ever been heard on the globe.

It was distinctly heard 3000 miles away four hours later. Here is a mini example of what Peter says in 3:10 will happen on the Day of the Lord when the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire. It was a mini example of judgement day, but a fantastic demonstration of destructive power. It created a title wave 50 feet high tearing across the Indian Ocean at speeds up to three hundred fifty miles per hour. It destroyed 163 villages with all their inhabitants. It reached Cape Horn in 17 hours, and on the way it destroyed 5000 ships. One Dutch ship was carried 2 miles inland. Dust from the pulverized island rose 20 miles into the air, and it was carried around the globe. Six months later the sky over St. Louis, Missouri was green and yellow from that dust.

Scientists went to visit the island in 1884, and they found no life at all. Two years later in 1886 they returned, and they found ferns, four varieties of flowers, two kinds of grass, butterflies, ants, caterpillars, morning glories, mango and sugar plum. Birds which carried the seeds of all this vegetation were there in abundance. It was again a paradise, and again a mini example of God's plan after the world is destroyed. Peter says in 3:13 that we look for a new heaven and new earth.

The events on the island of Krakatoa illustrate the events of all history from paradise lost to paradise regained. It illustrates the power of life over the power of death even in nature. Nature, of course, is God's plan, and we see this same fact in the spiritual

realm. Sin blew man's paradise and harmonious relationship to God all to pieces. But as the birds were God's agents in nature to restore life to the island, so the Dove of the Holy Spirit brings new life into the desert of man's soul. When men respond and drink of the water of life that Jesus offers, the desert blooms as a rose.

The whole point is that the power of life, good, and godliness will always triumph over the power of death, evil and wickedness, provided we are in the right relationship to the source of this power. Peter says in verse 3 that God's divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us to His glory and virtue. Everything necessary for the abundant and godly life is potentially ours through the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is the means by which we gain the power of God. From beginning to end the Christian life is a matter of the power of God working in us. By believing in Christ and receiving Him as Savior we are given, says John, the power to become the children of God. The Christian life from that point is a matter of the energy of God flowing through us.

The English word energy is taken from the Greek word frequently used by Paul. In Gal. 2:8 he writes, "He who energized in Peter for the mission to the circumcised energized in me also for the Gentiles." The Greek is translated in the New Testament as worketh, wrought mightily, or operated. The idea is God's energy working in man's life to empower them for service. Here are a few verses in which we see this word being used. Col. 1:29 says, "I labor, striving according to His energy which energizes in me in power." Eph. 3:7 says, "The gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the energy of His Power." Phil. 3:13 says, "It is God who energizes in you both to will and to energize for His pleasure." I Cor. 12:6 says, "There are diversities of effects of energy; but it is the same God who energizes all in all."

There are more, but these make it clear that Jesus meant what He said when He claimed His disciples could do nothing without Him. He meant nothing that is a part of the spiritual life, for He is the source of energy. To be without Christ is to be without power. On the other hand, Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." All things is what Peter is saying also. God has granted us all things by His power that pertain to life and godliness. Peter does not hesitate to speak boldly about the power of God, the provision of God, and the purpose of God, in this verse. Let's consider now-

GOD'S PROVISION.

That which God makes available through His power is what we are looking at. It is frustrating to read passages like this superficially because they seem to be so far beyond our experience. Peter says that God has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness. This being so, we should have no lack, but be perfect Christians. If God has provided everything, what can be lacking? But he goes on to tell them that they must labor diligently to add all kinds of things to their faith in order to be effective and fruitful. So they both have everything, and yet have a great deal yet to acquire. It is obvious then that we are dealing here with the difference between potential and actual.

In this verse Peter is saying that God's provision is complete. There is absolutely nothing that you need in order to be the best possible Christian that is not available. The potential for everyone of us to be all that we can be in God's plan is a reality. Any lack and any failure to attain this ideal is due to inadequacy on our part, and not God's lack of provision. The raw material is available, but what is needed is the labor to put it together. Markham captured this idea in poetry.

**We men of earth have here the stuff
Of Paradise-we have enough!
We need no other stones to build
The stairs into the Unfulfilled;
No other ivory for the doors;
No other marble for the floors;
No other cedar for the beam,
And dome of man's immortal dream.
Here on the path of everyday;
Here on the common human way,
Is all the busy God would take
To build a heaven, to mold and make
New Edens. Ours the task sublime
To build Eternity in Time.**

The poet has expressed the very thought of Peter. We do not need anything more, for all is provided to accomplish the ideal. All that is necessary now is to build. The problem is never supply, but labor. We must cooperate with God, or all His provision will be of no benefit. In other words, even the almighty power of God will not make the Christian life easy, for it costs to make real in life what God has made potential by His grace. God demands our cooperation before His provision can become actualized in experience.

A man purchased a bouquet of American Beauty Roses, and he exclaimed, "See what God wrought." The florist said, "Wait a minute." He disappeared into the green house, and he came back holding a plain common rose, and he said, "See what God wrought." Then he took the bouquet of beautiful roses and said, "See what God and man wrought." The florist was right. Some of the finest things in nature God will not do without man's cooperation. Hybrids with all their superior quality cannot be raised by depending on the laws of nature alone. They can only survive, as they came to exist in the

first place, by man's cooperation with the forces of God in a new venture. They are only potential by God's power, but they become actual by man's cooperation.

The Christian life is a hybrid life. It is a combination of the divine and human. If the human element fails to cooperate, the same things happens which happens to a hybrid plant. It reverts back to a common plant, and the Christian slips back into the natural life. This need never be, however, for God has provided all that is necessary for the commencement, continuation, and completion of the Christian life.

How do we lay hold on this amazing provision? Peter says it is through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and virtue. Peter keeps bringing this back to the knowledge of God as the means by which we become open to His power, and acquire His provision of all things. We cannot escape this idea as the key to all Peter says. R. H. Benson rightly said, "There is but one thing in the world really worth pursuing-the knowledge of God." Out problem with this basic truth is that we impose our modern concept of knowledge on the Scripture, and we limit it in a way that is not valid.

To know in the biblical sense means that one's mind, heart, and whole being is involved. To know is used to describe the most intimate relation of man and wife. Adam knew Eve and she conceived a child. To know means far more than mere intellectual acquaintance. To know is to love, and to express that love. The bible does not divide man up into unrealistic segments as we tend to do. We dissect man into intellect, emotion and will. This is alright for the sake of study, but we tend to think that real people operate like our descriptions on paper. In reality they do not do so. They are really more like the biblical picture. They do all that they do as a whole. They do not love with the heart apart from their mind and will.

They do not choose with the will apart from their emotions and intellect. They do not learn with their mind apart from their feelings and will. Man is a whole, and when the Bible refers to knowing God, it means as a whole man, and not just the intellect. To know God is to love Him and to obey Him. Knowing God is a commitment of the total person.

Jesus will say to some in the day of judgment that "I never knew you." He is not confessing to a lack of omniscience, but He is saying that I never had an intimate relationship of love with you. Whatever knowledge there was involved was only a matter of the head, and the heart was not included. We need to think with the mind of Christ when we consider the knowledge of God as the means by which we gain the power and provision of God. It is through a wise, loving, intimate, obedient relationship to God that we gain all things necessary to life and godliness.

Peter tells us God's purpose in calling us. We are called to His own glory and excellence. Every Christian has the highest possible calling. No Christian need ever feel insignificant, for he is called to the glory and excellence of God. Felix Adler wrote, "The object of religion is to rescue man from his insignificance, and to reveal to him his eternal self." In Christianity alone man finds this goal fulfilled, for only the Christian is called to the heights of becoming Christlike. Only a Christian can become partaker of the divine nature and display the glory of God. The big question is, are we answering the call?

Glory is greatness and honor. When we speak of the glory of Greece, or the glory of Rome, we mean the marvelous greatness, power, and splendor that characterize them in their golden age. The glory of any country is her honor. Sir Walter Scott wrote-

Stood for his country's glory fast,

And nailed her colors to the mast.

The glory of America is the greatness in honor of her history, and the benefits she has bestowed upon mankind. Likewise, the glory and excellence of God is His majesty, honor, and praise worthiness for all his benefits given to man through Christ. To be called to the glory of your country is to be called to participate in the heritage, honor, and blessedness of her past, and to demonstrate the virtues that made her great that they might be preserved for the future.

Applying this to the call of God to His glory we see why we lack so much of the provision of God. We are not fulfilling His purpose. We are not being good soldiers of Christ aiming to defend His glory and honor. We are not magnifying His majesty and message of love in life. The problem always comes back to our failure to cooperate with God's plan. We break the circuit by our ignorance and indifference, and so we lose the power of God, and in turn, we lack the provision of God to fulfill His purpose. The Great Wall of China was an enormous project costing immense expenditure in labor and lives. It should have provided them with full security, but it did not do so because of gatekeepers who were bribed, and the enemy was able to enter and conquer. It was the human element that failed, and the same is true in the plan of God. God has provided all that is necessary for security and victory, but the human element fails to cooperate and the purpose of God is not fulfilled. Peter goes on to tell us of the many things that we can add to our lives to cooperate with God. But the bottom line is that any lack we have in life is not due to God's lack of provision, but to our lack of cooperation in using that provision to experience His power.

7. HASTEN TO BE HEROIC Based on II Peter 1:5

In the days when there was little freedom of speech in England Thomas Paine spent sometime in prison for speaking his mind. Benjamin Franklin urged him to come to America. He did so in 1774. The difference was so great, and he so fell in love with the value of freedom that he caught a vision of what this country could be, and he began to set men's souls on fire with the vision. He wrote a little book called, Common Sense, and it sold 500 thousand copies in a day when there were only 2,500,000 people in the 13 colonies. One out of every 5 had a copy, and everyone was thinking and talking about independence. In 6 months the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia.

Then came the war with England. George Washington was being defeated again and again. He was camped opposite Trenton, New Jersey in Dec. of 1776. His army was ragged and hungry, and in a state of despair. It looked as if the vision was about to die and the cause of freedom perish. Tom Paine was there and saw the hopelessness and depression of Washington's men. He knew he had to rekindle the fire of their devotion and reawaken their vision if his own dream was to be realized. He put a drum between his legs and wrote the first of his Crisis Papers.

Lewis Dunnington wrote, "His racing pen was inspired by the very angels of heaven." Washington read it and sent a rider off immediately to Philadelphia to have copies printed and brought back with haste. On Christmas night of 1776 they were distributed and read. Part of it went like this: "These are times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country, but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman....Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, but the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

The men were filled with new courage and boldness. Washington took full advantage of it. He crossed the Delaware that night, and on the cold winter morning of Dec. 26, 1776 he defeated the British and took a thousand prisoners. From the very jaws of despair and defeat he snatched a triumphant victory and proved again that the pen is mightier than the sword. The pen can inspire in ordinary men extraordinary courage and turn them into heroes.

This is why God inspired men like the Apostle Peter to take up the pen and record those truths which Christians need to be heroic in the battle of life. The harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph said Paine, and this being so, the Christian has the potential for the greatest of all triumphs. No one faces a greater foe than the Christian. No one faces stronger opposition and obstacles. No one fights a harder battle than the one who strives to be truly like Christ. When a person signs his personal declaration of independence, and by faith in Christ breaks away from the bondage of Satan, he faces a battle with his old master. And quite often Christians are like Washington's soldiers. They are defeated, discouraged, and depressed. If we read between the lines and consider the implications of what Peter is writing in this letter, we see this to be the case with those Christians he is writing to.

It is clear that they are under constant attack by the enemy. Their faith is being shaken by false prophets, and they are losing their sense of direction and loyalty. They are ineffective and unfruitful, and some are so discouraged that they are blind to what Christ has done for them, and they are in danger of falling away. Many are borderline Christians who are not sure of their calling and election, and they lack assurance and power. Peter knows, however, that they are potential heroes, and that they can still be victorious soldiers of the cross. The reason for their defeat and ineffectiveness is their lack of discipline. They have no plan, and no systematic strategy by which to conquer. Peter knows they must

first recapture their vision and enthusiasm, and so, like Paine, he arouses them to think of their great heritage and hope. The exceeding great and precious promise, and all things for life and godliness which God has given by His grace in Christ, is their heritage, and their hope for a fruitful life now, and an entrance into an eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ in the future.

Peter now in verse 5 begins to play the role of the commander of the troops. Like Paine he inspires them with new vision and hope, but like Washington he must also deal with the practical matters of discipline and equipment for attack. Peter deals here with the practical down to earth matter of what Christians must do to bridge the gap between their great heritage and great hope. He, like his fellow General Paul, wants his troops fully equipped with the whole armor of God. He, therefore, lists the things every soldier of Christ must add to his equipment to be sure of victory. In physical warfare no commander can guarantee his men that they will not fall in battle, but Peter guarantees in verse 10 that those who obey orders and add these weapons to the inventory of their character will not fall.

We are dealing with weapons that can do what all the atomic weapons in the world cannot do. Here is an arsenal that gives absolute assurance. These weapons attached to the launching pad of faith are not only defeat proof, but they will lead us, not just to interplanetary travel, but to inter-dimensional travel, and we shall enter from time into the eternal kingdom of Christ. In the spiritual realm Peter was writing 2000 years ago about powers that are yet still the dream of scientists in the physical realm. These powers are like in this, however, that in both realms they are only made real and available on a practical level for life by diligence.

Peter, like a true commander, is determined to whip his troops into shape. The time is now, for the enemy is at hand. His words

carry a sense of urgency that we can only see by a study of the word he uses. The words in the Bible are like the atoms out of which the universe is built. Each is packed with potential power, and the task of the Christian is to try and penetrate it, and release that power. The word for diligence in the Greek is spoudo. It means to hasten and to speed it up. It is used all through the New Testament to describe urgency. It is usually translated haste rather than diligent.

Solome, after dancing before Herod, went to ask Herodius what to request of him, and Mark 6:25 says that she came back with spoudo, that is, with haste. He was eating out of her hand and she had to take advantage of the situation quickly lest the opportunity be lost. Dr. Luke, who knew from experience the haste of life, and the need for haste in emergencies, used this word often. The shepherds came to the manger in haste; Mary goes to Elizabeth in haste. When Jesus saw Zachaeus up a tree he told him to make haste and come down. Paul was a man often in a hurry, and he used the word to describe his need to sail from Asia before he got trapped by winter. He urged Timothy several times to do his diligence to come to him by winter. There are many more instructive uses of this word spoudo, but these make it clear enough. We see then that the comparison of Peter with a commander like Washington getting his troops ready for battle is very real.

Peter is not politely requesting, he is urging them to snap to it, to get busy, to get on the ball, and make every effort to get properly supplied for battle. Peter is sounding the trumpet. He is calling men to give heed to orders that make the difference between victory or defeat. What we see here is Peter's agreement with James that faith without works is dead. No one stresses more than Peter that all we have is by the grace of God, and that we are saved by faith. Peter is not dealing here with salvation, however, these people are Christians, and have a like precious faith with him. Their problem is going on in the Christian life to victory and fruitfulness. Peter

makes it clear there is no going on without work and effort on the part of Christians themselves.

A Gypsy proverb says, "It's a dog that trots about finds a bone." And it the Christian that gets busy, and who is diligent, who achieves success in the Christian life. A child is born without its will, but it cannot mature without its will. So also salvation in is, "I believe." But the fruitful Christian life is in, "I will do ." Alexander Maclaren wrote, "Diligence is the panacea for all the diseases of the Christian life. It is the homely virtue that leads to all success. It is a great thing to be convinced of this, that there are no mysteries about the conditions of healthy Christian living, but that precisely the same qualities which lead to victory in any career to which a man sets himself do so in this; that, on the one hand, we shall never fail if in earnest and saving the crumbs of moments, we give ourselves to the work of Christian growth; and that on the other hand, no fine emotions, no select moments of rapture and communion will ever avail to take the place of dogged perseverance and prosaic hard work. And it wins, and is the only thing that does win."

In other words, he writes, "If you want to be a strong Christian-that is to say, a happy man-you must bend your back to the work and give all diligence." I like his expression of the idea that there is no mystery about how to be successful in the Christian life. Christianity is simple and practical to understand. It calls for work, and what can be easier to understand than that.

**Sitting still and wishing
Makes no person great.
The good Lord sends the fishing,
But you must dig the bait.**

It is no mystery why the average Christian is a weak Christian. No one sits around trying to figure out why the average person is not

a great polo player, sky diver, or harpist. It is obvious, for they do not give themselves to the discipline it takes, and with the determination to work at it. So Peter says to make haste, and make every effort, and to labor diligently to add to your face your faith virtue first of all. Virtue is a word that means something today altogether than it did when the KJV was translated. Virtue today means moral excellence. There are many things we call virtues, and all the things Peter lists here are virtues in the modern sense of the word. Peter, however, is dealing here with a specific virtue. Virtue in Latin means man, and virtue is best defined here as manly courage. Other words that bring out the meaning of this word are valor, vigor, boldness, moral power, energetic excellence, firmness, and any other word that describes the heroic character. Peter is saying to his troops that the first thing they need is heroic courage. Peter is challenging every Christian to be a hero in the battle for righteousness.

The old English used the virtue to describe power. When the woman touched the hem of the garment of Jesus He felt virtue go out of Him, and that was power and energy. The old Wicliffe Bible put it in the English language using the word virtue for the mighty works and the miracles of Jesus. In Nazareth Jesus could not do any virtue it said. Milton calls the powers of heaven, "Celestial virtues." Thucydides and Homer used the word to describe the zeal, manliness, fortitude and valor of heroes in battle.

Peter is saying here, hasten to be heroic. The Christian life is a battle, and it is no place for idleness and indifference, or cowardice. God calls for energetic excellence in every believer. Robert G. Lee in this book Great Is The Lord writes, "Our assignment from the Lord is that in Christian living we should ever be magnificent and never mediocre. God never meant that we should trickle along in service as feeble rills when we can flow as rivers. For us he has rebuke if have incandescent light powers, and make candle light; if

we have pipe organ abilities, and make wheezy saxophone music; if we have locomotive abilities, and do push cart work; if we have power to run, and creep along like sluggard, reluctant to lay hold upon the plow-handles; if we have opportunity to bear fruit, and have only leaves; if we have the chance to be giants, and are puny pigmies piddling potter clay in the face of peaks that dare the pilgrim feet of spiritual pioneers."

