2 Peter 1:3-21 (Stanley Bruce Anstey) 171549

The Second Epistle of Peter, Divine Way of Being Kept, The (1:3-21)

Vss. 3-21—Peter then unfolds the divine way of being kept in an evil day. In an epistle that deals with the fallen and corrupted state into which the Christian profession would sink, it is refreshing that the Apostle does not begin on that sad note, but rather, with the faithfulness of God to keep His people in the path of faith.

Peter shows that there are two sides to our being kept: on the one hand there is what God has given to help us in the path, and on the other hand there is what we are responsible to do. As we will see, God wants us to be preserved in the path of faith and has made every provision necessary for this, but we need to be responsibly exercised about it too.

GOD'S PART

In verses 3-4, we have God's part. He has "given" to us everything that we need for our path to ensure a safe journey in our pilgrimage to heaven. It is a spiritual journey wherein are many dangers, but God has outfitted us with a full provision so that none would fall by the way. In particular, God has given us two groups of things: "all things that pertain to life and godliness" and "the greatest and precious promises."

Giving Us All Things That Pertain to Life and Godliness

As to the first of these, Peter says, "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue." We might ask, "What exactly are these 'things' that God has given to us?" The following list is by no means exhaustive:

Spiritual Capacity through New Birth—whereby we are able to appreciate and enjoy divine things (1 John 5:4-5).

The Word of God—to give us the knowledge of the truth and wisdom for the path (2 Tim. 3:15; Psa. 119:105, 130).

The Holy Spirit—to give us power to live a holy life (Rom. 8:2).

The Throne of Grace—to give us access by prayer into God's presence to obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

The High Priestly Intercession of Christ—to save us from spiritual dangers (Heb. 7:25).

The Advocacy of Christ—to restore us to communion if we fail (1 John 2:1-2).

The Whole Armour of God—to enable us to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10-18).

The Help of Angelic Agencies—to give us deliverance from temporal dangers (Heb. 1:13-14).

The Fellowship of Brethren—to give us encouragement in the path (2 Tim. 2:22; Acts 28:15).

The Gifts Given from the Ascended Christ—to give us "teaching, shepherding, and spiritual help" (Eph. 4:11).

Peter adds, "Through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue," because these things are to be applied in conjunction with our life of communion with God who has called us into blessing.

Giving Us the Greatest and Precious Promises

Vs. 4—The second thing God has "given" to us is the greatest promises. These precious promises have been set before the saints to encourage them to go on in the path of faith. Peter says, "Through which He has given to us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Great promises were given to the patriarchs in the Old Testament, and they should not be minimized, but these promises of which Peter speaks are not those. The promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have to do with the earthly blessings that will be realized by Israel in a coming day. But these of which Peter is speaking are promises that God has given to Christians. They are greater because they have to do with superior blessings which we have in Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). Even the blessings of the New Covenant under the reign of Christ as Israel's Messiah fall short of the height of Christian blessings with which these promises are associated.

Again, we might ask, "What would these promises be?" Some of these are:

- The promise of being eternally secure in our relationship with the Lord (John 10:28-29).
- The promise of His never forsaking us (Heb. 13:5).
- The promise of sweet fellowship and communion with Him every day of our lives (John 14:21, 23).
- The promise of answered prayer requests (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24).

- The promise to maintain us in the path of faith by interceding for us as our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-15) and as our Advocate with the Father if we fail (1 John 2:1-2).

- The promise of Him being in the midst of those whom the Spirit has gathered to His name (Matt. 18:20).

- The promise to come again and take us to the Father's house (John 14:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:15-18).

- The promise of being made like Christ morally and physically (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 2:2).

- The promise to reward us in heaven for labours done for Christ here (1 Cor. 3:11-14).

- The promise that we will reign with Him in His kingdom (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 20:4).

God's desire in all of these provisions for the pathway is that the saints would "become partakers of the divine nature." We are made partakers of the divine nature when we are born again, at which time we receive a new life from God that has His very nature. But that is not the aspect of partaking of the divine nature that Peter is speaking about here. (The fact that he says, "That ye may become partakers ... " shows that he is not referring to the initial reception of divine life, but something subsequent to it.) Peter is speaking of a practical partaking of that nature in a moral sense. It is to taste of the things that God enjoys and to be filled with His delights. When we thus "drink of the river" of His "pleasures," we partake of the things which His nature enjoys (Psa. 36:8). J. N. Darby said, "We are thus made morally partakers of the divine nature, by divine power acting in us and fixing the soul on what is divinely revealed" (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Loizeaux edition, p. 465). And what exactly is it that God delights in? His own words give us the answer: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight" (Matt. 3:17; Prov. 8:30).