God calls us all to heroic effort. Add to your faith manly courage says Peter. It will drive you on in the face of all opposition and obstacles to win the victory for Christ. We win the victory when we do anything for the Lord with all our energy. Paul says be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. He said to Timothy, "My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Everywhere we look in the New Testament we are reading orders to equip ourselves with courage and strength, and to march forth in boldness.

**It takes a little courage and a little self-control,
And some grim determination, If you want to reach a goal.
It takes a deal of striving, and a firm and stern-set chin,
No matter what the battle, if you're really out to win.**

Author Unknown

Peter agrees with the poet, and he calls every Christian to be a winner by adding to their faith the courageous qualities of the hero. One of the most courageous men of all history, whose bold adventures saved the lives of innumerable people was Norway's Fridtjof Nansen. While working on his PHd in Norway he learned of the great need for more accurate weather forecasting in the North Atlantic. The only way to get it was to chart the dangerous and almost inaccessible interior of Greenland. Admiral Perry and many others had tried to lead expeditions, but were forced back before they got half way. The experts said it was impossible because it was a "Seething nightmare of tossing ice blocks."

In 1888 Nansen and 3 Norwegian sportsman, and 2 Lapp guides tried it. It was an unbelievable experience. They were frozen in the ice, and they were tossed about like corks in their little boat as thousands of tons of ice would break off from glaciers and plunge into the sea. They had to climb mountains and bury themselves in tents for days because of blizzards no one could stand up against. In 6 weeks, however, Nansen was back with his priceless information. How did he do it when so many others failed? He said that unlike others he left no base to fall back on in case of disaster. "If we knew," he said, "that behind us there is nothing, then we must go forward. He eliminated the possibility of retreat. This is the kind of courage the Christian life calls for. There is to be no turning back, but an ever marching forward. If we want to be fruitful and successful soldiers of the cross, we must first of all follow the command of Peter, and hasten to be heroic.

8. EQUIPPED WITH KNOWLEDGE Based on II Peter 1:5

When Julia Ward Howe toured a battlefield during the Civil War her heart was heavy for things were not going well for the union cause. The soldiers were trying to keep their moral up by singing snatches of then popular army song-John Brown's Body. Mrs. Howe's minister, James Freeman Clark, urged her to write some good words to that stirring tune. The next morning she leapt out of bed and poured out unto paper the words that had formed in her mind.

**Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are
stored.**

He hath loosed the fateful lightening of his terrible swift sword.

His truth is marching on.

The song was published in the Atlanta Monthly, but nothing came of it for a year. Then Chaplain McCabe learned it by heart and taught it to those in Libby Prison. Soon the whole prison echoed with this stirring hymn. Lewis Dunnington writes, "From that moment, the Battle Hymn Of The Republic took wings and flew through all the camps of the army. Soldiers sang it in bivouac at night. They sang it on the march. They sang it rushing into battle. And where it was sung, it did more than many men for victory. It gave discouraged men the certainty that His truth is marching on-now!"

Nothing is so necessary as for a soldier to know that he is fighting for the truth. It is not enough to be brave and courageous. He must also be right and just. A brave man pursuing a wrong course is a curse to himself and all in his way. Peter commands those who would be soldiers of the cross to hasten to be heroic. Be diligent in adding to your faith virtue, and that means manly courage and boldness. Now Peter does not stop there, and we dare not stop adding either, for Peter says go on to add to your boldness-knowledge. Unless we are equipped with knowledge our boldness can be dangerous, and it can do harm to the cause of truth rather than aid it in marching on. Zeal without knowledge is a vice.

John Brown wrote, "Without appropriate knowledge, with due consideration, a man with the best intentions may do evil rather than good; and after running himself out of breath, find that it would have been his strength, his duty and interest, to have stood still. This was the case with Paul. He thought he was doing a great service in persecuting the Christians, but he says after his conversion that he did it in ignorance. Jesus said that those who crucified Him did it in ignorance, and he said to His disciples that will think they are doing God a favor by killing them. Ignorance is

no friend to God or man, and to be bold but ignorant leads only to folly. No general wants courageous soldiers who do not know how to use their weapons. A brave man who is not trained is of less value than a coward who knows what he is doing.

On the other hand, no soldier wants a brave general either who has no sense of judgment. Never was there a greater demonstration of boldness and bravery than when 600 English cavalry charged the Russian battery at Balaklava. It was a wholesale sacrifice of heroism to no purpose. The poet described it-

**Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of death,
Into the mouth of hell.**

"Grand, terrific, magnificent!" Exclaimed the general. Thank God we have no such general in Peter. He commands us to be bold, but not for boldness sake as an end in itself. It is of value to have blind zeal that courts martyrdom. Peter demands that his troops be equipped with knowledge. Peter stresses knowledge so much that you would think he was an ex-professor rather than an ex-fisherman. His reference says to knowledge are as thick as commercials around station breaks.

There is no other chapter in all the Bible that so stresses knowledge. Paul comes close in I Cor. 8 with 5 references. That is what Peter has here also, but all 5 of Paul's are on the Greek word gnosis, which simply means knowledge, but 3 of the 5 Peter has here are epignosis, which means full knowledge. We are in the great knowledge chapter of the Bible, and the fact that Peter makes so much of it tells us 2 things quite clearly.

I. KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT.

It is important to the Christian life, and to being a successful soldier of Christ, and for the same reason it is important in every other realm of life. No-how is the key to success and effectiveness. Benjamin Franklin said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." J. M. Clark in Overhead Costs in Modern Industry said, "Knowledge is the only instrument of production that is not subject to diminishing returns." Business is always ahead to have people employed who are growing in knowledge. A lack of knowledge can be expensive.

For example, a small factory had to cease operations when a vital piece of machinery broke down. The firms own mechanics couldn't get it working again, and so an outside expert was called in. He looked the situation over for a couple of minutes. Then he took a hammer and tapped on the machine at a certain spot, and it started running beautifully. When he submitted a bill for 100 dollars the plant owner hit the ceiling and demanded an itemized bill. The expert cooperated and this is what he sent. "For hitting the machine one dollar. For knowing where to hit 99 dollars." It was not labor but knowledge they were paying for. The majority of people who get rich do not do so by means of physical labor, but by means of knowledge.

A New York socialite came into the salon of Walter Florell, a famous milliner to movie stars. She announced that she needed a hat at once for a party she was attending. Walter took a couple of yards of ribbon twisted it around, and put it on her head. He said, "There is your hat madam." She looked into the mirror and exclaimed, its wonderful." Florell said, "Twenty five dollars." "But thats to much for a couple of yards of ribbon," she gasped. Florell unwound the ribbon and handed it her saying, "The ribbon madam is free." It was not material but knowledge she was paying for. Know-how is what is expensive, and that is what leads to success. The Bible confirms what we see to be true in life. Prov. 24:3-5 says,

"By wisdom the house is built, and by understanding it is established. By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is mightier than a strong man, and a man of knowledge than he who has strength." Riches in power belong to the man who knows, and this carries right over into the spiritual realm.

There is no salvation apart from knowledge. The Gospel is hid to those who are lost. The god of this world has blinded their minds. Shakespeare said, "Ignorance is the curse of God, and knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven." Jesus said, "This is eternal life that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." No one can believe the good news of the Gospel until they have knowledge of it, and so knowledge comes even before faith as a means to salvation. Peter, however, is not referring here to this knowledge which his readers already have. He is writing of knowledge which is to be added to faith after one is saved.

If our goal is to be Godlike and Christ-like, then to be equipped with knowledge is essential to reach that end, for as Hannah said in praising God in I Sam. 2:3, "The Lord is a God of knowledge." Jesus is the wisdom of God and in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Jesus spent a great deal of His short life on earth teaching and preaching, for knowledge was important to the building of His church. All the Epistles are written for our instruction and learning. Education is at the very heart of Christian faith, as it was of the Jewish faith. To neglect this vital aspect of God's plan, and to fail to equip yourself with knowledge is to lose much of the riches and power God intends for you to have.

Paul is always saying, "I would not have you to be ignorant brethren." Why? It is because being ignorant is to be poor when we might be rich, and to be weak when we can be strong. A good Christian is one who is forever adding knowledge to his faith, for he

knows it is important to the success of the church and his own life. Dr. John Knox has written, "Christianity began magnificently. It stepped from the soil of Palestine on its Westward march with the tread of an conqueror....It did not sit at philosophy's feet; philosophy was soon sitting at its feet. For all its humble origin among peasants of Galilee, and working men, poor and unschooled, it became the teacher of Greece as it became the ruler of Rome.

The wisdom of this world became foolishness in comparison to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is what is exciting about the knowledge the Christian is to add to his faith. Anyone can do it. You do not have to be a genius or a scholar. Peter is not writing his letter as an lecture to be delivered at the institute for super-duper Christians. This is a general Epistle written for the instruction for the common Christian, most of whom had far less education to grow in knowledge than anyone does today. We must recognize that Peter is saying that knowledge is important for every believer, and not just the leaders. This leads us to consider the second clear implication of what Peter is saying.

II. KNOWLEDGE IS IMMENSE.

A vast infinite reservoir is what we have to dip into with our finite little minds while we recognize the importance of knowledge, we must also recognize its immensity and our limitations. Not even a genius can begin to scratch the surface. In a single day modern man undertakes enough research to fill 7 complete sets of the Encyclopedia Britannica. You have probably read of how man's knowledge doubled in 1750; again in 1900; again in 1950; and then in 1960; and again in 1965; and now is doubling almost yearly. Much of it is technical data, and needs only to be known by specialists. The gap between us and the ancients is not that great, however, when it comes to essential knowledge. We are constantly

learning that they knew things we didn't know they knew. You cannot measure the relative increase if you don't know what they knew. Much of what we think is new is old, but we are just learning of how much the ancients knew.

Like the woman who was shopping the garden department, and she noticed a strange object. She asked the clerk what it was, and he explained that it was a sundial. He told her how the shadow of the sun moving across the dial could indicate the time of day. The lady said, "What will they think of next!" Let's not underestimate the ancients in secular or spiritual knowledge. The New Testament and history reveal that Christians were often as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. They out thought the pagan philosophers of their day and captured the minds of the masses. Paul is forever urging Christians to walk circumspectly and not as fools, and to walk in wisdom toward those that are without.

But it was Paul who said that we know only in part now. There is much we cannot know. Because knowledge is so important, and because we must be constantly adding it to our faith, and because it is so immense, we must be selective. Paul warns about foolish speculations and science falsely so called. We cannot afford to waste our time and mental energy on nonsense and matters that are indifferent. We must learn those things that make us better Christians in the field in which we serve. This means that we will all be interested in various aspects of knowledge. The one area we have in common is knowledge of God's Word. By this knowledge we are saved. Philip found the Ethiopian reading Isaiah and asked if he understood what he was reading. He said he did not and needed someone to explain it. Philip did explain it and the man received Christ as his Savior. He would never have been saved if he had not understood. Just owning a Bible, or even reading it, does not save without understanding.

We can never gain the blessings of God until we understand them, and understand what God requires of us. D. L. Moody was a great man of prayer, but at the end of his life he is said to have commented that if he could live life over again he would spend more time in Bible study because he had wasted so much time praying for things he later found out were not in line with God's interests as spelled out in Scripture. You cannot pray effectively without knowledge.

Christians often waste time in pursuing answers to questions that cannot be known, or are not worth knowing. They are like the boy who kept turning out the lights to see how he looked in the dark. You can never build a solid structure with the bricks of speculation. Such bricks are made without the straw of truth and they will not last. Paul says in Titus 3:9, "Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain." We will never know all that is worth knowing, and so when we add knowledge to our life we need to make sure it is worthwhile. Knowledge is important, and so we need to get busy learning. Knowledge is immense, and so we need to specialize in that which is of the highest value for our lives.

The Greek philosopher Socrates was once asked by a man how he could get wisdom. Socrates told him to follow him, and he led him down to a river. He asked the man to follow him into the water to a depth up to his nose. Then suddenly he pushed the man's head under water and held it there for a while as the man struggled to get his head above the water to breathe. When he came up he was angry and asked Socrates why he did that. Socrates replied, "You asked me how to gain knowledge. When you want knowledge as badly as you wanted air when your head was under water, you will get it."

This is in keeping with the New Testament language of

hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and of asking, seeking, and knocking. It fits Peter's attitude of urgency where he says to diligently add these things to your life. Paul was a student to his dying day, and even in prison he urged Timothy to bring him the books and the parchments. Benvenuto Cellini was cast into a dungeon in the Castle of San Angelo. It was horrible with its rats, wet, and mold everywhere. His leg was broken and his teeth were falling out from scurvy. It was hardly an atmosphere conducive to study. But one hour each day the rays of the sun penetrated through a small hole down into his cavern, and in that hour Cellini held his Bible in the light and read. All of us have limitations and handicaps, but God expects us to do the best with what we have, and to love Him with all our minds. Let us respond in obedience to the command to become equipped with knowledge, and pray with the poet-

**Oh God, I offer Thee my heart,
In many a mystic mood, by beauty lead.
I give my heart to Thee. But now impart
That sterner grace-to offer Thee my head.**

9. GODLINESS Based on II Peter 1:6

Feodore Dostoevski in The Brothers Karamazov brings Christ back to earth in imagination to a 16th century setting in Spain. It was during the terrible Inquisition when so-called heretics were being burned at the stake in great number. Jesus began at once to heal the sick, make the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the dead to rise. When the Cardinal of Seville, the Grand Inquisitor, entered the square in front of the Cathedral he observed what Jesus was doing, and ordered Him arrested.

That night the Grand Inquisitor came to see Jesus in prison, and warned Him that if He did not cease to hinder the work of the church He would be burned at the stake. "The masses," he said, "want bread and not freedom. Why have you come to disturb them?" Jesus did not answer, but approached the old man in silence and kissed him, and that was His only answer. The old man shuddered, went to the door, opened it, and said, "Go and come no more, come not at all, never, never." He let him out into a dark alley and the prisoner went away.

The story could be repeated in a thousand ways in every age, and it would always be the same, for Jesus is always the same, and people and society are always the same. That is why Hunter Blakely wrote, "Jesus Christ is life's Great Disturber. He is the most revolutionary character whoever set foot upon this planet. He disturbs everything everywhere. There is no area of life which he does not enter. He came into a world where men were nowhere in complete accord with the will of God, and until God's will is done on earth as completely as it is done in heaven, Christ will always be the Great Disturber."

Jesus would not fare any better in the 20th century than He did in the first. His godliness would again bring upon Him the wrath of man. Godliness is too disturbing to man. They must either destroy it, or conform to it. What is it? According to the Interpreter's Bible, "...it is strong awareness of the God-relatedness of all life. It is that attitude which sees all things in their relation to God." The Greeks used the word to refer to reference for, and loyalty to God. In the New Testament it is basically an absolute loyalty and devotion to God. This is a quality to life that leads us to great favor with God, but great disfavor with society in general.

The greater ones godliness, the greater the chance of ending up on a cross. This is why Jesus would be crucified in every age. He

would refuse to conform to any part of the sinful systems of men. He would denounce all prejudice, and refuse to accept rationalizing cooperation with any form of evil. He would not respect our social, educational, and racial walls. He would trample them under His feet, and stir up a storm of opposition. He would refuse to limit His followers to any denomination, and so He would be despised by many in the church as well as those in the world. Jesus was, is, and every shall be to the end of the world, the great disturber of men.

Jesus could have exhibited all of the virtues that we read of in Peter's list and been well received. All men admire a bold man; a man of keen intellect, and abundant knowledge. All people recognize the value of self-control, and patient endurance. In the abstract these are acceptable to all and universally honorable. The problem comes when all of these virtues are directed toward a definite objective. If is to be a great soldier, sportsman, musician, or business man, you will have your envious enemies, but the majority will applaud. However, if you use all of these virtues to do the will of God, you run into a wall of majority opposition. The ungodly consider it a crime, and waste of life and talent. The superficially godly are put to shame by superior devotion, and they demand a return to mediocrity so that they are not disturbed.

If Jesus had not insisted on being so God-centered and God-controlled, He could have easily worked out a program of peaceful coexistence with the Pharisees, but He was determined to make godliness primary, and that led to the cross. This says something about where we have arrived in this list of essential spiritual weapons for the battle of life. It says we have reached a new plateau of spiritual experience when we add godliness to our equipment. All the others are used by wise pagans, and servants of the devil. There can be no doubt that Satan himself has a good measure of boldness, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance. But with godliness we come to a great divide which separates the heroes

of Satan and the heroes of God. Godliness followed by brotherly love and love lifts us into the unique realm of Christian virtues which cannot be matched by the natural man.

The fact that godliness is a virtue that is to be added to the Christian life indicates that it is possible to be saved and still not possess godliness. Non-Christians cannot have it, but Christians even may not have it. This simply means that one can be saved by faith in Christ, and not go on to become totally God-centered and God-controlled. This ought not to be surprising since it is true in each of our lives. We know that we are far from absolute loyalty to God and His will. If we are honest, we know selfish motives and other values beside the will of God determine our attitudes and conduct. Godliness is not only a great divide between the Christian and non-Christian, it also is the point at which there is a great separation between the mature and the average Christian. Godliness is a virtue so seldom thought of that I doubt if one in a hundred, or possibly even a thousand, could say they have ever heard a sermon on it,

There is very little literature on the subject even though it is frequently dealt with in the New Testament. Paul uses the term most frequently. He begins the letter to Titus with these words-"Paul a servant of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness." One of Paul's purposes in life was to aid Christians in growing in the knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness. The godly man is a man who knows the truth of God. Is a man whose theology is based solidly on the Word of God. Ignorance is hindrance to godliness. To add godliness to our lives we must be students of Scripture. No person can be god-centered who does not know the truth of God and the will of God. No matter how zealous one is for some truth, and no matter how he defends it with great boldness, and even dies for it, if it is not

God's truth he is defending, the man has no more godliness than Satan. Godliness is totally dependent upon truth, and specifically the truth of God's revelation.

This is the foundation of godliness, but it is not the whole of it. Most New Testament references to godliness indicate it is a way of life, which includes both attitudes and actions. Let us not be so unwise as to think we can divorce the theoretical and the practical aspects of godliness. You are not likely to fall in love by reading books on courtship and marriage, for love is a personal involvement with another person, and not a matter of ideas. But one can get more out of the experience of love, and put more into it, if he has read on the subject, and knows truth relating to the experience and practice of love. So it is with godliness.

Knowledge of the Bible and God's nature are not in themselves godliness, but one can never truly be godly apart from this knowledge. If a person happens to do the right thing, but not because he knows it is pleasing to God, but simply because it seems like the best thing to do for his own welfare, he is not being godly. Godly living is that activity of the Christian which is done in direct and conscious obedience to the known will of God.

Later in this letter in 3:11 Peter, after describing the destruction of the physical world, says, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,..." Here godliness is connected with one's manner of life. Godliness is a term referring to the whole context of one's relationship to God in mind, soul, and body. To be godly is to obey the two great commandments which sum up the whole of the law and prophets. It is to love God with your whole being, and your neighbor as your self. Godliness is that virtue that leads us to more than temporal victories, but to eternal victories. Paul writes to Timothy in I Tim. 4:7-8, "Have nothing to do with godless and silly

myths. Train yourself in godliness, for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise of the present life, and also of the life to come."

The training in godliness includes every conceivable subject in its relationship to God. All virtues, duties, truth, and all conduct come under the subject of godliness. That is probably why it is so seldom treated, for it is so broad a subject that it is difficult to narrow it down so that you can concentrate on it, and know precisely what you are aiming at. If there is one word that can help us grasp the whole of this virtue, it is reverence. Reverence is that attitude and pattern of life which exhibits profound respect for God mingled with love and awe. The difference between the strong mature Christian and the weak Christian is the difference in the degree of reverence. Reverence means depth and strength. Irreverence means superficiality and weakness.

Thomas Carlyle said, "A man is never so noble as when he is reverent." If the church of today is weak, and often anything but noble and heroic, it is because of the obvious lack of reverence Christians have for God, His Word, and His purpose for men. Describing the scenes of a church conference George Redding said, "Church leaders milled in and out through the audience during speeches and prayers with as much reverence as that displayed by a group of politicians at a fish fry." Be still that I am God is God's advice to those who would know an experience depth in reverence and godliness, but like much advice, it is ignored. We American Christians are so influenced by the fast pace of life, and the noisy hustle and bustle of our society that we don't know how to be still and reverent.

The result of our lack of deep respect for the things of God is that the world has no deep respect for us and our message. Christians are not persecuted in our society, but are ignored as having little or

nothing of relevance to offer. Christians know that their superficial allegiance to the truth of God does very little to meet the needs of today. They experience the lack of power that comes with half-hearted loyalty, and they get discouraged with Christians themselves. They either fall away from the church and become indifferent, or they develop a surface type religion that is basically mere words. These latter Christians not only make themselves immune to the deeper life, but they prevent others from finding it. Rupert Brooke expressed it in a poetic picture.

**Safe in the magic of my woods
I lay and watched the dying light
Faint in the pale high solitude's,
And washed with rain and veiled by night,
And I knew
That this was the hour of knowing....
And suddenly there was an uproar in my woods,
The noise of a fool in mock distress,
Crashing and laughing and blindly going.
Of ignorant feet and swishing dress,
And a voice profaning the solitudes.
The spell was broken, the key denied me,
And at length your flat clear voice beside me
Mouthed cheerful clear flat platitudes.**

In plain prose, the man who tries to be deep and reverent in his search for the presence, power, and truth of God is constantly being interrupted and distracted by the superficial saint who solves everything with a cliché, or a verse he has memorized, but has never deeply meditated upon or applied in life. So many Christians are like this, and they have no depth because they do not wrestle with every issue as to how it relates to God and His will. Godliness is what makes all of life revolve around God and His will. If we go through a week and never relate anything in life to God until we get to church

on Sunday, we are not gifted with the virtue of godliness.

If you say that so and so is a godly person, you imply that the things of God play a primary role in their everyday life. They give evidence by their actions and life style that they put God, and the will of God, in a place of priority. Their resources are used to support the work of God; their time is used in the causes that please God, and their talents are dedicated to the glory of God. Eusebius, the third century church historian and theologian was named after the Greek word for godliness, which is eusebeia. He defined it as, "Looking up to the one.. God, and life appropriate to Him." He captured the two basic element of attitude and action. May God help us all to be more conscious of our need to daily add to our lives the virtue of godliness.

10. SELF CONTROL Based on II Peter 1:6

In 1949 the Honorable Harold R. Medina was the judge who presided at the trial of 11 communists charged with plotting to overthrow our government by force. In his book Power To Become Lewis Dunnington gives an account of an interesting sidelight to that great trial. For 9 months the judge was plagued with every possible trick to cause a mistrial. Insolence and disorder were common in the courtroom, but judge Medina with great patience refused to do anything to cause a mistrial. Then the communists learned of a weakness he had. He was afraid of high places. He had had acrophobia all his life, but had kept it under control even though his courtroom was on the 22 floor of the courthouse, and his apartment was many stories up as well.

Nevertheless, it was a real fear, and the communists took full

advantage of it. Shortly before the trial began Secretary of Defense James B. Forrestal had jumped to his death. You can imagine judge Medina's shock when he came to the courthouse and found pickets walking back and forth chanting, "Medina will fall like Forrestal." Only those with a phobia can appreciate the problem this caused for the judge. As this continued day after day he could not escape his fear, and it became an obsession.

He asked his wife, even on hot summer nights, to keep the bedroom windows closed. In court one day, after hearing the chant again, his head began to swim. He quickly recessed the court and went to a couch. He prayed as he never prayed before that he would gain control of himself, and escape the control of his fear. His request was granted, and with renewed confidence he returned to court and saw the trial to a conclusion, which put the communist behind bars. It was a victory for the nation, and a personal victory for judge Medina.

He had courage and he had knowledge, but without self-control all could have been lost. All the boldness and knowledge in the world will not keep a man from going down in defeat if he lacks self-control. The Apostle Peter knew this to be a fact from personal experience, and that is why he urges Christians to add to their courage and knowledge self-control. Lacking this virtue in his own earlier experience, he denied his Lord, and several times rushed ahead of Christ and needed to be rebuked.

Another Peter, Peter the Great, was a bold conqueror and a man of knowledge. He passed many laws for the protection of his subjects, but he was often subject to maniacal outbursts of anger. In fury he struck and killed his gardener and his own son. With great sorrow he said, "Alas! I have civilized my own subjects, I have conquered other nations, yet I have not been able to conquer and civilize myself. Anyone of us can be greater than Peter the Great,

for the truly great ruler is the man who is king of himself.

This is a truth that has been universally recognized. If we turn to the Orient we read Lao-Tsze who wrote, "He is strong who conquers others; he who conquers himself is mighty." If we turn to the Greeks we read Aristotle saying, "I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is the victory over self." If we turn to the Romans we read Seneca saying, "He is most powerful who has power over himself. If we turn to modern statesman, philosophers, and poets, they all agree that self-control is an essential quality for success. Shelly and one of his sonnets writes-

**Man who man would be,
Must rule the empire of himself, in it
Must reign supreme, establishing his throne
On vanquished will, quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears, being himself alone.**

Self-control is so essential to the success of any pursuit that it is even a virtue among evil men. Successful crooks are those who develop self-control. They have to be able to remain calm as the night watchman makes his rounds, and as they hide behind merchandise. They must have nerves of steel when the alarm goes off in the bank. As soon as a thief loses his nerve and lets emotion take over, he kills or gets killed, or makes foolish moves that lead to his capture. You cannot even be a successful crook without the virtue of self-control. Satan encourages his troops to add this virtue to their equipment, just as Christians are urged to add it to theirs. Whatever your goal, it is easier to reach it through self-control. Burns expressed this in A Bard's Epitaph.

**Reader, attend! whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,**

**Or darkling grubs this earthly hole
In low pursuit.
No prudent cautious self-control
Is wisdom's root.**

We would expect to find we would expect to find this root of wisdom in the wisdom literature of the Bible, and it is there in Prov. 16:32, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." This was written in a day when taking a city could be a long drawn out process of out witting and out waiting its inhabitants. But Scripture agrees with thinking men everywhere that the greatest victory is to conquer and rule ones own spirit. Caroline Le Row in True Heroism writes,

**But I will write of him who fights,
And vanquishes his sins,
Who struggles on through weary years
Against himself and wins.**

Peter is not trying to be original when he urges Christians to add self-control to their character. He is not coming up with anything new for victorious living. He is calling for us to take up a universally recognized value essential to the doing of anything effectively. There is no need for something new when the old is the best thing available. You can't improve on what is an absolute essential. Nothing can take the place of self-control. The old word for it was temperance, and this you can improve on, for the word temperance has too limited a meaning today to give us the biblical meaning. Temperance refers to self-control in regard to alcohol, but the biblical word takes in control over all of the emotions and appetites of life. To be temperate in all things is to avoid all excess so that one's reason is always in full control.

The fact that Peter urges Christians to add this virtue to their

lives implies that people do not naturally possess it, but have a tendency to be a slave to their passions and appetites. The New Testament is filled with passages that indicate Christians can be swept along by their lusts and desires into disgrace and judgment. That is why they are constantly being warned to walk in the spirit and make no provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. That is why they are warned about connections with their old life of sinfulness. That is why they are warned about the false prophets who could lead them into a false liberty in which they would again come under the bondage of the flesh. The whole second chapter of this letter deals with the judgments of God upon those who lost self-control, and it warns Christians not to add themselves to the list by forsaking the truth of God in giving themselves over to the lust of the flesh.

The simple fact is, there is just no chance of living the Christian life without self-control. Depravity is written into the very nature of the fallen universe, and our tendency is ever downward. If our self does not cooperate with the higher laws of God, we will follow the laws that lead to degeneracy. Control of the downward tendencies is so basis to success that it even has to be applied in machines. Cybernetics is a field that is rapidly growing. Norbert Weiner, professor of mathematics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, coined the word cybernetics from the Greek word which means steersman, and from which we get the word governor. A governor controls the speed of a motor, or controls the operations of a state as a steersman controls a ship. Cybernetics is a science dealing with control of communications.

Cybernetics is a fascinating field for the Christian to study, for it is filled with facts that show biblical principles apply even in the realm of machines. There is a sense in which we can talk about sin and depravity in machines. Man creates a machine in his own image by giving it sense organs so it can distinguish light from darkness. He cannot trust his machine, however, to always do what he wants it

to do. There is a mechanical tendency toward disorganization, which is equivalent to sin in the human realm. Man has to devise monitors to control the machine, or to warn him when it is being bad, and not taking orders. If an elevator was left to operate without controls, the light could come on pointing down, the door would open, and you could step into an empty shaft. That is the kind of dirty trick a machine will play on you if it is not controlled. So men are constantly devising control methods to prevent machines from being evil to their creator.

By evil we mean being out of harmony with the will and plan of a superior being and intelligence responsible for their existence. If only man could see that he is to God what the machine is to him-a creature gone astray, like a machine gone haywire and not responding in the way it was built to respond, and, therefore, in need of complete rebuilding. In Christ a man is renewed and brought back into harmony with his Maker, but without controls he will tend to go back again into the state of disharmony. Self-control is equivalent to the crew that maintains the machine. Self-control is what allows all the other virtues to operate smoothly and effectively. Take away the control and even good can lead to evil through excess.

Much evil is only good that has gone out of control. Food and sex are good, but gluttony and adultery are evil. Take self-control out of this list of virtues and Satan would be delighted to have you carrying the banner of the cross, for you could do more harm that way than if you were committed to evil. In 2:2 Peter says there will be believers who will follow the false prophets into licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. It is just like the case of an American soldier who rapes, plunders, and kills completely abandoned to the lusts of the flesh. He does far more harm to our cause than any enemy could do. So the profession Christian who lacks self-control, and displays lust and anger in speech and conduct

does more damage to the cause of Christ than any atheist ever could.

Satan is an expert in psychological warfare, and if he can just get us to abuse some legitimate desire or emotion, he can bring us to defeat. This was the essence of the temptation of Jesus. Jesus could have so easily yielded to the desire for food, popularity, or power. Only by perfect self-control and total allegiance to his Father's plan could he escape the pole of this temptation.

Self-control means "Ruling with a strong hand." It means to govern yourself. You cannot determine what goes on in Washington, but you are the controlling voice in what happens in the dominion of your own life. It is you who determine if the will of God becomes the constitution of your life. It is you who determine if Christ shall be the true power on the throne. He will reign only as we surrender, and we can only surrender if we are in control of our own lives.

Norman Vincent Peale tells of being in a maze in a house of mirrors at an amusement park. There were many wrong ways to go and each time you chose a wrong way you would bump into yourself in a mirror. He says it was much like life where we are constantly colliding with ourselves as the obstacle to success and progress. It is not others or circumstances, but it is self that gets in our way. The key to happiness, therefore, is to yield ourselves to Christ who is the Way through the maze of life. We need to stop running into ourselves, but gain control so that all of our energies might be in harmony with His will, and all of our activities consistent with His plan.

Thomas Paine stirred up Washington's soldiers to boldness and the result was that the Revolutionary War was won. Julia Ward Howe stimulated the Union troops to believe God's truth was marching on, and with that knowledge they won the Civil War. But

according to the Bible and all history these were the easy steps toward success. Sir Edwin Arnold speaking to a group of Harvard students said, "In 1776 you conquered your fathers. In 1865 you conquered your brothers. Will you permit an Englishman to say that your next victory must be over yourselves?" He hit the nail on the head, but he only suggests, while Peter demands that Christians conquer themselves if they expect to be of any use to God or man in the battle for good against evil.

Jesus died to save us from our sin that we might be good soldiers of the cross. For His sake and a needy world's sake let us discipline our lives and be self-governing. Let's add to our faith, courage, and knowledge-self-control. God, like any wise father, does not want His children to be totally dependent upon Him. We often think that to be filled with the spirit means that the Holy Spirit just takes over and does everything. The fact is, the goal is for you take over and choose to obey God, and He will then supply the power to do so.

We cannot pass the buck and say God has not supplied the power. You must take charge and do the will of God. Then the power will be supplied. God only gives power when you obey. Obedience is not His business, but it is yours. You are in charge of what you do with your life, talent, and time. How many times have you said to your child, "If you really want to do it, I will help you, but I won't do it for you." This is God's plan as well.

Paul exhorts the believers in I Thess. 5:14 that the insubordinate who will not control themselves are to be warned. You can be a Christian and still be undisciplined. In Luke 21 Jesus tells of the great trials that believers will face, and He says in verse 19, "Possess ye your souls." In other words, you be in charge of yourself, and don't lose control. If you are not in control you can be deceived, led astray, and tossed about by every wind of doctrine. A Christian who is not in control is in danger of being motivated by forces other

than the Holy Spirit. When you are in charge, you choose the way of truth and light, and are empowered by the Spirit. If you are not in control, you do not always choose the right path.

It is only you and I who can obey the commands to submit to God and resist the devil. It is our wills that must obey, and we must choose to do it or not. I will not do for my children what they must do to be responsible people, and God will not do for us what we must do to be responsible Christians. A father said to his boy who kept standing up in the pew, "Sit down." The boy would not obey and so the father finally grabbed him and forced him down on the pew. The boy looked up at his father and said, "I am sitting down on the outside, but inside I am still standing up." Submission is when you sit down on the inside and the outside because you choose to obey.

You must have mastery over yourself in order to obey the many commands of the Bible. You must have self-control in thought to obey Phil. 4:8, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report, think on these things." Without self-control of our thought process we will be dragged about by the world's promotion, and we will think on the things of temporal value and miss God's best. Christians who cannot control their moods are often at the mercy of the weather, news, and circumstances, because they are not in control of their thought process.

We need self-control in our speech to obey Col. 4:6, "Let your speech be always with grace, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." Never lose your temper except when you do it on purpose. There is a time for rebuke and sharp words, but they should be premeditated and not brought out impulsively by circumstances. II Tim. 2:24 says, "And the servant of the Lord must

not strive, but be gentle unto all men..." Only the self-controlled person can obey God's Word. Practice helps.

A man stood by as he watched another man get blasted. Afterward he asked him how he could be called a skunk, a bum, and a crook, and just stand there and smile. The man replied, "I am a baseball empire, and I have had a lot of practice." Practice may not make you perfect, but it will make you better than you are. Learn to speak only what you choose to speak so that you are always in control of that unruly member of your body, which is the tongue. Who is in charge of your speech? You are suppose to be in charge under all circumstances. James 3:2 says, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." Many people pride themselves on their frankness. They say, "I can say what I think." But the Bible says so does the fool. "A fool utters all his mind." Frankness is only a virtue when coupled with intelligence and tact. Otherwise it can be a sadistic vice that brings only suffering.

Titus 2:12 says, "We should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." This demands self-control. The Philadelphia Youth Study Center has this slogan-"The difference between the delinquent and the non-delinquent youth is the pause between the temptation and the act." Those who respond to the impulse of the moment, and who cannot control their response to temptation, will become a problem to themselves and to society. All unacceptable behavior is the result of loss self-control. Paul said, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." To be controlled by food, drink, sex, or any power is to lose the freedom of self-control, and thus, the freedom to do only that which pleases God.

The evil of so much of what Christians condemn is the fact that it deprives people of self-control. Do you think alcohol would be a

problem if people could drink and still have full control of their body and mind? It is the loss of self-control that makes drugs of all kinds dangerous. Loss of self-control puts you at the mercy of other forces, and Satan can take full advantage of this. You are responsible to always be in control of your car, and the Bible makes it clear that you are also responsible to be always in control of yourself.

What you are responsible to do you can always do if you discipline yourself. In 1941 Fritz Kreisler was forced by an accident to lay aside his violin for many weeks. When he finally went to tune it his fingers were so stiff that playing seemed impossible. He later reported, "But my desire was so intense, and I told myself-these are my fingers, and these are my slaves. I am the general, I order them to play and I will them to action. You know-the played." He could have said I can't and quit. He would have been defeated, but instead he took charge and controlled himself to press on to success. We can all do what God expects us to do if we are in control of ourselves.

It takes time to learn self-control. But even the animal kingdom recognizes the importance of control. Cranes by nature love to cackle and make noise as they fly, but the sound of their voice arouses the eagles to attack them and make them pay with their lives for their noisy chatter. The older cranes who survived these attacks learn to pick up a large stone to fill the cavity of their mouth before they fly. This stone forces them to fly in silence, and thereby avoid of danger their loose tongue brings upon them. Danger is a great motivation to learn self-control.