Peter's point is simple; if we live in communion with God and enjoy the things He enjoys, we will escape the corruption that is in the world through lust, because in such a state, the flesh in us will be inactive. The attractions of the world lose their power to draw our souls off track when we are enjoying something so infinitely greater. The result is that we overcome the world practically, and thus, escape the lusts that characterize its corrupt state. This shows that it's not what we know that keeps us going on in the path, but what we enjoy.

Having been given this great provision from God, there is really no excuse for any of us failing in the path—regardless of how dark and difficult the day may be. There is simply no truth to the idea that since things have gotten so disordered in Christendom in these last days, that God understands our situation and excuses our lack of faithfulness.

The Believer's Part

Vss. 5-21—We have been called to "glory and virtue" (vs. 3). Glory is what we will receive when we are called home at the end of the path and virtue is what we need as we journey along the way. Since this is so, God would have us to be responsibly exercised about our preservation and participate with Him in it by doing our part. As we have seen, God has given us all things that pertain to a life of godliness and He has also given us the greatest promises, but we have to give too. Peter says: "Giving all diligence ... ." Thus, we are to apply ourselves in the things that he is about to mention. In the latter part of this 1st chapter, he puts the onus squarely upon the believer to "supply" (W. Kelly Trans.) the moral and spiritual exercises that are necessary to being preserved.

Having the Moral Qualities Needed for Living Faithfully

Vss. 5-11—The first thing is to have the moral qualities needed for living faithfully for the Lord. He says, "For this very reason also, using therewith all diligence, in your faith have [supply] also virtue, in virtue knowledge, in knowledge temperance [self-control], in temperance endurance, in endurance godliness, in godliness brotherly love, in brotherly love (divine) love." Thus, there are seven moral qualities that we need to have in our lives. The KJV says, "Add to your faith..." placing the word "to" before each moral quality. But this is misleading. These supplements to the text imply that these moral qualities are to be added one after another in our lives in consecutive order. However, the thought in the passage is that they should be developed together. Similarly, the branches of a tree do not grow one after another but together as a whole.

Virtue [Spiritual Courage]

(Vs. 5)

Virtue refers to having the spiritual energy and courage to stand on the convictions of our faith. In a day when the general tendency in the Christian profession is to drift along with the current of things which is moving away from God and the truth, it is of utmost importance that we have this kind of conviction and energy to propel us along against the current.

Knowledge

(Vs. 5)

This has to do with being intelligent in the mind and will of God in a practical sense. It is quite possible to be full of energy and zeal for God but lacking an understanding of divine principles, and consequently, to take a wrong action in certain situations. Thus, we also need to have an "understanding of the times" to know what the saints "ought to do" in these difficult days (1 Chron. 12:32).

Temperance [Self Control]

(vs. 6)

We naturally tend to be creatures of extreme, and if we are not careful we become imbalanced. Therefore, it is necessary to remain in control of our bodily appetites and every other endeavour that we might engage in (1 Cor. 9:27).

Endurance

(vs. 6)

This refers to enduring hardship in the path of faith (2 Tim. 2:3). We can be sure that there will be resistance from the world in the way of reproach and persecution. Having this moral quality will enable us to fight through hardship and discouragement and to persevere in the path (2 Thess. 1:4). It is one thing to start out in the Christian path and quite another to continue (2 Tim. 3:14). There is nothing like persecution to sort out who is real and who is not (Mark 4:17).

Godliness

(vs. 6)

Personal holiness is not to be neglected, and therefore, is enjoined upon the saints here. Godliness is not obtained through passivity; it comes through serious exercise (1 Tim. 4:7).

Brotherly Love

(vs. 7)

This is affectionate love with emotion (Phileo). It is to be expressed toward our brethren in the Lord, but not toward the world. We are surely to love lost souls and reach out to them with the gospel (Rom. 13:8), but it is to be as God loves them (John 3:16) with divine love (agapao). If we love those of the world with phileo love, we might get drawn into the world through our affection for them.