Fines are also effective for people. If you go to visit the Oregon Caves National Monument, the guide will say, "I hope you enjoy your trek through the caves. Please do not destroy or take any of the rock formations. Actually we have had very little trouble with this. I don't know if it is our visitors great love for nature or the 500

dollar fine, but we are grateful for your cooperation." The Christian, however, is to be one who strives for self-control in all areas of life because it is pleasing to God and makes Him a channel God can use to bless others.

11. STAND AND STRIVE Based on II Peter 1:6

William Lloyd Garrison was born in 1805 and when he became a man he had the audacity to think he could remove a mountain and alter the flow of the river of history. Slavery was that mountain, and what a mountain it was. Slavery had existed from the dawn of civilization, and it was one of the most firmly rooted institutions in human history. The great empires of Egypt, Greece, and Rome were built on slave labor. The then English speaking world accepted it as normal and essential. The blessing of the church was upon it. In 1713 the Peace of Utrecht was signed which gave England a monopoly on the West African slave trade. The treaty was celebrated in St. Paul's Cathedral where they sang a special hymn written for the occasion by the Christian composer Handel.

Slavery was likewise entrenched in America. In 1835 the governor of South Carolina declared, "Slavery is the cornerstone of our Republican edifice. Destroy slavery and you put a stop to all progress." A professor at Yale University said, "If Jesus Christ were now on earth, he would, under certain conditions, be a slave holder." Most all men of prominence had slaves, including the president and the members of the Supreme Court. The law honored it, the church blessed it, and practically everyone defended it. It was a mountain of gigantic proportions, and who could dare be so presumptuous as to think they could dent it let alone remove it?

Only a man who took Jesus very literally when He said that faith is a grain of mustard seed could remove mountains would even attempt. Garrison was that man. It was as if David took on, not just Goliath, but a whole army of Philistine giants. Garrison was laughed to scorn as if he was a fool of the first class. He became the most hated man of his time. He was ostracized and burned in effigy. He was denounced from every corner of society. Nevertheless he believed God would help him win, and the Bible was the hammer he used to pound away at the mountain of slavery.

Norman Vincent Peale, who writes of this great battle in his book You Can Win says of Garrison, "He brought down his battle hammer and a faint tingle was heard. The people laughed and booed and sneered. But Garrison brought it down again and again. Blow after blow fell until his little hammer became a great sledge, the reverberations of which could be heard throughout the land. As he beat with his faith upon the mountain, a crack began to show. It widened until the people shouted with a mighty voice, "Look, the mountain is breaking!"

Almost beyond belief is the historical fact that 58 years after the birth of Garrison slavery was outlawed forever in the United States. Jesus said that those who followed Him would do greater things even than He did, and history is filled with examples of the fulfillment of that prophecy. Faith can remove mountains, but only by persevering, persistent, never ending steady pounding. That is why Peter wants Christians to add to their self-control, patience, or as it is better translated steadfastness or endurance. It refers to that quality of character that keeps on keeping on regardless of the cost, obstacles, and opposition. Garrison could have been bold, wise, and under control, and still have been a total flop had he given up. All the other virtues are of no avail if one lacks endurance and persistence. It is the holding on when letting go is so tempting that wins the battle. It is he who endures to the end that shall be saved,

and that is what Peter has in mind here.

He wants us to make our calling and election sure, and he wants us to be fruitful Christians. The whole New Testament stresses that these goals are only reached through perseverance. Now you might get confused by all the different words used to describe this basic and powerful virtue, but the Arndt and Gingrich Greek Lexicon says that all five of these English words are in the Greek word hupomone-patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, and perseverance.

These words indicate that the weapon we are now considering is valuable in both defensive and offensive warfare. The words like endurance and fortitude give us a picture of making a stand and holding your ground against every attack of the enemy. The word perseverance conveys the picture of marching into enemy territory and forcing the foe to retreat before your persistent and progressive power. Both are essential for victory, and both were clearly evident in Garrison as he stood fast and marched forward. Let's look further at-

I. THE STANDING FAST ASPECT.

Paul said to put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Without this weapon of endurance we will not stand but fall wounded from his fiery darts of affliction. Self-control is the holding back of our desires so that they do not lead us off the narrow path, but endurance is the power to avoid being pushed off the path by external forces. Self-control will keep you from hurting others, but it will not keep others from hurting you, and so you need the weapon of endurance.

Jesus makes it clear that you cannot survive without it. In Luke 21 He tells of great persecution to come, and of how one's own

family and friends will oppose them, and all men will hate them for His name's sake. Then in verse 19 He says, "By your hupomone (the same word Peter used)-by your endurance you will gain your lives." A steadfast unwavering loyalty to Christ is the only safe ground for Christians under attack. If they flee from this refuge, they will fall into the snare of the enemy. This is one of the most obvious facts of the New Testament strategy for Christian warfare. Looked at properly, persecution provides the necessary training to learn the discipline of endurance. If you never have any obstacles or opposition, and never have to suffer for your faith, there is nothing to endure. There is no ground to hold fast, and there is stress on the muscles of the soul, and the result is spiritual weakness.

Only as we see this, the trials are like boot camp getting us into shape for marching on to victory over the enemy, can we make any sense out of passages like James 1:2-3. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." Steadfastness is again the Greek word hupomone. We have to add this to our equipment to be a stable and fruitful Christian, and since it can only be produced by facing trials, therefore, we must rejoice in trials, for they are helping to prepare us to be better soldiers of the cross.

Rejoice in boot camp training. Sure it is miserable and rough, but it is the means by which you prepare to conquer, and it will save your life. Spiritual warfare is like physical warfare. All the glorying in tribulation in the New Testament makes sense when we see this. We need to grasp the reality of spiritual warfare, and the need for training and discipline in order to gain the victory. The undisciplined army will break up into chaos when the enemy attacks with a well organized force. The church loses its grip on society and is forced to retreat before the highly organized secular forces because Christians are undisciplined, and they do not know how to hold their ground. Many old battles have to be won all over again

because Christians failed to stand fast.

Paul rejoiced because the Thessalonian church was filled with Christians who had hupomone-steadfast endurance. In II Thess. he writes, "Therefore we ourselves boast of you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions, and in the afflictions which you are enduring." Here is a general commending his troops for a job well done on the battlefield. They were holding their ground in the face of vicious enemy attacks.

Hold on and stand fast! That is the command of Christ, and of all his generals, to the Christian soldiers on the battlefield of life. This is a virtue so obviously essential that it is universally recognized. Endurance under pressure has always been a part of greatness in any society. Ovid said, "Endure and persist; this pain will turn to your good by and by." Virgil said, "Endure and keep yourselves for days of happiness." Seneca said, "What can't be cured were best endured." In more modern times James Russell Lowell said, "Endurance is the crowning quality, and patience all the passion of great hearts." Abraham Lincoln sent this message to General Grant at the siege of Petersburg, "Hold on with a bulldog grip, and chew and choke as much as possible." Holding on is the key to victory. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote,

**Stick to your aim; the mongrel's hold will slip,
But only crowbars loose the bulldog's grip.
Small as he looks, the jaw that never yields
Drags down the bellowing monarch of the fields.**

The Christian soldier must have the tenacity of a bulldog, and the determination to hold on and endure to the end. Evil has made great use of this quality of character, and Christians must fight by using the weapon of endurance more effectively than the forces of evil. On Aug. 31, 1944 Hitler said to his generals, "All the coalitions

in history have disintegrated sooner or later. The only thing is to wait for the right moment, no matter how hard it is." He held out right to the end until the battle raged in the streets of Berlin. He was a man of endurance. He could hold out, but the allies did that also when he had the upper hand, and they added to their standing fast aspect of endurance the second aspect that we now want to consider.

II. THE STRIVING FORTH ASPECT.

This is the idea conveyed in the word perseverance. It is not enough to stand fast and hold the fort. You have got to move out and extend the territory you control. You have to be on the offensive as well as the defensive. This is the mission of the church. We are not to be bomb shelters only, but to be the infantry on the front lines going into all the world, which is enemy territory, and claiming it for Christ. The fact that the New Testament stresses this so much makes it clear that one of the greatest problems Christians have is the problem of discouragement. Christians are tempted to give up and to say the battle is futile because the enemy is too strong. Pessimism eats out the heart of Christian faith and the body begins to die. Every person who cares about the will of God faces this battle, and they need persevering patience to come out victorious.

Billy Graham faced it in a unique way in 1949. He felt so unqualified to be a preacher of the Gospel. He knew he needed to go on to school to get better educated, but the door was open for a crusade in Los Angeles. He didn't know what to do. He knew his limitations as any honest man does. He had no gift for singing. Grady Wilson, who began the first grade with Billy Graham, and who was converted at the same meeting under Mordacai Ham, and who had been associated with him ever since, claims that Graham is the world's worst singer. He offered Billy one hundred dollars if he could sing just one stanza of any hymn all the way through.

Billy Graham as a young man felt deeply his limitations in education and talent, and as he and Grady Wilson drove to the Los Angeles crusade Graham began to weep in despair. Grady told him he had to go on. The door was open and if he did not go through it the doors may be closed in the future. They pulled off the road and prayed for several hours. Graham poured out his soul to God. He offered himself with all of his inadequacy to be God's instrument. He went on to the crusade, and from there to world wide crusades for Christ. He came close to letting go and giving up, but instead he added perseverance to faith, and went on to the great things for God.

It is no wonder that Chrysostom the great golden mouth preacher called this virtue of steadfast endurance the queen of the virtues. It has saved more saints from defeat and carried them on to success than any other single quality of character. No Christian can move through life and survive without it. Someone said that if you get up one time more than you fall, then you will make it. This is hupomene-perseverance. It is the weapon Peter demands that we add to our equipment for successful Christian living.

Jesus is Himself our great example of persevering endurance. Paul writes to the Thessalonians who were enduring persecution and says in II Thess. 3:5, "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ." Look at all He endured without giving up. Look at how He persevered in the face of enemy attack, and marched steadfastly to the cross for you, and this will encourage you to press on, no matter what, for His glory, and your own joy in victorious living.

Jesus, not only by example, but by teaching, also made it clear that this virtue of standing fast and striving forward is essential for survival and fruitful living. In the Parable of the Sower he tells of those who receive the Gospel with joy, and for awhile they believe,

but then fall away under pressure. Others failed to be fruitful because the cares and riches and pleasures of life choke them out. Jesus concludes in Luke 8:15, "And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience." This patience is the same word hupomone. The Christian who lasts, and the Christian who counts, according to Christ and His Apostles, is the Christian who adds to his faith, courage, knowledge, and self-control-enduring an persevering patience. If at first you don't succeed, you are average. If at tenth you don't succeed, but keep on trying, you are the kind of rare Christian God needs to reach the world. Let us be those who obey orders and under all circumstances stand fast and strive forward.

It is frustrating when a postage stamp curls up and will not stick to the envelope. And so it is with Christians who attach themselves to some Christian service, but then quickly tire and begin to peel off. The lack sticktoitness, which is one of the most pleasing virtues to God and man. Christians who lack this virtue tend to give up before they complete things. Life is soon a cluttered workshop of unfinished projects. This leads to discouragement, and so they end up not even starting anything, for they fear all will be left undone. They escape failure by doing nothing. They are in the same category as those who never begin the Christian life for fear they can't hold out. God knows the tendency of the human heart, and that is why both Peter and Paul are constantly trying to encourage Christians to fight the tendency to give up. Paul says in Gal. 6:9, "Let us not grow weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart." We need to develop the attitude that come blood, sweat, and tears, I will press on. L. E. Thayer wrote,

**Hang on! Cling on! No matter what they say.
Push on! Sing on! Things will come your way;**

**Sitting down and whining never helps a bit;
Best way to get there is by keeping up your grit.**

The average Christian who persists will do more for God and the cause of Christ than the big shot who is only a bright burning meteor passing through, but soon to be burned out. You know if you had your choice of what to read by, you would take the candle rather than the streak of lightening. It is not the greatness of what we do for Christ, but the persistence with which we pursue it that pleases Him, and pays off in fruit. It takes time to grow solid wood. Rapid growing wood is soft. It takes many a hard winter before you get a mighty oak. It takes time and the overcoming of many trials to be a strong soldier of Christ. Perseverance, therefore, is an absolute essential to the Christian who wants to mature and be truly like Christ.

The Christian who wins the battle is the Christian who fails often, but who keeps on going. He has tried to be a Bible student, he has tried to be a prayer warrior, he has tried to witness, and in each case he has been a failure. Nevertheless, if he keeps on keeping on, and tries again and again, he is on the march toward the goal. The disciples fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus said to them to throw the net once more on the other side. It was in the same old place where they had failed, but Jesus said try again. They obeyed and learned the importance of persistence, for in that final attempt they were exceedingly successful. Your biggest victories can come in the very place where you have suffered your gloomiest failures if you are willing to persist and try again.

12. HOW TO MEASURE LOVE Based on II Peter 1:7

Tradition says that John the Apostle of love was carried to the Christian assembly when he was so old he could not walk, and his constant advice was, "Children love one another." When he was asked why he told them one thing all the time he replied that nothing else was needed. On the other hand, William Morris wrote a song titled Love Is Enough, and a critic reviewed it very briefly by writing, "It isn't." It is no real problem to chose between these two points of view, because love is such a complex subject that it is filled with paradoxes, and just about anything can be true about love.

God is love; therefore, love is a subject that gets us into the infinite. We do not have to even approach that, however, to recognize its complexity. It is important that we grow in our understanding of the complexity of love, for only as we do can be avoid blunders, and gain blessings connected with love. A man came to John Wesley and asked him about a certain woman well known to both of them. Wesley advised him not to marry her. "Why not" was his question, "for she is a member in good standing in your church isn't she?" He admitted it but said, "The Lord can live with a great many people you and I can't." Wesley was wise, and recognized that even romantic love and brotherly love combined does not guarantee compatibility. Love is not enough.

The fact that the New Testament places it at the top as the highest and most valuable virtue does not contradict this. The fact that having all else without love is to be nothing does not mean if you have love all else is unnecessary. Peter does not imply that after love is added you can neglect all the other virtues. This is like saying, after you get the top story built, you could knock the rest of the building down. Love is only effective and truly Christian love when it is built on the foundation of all the other virtues. As soon as this is forgotten love becomes sentimental, and is reduced to an emotion, and its power is gone. But when love is bold, knowledgeable, persevering, godly, and extended in all directions, upward to God,

outward to others, and inward to self, then it can be said, love is enough. Love is only enough when it is complete, and it is complete when it includes everything of value, which is equivalent to saying everything is enough.

This becomes clear as we study love from a scientific point of view as Sorokin does in his book *The Ways And Power Of Love*. He has established the fact that love has five dimensions, and all five are Biblical, and they put love on a level where it can be measured. The first dimension of love is-

1. Intensity.

Love, like faith, is a matter of degree. To say a man has love is not much more revealing than to say he has a temperature. It could be normal or high or even low. If you say he has 105 degrees, that reveals much, and the difference is in the intensity. So it is with love. A man might feed the pigeons, and give up his seat on the bus, and, therefore, be described as having love, but this is love of a very low intensity. Love can be so low it is at the zero mark, and describes one who just does not hurt anyone, but may be indifferent to going out of his way to help anyone. When one's acts fall below this he is in the realm of hate. Love grows in intensity as higher values in life are involved. If I give of my money I love in greater intensity than if I merely pity. If I give of my time and risk my health to aid another I love with greater intensity yet, and if I sacrifice my life for others I love with the greatest intensity. Jesus confirms this, for He says greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for a friend. Jesus, therefore, loved us with the greatest intensity possible, in that he died for us. Many have followed Christ in this dimension, and have loved with the highest intensity by giving their lives for others. However, as we go on we shall see that no one has been able to follow Him in all dimensions of love. Intensity is measured by the value of the sacrifice made for another.

2. Extensity.

In intensity, love can go from zero to infinity, which is the love of God. In extensity, love can go from love of one-yourself, to love of all men, all creatures, and all creation. As our love extends it becomes more Christlike. We begin with a self-love which is natural, and then family love, and then friend love, and then group or race love, and then national love. Most of these loves are natural, and most normal men will have all of these loves in varying degrees of intensity. One may not lay down his life for a friend, but will for his nation, and so it is a love of greater extensity of the highest intensity.

Christ demands an extensity of love that goes beyond what the natural man has. He goes even beyond the love of other races, people, and nations. He demands an extensity of love that reaches out even to one's enemies. He said if you love only those who love you, you are no different than the heathen who have that kind of love. Jesus not only taught it, and required it; He practiced the highest extensity of love by dying, not just for His own, but for all men. If Jesus had been just a Jewish Messiah, His love would be no different than any other great deliverer.

No man can follow Christ in his extensity of love, for it is not in anyone's capacity to demonstrate love for all men who have ever lived, and who ever will. Jesus is the only example of perfect extensity of love. We cannot attain this level, and we are not expected to. Being Christlike is not being identical to Christ, for this is impossible, and this should be made clear, for some thinking we are to be equal to Christ reject Christianity as impossible. Dorothy L. Sayers, responding to the high claims of Christ wrote,

**Thou liest, Christ, thou liest; take it hence,
That mirror of strange glories. I am I;**

**What wouldst thou make of me? O cruel pretence,
Drive me not mad so with the mockery
Of that most lovely, unattainable lie.**

It is both deceptive and destructive to convey to people that an unattainable ideal is expected. Whatever God expects is attainable, and He expects perfection of love, therefore, we must recognize perfection in us is not the same as it was in Christ. Our limits are far greater. We do not have the capacity to love as He did, but we can love with all the capacity we have, and that is to be Christlike. To imitate Christ is not to duplicate Him. This means that though we can love as intensively as Christ in laying down our lives, we cannot love intensively as extensively. That is, we cannot lay down our lives for all men. Nevertheless, we are to love all men with the intensity of which we are capable. This means we love most men with zero degree, or slightly above, in intensity.

It can be scientifically demonstrated that the more extensive our love gets, the less intensive it gets. A love that is really on fire, and fills a man with drive and power, is a very narrow love. Our love for God is to be very intensive, with all our heart, mind, and soul, but this is not expected in the command to love all men. We cannot love all men with our whole being. We can so love our mate and children, however, and that is why they alone present a danger of idolatry. Only when the extensivity of our love is very narrow can we love with idolatrous intensity, and that is why only those nearest to us are rivals with our love for God. This does not mean we can love anyone too much, but only too much relative to our love for God. All are to be loved less than God.

At this point it is well to point out that the love we are talking about is not a feeling or emotion. Emotion is a factor, but if you take that as the factor of measurement, you are in serious trouble. We have emotions right along that are far more intensive toward our

loved ones than we do toward God. If emotion is the measuring rod, we love many persons, and even things, more intensely than God. But if loyalty is the test, it is a different story. If there is a conflict between the will of God, and the will of one you love, and you chose to obey God, you reveal that He is indeed your God, and not another for whom you have greater emotions.

The value of studying love in its dimensions of intensity and extensity is that it does help you to get a more practical concept of love. It enables you to measure your love, and be more realistic, and aware of your limitations. If you say you love the Japanese people, or any other people, remember that without action toward them your love is extensive, but its intensity is near zero, and of little benefit. Christ alone combines a love of universal extensity and absolute intensity. Therefore, the greatest act of love you can perform is to help fulfill the great commission that men everywhere might come to know this love of Christ.

3. Duration.

Love can be momentary or eternal, or anywhere in between. There is the puppy love experience that comes and goes, and the lasting love of marriage that goes through a lifetime, and on into eternity. A very intense love can be very short lived. A soldier can suddenly risk his life and dash out into the battlefield to rescue a buddy. If he survives, the next day he may be living a very normal self-centered life with little concern for his buddy. Maybe even ten minutes after this intense act of love his concern may be over. On the other hand, an act of low intensity love may go on for years. It could be simply appreciation for your paperboy or someone else who provides a service. The ideal, of course, is to have an intense love with an eternal duration. Again, Christ alone can love with an everlasting love with absolute intensity. His love never fails, but he says of Christians that trials will cause the love of many to grow

cold. This is where love and perseverance go hand in hand. We must possess perseverance if our love is to be durable. The more Christlike we are the more durable our love will be. We often just love um and leave um. This is true with our interests in various people and projects. Ideal love endures.

4. Purity.

Let me quote Sorokin directly on this, "The purity of love ranges from the love motivated by love alone without the taint of a "soiling motive" of utility, pleasure, advantage, or profit, down to the "soiled love" where love is but a means to a utilitarian or hedonistic or other end, where love is only the thinnest trickle in a muddy current of selfish aspirations and purposes." To love God out of fear of hell, for example, is a very impure love. Or to love men because their company builds up your ego and reputation. There is every degree of purity of love just as all other dimensions have a variety of degrees. It is measured by the presence or the absence of selfishness in your motive. Most all of our love has some degree of selfishness, and so again only Christ has love that is perfectly pure.

5.The Adequacy of Love.

If our love is adequate, our subjective goal leads to objective consequences which are identical to it. This becomes easier to grasp if we look at it negatively. Inadequate love may be a very genuine and intense love which acts in such a way so as to lead to consequences opposite of its goal. Sorokin selects the most common example to illustrate. A mother who intensely desires her children to be honest, industrious and good, but who pampers them, fails to discipline them, and satisfies all their whims. Those objective consequences are irresponsible, lazy and dishonest children. The subjective love of the mother is true and real and sincere, but it does not lead to the goal of love, and, therefore, is a very inadequate love.

So we see that a truly Christlike love is dependent upon knowledge to be adequate. Love without knowledge is just not enough. With an intense love to cure your child you can in ignorance give him a poison and kill him. Such love is inadequate no matter how intense. Christian love must be love that is not blind, but a love that walks in the light.

Another form of inadequate love is when you act with no subjective love aim in mind, but your act leads to objective consequences of love. Many creative people create works of art, or literature, only for fame or money, but which lead many to be lifted and helped. the consequences are loving even if the aim was selfish. This is not Christian love. Christian love must have a subjective aim, and again only Christ has the wisdom to be able to have perfect harmony between his aim and the consequences. The great saints of history are those who have been able to combine in a high degree all 5 of these dimensions of love. These are all needed for love to be Christlike, and only then is love enough.

13. THE SUPREME VIRTUE Based on II Peter 1:7

Pitiram Sorokin in his book The Ways And Power Of Love tells of how in 1918 he was hunted down by the Communist Government of Russia. He was imprisoned and condemned to death. Everyday he expected to be shot as he witnessed the shootings of his friends and fellow prisoners. For 4 years he underwent endless horrors of human cruelty, death, and destruction. In spite of all this he was an excellent example of the power of positive thinking.

He wrote this in his diary while in prison: "Whatever may happen in the future, I know that I have learned 3 things which will

remain forever convictions of my heart as well as my mind. Life, even the hardest life, is the most beautiful, wonderful, and miraculous treasure in the world. Fulfillment of duty is another marvelous thing making life happy. This is my second conviction. And my third is that cruelty, hatred, violence, and injustice never can and never will be able to create a mental, moral, or material millenium. The only way toward it is the royal road of all-giving creative love, not only preached but consistently practiced."

This all-giving creative love he writes of is the agape love of the New Testament. God spared Sorokin that he might preach and practice this love. He became one of the most voluminous writers of modern times in the area of Sociology. He established the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. Altruism is another word for the love of others. After years of study and experiments Sorokin believes he has established the following truth scientifically:

"Unselfish love has enormous creative and therapeutic potentialities far greater than most people think. Love is a life-giving force, necessary for physical, mental, and moral health.

Altruistic persons live longer than egoistic individuals.

Children deprived of love tend to become vitally, morally, and socially defective.

Love is the most powerful antidote against criminal, morbid, and suicidal tendencies; against hate, fear, psychoneuroses.

It is an indispensable condition for deep and lasting happiness.

Only the power of unbounded love practiced in regard to all human beings can defeat the forces of interhuman strife.

It is goodness and freedom at their loftiest."

He feels he has established the fact scientifically which the New Testament proclaims, and that is that love is the supreme virtue. It is the pinnacle of perfection. It the weapon that will ultimately win over all the forces of darkness. He says that the finest fruit of

scientific thinking is identical to the finest fruit of the Spirit, which is agape love. Science is a precise method for interpreting and controlling nature, and when it comes to human nature the key factor in interpreting and controlling it is love. More and more people in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology are recognizing this fact that life without love just will not work.

Smiley Blanton, an American psychiatrist, has written a book titled Love Or Perish. He writes, "For more than 40 years I have sat in my office and listened while people of all ages and classes told me of their hopes and fears, their likes and dislikes, and of what they considered good or bad about themselves and the world around them....As I look back over the long, full years, one truth emerges clearly in my mind-the universal need for love. Whether they think they do or not, all people want love....They cannot survive without love: they must have it or they will perish."

A psychiatrist at a mental institution in Peoria, Ill. Says: "No matter what a psychiatrist knows he cannot cure a patient with knowledge. Someone has to love that patient, for the lack of love produced the neurosis. And only love can cure it." Dr. Karl Menninger, the noted authority in the world of medicine and psychiatry, said, "Love is the medicine for the sickness of the world." He tells his staff, which includes doctors, nurses, orderlies, and cleaning people, that the most important thing they can offer a patient is love. When people learn to give and receive love they recover from most of their illnesses. The biggest health problem in the world is the inability to love and receive love. Love is the greatest gift, and God gave us this gift in the giving of His Son.

Paul made it clear in I Cor. 13 that he could have all gifts and powers that anyone could ever hope to have, but if he lacked love he would be nothing. Peter agrees with Paul, and that is why he puts love at the top. We can be a very fine person with many virtues, but

without this supreme virtue of love we can never be Christ-like in the way that really counts. There would be no Gospel if God lacked this love, and there would be no communication of the Gospel if Christians lack it. It is far more comprehensive than brotherly love. That is a love that is exclusive for those who are brothers in Christ. Agape love is that which covers all that the New Testament says about our love for neighbors and enemies. It is a universal love. It is the only kind of love adequate to meet the human situation because it is not a matter of affection, but a matter of unconditional acceptance.

A love that depends upon feeling and affection would be so limited as to be of no value at all in relation to enemies, and of little value in relation to most other people. You can only have true affection for very few people, and so we have to get the idea out of our mind that when we speak of agape love we are speaking of some kind of emotion or affection. Agape love is unconditional acceptance of another person. It does not demand anything. Emotional love demands attraction, affection, and some kind of benefit, but agape demands nothing. The only perfect example is God's love for us. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. This means that God's love was expressed before we responded in faith. God loved man in an absolutely unconditional manner, and He required nothing of man before He gave His Son to die for their sins.

This was the kind of love Jesus displayed as He went about doing good and healing all manner of disease, both physical and spiritual. The law said, if you do this I will accept you, but the love of Christ said, I accept you, therefore, do this. Agape love is the difference between law and grace. The only way we can carry on the effectiveness of Christ is to add to our lives this supreme virtue of love.

Paul Tillich looking at it from the practical and scientific point of

view wrote, "You cannot help people who are in psychosomatic distress by telling them what to do. You can help them only by giving them something and by accepting them....Only then can one accept himself. It is never the other way around. That was the plight of Luther in his struggle against the distorted late Roman Church which wanted that men make themselves first acceptable and then God would accept them. But it is always the other way around. First you must be accepted. Then you can accept yourself, and that means, you can be healed. Illness, and the largest sense of body, soul and spirit, is estrangement." The power of the Gospel is, therefore, the power of love and reconciliation. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The sense of estrangement is not necessary, for God because of Christ accepts everyone unconditionally.

We do not love in the New Testament sense unless we can accept people unconditionally. If we demand anything of people before we accept them we fall short of agape love. This great truth can be perverted if we assume that God's acceptance of the sinner is the same as the salvation of the sinner. The liberal tends to do this, and by doing so weakens the Gospel of love by not going beyond acceptance by God to repentance and salvation. The conservative on the other hand is repelled back from the idea of telling the world they are reconciled to God, and they weaken the Gospel of love by changing its unconditional nature.

This puts the sinner in the position of having to do something to win God's love and be accepted.

Both of these perversions of love have hindered the cause of Christ. The liberal perversion brings into the church those who are not made whole by conversion. The conservative error keeps out of the church those who would be converted and made whole if they were accepted in love. This greatest weapon for spiritual warfare is like any major physical weapon. It is complicated and technical,

and it calls for a trained and skilled operator. To be effective uses of love we cannot afford to be ignorant of its nature anymore than a soldier can afford to be handling atomic weapons when he does not understand them.

It is one thing to be down on the launching pad of faith, but quite another to be way up in orbit controlling the ship of love. When we come to the top position in any field we have a great deal of responsibility, and so when we come to this supreme virtue and ultimate weapon against evil we have a great responsibility as Christian soldiers. If we want to be successful in soaring high into the atmosphere of Christ-like love, there are some important things we need to know about love. We cannot deal with them all now, but the major thing we need to understand is that-

LOVE IS EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE.

None of the weapons of spiritual warfare come cheap, but in comparison to love they are the parachute and love is the airplane. It costs to climb to love in Christian maturity. It cost God His Son to love, and it cost Christ His life to love, and a great deal of sacrifice while He lived. Richard Trench has put into poetry some of the things that Jesus didn't do because He loved.

**He might have reared a palace at His word,
Who sometime had not where to lay His head;
Time was when He who fed the crowds with bread
Would not one crust unto Himself afford.
Twelve legions, girded with angelic sword
Where at His beck, the scorned and buffeted.
He healed another's scratch, His own side bled,
Side, feet, and hands with cruel piercings gored,
O wonderful the wonders left undone.
And scarce less wonderful than those He wrought.**

**O love divine, passing all human thought,
To have all power yet be as having none.
O self-effacing love that thought alone
For others needs, but never for His own.**

Self-sacrifice is the very essence of agape love. It is costly because it is always giving regardless of whether it is receiving or not. Stephen Neill writes, "Love in the Bible sense of the word is always concerned with self-giving. It is never merely feeling; it always includes a steady direction of the will toward another's lasting good." Now that is easy to say, and love is easy to define, and fairly easy to understand, but if you think it is easy to practice, you are deceived. This kind of love is unnatural. Love for family, friends, and brothers in Christ is easier because there is a natural bond, but to love the stranger, the unlovable, and the enemy is to love across a chasm with no bridge. It is contrary to the natural tendencies of man. That is why agape love is so expensive. It is custom made, and can only be possessed as we participate in the divine nature. This is demanding and calls for costly commitment.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian, in his Works Of Love recognized this truth and said, "It is easier to become a Christian when I am not a Christian than to become a Christian when I am one." It is easier to enter the kingdom on ground level by faith in Christ than it is to climb to the heights of the kingdom by taking up the cross and following Christ all the way. To take up the cross and to add love to your life amounts to the same thing, and this is costly. Kierkegaard said that the Christians of his day rationalized and said that the command to love your neighbor as yourself was intentionally severe. It was like setting the clock a half hour ahead so as to be sure not to be late. This is really not necessary, however, if you are wise and careful, and so they made love easy and cheapened it.

Another way to cut down on the expense of love is to limit it to language. Love language can be beautiful and the cost is almost nothing. Beautiful expressions can be easily learned and used like well written poems for birthday cards. They make it easy to take care of a love obligation. This loving by words is like a tree with beautiful leaves but no fruit. It has aesthetic value but no practical life sustaining value. Leaves are allowed to take the place of fruit. It is easy and cheap, but in the long run more costly than sacrificial agape love. Israel was cut off because of its fruitlessness, and Jesus says every branch in Him that does not bare fruit shall be cut off. That is why John warns Christians in these words: "My little children, let us not live in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth." This is the hard way, and the expensive way, but the only way to be truly Christ-like and fruitful.

The reason it is so hard and costly to love in action and sacrifice is because it is so contrary to our natural tendencies, and to the value system of the world. We can only be Christ-like when we make Christ the supreme object of our devotion. We cannot bear the cost of love apart from a full commitment to Christ who alone can impart such love. The burden can be made lighter, but not the cost. The poet put it-

Love came to me with a crown, I took it and laid it down.

Love came to me and said, Wear it upon thy head.

Tis too heavy, I cannot wear it, I have not strength enough to bear it.

Then my soul's beloved spake, Saying, wear it for my sake.

When lo! The crown of love grew light, and I wore it in all men's sight.

When we do all we do for the sake of Christ, the burden is lighter, but the fact remains that the cost is no cheaper. It would all be so easy if we just had to love God, for He is unchangeable and there is

security in loving Him. But there is great uncertainty and risk in loving those close to you, let alone the neighbor, the stranger, and the enemy. St. Augustine in his confessions tells of how the death of his friend Nebridius plunged him into despair. This is what comes, he says, of giving your heart to anything but God. All human beings pass away, and so he reasons, do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose. If love is to be a blessing, not a misery, it must be for the only Beloved who will never pass away."

Augustine's thinking is clouded by his grief, for what he is doing is seeking a love that is not so expensive. He wants an easy and secure love in God alone where there is no risk. Scripture commands us to love Him supremely, but not Him solely. C. S. Lewis read this passage from Augustine and responded like this in his book *The Four Loves*: "Of course this is excellent sense. Don't put your goods in a leaky vessel. Don't spend too much on a house you may be turned out of. And there is no man alive who responds more naturally than I to such canny maxims. I am a safety-first creature. Of all arguments against love none makes so strong an appeal to my nature as "Careful." This might lead you to suffering."

But he goes on to say that when he responds to that appeal he feels a thousand miles away from Christ. He writes, "If I am sure of anything, I am sure that His teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liabilities. I doubt whether there is anything in me that pleases Him less." There is no way to make love cheap and please Christ. Love costs, and there is no escape. It is a risk every time, and loss is certain. To think you can love and escape tears is to be blind to the risks of love. You cannot love a dog and escape suffering, for the dog will die or be killed. If you love, you are opening your heart to suffering and disappointment. All the sorrows of Jesus were due to His loving. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus his friend. He wept over Jerusalem.

His heart was saddened because the rich young ruler, whom He loved, turned and left Him. There is no easy way to love by which you can escape the suffering it brings.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell." Lack of love is even more costly, however, for the price of it is hell. In the long run love is the best bargain in the universe, but we must ever be aware that it is nevertheless extremely expensive. A. J. Gossip put it, "You will not stroll into Christ-likeness with your hands in your pockets shoving the door open with a careless shoulder." You will be Christ-like only at great expense and sacrifice. So let's stop kidding ourselves, and get out of our safety zones and begin to march into enemy territory and claim it for Christ. We do this by paying the cost to love all whom God loves. It is expensive, but it is worth the cost for when we have this we are in possession of the Supreme Virtue.

14. BROTHERLY LOVE Based on II Peter 1:7

D. L. Moody has related a tradition concerning the sight of Solomon's temple. It seems that the land was occupied by two brothers. One had a family and the other was unmarried. One evening after harvesting the wheat, as they sat in their separate dwellings, the elder brother said to his wife, "My younger brother is unable to bear the burden and heat of the day. I will arise and put my shocks with his." The younger brother said to himself, "My brother has a family with greater need than I. I will arise and put my shocks with his." They met in the night each with their arms filled with shocks, and it was on that ground hallowed by such brotherly love that the temple was erected. Brotherly love was a

great value in the Old Testament, and many of the Old Testament saints would gladly pray with the poet:

**If any lift of mine may ease
The burden of another,
God give me love and care and strength
To help my ailing brother.**

There are great examples of brotherly love such as David and Jonathan, or Ruth and Naomi. Let us remember that though the word sounds very masculine it includes the female also. Philadelphia is the Greek word that Peter uses, but this virtue is so vital a part of New Testament Christianity that often the highest word for love, which is agape, is also used to described brotherly love. For example, Jesus in John 13:34 says, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another: as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Jesus calls us to put brotherly love on the same level as His love for us, which is agape love, and agape is the Greek word used in that verse. Jesus also says that this is a new commandment. The Old Testament could be summed up in the two great commandments of loving God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves. Now Jesus says He is adding a third commandment of love, which is brotherly love, and distinct from love of neighbor.

Peter has given us these three great commandments as the last three in this series of essential weapons for Christian victory. Godliness is love and loyalty to God. Love at the end of the list is our love to all men; to our neighbor and even toward enemies. But here in the middle of these two which sum up the whole Old Testament is the new commandment of Christ to love one another. This love is exclusively directed toward those who, by faith in Christ, have become children of God and our brothers. We must love all who are our brothers before we can love all others. We are

to do good to all men, says Paul, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. The New Testament makes a great deal of this brotherly love. So much so that the Apostle John says that if we do not have it we are not truly Christians. If we say we love God but hate some brother in Christ, we are liars and deceive ourselves. Love of God and love of one's fellow Christians are so bound together that they cannot exist separate from each other. Christians are to demonstrate to the world that love can unite people of every race, background, and personality.