Divine Love

(vs. 7)

This is agapao love. It is love that emanates from a settled disposition of the heart—a decision to love its object which does not involve emotion or merit in the object. God set His divine love upon us when there was nothing in us to love! (Rom. 5:8). God loves with both kinds of love (John 3:35; 5:20) and we are to love in both ways as well. Divine love tempers brotherly love. This is needed because if we only loved our brethren with brotherly love, we might be inclined to overlook certain faults in them that need to be addressed and rebuked.

Vs. 8—Peter concludes by saying: “If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren [idle] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Note: he doesn’t say, “If you know about these things,” but rather, “If these things be in you and abound.” This shows that it is not enough to have been made aware of the need of these moral qualities in our lives; they need to be an integral part of our beings, and as such, to have formed our character. If these things are only with us in a superficial way, they could easily be laid aside, and this has been the case with many. The result of these things being part of our beings is that we will be fruitful in the path of faith.

Vs. 9—Peter then warns: “He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old [former] sins.” This shows that if the positive characteristics of the new life are not being developed in us, we will become blinded to our own state and will lose sight of God’s objective of having Christ displayed in His kingdom glory in the world to come. This may result in a sad departure from the path. Hence, if we are not going on in the Christian path, we will surely slide backward, because our state of soul is never static.

Vs. 10—Since this is the case, Peter says: “Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall [stumble]” (W. Kelly Trans.). Again, he puts the onus on the believer to apply himself in these things so that he wouldn’t stumble in the path. We might wonder: How we are to make our “calling and election” more sure when it is as sure as it could ever be? For it is something that is altogether God’s prerogative; He chose us, and He called us—and we’ve had nothing to do with it. However, Peter is not speaking of what is true and sure in the heart of God, but of what should be manifest in our personal lives as we walk with the Lord. We prove and confirm that we are His elect by manifesting the moral features that Peter has been speaking about and by bringing forth fruit unto God in our lives. These things are the unmistakable evidences of our calling and election.

Vs. 11—The great result is: “An entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Thus, in a coming day, God will compensate the saints’ devotion to Christ and their service for His name, and it will be displayed before a wondering world (2 Thess. 1:10; Eph. 1:12). Many have thought that this verse is referring to our entrance into heaven when the Lord comes (the Rapture). This would mean that some of the saints are going to have a grander entrance into the Father’s house than others, due to their faithfulness on earth. However, this is not true. The saints’ responsibility is not taken up at the time of the Lord’s coming to take us home to heaven (the Rapture); we will all have an equally grand and happy reception then. The question of the saints’ faithfulness (or lack thereof) will be taken up later at the judgment seat of Christ, and the results will be manifested before the world at the Appearing of Christ and during His millennial kingdom (Matt. 24:45-47; Luke 19:15-19). This is what Peter is referring to in this verse. He is not speaking of our entrance into heaven but of our entrance into the public side of “the everlasting kingdom,” which will be when we come out of heaven with Christ at His Appearing (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:14; 2 Thess. 1:10; Jude 14, Rev. 19:14, etc.).

F. B. Hole said, “The everlasting kingdom is not heaven. No one gains heaven as the result of diligence or fruitfulness; nor do some gain an abundant entrance and others a meagre entrance there. There is no entrance into heaven save through the work of Christ—a work perfect and available alike for all who believe—so that all who enter at all enter in the same way and on the same footing without distinction. The everlasting kingdom will be established when Jesus comes again, and in connection with it, rewards will be given as the parable of

Luke 19:12-27 teaches us. There will, consequently, be great differences as to the places that believers will occupy in the kingdom, and our entrance into it may be abundant or the reverse. All will depend upon our diligence and faithfulness. The remembrance of this will certainly stir us to zeal and devotedness." (Epistles, vol. 3, pp. 127-128)

The positive results of having these moral things in our lives are:

- We will be fruitful in our Christian lives (vs. 8).
- We will be preserved from stumbling in the path (vs. 10).
- We will have an abundant entrance into the kingdom (vs. 11).