The fact that it is made a commandment, and the fact that Peter and all the Apostles urged Christians to add it to their lives clearly indicates it is not just an automatic part of the Christian life. Christians are not automatically lovable to each other. People come to Christ out of every conceivable background and with every conceivable personality. They have much that is not in common, and so it is only as they concentrate on what they do have in common, namely Jesus Christ, that they can love one another. So many Christians have a hard time figuring out other Christians and their values, or beliefs, and they don't know what to do about them. The answer is as simple to state as the Department of Agriculture stated it to a man with great pride in his lawn. He was fighting to keep it free from dandelions, and after trying every known device to get rid of them, he wrote to the government agency and told them all he had done. He asked them, "What should I do now?" In due time they replied, "We suggest you learn to love them."

That is the New Testament demand, and you are to learn to love all who claim Jesus as Lord and Savior. Brotherly love is not a matter of affection, but of duty to Christ, and commitment to His purpose. The success or failure of the church depends upon the obedience of Christians to this commandment of Christ. When Christians obeyed it the world looked and said, "Behold how they love one another." This so impressed the pagans that it opened the

door for the Gospel. Lucian, a Greek writer in the second century, wrote this of Christians: "It is incredible what pain and diligence they use by all means to aid one another. They have an extreme contempt of the things of the world. Their legislature made them believe that they are all brethren, and since they have renounced our religion, and worshiped their crucified leader, they live according to His laws and all their riches are common."

The pagans may have misunderstood much of the theology of Christianity, but they could not fail to be impressed with the love of Christians for one another. They pagans had no basis for such love and unity. The Christians had God as Father, the church as mother, and Christ as the elder brother. The Holy Spirit was the unifier of all, and so they were an unique family. Christianity alone provides a basis for a universal brotherhood. John Holland wrote, "Science can make a neighborhood of a nation, but only Christ can make the nations into a brotherhood. It is extremely important, therefore, that all Christians know why brotherly love is to characterize their lives, and what they can do to express it. Let's consider the question first:

I. WHY IS IT SO ESSENTIAL?

Jesus gave His reason for its importance in John 13:35: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." Jesus wants brotherly love to be the trademark of the Christian. It is to be the sign by which men know his followers. It is to be the key value in witnessing to the world. Lack of it could destroy the progress of the church. History has demonstrated this over and over.

Clement wrote in the second century, "When pagans hear from our lips the oracles of God, they marvel at their beauty and greatness; afterwards, when they discover that our actions are not

worthy of our utterances, they betake themselves to blasphemy, declaring it is all myth and delusion. When they hear from us that God says, 'It is no credit to you if you love those who love you, but it is a merit to you if you love your enemies and those who hate you'-when they hear that, they marvel at such surpassing kindness; but when they see that we fail to love not only those who hate us but even those who love us, then they deride us, and God's name is blasphemed."

A failure on the part of Christians to practice brotherly love makes mockery of the whole Gospel, and it weakens the witness of the church more than any other single factor. Brothers in Christ must learn to agree to disagree on non-essentials, just like literal brothers do. If you wait until all Christians agree with you before you love them, your love will come too late to be of any use in time, for all Christians will never agree in time. We need this fruit of the spirit now, and not just in heaven.

John Wesley was one of the wisest men whoever lived, and though he had deep convictions that changed the world, he could get along with almost everyone. He said, "It is certain so long as we know but in part, that all men will not see all things alike." He loved men who differed with him because he was not so arrogant as to believe he was all wise. It is essential that every Christian possess this attitude, for love cannot thrive in the soil of pride and intolerance. On the other hand, when love is absent the weeds of pride and intolerance thrive, even in the Christian life. Lack of brotherly love has brought shame upon the church again and again.

Constantinople had been for many centuries the bulwark of Christendom and civilization, but the soldiers of the cross from the West, during the Crusades, attacked the city, burned it, desecrated its Cathedral, and conducted a blasphemous mockery of the Greek Orthodox service with a dancing girl on the high altar. The Greek

church never forgave that outrage, and when they had to choose between Mohammedan rule, or that of the Catholics, they chose the Moslems, and thus, a foolish feud between Christians led to a great triumph for paganism. To make matters worse, they each claimed to be the one true church, and excluded each other. Then, as if two one true churches was not enough, the church of England claimed the only true Apostolic succession and said that they were the one true church.

In a Manual for Confirmation Candidates this is what they taught their children: "The Catholic church is the home of the Holy Ghost. It is His only earthly home. He does not make His home in any dissenting sect. Sometimes people quarrel with the church, and break away from her, and make little sham churches of their own. We call these people dissenters, and their sham churches sects. The Holy Ghost does not abide, does not dwell, with them." The absurdity does not stop with only three one true churches, however, for these so called sham churches decided to declare all of the others apostate, and take the title for themselves, and so the number of one true churches has multiplied through the years.

Robert Hall, the great Baptist preacher, wrote concerning this nonsense: "Nothing more abhorrent to the principles and maxims of the sacred oracles can be conceived than the idea of a plurality of true churches, neither in actual communion with each other, nor in the capacity for such communion. Through this rending of the seamless coat of our Savior, this schism in the members of His mystical body, is by far the greatest calamity which has befallen the Christian interest..." Jesus said a house divided against itself cannot stand, and this goes for the church as well as the house of Satan. One of the things that most impressed me about the Billy Graham team, and its policy and programs, is its foundation in love. Every conceivable kind of Christian unites together in the common cause of extending the kingdom of God.

Hundreds of ministers whose theology is in conflict, and whose views on church life, polity, membership, baptism, theology, etc., is widely different, and yet all in one accord on that which is essential. Billy Graham is doing more for the ecumenical movement than anyone, with the goal being, not organic unity, but unity in brotherly love. This is no doubt the reason for why he has been so successful. Alexander Campbell, the pioneer leader of the Church of the Disciples said, "This plan of building our own tents and of confining all goodness and grace to our noble selves and to the elect few who are like us, is the quintessence of sublimated Pharisaism." Lack of brotherly love means a weak and negative witness to the world, and a fruitless Christian life. There are other evil results also, but these are sufficient to answer the question why brotherly love is so essential. If you cannot love those in Christ who differ from you, don't expect the world to be impressed with you, for you are no different from them. Now let's consider the question-

II. HOW IS IT TO BE EXPRESSED?

The most obvious way is by means of tolerance. The Dutch has a custom to symbolize the need to live together in unity. They put two earthen pots afloat and put this inscription on them, "If we knock together, we sink together." Every time one Christian knocks another both are brought lower in the eyes of the world, and the knocker in the eyes of God, for this is one of the things that He hates. We are not talking here about the valid rebuke for sin. Paul rebuked Peter to his face for his false views, and Peter became a better man for it. It is valid to rebuke another believer in order to get them to forsake a wrong path, but this is part of loving one another. Paul did this to help Peter. He did not go out and start an anti-Peter campaign. Tolerance does not mean that you let fellow Christians do as they please and go astray without rebuke or warning, but it means that you do not demand that they conform to you and your views for fellowship. Christians may disagree and even split up as

did Paul and Barnabas, but love will bring them back together again, as it did them, for love will make them reconsider their differences, and recognize their unity in Christ is far more important than their differences in viewpoint.

No man is an island, except the one who will not have fellowship with anyone who differs from him on things non-essential. He is a lonely man indeed. Robert Hall said, "The man who is good enough for Christ is good enough for me." Does Jesus love people who are radically different in viewpoint? Look at the 12 He chose for His disciples and you have the answer. The poet wrote,

**One Master's peace the strife shall end,
One life our lives combine,
And he that is my Master's friend
Shall be a friend of mine.**

This is brotherly love, and this is the way to power in the church. This is not just saying live and let live, but live and help live. A company of soldiers who cannot work together, but who disagree and fight among themselves, rather than against the common enemy, is not going to be very effective tool in the hands of the Commander. That is why Jesus threatened to set aside some of the churches in the book of Revelation, for they had forsaken their first love and were more involved in other pursuits than the pursuit of love.

Intolerance is unchristian, unwise, unjust, and unkind, but unfortunately it is not uncommon. Many are like the Mary in this little poem.

**Mary had a little slam
For everyone, and so-
The leaves of her engagement book
Were always white as snow.**

Some professing Christians seem to thrive on the slamming of others. I hear Christians critical of other Christians without ever reading their works. They make claims of how they are not true believers, when the evidence is clear that they are. This lack of brotherly-love that will not even seek to understand others is shameful, and it is hateful to God. It is one of the most unwise things that Christians do when they judge other Christians without even knowing the people they condemn. It is folly on the highest level, and makes Christians look stupid. If you tend to be critical of other believers, there is a good chance that you are being an enemy of the cause of Christ, for likely you have not really studied to know the people you condemn. Brotherly love will make sure that any condemnation of another brother is for their good, and that it is based on first hand contact, and not based on second hand information about the person.

John Chrysostom, that golden mouthed preacher of many centuries ago, wrote, "Was it ever seen that a sheep did persecute the wolf? No, but contrairwise. So also Cain persecuted Abel, but not Abel Cain. So Ishmael persecuted Isaac, not Isaac Ishmael. So the Jews did Christ, not Christ the Jews. So the heretic Christians, not Christians heretics. Wherefore by their fruits we shall know them. He whom thou perceivest to take delight in persecution and bloodshed is a ravenous wolf." There are many who pretend to be defenders of the faith who are wolves in sheep's clothing. All through history the persecutor has been the anti-Christian, even if he is defending the orthodox viewpoint. It was in defense of orthodoxy that Jesus was crucified, and He is crucified afresh in every generation by those who defend the faith without brotherly love and tolerance of those who differ.

We usually think of John as the great apostle of love, and Paul likewise, for he wrote the great love chapter of I Cor. 13, but we cannot leave Peter out, for he makes it clear that without love the

Christian is blind, inadequate, and unfruitful. If love is the greatest virtue, then brotherly love is a part of that supreme virtue, and we need to have it in all situations to make sure we are part of the answer, and not part of the problem in the body of Christ. Swift wrote,

**And when with grief you see our brother stray,
Or in a night of error lose his way,
Direct his wandering and restore the day.
Leave to avenging Heaven his stubborn will,
For, O, remember, he's your brother still.**

Am I my brothers keeper? Yes, says the New Testament. Dr. David Jones tells of 12 people he had in a training camp planning to go to the mission field. They did not like each other, and the tension grew until one exploded and said, "I can't stand any of you! I can't wait to get to Africa so I can love the natives." He wanted to get to agape love by bypassing Philadelphia love, but it just will not work. We need to recognize that we cannot be what God wants us to be without brotherly love. Paul backs up Peter on this issue, and he writes in Rom. 12:10, "Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor." In I Thess. 4:9-10 he writes, "But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do all love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more." That is the key, for no matter how much we love one another, we must keep on growing more and more in brotherly love.

15. FRUIT IS SUCCESS Based on II Peter 1:8

Two young brothers, Nathaniel and John Chapman, entered the Black Bear Tavern, the largest building in Pittsburgh back in 1788. They were looking for a place to sleep in this little village on the Western Frontier. All of the rooms were filled, so they had to sleep on the floor in the corner of the bar. Little did the bar keeper realize that one day one of these brothers, John, would become one of the most famous characters West of the Allegheny Mountains. John had been to Harvard, and had also been a missionary preaching the doctrines of the Swedish mystic Swedenborg. He came to Pittsburgh because it was the point from which people departed for settlements in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.

John and his brother went up the Allegheny River to visit an uncle. When they found his cabin empty they decided to settle there for awhile. John noted that there was an absence of fruit trees in the area, and he decided to do something about it. He found an neglected orchard and set out hundreds of apple tree shoots. Clarence Macartney in his book of historical studies called Right Here In Pittsburgh says, "This was probably the first nursery in the West." John became so concerned about orchards and the providing of fruit for the people moving West that he made it his life work to plant apple trees.

He said, "Fruit is next to religion. I use to be a Bible missionary down in Virginia, but now I believe I'll be an apple missionary. He chose a very fruitful profession, and he was a marvelous success at it. He became known all over the country as Johnny Appleseed. Everywhere he went he carried his bag of apple seed and he planted them. He said, "I am going to sow the West with apple seeds, making the wilderness to blossom with their beauty, and the people happy with their fruit."

On horseback, in canoe, and on foot he roamed the wilds of Western Pennsylvania, Southern New York, and Ohio. He kept a

cabin near Pittsburgh. He dressed with ragged, ill fitting, faded garments. He went barefoot and had long black hair that fell over his shoulders. He made friends wherever he went as he sowed his seeds and preached from the Bible. When the Indian wars raged through Ohio, he was the only white man who could go on roaming the woods and not be killed, for the Indians also loved him. For 50 years he lived a vagabond life risking every danger to sow his seeds. More than once he was brought down by malaria. Robert Luccock in The Last Gospel tells of how on one occasion he was found by a pioneer in an Ohio River settlement dying with an intense fever. He did not know who he was, but he called for a doctor. The doctor came and seeing him clutching a bag of seed with the initials JC burned into the leather said, "It's Jonathan Chapman that good Samaritan of Pittsburgh come to settle among us. Praise God from who all blessing flow."

At the age of 79 Johnny Appleseed died at Fort Wayne, Indiana where he is buried. Monuments have been created in his memory, and many legends have surrounded his career. In the U. S. Senate, General Sam Houston of Texas paid this eulogy to Johnny Appleseed: "This old man was one of the most useful citizens of the world in his humble way. He has made a greater contribution to our civilization than we realize. He has left a place that can never be filled. Farewell, dear old eccentric heart. Your labor has been a labor of love..." We are interested in this life, because his life of love and fruit illustrates the ideal of the New Testament for the Christian. Our goal is not apples, but our goal is fruit. As Peter indicates here, and as the whole Bible makes clear, the purpose of all virtues, including love, is that they might lead us to fruitful living.

Johnny Appleseed dressed like a bum, had his hair like a hippie, had habits as strange as John the Baptist, and was just a very unusual man, but he became a great success because fruit was his aim, and he fulfilled that aim. Without fruit he would have been

considered an eccentric old fool and a mad man. Fruit made the difference, and fruit will make the difference for all of us between failure and success.

Fruit is one of the key themes of the Bible. God is a God of fruit, and all that is in harmony with His will is fruitful. Paradise was paradise because of the fruitfulness of nature. To be put out of paradise was to have to labor for food, for the earth was less fruitful outside of paradise. When paradise is regained, Rev. 22:2 describes it as possessing fruitfulness beyond anything we, or Johnny Appleseed, could ever imagine. A tree bearing 12 kinds of fruit and yielding its fruit every month.

The Godly in the Bible are often likened to a tree, and the effects of their godliness to fruit. In Psa. 1 he who delights in the law of God, "..Shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." Success and fruit go together. Paul was a Johnny Gospelseed going everywhere sowing the seeds of life in Christ. He says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. The whole ministry of the church is symbolized in fruit bearing. Jesus sent forth His disciples that they might bear fruit.

It was no accident that the Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost. This was the great feast of harvest when the fruits were gathered in. What delight God has in harmony and beauty of symbolism. The coming of the Spirit was the beginning of the harvest of the church. Three thousand souls were saved that day, and the church immediately began to bear fruit. The dry bones of Israel were clothed with living flesh. The desert of Israel began to bloom like a rose, and began to produce the fruits necessary to refresh the world and bring new life to all.

Jesus cursed the fig tree because it had no fruit. It was a symbol

of Israel. Israel was cut off because she was barren and unfruitful, and a new branch was grafted in, which was the Gentiles. God just will not tolerate perpetual unfruitfulness. Jesus tells us clearly why Israel was replaced by the church to represent the kingdom of God on earth. In Matt. 21:43 he said to the Jewish leaders, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it." Even the kingdom of God is of no value if it produces no fruit. Every gift of God and every virtue is of no value if they do not produce fruit.

Jesus was very fruit conscience. In the Parable of the Sower He taught that much seed is choked out before it bears fruit, and so is of no value. But some seed goes on to bear fruit, and some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty. Not all seed is equally fruitful, but any fruit is some measure of success. John the Baptist required fruit as evidence of repentance. Jesus said that by their fruits you shall know them. Fruit is the test of all truth. That is why Paul warns Christians not to partake of the unfruitful works of darkness. The Christian should be so fruit conscience that he does not waste his life on what is unprofitable. This is even so in spiritual experiences. We are urged to aim for the best and most fruitful gifts.

In I Cor. 14:14 Paul says, "...if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful." The good can be the enemy of the best and rob us of fruit. All we do needs to be evaluated according to its fruitfulness. We can get caught up into the 7th heaven in emotion but if we do not turn this spiritual experience into some sort of fruitfulness, it is all in vain. Fruit is what counts, and fruit alone is success. Even the death of Christ is a fruit issue. In John 12:24 He says, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." A seed that does not die and thereby bear fruit is of no value. It is as worthless as a dead rock. Success for a seed is in bearing fruit, and if it cannot bear fruit without dying, then dying is the only way to

success. So it is with the seed of David-the Lord Jesus Christ, and so it is for all who follow Him. Whatever the cost we must pay the price to bear fruit, for fruit is success.

In the light of all this, which does not begin to cover all the stress of Scripture on fruit, we can see why Peter makes the goal of all these virtues the escaping of an unfruitful life. This is the worst possible fate for a Christian to be a dead an barren branch. The world desperately needs a army of Johnny Gospel-seeds planting the trees of life in the wilderness of the world.

When Julian the Apostate was Emperor of the Roman Empire, this is what he wrote to a pagan priest: "Let us consider that nothing has contributed so much to the progress of the superstition of the Christians, as their charity to strangers. I think we ought to discharge this obligation ourselves. Establish hospitals in every place, for it would be a shame in us to abandon our poor, while the Jews have none, and the impious Galileans (thus he calls the Christians) provide not only for their own poor, but also for ours." Here is pagan testimony to the fruit bearing power of agape love. The love of Christians even gets their enemies to do good works just to try and keep the church from getting all the credit. God alone knows all the good evil men have done in order to keep others from turning to Christ. Government programs of welfare do much good, but they rob the church of her fruits. People now look to the government when they use to look to Christians motivated by the love of Christ to meet their needs.

We seldom stop to realize that even good works divorce from the Gospel are the means by which the powers of darkness can keep people from turning to the light. If Satan can meet all a man's needs on the physical level, why should he turn to the church or to Christ? This means the government programs compete with the church for the allegiance of men, The church must be actively engaged in

demonstrating love on every level, and do it in the name of Christ, for only as men see that we are motivated by His love will they turn to Him.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the gifted Negro poet, felt deep bitterness over the injustice to his people. He was a cynic and his poetry reflected this.

**A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
An never a laugh but the moans came double,
And that is life!**

Before he died at the age of 33 he experienced the love of Christ in his own life, and he was transformed. Instead of the soar and bitter fruit of despair, he bore the sweet attractive fruit of the Spirit, and he wrote,

**A crust and a corner that love makes precious,
With a smile to warm and the tears to refresh us,
And joy seem sweeter when cares come afar,
And a moan is the finest foil for laughter,
And that is life!**

Paul Dunbar became a success before he died because he bore the fruit of the Spirit, and fruit is success. This is the goal for every Christian. We must produce that fruit which attracts the hungry soul to Christ. If the church is ineffective today, it is because they are like neglected orchards. The fruit is small and unappealing. Hungry minds and hearts are looking elsewhere for satisfaction. We must each strive to produce fruit according to our gifts. God does not expect a grapevine to produce watermelons, nor does he expect an apple tree to produce corn. Each is to produce according to its

gifts. You are not to compare yourself with anyone else, but to measure how effective you are in the use of your own gifts. If you have the gift of helping others and no one is thanking you for your help, you are not using your gift, and are not producing fruit. Evaluate your gifts in the light of whether they are producing fruit.

Fruit is what we give back to God for the gift of salvation. Salvation is what we accept from God, but fruit is what we achieve for God. Salvation is a gift from God, but fruit is a goal we reach for God. Salvation comes as free grace, but fruit comes by fertile growth. Salvation is God's investment in us, but fruit is the interest we return to God on His investment. May God help us to be successful in our service for Him by striving to bear fruit, for fruit is success.

16. NEARSIGHTED CHRISTIANS Based on II Peter 1:9

F. W. Boreham, the famous Australian preacher, had an instructive experience in St. Paul's Cathedral. He and a friend were looking at Holman Hunt's well known painting, "The Light Of The World." The Savior stands before a closed door with a lantern in His hand, and He is knocking. Boreham said to his friend, "I have never been able to understand why Holman Hunt thought it necessary to put a lantern in the Savior's hand on such a brilliant moonlight night. The whole landscape stands out as vividly as at noonday."

Just then a stranger interpreted. "You must forgive me," he said, "But it happens that I knew Holman Hunt well, and I was with him a good deal when he was working on the painting before you. If you pardon my saying so, you have completely missed one of the main

ideas he had in mind. He intended you to gather from the tangle of undergrowth on the ground around the door, that the house is standing on the fringe of the wilderness. The Savior is about to leave the open country, bathed in moonlight, and plunge into the shadowed gloom of the thickly wooded wilds. It is in preparation for His gloomy journey through the darksome recesses of the wilderness that He has lighted His lantern. He is knocking at the door not merely with the hope of being admitted, and supping with the members of the household, but in order to unite them to cooperate with Him in His mission by accompanying Him on His otherwise lonely journey."

It is fascinating to have this commentary on that painting, for it reveals the artist was aware of something that Christians tend to forget. He was aware of the fact that Jesus wants to enter the heart's door of the individual, not to love them and leave them, but to love them, save them, and recruit them for the great task of pushing back the darkness with the Gospel of light.

You would think that a Christian could never forget the purpose of Christ and His commands to take up the cross and follow Him. You would think that a Christian could never forget the cross, and the great commission to take the good news of it into all the world. But Peter says in verse 9 that Christians can even go to the point of being forgetful concerning their own cleansing from sin. Jesus implied the same when He instituted the Lord's Supper to be observed in remembrance of Him, and to show forth His death until He comes. The implication is that Christians would forget His sacrifice for their sin without a constant reminder. In this passage Peter's main concern is with the need to keep Christians reminded of what they already know.

In verse 12 he says will not be negligent to keep them in remembrance. In verse 13 he writes of stirring up their

remembrance as long as he lives, and in verse 15 he says he is putting these things in writing that they might have them in remembrance after he is gone. Peter is fighting a major disease of the spiritual life. It is the disease of spiritual amnesia. The person with amnesia has forgotten his identity. He is normal in every other way, but he does not know who he is. Israel fell victim to this disease time and time again. She forgot that she was the bride of Jehovah, and the elect people of God.

Moses cried out in Deut. 32:18, "You were unmindful of the Rock that begat you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth."

In Judges 3:7 we read, "And the people of Israel did what is evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God..."

Isaiah gave this as the reason for the sorrows of Israel in Isa. 17:10, "For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge."

God speaks in Jer. 2:32, "...My people have forgotten me days without number."

This is the common lament of the prophets. Israel has forgotten the Lord her God. It is no wonder then that she bore no fruit.

Forgetfulness and fruitfulness are opposites. Peter says that if you have all of these virtues, and cultivate them, you will bear fruit, but if you lack them you will be like Israel of old, blind, nearsighted, and forgetful of God's will and deliverance.

It is important for Christians, not only to recognize the great potential they have to be fruitful, but also to be aware of the great danger they face in being forgetful. Forgetfulness is the cause of so much sorrow and folly. Why do people who have lived together for years, and who have gone through joys and sorrows together, decide to get a divorce, or do something that will lead to divorce? It is basically because they forget. They forget their vows and commitments. They forget the love they once had. They forget all of the values they shared in the past, and the ideals they were aiming

for, and they look only at the present. Because it is unpleasant they forget all their obligations and play the fool.

Why do young people who have been given everything grow up and rebel, and seek to overthrow the source of their blessings? It is because they forget. They forget the sacrifice and love of their parents. They forget the motives and ideals of the past, and look only at their desires of the moment.

Why do Christians forsake the will of God? Why do they get fed up with the church? Why do they get irritable in relation to other Christians, and sinful in relation to the world? It is because they forget. They forget the love and sacrifice of Christ for sinners. They forget that Christians are still sinners. They forget the call to struggle against the forces of darkness, and to climb to the ideal of Christlikeness. They look only at the present imperfections, and they get discouraged and frustrated, and they give up. They lose the vision of the great past and the glorious future.

Peter puts it in very plain language. He says they are blind, and they cannot see afar off. Christians are so use to hearing the unsaved referred to as the blind that it is quite a shock for Peter to refer to Christians as blind. Peter is warning Christians of the dangerous power of negative thinking. He has listed all of the positive virtues the Christian must have to be a successful soldier of the cross, and a fruit bearing servant of Christ. In this verse he shows to what depth of failure a Christian can fall if he lacks these things. He can be blind, nearsighted, and forgetful. Peter's purpose in this negative language is positive, for he wants Christians to avoid this kind of failure. Knowing this can happen should make us practice preventative measures to ensure that the fruit of our lives is not blighted by these diseases. I say diseases because, though we have only mentioned spiritual amnesia, it appears that the key symptom of the unhealthy Christian life is spiritual myopia.

This is another name for nearsightedness. It is a condition in which the rays from distant objects are brought to a focus before reaching the retina, and so it is blurred. A Christian with spiritual myopia is all caught up with an entangled with what is under his nose, but he has lost the vision of the distant past and the upcoming future in God's plan. He is forgetful of the cross, and blind to the glory of the future. He is cut off from the root of the past, and the fruit of the future. He lives the limited and useless life of a dead stump, for he forgets his cleansing from sin, and the purpose for which he was saved.

Myopia is caused by a constant absorption of the eye in small things such as dim print and thin threads. The Christian who specializes in the trivial, and gets so wrapped up in the petty projects of the present that he forgets the end toward which he is to be moving, becomes a very narrow and unfruitful Christian. The Christian must have a great vision that sweeps the skies of God's purpose like a giant telescope. Peter says if you lack these virtues you are blind, and can see only what is near at hand, and so it follows that if you have them, you can see far.

John Henry Jowett likens each of these virtues to a lens on a telescope. Each one gives you more powerful vision. He writes, "Every supplied grace enlarges the spiritual vision. Every refinement of the disposition is the acquirement of an extra lens. And now I think of it, my text is like a vast drawn-out-telescope, with lens after lens added, ever contributing to the intensity and extension of its range." The mature and fruitful Christian is one with a powerful vision of the glory of God, and His ideal for man. Christians with myopia are nearsighted saints who see only the muddy mess of man's making, and they cannot see the stars of God's making. Nearsighted is a curse, and it is far more prevalent than we realize.

William L. Stidger, a famous preacher and author of numerous books, tells about his battle with the American jitters. A less dignified name he says is ants in the pants. In a ceaseless flurry of one thing after another he became restless, irritable, angry, jealous, suspicious, and finally even went to pieces in a nervous breakdown. Even a rest in California seemed to do no good. Then, just by accident, a friend invited him to go to the top of Mt. Hamilton one night to visit the Lick Observatory. They allowed him to look through the high-powered telescope, and for the first time in his life he saw the stars in plane behind plane. He writes, "With the human eye we see only stars in a single plane. But there I saw front yards full of stars, backyards, and meadows and fields of stars, rivers of stars, forests of stars, long mountain ranges of stars-stars behind stars." His friend told the astronomer of his illness, and he said, "This is the best cure for nerves I know."

And it was for him, for all the things he worried about became trivial after he had seen the stars. That vast vision expanded his horizon, and made him break away from the limits of nearsightedness. Its the same story over and over in multitudes of problems and diseases. People are self-centered, narrow minded, and live with such limited vision that they can't keep from being small, sick, blind, and unfruitful. It is all the more tragic when it happens to a Christian, for he has all these resources to cure myopia and expand his vision.

A few years ago a group of people aroused by the miseries of preventable blindness organized the Society For The Conservation Of Vision. This is what the church is to be on the spiritual level, and the Apostle Peter has given us the principles on which we are to operate. We are to go beyond the conservation of vision, however, into the field of the expansion of vision. Vision and fruit are closely linked in this passage so that we can say, the greater the vision, the greater the fruitfulness. The more nearsighted one is, the less fruit

he will bear. Where there is no vision the people perish says Prov. 29:18. They perish because without vision there is no growth or fruit. Lack of vision is like lack of momentum on a bicycle. Once that is lost there is nothing to do but fall. Peter says this is what will happen to the nearsighted saint, but for the one who adds these lenses of virtue to the telescope of his character, there will be vision, fruit, and perfect assurance that they will never fall.

We need to examine our vision constantly using Peter's list as a chart. Test the eye sight of your soul by this standard. See where you are weak, and strengthen that area of your Christian life. If you do not have long range vision, and so have long range goals, you will tend to become frustrated by short range failure.

Abraham Rosenback said in his autobiography that on Feb. 14, 1493 Columbus prepared a complete account of his marvelous voyage. He wrote on a stout piece of parchment, wrapped it carefully in a piece of waterproof cloth, then placed it in a iron bound barrel, and threw it into the raging ocean. He said, "If I thought there was one chance in a million of finding it, I would take my power boat...and cruise in the neighborhood of the Azores forever."

What brings a man to a point where his birthday and book can have this kind of influence? It is certainly not nearsightedness, but rather, long range vision. The poet Edwin Markham was asked if he thought Columbus was called of God to do what he did. He replied, "Yes! I have read every book available, including the diary of Columbus, and it is clear to me that Columbus looked upon himself as a servant of God in that eventful voyage. Markham concluded a long poem about Columbus with these words:

**Now let this startling thing be said;
If land had not been on ahead,**

**So mighty had been his gallant dare,
God's glad hand would have put it there.**

When asked what he meant by these lines he said, "I mean that God in His heavens, the stars and planets in their courses, the sun and moon and stars, the seasons in their cycles, all history, time and eternity, and the very angels in heaven are always on the side of the daring, the audacious, the courageous- the man or woman who catches his vision, feels that he is God's servant, and goes ahead regardless of obstacles!"

Columbus was a man of vision, and that is why he was a man of fruitfulness. Those who were blind and nearsighted and forgetful of the adventures of the past, and of the potential of the future did nothing by which to be remembered. All of this is relevant to Peter's words here. We shall either take the high road of adventure by adding these virtues to our lives, and thereby gain a vision that pulls us even higher, or we will be content to take the low road of safety and security in messing with the mediocre, and thus, be nearsighted Christians. We will be blind to God's best both past and present, and fruitless as a tumbleweed in the future. May God help us to climb with Christ and catch the vision that will compel us, like Columbus, to launch out in search of new worlds to discover in the realm of spirituality, and thereby avoid being nearsighted Christians.

17. A SURE ELECTION Based on II Peter 1:10

One of the principle characters in the book Darkened Doors is Adrian Mallard, who is a brilliant but skeptical lawyer and sportsman. He learns that he is the victim of a serious heart disease.

His friend, Professor Boyd, a distinguished psychologist, was one day singing the praises of the open mind. "Is that good enough?" asked Mallard. "An open mind doesn't get you anywhere. I'm beginning to want certainty!" Boyd is amused by this hopelessly unscientific desire. "Certainty!" he replied. "Certainty! I am surprised at you! What do you want to be certain about?" Mallard answers in all seriousness: "About life-about death-about what happens afterwards. What's the good of your scientists if you can't tell us that?

Mallard speaks the mind of the modern man who wants to be sure of something ultimate in a world in a whirl of constant change. It is hard to have any security in a world characterized by change. Dr. Samuel Miller of Harvard Divinity School describes the rapid acceleration of change in our society. "Regardless of whether it is good or not, and article must be constantly changed in order to sell. Professions disappear overnight; complex techniques become useless with the twist of a knob. And M.I.T. Professor complains that the instruction he gives will be obsolete by the time his students get a degree for learning it. Everywhere continuity is in the shambles, cut and chewed by the incessant chopping of the jaws of progress."

The result is that very few people can stand with the prophets of old and say, "Here am I." They stand instead as bewildered and asking, "Where am I?" They are uncertain as to where they are and where they are going, and so they tend to remain in a rut and go nowhere. This can happen to Christians also, and that is one of Peter's concerns for the Christians of his day. He wanted to get them out of the rut of complacency and to catch a vision that would lead them on to fruitfulness for the glory of Christ and their own happiness.

Certainty plays a major role in the success of this goal, and so Peter urges them in verse 10 to make their calling an election sure.

Man does not have to be certain about everything, but he has to be certain about something. F. W. Boreham said, "There is no craving in the human heart more persistent or more passionate than the craving for certainty." Luther put it negatively when he said that no more miserable state of mind existed than that of uncertainty. Certainty concerning some value in what gives life meaning is essential to happiness. Happiness can be measured by the number and quality of a person's certainties. One of the most beautiful love poems I ever read is that by Amelia Burr:

**I am not sure the earth is round,
Nor that the sky is really blue.
The tale of why the apples fall
May or may not be true.
I do not know what makes the tides,
Nor what tomorrow's world may do,
But I have certainty enough,
For I am sure of you.**

One solid certainty makes for many uncertainties. This is true also in the spiritual realm. A know-so Christian is not a know it all Christian, for Paul says that we only know in part, and any honest Christian knows that he is ignorant and uncertain concerning many of the mysteries of life. Luther wrote, "For although we may be certain that we believe in Christ, nevertheless we are certain that we believe in all the things that appertain to Him, and therefore what we actually believe is uncertain."

Peter is not aiming for the goal of absolute certainty concerning everything, for this would be, not to partake of the divine nature, but to become God Himself. Peter's goal for Christians, and the goal all of us are to aim for, is certainty concerning our election. In this we can be sure and we say with Paul, "I know in whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have

committed unto Him against that day." In other words, I can be certain of Christ and be certain of His promise of eternal life. We can be unsure of many things and yet have the security that brings us God's best if we are sure of this.

John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace, said in his declining years, "When I was young I was sure of many things. There are only two things of which I am now sure; one is that I am a miserable sinner, and the other that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior." This is the kind of certainty that all Christians should have, and it should be even more specific than this. It should go so far as to say that He is my Savior, and that I am sure I am one of the elect. Make sure of your election says Peter.

He is not writing to a pack of politicians, but to a church of common people. All of us are to have something in common with politicians, however. The politician's big aim is his election. He works, speaks, and drives himself on and on to the end of becoming elected. What politician would not love to have a list of procedures to guarantee the certainty of his election? Peter says he has given us just such a list here so that if we follow it we cannot fail. If you do these things you shall never fall is what he says. This is encouraging enough, but then he goes on to say that on top of the certainty of a lifetime office our election made sure will lead to an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ. Just think of it! The winner of the coming election for the highest office of our land gets only an entrance into the White House. It is a great honor indeed, but not to be compared with the consequences of the election we have in Christ. The president may be out of the White House in four years, but our entrance into the kingdom of Christ is forever.

We see then why Peter is so concerned that Christians make their election sure, for to be sure of this is to have certainty concerning the highest value of life, and this leads to the best,

happiest, and most fruitful life. All kinds of questions arise out of this challenge to make our election sure. It leads us into the depths of the most complicated and difficult questions that theologians struggle with. The problem with God's sovereignty and man's free will are involved here, for how can we have anything to do with making our election sure when it is God who elects? This then gets us into the problem of the relationship of faith to works. Is our assurance of salvation to be based on our faith in Christ, or upon the doing of these things as Peter says? Is fruit taking the place of faith here? Is man's will superceding the will of God here? These and numerous other questions arise the deeper you probe into this verse and the concept of election.

We cannot investigate every tunnel in the cave of this truth, and so we will have to be selective. The first thing we need to do is to get a grasp of just what it is we are talking about. What is election? We are not running for anything, and our names are not on ballots to be voted on by anyone. Someone tried to simplify the idea of election by saying that God votes for us; the devil votes against us, and we cast the deciding vote. There is a lot of truth in this oversimplification, but it is not what the Bible means by election. Election has nothing to do with the devil's vote or ours. It is totally a matter of God's vote.

Augustus Strong in his Systematic Theology defines it: "Election is that eternal act of God, by which in His sovereign pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, he chooses certain out of the number of sinful men to be the recipients of the special grace of His Spirit and so to be made voluntary partakers of Christ's salvation." Misunderstanding of this doctrine has led to many futile battles and much unjust criticism of God. He has been labeled a tyrant and called unfair by those who have never taken the time to investigate the purpose of God in election. They jump to the conclusion that God elects some to be saved, and by not electing the

others He dams them. This cruel caricature of God has no basis in the Bible. As we learn the purpose of God's election of some we will also understand how we can give heed to Peter's challenge to make our election sure.