Being Established in the Present Truth

Vss. 12-14—The second thing needed to ensure preservation in the path is to be established in the Christian revelation of truth—and especially as it applies to the condition of things in the last days when Christendom would be in disorder, as chapters 2-3 indicate. Peter says, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." This shows that it is important to have an understanding of the truth; it will "preserve" us in the path when held in communion with the Lord (Psa. 40:11). The principles of God's Word, when upheld and applied in one's life, will guide us and keep us from getting off track (Psa. 17:4; 119:105, 130). Those who have not been grounded in the Christian revelation of truth are susceptible to being "carried about with every wind of doctrine" that comes along (Eph. 4:14). The Apostle Paul states that being "established" in the truth involves understanding both his "gospel" and "the revelation of the Mystery" (Rom. 16:25). The fact that Peter says, "Though ye know them, and be established in the present truth," shows that he considered those to whom he was writing as having matured in the faith. Peter's burden was to keep the saints "in remembrance of these things" because there is a very real danger of forgetting them.

Knowing the Old Testament Scriptures is a tremendous advantage for a Christian, for therein are many principles that can help us in our walk with the Lord. But they will not establish us in "the present truth." Why? Because the present truth which Peter is referring to is not found in the Old Testament; it is the revelation of Christian truth which God has delivered to the saints through the apostles; it is New Testament truth.

Vss. 13-15—Sensing from the Lord that the time of his death was drawing near, Peter accounted it a right and profitable thing to use his time and energy to stir up the saints by putting them "in remembrance" of "these things." This shows that he knew the value of repetition. It also shows us that while we may know the truth and have been established in it, we still need to go over those things, again and again, so that they remain "always in remembrance." Thus, we are not to be looking for new truth—for with such endeavours some have turned aside into error—but rather, to go over the same truth that was "once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

The Lord had told Peter that when he was "old," he would be called upon to die for God's glory as a martyr (John 21:18). In the fact that he says, "As our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me," suggests that his death would be by crucifixion (vs. 14). Religious history tells us that he, by his own request, was crucified upside down, for he didn't feel worthy to be crucified in an upright position as the Lord was.

Keeping God's Glorious End Before Our Souls

Vss. 15-21—The third thing needed for preservation in the path is to have our eyes fixed on God's glorious end—which is to have Christ publicly displayed in His kingdom glory in the world to come (the Millennium). To assure the saints that this great end will be reached in the ways of God, Peter points us to what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. He says, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." The apostles (Peter, James, and John) were given a preview of Christ's coming kingdom glory (Matt. 17:1-9). It was God's confirmation and guarantee that His ultimate end would be reached by Christ being publicly glorified in the world to come.

Being actual "eye-witnesses" of the event, the apostles have "made known" to us the certainty of it and its meaning. Peter assures us that what they saw was not a dream, nor was it some well thought up scheme that they had "cleverly imagined"—it was a divine reality. Thus, we have living proof in the testimony of the apostles that God will crown Christ publicly as "King over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9) and that He will reign as such in millennial kingdom glory. Many Christians look no further than the Rapture, thinking that it is the fruition of God's purpose. It will mark the end of the Church's history on earth, but God's great end has to do with the display of Christ in His kingdom glory in two great spheres—in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:10). It's true that we will be called to heaven at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:15-18) and glorified together with Christ at that time (Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:21), but Peter does not dwell on that side of things here.

Vss. 19-21—What they saw on the mount confirmed the prophetic Word in the Old Testament. Peter says, "We have also the prophetic Word confirmed, in giving heed to which we do well (as to a light shining in a dark place), until the day shall dawn, and the morning star arise in our hearts." (A translation from J. N. Darby's Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Loizeaux edition, p. 473 – footnote.) The Old Testament prophets wrote about that day, but the apostles saw it with their own eyes! There is one difference; the prophetic Scriptures tell of Christ's earthly glory in that coming day, whereas the Mount of Transfiguration tells of Christ's heavenly glory. These two testimonies do not contradict each other; on the contrary, they complement one another, for Christ will have glory in both spheres. The KJV rendering of verse 19 suggests that the prophetic Word was made "more sure" by the experience that the apostles had on the mount, but those prophetic Scriptures couldn't have been made any more sure than they already were; they are God's inspired Word! What Peter is simply saying is that the scene on the mount coincided with and confirmed what the Old Testament Scriptures had stated.