God's election is teleological, and this means that it is for a purpose. It is a means to a greater end. God chose Israel to be His elect people, but not just so He could bless them and curse the rest of the world. It was that through them He might bless all the rest of the world. Abraham was chosen and his seed blessed that through his seed all the nations of the earth might be blessed. Election is God's way of making sure that His will is represented on earth. Just as we elect a representative so that our voice can be heard in congress, so God elects individuals and nations that His voice might be heard on earth. We elect a president not just to be a blessing to our party, but for all the people of the nation. The purpose of God's election is also that through the elect the non-elect also might be blessed.

God reaches down and in a dramatic way converted Paul. It was not just so He could bless Paul, but because Paul could be an instrument to communicate the Gospel to millions. God is not being unjust and unfair in electing some, for His purpose in so doing is that all may have the hope of salvation. God has no obligation to save anyone, for all have sinned, and all are worthy of His judgment. God loves man, however, and desires to save all that can be saved. Election is the method by which He will be able to save the most.

Jesus followed this same procedure. He chose 12 to be with Him, but not in order to discriminate against others, and to deny to others the blessings of His teachings. His purpose in choosing them was that through them His teachings might benefit all. He makes this clear in John 15:16, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and

that your fruit should remain...." The purpose of His election has been fulfilled, and we are reaping the fruit of the Apostles today.

It is only when we get the mistaken idea that God arbitrarily chooses some for salvation and special privileges as end in itself. That we feel is unjust and unfair. But if we keep the biblical view in mind, election is just another example of the marvelous grace of God. Election carries with it great responsibility, and when this is forgotten, and the elect see only the privileges and become proud, then they are in danger of forfeiting their election. Israel was God's elect, but when she continued to fail to fulfill the purpose of her election and bore no fruit, she was cut off. She repudiated her election and God's wrath fell. In His mercy He preserved a remnant to form the basis for a new Israel and a new elect people. This new Israel was founded by Christ, and the church became the new elect and chosen race.

Paul makes it clear that the new Israel is under the same obligations as the old Israel. The purpose of God's election is the same, and that is that the elect are to be His servants taking His good news to all men. If the new Israel fails to fulfill this purpose, she has no more reason to feel she will be allowed to remain a fruitless branch on the tree of God than did old Israel. This is not a matter of speculation but of clear revelation. Paul in the context of Israel being cut off writes to the church in Rom. 11:19-22, "You will say 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Note then the kindness and severity of God; severity toward those who have fallen, but kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off."

God's election is for the purpose of the elect being His servants

and bearing fruit. If the elect do not fulfill this purpose they repudiate their election and fall. We must grasp this purpose of election. It is the goal of the elect to be tools of God to reach those who are not elected. God does not elect some so as not to elect others, but that He might have someone to reach the others.

Henry Van Dyke said, "Election to service is the supreme saving truth." Failure to see this is to be blind like Israel of old. When we elect a president it is not for the sake of showering upon him great honor and blessing. This happens, of course, but only as a means so that he can in his place of honor and power be a servant to all of the people. This is the principle behind God's election also, and now we can see what Peter is driving at. To make our election sure is to fulfill the purpose of it by adding all of these virtues to our lives that we might bear fruit. This is the way to security and assurance and certainty in our relationship with God.

No wonder Peter is so urgent and insistent on this matter. No wonder he wanted it kept before Christians at all times. He did not want to see the new Israel fail as did the old Israel and fall from election. Here is a guide, therefore, that if followed guarantees you will never fall. Elections will come and go, but here is an election we must be concerned about constantly. Let us give heed to what we have learned in this single tunnel of truth. Election is for a purpose. Let us fulfill that purpose and so live with the confidence and certainty that comes with the knowledge of a sure election.

18. OUR ETERNAL REWARD Based on II Peter 1:11

Among the Kamba people of East Africa there persists an ancient legend. The story goes that the people of that region long

ago were very embittered by death's merciless destruction. They sent messengers to all countries of the world to seek a place where death did not reign so they could all move there. The messengers traveled over the face of the earth for years wondering from country to country. Finally they returned with the tragic report. "We must stay here and die as our fathers died, for a kingdom where death is not master does not exist in all the world."

All people have longed to find a kingdom where death is excluded, and this has led to the belief in the immortality of the soul. Men have an inherent conviction that somewhere there is a kingdom where death is no more, and since it has not been found on earth, they believe it is in a land beyond the grave. The fact that this longing for such a kingdom is universal demonstrates that man recognizes death to be an intruder into the universe. It does not belong, and life will never be fully as God intended it to be until death itself is dead.

The Bible clearly reveals that such a kingdom is the goal in God's plan when the last enemy is destroyed, which is death. Before immortality was brought to light in Jesus Christ there were many who, by means of reason, came to the same conclusion that would be given by revelation. Socrates over 300 years before Christ said, "If this be a dream, let me dream on, and awake to disappointment rather than suffer from the haunting fear that death ends all! But this is no dream, since there is no appetite without provision made for supplying it, how then, will you explain this thirst of mine, unless there be water somewhere to quench it." He was right, and water does exist in Jesus Christ, and if we drink of this water of life we shall never thirst again.

Cicero a hundred years before Christ said, "I am well convinced then, that my dear departed friends are so far from having ceased to live that the state they now enjoy can alone with propriety be called

life." We cannot say if this was true for his friends, but he was right in his conviction that such an abundant life is possible beyond the grave. Until modern times men have made heaven a major concern, and they have sought to understand, by means of reason and revelation, all they can about this kingdom where death does not reign. This is no longer a pursuit of the majority of men.

Lewis Whittemore in his study of immortality says, "Modern man is, for the most part, concerned with neither the hope nor the fear of immortality." People often say little is heard about the flames of hell from the modern pulpit, but they seldom complain that the joys and rewards of heaven are not expounded. It is not only hell, but heaven also that is neglected in our day, and this is due to the powerful influence of secularism and materialism that keeps us nearsighted with our focus limited to the here and now. We are unaware that our greatest enemies are those who rob us of the vision of heaven.

The hell deniers are not bosom friends, but they are not the foes to be feared. Those who attack hell and seek to eliminate it often do so just because they believe in heaven. The universalist wants everyone in heaven, and the annihilationist wants heaven to be the only kingdom of eternal existence. We disagree with these hell opposers, but we can recognize they are friends of heaven. It is the foes of heaven that are the real danger. The attack on heaven came in full force during the French Revolution when atheism went wild, and was determined to destroy God, and topple the monarchy of heaven.

Communism picked up the challenge and labored also for the overthrow of heaven. Heaven has got to go if men are to give their all to the state on earth. Marx wrote, "The people cannot be really happy until it has been deprived of illusory happiness by the abolition of religion.....Thus it is the mission of history, after the

other-worldly truth has disappeared, to establish the truth of this world." Lenin wrote, "Religion teaches those who toil in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world, and consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven. As for those who live upon the labors of others, religion teaches them to be charitable in earthly life, thus providing a cheap justification for their whole exploiting existence and selling them at a reasonable price tickets to heavenly bliss." The tragic truth is that the teaching of heaven has been perverted in the past to justify evil in the present.

If we examine Peter's appeal to Christians to consider their eternal reward, we see that the purpose of it is that our life here on earth might be more effective and fruitful. Peter does not say that we are not to worry if we are living a weak and fruitless life now, because it will all be made up to us in heaven. He does not say that we can be idle and indifferent to the needs of others on earth, because it doesn't count. On the contrary, he says just the opposite. He says we are to fight every evil with courage, and grow in all the virtues that will enable us to build on the solid rock, and bring forth a garden of much fruit. Our love is to be universal, and we are to give the world everything we've got, just as Jesus did, for as we sow so shall we reap.

The hope of eternal reward is that which is to motivate us to make the most of this life, and not a drug to make it bearable. Understood properly, those with eternities values in view will do more to enrich this earth than the heaven despisers ever will. The Christian, because of his vision and hope of eternity, introduces the higher values into society, which are the eternal values of love and fellowship with God. He does not despise the values of materialism, but enjoys them to the full. He recognized, however, that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions, and that man cannot live by bread alone. So he does not allow the values of materialism to dominate his life, but uses them as a means to gain

the higher values which Peter has listed here.

It is the reward of heaven, however, that motivates us to add these values to life, and to apply them so that we bare fruit, and become profitable servants of Christ. George Herbert said, "Service without reward is punishment." God has so made us that we demand a reward for service, and He would not deprive us of it. He appeals to that innate desire. Jesus said we would have to suffer and be persecuted to follow Him, but we are to rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is our reward in heaven. The communists knew that there had to be a reward to motivate service for the state, and so they held out their utopia. They just reduced the reward idea from heaven to earth, but they knew they could not eliminate it, for as the poet said, "Who would run, that's moderately wise, a certain danger for a doubtful prize."

The emphasis of Peter on the abundant or rich entrance into the eternal kingdom indicates degrees of reward for Christians, which will vary according to the degree of their obedience in adding these virtues to their lives. In other words, not only the fruitfulness of time, the rewards of eternity, depend upon what we do with these virtues. The Speaker's Bible put it, "Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will get an entrance into the eternal kingdom, but every believer will not get an abundant entrance. Many a ship gets into port which does not enter under full sail, canvas filled with favoring breezes, top-most flag unfurled, and music playing. Many a vessel enters harbors dismasted and almost sinking."

Scripture makes it clear that some will be saved as by fire, but all their works will be burned up because they are made of wood, hay, and stubble. Numerous verses tell us we shall all be judged and rewarded according to our works. We are not saved, but rewarded according to what we have done in the body. The Bible does not anywhere encourage us to believe that what we do here does not

matter. On the contrary, everything we do, and the quality of it, determines our eternal reward. Do a slipshod job in anything, and you just pile up rubbish for the fires of judgment. Do it well, and you add another jewel to the crown of eternal life.

Riches can be acquired by gift, by inheritance, and by the fruit of labor. Salvation is ours as a gift of God, which we receive by faith. The eternal kingdom, and many of its blessings, are ours because we are joint heirs with Christ, but the riches of which Peter speaks are the rewards of our labor in serving Christ and becoming Christlike. This abundant entrance is conditioned upon our adding these virtues to our lives. If we add for God, He will multiply to us. If we serve Him, He will serve us better. God will never be out done in grace. He is not like the king Nicephorus wrote about who was going on a barge when his crown fell in the water. A barge man leaped in after it. Taking it up he put it on his head and swam to the barge. The king gave him a talent for saving it, but then cut his head off for wearing it.

Jesus offers the fruitful servant a place on His throne and a crown. Jesus said in Rev. 2:10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Paul said in II Tim. 4:7-8, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." In James 1:12 we read, "Blessed is the man who endureth temptation for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love him." In every case we see that the best of heaven is conditioned upon our doing our best on earth. Salvation is a gift, but the abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom is a reward for a job well done. Dennis McCartly wrote,

**He who does God's work will get God's pay,
However long may seem the day,**

**However weary be the way.
Though powers and princes thunder, nay.
No human hand God's hand can stay;
Who does His work will get his pay.
He does not pay as others pay,
In gold or land or raiment gay,
In goods that perish and decay.
But God's high wisdom knows a way,
And that is sure, let come what may.
Who does God's work will get God's pay.**

This being so, I trust that we will all be wise enough to keep rereading this passage, and seek to be adding these virtues to our lives. What we do with these virtues from now until we die will determine the degree of our eternal reward.

19. THE WARNING Based on II Peter 3:1-13

On a Friday afternoon, May 31, 1889 a man by the name of Daniel Peyton came galloping down the road in Johnstown, Penn. Sparks were flying from the hoofs of his big bay horse. He was shouting for all he was worth that the damn had broken. Some believed his warning and fled to the hills. Others thought he was crazy, and they ignored the warning. They said, we have heard rumors for years that the damn might burst, but they were always false rumors. They just laughed and went about their business. Scarcely had Daniel ridden out of town, however, when they heard another sound. It was a dreadful rumble and roar of a flood. Now it was too late, and in moments a wall of water 15 feet high came tumbling down upon them, and hundreds of people were swept to their death.

Warnings are funny things. They are so important, and yet they do not do a thing if they are not obeyed. From the time we are children we have to learn how to obey warnings. When mother tells us the stove is hot, and we do not chose to obey and touch it anyway, we get burned, and suffer the consequences of not giving heed to a warning. We are warned not to play by the river, and not to cross the busy street, and not to get into a car of a stranger, and not to eat or drink anything under the sink. Yet, every year thousands of children die because they do not obey these warnings. Medicine bottles have the warning, keep out of the reach of children, but children die by the thousands because this warning is not heeded. Warnings are one of the best things we have in life, for they protect us from all kinds of dangers.

Millions of people have been saved by warnings. Fire alarm systems have saved many. Warnings of dangerous traffic situations have saved many, and warnings about dangerous poisons have done the same. Let's face it, warnings are wonderful, but we also must face the fact that we hate them. We want to do as we please, and so we despise warnings that tell us we will suffer if we go our way. Adam and Eve were warned not to eat the forbidden fruit, but they did not heed the warning, and the result was the fall of man. Warnings are made every year about the danger of mixing alcohol and driving, yet millions of self-confident drinkers have laughed at that warning, and now they have filled the graveyards of our land.

Warnings are made by the government, and studies from universities support them, that smoking is harmful to your health. Millions consider it a big joke, even though thousands die every year due directly to their smoking habit. Death wins every time we refuse to listen to a warning. Napoleon kept on marching toward Moscow in his determination to conquer the world, even though he had clear warning that he was being foolish. The storks and the cranes were flying South because they knew a terrible winter was coming. God

gave the animal kingdom built in instincts to obey the warnings of nature. Man was left free to choose, and Napoleon chose to ignore the warning of the birds. When the storm hit, and he had to retreat, he left a half a million men frozen to death scattered over the countryside.

You would think men would learn from the folly of others, but even knowing the tragic mistake of Napoleon, Hitler did the same thing in 1941. He decided to attack Russia and get deep into it, and then came the cold of winter. He was warned about the deadly cold winters in Russia, but he replaced all the generals who warned him that it was a hopeless situation. Hitler refused to listen to any warning, and the result was the German Army was defeated, and that was the beginning of Hitler's downfall. We can thank God that he was a fool. Fools never learn to like warnings. They refuse to let warnings change their minds and their plans. How does a wise man differ from a fool? The wise man gives heed to warnings.

Noah was not a perfect man, nor was he free from sin and folly. He got drunk after the flood, and brought shame upon himself and his family. Still, he became the greatest and wisest man of his day because he had the wisdom to heed God's warning. God said He was going to destroy the world, and Noah did not laugh and say, people are always saying the world is going to end. He said, I believe, and he got busy and built an ark, and he was ready when the warning came true. Noah was a man of faith, and faith is that attitude that takes God's warnings seriously. God has made it clear that He is going to destroy the world again, but this time by fire. When Christ comes again there will be a final judgment for those who are ungodly. He loves men so much that He delays His coming. He is long suffering, and not willing that any shall perish. But in love He has given us warning, and if that day comes and you are not ready, you will be like those in Noah's day, up a creek without a paddle. You will be written down in eternity along with a list of all

the fool's who had a clear warning but laughed and ignored it.

There are those who try to escape the urgency of the warning by saying God is love. What they fail to realize is that nobody hates hell more than God. God has done everything He can to rob hell of its victims. He gave His Son to die for all men that none need end up in hell. Jesus gave His life, and sent His church into all the world to warn men of the folly of going to hell, when He has opened up the way to be forgiven so that all might enter heaven. The good news of the Gospel is that nobody needs to be a fool. Nobody needs to be lost. Nobody needs to go to hell, and be separated from the God who loves them. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Jesus takes no joy in judgment, for He died that men might escape it.

Repent says the Word of God to the sinner. Turn from your wicked way, and put your trust in Me, and I will forgive and cleanse, and make you a new creature. Your whole destiny hangs on what kind of person you choose to be. If you choose to be a self-centered mocker of warnings, who refuses to do anything but that which is your own way, then you will go the way of all warning mockers, and perish in your folly. If you swallow your pride and by faith heed the warning, and put your trust in Jesus, you will go the way of all warning heeders, and you will be forever a part of the family of God.

Do not be a despiser of warnings. The town of Amyalea was so often alarmed by false rumors that the Spartans were coming that they made a decree that no one ever mention the subject again. When the Spartans did come there was no warning, and they easily took the town. It is foolish to despise warnings. A fire broke out back stage in a theater, and the clown in the show came out to warn the public. They all thought it was a joke and applauded. The world will end with many who think the warnings are all a joke, and learn the hard way that judgment is no joke.

Nobody wants to be awaked in the night by someone shouting fire, but thank God, if there is a fire, someone cared enough to sound a warning. What would you think of a neighbor who saw your house on fire in the night, and said to himself, "I would wake them up if I shouted, and I hate to disturb them at this hour." You would be appalled at such a foolish attitude. Go ahead and disturb them. Throw a rock though the bedroom window if you have to, but give them a warning. It is love that warns. It is because parents love their children that they warn them of the dangers. If no warning is given, that is a cruel indifference.

Why should anyone be angry if someone says repent and turn from your wicked way or you will perish. That is not a cry of one who hates you, that is a cry of love and grace. It is the cry of God to spare men from judgment. You do not have to like warnings to obey them. You may not like your neighbor at all, but if he is crying out, fire, fire, you must recognize it is only wise to respond to it. What would you think of a man who is drowning, who says of the rope being thrown to him, that he does not like that kind of rope, for there is a better kind of rope made by a different company. A man who drowns with such an absurd objection on his lips deserves to drown, and few could be made to weep at his loss.

The Bible makes it clear that men are responsible for how they respond to warnings. If they choose to ignore them and are unprepared, their blood will be on their own head. There is no one to blame but themselves. No one can say it is God's fault, my parents fault, or societies fault, for every man is responsible for how he chooses to respond to warnings. It may be true that your parents never loved you, your teachers never taught you, your friends let you down, and your community rejected you, but the fact is, God loves you and made a way for you to overcome all of the negatives of life. If you choose not to come to Him, and be made whole, and if you choose not to take the way of escape, then you , and you alone,

are responsible for your judgment. You can be wise and receive Christ as your Savior, or you can ignore the warnings to those who have no Savior, and be a fool. The choice is yours.