He says that we will "do well" to "take heed" to such passages of Scripture. This was a needed exhortation for these believing Jews because they may have been tempted to neglect the Old Testament Scriptures after they converted to Christianity. In their minds, those things

pertained to their old life as Jews, and therefore, had no real application to them now. Peter addresses this mistaken idea and explains that those Old Testament prophecies are of great practical value to Christians, and we would do well to heed their message. Those passages of Scripture are like “a light shining in a dark place”—this world. They present God’s unchanging moral standards for man; we learn from them that while man’s morals change and decline with the times, God’s do not. The prophetic Word sets before the believer the hope of this world being set right when Christ reigns. At that time, there will be a “regeneration” of moral life on earth, and everything will be ordered according to the mind and will of God (Matt. 19:28).

Thus, being occupied with the prophetic Scriptures causes the millennial “day” to “dawn” in our “hearts” before the time when it will dawn upon this world at Christ’s Appearing. The saints whose hearts are fixed on Christ’s coming kingdom glory “love His Appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8), because it is the time when He will be openly vindicated in this world where He was shamed; and, if we have been enlightened in the present truth (vs. 12), “the Morning Star” will arise in our hearts. This refers to the imminent hope of the Lord’s coming to take us home to heaven at the Rapture (Rev. 22:16). It rises in our hearts in the sense that it becomes an imminent thing to us, because we know that the Morning Star appears on the horizon before the sun rises and a new day begins. So, Christ will come for His saints at the Rapture before He comes with His saints at His Appearing to bring in the millennial day. If the Appearing of Christ to set the world right is shortly to come to pass (Rev. 1:1), then the Rapture is even nearer! This is the Christian’s “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

When these two things are realized in our souls, they will make an impact on our lives. The immediate effect of “the day” dawning in our hearts delivers us from this world. We realize that there is no point in putting our energy into building up something for ourselves here in this world when that whole system is about to be judged by God. The immediate effect of “the Morning Star” rising in our hearts bestirs bridal affections in us toward our heavenly Bridegroom and a longing to be with Him; and it also begets in us a genuine concern to reach the lost with the gospel (Rev. 22:17). Thus, there is nothing so refreshing and spiritually healthful than to have our hearts fixed on that future scene of glory when God will publicly exalt His Son.

Vss. 20-21—Drawing this subject to a close, Peter gives a word of caution as to the handling of the prophetic Scriptures. He says: “Knowing this first, that [the scope of] no prophecy of Scripture is had from its own particular interpretation, for prophecy was not ever uttered by the will of man, but holy men of God spake under the power of the Holy Spirit.” In saying, “No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation” (KJV), he means that no passage has its own isolated interpretation. Hence, when interpreting the prophetic Word, we must keep in mind that no one passage can be fully understood without the rest of Scripture having its bearing on it. This is a great guiding principle for correct Bible interpretation. The J. N. Darby Translation footnote on verse 20 states, "One might almost say 'no prophecy explains itself.'" Therefore, we must have the light of all the Scriptures shed on any one passage to correctly understand the full scope of its meaning. F. B. Hole said, “It is a warning against treating each prophetic utterance as though it were, by itself, a kind of self-contained saying to be interpreted apart from the mass of the prophetic teaching. All prophecy is connected and inter-related and to be understood only in connection with the whole” (Epistles, vol. 3, p. 131).

This “golden rule” of Bible interpretation is of paramount importance; it will deliver us from error. In spite of this warning, the cults in Christendom are notorious for isolating passages of Scripture in the Word of God and building spurious doctrines out of their mistaken ideas. Peter reminds us that the prophets did not write the Scriptures in that way—that is, “by the will of man.” Being “moved by the Holy Spirit” under inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16), they wrote the Scriptures in such a way that it all fits together as one harmonious whole—no passage contradicts another (John 10:35). This is remarkable because many of those men whom God used lived in different places and their lives were hundreds of years apart in time; they couldn’t have consulted one another to assure consistency. There were many writers but one Author—God Himself. On occasion, God would use unholy men to communicate a prophetic word—like Balaam (Num. 22-24) and Caiaphas (John 11:49-52)—but He would only use “holy men” to write the Scriptures. Since the Scriptures are divinely inspired of God, we can expect with the fullest assurance that the future glories of Christ, which those Old Testament prophecies forecast, will surely come to pass.